



Public Participation Component of the Rio Grande National Forest's Forest Plan Revision Process

LESSONS LEARNED

October 2015

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Why should you read this report?

When the U.S. Forest Service released the 2012 Planning Rule for the National Forest System, roughly half of the land and resource management plans, or “forest plans,” for National Forests and Grasslands were past due for revision. The U.S. Forest Service initially selected eight National Forests to revise their forest plans using the new 2012 Planning Rule. These “early adopter” National Forests were followed by several “mid adopter” Forests, including the Rio Grande National Forest (RGNF).

As one of the first plan revisions under the 2012 Planning Rule nationally, and the very first plan revision in the Rocky Mountain Region of the U.S. Forest Service, the RGNF’s plan revision is significant to Region 2 and the entire National Forest System. The 2012 Planning Rule set forth “a process that is designed to provide more opportunities for all affected parties to collaborate in all phases of planning.”¹ In this spirit, the 2012 Planning Rule requires the Forest Service to “engage the public...early and throughout the planning process...using collaborative processes where feasible and appropriate.”²

In 2014, the U.S. Forest Service contracted the National Forest Foundation (NFF) to manage, coordinate, and facilitate the public participation component for the first year of RGNF forest plan revision in order to lay a foundation for sustained collaboration between the RGNF and community stakeholders. The first year of forest plan revision included overall process design and the assessment phase. The NFF’s objectives were to

- help the RGNF meet and exceed the public participation requirements of the 2012 Forest Planning Rule,
- help lay a foundation for long-term, sustained collaborative engagement, and
- capture lessons learned associated with managing and sustaining public participation and collaboration under the 2012 Forest Planning Rule.

The NFF and RGNF learned many lessons associated with **public outreach and involvement, meeting design and documentation, online and alternative engagement, and operations** during the process design and assessment phases. This report discusses and shares those lessons. The NFF believes that National Forests and Grasslands preparing to revise forest plans under the 2012 Planning Rule can benefit from the NFF’s experiences. We hope you will find these lessons useful and informative.

¹ 77 Fed. Reg. 21,185 (April 9, 2012).

² 36 C.F.R. §219.4.

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Public Participation Process

The RGNF's public participation process, and the NFF's involvement, is outlined below.

**Spring
2014**

The NFF and RGNF began discussing how the NFF could support the public participation component of the forest plan revision process in accordance with the 2012 Planning Rule.

The Rocky Mountain Region (Region) hired the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution (U.S. Institute) to conduct an internal assessment of the RGNF to determine the Forest's capacity and readiness to begin the Forest Plan revision process. The U.S. Institute determined that the RGNF had limited capacity, but could enter into revision if there was support from the Region.

**Summer
to Fall
2014**

The NFF and RGNF began preparing the Forest and the local San Luis Valley community for the forest plan revision process. As a first step in the process, the NFF conducted a series of in-person interviews with key stakeholders in the San Luis Valley to help inform and design a local public participation process.

The NFF hosted eight Forest Plan Community Awareness meetings at four different locations in the San Luis Valley. These meetings provided local residents and other interested parties with background on the forest plan revision process and an overview of public participation opportunities throughout the process.

In October, the NFF launched an interactive forest plan revision Mindmixer website. The website was designed to gather public input throughout the revision process using polling questions and fostering online discussions about plan issues.

**Winter
2014-15**

In December, the RGNF formally initiated the forest planning process and entered into the assessment phase of forest plan revision.

From December until February, the NFF and RGNF encouraged public participation in the forest plan revision process by co-hosting approximately 15 meetings with established organizations in the San Luis Valley. At meetings co-hosted by local organizations, the NFF and RGNF discussed the forest plan revision process and forest plan-related issues relevant to the host organizations.

In February, the Regional Office used an existing agreement to hire the U.S. Institute to conduct interviews with regional and national groups. The purpose of the interviews was to assess the best means for engagement of these groups throughout the public participation process.

**February
to July
2015**

The NFF and RGNF convened 19 assessment phase meetings in the San Luis Valley. Meetings focused on specific clusters of plan assessment topics (e.g., aquatic and riparian resources). At least two meetings were focused on each cluster. Several additional co-hosted meetings also occurred in this timeframe. Online discussion topics on the MindMixer website aligned with in-person meeting topic clusters and added an additional avenue for public engagement.

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Methods for Capturing Lessons Learned

In June and July 2015, the NFF conducted 13 interviews with National Forest and Region staff and the contractor who was involved in the public participation process. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and were conducted over the phone. Notes from each interview were compiled and analyzed for themes and lessons. NFF staff then participated in two in-person meetings with key members of the plan revision process to review and discuss key themes, successes, and challenges.

Lessons Learned

The lessons below are organized into four primary categories – **public outreach and involvement, meeting design and documentation, online and alternative engagement, and operations.** When possible, the lessons learned after application of successful strategies and techniques include a description of the factors that promoted success. Similarly, lessons arising from challenges describe factors that resulted in shortcomings. The NFF intended to capture both the strategies that were successful and should be repeated, and those that should have been done differently.

Public Outreach & Involvement

What steps did we take?

Collaborative Assessment. The first step taken by the NFF when the project began in the spring of 2014 was to conduct a collaborative assessment with local San Luis Valley stakeholders to develop a clearer picture of the community's needs, concerns, and interests. A collaborative assessment is a standard tool in collaboration and the broader field of conflict resolution used to clarify important issues, expectations, and concerns and generate options and recommendations to move forward. In this situation, the assessment also served as an important tool to build trust with stakeholders, assess the community's capacity to collaborate, and demonstrate willingness to design a process around the community's needs. During this process, the NFF conducted in-person interviews with 22 individuals. Interviews generally lasted one hour, and most took place in communities – many of which were rural – where interviewees resided. The NFF analyzed and summarized interview notes to review with RGNF and Region staff.

Process Design. Information gained from the collaborative assessment directly informed process design and specific public outreach methods. Public meeting topics, meeting venues and timing, and communication and outreach methods were organized based on local needs and interests. For example, meetings were scheduled in remote locations in an effort to reach underserved communities, meeting notices were delivered via multiple avenues (print flyers, email blasts, press releases) and were available in Spanish, interpreters were available at specific meetings, and meetings were initially held twice each evening in order to cater to local work schedules. The NFF and RGNF also worked with local contacts, including an environmental justice expert who was a critical link to underserved communities, to outreach to the public. Importantly, the overall process was continually evaluated and adjusted to meet community needs and make efficient use of available resources. For instance, RGNF staff, the NFF, and Peak Facilitation would commonly debrief following public meetings to discuss what worked and did not work. Adjustments would be made before the next meeting. Additionally, comment cards were offered to all participants that addressed

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items such as effectiveness of outreach efforts and efficacy of meeting tools.

Community Awareness Meetings. The collaborative assessment results showed that a basic understanding of the forest plan revision process and 2012 Planning Rule would encourage more participation throughout the process. Following these findings, the NFF and RGNF hosted eight Forest Plan Community Awareness meetings at four different locations within the San Luis Valley. Aside from providing information about the forest plan revision process, the meetings also helped citizens understand the public participation opportunities throughout the process and introduced RGNF staff to community members. During Community Awareness meetings, the NFF coordinated with Peak Facilitation to gather additional information to help guide the local public participation process and information regarding issues of local importance. Meetings were designed to be community-based and interactive, and used innovative tools such as real-time polling and video interviews, as well as more traditional methods such as map-based exercises and discussion time with snacks. Spanish translators were available at meetings. Meetings were advertised in the local media, with email blasts to stakeholder contact lists, through U.S. Forest Service mailings to key contacts, with flyers at community gathering locations, and on the forest plan revision website.

Co-Hosted Meetings. The NFF and RGNF encouraged public participation in the forest plan revision process by co-hosting meetings with established organizations in the San Luis Valley. At these co-hosted meetings, the NFF and U.S. Forest Service representatives attended meetings convened by established local organizations to discuss the forest plan revision process and discuss forest plan-related issues relevant to the host organizations. The co-hosted meetings helped build relationships and trust with local organizations and entities, and reached a variety of community members throughout the San Luis Valley.

Assessment Phase Meetings. The NFF and RGNF convened 19 assessment phase meetings in the San Luis Valley. These meetings focused on specific clusters of forest plan assessment topics (e.g., aquatic and riparian resources). Generally, two to three meetings were focused on each topic cluster. In order to reach as many people as possible, meetings were scheduled at least one week apart, and were held in different parts of the San Luis Valley. The Mindmixer website served as an additional avenue for public engagement, with survey and discussion topics aligning with in-person meeting topic clusters.

Successes – What worked well?

- **Success: developing a public engagement process that built trust and collaborative capacity in local communities.** Staff and contractors thought the process promoted trust and learning between the public and the Forest Service, and developed collaborative capacity among the public. As one Forest Service staffer commented, “this process was genuine.”

Factors promoting success

- **Collaborative assessment.** The collaborative assessment directly informed the deliberate steps taken to design a process that met the local community's needs. RGNF and NFF staff were committed to reaching underserved communities and making local connections, which set a positive tone for engagement.
- **Involvement of local Forest Service staff.** The involvement of respected, long-

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term RGNF staff helped build trust within the community. District staff members were able to help strategically plan the public meeting schedule and determine when and where meetings should occur to best accommodate specific publics and the topics of highest interest. For example, some recreational groups were only in town during certain seasons, so the recreation-focused meeting was scheduled to accommodate as many recreationists as possible. In another community where wilderness was of great interest, holding a wilderness-focused meeting was beneficial and had strong attendance. When line officers or other leaders at the district level reached out to the public to notify individuals of upcoming meetings, higher levels of attendance were quite noticeable.

- **Efforts to create an inclusive process.** The NFF and RGNF demonstrated a commitment to inclusive collaboration by providing a Spanish translator, advertising meetings through various venues, and providing abundant opportunities for input and discussion. These efforts were recognized by stakeholders and formed a strong basis for building long-lasting relationships.
- **Use of co-hosted meetings.** The use of co-hosted meetings with local organizations demonstrated to the community that the agency was willing to meet the public where they lived and were active. Peak Facilitation scheduled approximately 15 co-hosted meetings, with support from RGNF staff. Interviewees noted that co-hosted meetings were beneficial, especially for building relationships.

Challenges – What could have been done differently?

- **Challenge: developing a long-term plan for the revision process and public participation.** Some Forest Service staff appreciated that the NFF entered the contract with a public outreach and engagement process ready to go. However, others felt like the process was rushed and that more time spent designing the process, identifying milestones, and ensuring alignment between the Forest's planning steps and the public engagement steps would have been beneficial. In addition, many who were involved felt that the quality and type of information received might not feed directly into the preliminary "need to change" analysis and NEPA side of the forest plan revision process. The Forest Service did not have a clear idea of how they would approach the overall revision process, so team members could not develop a long-term plan for the revision process, and did not have a clear idea of the type of information needed, and when it would be needed.

Factors that led to shortcomings

- **Timing and lack of guidance.** The RGNF started the plan revision process before the 2012 Planning Rule directives were formally released, so clear direction for the overall process was not available. RGNF and NFF staff members were charting their own path. Furthermore, because of timing issues associated with the end of the fiscal year, financial commitments had to be made quickly before a full picture of the process and related costs could be developed. This created somewhat limited opportunities based on available budget, forcing the NFF and RGNF to "make due" with the resources at hand.

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Additionally, the newness and unknowns of the 2012 planning rule created hesitation in decision making and stymied agency willingness to take risks and move forward. Familiarity with the previous planning rule, and the 2012 planning rule's paradigm shift from the "we propose, you oppose" mentality to up-front collaboration initially challenged long-held approaches and understandings of agency staff, making it difficult to develop clear, long-term plans.

- **Challenge: recognizing, early in the process, how information and input received from the public will feed into the Forest Plan Revision process.** Some suggested that it would be helpful to show the public what the RGNF did with information and issues that came out of public meetings and the Mindmixer website.

Factors that led to shortcomings

- Long-term planning was a key missing link in the early stages of public outreach and involvement. That being said, RGNF staff feel like there are still opportunities to show the public how information from the assessment meetings has (or will) inform the proposed forest plan.
- **Challenge: reaching underserved and youth populations.** Although RGNF and the NFF believe that significant efforts were made to involve underserved and youth populations, all readily admit that outreach could be improved with additional capacity.

Factors that led to shortcomings

- While efforts were made to accommodate underserved populations (e.g., advertising meetings in Spanish, providing Spanish translators, hosting meetings in underserved communities, etc.), significant participation was not seen from these communities. The NFF and RGNF understood that reaching these populations would require efforts to meet the populations where they live and are active. For instance, the outreach team discussed engagement at local schools and hosting information tables at local stores or meeting places. However, adequate resources did not exist for these types of efforts.

Meeting Design & Documentation

What steps did we take?

Subcontracted Facilitator. With only one staff person in Colorado, the NFF recognized it did not have the capacity to organize, manage, and facilitate all plan revision meetings. Therefore, the NFF sought the assistance of a third-party consultant. The NFF invited proposals from four known facilitation businesses in the area, received three responses, and selected Peak Facilitation. The NFF hired Peak Facilitation to schedule, organize, manage, and facilitate all plan revision meetings. Peak Facilitation provided a lead facilitator and one administrative staff member to support public meetings and help manage online engagement.

Planning Calls. The NFF, Peak Facilitation, RGNF staff, and regional staff participated in weekly calls to design and plan upcoming meetings. RGNF resource specialists joined calls on an as-needed

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basis. During calls, participants discussed meeting announcements, agendas, and many other aspects of day-to-day public engagement. Calls typically lasted one to two hours.

Community Awareness Meetings. Community Awareness meetings were designed to introduce the forest plan revision process to the public and to begin building relationships and collaborative dialogue with local stakeholders. Meetings began with presentations from Peak Facilitation and RGNF staff, providing an overview of the plan revision process and a road map for public participation throughout the process. Meetings also involved interactive activities such as real-time digital polling, self-facilitated small group discussions, and individual video interviews.

Co-Hosted Meetings. Co-hosted meetings provided an opportunity for established organizations to invite RGNF staff to one of their scheduled meetings to discuss the forest plan revision process. Every meeting was different, as they were planned by the established organization and focused on topics of specific interest to the organization. The Deputy Forest Supervisor or Public Affairs Specialist, and a Peak Facilitation-provided note-taker typically attended co-hosted meetings.

Assessment Meetings. Assessment meetings were designed to solicit feedback from the public regarding the specific assessment topics contained in the 2012 Planning Rule. Due to the number of individual assessment topics, related topics were clustered (typically two to three) to create themed meetings. At the meetings, small group approaches, such as the World Café format, were used to encourage attendee interaction. Typically, during each meeting, a RGNF line officer would open the meeting and describe the forest planning process, and then the facilitator would explain the meeting format and organize participants. Participants then broke into small groups to engage in substantive, issue or map-based discussions. Each small group had a discussion facilitator and note-taker, and Peak Facilitation staff compiled notes after each meeting to share on the Mindmixer website. Efforts were made to use Peak Facilitation and NFF staff for small group facilitation and note taking, but limited third-party resources required RGNF staff to support these efforts.

Successes – What worked well?

- **Success: establishing a collaborative atmosphere for stakeholder engagement at public meetings.** As one interviewee explained, “The meetings were definitely collaborative and respectful.” Others thought meeting participants were very engaged, explaining, “It wasn’t your typical public meeting process” and “people were able to speak freely to a neutral party as opposed to people uniforms.”

Factors promoting success

- **Third-party, neutral facilitator.** The use of a third-party facilitator provided a comfortable environment for public participation. Peak Facilitation’s facilitator had experience working with local communities, relationships with key community members, and an energetic approach that kept attendees engaged. She was able to develop a rapport with most meeting attendees that proved helpful for soliciting information and feedback. Furthermore, interviewees explained that by listening and participating instead of running the meeting, the RGNF was able to change the typical public meeting dynamic and build trust. One interviewee also felt that working with a third party facilitator resulted in the Forest Service receiving input that was more valuable.

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- **In-person meetings.** Interviewees recognized that “face-to-face meetings are best.” Many reflected on the value of face-to-face conversations, and the broad support for in-person meetings from the public. Although RGNF and the NFF made efforts to support non-traditional forms of public engagement, the rural community was more attuned to in-person meetings.
- **Meeting format.** Peak Facilitation suggested using a modified World Café format for public meetings, and participants and RGNF staff expressed positive feedback about this approach. The meeting format helped engage all participants, provide a “safe space” for quieter participants, and ensure a variety of topics was discussed at each meeting.
- **Map-based exercises.** RGNF staff felt that map-based exercises were useful; map-based discussions were a key components of many meetings.

Challenges – What could have been done differently?

- **Challenge: taking staff capacity into account when planning public meetings.** Initially the RGNF and the NFF planned on a public meeting format that could be led by one facilitator with assistance from a note taker. However, when the team decided to switch the meeting format to World Café, more people were required to facilitate and document each small-group discussion. When using these types of resource intensive meetings, contractors should make sure to budget for increased staffing needs.

Factors that led to shortcomings

- The change in meeting format required more help and participation from RGNF staff, which had not been anticipated among staff and was not always positively received.
- **Challenge: preparing for meetings.** Even with support from the NFF and Peak Facilitation, a significant amount of RGNF staff resources were needed to prepare for public meetings.

Factors that led to shortcomings

- Third-party contractors do not have the information needed to develop all meeting presentations and materials. Therefore, RGNF staff were required to spend significant time creating presentations, developing maps, and compiling additional information. With a greater up-front recognition of this need, the RGNF may have been able to dedicate more of its resources to these tasks.
- **Challenge: scheduling meetings with adequate advance notice.** Most meeting venues within the local community would not allow the booking of venues further than one month out. This limited the ability of the planning team to provide and advertise detailed meeting schedules and adequately advertise upcoming meetings. Although there may be little done to address this challenge, it is something worth taking into consideration when selecting meeting locations.

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- **Challenge: avoiding public meeting burnout.** The number and frequency of public meetings made it challenging to sustain participation. The first 10 public meetings drew large crowds; some meetings had around 40 participants. However, RGNF staff and contractors saw attendance drop off in the next 10 meetings, which only averaged 10 participants per meeting.

Factors that led to shortcomings

- Interviewees felt the drop-off could be the result of several factors, such as the seasonal timing (i.e., people are busy during the summer) or duplication of issue topics (i.e., less interest in the second or third meeting around a topic such as recreation).
- **Challenge: developing the right questions to ask.** Significant time and effort was spent by the NFF, Peak Facilitation, and Forest Service staff developing assessment questions that could be understood by the public and written in a way to solicit information needed to support assessments. If, at a regional or national level, the Forest Service developed assessment questions for a public audience, information gathering might be more efficient for local Forest Service staff and contractors.

Factors that led to shortcomings

- Many of the assessment questions contained in the Forest Service directives are technical and written in scientific terms. A deep understanding of natural resource management is typically required to understand and respond to the questions.
- **Challenge: ensuring there is a shared understanding of the local community, customs, and cultures.** Some interviewees felt as though the subcontractor made comments or used a style that wasn't always appropriate for the more conservative local community. In a rural community, understanding the local culture is important. When outside contractors are used to provide public outreach services, it is commensurate upon local Forest staff to ensure that contractors have an understanding of local customs and cultures.

Online and Alternative Engagement

What steps did we take?

Meeting advertisements. RGNF, NFF and Peak Facilitation staff advertised meetings using a variety of media. The NFF and Peak Facilitation maintained a dynamic contact list, from which the NFF sent roughly bi-weekly email blasts. Additionally, through the MindMixer site, all participants received frequent updates about Mindmixer discussions and upcoming meetings. RGNF staff sent press releases to local newspapers, radio stations, and other print publications, and Peak Facilitation posted meeting flyers at local gathering spots. Occasionally, local line officers or other district leadership would send written invitations and make phone calls to local stakeholders.

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MindMixer Website. The NFF contracted with MindMixer to establish a web platform that allowed for information sharing and two-way communication with the public. This website required visitors to sign-up and allowed for varying levels of engagement, from reviewing meeting notes to participating in real-time dialogue with RGNF staff and other community stakeholders.

Forest Service Website. The RGNF hosted a Forest Service website that contained basic information on the plan revision process and directed visitors to the MindMixer website.

Email comments. The RGNF set up an email address to receive email comments on the plan revision process.

Successes – What worked well?

- **Success: developing an effective system for email “blasts” and marketing.** Email blasts were delivered through MindMixer. Interviewees felt the email blasts, when paired with press releases and news clips, helped keep people updated.
- **Success: using online survey tools.** Peak Facilitation supervised use of SurveyMonkey to solicit feedback around specific assessment questions. While the translating of assessment questions into language that could be more easily understood by the public was described as burdensome, the use of SurveyMonkey easily allowed the team to collect responses to specific questions.

Challenges – What could have been done differently?

- **Challenge: anticipating technology needs and ensuring web-based engagement tools can meet those needs.** MindMixer was used to facilitate online engagement with the public. Initially the tool seemed like a great option, however, after using it, RGNF staff and contractors realized that the functionality was lacking. The team had problems organizing information and using map-based features to meet plan revision needs. To fill mapping needs, RGNF and the NFF spent considerable time trying to use other mapping tools, including Google Maps and Talking Points Collaborative Mapping. Some felt that MindMixer was a useful way to engage a national audience, and pointed to the fact that national interest groups engaged via the tool. However, others also thought that webinars would be good for “making long distance connections” and engaging groups on the national level, particularly during the NEPA process.

Factors that led to shortcomings

- It can be challenging to find a one-stop shop for online engagement (e.g., a site that offers two-way communication, document sharing, map-based engagement, online surveys, etc.). It is also confusing to offer stakeholders a variety of sites and tools for their engagement. It is important to consider what forms of online engagement may be most useful prior to starting the revision process.
- **Challenge: anticipating the staff capacity needed to manage online and alternative engagement.** Some mentioned that Peak Facilitation was able to “step up” and successfully

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organize and manage a large amount of the online engagement. It would have been beneficial to recognize the amount of time needed up front, and plan for necessary staff capacity. Local forests may wish to consider increasing information technology (IT) capacity to address this need.

Operations

What steps did we take?

National Forest Foundation. The NFF was hired to support the public participation component under a contract with the U.S. Forest Service. The NFF anticipated hiring a facilitator and subcontracting with others as needed to support the process.

Peak Facilitation. The NFF subcontracted with Peak Facilitation Group, a Colorado-based facilitation and mediation business, as a third-party neutral facilitator to assist with public meeting planning, management, and facilitation.

U.S. Forest Service. The RGNF had a team of staff working on the forest plan revision process, including the forest supervisor, deputy forest supervisor, three district rangers, a public affairs specialist, a forest planner, and resource specialists as needed. Several staff from the Region's planning shop were also involved in the process. However, many individuals – often key members of the planning team – transitioned in and out of staff positions throughout the process, either permanently or through temporary (detail) assignments. Moreover, the Region initially offered to form a “core team” and provide supportive resources, but according to many interviews, the support and resources did not materialize as initially planned. Importantly, the Region did provide a strategic planning specialist who served a key role in the Forest's plan revision efforts and as a liaison between the Forest and the Region.

MindMixer. The NFF contracted with MindMixer to establish an online engagement platform for stakeholders.

In-Person Team Meetings. The NFF, Peak Facilitation, RGNF and Regional staff gathered for six in-person planning meetings over the one-year period. At these meetings, all parties discussed long-term plans for public engagement. Although no complete yearlong plan was developed, these meetings typically created alignment on the overall plan for the next several months.

Phone Meetings. The NFF, Peak Facilitation, RGNF and Regional staff participated in weekly phone calls to address public outreach efforts, meeting planning, and online engagement. These calls typically lasted one to two hours.

Successes – What worked well?

- **Success: convening regular team meetings.** The NFF organized regular team meetings (in-person and via phone) for Forest Service staff and Peak Facilitation. Interviewees noted that these meetings were essential to keep everyone aligned during the public engagement process.

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- **Success: working with a “general contractor” to encourage a dynamic, efficient process.** Interviewees discussed the benefit of working with the NFF in a “general contractor” role, which allowed the RGNF to be more nimble and efficient when contracting and subcontracting. By entering into an agreement with the NFF to support public participation efforts, the NFF was able to hire contractors and purchase resources more quickly than the Forest Service contracting process would allow.
- **Success: using a Forest Service “point person” as a liaison between the Forest and the Region.** The Regional Office hired a strategic planner dedicated to assisting the RGNF with plan revision. RGNF staff believe this position was crucial to keep the Forest and Regional Office aligned and provide guidance and support.

Challenges – What could have been done differently?

- **Challenge: managing focused, efficient internal meetings.** Many interviewees mentioned that at first there were “too many calls” that “were long and had a lot of people on them” and often were inefficient because of the variety of opinions. In response to feedback, the NFF organized weekly calls by topic, so that only the essential people needed to attend. This still proved challenging, as it created even more phone calls. In addition to regular calls, a few in-person meetings were essential to set a public meeting schedule, discuss target audiences, and develop meeting agendas and content.

Factors that led to shortcomings

- The team found it difficult to create an internal communications scheme that was an efficient use of time and had all of the “right people” involved, but not so many that the decision-making process was stymied.
- **Challenge: early in the process, designating roles and responsibilities among Forest Service staff at the forest and regional levels, contractors, and sub-contractors.** Interviewees discussed problems with role assignment and accountability, which were amplified during Forest Service staff transitions. As one interviewee described, “...several times during transitions people would say, ‘who is doing this?’ or ‘oh...was I supposed to do that?’ Sometimes people would just assume jobs would be carried over, but that didn’t always happen.” There was also confusion between contractors and subcontractors. RGNF staff also noted that it was confusing to differentiate between the roles of the NFF and the U.S. Institute.
- **Challenge: dealing with Forest Service staff transitions during the plan revision process.** Many interviewees lamented the challenges associated with staff turnover, especially temporary detail assignments, saying that constant turnover of personnel was a major problem, especially in the forest planner position. One interviewee suggested that the Forest Service should make sure key players would stay on the Forest throughout the duration of the plan revision process, perhaps by requiring a two-year commitment from staff leads. Others mentioned the importance of creating some overlap between incoming and outgoing staff, or if that’s not an option, developing transition materials to keep the

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team oriented and moving throughout the revision process.

- **Challenge: creating strong communication channels within the National Forest.** RGNF interviewees mentioned that internal communication was a struggle at times, and RGNF staff said they could have used a consistent communicator to keep employees updated and let them know when help was needed to create maps or advertise meetings.

Factors that led to shortcomings

- Some attributed the challenge to a lack of accountability within the RGNF. For example, one interviewee explained, “the archeologist did a great job [with meeting outreach] and they had fantastic turnout for the meeting she was responsible for. Other people lost track of what their roles were...” To address this issue, RGNF staff suggested a regular update meeting with representatives from each district.
- **Challenge: ensuring there is alignment between the National Forest and Region.** Although hiring a dedicated strategic planner benefitted the process, RGNF staff, contractors and subcontractors still referred to the challenging “misalignment” between the RGNF and Region.

Factors that led to shortcomings

- The NFF and Peak Facilitation were often confused about roles and responsibilities between the Forest and Region, and Region-level staff participated inconsistently in the public engagement team meetings. RGNF noted that the original intent was for the Forest and Region to work hand in hand; however, staff and resource transitions made this goal challenging.
- **Challenge: clarifying expectations and setting sideboards when contracting with an intermediary.** Some interviews discussed the need for the NFF to be “present” throughout the process, and voiced a desire for the NFF to be more involved in daily operations, facilitation, and outreach instead of overall strategy. There were also varying expectations; some were clear that the contractor’s role was to help design and plan the public engagement process, and manage facilitation, while others were not as clear. Some thought that discussing expectations up-front would help alleviate tensions, and one interviewee noted that scheduling specific meetings for the contractor to “check in” with the RGNF would have been helpful in order to ensure that the NFF could work more directly with RGNF to manage process adjustments and provide ongoing support.