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Collaborative Design of Citizen Engagement in City and County

Comprehensive Planning: A Simulation

Teaching Note

Background Information

A unique branch of collaborative public management is one that explicitly includes citizens within the collaborative process. This branch, citizen-centered collaborative public management (Cooper, Bryer, & Meek, 2006), is the focus of important empirical and conceptual research. Citizen-centered collaborative public management stands apart from other variations that are focused on cross- or inter-sectoral relations to solve problems in society (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003). Without diminishing the importance of these cross-sectoral forms of collaboration, the notion of citizen-centered collaborative public management suggests that citizens and the values of citizenship need to be more centrally placed in the research and practice of governance.

Two examples of citizen-centered governance have emerged in recent years on opposite sides of the United States. Though these are not the only examples, these are the basis for this simulation.

First, in the City of Los Angeles, voters approved a new charter in 1999. The centerpiece of this charter was the creation of a system of neighborhood councils. Part of the evolution of

This simulation was a first place winner in our 2007 “Collaborative Public Management, Collaborative Governance, and Collaborative Problem Solving” teaching simulation and case competition. It was double-blind peer reviewed by a committee of academics and practitioners. It was written by Thomas A. Bryer of the University of Central Florida, and edited by Laurel Saiz. The author wishes to thank Dr. Terry Cooper for inspiration concerning approaches to collaborating with citizens and Dr. Ronnie Korosec for valuable feedback on previous drafts. This simulation is intended for classroom discussion and is not intended to suggest either effective or ineffective handling of the situation depicted. It is brought to you by E-PARC, part of the Maxwell School of Syracuse University’s Collaborative Governance Initiative, a subset of the Program on the Analysis and Resolution of Conflicts. This material may be copied as many times as needed as long as the author is given full credit for his work.

this new system of citizen empowerment included researchers at the University of Southern California, who facilitated collaboration between public administrators and citizens with the neighborhood councils (Kathi & Cooper, 2005). In three separate cases, a variety of outcomes emerged with respect to the development of trust, sustainability of relationships, and responsiveness of administrators to the participating citizens (Cooper & Bryer, 2007a; Cooper, Bryer, & Meek, Forthcoming). Additionally, a variety of personalities embedded in distinct organizational cultures were observed, leading some administrators to be more responsive and willing to work with citizens than others (Bryer, 2007). The characters in this simulation represent the personalities and their motivations recorded in this research.

Second, in the State of Florida, an effort is underway to amend the State Constitution. Known as the Florida Hometown Democracy effort, the amendment would require all changes to city and county comprehensive plans that are approved by local government bodies be placed before voters as a referendum. The proposal has triggered substantial debate among homeowners, business owners, developers, and government officials. Proponents suggest that developer interests currently control land use decision-making and decisions made by government officials are based on political need, rather than community good. Opponents suggest that if the amendment passes, rather than having elected officials making land use decisions, the decisions would be left to homeowners and individuals who would stop all development, despite potential economic and social benefits. Opponents, including the Chamber of Commerce, facilitated a citizen-engagement effort in the Central Florida region to identify principles to guide land use decision-making. Though the effort included more than 20,000 Floridians, the resulting principles are not binding on elected officials.

The Florida case provides the context for this simulation; the City of Los Angeles cases provide some of the character personalities and interests. Students will be asked to work across interests to create and institutionalize a citizen-participation mechanism in the comprehensive planning creation and amendment process. Prior to starting the simulation, students should complete some readings to become knowledgeable of some options for citizen engagement with government.

Suggested Readings Prior to Simulation Commencement

The central discussion focus in the deliberative exercise will be how to structure citizen engagement in the comprehensive plan creation and amendment process. Thus, the first set of readings that are suggested are good resources for understanding the variety of tools and processes available to engage citizens with government. The first is co-authored by Terry L. Cooper, Thomas A. Bryer, and Jack W. Meek and is entitled “Citizen-Centered Collaborative Public Management” (2006). The article reviews six approaches to civic engagement and explores how each contributes to enhancing government trust in citizens, citizen trust in government, citizen efficacy, citizen competence, government legitimacy, and government responsiveness. Approaches to civic engagement that are explored consist of adversarial, electoral, information exchange (i.e., the hearing), civil society, deliberative, and last, citizen-centered collaborative public management.

A second reading is co-authored by Carolyn J. Lukensmeyer and Lars Hasselblad Torres and is entitled “Public Deliberation: A Manager’s Guide to Citizen Engagement” (2006). The authors examine a variety of deliberation techniques that are available both on-line and through face-to-face interaction.

Archon Fung also explores a variety of participation approaches in an article entitled “Varieties of Participation in Complex Governance” (2006). Fung frames a variety of participation approaches according to the joining of three continua. First he asks who should participate, ranging from expert administrators to the diffuse public sphere. Second he considers how much authority the participants should have, ranging from individual participant education (and no authority) to direct authority or control over a policy or management area. Last, he asks what kind of communication and decision mode should be used in the process, ranging from participants listening as a spectator to having participants actively deliberate and negotiate with each other. A variety of techniques and approaches to citizen participation emerge as points along each continuum are combined.

A pair of additional readings on citizen engagement processes may be useful, as well, for classroom discussion, if not assigned reading. The first is a book chapter by Judy B. Rosener (1977) in a government-published reader on citizen participation from the late 1970s. Though dated, the chapter provides an excellent overview of various techniques and processes for engaging citizens. The author presents thirty-nine techniques in a technique-function matrix to assist public officials in selecting the approach that best accomplishes the intended goal, such as to identify attitudes and opinions of citizens or to generate new ideas and alternatives. The second supplemental reading is a classic in the field of citizen engagement, Sherry Arnstein’s “A Ladder of Citizen Participation” (1969). Arnstein presents a zero-sum hierarchy of citizen participation approaches, ranging from the manipulation of citizens to citizen empowerment through direct control.

Ideas presented in Arnstein’s framework can be taught along with the frameworks of Cooper, Bryer, and Meek (2006), Fung (2006), and Rosener (1977) to help students think about what they want to accomplish through the engagement of citizens and how to accomplish it. It may be that more than one step along Arnstein’s ladder is necessary to accomplish a public official’s goal. This is an idea that is expressed through a character profile of a local government manager by Cooper and Bryer (2007b). Overall, classroom lecture and discussion should focus on exploring the drawbacks and benefits of the different models of participation so that class members have the tools to deliberate about the best participation process to create in the simulation.

In addition to readings on citizen engagement, the simulation can be used to teach facilitation skills and techniques. If this avenue of instruction is pursued, I recommend two readings. The first is a book chapter authored by Sandor P. Schuman (1996), in which he identifies four types of facilitation tools: content, cognitive, social, and political. Content tools are used to feed back to group members the substance of their discussions. Cognitive tools are available mental models and discussion questions that can help group members think and talk through

the issue of concern to them. The social tools that are available include group member interaction patterns, such as small group work versus whole group, and how small groups are created. Political tools are processes that can be used to include or exclude certain individuals or types of individuals from group processes.

To accompany Schuman's article is a short book by Michael Doyle and David Straus (1984) entitled *How to Make Meetings Work: The New Interaction Method*. Select chapters in the book discuss the role of four unique actors in a group process, each of which will be part of the simulation. Group members are the key players in the simulation; a group manager (who can be played by the instructor in the simulation) keeps the group focused on the task and is final arbiter if such a decision is needed. The facilitator is a neutral, non-judgmental guider of the group process. Recorders are note-takers for the group. Good note-takers are required to allow group members to focus on their discussion.

Last, I suggest students read Fisher and Ury's book, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* (1981). This accessible and intuitive book teaches how to negotiate with people who hold opposing positions. The authors teach that negotiators should focus on interests, rather than positions, on facts, rather than personalities, and on generating win-win solutions, rather than compromises. These lessons are instrumental in a group dialogue process, particularly when group members enter a dialogue with opposing favored solutions (e.g., a hearing process versus a ballot referendum to decide whether and how to amend a county's comprehensive plan).

Guiding the Simulation

The simulation followed by discussion can take up to three hours, or a single class period. Instructors can choose to take less time, but the more time that is allowed, the more students can examine in depth the benefits and drawbacks of different approaches to civic engagement. Additionally, with more time, the students can observe how competing interests can come to a single table to try and reach consensus. The simulation should be preceded, probably in the previous class session, by a lecture on forms of civic engagement. This lecture is the equivalent to the presentation of objective facts that are found in numerous forms of citizen participation (Lukensmeyer & Torres, 2006). All participants will be on the same page in terms of information available through the lecture. A lecture can also be given on facilitation and interest-based negotiation using the recommended readings (Doyle & Straus, 1984; Fisher & Ury, 1981; Schuman, 1996).

Following the simulation, the instructor can guide students in discussion about lessons learned. Possible discussion questions include the following:

- What observations do you have about the deliberation?
- Did the deliberation move in the direction you expected? Why? If not, what surprised you?
- If the participants reached consensus, do you feel they achieved a win-win

solution for all parties, or did each participant sacrifice an interest or value of importance to him or her?

- If the participants did not reach consensus, what prevented it? What might have been done to reach consensus, either by the facilitator or a participant?
- What are your thoughts about the Hometown Democracy effort? If given the choice between the status quo hearing process and the referendum process, would you implement the referendum process? Why or why not?
- Were there any citizen engagement process alternatives that were not considered? What else might the participants have discussed?

It is important to stress at this point that there is no right answer as to which citizen engagement process is best for this situation. More than one process may be suitable, or they may be combined. What is created depends on the people at the table, the capacity for implementing a process, and the unique administrative and political cultures that pervade the jurisdiction. The simulation will demonstrate the complexity of decision-making that involves various interests and the contextual factors and individual experiences that lead to different kinds of decisions.

Beyond the issues addressed through the above questions, the simulation will demonstrate the tension between expertise in policymaking and experience—technical knowledge versus experiential knowledge. Some students will advocate for policies based on the expertise of professionals; other students will advocate for increased use of everyday citizen experience. In finding a suitable citizen participation process, students will identify the tension that exists and seek a balance between the opposing points.

I have used variations of this simulation for a master's class in cross-sectoral governance. In addition to having the participants and facilitator practice the use of interest-based negotiation (Fisher & Ury, 1981), I encourage the use of a decision-process called proposal-based decision making. There is no citation or reference for this process; I learned it myself through experience in practice. The idea and process is simple. Specifically, it proceeds in the following sequence:

1. Any individual who wants to have a position adopted by the group (with respect to stakeholder identification, for instance) needs to make a formal proposal. For example, “I propose that homeowners be represented by the officers in homeowners associations.” The person making the proposal should state here the reason why the proposal is being made (i.e., what is the interest being served).
2. The facilitator then asks all other participants to express their agreement with the proposal in one of three ways. They should give a thumb-up if they agree, a thumb-middle if they have some hesitation, and a thumb-down if they completely disagree.
3. With these expressions of agreement, the facilitator should then start with those individuals who have their thumb down. He or she asks them, “How can

the proposal be changed to bring you up?” Any change in the proposal should be stated in terms of the interest being served, not based on a preferred position. Justification for the position needs to be given.

4. This process continues until all parties have their thumb up, expressing agreement.

Proposal-based decision-making is a consensus process and, thus, it can take a longer period of time than a process that encourages or at least allows for compromise. To keep the process moving, the participants can agree up front that each proposal will be discussed for no more than 10 or 15 minutes, and then a super-majority (two-thirds) vote will be taken to decide the fate of a proposal. Ultimately, this process has proven useful in the classroom to show students the possibility for consensus building and how to argue for their positions based on interests.

I suggest that the instructor take notes on phrases students use during the simulation and read them back to students afterwards. For instance, in my own classes I have had students repeat phrases, such as “with all due respect” and “I don’t have the authority to address that concern.” These are phrases that should be brought to student attention, as they tend to shut down all negotiation and deliberation. On the other hand, the instructor should also highlight phrases and words that helped keep the focus on interests, thus leading to a winning solution for all parties.

Last, I recommend an optional assignment post-simulation that requires student reflection. After the simulation, students can be instructed to adopt the role of one of the key players in the simulation. They can choose any character they wish. From this adopted perspective, each student should write a three-page memo to the head of the organization that summarizes the solution and identifies the pros and cons of the solution.

The memo should briefly describe the content of the deliberation in leading to the solution, express differences in opinion, and suggest alternatives based on the differences they express. The best memos will be those that clearly justify why they agree or disagree with the final solution and offer an alternative that is consistent with the interests expressed in that alternative opinion. I have used this kind of reflective memo in contract negotiation exercises in master's classes and have found that it works well to facilitate student thinking. It also allows the instructor to see how well students are learning the material on an individual basis.

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