

Communication Tips for DFG Marine Region Staff Attending Constituent Meetings

Purpose of These Meeting Tips and Guidelines

1. To facilitate high levels of communication between DFG staff and public constituents.
2. To maximize the ability to reach meeting outcomes and end meeting on time.
3. To continue to build trust and functional working relationships with constituents, other agencies, and the public.
4. To provide opportunities for constituents to better understand and support the mission¹ of the Marine Region of the Department of Fish and Game.

Meeting Participation Tips for Staff

These tips are especially important for staff who are not leading/facilitating the meeting.

- ☐ Acknowledge frustrations/feelings/priority of audience FIRST - before you begin sharing information!
- ☐ Let the audience know what information will be available at this particular meeting.
- ☐ The role of DFG staff is to provide constituents with the opportunity to access information and to clarify it if they wish.
- ☐ Set context and clarify expectations: "I will provide you with all the _____ information and then I will answer your questions." If I can't answer your question today, I will get back to you by_____.
- ☐ If audience members interrupt, listen carefully until they are done. Do not try to stop them. If they have a question let them know you heard it and make a note of it (flip chart). Then let them know you will finish providing the information and will answer their question(s) when the meeting is open for other questions. If they interrupt again do the same thing. Don't try to control or rush them. If they interrupt again – repeat and stick to your process.
- ☐ Respond only if an individual has a question, otherwise just listen well and ask if they have a question related to their comment. Do not try to overpower or overwhelm them with information. There are no universal agreements between the public and DFG that put staff in the role of "teacher." Such a perception can be resented by people who are already frustrated and/or angry.

¹ *To Protect, Maintain, Enhance, and Restore California's Marine Ecosystems for Their Ecological Values and Their Use and Enjoyment by the Public.*

- ☐ When you are done answering questions, let the audience know the next steps to address their concerns, unanswered questions, and ideas. Make only commitments you can keep.
- ☐ Approximately 60% of all communication is non-verbal. To frustrated constituents you may be perceived as a threat before you even open your mouth.

Some things to consider:

- Folded arms at chest while listening or talking may be perceived as indicating a closed or aggressive attitude.
- Stand or sit in an open posture – relax arms at side, move about, or clasp arms in back while standing – keep arms above the table.
- Avoid standing with legs spread wide apart, may be perceived as indicating an aggressive, defensive attitude.
- Avoid all side bar conversations unless you are at a break in the meeting. Your wish to gather information from a colleague may be perceived as “conspiratorial” or disrespectful.
- In a serious meeting – be sensitive to what you choose to laugh at.
- Match the energy as the person addressing you - not in anger, but in level of seriousness and sincerity. Leaning slightly forward in an energetic, listening manner communicates interest.
- Ask more questions to make sure you have the point straight before you start to address it.

Please note: These are particularly valuable when addressing frustrated or angry constituents – the more frustrated they are the more important it is to use these tips as a checklist for successful communication and interaction. Additional thoughts? Please contact Diane Strachan at strachan@snowcrest.net.