

Citizen, Customer, Partner

Engaging the Public
in Public Management

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8

Engaging Representative Participation and Reaching Effective Decisions

Whenever public managers choose to bring the public into administrative decision making, they immediately face a twofold challenge: (1) how to persuade a representative public to participate, and (2) how to engage that public effectively in reaching a decision. This chapter explores each challenge, and offers counsel for meeting both.

THE DILEMMA OF REPRESENTATIVE PARTICIPATION

The history of public administration offers countless examples of decision making gone awry as a result of failures in representing the public. As a few illustrations:

- As described in the last chapter, a plan to auction tracts of public land for oil and gas drilling in Pennsylvania had to be substantially modified in the face of objections from environmental groups who were excluded from shaping the plan (Welsh 2004).
- As described later in this chapter, an initiative to develop an innovative “urban village” in Seattle failed when planners ignored the need for “broader representation of differing points of view” in the planning process (Iglitzen 1995, 634).
- As described in the next chapter, efforts to clean up a Superfund toxic waste site in New Bedford, Massachusetts, stalled when community residents mobilized in opposition to the cleanup plan (Downer, Doberstein, and Cullen 2001–2002).

These failures sometimes stem from agency mistakes, most blatantly when agencies try to circumvent public demands for involvement. Frequently, though, the problems reflect an agency’s inability to persuade a representa-

tive public to participate. Too often, as Barrett and Greene (2005, 49) have observed, “the members of the public who are generally providing input are not what you would picture in a civics text.” They do not resemble a representative public.

The difficulties begin with the core bias of political and civic involvement: involvement increases with socioeconomic status, such that participation in any involvement process typically tilts toward those with more education and income (see, for example, Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995). Achieving representative participation consequently requires overcoming a natural tendency toward *unrepresentative* participation.

The techniques of public involvement sometimes only reinforce that tendency. For one thing, in contrast to such common forms of political and civic involvement as campaigns and elections, public involvement opportunities often pass unnoticed by potential participants. In a survey of possible participants in public forums on toxic waste cleanup in four North Carolina communities, “a staggering 81 percent reported not knowing about any meeting” (Laurian 2004, 59). Representative participation cannot be expected when most participants are unaware of opportunities.

The nature of discussions in public forums also can alienate the socioeconomically disadvantaged, exacerbating the bias. As Baum (1998, 415) has observed, “people with less formal education and likely to be poorer” are often “uncomfortable speaking in public, unfamiliar with parliamentary procedures, and unaccustomed to deliberating about the future in the abstract.” Anyone who harbors such feelings is unlikely to participate in public forums.

Advisory committees, another common vehicle for public involvement, are legendary for their socioeconomic bias through the so-called “blue-ribbon” committees (e.g., Dahl 1961, 124). Dahl’s blue-ribbon description referred not so much to the quality of committee members as to their pedigrees in terms of income, education, and positions of prominence in the community. It was not an approach likely to represent a cross section of any community.

Some observers extol neighborhood organizations as likely to be representative of their communities due to their ground-level nature, but most evidence suggests the same socioeconomic bias as with other forms of involvement (see, for example Thomas, 1986, 44–46). As Harwood and Myers (2002, 83) have observed, “Most residents do not participate in the association meetings,” and “the majority of those who participate are middle-class homeowners.”

Worse perhaps than the risk of socioeconomic bias, many public involvement opportunities simply fail to arouse much interest in the public. As Jonathan Walters (2009) asked rhetorically of public involvement in local budget processes, “O citizen, where art thou?” A good illustration comes from the Nebraska watershed planning case profiled in the last chapter, where only

one person responded to a widely publicized call to a public meeting (Irvin and Stansbury 2004). The lack of public turnout can extend even to issues that might be expected to arouse substantial interest. With hazard mitigation planning, for example, "Despite mounting evidence of the perils to life and property from floods, hurricanes and earthquakes, planners have had difficulty attracting substantial public involvement" (Godschalk, Brody, and Burby 2003, 734).

DEFINING THE RELEVANT PUBLIC

Planners of public involvement processes should recognize the difficulties in achieving representative participation, but not be paralyzed by them. They should focus instead on defining who comprises the relevant public and how to attract that public to the decision-making process.

As explained in the last chapter, the relevant public consists of any actors external to an agency (1) who may have information relevant to the issue at hand, and/or (2) whose participation in decision making is necessary to assure successful implementation. These dual criteria point to the principal external actors who are likely to be interested in an issue because they have strong feelings on the issue and/or the issue affects them directly.

In broader democratic terms, the two criteria also point to the individuals likely to be most important for obtaining the consent of the governed. Democracy does not mean that most people should be involved with most issues. To the contrary, the people who are likely to want a say in specific decisions are usually those people who have relevant information, a concern for how a decision could affect them, or a potential role in implementation. These are the actors who deserve the principal attention when public managers seek to involve external actors in administrative decision making.

To maximize representative participation of this relevant public, public officials should begin by pursuing this design principle:

Citizen Principle 12: In any decision making with public involvement, undertake careful and thorough advance identification of possible relevant external actors and groups.

Those actors can encompass a wide array of groups, including traditional interest groups (e.g., business lobbies, labor unions), program beneficiaries, consumer and environmental groups, other public interest groups, residential groups (organized homeowners' associations or unorganized residents of an area), advisory

groups that include representatives of any of the other groups, plus previously unorganized groups that might share an interest in an issue. Two examples illustrate what the relevant public might look like on specific issues:

- *Development of a comprehensive plan for Austin, Texas:* Determined not to exclude key groups from a comprehensive planning process, the City of Austin created an Austinplan Steering Committee representing nine sectors: "business, culture, environmental, ethnic minority, human services, neighborhoods, public sector, real estate, and community at large" (Beatley, Brower, and Lucy 1994, 186).
- *Negotiations on coastal zone regulations in Delaware:* To develop regulations for the use of coastal areas, the state of Delaware recognized the need to involve a broad range of publics. Eventual negotiations included (1) the Sierra Club and the Delaware Nature Society, representing environmental groups, (2) the DuPont Corporation and the Chemical Industry Council, representing industry, (3) unions, (4) the area farming community, and (5) the state's natural resource department (Arthur, Carlson, and Moore 1999, 4).

The Top-Down Approach

A thorough stakeholder identification process ordinarily requires a combination of a top-down approach directed by the manager and a bottom-up approach emanating from the public. In the top-down approach, managers and staff attempt to define the potentially interested external actors in advance of an involvement process. Managers might begin by thinking broadly about what types of citizens and other external actors could have a stake in or useful information to offer on the issue before then brainstorming with staff to elicit other nominations. Okubo and Weidman (2000, 313) recommend that planners ask three questions:

- Who is directly affected?
- Who could block things?
- Who could help implement?

Additionally, a rudimentary historical analysis could identify groups that have shown interest in similar programs in the past (see Freeman 1984, 54). Available lists of organized groups might also be checked to identify organizations that may currently represent those actors and organizations.

As the complexity of an issue and the range of possible external actors grow, managers should consider using more complex and formalized techniques

for defining the relevant actors. Bryson (2004, 28) recommends a process that begins with a small planning group conducting preliminary stakeholder identification, and then expands across several steps to progressively larger groups, with the latter often including the stakeholders themselves.

Managers can wonder how broadly to cast the net in defining the relevant public. As a general rule, the risk of being too *exclusive* in an initial definition is probably greater than the risk of being too *inclusive*. Public decisions have historically encountered greater threats from interested groups that were overlooked than from uninterested groups that were not. Even when managers worry about being overwhelmed by too many interests, exclusion is still more appropriately exercised at a later point once the various groups have shown their level of interest. Groups with little interest in an issue are unlikely to accept invitations to join in deliberations anyway.

Stakeholder identification processes should also consider the nature of public sentiment on the issue. Public involvement carries as a principal purpose to develop an understanding of public opinion on an issue, but managers can make better choices about how to pursue any involvement if they can anticipate at least the broad contours of those public sentiments. As suggested in the last chapter, that requires asking:

- Does the relevant public share the agency's goals?
- Is there likely to be conflict within the relevant public on the preferred solution?

More advanced stakeholder analyses attempt to answer additional questions. Bryson (2004, 29–30) recommends that stakeholder analyses, depending on their scope, attempt to define “the criteria the stakeholder would use to judge the organization's performance,” “how well the stakeholder thinks the organization is doing,” “how each stakeholder influences the organization,” “what the organization needs from each stakeholder,” and the “importance” of each stakeholder to the organization.

Agencies that are less advanced in their thinking about stakeholders may want to consider a more limited internal “stakeholder audit” (Thomas and Poister 2009). As described in Case 8.1, a stakeholder audit maps the universe of stakeholders relevant to an agency and describes their relationships with the agency. It should typically be viewed as a first step in considering how to work more closely with a variety of possible stakeholders.

The GDOT stakeholder audit relied solely on the perspectives of agency staff, providing only an internal agency perspective on stakeholders. This approach risks overlooking groups who feel they have a stake in the GDOT but are not recognized by the department. Yet this kind of limited audit can be an

Case 8.1

The Georgia Department of Transportation Stakeholder Audit

As described in earlier chapters, the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) has become much more customer oriented in recent years, recognizing that success in providing a high-quality transportation system for Georgia requires the cooperation and support of numerous external stakeholders. Toward that end, the GDOT leadership in 2005 commissioned two consultants to map the universe of the department's significant external stakeholders and to define what the department knew and did not know about each of them as well as what additional assistance the department might need from each, a task that eventually became known as a stakeholder audit (Thomas and Poister 2009).

The audit began with the consultants developing a semi-structured interview protocol to use for questioning key GDOT personnel. Each interview began by asking the subject to review a preliminary list of the GDOT's external stakeholders and then to name any that might be missing. Other questions focused on channels of communications with specific stakeholders and needs for additional information that could help improve working relationships with various stakeholders.

The interviews began with the department's fourteen-member leadership team, including the commissioner and deputy commissioner, division directors, and key executive staff members. Based on their suggestions, interviews then “snowballed” to other GDOT officials, primarily office heads and program directors who had an outward-looking perspective on the GDOT's interactions with stakeholders. In all, twenty-eight GDOT officials were interviewed.

Based on the interviews, the consultants developed a “stakeholder map” displaying GDOT's stakeholders organized by clusters. One cluster, for example, covered GDOT's customers or publics, including Georgia residents in general, the motoring public, and professional drivers. Other clusters focused on:

- Advocacy and interest groups that are affected by the GDOT (e.g., highway advocacy groups, environmental groups)
- Suppliers and business partners, especially private contractors and consultants that do much of the work of the department on a contract basis
- Policymaking and oversight bodies and funding agencies, most prominently the Georgia General Assembly and the Governor's Office

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- Other state agencies whose missions include aspects of Georgia's transportation system (e.g., the State Road and Tollway Authority, the Georgia Ports Authority)
- Nontransportation governmental agencies whose missions overlap with the GDOT's (e.g., the Georgia Department of Economic Development, the Federal Emergency Management Agency)
- Nonstate public entities that work with the GDOT as planning and service delivery partners, in particular, 159 county governments and 502 municipalities

The stakeholder audit also described channels of communication with the various stakeholders, and offered assessments of needs and opportunities for additional feedback.

GDOT officials appear to have found the audit useful. As one piece of evidence on that score, a number of GDOT officials commented positively to the consultants about how the audit improved their understanding of the "bigger picture" of the department's operating environment, encouraging them to think beyond organizational boundaries. In addition, based on the audit, the GDOT commissioned a number of surveys and focus groups to obtain information the audit had identified as needed. Some of the resulting information subsequently led to improvements in department operations (for more detail, see Chapter 4, and Poister and Thomas 2009).

appropriate first step for agencies that want to strengthen their relationships with stakeholders but are not yet comfortable engaging in the intensive outreach that Bryson (2004) recommends for stakeholder identification. As the GDOT case profile shows, an audit can better familiarize an agency with its stakeholders, perhaps moving the agency toward more engagement with stakeholders.

The Necessity of Aggressive Recruitment

After identifying key publics and stakeholders, managers must work to see that those actors actually participate in the public involvement, as this design principle asserts:

Citizen Principle 13: Undertake aggressive recruitment of representatives of relevant publics prior to any decision making with public involvement.

Public announcements should be prepared and then circulated widely, along with targeting to specific forums such as churches, neighborhood groups, and other organizations where key publics and other stakeholders may be found. Officials should also consider personally contacting any individuals and group leaders whose participation is especially important.

Persuading the public to participate also depends on how the issue is framed. When managers believe an issue requires public involvement, they should take care to define the issue in clear and cogent terms likely to engage the public's interest. For example, Godschalk, Brody, and Burby (2003, 752) argue that hazard mitigation planning "can gain a place on the public agenda" only if "connected to more immediate quality of life concerns" of residents. Publicity for public involvement opportunities consequently requires clear and succinct explanation of why the public should care.

How the involvement is structured also affects participation. As one obvious example, public sessions should be scheduled in convenient places and at convenient times, which in the latter case usually means not during the daytime, when many people are at work.

The Bottom-Up Approach

No matter how thorough the top-down approach, public managers must expect and embrace a bottom-up approach, allowing the public to define itself and its interests during involvement processes. To do this, managers should let public involvement unfold and observe what it reveals about who is interested and what their opinions are.

Managers can still structure some of the opportunities for bottom-up definition. A manager might choose, for example, to separate the initial definition of the public from actual decision making, as perhaps by using a citizen survey to learn how citizens feel about an issue without prompting public calls for action. In a less formal approach toward the same end, a manager could query key contacts about the nature of the relevant public, while recognizing that key contacts do not always have a good sense of divisions within the public. Either or both approaches might have been used in the Nebraska watershed planning case described in the previous chapter, perhaps heading off the underwhelming public meeting.

Managers will often not want to separate defining from involving the public. Prior experience with an issue frequently gives a manager enough confidence about the nature of the public to move directly to decision making, allowing any additional necessary definition to occur then. Managers also often lack the time or resources necessary for a separate process of defining the public.

When defining the public and decision making proceed in tandem, managers need to give special attention to ensuring that the relevant public shows

up. Proposed projects often draw little response initially, only to have public opposition mobilize later as a project moves closer to becoming a reality. That phenomenon is a common occurrence with the siting of so-called LULUs (locally undesirable land uses), when citizens join in opposition only after planners settle on a specific site. The costs of overlooking this potential opposition can be substantial, as civic leaders in Seattle, Washington, learned when they tried to develop a mixed-use “urban village,” as described in Case 8.2.

Latent groups can often be identified and engaged if planners are thorough about defining and recruiting relevant publics. In the Seattle case, taking a top-down approach, planners might readily have guessed that businesses and residents in the path of the project could feel threatened and might organize to oppose the project. Or, using a bottom-up approach, the planners could have held open public meetings to discuss the initial plan, expecting any opponents to identify themselves there. This last point hints at another important principle for trying to engage representative participation:

Citizen Principle 14: In decision making with public involvement, employ a variety of techniques and offer multiple opportunities for hearing from the public.

Public officials will typically obtain more diverse and more representative readings on public sentiments by (1) using a variety of techniques (e.g., public meetings, advisory committees, citizen surveys) for public involvement, and (2) providing multiple opportunities (e.g., public meetings at different sites and/or different times). Although cost considerations may limit the ability to heed this principle, managers should look for ways to obtain multiple readings where they see important questions about public sentiments on an issue.

No matter how much care they take, managers cannot always identify all relevant groups in advance or even through initial public involvement opportunities. One group or another will frequently escape attention, only to emerge later as an important player. Managers need to be ready to adapt when that happens. In the Seattle case, once project leaders saw the first signs of public opposition, they could have sought meetings to discuss the project with the emerging opposition. They might also have invited community representatives to serve on the planning committee or might have created a separate community advisory committee. In any event, sticking to the initial plan probably was not a good choice.

Despite all the difficulties and challenges, managers frequently achieve relatively representative participation in public involvement if they are conscientious in working toward that goal. Case 8.3 from the Dutch city of Enschede suggests how that can be accomplished.

Case 8.2

The Costs of Exclusion: Planning an “Urban Village” in Seattle

The Seattle Commons project began in 1991 when a small group of prominent citizens hatched an idea for “a major in-city park and urban village” in central Seattle (Iglitzen 1995, 622). The citizens formed the Committee for the Seattle Commons, and obtained foundation funding to plan the project. Their initial idea quickly “transformed from only a park to an urban village with a large park at its core—a holistic plan that included multiple types of housing, transit, a pedestrian orientation, with a mix of commercial and residential uses” (624).

From 1991 to 1993, the committee worked to elaborate details of the plan and to build support. The latter effort focused principally on “the cultivation of ‘influentials,’ many of whom were in leadership positions in a variety of civic organizations and who knew one another from current and past civic betterment efforts” (Iglitzen 1995, 625). Their efforts culminated in a second draft plan, which was endorsed by the Seattle city council in November 1993. Since the plan included a property tax increase to cover part of the development costs, it also required voter approval, and there the project collapsed, falling to a 53–47 percent defeat in a 1995 referendum.

The referendum failed in the face of three pockets of resistance. First, as the initial vision for the project became public, small-business owners who were in the path of the project mobilized in opposition, fearing the project would mean their forced relocation. Second, housing and neighborhood activists objected to the project’s possible negative impacts on the neighborhoods that also lay in the project’s path (Iglitzen 1995, 628–629). Finally, once the project reached the referendum stage, opposition also came from an ongoing “taxpayer revolt against government spending” (633).

Project planners had not involved any of these groups in their planning, believing they could build support among community elites with citizen support following. Reflecting that thinking, an outreach effort to build broader citizen support began only after the second draft of the proposal was completed in late 1993. Some citizen support materialized, but the three sources of opposition were not won over.

The planners knew that they were excluding these groups from the planning, but they thought that was the best approach. In their view, “the entire effort might well have remained stillborn, never moving past the drawing boards, if it had been forced too soon into the public arena, to be picked and pulled apart before it had amassed sufficient strength to continue its momentum” (Iglitzen 1995, 634).

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Case 8.2 (*continued*)

Viewed from the perspective of the design principles, that was a dubious choice. Specifically:

1. Although the planners appear to have recognized that external involvement would be required to gain the acceptance necessary for implementation, they erred in thinking that involving community elites could substitute for representative participation. That gamble proved especially ill advised once the need for a referendum developed.
2. The planners appear to have been blind to the possibility that some unorganized groups might oppose the project. Yet, even a modest effort at stakeholder identification could have alerted planners to the likelihood of opposition from small businesses and neighborhood groups.
3. When opposing groups did in fact mobilize, planners still showed no interest in hearing their perspectives. As a consequence, those groups felt both excluded and threatened, and became more resolute in their opposition.

The planners were also naïve in believing that avoiding broader involvement would protect the project from being “picked and pulled apart.” As it was, the planners eventually made extensive concessions to project opponents anyway—for example, reducing the project’s scale to less than one-tenth of what was originally proposed—in a belated effort to win over opponents before the referendum. One might wonder whether the project could have retained more of its original form and gained voter approval had opponents been invited to the table much earlier and concessions made then.

This case illustrates the costs of overlooking important groups in a planning process, especially groups that are initially unorganized or poorly organized. In this case, although none of the groups that opposed the project were organized at the outset, the threat perceived from the project converted them into a formidable political force.

Who Represents Whom?

When members of the public voice their opinions, public managers must reach judgments about who speaks for the public or for what segments of the public specific individuals speak. Without an ability to make good judgments here, public managers will not know what opinions to heed in formulating decisions. The task of determining who represents whom can be at least as challenging as defining

Case 8.3

Achieving Representative Participation in a Dutch Post-Disaster Planning Process

After an explosion in the year 2000 killed 22 residents and devastated the Roombeek district of the Netherlands city of Enschede, city leaders chose to pursue “maximum feasible participation” of residents and displaced residents in planning the area’s future, with the goal that their ideas “should guide the planning process” (Denters and Klok 2010, 583). That decision challenged project planners to figure out how to “enable all those residents who would want to participate to engage in the redevelopment process.”

The Roombeek district housed about 1,500 residents prior to the explosion, but most were displaced, at least temporarily, and many were injured, too. The area had also suffered from high unemployment and included many low-income households, although there were a few pockets of prosperity. About two-thirds of the residents were of Dutch origin, with the other third having migrated from Turkey, former Dutch colonies, and other countries.

Achieving representative participation among this kind of population would not be easy. As noted earlier, low-income populations typically are underrepresented in any form of political participation. The same pattern often holds for ethnic minorities, especially when they may face language issues if they do participate.

Recognizing the challenge, city officials developed an elaborate “process architecture” designed to achieve representative involvement. As its principal element, the architecture featured “multiple participatory arenas” (Denters and Klok 2010, 587). These included general public forums, “special participatory opportunities” for specific groups such as “male Turkish residents, female Turkish residents, Moroccan men,” and so forth, and a set of three panels of experts created as a “way of infusing the required professional expertise in the process.”

In addition to the different arenas, the architecture specified a comprehensive strategy for recruiting participants, including these components:

- A broad range of announcements through a range of mass media
- Personal mail invitations, where addresses could be found
- Requests of those invited to bring “former neighbors and neighborhood acquaintances” with them
- Requests of neighborhood professional organizations to recruit participants

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Case 8.3 (continued)

- A “Builders of the Future” schools project, where schoolchildren were encouraged to develop “their own visions of a new Room-beek” and told of the importance of their parents’ participating in the larger planning process

Recruitment also emphasized “indirect techniques” designed to reach displaced residents who might not be reached by direct means.

The architecture also stipulated separate sets of rules for residential participants and the two kinds of professionals who were assigned to the different groups—process facilitators, composed of trained facilitators hired by the city to chair participant meetings, and town planners, experts also hired by the city (Denters and Klok 2010, 588–589). The task of drafting reports on the various meetings fell to the process facilitators, but with participants asked to review the reports. The municipal council eventually approved a final rebuilding plan, but only after planning participants gave their endorsement (587).

As a result of these efforts, the project succeeded in gaining relatively representative participation in the planning. A post-project survey showed that the vast majority of residents (83 percent) knew about the participatory planning process, and almost one in every four residents from the area’s inner ring attended at least one of the participatory meetings (Denters and Klok 2010, 591). Even more notably, those who did participate closely resembled the area’s population as a whole on all key demographics: education, income, homeownership, gender, and country of origin (596).

Comparing the Enschede efforts to the design principles suggests a number of reasons for the city’s success in achieving representative participation:

1. The Enschede planning focused on issues likely to interest community residents, and the city was explicit that the opinions of community residents would shape eventual decisions.
2. Planners used a variety of means to reach potential participants, paying special attention to the need to reach displaced residents.
3. Planners created a variety of arenas where members of the community could speak their minds, including forums focused on specific ethnic minorities.

Enschede’s success offers encouragement that public involvement need not be undermined by participation biases, if planners are scrupulous in how they seek participation.

the relevant publics. The strident voices that sometimes claim to express widely shared sentiments may reflect only the isolated opinions of a vocal minority that hopes to achieve through volume what it lacks in numbers. Similarly, voices too low to be heard above the din sometimes speak for the many.

Officials may often wonder for whom someone speaks. As a Cincinnati municipal official put it years ago, “The usual problem is how many people do they represent. You have some neighborhood groups that are very vocal, and you’re surprised to find out later that there’s a total of ten members in the group.” Or, more than one group may claim to represent an area. As another Cincinnati official recalled, “one of the community councils had a leader who was a bar owner. I used to get people coming up and whispering to me all the time [at public meetings], ‘Don’t pay any attention to that guy.’” Finally, there is also the problem of a group’s losing its legitimacy in a community. As yet another Cincinnati official commented, “You get a group which started and was very active. You still find yourself talking to them, but there’s really nothing there anymore” (Thomas 1986, 97).

Although there are no easy rules for making sense of many voices, the experience of public administrators and elected officials suggests some metrics to consider:

1. *Membership lists*: How many members can a group document?
2. *Attendance at public hearings*: How many people in attendance appear to identify with the group?
3. *Repeated observations*: To what extent can the group sustain membership and attendance?
4. *Democratic procedures*: Are the group’s meetings and procedures open and democratic?
5. *Multiple sources*: What do others in the community think about community opinion and the representativeness of the group?
6. *Letters and e-mail*: Assuming a record of these communications is kept, what does it suggest about public opinion?
7. *Phone complaints and comments*: Assuming a log of these is kept, what does it suggest?
8. *Survey results*: Where a survey has been or will be run, what do the results suggest about public opinion on the issue at hand?

Seldom will any one metric provide information adequate to judge either the legitimacy of particular groups or the nature of broader public opinion. In the end, those trying to learn about public opinion are best advised to triangulate, drawing from a variety of sources to assess who represents whom and which opinions should be heeded.

The Role of Other Governmental Actors

As argued in Chapter 7, the public cannot be considered in isolation from other stakeholders, including other governmental actors. In deciding how to involve the public, planners should consider which governmental actors have a stake sufficient to warrant inviting their involvement, too. These actors could include (1) other departments in the same governmental unit, (2) other units at the same level of government, or (3) other levels of government. When any of these actors holds a legitimate interest in an issue, their omission could prove damaging or fatal. In Corpus Christi, Texas, for example, an otherwise exemplary community goal-setting effort failed when municipal department heads who were excluded from the goal setting balked at implementing the goals (McClendon and Lewis 1985).

It may be more important now than ever to involve other relevant governmental actors since many contemporary problems cross traditional functional and governmental lines. Problems such as drug abuse, unemployment, and air pollution often cannot be adequately addressed by a single governmental department, but instead require cooperative action by multiple departments, governments, and community organizations, as well as citizens.

ACHIEVING OPEN DIALOGUE AND EFFECTIVE RESOLUTION

Those who eventually come to a public involvement process must then be persuaded to join in dialogue and to cooperate in reaching a decision. For the involvement to succeed, a decision must be reached. It should reflect the ideas of the various participants, it should have their support, and it should have a high likelihood of successful implementation. These are the elements that comprise the second part of the challenge this chapter addresses.

Those elements are not easily achieved when people of different backgrounds and different perspectives join in debating an issue. After all, success requires that those who become involved compromise, surrendering some of what they prefer; and the compromises must come from people whose strong feelings probably explain their becoming involved in the first place.

Decision Making and Human Nature

Success seems even less likely if one subscribes to the widely held economic view of human behavior that people are self-interested and disinclined to cooperate. Seen from this perspective, instead of looking out for the interests of the group, participants are more likely to look out for themselves, asking, "What's in it for me?"

The usual dynamics of dialogue among people of different perspectives could exacerbate the problem. As Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002, 191) have argued, "real-life deliberation can fan emotions unproductively, can exacerbate rather than diminish power differentials, can make people feel frustrated with the system that made them deliberate, is ill-suited to many issues, and can lead to worse decisions than would have occurred if no deliberation had taken place." Indeed, collaboration "under the best of circumstances . . . taxes our collective ability to communicate competently, to debate constructively, and to explore thoroughly" (Daniels and Walker 2001, 11). The prospect of these dynamics does not augur well for the effectiveness of decision making where the public is involved.

Another view of human nature offers more hope for success. Collective-action theorists propose that many people have developed "generalized norms of reciprocity" that incline them toward involvement and cooperation under the right circumstances as at least "wary cooperators" (Hibbing and Alford 2004; Lubell and Scholz 2001, 176; Axelrod 1984). Wary cooperators refers to people who want to cooperate but are doubtful whether others will reciprocate; if others do not reciprocate, wary cooperators are poised to opt out. As Nobel laureate Elinor Ostrom frames the argument, "Our evolutionary heritage has hardwired us to be boundedly self-seeking" but "we are capable of learning heuristics and norms that help achieve successful collective action" (Ostrom 1998, 2).

What Ostrom implies, substantial evidence corroborates: the effectiveness of decision making with public involvement rests on engaging participants in a manner that encourages norms of mutual trust, open communication, and cooperation. When participants embrace those norms, they are more likely to join in constructive dialogue and to cooperate in reaching a decision, the cornerstones of effective deliberation.

Principles of Effective Deliberation

Effective deliberation can occur in a variety of formats and contexts—from public meetings to advisory committees to "consensus conferences" to "citizen juries" and more (see Chapter 9). It is neither the format nor the context that is crucial for effective deliberation, but whether that format and context incorporate a few key principles that nurture norms of open communication, trust, and cooperation.

First, participants should be encouraged to come prepared to cooperate, as this principle asserts:

Citizen Principle 15: Encourage participants in decision making with public involvement to come with and to maintain an open mind.

As Barabas (2004, 690 and 699) demonstrated in a rigorously controlled study, deliberation among diverse citizens succeeds more often when premised on “procedural requirements that diverse participants relax their strongly held views,” with the key being to “encourage participants to keep an open mind.”

Second, involvement should be structured to ensure effective two-way communication, as captured in this principle:

Citizen Principle 16: In any decision making with public involvement, include both (a) agency education of citizen participants and (b) communication of citizen perspectives to the agency.

On the one hand, since citizens seldom come to an involvement process knowing all they need to know about the issue at hand, officials need to educate by providing necessary background information (e.g., McComas 2010, 180). On the other hand, the citizens who participate must find opportunities to inform and be heard themselves. Historically, many public officials have failed here, preferring the so-called “Three-I Model” of public involvement: “inform, invite, and ignore” (Daniels and Walker 2001, 9). For citizens to feel that their involvement is meaningful, they must be able to communicate their concerns and those concerns must be heard (Beierle and Konisky 2000, 596; Cvetkovich and Earle 1994).

To make this principle work, public managers must recognize that citizens can provide valuable information and perspectives that can contribute to better decisions. As Fung and Wright (2001, 18) have argued, better solutions often result from “the variety of experience and knowledge offered more by diverse, relatively more open-minded citizens and field operatives than by distant and narrowly trained experts.” On occasion, the perspectives of citizens on technical issues can even prove more valid than those of experts. As Fiorino (1990, 227) has documented, “lay judgments about risk are as sound or more so than those of experts. Nonexperts see problems, issues, and solutions that experts miss.”

Third, for trust to develop, much of this communication must occur in face-to-face, small-group settings:

Citizen Principle 17: In decision making with public involvement, include significant opportunities for face-to-face small-group interaction.

As Ostrom (1998, 6) has reported, “consistent, strong, and replicable findings” demonstrate “that substantial increases in the levels of cooperation are

achieved when individuals are allowed to communicate face to face.” People “judge one another’s trustworthiness by watching facial expressions and hearing the way something is said,” which can only occur in face-to-face settings where participants number no more than fifteen (14). Enabling people to talk in small groups “optimizes the opportunity for each participant to meaningfully contribute to the conversation and to feel heard” (Lukensmeyer and Torres 2006, 21; see also Gericke and Sullivan 1994, 133).

At the same time, these needs for communication and dialogue must be balanced with the eventual need for resolution, requiring that opportunities for individual expression be tempered by efforts to aggregate ideas and move toward a decision. For one thing, since decision making with the public typically involves large numbers of people, mechanisms must be in place to aggregate information from small-group interactions to full-group decision making. This aggregation can best be achieved by “nesting” the former in the latter (Ostrom 1990, 90), as this principle stipulates:

Citizen Principle 18: In decision making with public involvement, nest small-group interactions within larger involvement mechanisms.

Nesting helps to funnel input from small groups to larger groups where decisions can be made that reflect that input.

Having effective neutral leadership to facilitate the involvement process also enhances the aggregation of opinions, as this next principle asserts:

Citizen Principle 19: Use a trained facilitator, preferably a neutral outsider, to lead any decision making with public involvement.

A trained facilitator can encourage expression of opinions and dialogue while also moving the group toward resolution, increasing the likelihood of success (e.g., Baker, Addams, and Davis 2005, 497; McComas 2001a, 49). Conversely, the absence of a facilitator can potentially doom an involvement process, as Case 8.4 illustrates below.

A public agency may sometimes prefer to use a facilitator from within its ranks, but doing so risks the individual’s being perceived as torn between the agency role and the facilitator role (e.g., Chess, Hance, and Gibson 2000, 251). A neutral outside facilitator avoids that risk and should consequently be better able to serve as the “empathetic, non-self-interested decision-maker”

Case 8.4

**Exemplary Involvement Gone Awry:
A Failure of Land-Use Planning in Arizona**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) of the U.S. Department of the Interior undertook what was in many respects an exemplary public involvement process for land-use planning in southern Arizona in the early 1990s. After an initial effort to acquire land along the San Pedro River sparked resistance, the BLM proposed to develop its acquisition plan through a new participatory "coordinated resource management" (CRM) approach "that utilizes planning teams made of agency representatives, landowners, interest groups, and members of the general public that, in theory, fits the participatory democracy model of public administration in public land management" (Moote, McClaran, and Chickering 1997, 880-881). CRM entails extensive exchanges of information and dialogue, with decisions made by consensus after receiving input from all group participants.

The process began in August 1992 with a three-day meeting to set ground rules. The CRM group met regularly over the next four months to hear from interest groups, governments and government agencies, and citizens on various land-use issues and policies. The group then defined property acquisition alternatives and goals, ultimately in January 1993 producing a management plan including priorities for the watershed (Moote, McClaran, and Chickering 1997, 881).

Some issues remained unresolved, prompting the formation of a twenty-two-member steering committee that met monthly during 1993, "trying to build trust among group members and clarifying issues and concerns." Based on the committee's input, the BLM revised its acquisition plan to focus on development of cooperative management plans with landowners (Moote, McClaran, and Chickering 1997, 881). BLM also decided to use an information form, which the steering group had developed, when contacting landowners about acquisition.

But the steering committee had not achieved unanimity on using the form, and some members objected to its use. Subsequent committee meetings became bogged down in continuing debate over use of the form until in early 1994 the members accepted that they were at an impasse and disbanded, leaving the BLM on its own in further efforts to carry out its plan.

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Case 8.4 (continued)

Asked later to evaluate the process, participants offered a divided verdict. On the one hand, representation and expression of opinions received high marks as "unbelievably broad" as well as "successful in achieving information exchange and learning." On the other hand, many participants lamented "not achieving continuous participation in planning," in part due to the time demands of the drawn-out process, and the failure to reach consensus on a plan. The group was also criticized for having chosen "a consensus decision-making process, but [with] no way to determine when consensus had been reached." In fact, the group sometimes reached unanimous agreement on an issue at one meeting, only to have participants who were not present at that meeting later raise the issue anew. Overall, participants assessed the planning process as a failure because, absent consensus, the BLM eventually had to make "a unilateral decision to move forward" (Moote, McClaran, and Chickering 1997, 882-884).

When viewed through the lens of the design principles, this case illustrates how even a mostly exemplary public involvement process can go awry:

1. BLM officials perceived accurately that needs for information and public acceptance recommended extensive involvement of external actors, and they undertook a process using the appropriate public decision approach, intending to reach a decision jointly with community actors.
2. Officials also structured a decision-making framework that appeared conducive to success. In particular, they appear to have been committed to using the results of the process, and they initiated decision making early, imposing few constraints on the eventual decision.
3. They encouraged and achieved "unbelievably broad" participation of interest groups, citizens, and other stakeholders.
4. They sought and achieved extensive dialogue.
5. Despite those virtues, no decision resulted from the process, leading to a judgment of failure in the eyes of most participants. The single crucial factor in that failure appears to have been the absence of a trained facilitator. A facilitator might have been able to move discussions from the initial voicing of diverse ideas, where the process excelled, toward eventual consensus, including prior agreement on what consensus should mean (i.e., probably not unanimity), and ultimately to closure, where the process failed. The need for a facilitator was not lost on the participants, who "said that meetings needed facilitation to encourage dialogues, make sure everyone was heard, and keep things on track" (Moote, McClaran, and Chickering 1997, 884). Absent that facilitator, the many virtues of this public involvement process were largely wasted.

that people prefer (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002, 161; see also Santos and Chess, 2003, 278).

The Arizona case also illustrates the danger of seeking consensus solutions, especially where consensus is defined as unanimity. As van den Hove (2006, 14) has observed, a “practical challenge in designing participatory processes lies in the combination of consensus-oriented cooperative aspects of participation with compromise-oriented negotiated aspects.” Idealistic notions about collaboration should not blind public managers to the likely need for compromise on many issues.

Finally, a public involvement process cannot succeed unless its leaders personify integrity, as this design principle recognizes:

Citizen Principle 20: In decision making with public involvement, leaders should behave in a trustworthy and transparent manner.

Beyond the obvious examples of outright lies and deception, untrustworthy behavior also extends to failures of disclosure as well to behavior that could prompt perceptions of untrustworthiness (e.g., Tyler and Kramer 1996). As Susskind and Field (1996, 7) have noted, “too many mistakes have been made, and too many situations have been mishandled for the public to trust the opinions and reports of” public officials. Given that history, public managers who invite public involvement should also anticipate needing to overcome initial distrust from citizens whose experience has taught skepticism. To succeed will likely require that trust “pervade all aspects” of any involvement process, as Bacot, Bowen, and Fitzgerald (1994, 239) have suggested.

As challenging as meeting all of these design principles could appear, the results can justify the effort, as exemplified by the profile of redevelopment planning in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in Case 8.5.

It remained uncertain after Community Congress II, in the New Orleans case, whether the proposed plan could be implemented, demonstrating how even an exemplary process may not guarantee long-term success (Williamson 2007, 33). The process came at significant cost, too. By itself, the technology for linking different locations and small groups to the full group would have been unaffordable without substantial outside funding.

THE PROMISE OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public involvement invites many risks and often results in failure, as in the Arizona and Wisconsin land-use planning cases profiled in this chapter and

Case 8.5

Public Involvement At Its Best: Post-Katrina Planning of New Orleans Redevelopment

After several failed initiatives to plan for post-Hurricane Katrina redevelopment, New Orleans residents were understandably wary when an effort began in late 2006 to develop a Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP). Their skepticism eventually softened, though, when the effort proved much more successful than its predecessors, due probably to a well-designed and well-executed public involvement process (Williamson 2007).

The process was initiated by New Orleans’ City Planning Commission, which had been shut out of two earlier planning efforts. From the start, commission planners viewed public involvement as crucial. As one planner said, “It doesn’t matter what the plan is if no one embraces it. There has to be a process to embrace it” (Williamson 2007, 13).

The eventual process had three principal components. First, an elite Community Support Organization was formed and met regularly as an oversight body. Second, eleven different planning firms were hired to work with all interested residents in each of the city’s eleven districts. Third, there were to be two Community Congresses, large-scale public meetings designed to aggregate ideas from various districts and residents. The first Community Congress on October 28, 2006, was widely viewed as a failure (Williamson 2007, 16). Attendance totaled only 300, and participants were more white and affluent and less from flood-damaged areas than city residents as a whole, and thus not a group that could speak for the city as a whole.

Community Congress II, held December 2, 2006, proved a different story. This meeting was facilitated by AmericaSpeaks, an organization that specializes in large-scale public involvement exercises. Helped by its outreach efforts, participation expanded dramatically to approximately 2,500 current and past residents of New Orleans. With the assistance of telecasting and the Internet, participants represented sixteen cities, including many places where residents had migrated post-Katrina. Later analysis showed that the participants were generally representative of the city’s pre-Katrina population, with, for example, a 64 percent black composition, very comparable to the 67 percent pre-Katrina (Williamson 2007, 18).

At the congress, participants were divided into small groups at individual tables and asked to discuss various planning questions. With the aid of individualized keypad polling and networked laptops, ideas from the many participants and tables were communicated upward and aggregated, then

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Case 8.5 (continued)

communicated to the full group for review, summary, and decision making. The process appeared to engage participants effectively in the planning discussion, reportedly "enabling conversations across differences" (Williamson 2007, 21).

In the end, Community Congress II appeared to have been successful in meeting both parts of the challenge announced at the start of this chapter: engaging representative participation and reaching effective decisions. A comparison to the design principles suggests why and how:

1. Leaders of the process recognized public involvement as being crucial to obtaining public acceptance in order for the plan to be implemented. They also recognized the need for the extensive sharing of influence, as embodied in the public decision approach, in order to gain and hold the interest of a public that was both wary and weary of planning exercises.
2. Helped by technology to reach residents who had been displaced to other cities, the leaders of Community Congress II engaged the broad and representative participation that was crucial to the legitimacy of the process.
3. Process leaders structured discussions in a manner that encouraged open communication and dialogue, while also facilitating aggregation of diverse ideas into decisions. As recommended, initial discussions occurred on a face-to-face basis in small groups, but they were nested in larger decision-making structures through the use of sophisticated communications technology. That structure promoted two-way communication from small groups upward and from the top down.
4. In an important contrast to the Arizona BLM case, facilitators worked with both the small and large groups. These facilitators, in combination with the technology, provided the capability to move from individual and small-group discussions to full-group decisions.

the last. Those failures sometimes occur when an agency has seemingly performed well at almost all aspects of public involvement, as the Bureau of Land Management did in the Arizona case. Only the lack of a facilitator marred that involvement, but that single shortcoming apparently doomed the process.

Yet, when public involvement works well, the results can be spectacular. In the New Orleans case, planning with public involvement produced rep-

resentative participation, extensive discussion and exchange of opinions, substantial agreement on many plan elements, and broad public support of the resulting plan. Moreover, these results were achieved in an environment that seemed inhospitable to public involvement: a city without "a strong history of citizen engagement" at a time, post-Katrina, when residents were weary and suspicious of more planning (Williamson 2007, 12). Similarly, in the Dutch city of Enschede, another post-disaster planning process also brought exemplary results.

Success in both cases attests to the value of a well-planned, well-run public involvement process. Planners in New Orleans and Enschede succeeded in difficult post-disaster environments by structuring involvement processes that adhered closely to the design principles defined in this chapter and the last. Other public managers can expect to achieve similar outcomes if they are willing to take the same care in engaging the public in resolving issues.