

WORKSHOP: DOES CITIZEN PARTICIPATION MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Naylor and Richardson
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Which is the generic term and which is the particular term, volunteering, or citizen participation? A conference in Region IV set as its theme, "Volunteering is Citizen Participation." I certainly wouldn't quarrel with that. My problem at HEW is to convince people that citizen participation is volunteering. With both terms, the intent is to involve citizens actively to implement government response to their problems.

The federal system of advisory committees discussed this morning includes many people who are jolly well paid to come, and therefore, they're technically not volunteering, and their impact is thereby limited. On the other hand, there is successful and real citizen participation. Ruefully I point to the Right to Life Movement success from their standpoint, in getting a rider attached to the HEW and DOL appropriations bill through congressmen whom they won to their point of view as citizens participating in a lobbying effort. That rider stated that no federal funds were to go for abortions and for weeks both budgets have sat in committees, unable to compromise. Whether we agree or disagree, we all can see this as an example of effective citizen activism. Both sides have certainly been active picketing Congress and HEW.

Sam Brown referred as the Director of ACTION to the mission of ACTION to inspire citizen action and citizen participation. I don't know whether he's old enough to remember, but I do, that ACTION tried that before, and was quickly stifled because it threatened the Establishment. I hope Sam Brown isn't punished for wanting to involve people in their own destiny. That's the basic principle for citizen participation. But ACTION almost went down the tubes on that very issue: as I remember, Vice-President Agnew was particularly upset about using Government money to subsidize citizens to criticize government programs. I think that ACTION is by now strong enough to back up citizens who point out needs for change and stir up public interest in issues.

Stirring up can take a wide variety of methods. Already used is the study Sam Brown described in which ACTION consulted with 180 people interested in volunteering for an assessment from their

perspective of what ACTION had been doing. Then they laid out new plans based on what they were told which could turn ACTION into a very different organization from what it used to be. The crucial factor will be continued citizen interest and support.

One of the problems with leader made decisions in government is what I call middle level sag: the grass roots want reform, and the leaders want reform, but the people in the middle have too many vested interests in keeping things the way they are. This sag is very hard to overcome. That's why we need citizen participation at every level. We need them in the front line, humanizing services and as Ivan Scheier has pointed out many times, that experience qualifies and motivates people to plan and evaluate programs. Therefore, it seems very important to me to have a feedback structure of some sort to get a continuous flow of thinking from volunteers at every level because they don't have a job at stake and are not vulnerable because of need for the services. All three have important points of view: We certainly need the expertise of the service providers, and we certainly need to hear the wishes of the consumers, and we also need the neutral point of view of dedicated volunteers. Many have had a lot of experience interpreting consumer needs, the community tradition, history and experience, to staff who may not know the town as well as the volunteers do. (A lot of staff take jobs in a new community, and have much to learn about the people there.) One of the best ways to do it is through volunteers who have observed changes and growth in their community and can interpret the customs and experiences there, to explain its attitudes. Such community wisdom should go into the program development process, which is why volunteering, as a form of citizen participation, can improve programs and contribute to public policy.

We had a strange and wonderful experience in citizen participation at HEW in the last year. Just about a year ago now, our philosopher king Secretary asked some of us to suggest how we might involve citizens and find out what they thought about the processes within HEW, how could processes be improved so that HEW could be more responsive, and the public wouldn't be so frustrated. He called for a Citizen Participation Task Force which started with a lot of hard work on a statement in the Federal Register which laid out alternatives for change in HEW and asked for citizen opinions on those changes. Four hearings were scheduled from Pittsburgh to San Diego for citizens to come to tell us what they thought. We were all deployed to those hearings to listen, and that was a new kind of citizen participation. Two realities limited the dialog: the staff had a need to justify HEW and so many came that local people could hardly get a word in edgewise. The hearings lasted

from 9 a.m. until midnight. People were in and out and they did get many words in, obviously, but the listening stance was very foreign to everybody's expectations for citizen participation. Most felt that when the government wants to do something, hearings are held for telling the public what it's going to do. That concept affected those hearings, but still, some important ideas were recorded.

The idea of listening, of "inputs" from citizens began to penetrate. Focus was difficult. The citizens speaking were not willing to limit reactions to the processes of HEW. They wanted to talk about programs, why HEW had changed from categorical programs, to research and demonstrations. To them this means that every grant program is a temporary arrangement, slated to terminate in a maximum of three years. This has something to do with process, but it had a lot more to do with money and program. People were cut off every time they tried to talk about program or money, because the stated purpose of the hearings was to talk about process.

Those who had to take the written materials and tapes from four twelve-hour exposures and try to make a sensible report were going great guns into January. Along came January 20 and there was scarcely anyone left from the Task Force. A letter went out from the new Secretary saying that the information was under consideration, because it was funneled out to the agencies to whom it related. I really think it was not lost motion, for I begin to see suggestions reflected in the reorganization, in welfare reform, in the whole stance of HEW as a social services organization for the first time in eight years. I think the public was telling us a lot in those forums and growing impact if the public continues to debate the tough issues and let officials hear from their discussions.

In 1974 Title XX was known as special (social service) revenue sharing which also includes Housing and Community Development, Rural Development, CETA, the Education amendments, Health Planning and Resource Development. This has its pluses and minuses from the standpoint of people who are operating programs. Plus is the chance every fiscal year to compete for the funds allocated. For good standing programs, the minus is a constant search for new and innovative approaches to qualify for support, even if what has been done has been proved effective.

Project Directors tell me, "You can't relax when you get the first demonstration grant because it's not going to last forever, and the

red tape is unbelievable." Accountability is built in. Probably you will have earned that money very thoroughly by showing that it is innovative, when what you'd like to show is that it is effective.

The important question is, "How are citizens to be involved? Who are they? What impact can they have as volunteers on service receiving systems and on public policy?" Charles Richardson has agreed to share his thoughts on this from a local government perspective:

My name is Chuck Richardson and I work for a metropolitan planning agency sometimes known as an areawide planning agency or council of government. We cover a five county area. We have 44 elected officials, comprising our board, to whom we have to respond. We have a mandate by federal regulations to implement on the local level citizen participation processes which are theoretically identified by the agencies which Mrs. Naylor is speaking about. I suggest to you that there is a significant inconsistency when you speak about HEW, HUD, EPA, FHWA, all of these agencies for which I have the responsibility of devising a citizen participation program that will meet the requirements of each of these agencies and the individual monitoring and analysis that is done by everyone who has their own perspective of it.

I had the pleasure yesterday of discussing with a group my concept in relationship to developing citizen participation programs with federal financial assistance if requested and taking a business approach to it. I think very definitely, unless we are able to get citizens to understand that for the most part they don't make the decisions, but they do have a significant influence on the decisions that are made. As a result of that, we have to encourage them to look at that kind of organizational process which I call in-service training techniques, workshops, group discussions, which I think have a significant influence on the management of that process. You then bring to parity, the concerns and the comments made by citizens to the perception of the bureaucrat who has the responsibility and the authority in making those decisions. That's the perspective which I allude to.

The orientation, training, and education for citizen participation is terribly important. If citizens understand the knowledge that exists now on issues, and then add to that knowledge their own wisdom, more sound decisions can be made.

Citizen participation raises an awful lot of semantic questions. To what extent if you are a citizen, and if you hate taxes, are you a volunteer? Is there some ownership you have in what you're making decisions on? Another question is, how is that ownership then translated into dollars? We have in-kind contributions from local units of government which trigger federal funds but there is nothing that translates your ownership as a taxpaying individual into bringing that back, other than through the governmental system.

Very few citizens make decisions, they influence decisions through their elected officials. That's why the Secretary of any Department can disband any operation he wishes which is not legislatively mandated. It's legislatively mandated that he provide information and awareness to interested and impacted citizens. The highest elected official in every community is the one who is held legally responsible for the decision. We who are administrators, who are the linking pins, need to find out how to gain the parity for the concerned individual. You have expressed concerns of yours, but I'm not too sure that they're the issues, because we have not been able to thoroughly go through and extract out of your concerns what are really the issues that are identified on the federal level or even at the highest local level. That gets into the area of prioritizing. These are some of the concerns that I have: accountability is support implementation. If a person supports the implementation of a project using your federal tax dollar, that has accountability attached to using tax dollars. In the participatory process, we need to understand very clearly legislative intent. Someone asked me yesterday, how would I go about it in dealing with a group, and I said the first thing I would do is go and get the bill. Many say the bill is too complicated for citizens to understand. I think it's an error for us to assume that individuals who are citizens don't have kids in college, don't have sisters or brothers, don't have intelligence or in many instances are more intelligent than some of us that will take that law and explain it to them. They wish to be as knowledgeable about it as any one else. Until we look at it from a parity standpoint, citizen as the equal counterpart to the elected official, people are never going to get into a discussion, so that they can influence the process of citizen participation.

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That is the methodology of the Volunteer Development System distributed herewith: to give citizens confidence and competence to participate in the way they choose from many options we can offer.

I have described the listening technique and the telling technique. I'd like to say that citizen advisory committees are established for this purpose, and ideally should provide a two-way communication. Sometimes they simply rubberstamp, and sometimes they are very presumptive. A lot depends on the way they are oriented and trained, as Chuck says. My plea is to develop volunteers, systematically, so that people can have real impact that grows out of their service experience. They can become advocates, eligible to serve on such things as advisory committees, or give effective testimony at hearings. Other ways we implement citizen participation include having a kind of ombudsman in reverse: an outreach person paid to gather citizen opinion, to listen as a local person trusted by the local people, empowered to report to high authorities, and enabled by being paid to get a reading on the feeling of people in an area on an issue. This is being done by the Transportation Department before a final decision is made by the Secretary of Transportation such as the one on the Concorde. There is a great deal of opportunity for citizens to influence that decision individually.

Another device is the citizen referendum, when an issue appears on the ballot, and the voters register their preferences. This doesn't give them very much latitude, but it does give the government some idea of how people feel on an issue besides what the polls say.

Ombudsmen in the traditional sense take up a complaint and follow it through as paid staff members. At the local level, there are a good many ombudsmen in multi-service centers who help people through the intake process for a variety of services: recreation, preventive health services, medical, social, educational and vocational rehabilitation services. Ombudsmen know where the services are offered and how to get people through the admissions process or other impasses so that they can use service effectively.

Temporary citizen review boards are not usually the same people who are carrying advisory committee responsibilities because they have to be one step removed from past experience for objectivity, theoretically. They're often made up of a predominately expert constituency who serve on an adhoc basis and don't carry ongoing responsibility. Consumers are increasing in proportions in these review process groups, but professional experts still predominate.

Technical assistance takes a variety of forms, too. A good deal is being given by each of the federal departments in its area of service

as part of the new federalism. "New Federalism" is local decision-making which has devolved from very highly centralized decision-making patterns. That's the pattern that underlies general revenue sharing and all of the specialized revenue sharing and block grants. However, local communities, for general revenue sharing purposes, have been ill-prepared. They simply haven't had the information it takes to make sound decisions. And yet, decisions have to be made by the local general purpose governments.

The Local Government Improvement Act is five years old, and was renewed at the end of 1976 to go for another four years. The League of Women Voters has been monitoring the uses made of federal dollars under its general revenue sharing. Local decisions seem to be improving because people are just becoming aware of the power that they can exert over allocation of scarce community resources. Unearmarked money with scarcely any restrictions comes on a complex formula basis, 1/3 to the states, 2/3 to 39,000 general purpose governments. At first, serious mistakes were made, some strange but understandable decisions. I remember at a 1974 meeting at Salt Lake City, the Chariman of the County Commission said that they took the lump sum and built 14 firehouses. He said that they'd wanted those firehouses for many years, and they've never had that much money available at one time to build them. They didn't dare put the money into service programs because they were afraid that it would not be renewed. If they created jobs, and a program developed, it might be dropped. My own home community spent \$180,000 on an animal shelter for 45 dogs and 30 cats which has piped-in music and a complete change of air every four hours. Most of us who live in Arlington, Virginia, don't have that! A lot better uses of that money were not made known because it had to be allocated within a certain length of time. People who wanted that animal shelter were ready with blueprints, estimates of cost, and glowing descriptions of what the benefits were going to be. Probably the county board of supervisors just heaved a great sigh of relief for a way to keep the money in the county!

Citizen participation has parallel basic issues, to those in volunteerism. Can you mandate citizen participation? There are authors who claim that you can. But the minute you mandate it, something is gone from the power that you've authorized, because with a mandate always goes limiting accountability. I had an interesting discussion with a woman doctor from Poland not long ago. Poland is divided into service zones. Every zone has a population of at least 100,000 with a social worker, and a minimum of ten volunteers. These are citizens who volunteer like our citizens in the army: they're simply named to serve in this capacity

for a given period in a geographic area. I asked her as tactfully as I could, how much latitude they had in the decision-making process, and she said, their responsibility is "just information." They carry information out from the government to their neighborhood, and they carry information about needs in their neighborhood back to the government. They don't process that information, they don't have to involve anybody else. To me it would be a very awesome responsibility, but the most dismaying thing about it, is that the "volunteer" in Poland has very little choice in the process.

We have experimented with mandated volunteering and it didn't work, in the 1967 Amendments to the Social Security Act. It's still there in three parts of the Social Security Act: maternal and child health, medical assistance, and child welfare services but not in AFDC. Citizen volunteers are of low income and reimbursed when involved in advisory committees and decision-making at the local level and in the actual delivery of services. The reason this "Harris Amendment" mandate didn't work in public assistance in general, was partly the unwillingness of the people who were accustomed to being decision makers to devolve power at all. Congress in its frustration has now devised other formula grants to give local people power of allocation in the many special revenue sharing programs.

Elizabeth Frier, Director of Volunteers in Michigan Social Services had an eloquent client who described welfare as faring well, like "general welfare" in the introduction to the Constitution. How can anyone fare well in poor housing, with inadequate nutrition, or unsafe? General welfare means the whole ambience for the individual, whether (s)he has a healthy place to develop or not. Some individuals in deprivation can express themselves very well, and they do. But I believe we need volunteers to speak for others who can't. Whom do we choose to speak for others as advocate volunteers? Some special characteristics are important, and we must plan how they might be developed in persons.

The first is authenticity and credibility. How do you get people who really know what they're talking about, and are believed by other people or perceived by other people as being reliable, into the decision-making process? And if you get people who are authentic and credible, how do you keep them that way? Because once they get into a decision-making body, they may have trouble keeping in touch with changing realities in the community.

Another characteristic needed is openness to new ideas. Some people

wait to get onto an advisory committee or some other soap-box with an idea ten years old which they have been trying to sell ever since. Citizen participation looks like a golden opportunity, but when they get on a committee, they don't hear anything, they just wait for somebody else to stop talking so they can talk about their original idea. That's not what we need! Openness to broader perspectives is terribly important.

We have to have people who can get things done without hurting people, not ruthless achievers, who believe so fervently they sometimes lose sight of the feelings of the other people involved.

We need people free to deal forthrightly with resource questions, who won't make promises about resources without follow through. They will not "roll over" hidden costs in the hope that they can pay them later on. They will make realistic estimates and they will work to mobilize support for what they believe in.

We need people who can prioritize, and make some very difficult choices. In communities today, we are caught between the pressures of inflation and depression. We have to decide what things come first chronologically, because they're feasible, or what things come first because they're the most important. We simply don't have resources enough to do everything.

The sixth characteristic I'd like to see in an advocate is vision: an idealist, with a vivid idea of how things ought to be, what's just, socially, economically. The British talk about geographic justice: Why can you have services if you live in one place, but not in another?

Seventh, last and probably the most important, we need people who are able to act and to do things. Not just sit and pontificate in decision-making, but pick up and follow through--pretty special people! In any group we can find the right combination if we recognize the importance of these elements; everyone has some of them.

We need to hear from you, now take ten minutes and identify one issue on which you feel citizens should be informed and involved. Set the priorities from the standpoint of timeliness, feasibility, and importance.

TABLE REPORTS

Table I

The whole issue of jails
Health care costs
Our correction system that doesn't correct, but warehouses people.
Housing
How decisions are made
How spokesmen are chosen

Naylor: This is another kind of justice that we're concerned with. The process that we're anticipating can bring about greater parity, if people make it come to life, accord others respect, and make sure there is balance and representation in decision-making groups as Chuck described it, so that they will truly express the feelings of the citizens in the area. People who are not citizens are paying taxes and if they're interested enough to participate they just might bring some very fresh perspectives to the decision-making process. We hope we won't exclude people who are not technically citizens, either.

Table II

Education
Preventative health
Methods of building citizen understanding

Naylor: That's very important. There are new enabling programs coming down the pike such as the Life Long Learning Act passed in November, for adult and continuing education programs. It isn't only the legislation that we need to know about, it's the regulations that follow, and ground rules for applications. A new nationwide computerized information system is available through your County Extension Service office. It's called FAPRS, Federal Financial Aid Program Resource System, and can give you information about funding for local programs.

Table III

We started out with our important point being allocation processes and we went from there to the need for the tools. Citizens do feel inept at reading budgets and understanding what the process really is. Our officials really have not made it much clearer or have not been helpful. Training of advocates and how we really do need to train our citizens to understand and be able to advocate up the ladder. Neither have we trained our officials to be able to understand how to involve citizens as participants. We got into the Institute for Volunteerism idea, on how we need to train our bureaucrats to use volunteers or citizen participants like we need to train our medical people to understand how to use volunteers better, or in any other area.

Naylor: There's concern that the devolvement of power is not happening willingly, and that citizens are not being accorded authority they should have in the decision-making process. Power is not given up willingly. We're seeking a way to realize some of the idealism that we've been talking about and yet grapple with the realities of power as we see it in communities. Political savvy is important, but knowledge is power, too.

Ivan Scheir: Training won't do it, but it will help, it affects attitudes. Build rewards into the system for effectively involving people for listening, and for producing some of the evidence they did hear.

Table V

We too, think energy is a top, top topic, and also transportation which may or may not be a part of the energy situation; it is a separate item too. But what we talked about, is that you can get a real backlash if you ask for citizen participation and then don't pay any attention to what they say. Too often that happens. I have been involved in hearings two different years on Title XX. There was no doubt about where the clients', as customers', interests lay, but no one paid attention to that, either on a federal or on a state level except to count them. We were glad that many people came and expressed an interest, but it didn't really matter, it wasn't a part of the planning process. If that goes on much longer, you're going to get a backlash where your citizens either are not going to participate or they're going to riot. Either way that isn't good.

Richardson: How many people are involved in the A-95 review process? How many use it as a tool for citizen participation? 50% of the people this year have never heard of the A-95 review process. Personally I think that's tragic. It's a circular out of the Office of Management and Budget which was originally designed for agency review, but can be used at the local level if you find out who handles the clearinghouse in your level. You can be placed on the list to get information about requests for federal financial assistance when the application is made. Otherwise, once a decision is made in the federal bureaucracy unless you take legal action, you're not going to change it anyhow, until it comes up for its refunding cycling. The A-95 review process is a very significant vehicle for people to have knowledge of and to use because they have a significant impact in that process. The Carter administration strongly supports Metropolitan Planning Organizations, called Council of Governments in some areas; identify the planning agencies through which the federal dollar comes through the state into your local areas. I have persuaded the committee that I provide staff services for, that one of their major responsibilities is to ask people who are requesting financial assistance, "How did you involve citizens in your local community?" In the development of your application, it is not our responsibility as that advisory committee elitist up here to determine whether consumer participation was adequate, but to find out how it was done at the more local level and how you went about that process which is beginning to work. I would encourage each of you to look into the A-95 review process in your own local areas as a method or vehicle for citizen involvement.

Another: One of the things that has concerned me for many years is the fact that people who have been involved in the decision-making process in one way or another at a local level in respect to HEW or HUD activities, find ourselves unable to communicate with others throughout the country who have similar interests and thereby help to impact future legislation. We may be communicating upwards to you but we never get a feedback to whether our concerns are in some way or another adding to the changes that you're building into the legislation when it comes up for review by Congress, because we know that you are the ones that are initiating the legislation or at least the improvement. Nor do we have a chance to compare experiences with others throughout the country to find out whether their experiences are similar. Years ago I discovered working with the League of Women Voters at the state level that indeed local Leagues were having similar situations occur, not only in our own state but all through the country. The process of developing a community action organization has been exactly the same throughout the country. We had no way of getting that information to you from our perspective as citizen activists,

and we find that true even now. While working on health planning and health systems agencies or Title XX, Advisory Committees are just not finding a way to communicate with each other.

Naylor: I want to thank you for your participation and for raising these issues, which ought to be on our agenda for discussions as we meet with other groups. We are often the people who do the convening in our communities, in our jobs, or in our professional associations. Unless the public is informed about the needs of other people and the solutions that other people have found, everybody has to invent his own wheel and citizen participation is not going to work very effectively.

I promise you to disseminate what you have said as widely as I can. I hope you will promise me to promote volunteers into decision-making roles, to help make government more responsive to citizen wants and needs. Thank you for your perspectives given here today.