GROUND RULES

CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT AS GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES MANAGE EQualize POWER

COMMUNITY VENTURES

PARTNERSHIPS IN EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

BY

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WHAT SHOULD WE DO ABOUT GLOBAL WARMING, ENDANGERED SALMON, TIMBER SALES, WATER POLLUTION, GRASS SEED BURNING, AND GROWTH MANAGEMENT? THESE ARE BUT A FEW OF THE IMPORTANT PUBLIC ISSUE DECISIONS PEOPLE FACE TODAY. IN THE PAST, ELECTED AND APPOINTED GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS WOULD GATHER FACTS FROM EXPERTS AND MAKE DECISIONS TO RESOLVE THESE ISSUES. TODAY, HOWEVER, MANY DIVERSE, SOMETIMES CONFLICTING, GROUPS OF CITIZENS, BUSINESSES, AND GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES ALL EXPECT TO BE A PART OF ANY DECISION MAKING PROCESS.

All interested parties affected by an issue should have an opportunity to participate fully in the development of the solution. Position, control of funds, information access, or legislation may exclude or devalue the involvement of segments of the public (Table 1). This circular will present the difference between citizen input and citizen involvement, as well as the difference between reactive and proactive citizen involvement. The circular will also suggest that the development of working agreements and ground rules allows interested parties to participate equally in the resolution of their issue.
TABLE 1.

COMMON COMPLAINTS ABOUT PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMS

1. THOSE WHO ARE VOCAL AND PERCEIVED TO HAVE POWER ARE SERVED FIRST, WHILE THOSE WHO ARE RESERVED ARE UNABLE TO MAKE A CASE AND MAY BE IGNORED.

2. THE VIEWS OF ORGANIZED GROUPS SEEM TO BE GIVEN MORE WEIGHT THAN OPINIONS OF INDIVIDUAL CITIZENS.

3. THE CITIZEN OFTEN MUST INITIATE THE INQUIRY.

4. WHEN THE AGENCY INITIATES PUBLIC PARTICIPATION, THE PUBLIC VIEWS BOTH THE MEETINGS AND THE PROCESS AS TOO FORMAL, WITH RULES AND PROCEDURES THAT ARE EITHER UNKNOWN OR UNCLEAR TO THE PARTICIPATING PUBLIC.

5. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT TAKES PLACE AFTER THE PLANS ARE MADE OR AFTER POSITIONS ARE SOLIDIFIED.

6. THE PROCEDURES ARE AIMED AT LETTING THE PUBLIC REVIEW AND REACT TO MATERIAL PREPARED BY THE BUREAUCRACY.

7. THERE IS OFTEN NO FEEDBACK ABOUT THE IMPACT OF ANY SUGGESTION, THE CITIZEN IS FRUSTATED BY THE LACK OF FOLLOW-THROUGH.

8. BECAUSE THE PROCESS IS VIEWED AS ERRATIC, IDEAS ARE SEEN AS BEING LOST "IN THE QUICKSAND OF BUREAUCRACY" WHILE THE CITIZEN WAITS FOR AN ANSWER.

WHY CITIZENS NEED TO PARTICIPATE

Citizen participation in the development of public decisions is needed to ensure fairness and an acceptable, collective decision about shared problems that can be implemented. Citizen concerns, views, hopes, and perceptions are critical to the development of a workable decision. Citizens may participate in several ways.

Many citizens seek to participate without direct personal involvement. They want decision makers to hear their views and to recognize their influence without becoming involved with other points of view. Certain participation behaviors do not require the presence or the visible interaction with others in a group decision-making process. Individuals can participate without being present, they can write letters or have an interest group represent them. Involvement requires an individual's presence and visible interaction with others in the decision-making process.

Salancik and Pfeffer (1978) examined the role of community participation in a public decision. They explain that participation in the political environment is one important manner in which an interest group links itself to the social system. The interest group gains legitimacy and support through participation in the political process. Agencies see an interest group as legitimate if its ideas or "interests" are acceptable or credible to those outside the interest group. Citizens view political action committees, environmental and consumer groups, and producer associations as legitimate mechanisms by which to influence a government agency's goals.

LEVELS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

In 1969, Sherry Arnstein's article "Eight Rungs on the Ladder of Citizen Participation" addressed the issue of how a government agency may restrict or empower a citizen interest group. Although her comments were directed specifically at a low income economic development program, her descriptions remain applicable to many areas of public affairs today. The eight rungs of the "participation ladder" describe increasing gradations of citizen participation (Table 2).
TABLE 2.

LEVELS AND TYPES OF CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT

To judge the acceptability of any type of citizen intervention, we need to look at the levels and types of citizen involvement. Sherry Arnstein (1969), in the Journal of American Institute for Planners, developed a model for citizen participation. This adaptation of the model shows the types of citizen participation government agencies can adopt when seeking public input.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITIZEN PARTICIPATION TYPES</th>
<th>CITIZEN PARTICIPATION MODELS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Proactive Participation &quot;Involvement&quot;</td>
<td>Citizen Control</td>
<td>Community controlled organization</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Delegated Control</td>
<td>By law - dominant decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partnership</td>
<td>Negotiated decision making, participants may receive compensation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reactive Participation &quot;Input&quot;</td>
<td>Placation</td>
<td>Citizen Advisory Boards - often without staff or power</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Consultation</td>
<td>Public meetings inviting ideas - no assurance of action</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Informing</td>
<td>Informing of rights - first step to participation, but often superficial</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-participation</td>
<td>Therapy</td>
<td>Powerlessness = inability to cope or adapt Group therapy masked as participation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manipulation</td>
<td>Rubber-stamp boards, public relations, for system = contrived to substitute for participation</td>
</tr>
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</table>

The bottom rungs, manipulation and therapy, describe levels of "non-participation" that public agencies may use as a substitute for the participation of many. Government agencies are often required to provide opportunity for this type of public feedback. Requests for citizen feedback may take the form of written or verbal testimony at public hearings. However, the decision-making authority resides with an agency or official. Advice or testimony is only advice or testimony. The agency must consider, but may reject, the testimony. As a result, individuals or groups may feel that they are powerless or unable to cope. Agencies may also seek participation as a public relations tool for the agency through rubber-stamp boards contrived to substitute for effective participation.

Many federal, state, and local government agencies have recognized the need for public participation. They are, however, often reluctant to give up their power to make the final decision. They may seek public participation that reacts to decisions already made within the agency. Arnstein (1969) describes the following reactive participation behaviors: Citizen advisory boards may be used to advise the agency; however, these boards are often without staff or power to make decisions, thus the agency takes the advice "under consideration." The agency may hold public meetings inviting ideas from the public without any assurance of action. Agencies may also inform the public of its rights in the decision-making process but not provide an adequate process for exercising those rights. All of these are first steps, though superficial, toward allowing public participation.

When agencies meet today’s public demand for strong involvement in public decision-making, the participation process becomes proactive. Arnstein would describe proactive participation as the top rungs of the public-decision ladder. Agencies involve the public in a decision-making or managerial role. Examples of proactive participation are negotiated agreements over public issues, citizen dominated decision-making, and community controlled corporations.

Whether consciously or not, managers make a choice about the type of public participation they allow or encourage. Furthermore, this decision reflects the power they are willing to share with the public. Research has shown that in some areas of public policy, agency decisions are less likely to be challenged if managers choose to involve the public in proactive decision-making processes (Eulke and Roberts 1987).
WHY AGENCIES NEED CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND FEEDBACK

One explanation for why an agency needs citizen participation is described as "resource dependency" theory (Edgar and Camper 1968). Resource dependency is especially relevant when discussing how bureaucracies interact with interest groups in the political environment. This theory assumes that an agency needs its political and public surroundings for the physical, human, and financial resources and the information necessary for the agency's survival. The successful agency builds coalitions to gain resources and information.

Since the agency needs them, these coalitions may influence the agency's agenda and behavior. Agencies (federal, state, and local) form coalitions with interest groups by negotiating the goals and priorities for the agency. The best outcome for the agency is to develop client advocates for its organization. Client advocates can lobby to increase agency resources.

THE PUBLIC INPUT CHOICE

Managers of public organizations may view public interest groups in two ways—as a resource pool or as a source of information and knowledge about the public's best interest. When viewed by the agency as a resource pool, the bureaucratic organization wants to gain influence and secure interest group support to assure adequate resources. The content of the public input is often secondary to the power gained by the agency in the process.

When an agency is seeking citizen participation to achieve the one specific purpose of support, participation is usually "top down." The agency organizes the input process around its own goals and may not address the needs of the individual or the public at large.

Examination of a set of common citizen complaints typifies this "reactive, top-down" approach (Table 1). When forced to do so, agencies listen to those groups that have the ability to give or take resources, bring public criticism on elected or appointed officials, or have access to the press. The agency's bureaucracy controls the process. Meeting dates, times, and locations; public testimony rules; and access to materials, plans, and decisions are all designated by the agency or public body receiving the "public input." Actual public participation is reserved for reaction to a decision. Reactive public response is not true involvement. Again, Arnstein provides us with a measuring stick for evaluating participatory decision making and citizen involvement programs (Table 2).

THE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT CHOICE

An agency may view the public as a source of information and knowledge about the public's own best interest concerning the issue at hand. When this is the case, the concerns of the agency become the accuracy and completeness of the information gathered from the public. It is "what" the public says that influences the decision making of the organization, not just who says it.

The goal of proactive public involvement is to make better decisions. Involvement helps to ensure that all the important information is available to the decision-making body. Involvement also ensures that decision makers are aware of an array of concerns and a range of action alternatives. By including groups who, if ignored, will resort to traditional political or legal mechanisms such as elections, lawsuits, or recalls to ensure consideration of their ideas, this process will result in better decisions. Proactive public involvement does not make the manager's decision easier, but may very well assist in making it better. "Successful public involvement, if anything, makes decisions more difficult because it should alert the manager to a range of complexities and conflicts which he could easily ignore without such information. Moreover, public involvement will increase the time necessary to reach decisions; it takes money and personnel to adequately involve the public" (Heberlein, 1976).

Bureaucratic organizations have found that retractions, lawsuits, or cover-ups are less likely when adequate public involvement occurs before the agency makes a decision. A good decision, like a good agreement, has several characteristics:
(1) the decision is workable, it can be implemented;
(2) the information gathering occurs before the decision, not after;
(3) the decision is perceived as fair and equitable, all the interested parties participated in the development of the decision.

Once a governmental agency makes the choice to involve the public, they manage the involvement process may determine the success of the decision-making. Coalition building between citizens and agencies to gather information and knowledge, not resources, must be inclusive. Furthermore, the coalition of citizen groups and agency(s), once formed, must behave in a fair and open manner. Ground rules can define behaviors for the coalition that will help lead to successful decision making.

Fundamental to a good decision is the development of a process for fair and open involvement. Equalizing the power base for involvement requires that everyone know, understand, and share in the development of the ground rules. "If you don’t know the rules, you can’t play the game."

**WORKING AGREEMENTS: GROUND RULES THAT HELP EQUALIZE POWER**

**GROUND RULES AS AN AID**

Ground rules are a set of agreements developed by participants in a collective decision-making process. Ground rules identify what contracts, agreements, or expectations the group has for the proper conduct and behavior that will occur during their negotiations or problem-solving efforts. Ground rules specify the group’s procedural agreements of how they will conduct work and what minimum behavior standards and agreements are necessary for them to begin mutual risk-taking and problem-solving. The ground rules can be viewed as an essential first step as the participants begin to build the level of relationships and trust necessary to accomplish their task and to ensure implementation of their agreements.

**PROCESS TO DEVELOP GROUND RULES**

Each decision requires a different coalition of stakeholders or interest groups. Each coalition’s knowledge, skills, and needs are different. The same coalition may need to revise and update their ground rules as the process and relationships develop. It is certainly not advisable for any coalition to just pick up a standard set of ground rules from another group or process and “adopt” them or, more truthfully, impose them on another planning process. Ground rules, to be effective, need to be custom tailored by and for both the interest groups’ (stakeholders’) and the agency’s particular needs. Ground rules need to be living agreements that are actually helpful to the group process and progress, not just posted at every meeting.

As the process begins or problems occur, a facilitator can begin to identify areas in which the group may need ground rules. Techniques used to determine these areas or issues include sensing interviews, caucus meetings, and/or orientation sessions. Issues may surface as problems that need resolving before risk taking and creative problem solving can occur. There also may be concerns that reflect perceptions of past dealings with the various parties in the group. For example, issues of media coverage or distribution of draft recommendations may have caused contention or mistrust in previous encounters. The coalition participants need to address positively the incident before they can begin to develop trusting relationships.

During the first few meetings the discussion, development, and group adoption of a customized set of ground rules should occur. This needs to happen early in the process before patterns become set or conflict escalates over the content of decisions. Drafting the understandings should be a shared responsibility among a neutral facilitator, the participants, and other affected parties. This process provides an early opportunity for the parties to discuss their perceived understandings of the various roles the facilitator and participants can play. It allows the facilitator to highlight procedural issues, such as fairness, equal bargaining power, attendance, and confidentiality.
Discussions of procedural fairness and values by the participants occur more freely before issues of material difference arise. This allows the participants to educate each other about the values and cultures in which they operate, i.e., delegated power, decision-making models and accountability. This also allows the participants to increase their ability to understand the other parties' interests, incentives and decision-making structures.

Discussion, group problem solving, and group consensus to conduct activities following a customized and specific set of ground rule agreements all allow a coalition to define a set of common interests early in the process. This also provides hands-on learning about how to work with interest-based needs rather than fixed positions. It is a critical opportunity to allow the group an early common success that may model behavior for future agreements. Groups in intense disagreement and conflict often refer to these ground rule decisions as evidence of their ability to work together. This important sense of accomplishment can often reverse or moderate intense disagreement on substantive issues later.

GROUND RULES

The very act of developing and agreeing on the working agreements provides an opportunity for participants to practice their problem-solving skills before the "real" decision must be made. The content of the ground rules is also of great importance as these decisions set the "rules of the game." How decisions will be made, participation, data collection, problem solving, and conflict management have all been included in various ground rules.

Three examples of ground rules have been provided to help the reader understand the scope of procedural agreements that can be included in the ground rules.

The first case example was used in a second grade classroom showing that ground rules can be quite simple and includes issues as basic as no fighting.

CASE 1: PROCEDURES AND CONSEQUENCES: RULES THAT WILL HELP US LEARN!

Our number one rule: Treat everyone nicely. After much discussion, we discovered that this statement covers a lot of territory including:

- No fighting
- Share
- Be kind
- Don't take things that belong to others
- Be gentle, not pushy
- Don't be jealous
- Help other people
- No yelling in other people's ears
- Listen to other people when they are talking
- Play with everyone; include everyone
- Don't say bad words
- Don't pull other people's hair or teeth

Our number two rule: Don't bother other people's work

Our number three rule: Take care of our materials by:

- Not using them roughly
- Don't hide the materials
- When you are finished, take them back and place them carefully on the shelf
- Watch all the pieces so they do not get lost

Our number four rule: keep our classroom beautiful by doing the following:

- Throw your garbage away
- Put your work away
- Do your job
- Recycle our paper

Our number five rule: when Mrs. Knight says, "Stop and listen, please," We should stop and listen and put our eyes on her.

Our number six rule: Work hard, have fun, and learn a lot.

To enforce these rules, our class has adopted the following order of consequences:

1. We should talk to the person about breaking the rule and tell them to stop.
2. If they do not stop, tell Mrs. Knight or an adult. She will talk to the person and try to help.
3. If that does not work, we should call his/her mom or dad and explain the problem. His/her mom or dad will try to help.
4. We will ask Mrs. Wooley, our principal, to talk to the person and try to help with the problem.
The second case example represents the ground rules of 16 separate interests. They hoped to come to a resolution on open grass burning during late summer. Interests represented included members of the grass industry and farmers, wheat growers, two clean air coalitions, the American Lung Association, tourism, and both federal and state government agencies. The process used to develop the ground rules included answering the following three questions: How do I want to be treated? How can I be assured the process will be fair? What are the issues I am afraid of?

CASE 2. GROUND RULES FOR THE INLAND NORTHWEST FIELD BURNING SUMMIT, MARCH 26, 1991

Each of the participants in the Summit agreed to the following ground rules:

1. **Legitimacy and Respect.** Summit participants are representative of a broad range of interests, each having concerns about the outcome of the issue at hand. All parties recognize the legitimacy of the interests and concerns of others, and expect that their interests will be respected as well.

2. **Active Listening and Involvement.** Participants commit to listen carefully to each other, to recognize each person’s concerns and feelings about the topic, to ask questions for clarification and to make statements that attempt to educate or explain. Participants should not assume that any one person knows the answer.

3. **Responsibility.** Each of us takes responsibility for getting our individual needs met, and for getting the needs of Summit participants met. Participants commit to keeping their colleagues and constituents informed about the progress of these discussions, and to do so in a timely manner.

4. **Honesty and Openness.** Constructive candor is a little used but effective tool. Participants commit to stating needs, problems, and opportunities, not positions.

5. **Creativity.** Participants commit to search for opportunities and alternatives. The creativity of the group can often find the best solution.

6. **Demiliarized Discussion.** Participants commit to leave their weapons of war at home (or at least outside the room).

7. **Consensus.** Participants agree that any decisions will be reached by consensus.

8. **Separability.** This summit is in no way meant to detract from or interfere with current efforts regarding field burning.

9. **Media.** Participants agree that to get maximum benefit from the Summit, a climate should be created that encourages candid and open discussion. In order to create and sustain this climate, participants commit to not attributing another participant’s suggestions, comments, or ideas to the news media or non-participants. We encourage the participants to use good faith in dealing with the media, and to refer questions to Bill Justus, at the Spokane Chamber of Commerce, Ag Bureau. No media will be invited to attend unless cleared with participants prior to the meeting.

10. **Freedom to Disagree.** Participants agree to disagree. The point of this Summit is to foster open discussion of issues. In order to facilitate this we need to respect each other’s right to disagree.

11. **Commitment.** Participants agree that this effort is a priority in terms of time and/or resource commitment. Each participant will provide the name of an alternate. The alternate will attend in the absence of the participant. It is the responsibility of the member and alternate to keep each other up to date.

12. **Rumors.** Participants agree to verify rumors at the meeting before accepting them as fact.

13. **Freedom to Leave.** Participants agree that anyone may leave this process and disavow the above ground rules, but only after telling the entire group why and seeing if the problem(s) can be addressed by the group.

14. **Dispute Resolution.** Participants agree that in the event this effort is unsuccessful, all are free to pursue their interests in other dispute resolution forums without prejudice.
Case example three represents a state agency which was about to embark on a lengthy and conflictive change process. It was important that the management team clearly delineate the rights and responsibilities of all participants. In this process, management developed the principles and all the staff were asked to add additional principles or identify principles they questioned. In one large meeting, all the people involved in the process agreed to the ground rules.

CASE 3. DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL: 'CREATING AN ORGANIZATIONAL VISION FOR THE DOP' OCTOBER 1990

Principles and Working Assumptions

1. "Constructive participation" will be employed to build a consensus on how DOP will approach the challenges of preparing for Workforce 2000. Employees have a right and an obligation to be involved in each segment of the process. Employees will be encouraged and provided an opportunity to participate in decisions that affect them and their jobs. Participation and involvement build ownership, responsibility, and commitment.

2. It is essential that the sensibilities of individuals be protected, and that the self-esteem of employees be enhanced as a consequence of the organizational development process. Every effort will be made to ensure that individuals are not devalued when changes occur in jobs, roles, or functions.

3. Any changes will be developed through a creative problem-solving team process which entails a balance of hard work, fun, and excitement.

4. Individuals and groups will take responsibility for behavior which supports the needs of DOP in its self-defined mission.

5. Participants on the problem-solving teams will share the results of the process with their colleagues in a timely manner.

6. The process of building trust will encourage participants to respect one another's opinions and to be sensitive to one another's needs.

7. An anticipated outcome of this undertaking is the creation of an organizational culture in which members feel safe to discuss their ideas of how the work of the DOP can be improved, and that members need not fear any type of retribution resulting from their participation in the organization's problem-solving groups.

8. The involvement of external facilitators in no way implies that a plan of reform or reorganization is being imported into the DOP. The role of the facilitators is to organize and conduct a process whereby the employees and managers of the DOP create their own organizational vision for the agency's role in preparing for the challenges of Workforce 2000.

9. Key values reflected in this process include integrity, trust in people, and dedication to the provision of quality service.

10. The process will encourage risk taking and an openness of the participants to try new things and to be creative.

11. Continue to involve clients and consider the impact and implication of changes on client agencies.

12. Continuously monitor and evaluate the process.

13. Where possible, when decisions are made, this information needs to be shared with staff before outside clients.
CONCLUSION

Citizens and government agencies need each other to make useful decisions about the future. Fully involving the public leads to better decisions. To accomplish full involvement, all interested parties require a level playing field; each actor needs equal power. An effective set of ground rules can aid the involvement process. Understanding public participation behaviors and ground rules represent the first steps in achieving success in public decision making.

REFERENCES


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A Western Regional Extension Publication March 1995 WREPO129

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