HANFORD ADVISORY BOARD

A Site-Specific Advisory Board, Chartered under the Federal Advisory Committee Act

Advising:
US Dept. of Energy
US Environmental Protection Agency
Washington State Dept of Ecology

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Washington State Department of Health

HAB Facilitation Team
ProSidian Consulting
Richland Office
713 Jadwin, Suite 3
Richland, WA 99352
Phone: (509) 588-7010

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Brian Vance, Manager
U.S. Department of Energy, Office of River Protection
P.O. Box 450 (46-60)
Richland, WA 99352

Dave Einan, Manager
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 10
825 Jadwin Avenue, Suite 210 (A1-43)
Richland, WA 99352

Alex Smith, Manager
Washington State Department of Ecology
3100 Port of Benton Blvd.
Richland, WA 99354

Dear Mr. Vance, Mr. Einan, and Ms. Smith,

Background:

The Hanford Advisory Board appreciates the efforts of the Tri-Party Agreement (TPA) agencies to continue holding public meetings and adapting the meeting formats to accommodate virtual participation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unforeseen circumstances, such as pandemics and weather conditions, present a challenge to effective public involvement which is a necessary part of regulatory processes and site decision-making. While the Board prefers in-person meetings, continuing to improve virtual meeting formats is helpful for increasing public engagement when we cannot attend in-person.

Advice:

- The Board advises the agencies to engage in an ongoing conversation with the Board for continuous improvement of the virtual public meeting format.

- The Board offers the following recommendations with the goal of continuous improvement of virtual public meetings going forward.

Recommendations	Rationale/Additional Information
When someone who asks a question loses their connection, allow time for response upon return.	Participants with questions should have the opportunity to hear the answer and ask a follow-up. Participants should identify themselves when they begin speaking.
Ensure meeting content is accessible to hearing impaired and sight impaired.	Continue current notices of access to hearing and sight impaired availability on all virtual meeting notice documents. However, several services/platforms (e.g., Microsoft Teams) can accommodate instantaneous closed captioning. Ensure all presentations can be zoomed in or have electronic copies available for download.
Ensure meetings are scheduled to have adequate time for everyone to comment or have questions answered, similar to in-person meetings	Scheduled end times can be conservatively extended in public notices to ensure adequate time for questions and answers.
Consider showing slides before the start of meetings with helpful tips about presentation zoom, accessibility options, camera, controls, etc.	Including screenshots, arrows, or other markers might help participants find controls.
Communicate the whole context and arena surrounding the specific scope discussed at a public meeting. Help the public locate specific actions within the larger story of cleanup.	Examples discussed were the Vitrified Low Activity Waste (VLAW) Waste Incidental to Reprocessing (WIR) meeting, which offered much contextual information, versus the 242-A Evaporator permit modification meeting which lacked key information (e.g., the evaporator is currently non-functional, potential safety considerations of the project, the plan for four penetrations instead of only the three discussed at the meeting)
Participant list should be visible to all meeting participants.	Meetings to date have not allowed participants to see who else is in attendance. This limits opportunities for networking, discussion, public involvement tracking, etc. and causes a loss of a key benefit of an in-person meeting. Participants who are by phone only can be asked to self-identify at the beginning of the meeting.
Allow conversations in the chat box to be visible to all participants. An ability to have sidebar conversations without being too disruptive would also be of benefit.	Provides accountability for questions and answers, and allows members of the public to interact similar to conversations during an in-person meeting. We recognize concerns about potential distraction from speakers but respectfully request that this function be enabled on a trial basis.
To the extent possible, schedule virtual public meetings to begin after 5:00 PM	Preserving evening meeting times may increase public participation from those people working regular schedules.

Recommendations	Rationale/Additional Information
Encourage all participants, including presenters, to show video of themselves while presenting.	Connection between participants and visual cues.
Stay current on what technologies are allowable for use by federal government from a security standpoint. Be at the forefront of trying new technological options.	For example, security issues with Zoom have apparently been resolved for government use. Other technologies to consider incorporating into public meetings include Mural, Reddit (specifically "Ask Me Anything" discussion formats), Microsoft Teams, and video captioning services (YouTube, Panopto, Canvas)
Adjust the meeting and presentation format to include public participant check ins and involvement opportunities.	Examples include live polls, open-ended questions for participants, a guided post-meeting discussion forum (to replicate the post-meeting milling around feeling).
Update the Hanford Public Involvement Plan to include guidelines for virtual public meetings.	Capture best practice in a publicly accessible document.
Provide an opportunity for alternative viewpoints from public interest groups, local/state government, tribes, or other non-Federal parties during virtual meetings.	The Public Involvement Plan in the TPA describes that alternative viewpoints will commonly have an opportunity to be heard during Hanford public events.
Provide and make readily available a PDF glossary of common terms and acronyms as supplemental materials for each public meeting.	Makes the complex language of Hanford cleanup more accessible to the public.
Record or transcribe virtual meetings and make the information available for public viewing after the event.	Virtual meetings with integrated recording options provide a new opportunity to increase engagement with people who cannot attend meetings live.
Consider hybrid in-person and virtual meetings (after COVID)	Improve the experience for remote participants and greater remote presence
Have consolidated visual and computer audio available for virtual meetings, in addition to the ability to call in with a telephone alone.	Provide multiple options for connecting to a virtual meeting, does not tie up land line phones for people calling in from home, and makes it easier to record meetings.

The Board is open to providing feedback to the TPA agencies as any of these items are implemented through its Public Involvement and Communications Committee.

Sincerely,

Susan L. Leckband

Susan Leckband, Chair
Hanford Advisory Board

cc: Kelly Snyder, Designated Federal Officer, U.S. Department of Energy, Headquarters
Randy Bradbury, Ecology, Manager, U.S. Department of Ecology
Emerald Laija, Environmental Scientist, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Gary Younger, Federal HAB Coordinator, U.S. Department of Energy
James Lynch, Deputy Designated Federal Officer, U.S. Department of Energy
Stanley Branch, Deputy Designated Federal Officer, U.S. Department of Energy
Oregon & Washington Delegations