Managing Citizen Participation Given Cultural Diversity:

Tool Choices and Implementation Challenges

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The public administration literature describes numerous tools for citizen participation, but pays little attention to how public managers select and deploy these tools in complex and culturally diverse governance settings. This paper describes citizen participation "tool choices" and associated implementation challenges, as observed during a longitudinal, comparative study of Children and Families Commissions in eight California counties. We find that commonly used civic engagement tools are internally complex, presenting staff with thickly nested questions and persistent tradeoffs between the goals of inclusivity and deliberation. Public administrators need to be conversant in the strengths and limits of multiple citizen participation tools if they are to build effective public relationships in culturally diverse contexts. They must also be schooled in the various meanings of citizenship, since the value of various civic engagement tools cannot be ascertained without defining *what matters* in citizen participation efforts, not just *what works*.

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With now waxing, now waning enthusiasm, the public administration literature describes numerous tools for citizen participation in governance. Recent examples include issue forums (Matthews 1994), deliberative polls (Fishkin 1991; 1995), citizen juries (Crosby et al. 1986; Kathlene and Martin 1991; Renn, et al.1993), and representative survey panels (Weeks 2000). Comparatively little attention is paid to how public managers select citizen participation tools and deploy staff to implement these "tool choices" in complex governance settings (Salamon 2002). By overemphasizing the promise of single techniques or approaches, the literature downplays the managerial and political skills needed to adapt multiple tools given competing objectives, linguistic and cultural diversity, class disparities, and the baggage left by previous engagement efforts.

This paper analyzes these administrative choices and challenges, drawing on a longitudinal, comparative study of how civic engagement tools were chosen, deployed and adapted by Children and Families Commissions in eight California counties. The counties include Contra Costa, Monterey, San Diego, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, and Yolo, and the observations occurred between fall 1999 and spring 2002. The commissions came into existence as a result of Proposition 10, a November 1998 California ballot initiative that taxes tobacco products to create a multi-billion-dollar state revenue stream dedicated to improving the health and school readiness of children ages 0-5. Commissioners in each of California's 58 counties decide how local funds (apportioned by birth rate) are spent and how the state-required public input is obtained and incorporated.

Data for this analysis come from civic engagement'"laboratories" created by a partnership between five foundations interested in civil investing and eight local commissions, who teamed to form the Civic Engagement Project for Children and Families (CEP). Along with an adult education specialist, the author led a University of California research team that observed CEP activities and related outcomes. Three "guiding principles" framed the experiments and our observations: *inclusive participation*, particularly from lesser-heard voices; *civic dialogue*, aimed at stimulating an ongoing network to support children's issues; and *policy effectiveness*, defined as evidence that inclusive dialogue impacted commission decisions or catalyzed community initiatives.

CEP offers a rare chance to examine civic engagement tool choices and associated implementation challenges in dynamic policy settings. The remainder of the paper is organized into four sections: 1) a brief statement of our methods and their limits; 2) a characterization of the context in which the Prop 10-funded commissions make decisions, including shared elements and source of local variation, 3) examples of the most common "tool choices" across the eight cases, and descriptions of the public management challenges associated with implementing each tool, and 4) a discussion of the implications for how public managers are recruited, trained, and schooled in the various meanings of citizenship.

Methods

The evaluation team included the University of California researchers, and local observers familiar with social services in each of the eight counties. The observers provided background information on the local context and observed a sample of local civic engagement activities using common protocols. We also employed

interviewers to conduct retrospective interviews with public participants in commission meetings and activities. Across the eight counties the team observed 148 public meetings, and conducted 340 semi-structured interviews with commissioners, funders, CEP project staff, local commission executive directors and civic engagement staff, and public participants (35 conducted in Spanish). In addition we analyzed CEP and local commission documents, and related materials relevant to the statewide implementation of Prop 10.

Despite this intensive evaluation effort, many local partners were dissatisfied with our initial attempts to describe their activities, feeling that we had missed or mischaracterized certain initiatives. To a certain degree this was inevitable, given the relatively modest resources available for the evaluation, and the vast geographic scope of the project (San Diego county alone is as large as the state of Connecticut). The evaluation team was often unable to attend certain events or not made aware that they were happening. In addition, our primary objective was to identify cross-county patterns that might inform the foundations' steering committee, rather than to provide in-depth feedback on the activities of particular commissions.

The evidence presented in this analysis survived intensive scrutiny by both CEP and local commission staff. These key players provided a validity check on the factual claims made regarding their choices and challenges, even if they sometimes disagreed with our interpretations of the degree to which their efforts were meeting project goals. The findings are best viewed as a set of working hypotheses grounded in observed patterns, rather than as definitive conclusions.

The Context for Citizen Participation in Prop 10 Decision Making

Shared Features Across the Eight Counties

Many features of the Prop 10 decision-making context are common across the eight counties. Each commission is appointed by the county Board of Supervisors, and functions as an autonomous, quasi-public entity with independent decision-making authority. The commissions deliver few services directly, instead selecting tools (e.g., competitive grants, public information, subsidies) that encourage other actors to produce the intended outcomes for children. The milieu in which the local commissions operate exhibits characteristic features of the "new governance" paradigm, where public action is increasingly the product of complex networks of public, nonprofit, and private actors, rather than hierarchically organized government agencies. As Lestor Salamon (2002, 600-601) observes, "these collaborative networks are not"'free-form,' but are instead structured by '*tools of government action'* (emphasis in original) that define the actors involved in various types of undertakings, the roles they will play, and the relationships they will have to each other." Following Salamon's lead, this analysis describes how various tools of citizen participation structure roles and relationships between local commissions and the various publics they encounter or mobilize.

Commissioners describe Prop 10 as a rare"'funded unmandate," welcoming the large infusion of new state funds with few restrictions on local use. Participating commissioners interviewed early in the project hoped that Prop 10 would boost service integration and focus community attention so that a new advocacy force for young children and families would develop. Several commissions have since considered or begun to implement major new programs such as fiscal subsidies for child care workers, guaranteed health insurance for children, or universal pre-school. The non-incremental nature of many of these reforms is anomalous when

viewed against the typical social services scenarios in local government. So was the insistence of many commissioners we interviewed that "civic engagement is integral to everything we do," rhetoric that mirrors the call for a "new public service" in which engagement with citizens is considered a central feature of the everyday work of public managers (Denhardt and Vinzant 2000).

We found promising examples of such practices, but also a significant gap between this rhetoric and observed realities. In many respects commissions operate like typical bureaucratic agencies, facing constraints such as state statutory requirements, budgetary uncertainty, tight and somewhat unpredictable time pressures, and lobbying efforts by organized constituencies in the counties (e.g., child care workers, established agencies). One major consideration in setting local priorities is to use Prop 10 dollars to help leverage additional funds from state, federal, and private sources, or to backfill gaps in existing programs. These types of deliberations typically call for the seasoned wisdom of administrative veterans, rather than new public voices.

In this and other ways, local civic engagement staff frequently encountered a tradeoff that is often reported in the citizen participation literature, between inclusive participation in decision-making on the one hand, and wise and reasoned judgment among peers who can meet to deliberate, on the other (Baiocchi 2001, 49; Bessette 1994; Crosby, et al. 1986, 170; Fishkin 1995, 142; Hauptman 2001). As Nagel (1992, 1980) notes in describing the public participation process in Oregon's health care reform planning, "One part of their program was deliberative but not representative, the other was representative but not deliberative." The eight CEP counties provide a dynamic setting for observing the practical demands associated with managing this type of tradeoff, given California's growing diversity and income inequality (Baldassare 2000).

Sources of Variability in Local Contexts

Perhaps more notable than the shared elements across the eight counties are the significant variations in funding base, demography, local political culture (including previous history of collaboration), and staff skills and continuity. In just over two years of state funding, the Prop 10 dollars available to the eight CEP counties ranged from $5.3 million (Yolo) to $283.9 million (San Diego). Though they faced the challenge of reaching more children and families, the larger counties had significantly more commission resources to invest, in addition to the $60,000-$100,000 per year that CEP made available to each participating commission.

The CEP funds were used to hire a local civic engagement coordinator, engage temporary consultants (e.g., bilingual translators, media consultants); develop outreach materials; cover food, childcare and other costs of community meetings; and in some cases provide stipends for community participants. Larger commissions supplemented the CEP funds by hiring outreach workers, and often had an easier time attracting and retaining qualified civic engagement staff. The latter is particularly important, since some CEP counties went a year or more without hiring a designated civic engagement staff person, seriously delaying the CEP implementation.

Counties vary considerably in the number of sizable non-English speaking groups they must address. For example, Santa Cruz can confine its bilingual work to its large Hispanic community, while commissions in Contra Costa, Yolo, and Santa Clara have to consider 10 or more linguistic sub-populations, such as Cantonese, Vietnamese, Mien, Laotian, Russian, and users of American Sign Language. Most commissions translate documents into Spanish and employ Spanish-speaking staff; a few have held meetings or translated materials into other languages. Commissions also involve English-speaking groups considered less likely to participate in

local planning processes, such as African-Americans, Native Americans, Asian-Pacific Islanders, parents of children with special needs, homeless families, incarcerated parents, etc.

While all eight CEP counties rank among the wealthiest third in the state, income inequality within the counties is extreme. For example, San Francisco ranks second among California counties in per capita income but has a child poverty rate of 21%.

Local political traditions represent distinct ideological and cultural orientations. Democratic-leaning San Francisco has a rich history of "bottom-up" political participation and a strong ethic of inclusivity in government programs. By contrast, Republican-leaning San Diego is governed with a strong managerial and entrepreneurial mindset, with the public more likely to be viewed as "consumers of services" than as""citizen co-creators" of plans. Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, and Yolo combine the cosmopolitan influence of university towns with small, isolated rural communities. Each has a highly participatory civic culture, in contrast to Monterey and Contra Costa, where suspicion of government runs high. San Mateo's wealth and geography, and its enviable ratio of fiscal resources to community needs, has made it a popular destination for government leaders and social services administrators. The long tenure of many of these leaders is both a benefit in terms of experience and a source of anxiety for those who feel new blood and ideas are needed. These brief caricatures are no doubt inadequate descriptions of these complex locales, but they support the basic point that the soil in which citizen participation seeds are planted is far from uniform, either between or within counties.

By far the most important variable distinguishing the eight commissions is the quality of the local staff and leaders—their skill, commitment and persistence. The work of civic engagement is labor intensive, non-routine, and dynamic. It requires unusual degrees of local knowledge, clarity about purposes, sensitivity to

diverse populations, the ability to both listen and lead, and a thick skin, among other skills and talents. Critical factors include how many staff are employed full-time, how well they are paid and supported, how much experience they have, and how well their style and backgrounds fit in the local context.

Civic Engagement Tools and Associated Implementation Challenges

As CEP evolved, project staff granted local civic engagement coordinators considerable discretion to determine their own approach and techniques. In exercising discretion, the coordinators typically worked closely with the commission executive director, and with some form of civic engagement advisory committee. These committees ranged in size and composition, but usually were composed of a small number of commissioners and some parent or community representatives. As a result of CEP sponsored meetings, executive directors and civic engagement staff became more aware of their colleagues in the other counties, and began to share ideas about tools or approaches. As a result, a number of civic engagement tools were implemented in multiple counties, though often with significant local variations. In addition, a few civic engagement tools developed in response to community input received during the development of state required strategic plans.

In what follows we briefly identify six of the most common tools deployed, and associated implementation challenges. Once selected, the various civic engagement tools turned out to be internally complex, presenting staff with nested sets of puzzles, questions, and challenges. Our intent is to bring these characteristic features come into clearer view.

Advisory Committees

This is a familiar form of citizen participation, but because recognized expertise is often a qualification for selection it typically elicits participation from those already engaged at the expense of lesser-heard voices. CEP prompted experiments to move beyond this status quo, altering the nature, composition, and functions of particular advisory groups.

For example, San Diego's commission created a Technical and Professional Advisory Committee whose 15 members represent well-known service providers and can make formal recommendations to the commission. Local partners devised two strategies to insure that this committee is informed by citizen voices. First, one meeting per quarter is rotated among different regions of the county and ends with an open'"community conversation." The idea is to make the committee more aware of community concerns, and vice versa. Second, the commission has developed a separate layer of advisory structures called'"leadership teams" to solicit advice on key commission initiatives. These teams elicit greater involvement of parents, and can operate less formally since they report to the executive director and not the commission, thus avoiding constraints imposed under the Brown Act (California's open meeting law).

Across the CEP counties, the more formal the advisory structure, the more power it tends to have and the less likely it is to invite the regular participation of parents and community members. Conversely, less formal advisory structures are more likely to provide a welcoming setting for diverse participants and tend to have less direct influence on commission decisions. Among the implementation challenges associated with using advisory committees to promote inclusive citizen participation are:

- The commissioners are willing to delegate part of their decision-making power to an advisory committee, or at least identify upcoming decision areas about which they are willing to entertain advice;

- There are clear agreements as to the function, membership, and role of the advisory committee, such as whether it can make formal recommendations to the commission;

- Interests and experiences of a broad array of providers and community people are represented, giving the committee public legitimacy;

- Persons selected for the committees understand the content and process issues sufficiently to engage in informed deliberation;

- A safe and welcoming environment is created for discussion and continuing learning, so that newcomers are not intimidated.

Outreach Workers

Typically, commissions hire outreach workers with some previous history of community involvement to build relationships and connections with particular segments of the community—ethnic, class, neighborhood, or special interest. For example, eight outreach workers in Santa Cruz, most bilingual Spanish-speakers, conducted intercept interviews at locations like migrant housing units, pre-schools, shopping malls, and grocery stores. Contra Costa deployed a Spanish speaker to work in the heavily Hispanic east county area and a popular black pastor to work in the predominantly African-American Richmond area. Santa Clara hired and trained 15 outreach specialists to target different ethnic groups and community sectors, such as the faith community or gay

and lesbian parents. Such outreach workers have been very effective at overcoming language and cultural barriers and promoting more inclusive participation in commission-sponsored events.

On the other hand, as CEP evolved the evaluation team increasingly heard about a perceived disconnect between outreach work and the deliberations of the commissions. Local civic engagement staff and commission executive directors often describe themselves as being caught between two very different worlds, one heavily bureaucratic and formal and the other idiosyncratic and dependent on trusting personal relationships. Few staff are comfortable in both these worlds or have a well-thought out strategy for bridging the two.

The CEP experience suggests a number of key challenges in deploying outreach workers, including:

- The commission can identify the community segments in need of an outreach worker, and commit sufficient funds to hire qualified individuals;

- Staff and outreach workers combine community respect and local knowledge with an understanding of the commission and its processes, and credibility with commissioners;

- Provision is made for staff training and supervision;

- Criteria for determining the success of outreach workers' efforts can be developed.

Community Conversations

This tool consists of episodic meetings designed to reach a diverse set of parents and community members. Although they may lead to more institutionalized forms of citizen involvement, these meetings are intended primarily as an accessible entry point into the work of the commissions.

For example, Contra Costa's commission convened a series of regional community conversations centered on the question,'"How can we make Contra Costa a better place for families with young children?" The meetings were intended to provide commissioners with new program ideas and to give community participants the opportunity to learn about Prop 10, apply for commission funds, become involved with commission committees, or become advocates for children. Two meetings (one week apart) were held in each of the four county regions. Commission staff arranged childcare and dinner at all meetings and simultaneous English-Spanish translation in the three regions where it was needed. Outreach techniques included invitations (in English and Spanish) to those on the commission mailing list; articles in local Mothers' Club newsletters; asking community agencies, child care centers, and other associations to recruit participants; advertising in the community calendar section of the local newspaper; and connecting with existing email networks. Hiring outreach workers with credibility in their communities appears to have contributed to the meetings' turnout (40-60 participants per meeting) and diverse participation as did the incentive of a $40 gift certificate for attending both sessions

Almost universally, the meetings we observed demonstrated the value of exposing citizens to occasions where broad participation is encouraged and everyone is listened to with respect. Participants we interviewed often mentioned how the meetings had made them aware of previously unknown programs or services and of the concerns of parents whose social circumstances are very different from their own. These cross-class encounters could be jarring, as when two women we interviewed from wealthy neighborhoods felt thoroughly "out of place" at a meeting dominated by concerns over unsafe parks and drug dealing. At another meeting, an

African-American and a white woman sparred over whether certain support services were, or were not, accessible to all families.

Overall, however, the energy and mutual concern evident in the meetings was inspiring, as participants experienced what Button and Mattson (1999, 631) describe as "the inherent joy of gathering together in mutual discussion with fellow citizens." As in the policy settings those authors describe, the default mode in these dialogues was to gain more information about the issues and to build community understanding, rather than to directly engage differences of opinion or evident conflicts. In their effort to be open and respectful, meeting facilitators "heard everyone out," but did relatively little to educate public opinion or to seize opportunities to differentiate areas of consensus and conflict. Participants who were new to public meetings were pleased by the care taken to make the meetings accessible and comfortable, but more seasoned participants often wondered when or if organizers were going to get down to more substantive business with clearer links to decisions facing the commission. A vocal minority of participants we interviewed complained about the lack of visible results or follow-up from the meetings.

Local civic engagement staff found that using community conversations as a tool created one recurring choice: whether to convene groups that were homogenous or heterogeneous. Some opted for working primarily with groups that shared a history of working together, or some bond of ethnicity, culture, or language. Others, like Contra Costa, attempted to gather diverse publics for conversation. While the latter seems preferable from the standpoint of deliberative ideals, most staff actually preferred the former, particularly given CEP's emphasis on reaching individuals with little familiarity with public meetings, including immigrant populations.

Among the features of community conversations that are critical to supporting inclusive and deliberative participation are:

- Staff who can insure that the conversations are framed, convened, and facilitated appropriately (e.g., food, childcare, translation);

- Follow-up opportunities are created so that interested individuals can become involved in a more ongoing fashion;

- Comments, concerns, and information are accurately and sensitively recorded (in a manner that

"gets behind the icon" as Richard Harwood puts it) and conveyed both to participants and decision-makers;

- The commission does not ignore the feedback, but carefully considers it;

- Citizen participants are kept informed about what is happening to the ideas they offered, and any decisions or progress that has resulted.

Community Capacity Building

This form of civic engagement seeks to develop local leaders and organizations whose assets can help the commission achieve intended outcomes and whose approaches would model promising practices of civic engagement. San Diego's commission contracted with the Consensus Organizing Institute (COI) of San Diego State University to develop community leadership in three pilot collaboratives. In each, a core group of 6-10 parents identified by the COI organizer meets weekly and then reaches out to involve other parents (e.g., creating service directories, holding school readiness forums). The COI approach emphasizes careful and patient nurture of self-selected parent leaders willing to invest their own time and energy. The theory is that

intensive focus on a few citizen leaders will create a snowball effect that promotes more widespread

participation.

San Mateo's commission has conducted over 91 public dialogues regarding early childhood issues, in

partnership with the Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center (PCRC). Their avowed purpose is not to impact

commission decisions, but to develop leadership by stimulating individuals and groups to advocate for the

interests of young children and families. In engaging San Mateo's target audience—Latino women with little if

any previous history of connection to public affairs—civic engagement staff spend much of their time

cultivating trust and personal relationships, one at a time. Staff make no apology for not engaging these women

more directly with the commission. In their understanding, "a dialogue is an intense personal encounter with

someone you trust," rather than a deliberation about public issues. A few San Mateo dialogue participants

express concern with the lack of tangible links between their discussions and the commission's work. On the

other hand, the dialogues have exposed more than 500 individuals to conversations about how the community

can better support children and families.

Here is a partial list of elements that go into designing an effective community capacity building

strategy:

- The commission can either partner with an existing community organization or use its own staff to

  create capacity;

- Whomever leads the capacity building effort can strike a balance between being supportive and being

  directive;

- Parents and other community persons can identify real and significant roles in which they can make a difference and exercise some autonomy;

- Parents and other participants can learn by doing and can gain skills, knowledge, and experience under the coaching of a mentor while carrying out specific tasks;

- More formal training on specific topics (presumably at teachable moments) can supplement the on-the-job training approach of experiential learning;

- Participants gain confidence as they experience success and perceive more areas in which they can make a difference;

- Participants involve others and more people will want to be involved as their sphere of influence expands;

- There is both a weaning process in which the local community organization learns to operate without dependency on the mentor/staff, and a support process in which the community partner can call on a designated resource for periodic help;

- Recognition of community partners by the commission is frequent and genuine.

Mini-grants

Four counties set aside a small portion (less than 10%) of their Prop 10 allocation for mini-grants. These awards of $500-$10,000 go to non-traditional recipients, such as parent groups, small neighborhood organizations, or home-based childcare providers. Santa Cruz awarded 40 mini-grants of up to $10,000 to family childcare providers to purchase equipment and materials. Outreach workers helped publicize the grants

and workshops during the application process that built a sense of collaboration among participants and between participants and the commission. Recipients were warmly grateful to the commission for reaching out to people who had never previously received public funding.

The San Francisco commission Parent ACTION (Achieving Change Together in Our Neighborhoods) Grant program solicited grants for "parent initiated and parent led projects that help improve the lives of young children 0-5, either by strengthening parents/caregivers' ability to support their young children, by building relationships among parents, linking parents to services, supports and activities in the city, or by making neighborhoods young child and family friendly" (staff report to the San Francisco commission, 8/01/01). The idea of parent grants had emerged from earlier community conversations and the program provided concrete public evidence that the commission was listening to citizens. The San Francisco commission shared its power by granting a parent selection board the authority to recommend which proposals to fund. The application process was simple and accessible with ample technical assistance (10 formal workshops plus individual assistance). As a result of these efforts, the selection board, applicants, and funded programs were widely perceived as representing the diversity of San Francisco's population in terms of race, ethnicity, neighborhoods, and language.

Although the mini-grant programs primarily engage the public in direct action rather than in deliberative discussion, the existence of the programs does tend to catalyze goal-directed conversations among parents and service providers. The aim is to enable parents and community-based groups to complement the service delivery activities of existing agencies. On the downside, these programs are time-consuming to implement and may

divert public attention from commission decisions about the greater portion of local Prop 10 funds. CEP partners in San Francisco discovered that genuine efforts to share power with citizens take

more staff time and energy rather than less, and representatives of funded programs reported that procedures for getting funds from the city were cumbersome and challenging. Staff had to educate and adapt project leaders to the city process and vice versa, and spent considerable time negotiating contractual and reporting agreements.

Among the challenges to implementing mini-grants as an effective citizen participation tool are:

- the willingness of the commission to dedicate funds in this fashion;

- the ability of staff to manage the program and supply technical assistance that is geared to neophytes to the grant process;

- the ability to resolve the inherent difficulties of adapting standard bureaucratic practices (e.g., insurance issues, reporting and accountability requirements) to small grants;

- the capacity to encourage applications in languages other than English;

- the ability of the commission staff to find a balance such that sufficient proposals are attracted, but not so many that the rejection rate creates bad will in the community;

- the status gained by being a commission grantee makes recipients an effective voice with parents, peers, and others in the community.

Program Design Workgroups

This tool involves citizens directly in the design process for commission-funded initiatives and programs, rather than following the typical pattern where staff members design programs after receiving input from community groups and direction from commissioners. For example, Santa Clara established several

"Community Design Work Groups" consisting of about 50 persons selected to represent various facets of the county's population. These individuals discussed proposed commission initiatives, asking, "What will be different if this program is initiated?" and""How does this proposed program address/support the guiding principles from the commission's Strategic Plan?""""The work groups generated questions for focus groups conducted by outreach workers, using suggestions that emerged to engage in further deliberation and ultimately to recommend program designs for commission funding.

Participation in the design teams is limited to a relatively small number of citizens, but can be considered representative when care is taken in the selection process. For example, the design work groups specified that the commission's "Regional Partnerships" have at least 51% of their membership from parents and non-agency affiliated community members rather than from provider groups. When this condition is met, the Partnerships are granted autonomy to create a community-based plan that spends up to $2 million in Prop 10 funds over a three-year period.

This form of citizen participation is highly deliberative and has a clear link to commission funding decisions. In Santa Clara's case, a representative group of local citizens—and the broader group of citizens from whom they gather input—is empowered to play a critical role in deciding how millions of dollars of Prop 10 funds are spent in the community. Program design workgroups are effective citizen participation tools when:

- the local political culture and the commission support sharing power with citizens, and back their commitment with significant funding;

- staff can invest the extra time required to orchestrate meaningful involvement of community members in complicated design processes;

- community members are sufficiently convinced that their voices will be heard to be willing to commit time and energy;

- commission requests for revisions of design workgroup proposals are clearly explained, with a chance for the group to defend its ideas;

- participants are informed of the final product of their work, and recognized for their contributions;

- pre-existing power differentials between participants do not preclude genuine listening to all perspectives.

Discussion

Developing a greater appreciation for the practical steps required to engage citizens meaningfully is important, whether one views citizen participation primarily as an aid to program improvement (Epstein et al. 2000) or as an ethical ideal (Denhardt and Vinzant 2000). This analysis supports the conclusion that public administrators need to be conversant in multiple tools for civic engagement, and to gain practice in the craft of deploying these tools creatively. The managerial wisdom called for has little to do with being au courant with the latest promising technique of citizen participation and everything to do with learning how to coordinate multiple tools amidst organizational complexity and in a contextually responsive fashion. Some tools do better at promoting inclusive participation; others do better at promoting deliberation. Some attempt to build

community trust in an open-ended fashion; others give citizens explicit power within formal decision-making processes. The trick is to juggle multiple strategies on multiple fronts to achieve citizen participation objectives.

Context matters, often decisively. The nested set of citizen participation strategies in Santa Clara's program design process complements the county government's commitment to cultivating a participatory administrative culture. This same process would not fit well in San Diego, where the public culture emphasizes efficient management. But San Diego has found its own ways to benefit from more inclusive citizen voice through creative citizen engagement with commission advisory structures and the subcontract to stimulate consensus-based organizing.

The word'"tool"—used here in its generic sense of a "means to an end"—may suggest a misleading directness. The finely tuned combination of relationship building and orchestration skills required of successful civic engagement managers resembles a Swiss watch more closely than a simple shovel. If engaging citizens is part of the everyday responsibility of public administrators as advocates of the new public service argue, then it will be important to think more systematically about how to select and train managers who can pursue this demanding work. This analysis supports the call to diversify the public administration workforce, since the cultural and linguistic sensitivities of staff are integral to building public relationships. In addition, the skills and sensitivities we have identified would seem to be better learned by apprenticeships in a variety of local government settings than by traditional classroom instruction.

An important training need is to clarify the purposes for which inclusive and diverse participation is sought, rather than treating diversity as simply an end in itself. Among the potential purposes brought to light by our analysis are:

- Determining whether distinct groups have distinct agendas: e.g., different types of services desired, different modes of service delivery required, or different ideas about the relative priority of funding community-based projects rather than programmatic services delivered by traditional institutions;

- Clarifying areas of conflict and consensus, given group distinctions;

- Building a sense of common identity and purpose that can be shared across cultural distinctions;

- Increasing the legitimacy of the Commission in all segments of the community;

- Ensuring greater use of funded programs by the entire intended recipient population;

- Identifying barriers to accessing existing services;

- Building interest in community "do it yourself" efforts on behalf of children in particular population segments.

Depending on the specific ends desired, different forms and tools of civic engagement may be more or less appropriate. For example, if the goal is identifying the agendas of distinct groups, it may be sufficient to conduct outreach and meetings with discrete groups one at a time. But if the goal is to create a common identity and purpose, or to clarify areas of conflict and consensus, some way must be found to bring distinct groups together in a setting that supports the sharing of diverse perspectives and mutual learning.

Another training need, and an area in need of more focused research, concerns methods for communicating the content of civic engagement activities to decision makers. During CEP, the methods tried included staff reports, presentations by community members at commission meetings, and inviting commissioners to be present at civic engagement meetings or other public events. None of these methods was judged to be very satisfying by civic engagement coordinators or executive directors. Commissioners we

interviewed put the most stock in occasions where they heard directly from members of the public, particularly

encounters that opened their eyes to social realities from which they are distanced.

Our CEP observations also underscore the critical need to school public managers in competing

understandings of what it means to be a citizen. During our involvement with CEP, we struggled to find a solid

evaluative standpoint from which to assess the value of the various citizen participation efforts. We sought to

maintain a distinction between political discussion that may be quite participatory but relatively trivial, and a

significant citizen politics that creates valued public work or advances larger agendas and issues (Boyte and

Kari 1996). In any particular case, however, this line is hard to draw. For one thing, CEP strategies conceived of

citizens in a variety of guises: rationally informed participants (e.g., advisory committees), customers giving

feedback on services received (e.g., requiring parent participation in many funded programs), citizen problem

solvers (e.g., mini-grants), and simply as parents—the de facto—"front-line service providers" most responsible

for the education of the state's future citizens.

Observing Prop 10 decision making, a cynic might conclude that members of the pre-existing planning

networks ("insiders") got access to the decision-making process which determined how millions of dollars

would be spent, while ordinary citizens got well-facilitated "meet and eats" (as the community conversations

were called in San Francisco) and a chance to compete for relatively small grants. CEP partners often seemed

more interested in introducing into public life the norms of personal sharing and community caring, rather than

demystifying the system so that citizens could influence existing public processes. Many public meetings we

witnessed seemed based in the implicit presumption that "sympathy for one another's feelings" is necessary in

order to act in public—a rather too transient basis on which to ground sustained public action (Sennett 1974).

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On the other hand, scattered amongst the civic engagement literature are voices that espouse the merits of CEP-like conversations that are free from high expectations while providing a chance to talk intelligently with neighbors about matters of mutual concern. Button and Mattson (1999) warn that an effort to draw direct links between citizen voice and political/administrative action may simply reinforce citizens' sense of their own inadequacies, or their cynicism about the system. As they state (1999, 633),'"political theorists who read into deliberation a universal process—either positive or negative—clamp down too tightly on its inherently open-ended nature." In a similar vein, Schudson (1998) argues that our ideal of good citizenship places too much weight on the Progressive Era understanding of the informed citizen, and too little on trust-based or rights-based understandings of citizenship. William Sullivan (2000, 36), himself an advocate of deliberative democracy, notes that "mutual recognition is…the ignition point of genuine democratic life," and emphasizes the importance of social bonds as the first step toward more robust civic partnerships.

From this perspective, one can look more sympathetically at the decision of many local civic engagement coordinators to emphasize trusting relationships with citizens at the expense of educating them to participate in commission processes. CEP certainly showed that in a social environment riddled with inequality and ethnic distinctions, the negotiation of social meanings and of individual and community identities is part of the transaction subtext in any public participation process. By encouraging commission staff to ask questions about which groups to recognize and how, CEP demonstrated the open-ended nature of the resulting choices and the difficulty of knowing how to assess whether progress is being made.

These conflicting assessments of the value of various tools and approaches to civic engagement are part of the struggle to define *what matters* in citizen participation efforts, not just *what works*. Given the difficulty of

determining whether we are witnessing a retreat from politics disguised as citizen empowerment or the patient

development of a democratic citizenship rooted in social trust—or something entirely different—an

experimental and reflective mindset is well advised.

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