

GROUP FACILITATION:

**Listening to the City: Public Participation and
Group Facilitation in Redeveloping the
World Trade Center Site**

**Deliberative Democracy
Rebuilding Ground Zero with Democracy
Online Dialogues
One Facilitator's View**

**Helping the Masses Find Their Way
A Powerfully Personal Affirmation**

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**Goals of Deliberative Democracy
How Well Were Participant Interests Reflected?**

**Reflections from Down Under
Rethinking and Rebuilding Lower Manhattan**



A RESEARCH & APPLICATIONS JOURNAL

**Sandor Schuman
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Listening to the City: A Public Participation Case Study, Alternatives, and Analysis

S a n d o r P . S c h u m a n

Governmental decision makers, politicians, civic groups, and other stakeholders in public decision making are seeking mechanisms for engaging citizens in public policy decisions. The size and visibility of “Listening to the City,” the largest face-to-face public participation event ever held, and the political, social, and emotional needs that it responded to, provide an attractive opportunity to draw attention to broader issues regarding public engagement, group facilitation, and the future of democracy.

This special issue provides an in-depth case study of “Listening to the City” and uses it as a departure point for broader discussions of the role practice of public participation. Reflecting the diverse backgrounds and experience of the 25 contributing authors, which include both academics and practitioners, the content is descriptive, evaluative, and speculative.

The first three articles present a thorough description of the underlying philosophy, organization and implementation of “Listening to the City,” a large-scale public participation event involving 5,000 face-to-face and online participants. The design was purposefully “high tech” and “high touch;” these articles make clear how this was accomplished.

The next eleven articles present a variety of perspectives on the event, based on the experiences of facilitators who worked with groups of participants. Some are personal reflections on the role of facilitating public participation; some offer practical advice for working with diverse groups, some are evaluative.

The remaining eight articles take a critical look at public participation, examining its purposes and effectiveness.

I hope the professionals who advocate for, design, and implement these types of processes and events—group facilitators and public participation practitioners and advocates—will gain from this special issue detailed knowledge about how to organize these types of events, and what to be prepared for during their implementation on both the personal and organizational scales. They will find here a variety of methods that might be used to accomplish similar purposes, as well as their relative strengths and weaknesses, and can use this issue as an opportunity to learn about and reflect on the societal applications and implications of group facilitation.

Editorial

Other readers might include educators—in areas such as political science, public policy and planning processes, public involvement and consultation, and communication—as well as the more than 5,000 participants in the “Listening to the City” events. I hope these readers will profit from this “behind the scenes” look at how the event was organized and implemented and be in a better position to understand the rationale and motivation for such events.

The authors and reviewers of this volume deserve our collective thanks. Not only did the authors draft and revise their own articles, they also peer-reviewed each others work. An additional cadre of reviewers lent their special expertise to this effort. My personal thanks to al of you for your dedication to extending the meaning of "Listening to the City" beyond its original scope.

—Sandor Schuman

Listening to the City: Casting a Spotlight on the Growing Movement for a More Deliberative Democracy

Joe Goldman

ABSTRACT:

This paper provides context for “Listening to the City” by considering the broader deliberative democracy movement that has begun to grow across the country. First, it examines the condition of American democracy and the problems that forums like “Listening to the City” are attempting to address. The article then looks at the deliberative democracy field and the leading practitioner organizations that have been experimenting with new ways for citizens to participate in governing processes. Finally, the paper returns to “Listening to the City” to note how the process was unique from other efforts to engage citizens in governance.

KEY WORDS:

Deliberative Democracy, Deliberation, Deliberative Democracy Consortium, Citizen Engagement, Public Engagement, AmericaSpeaks, Listening to the City, World Trade Center, 21st Century Town Meeting, Carolyn Lukensmeyer, Democratic Renewal, Social Capital

It is the consequence of [the Town Meeting], that not a school house, a public pew, a bridge, a pound, a mill-dam, hath been set up or pulled down ... without the whole population of this town having a voice in the affair... In every winding road, in every stone fence, in the smokes of the poor-house chimney, in the clock on the church, [the people] read their own power.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

What government really ought to be is a barn raising – a community effort in which everyone works together for an end that benefits all.

— Rick Cole, former mayor of Pasadena, CA

Indications of America’s ailing democracy are not hard to find. Whether you look at dismal voter turnout rates, declining confidence in governing institutions or the loss of social capital in communities, the signs that something is wrong are everywhere. As journalist William Greider wrote in *Who Will Tell the People*: “The decayed condition of American democracy is difficult to grasp, not because the facts are secret, but because the facts are visible everywhere.”¹

To combat the ills of American democracy, a movement is slowly growing across the country to reinvent our governing institutions and reconnect citizens to the most important

decisions that impact their lives. While “Listening to the City” may have been the most visible example of efforts to engage the public in the governance process, the movement for a more deliberative democracy is occurring in the nation’s smallest rural communities as well as our largest metropolitan regions. Citizens are making their voices heard on issues as local as municipal budgets and as national as Social Security reform.

- 1) In Washington, D.C., more than 3,000 citizens respond to their mayor’s call to help develop the city’s budget and strategic plan at a 21st Century Town Meeting facilitated by the DC-based nonprofit, AmericaSpeaks.
- 2) In Springfield, IL, hundreds of citizens deliberate in small groups to address racial issues in their community with the help of the Study Circles Resource Center of Pomfret, CT.
- 3) In Philadelphia, a random sample of 340 citizens from across the nation are brought together by the Center for Deliberative Polling to discuss American foreign policy in the aftermath of 9/11. The results of their discussions are televised to the nation on PBS.
- 4) On the virtual world of the Internet, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency engages thousands of citizens in a national conversation about environmental rule making, supported by the online dialogue group, Information Renaissance.²

Each of these examples, and hundreds of others like them across the country, are showing elected officials, journalists, and policy advocates that the public wants to be heard and that citizens can make an important contribution to public decision making. These efforts are being spearheaded by a dozen or so innovative organizations that have been experimenting with different methods to renew American democracy over the past decade or more.³ Applying new approaches, technologies and facilitative methodologies to authentic deliberation among the public, these organizations are responding to the ills of our democracy by rethinking how governance processes can and should work.

This paper will consider “Listening to the City” in the context of the growing movement for a more deliberative democracy. It will begin by asking what is wrong with American democracy – what has caused so many individuals and organizations to look for new ways for our governing institutions to work? Then, it will look at some of the organizations leading the deliberative democracy field. Finally, it will return to “Listening to the City” and consider what is unique about the 21st Century Town Meeting approach that was utilized to support the public conversation on the rebuilding of Lower Manhattan.

An Ailing Democracy

Why are a growing number of individuals and organizations becoming concerned about the health of American democracy? The statistics speak for themselves.

Voter turnout in recent presidential elections has hovered around 50 percent, down from 62 percent in 1960. Less than 40 percent of eligible voters chose to participate in the 2002 mid-term election. While the public’s trust in their elected officials has improved slightly since the historic lows that were hit in the 1990s, it is still remarkably low. According to a New York Times/CBS News poll, the percentage of Americans who “think they can trust the government in Washington to do what is right” always or most of the time dropped to 18 percent in 1995. This number rebounded after 9/11 to 55 percent, but has since dropped back to 36 percent as of last summer. A poll conducted by The Pew Charitable Trusts found that less than four in ten Americans believe that “most elected officials care what people like me think.”⁴

According to an array of indicators, far fewer Americans are participating in the public life of the country than once did. A study by the Roper Center for Public Research found that between 1973 and 1994, the number of people who:

- 5) Served as an officer of some club or organization declined by 42 percent;
- 6) Worked for a political party declined by 42 percent;

- 7) Served on a committee for some local organization declined by 39 percent;
- 8) Attended a public meeting on town or school affairs declined by 35 percent; and
- 9) Attended a political rally or speech declined by 34 percent.⁵

The Roper Center also found declines in the numbers of people who had performed each of the following activities in the previous year:

- 10) Made a speech (-24%)
- 11) Wrote a congressman or senator (-23%)
- 12) Signed a petition (-22%)
- 13) Was a member of some “better government” group (-19%)
- 14) Held or ran for public office (-16%)
- 15) Wrote a letter to the paper (-14%)
- 16) Wrote an article for a magazine or newspaper (-10%)⁶

According to *Bowling Alone* author, Robert Putnam, interest in current events and public affairs has dropped by 20 percent over the past quarter century. Daily newspaper readership among people under 35 declined from two-thirds in 1965 to one-third in 1990 at the same time that TV news viewership in this same age group fell from 52 percent to 41 percent.⁷

While most of the literature describing the nation’s decline in social capital and civic engagement tells us little about participation and its relationship to the decline, advocates for a more participatory democracy have taken these statistics as a call to arms for the reinvigoration of democratic practice. At one time or another, we have all experienced a feeling of being disconnected from our government. Especially when it comes to national issues, there simply aren’t many ways for average citizens to feel any sense of ownership over the decisions that are being made in our names. Policies on national defense, health care, social security, campaign finance and federal taxes can often feel beyond our control. It should come as no surprise to us, then, that so many citizens have become disillusioned and detached.

“People fail at citizenship not because they are apathetic but because they do not think their actions or views make any real difference,” according to former pollster turned democratic innovator, Daniel Yanklovich.⁸ Many Americans no longer identify themselves as citizens in the fullest sense of the word because they have so little opportunity to play that role in

contemporary political life. They may experience being residents, consumers and employees in their every day lives, but they lack any active connection to *public* life and the governing institutions that have been created to represent them.

Over the years, thousands of prescriptions for curing the ills of American democracy have been put forward by academics, journalists and pundits. Unfortunately, the most common of these – like campaign finance reform, term limits, and changes to the electoral system – fail to address the core failing of our system of governance. We don't need to simply reform our elections, we need to find ways for people to participate beyond elections. We don't need to simply get money out of politics, we need to bring people back in to politics.

At the most fundamental level, we need to create new mediating institutions that serve as a link between the people and their government. We need to create spaces where an informed public can deliberate, build consensus, and make their voices heard. According to Greider: "Democracy is about aggregating the collective power of citizens to speak in their behalf. That process requires strong mediating institutions that are loyal to their adherents, that will listen to them and translate their values into technically plausible language, that will defend their claims ... That linkage is a large part of what's missing in contemporary politics."⁹

In the last years of his life, Thomas Jefferson saw the flaw in the American system of democracy that he had helped to create. In a flurry of letter-writing and lobbying, Jefferson called for the "salvation of the republic" by creating a ward system in American communities that would provide a local venue for the public to participate and be heard. "Divide the counties into wards of such size as that every citizen can attend, when called on, and act in person. Ascribe to them the government of their wards in all things relating to themselves exclusively," he wrote.¹⁰

Unfortunately, Jefferson's call for institutions to support meaningful public participation in governance came too late. Voting, jury duty and running for elected office remain the only formal routes for citizens to participate in governance. Mechanisms that have been developed for governing institutions to collect public input, like public hearings and other forums provide little incentive for the public to reinvest in civic life. These forums tend to be dominated by the airing of individual concerns and too often devolve into repetitive ax-grinding, grandstanding and shouting matches between various stakeholders.

The movement for a more deliberative democracy seeks to cure the ills of American democracy by creating new kinds of spaces that will support citizens coming together to learn from one another, express their opinions, and impact public decision making. This movement is combating distrust of government, low voter turnout, and a general climate of cynicism with a spirit of innovation and an earnest commitment to the democratic values on which our nation was founded.

A More Deliberative Democracy

The idea of deliberative democracy, as old as democracy itself, has undergone a revival in recent years. By definition, the term refers to "decision making by discussion among free and equal citizens."¹¹ A deliberative democracy, as such, is a community or state whose governing institutions are influenced by the preferences of the public as developed through informed deliberation. Underpinning the concept is the assumption that deliberation produces high quality decisions in the general interest through the sharing and testing of opinions, experiences and ideas by diverse groups of individuals.

"To combat the ills of American democracy, a movement is slowly growing across the country to reinvent our governing institutions and reconnect citizens to the most important decisions that impact their lives."

Public forums, like "Listening to the City," seek to produce the ideal spaces for informed public deliberation that simply aren't available to the public under normal circumstances. In these safe public spaces the public can come together to deeply engage with important issues. They wrestle with difficult questions, learn from one another, build public consensus and influence decision making. As such, they develop a sense of ownership of public issues and build a connection between themselves and their governing institutions.

Archon Fung, a Harvard professor who has written extensively about new innovations in the deliberative democracy field, recently coined the term "mini-public" to describe these forums. A mini-public, according to Fung, seeks to create a "more perfect public spheres" by improving "the quality of participation and deliberation in a significant area of public life" and creating ideal conditions for citizens to influence governance processes.¹²

Fung qualifies these vehicles for participation as *mini*-publics because they tend not to be institutionalized within governing bodies through constitutions or legislation, but rather are adapted

to existing governance processes. They reside in the “middle range of democratic institutions,” engaging hundreds or even thousands of citizens, but certainly not the entire polity.

“We don’t need to simply reform our elections, we need to find ways for people to participate beyond elections. We don’t need to simply get money out of politics, we need to bring people back in to politics.”

The notion of the mini-public implies a certain degree of experimentalism. Over the years, several different approaches have been developed for engaging the public in deliberation to influence decision making – each one utilizing different methods and techniques to provide the public with greater voice. In general, all of these approaches share a common set of assumptions about how the public must be convened in order to improve the health of our democracy:

- 17) **Diverse Representation:** The diversity of the community must be represented in the discussion to ensure that no one is left out and that every perspective is heard.
- 18) **Neutral Space:** The public must have the opportunity to make up its own mind in a space that is safe and impartial.

- 19) **Informed Participation:** Citizens must have adequate information about the issues being discussed and the context surrounding the discussion, such that they can make reasonably sound judgments.
- 20) **Authentic Deliberation:** A real and meaningful opportunity must be provided to citizens to participate in a real exchange of opinions that can support learning and changes in perspective.
- 21) **Empowered Public Voice:** Through some mechanism, the judgments reached by the public must have the chance to influence actual decision making and change.

While the different kinds of mini-publics that have been developed share these similar assumptions, each one carries them out differently. The Center for Deliberative Polling, for example, seeks to ensure diverse participation through random samples, while the Study Circles Resource Center builds diverse organizing coalitions to recruit representative groups to participate. Web Lab convenes citizens online in small self-facilitated groups, while the National Issues Forums engage citizens in facilitated face-to-face discussions with trained moderators.

The table below describes some of the most notable mini-public approaches that are being used in the U.S. today.

MATRIX OF MINI-PUBLICS¹³		
Organization	Approach	Description
AmericaSpeaks www.americaspeaks.org	21 st Century Town Meeting	Large-scale forums of as many as 5,000 people engage citizens in small-group discussion supported by trained facilitators. The use of keypad polling, groupware computers and interactive television allows the forums to link together the small group discussions to generate community-wide preferences. Representative groups of citizens are recruited through a variety of means, including grassroots organizing and the media. Major stakeholders are engaged in the process and a clear link to decision making is established from the start.
Center for Deliberative Polling www.la.utexas.edu/research/delpol	Deliberative Poll	A scientifically-generated random sample of citizens are gathered in a single location to participate in small-group facilitated discussions about a public issue. Segments of the deliberations are broadcast via public television to reframe an issue in terms that reflect the views of a representative, informed public. Surveys before and after the forum measure the change in opinion that results from the deliberation. The resulting changes in opinion represent the conclusions the public would reach if people had a good opportunity to become

		more informed on the issues.
E-the-People www.ethepeople.org	Online Public Forum	Discussions are conducted through an asynchronous online platform that is designed to maximize member control over the topics and frames that are considered for discussion. Posted messages to the forum are rated by readers, giving highly rated submissions greater visibility. Partnerships with local newspapers encourage discussion and action around local elections. Participants are encouraged to act on their views through online petitions and letter writing
Information Renaissance www.info-ren.org	Network Democracy	An asynchronous online deliberation that takes place over multiple weeks engages large groups of citizens in discussions of public issues. Often deliberations include roundtables that bring together issue experts, public officials and advocacy groups to discuss the issue under consideration. Generally, deliberations are sponsored by public agencies to influence their policy or rule making processes.
Jefferson Center www.jefferson-center.org	Citizen Jury	A randomly selected panel of about 18 citizens meets for 4-5 days to examine an issue of public significance, serving as a microcosm of the public. Jurors are paid a stipend for their time. They hear from a variety of expert witnesses and are able to deliberate together on the issue. On the final day of their moderated hearings, the members of the Citizens Jury present their recommendations to the public.
National Issues Forums Institute www.nifi.org	National Issues Forums	Structured, local deliberations are held across the country around a critical national policy issue. The deliberations are moderated by trained facilitators and supported by non-partisan "issue books" that present issues in terms of three options or scenarios. Forum results are shared with national and local leaders through reports.
Study Circles Resource Center www.studycircles.org	Community-Wide Study Circles	Multiple groups of 8-15 people within a community or region meet regularly over a period of months to discuss a designated issue. Group deliberations are supported by pre-prepared discussion guides and trained facilitators. At the end of the process, all participants take part in a community meeting to create action strategies for the future.
Viewpoint Learning www.viewpointlearning.com	ChoiceWork Dialogue	Day-long deliberations between representative groups of 40 participants at a time work through hard values-based choices. Sessions are led by highly-skilled facilitators, often providing participants with 3-4 distinct approaches to the issue developed based on polling or research with stakeholders. Deliberations are used to research how stakeholder attitudes on an issue may evolve or to mobilize support for action on a contested issue.
Web Lab www.weblab.org	Small Group Dialogue	Asynchronous online deliberations that convene citizens in small groups over multiple weeks to encourage greater interaction, investment and accountability amongst participants. Groups are generally self-facilitated. Polls may be used take the pulse of participants throughout the course of a deliberation.

Over the course of the past decade, these approaches have collectively engaged hundreds of thousands of people, showing citizens the influence that they can have on governance processes and demonstrating to elected officials that the public can make a valuable contribution to shaping policy. Together they represent the beginning of a movement that can address the basic ills of our democracy. However, in order to make a sustainable and lasting impact, these approaches must be institutionalized – they must move from being mini-publics to publics.

Institutionalization would mean that deliberative democratic processes have become a part of the every day operation of our governing institutions, like juries and elections. While the work that has been conducted thus far is promising, public processes tend to be confined to periodic projects that remain outside of the sustained governance of communities. The movement of “mini-public” to “public” would mean that deliberative democracy has moved beyond exceptional projects into the realm of how institutional governance occurs at every level.

It is, perhaps, too early to compare and evaluate the various approaches to engaging the public described above, as a great deal of growth and experimentation remains to be done. It will eventually be extremely important to discern their individual strengths and weaknesses in order to determine within which contexts each is most appropriate. However, while many of these approaches have matured considerably over the past decade, a substantial amount of learning must occur to discern how each one should be best used. Little data is available to evaluate the quality of participation and outcomes that are being produced by each of the approaches.

One may wonder why we should be hopeful that the deliberative democracy movement will take root. Why should we believe that these mini-publics can transition from being periodic events to formal governing institutions and processes? Why will this reform movement be successful where other efforts to increase public participation in governance have failed?

There are no easy answers to these questions, but there are several indicators that suggest a promising future for the practice of deliberative democracy. First, the rapid advancement of technologies and methodologies to support participation, like those used at “Listening to the City,” represent real breakthroughs in participation that allow for more efficient, effective, and satisfying engagement of the public than has ever been possible in the past. Second, the approaches address a real need felt by policy makers to have a neutral, unfiltered mechanism to obtain information from the public without fear of manipulation or coercion. In a political era dominated by polling, sound bites and lobbying, mini-publics provide policy makers with a

genuine opportunity to engage constituents in a non-adversarial context. Third, mini-publics promote collaboration and general interest solutions, offering an attractive alternative to special interest politics and conflict. Fourth, there is a growing list of examples that suggest that these approaches to governance process produce impressive results. The role that “Listening to the City” was able to play in advancing the discussion, while increasing the credibility of the planning process, indicates that there is a real reason for policy makers to adopt similar processes that can help them get past logjams and enlist greater support from their constituencies.

While it is noteworthy that the most interesting experimentation with mini-publics is being done by non-profit and private organizations in partnership with the public sector, one need not draw the conclusion that the expertise and motivation required to bring about this style of participation lie outside of the capacities of the public sector. Rather, it seems more likely to be the case that the organizations that have developed these models have had a degree of freedom to experiment that has been unavailable to the public sector. It is certainly true that greater work must be done to discern how best to build capacity within communities to conduct these processes. There is no greater challenge for the above-mentioned practitioners than to increase the sustainability of their approaches.

The 21st Century Town Meeting™

“Listening to the City” cast a spotlight on the practice of deliberative democracy in a new and exciting way by grabbing the attention of the national and international media and demonstrating to the world that the public could, in fact, come together and discuss complex planning issues in a meaningful and informed fashion. The approach that was used in New York, AmericaSpeaks’ 21st Century Town Meeting, was uniquely suited for the situation in New York. Its distinct strengths played an important role in contributing to the success of the endeavor. It may be worthwhile to consider how the 21st Century Town Meeting is unique from other approaches in the field.

The most visible distinction between an AmericaSpeaks 21st Century Town Meeting and the other kinds of mini-publics that have been developed is the scale of engagement. Unlike any other face-to-face approach, AmericaSpeaks’ forums enable thousands of people to come together in a single place to deliberate and have their voices heard. While this distinction is significant, however, it is perhaps more important to consider how AmericaSpeaks uniquely orients its processes towards influencing governance. This distinctive feature of the approach, in fact, lies at the heart of why the scale of these forums matters.

Each mini-public employs one or more theory of change that consists of a set of assumptions about how a certain approach empowers the public voice. For example, some approaches

generate recommendations to elected officials and make a series of assumptions about why these elected officials may be likely to respond to the public's recommendations. Other approaches seek to foster citizen action to initiate change, influence the preferences of voters, or change personal behaviors of a critical mass of people in a community. Without some conception of how citizens can impact action and change, a public forum is a dialogue, not a deliberation.

The AmericaSpeaks approach brings citizens and decision makers together within the context of institutionalized governance processes in such a way that bolsters the priorities expressed by the public to make it more likely that they will be heard. The approach is unique in its sophisticated approach to decision making – taking into consideration how governance processes work and the needs of contemporary decision makers.

Four elements of the AmericaSpeaks approach stand out in this regard:

Large-Scale Forums: The size of a 21st Century Town Meeting helps to ensure that the public's voice will be heard. When thousands of people come together to deliberate about a public issue, it becomes very difficult for decision makers to ignore them. By convening forums at this scale, AmericaSpeaks shows decision makers that the public cares about the issue and that the views expressed by the public represent a substantial portion of the community. Perhaps just as important, the scale of these forums attracts the media, amplifying the public's priorities and giving credibility to the process.

Clear Articulation of Preferences: The use of technology at 21st Century Town Meetings makes it possible for the public to articulate clear and concrete messages to decision makers. Often public processes generate long reports that assemble a plethora of views expressed by citizens. These reports make it easy for decision makers to respond to those things that they agree with and disregard everything else. Polling keypads and groupware computers sort and prioritize public comments, allowing organizers of a 21st Century Town Meeting™ to present the collective public voice to decision makers.

Timely Reporting: The technology also allows the views expressed by the public to be reported very quickly, responding to the time frames of modern policy making processes. For every policy issue, there is a limited window of opportunity within which the public has an opportunity to influence decision making. A 21st Century Town Meeting is able to generate reports of the shared priorities of thousands of citizens within hours of the forum. Literally, on their way out the door, participants in "Listening to the City" forum were provided with a preliminary report of the day's proceedings. Within weeks, a more complete final report was available for decision makers and the media.

Engaging Decision Makers: AmericaSpeaks always works with decision makers prior to a forum to ensure that they have bought in to the process and that the questions being addressed by the public reflect issues that may be influenced within the current decision making process. AmericaSpeaks works to ensure that decision makers are present at 21st Century Town Meetings and have adequate access to the process to understand the credibility of the public's participation.

The success of "Listening to the City" may be largely ascribed to these elements of the 21st Century Town Meeting approach, which helped to ensure that the public's voice was heard. Given the number of interests involved, the character of the planning process, and the high profile of the issue, the 21st Century Town Meeting approach was uniquely appropriate to help citizens impact decision making in New York. The fact that decision makers were swayed by the preferences expressed through the forum was no accident – it was a highly strategic process that leveraged the AmericaSpeaks approach to further the public interest.

As we survey the public problems that face our country at the local, regional and national levels, it will be important to consider the unique strengths and weaknesses of the various approaches to engaging the public that have been developed and the contexts within which they are most appropriate, so that we may use them more wisely.

Conclusion

At this point in our country's history, we should be both optimistic and pessimistic about the condition of our democracy. The dismal statistics demonstrating the decline in the average citizen's engagement with public life are reason for great concern. The vitality of our communities and health of our democracy depend on an active and involved citizenry. Unless we find ways to reconnect people to public life, our communities will continue to decay and the public will continue to grow more alienated from those who govern in their name.

Fortunately, it is heartening to know that a growing number of people recognize this threat and have begun to act. Across the nation, mini-publics are providing new venues for the citizens from every walk of life to come together to deliberate about the most important decisions impacting their lives. Hundreds of communities have used Study Circles over the past decade to increase communication among citizens and address community problems. Each year, thousands of people participate in deliberations about national problems through the National Issues Forums. More than 60,000 people have had the opportunity to influence governance processes at the local, regional and national levels through 21st Century Town Meetings over the past five years. While a great deal of work remains to be done to improve the approaches that have been developed and

to determine how they may be best institutionalized into our governance process, the success of these efforts to date is promising. The resources, know-how and approaches are out there to begin renewing our governing institutions and we should be hopeful that they will be put to good use.

“Listening to the City” was an excellent showcase for deliberative participation in the governance process. It proved that citizens could grapple with difficult issues. It showed that the public could come together across remarkable diversity and find areas of general consensus. Most importantly, the initiative demonstrated that decision makers will respond to the public under the right circumstances. It is important to remember, however, that “Listening to the City” is not an isolated event. It is part of a growing movement and, hopefully, it is only the first of many high-profile opportunities for the public to be heard in the years to come.

AUTHOR

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NOTES

1 Greider, W. (1992) *Who Will Tell the People: The Betrayal of American Democracy*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

2 More information on each of these organizations may be found online: AmericaSpeaks (www.americaspeaks.org), Study Circles Resource Center (www.studyircles.org), Center for Deliberative Polling (www.la.utexas.edu/research/delpol), and Information Renaissance (www.network-democracy.org).

3 Other organizations include the National Issues Forum, the National Civic League, the Jefferson Center, Web Lab, E-the-People, Viewpoint Learning and the Public Forum Institute. Last year, many of these organizations came together with researchers and

government officials to form the Deliberative Democracy Consortium (www.deliberative-democracy.net) in order to foster the “nascent” movement.

4 “Skepticism is the Status Quo.” *The New York Times*. January 2, 2004.

5 Putnum, R. (2001). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

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Rebuilding Ground Zero with Democracy: Listening to the City and the 21st Century Town Meeting™

Ashley Boyd and Jane Berkow

ABSTRACT

This article introduces readers to the principles guiding the development and planning of a 21st Century Town Meeting™ using *Listening to the City* as an example. First, the article outlines AmericaSpeaks' Taking Democracy to Scale™ model, on which the 21st Century Town Meeting™ process is based. Then, each element of the Taking Democracy to Scale™ model is described in detail using specific examples from *Listening to the City*. The article concludes with a brief analysis of the impact of *Listening to the City* and the potential of the 21st Century Town Meeting™.

KEYWORDS

AmericaSpeaks, town meeting, public hearing, feedback

INTRODUCTION

“We have a word for what they were doing. The word is democracy.”²

—Pete Hamill, New York Daily News

Even the most hardened, cynical observers marveled at the sight of approximately 4,500 citizens working together to resolve the most challenging planning process of our time – rebuilding the World Trade Center site. *Listening to the City*, a day-long meeting on July 20, 2002, provided ordinary New Yorkers an opportunity to have a direct voice in the rebuilding process. In response to the participants' concerns about the initial six proposed designs, the key decision makers went back to the drawing board, introducing the international competition from which Daniel Liebskind's winning design emerged.

Listening to the City was the largest demonstration of AmericaSpeaks' 21st Century Town Meeting™ process to date. Since 1997, AmericaSpeaks, a non-profit organization, has facilitated 21st Century Town Meetings™ throughout the country on issues ranging from Social Security reform to urban and regional planning and resource allocation.³ The process is

designed to engage citizens in the public decisions that impact their lives.

AmericaSpeaks' founder and president Carolyn J. Lukensmeyer developed the 21st Century Town Meeting™ process in order to bridge the widening gap between decision makers and citizens. Traditional tools of democracy, such as public hearings, have largely become diluted, public relations exercises that only reach those who are already very engaged or representatives of special-interest groups. At the same time, the needs and realities of governing have changed – decisions must be made in shorter time frames and the mass media responds only to large displays of collective action. As a result, Lukensmeyer recognized a need for new democratic tools that could dramatically increase the scale of citizen participation in public decisions, enhance the quality of the deliberation experience, and make the results immediately accessible.

After extensive interviews with academics, practitioners, foundation officers, elected officials, and activists, and listening to ordinary people across the nation, Lukensmeyer identified seven core elements necessary for new, effective democratic tools:

- Develop a Context-Specific Strategy

- Build Credibility with Citizens & Decision Makers
- Ensure Diverse Participation
- Establish Informed Dialogue
- Create a Safe Public Space
- Impact Decision Making
- Sustain & Institutionalize Citizen Voice

Collectively, these seven elements form the AmericaSpeaks Taking Democracy to Scale™ model for large-scale citizen engagement. The 21st Century Town Meeting™ is a process based on the Taking Democracy to Scale™ model.

Listening to the City: 21st Century Town Meeting Case Study

Despite its unprecedented scope, Listening to the City offers an excellent case from which to explore elements underlying all 21st Century Town Meetings™. The project demonstrates the potential power and challenges of this new process for public participation. What follows is a detailed description of how Listening to the City was planned and executed according to the seven elements of the Taking Democracy to Scale™ model.

Develop a Context-Specific Strategy

No 21st Century Town Meeting™ is the same. In order to make an impact, public deliberation must be tailored specifically to the community in which it will be conducted and linked effectively to relevant decision-making. Therefore, each AmericaSpeaks project begins with a thorough analysis of the community, political context, issues and desired outcomes that surround the subject matter of concern. Such an analysis allows organizations considering a public engagement process to gauge whether the project is realistic, reasonable and well-timed.

The first strategic question to consider is whether or not the issue under consideration is “ripe” for public deliberation. There must be a widespread interest in the issue and an apparent reason for citizens to talk about it. “Ripe” issues are generally either those that have moved along the policy-making process but have yet to be decided, or alternately, are in a very early stage of policy making and require significant input to frame the issue. Whatever the issue, it should have relatively high visibility and be an issue of key concern to a broad spectrum of the public.

Secondly, one must carefully examine the political context to assess the commitment and opportunities to integrate the outcomes of the 21st Century Town Meeting™ with formal decision-making processes. The meeting cannot be planned in a vacuum. Rather, the meeting should be designed to be useful to decision makers and should be scheduled with the timetables of the decision-making process in mind.

In the case of *Listening to the City*, there was no doubt about the “ripeness” of the issue. Many months after the terrorist attack, New York City residents demonstrated a steadfast commitment

Sample Strategy Questions

Issue Readiness

What is the history?

What has been accomplished?

How polarized have positions become among decision-makers, stakeholders and the public?

Political Context

Who are the decision-makers?

Who has influence over decision-makers?

What are the interests at stake?

Who are the stakeholders?

Communications Context

What will it take to get the attention of decision-makers?

What will it take to get the attention of diverse communities of the public?

to the rebuilding efforts through volunteer activities and community meetings. Shortly after 9/11, the Civic Alliance to Rebuild Downtown New York organized a coalition of more than 75 civic, business, environmental, community, academic and labor groups to represent citizen interests in the process for redeveloping Lower Manhattan.⁴ At the same time, organizations representing families of victims began mobilizing and attempting to influence the clean-up and redevelopment process.

Despite the widespread public interest, it was not clear whether a 21st Century Town Meeting™ could effectively make an impact on decision making given the political environment. The formal decision-making process, authority and timeline were murky for many months, as the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) was charged with managing the redevelopment process while the Port Authority of New York/New Jersey was the land owner. Early in the rebuilding efforts, the LMDC and the Port Authority had a public battle over hiring a consulting design firm, indicating fractures within

the shared leadership. In the midst of this confusion, the LMDC had its own schedule of traditional public hearings planned, and several other civic planning coalitions had already begun submitting specific plans and ideas for the rebuilding process.

The way in which these strategic challenges were addressed in the planning and execution of *Listening to the City* will be illustrated in the description of the remaining six elements of the Taking Democracy to Scale™ model.

Build Credibility with Citizens and Decision Makers

Building credibility with citizens and decision makers, the second element of the Taking Democracy to Scale™ model, represents a significant challenge since both are often highly skeptical about civic engagement efforts. However, this credibility is essential in order for the engagement process to attract diverse participation and impact decisions.

Citizens often question whether the 21st Century Town Meeting™ sponsors have a “hidden agenda” and will influence the outcome of the meeting. Decision makers, on the other hand, are often worried that the general public cannot effectively grapple with the complexity of public policy decisions. The public, many argue, cannot possibly consider and make recommendations on a multi-faceted issue and, as a result, their feedback will be overly general and of limited use. Conversely, decision-makers worry that “special interest” citizens – the public who are highly-conversant with the issues but from a limited, narrow perspective – will dominate and skew the outcome of the meeting.

To address these concerns about legitimacy, AmericaSpeaks carefully and strategically positioned *Listening to the City* among these two core audiences. First, AmericaSpeaks and the Civic Alliance, *Listening to the City*'s first sponsor, recognized that the LMDC and the Port Authority should also sponsor the meeting. This joint sponsorship would establish the meeting's credibility among both decision-makers and citizens.

To demonstrate the contribution that citizen engagement could make in the rebuilding process and to gain credibility with the LMDC and the Port Authority, the Civic Alliance sponsored an initial, smaller-scale *Listening to the City* conducted by AmericaSpeaks on February 7, 2002. Using the 21st Century Town Meeting™ process, approximately 700 participants met to discuss and draft general guidelines for the rebuilding process. LMDC, Port Authority and New York City officials participated in the meeting. Soon afterwards, key decision-makers expressed their full support for a larger meeting as a means to solicit public feedback on the six initial designs. Ultimately, the LMDC and the Port Authority made *Listening to the City* part of their own official public engagement process and signed on as formal co-sponsors.

Once planning for the July *Listening to the City* began, AmericaSpeaks relied on its role as a neutral, honest broker to establish credibility among the various stakeholder groups and their constituencies. Because AmericaSpeaks was concerned only with the civic engagement process – not the issue under consideration – stakeholders and citizens accepted it as a credible convener. In this role, AmericaSpeaks staff:

- Oversaw the development of the participant materials,
- Managed the program design process to ensure the issues and options were reflected in an accurate and balanced way, and
- Summarized the meeting outcomes.

Early in the project, AmericaSpeaks brought together a diverse, representative group of organizations and individuals to actively provide guidance to the project. This Citizens Advisory Committee included approximately 30 organizational and community leaders who mirrored the ethnicity, geography and issue concerns of the New York City region.⁵ Committee members met as a group approximately once every three weeks, and more frequently during the final stages of the design process. The active involvement of the Citizen Advisory Committee helped address any concerns about partisan or issue bias as they emerged. This broad civic participation also increased decision makers' confidence that *Listening to the City* participants would be diverse and represent the entire region.

Additionally, *Listening to the City* sought to build credibility among citizens and decision-makers by securing media coverage in elite, agenda-setting publications before the meeting. The goal was to capture the unique nature of the meeting and generate interest in the process. Although these efforts had limited success in generating stories exclusively about *Listening to the City*, the media outreach strategy ensured that the meeting was mentioned in most articles about the rebuilding effort.

Ensure Diverse Participation

Ensuring diverse participation – across geographic, demographic and interest lines – is the third element of the Taking Democracy to Scale™ model.

The practice of democracy falls short if members of the community do not or cannot engage in deliberations on issues that impact their lives. Too many town meetings and public hearings attract the “usual suspects” and the axe-grinders. Minimal effort is usually expended in reaching out to the various populations within the community to achieve even a semblance of representation. Achieving diverse participation remains one of the biggest challenges in creating effective, large-scale citizen engagement efforts.

For each project, AmericaSpeaks works with the meeting's sponsoring organizations to develop outreach strategies that ensure a diverse mix of citizens. In particular, AmericaSpeaks makes a specific commitment to reach "general interest" citizens who do not belong to any stakeholder group engaged on the issue. This commitment is founded on the belief that every segment of a community has a right to be heard and can offer value to the public discussion. Additionally, "general interest" citizens usually can identify common-good solutions more quickly than special-interest group representatives.

Listening to the City's sponsors aimed to recruit 5,000 citizen participants from all walks of life in the New York City region. In an effort to reach citizens not traditionally included in decision making, *Listening to the City* sponsors set a goal for participants to mirror the demographic diversity and geographic distribution of citizens of the region. The participant also goal included attracting at least 50% "general interest" citizens. The project staff used data from the 2000 Census to develop the ethnic and geographic outreach goals against which to measure progress in reaching these goals.

Additionally, given the nature of the events of 9/11 and the devastating impact it had on many New Yorkers, special efforts were made to involve the people who had been most directly impacted by the 9/11 attacks in larger numbers than their representation in the population. Targeted, direct outreach was conducted in order to attract family members and friends who lost loved ones, 9/11 survivors, rescue workers as well as Lower Manhattan residents, business owners, and workers. In response to the concern that Orthodox Jews, many of whom live in Lower Manhattan's Lower East Side, would not be able to participate in a Saturday meeting, a second meeting was added on Monday, July 22. Others who could not make the meeting on Saturday, July 20th were encouraged to register for this alternate meeting, which accommodated another 300 participants.⁶

AmericaSpeaks Principles – Outreach & Participation

Mirroring the area's demographic diversity with regards to age, ethnicity, and geography

Attracting at least 50% "general interest" or unaffiliated citizens

Creating an equal balance of perspectives

Representing those who will be most impacted by the outcome of the decisions

Outreach Tools

Twelve field outreach workers, experienced in organizing within their assigned communities, were posted in all New York City

boroughs and in suburban counties in New Jersey, New York and Connecticut. Outreach workers distributed flyers at workplaces, community events, and job fairs, conducted organizational presentations, and disseminated information through organizational networks and businesses. Outreach materials were translated into Spanish and Chinese and included notices that translators in these languages would be available to participants during the meeting. Free shuttle buses were provided to transport participants to and from locations in the outer boroughs and suburbs.

Listening to the City was carefully branded through images and positioning. "Remember and Rebuild" was chosen as the tagline. The phrase was embedded in the project's logo – a yellow rising sun behind a deep blue stylized Lower Manhattan skyline. This "look and feel" was used in all *Listening to the City* materials and later in the design of the meeting space itself.

Outreach messages were developed and continually refined to address citizen concerns about the meeting's credibility and impact. "Make History – Help Shape the Future of Downtown New York" and "Decision makers are committed to listening and considering the outcomes of the meeting" became the central messages in community outreach efforts.

An aggressive media strategy was employed to generate advance media coverage in targeted communities. As mentioned previously, securing media coverage prior to the event proved very challenging. However, media coverage did increase significantly in the weeks prior to the meeting and spiked when, five days before *Listening to the City*, the LMDC released its initial six designs for the rebuilding. In these stories, the meeting was announced as the public's first opportunity to review the site plans and provide input on them. In the final weeks, advertisements were placed in ethnic and community newspapers and on Spanish-speaking radio stations in order to attract more African American and Hispanic participants as well as those from the outer boroughs and suburbs.

Registration

Participants had the option to register using an online registration form on the project's website, calling a toll-free phone number (available 24/7) or filling out a registration form provided by an outreach worker. Phone registration was provided in Spanish throughout the project and in Cantonese and Mandarin in the final weeks before the meeting. As people registered, they were asked to voluntarily provide basic, confidential demographic information. The data helped the outreach staff monitor the demographics of the registrants to determine whether any targeted population might be underrepresented. The project staff was then able to shift and increase outreach resources and efforts to specific communities as mentioned above.

Participants were strongly encouraged to register before the meeting. Registrations came in slowly at first but doubled each week during the final three weeks before the meeting. The numbers soared during the July 4th weekend in response to the increasing media coverage and outreach at public events. The single most effective story was a two-minute news piece that demonstrated the meeting technology in a mock small group dialogue that broadcast repeatedly on a local news channel. Registrations spiked again in the final week after the LMDC released the initial six site plans four days before *Listening to the City*.

Several days before the meeting, more than 5,000 people were registered and advance registration was closed due to concerns about being unable to accommodate citizen interest. In general, AmericaSpeaks closes registration when all participant seats are filled because open seats from no-shows are generally filled by participants who arrive without pre-registering. Given the news that registration had closed early, *Listening to the City* had fewer on-site registrants than usual, which accounts for the gap between the meeting’s capacity and its attendance.

Listening to the City succeeded in attracting participants that represented the rich diversity of New York City. Overall, participant demographics mostly corresponded to the region’s age breakdown, though middle-aged participants were over-represented and young people (19 and under) were significantly under-represented. Participants represented a wide range of income levels, with 17% of participants having household incomes \$25,000 or less and 13% of participants having household incomes of \$150,000 or more. Overall, participants with higher household incomes were slightly over-represented compared to demographics for the region. In terms of ethnicity, Caucasian, Asian/Pacific Islander and mixed race participants were slightly over-represented while African Americans and Hispanic participants were under-represented. Sixty-seven percent of participants were Caucasian (compared to 64% regionally), 12% Asian/Pacific Islander (compared to 9%), 10% Hispanic (compared to 21%), 7% African American (compared to 20%), and 5% mixed heritage (compared to 2%).

Listening to the City also attracted those communities most impacted by 9/11. Appropriately, a plurality of participants – 46% – were residents of Manhattan, the geographic area most impacted by the attack and aftermath. However, the entire region had been impacted economically, and participants from Brooklyn (18%) and Queens (10%) were also present in large numbers. Additionally, 10% of participants lived in suburban New Jersey and 12% lived in other areas in New York State, representing commuting workers.

Most participants had been directly impacted by the 9/11 attacks. Ten percent of participants were family members of a victim, nearly 20% had survived the attack, and over 30% had lost a

friend or co-worker. Approximately 6% of participants were rescue workers, and more than 20% were residents of Lower Manhattan. Participants had strong economic ties to the region with more than 40% saying they worked in Lower Manhattan and over 20% saying they had lost a job or income since 9/11.

Establish Informed Dialogue

The fourth element of the Taking Democracy to Scale™ model is establishing informed dialogue. Citizen dialogue can only be productive if there is a shared ground of factual, neutral information. With such a strong foundation of information, citizens can review numerous viewpoints, discuss them with confidence, and come to their own determinations about what they believe and what they think should happen.

In an AmericaSpeaks 21st Century Town Meeting™, informed dialogue is created through the combination of program design, issue framing and participant materials. The following section describes how these elements were used to create informed dialogue within the *Listening to the City* program.

Program Design

Listening to the City was developed using the standard 21st Century Town Meeting™ structure, design and tools. The table below contrasts the 21st Century Town Meeting™ design with the standard public hearing.

Standard Public Hearing	21 st Century Town Meeting™
Speaker-Focused	Participant-Focused
Experts deliver information	Citizens respond to and discuss information provided by experts
Airs individual ideas and concerns	Identifies shared ideas and concerns and assigns them relative priority
No group discussion of questions	Facilitated group discussions based on focused questions
Limited reporting of participant input	Instant, detailed reporting of participant input

The *Listening to the City* program followed a highly-structured agenda that emphasized small group discussion on specific, directed questions and used technological tools. Participants

were seated at small, round tables with no more than 10 other participants. Seating was assigned to ensure that each table reflected the demographic diversity of the region. Professional facilitators were placed at each table to support the participants' work and ensure everyone had an opportunity to participate fully. Each table chose a participant or participants to serve as the recorder who kept track of the table's ideas.

Technological tools transformed these independent, small group discussions into one large community discussion by revealing

Excerpt from the *Listening to the City* Program Agenda

Welcome from Regional Plan Association, LMDC and Port Authority Leaders (20 minutes)

Table Introductions (15 minutes)

Participant Demographics: Keypad Polling (10 minutes)

Presentation on Regional and Lower Manhattan Context (15 minutes)

Table Discussion (45 minutes)

What are your hopes and concerns for the rebuilding in Lower Manhattan – rebuilding the site and the lives of those who were most impacted by 9/11?

how participants at other tables felt and thought about the same issues. Laptop computers at each table were used as “electronic flipcharts” to record the outcome of each table's discussions. At the end of every discussion period, each table's recorder submitted its report to a centralized database. A group of trained experts – called a “Theme Team” – reviewed each table's comments immediately after each discussion ended and identified common themes and ideas across the tables. The team presented the themes from the discussion back to the participants – usually within 15-30 minutes – and prepared and distributed a preliminary report of the meeting's results to participants as they left the meeting hall.

Throughout the meeting, each participant also had an opportunity to vote individually in response to various policy options and questions. Keypad polling devices allowed each participant to vote anonymously on issues of concern. These keypad votes were used to prioritize the themes and recommendations that emerged from the collective small group discussions. The voting results were displayed automatically on large screens set up throughout the meeting space, allowing participants to receive immediate feedback about how their perspectives compared to those of the larger group.

The excerpt of the *Listening to the City* agenda shown below demonstrates how the combination of small group discussions,

keypad voting and theme team reports worked together in the program design.

Issue Framing

In order to effectively frame issues for public deliberation, one must reflect a variety of view points and perspectives without losing sight of the goal to impact the decision-making process. The issue-framing process of *Listening to the City* clearly demonstrates the tensions that arose in trying to balance the stakeholders' varying needs and perspectives within the six-hour program.

The *Listening to the City* design team, led by senior AmericaSpeaks associates, included the meeting's Executive Committee, representatives from key stakeholders in the rebuilding process, such as the LMDC, the Port Authority, and the Civic Alliance. The Citizens Advisory Committee members also reviewed the program at every stage of development and offered specific suggestions. Additional Citizens Advisory Committee meetings were added in the final weeks before the meeting to accommodate their interest in the design process. In the final week, Committee members served as a program design “focus group” to test the framing and effectiveness of discussion questions. In the later stages of the design process, representatives from the laptop and keypad polling technology companies also participated as did event staff members played crucial roles in program management.

Almost immediately, key differences about how to frame the redevelopment process emerged among the stakeholders.

Representatives from the LMDC and the Port Authority were most interested in getting citizen feedback on the six concept plans that they had commissioned for redevelopment of the site. The Civic Alliance, on the other hand, had a strong interest in expanding the content of the meeting to include discussion about rebuilding the lives of those most directly impacted by the World Trade Center disaster. They wanted to focus a part of the meeting on key, long-term issues that heavily impacted Lower Manhattan residents and businesses such as transportation, jobs, housing, civic amenities, safety, and the environment. Although everyone agreed that both content elements were important, the conflict centered around which of these topics to place first on the agenda. In the end, the stakeholders agreed that the meeting should include both short-term and long-term redevelopment issues. Once the questions for the two program sections were designed, the stakeholders agreed that beginning the meeting with the review of the six designs would create the most dynamic experience for participants, decision makers, and the media.

On the day of the meeting, participants carefully reviewed and discussed the initial six redevelopment designs and voted on various aspects of the plans. The second half of the program was

dedicated to discussing and prioritizing long-term, regional issues related to “rebuilding lives” impacted by 9/11. Because the program covered so many issues and the time for each discussion was relatively short, some participants and table facilitators felt the dialogue was rushed. However, the program design process was effective and credible because it engaged all of the key stakeholders and represented all interests.

Participant Materials

The participant materials further supported the balanced framing of the issues and encouraged an informed discussions at the tables.

Listening to the City participants received a 16-page participant guide that included a section on the history and mission of the LMDC, the principles guiding the planning process, and a brief history of the World Trade Center and Lower Manhattan.⁷ In addition, the LMDC prepared a section describing the decision-making structure related to the World Trade Center redevelopment, and overviews of the six site plans. The Civic Alliance drafted sections describing the estimated economic and social impact 9/11 had on the New York region and summarized several possible remedies.

Additionally, each table was provided large color copies of the six site plans for participants to review in detail. These concept plans were not fixed blueprints with architectural details but displayed rough design elements showing the approximate location and size of the building structures that would replace the Marriott hotel, the 11 million square feet of office space, and the 600,000 square feet of retail stores as well as accommodate a memorial, open space, and a new transportation center. Experts familiar with the site designs and rebuilding issues were available to answer questions at tables as they emerged during the discussion period.

Create a Safe Public Space

The fourth element of the Taking Democracy to Scale™ model is creating safe public space. The goal is to create an environment in which each participant, even when surrounded by thousands of others, can feel supported to share his or her most deeply-held beliefs and opinions. The most effective way to create a safe public space is to demonstrate respect for each individual’s opinions and needs in all aspects of the meeting set-up and services. This section will describe the primary meeting functions that create a sense of safe public space.

Meeting Space & Services

A 21st Century Town Meeting™ space should be inviting and reflect the spirit of the community. One of the most challenging

elements of *Listening to the City* was transforming the hangar-like space at the Jacob Javits Convention Center into a room conducive to intimate conversation. This was especially important to the discussions that would carry an emotional charge, such as the creation of a permanent memorial for 9/11.

The event management team worked hard to make the meeting space more intimate and convey the historic nature of this event. Pipe-and-drape decoration positioned around the room matched the meeting’s logo and promotional materials and added color and life to the room. Large banners displaying historic photos of Lower Manhattan hung on the walls throughout the space to place the conversation in its historical context. Several special exhibits from the New York Historical Society set up in enclosed booths at the perimeter of the room displayed photos, drawings, and artifacts from 9/11. The exhibit set a somber, reflective tone appropriate for a meeting dedicated to the tragic events.

To ensure the meeting would meaningfully include all participants, special attention was given to providing support to a wide range of special needs. These services included the following:

- Assisted listening devices for the hearing impaired
- Large print and Braille for the visually impaired
- Spanish, Mandarin and Cantonese-speaking tables with translators, simultaneous translation equipment and translated materials
- Wheelchair assistance
- Free, on-site childcare

These free services, widely publicized in outreach materials, were used extensively by participants.

Technology

The technological tools used in 21st Century Town Meetings™ contribute significantly to participants’ feelings of safety and respect. Even in a room with thousands of people, the technological tools ensure that each individual participant’s voice can be heard. Further, the Theme Team’s careful consideration of all of the data from each table demonstrates that participant ideas have been registered.

When themes from table discussions were displayed on the large screens and read by the Lead Facilitator during *Listening to the City*, the energy in the room was dynamic. Participants nodded in agreement, compared their report against the themes, and consulted with their tablemates about the outcomes. At one point, the room erupted in laughter and applause as participants

reacted to the theme, “Looks like Albany!” The Theme Team drew the phrase from one table’s report to illustrate the theme that the site designs were not sufficiently distinctive or innovative.

When aggregating this tremendous amount of data, it would be possible for people to feel that their ideas had not been captured. The table recorder, a volunteer from among the participants, could introduce his or her own ideas into the computer without other participants’ knowledge. To address this concern, *Listening to the City* table facilitators were instructed to sit next to recorders and watch what he or she typed before the report was sent. Facilitators also were instructed to ask participants to rotate the recorder responsibilities throughout the meeting to limit control by one participant. Most importantly, the Theme Team process was transparent and its reporting was reviewed by the participants. During *Listening to the City*, as with other 21st Century Town Meetings™, participants had opportunities to re-submit ideas and concepts that were not captured or reflected accurately. The revised Theme Team report, which reflected that feedback, was displayed to participants again and then used in the final report.

Listening to the City clearly demonstrated the important role that technology plays in the overall process. A computer-networked meeting of this size had never been attempted, and flawed wiring by the convention center meant the standard technology set-up did not work as planned. As a result, when the table discussions began in the morning, the laptop computers at several tables were not properly networked together. Although many participants were shifted to tables with working computers and the technical staff continued troubleshooting, some participant tables were not able to instantly submit their comments to the Theme Team for some period. As a result, some table facilitators and participants became frustrated. The keypad voting system, which works wirelessly, worked without problems.

Overall, participants expressed strong satisfaction with the quality of the meeting. Four out of five *Listening to the City* participants indicated they were very satisfied or satisfied with the quality of the dialogue.⁸

Staffing

The 21st Century Town Meeting™ staffing configuration aims to make sure all participants feel welcomed and supported in the challenging work that lies ahead of them. The multi-leveled configuration is designed to be a dynamic organism that can respond almost instantly to participants’ needs. This responsive system allows the meeting to feel small and personal in scale – despite its complexity and size.

The facilitators assigned to each table form the link between the participants and the program. They help keep the conversations on task, support an environment of respectful listening, ensure

each participant at the table has a chance to speak, and provide links to meeting services as needed. Given the importance of the table discussion, the program staff are responsible for assisting facilitators in any way possible.

More than 500 volunteer table facilitators were required for *Listening to the City*. Given the historic nature of the meeting and the nation’s heartfelt response to the events of 9/11, meeting organizers felt it appropriate to recruit at least one table facilitator from each of the 50 U.S. states. Facilitator qualifications included a strong background in small-group facilitation and a capacity to facilitate an intensive, day-long program. Additionally, table facilitators were required to attend a four-hour orientation session before the meeting that included extensive background information about the rebuilding process, descriptions of the site plans and a review of the meeting agenda.

Word quickly spread in facilitator networks throughout the nation, and, to the surprise of many, more than 800 individuals volunteered—willing to come at their own expense — within the first two weeks of recruitment. The *Listening to the City* organizers worked hard to select a table facilitator team that matched the diversity expected among the participants. Ultimately, more than 500 were invited to *Listening to the City*, representing all 50 states plus Canada, England, Australia, Columbia, South Africa and Denmark.

A team of 25 Area Facilitators circulated throughout the meeting space to provide assistance to Table Facilitators while four Floor Managers provided a link to the Lead Facilitator onstage. Additional services that supported the *Listening the City* program included issue experts, grief support counselors, volunteers, and representatives from relevant social service organizations.

Impact Decision-Making

The sixth element of the Taking Democracy to Scale™ model is impacting decision-making.

Standard public meetings that don’t significantly impact decisions have fueled widespread public distrust of and dissatisfaction with public participation processes. For this reason, AmericaSpeaks is careful to ensure that each 21st Century Town Meeting™ is positioned to significantly influence the outcomes of the decision-making process. The intended outcomes vary depending upon the meeting’s role but can include:

- Changing the terms of the debate
- Identifying key options

- Setting the priorities in strategic plans
- Making recommendations about resource allocation
- Selecting among policy reform options, and
- Developing a framework for long-term planning.

No one strategy alone positions a 21st Century Town Meeting™ to impact the decision-making process. In fact, impact is created through the effective implementation of the previous five elements of the Taking Democracy to Scale™ model.

Listening to the City participants sent clear, detailed feedback to decision-makers about the six site plans. Participants overwhelmingly stated that the plans did not meet their expectations. In fact, only two of the options received marginal support when participants were asked to rate the plans as a setting for a permanent memorial.

Additionally, more than 700 pages of detailed feedback from the table discussions were captured electronically. The strongest common themes from these reports included the following:

- Develop bolder, more innovative designs
- Restore the visually unique skyline
- Preserve the footprints of the buildings as a symbol
- Reduce density of office space
- Make Lower Manhattan a lively, multi-use community
- Hold an international design competition, and
- Don't rush the development process.

In response to the discussions about long-term issues surrounding the rebuilding process, participants identified the following priorities for Lower Manhattan:

- Provide affordable and middle-income housing for all
- Improve and expand transit services
- Develop more diversity in businesses without diluting its character, and
- Create new jobs and training programs, particularly for those directly affected by 9/11.

After *Listening to the City*, agencies leading the rebuilding effort, including the LMDC, acknowledged that the current plans

would not be acceptable and pledged to go back to the drawing board -- even if it meant delaying the official timetable. Addressing participants at the conclusion of the meeting, LMDC President Lou Tomson said, "We have to see if that next phase of the timeline is realistic. We have to make this work, and if it takes a month or two in a different direction, then it takes a month more, or two or three."⁹ National and international media carried the story that *Listening to the City* participants had redirected the redevelopment effort, including the headline "Officials Rethink Building Proposal for Ground Zero" in the next day's *New York Times*.

Two months after *Listening to the City*, the LMDC and the Port Authority announced they had launched a new design process and had chosen six teams of internationally-renowned architects and planners to develop new designs. In this new round, the LMDC dramatically changed the parameters for the designs, incorporating most of the suggestions from *Listening to the City* participants. The architects were directed to develop designs with less commercial and office space, the footprints in a memorial space if possible, a powerful skyline element, and residential housing. Many elements of Daniel Libeskind's winning design incorporate these elements and directly respond to the public's concerns about the first set of plans.

Listening to the City's impact on the broader redevelopment issues is not entirely clear. Participant input on the long-term issues related to the rebuilding effort was less concrete than short-term issues such as the site plans. The media reported very little on the long-term issues and decision makers made no specific commitments in the areas of job development, housing and transit during the meeting. The difference of impact between the two *Listening to the City* discussions underscores the careful, strategic positioning required to impact the decision-making process and continued study required to understand this process.

The following factors positioned *Listening to the City* to have some significant impact on the decision-making process:

- Scale and Diversity of Participation – *Listening to the City's* scale commanded attention and demonstrated its legitimacy as a measure of public opinion. However, if the audience had been less diverse, the scale alone would not have had the same impact. Because participants mostly corresponded to the demographics of the region and included representatives of all major stakeholder groups and geographies, the meeting results were credible.
- Participation of Decision Makers – Based on *Listening to the City's* credibility and decision-makers' sponsorship of the project, the key leaders in the redevelopment process attended the meeting and responded to participant concerns. Participation by decision makers in turn increased the credibility among participants and media representatives.

- **Informed Dialogue** – Participants were provided extensive information from which to evaluate the six site plans and regional issues, which increased the credibility and impact of their opinions. For example, participants listened to a detailed presentation of the plans and planning issues presented by the Port Authority's chief engineer before having an in-depth discussion and voting on them. Participants also listened to the opinions of the other participants at their tables, which often shifts viewpoints.
- **Media Coverage** – Extensive media coverage of the meeting validated and leveraged the participants' input. More than 200 media outlets sent representatives to cover the event, including all of the national broadcast media, major newspapers from around the country, and international media outlets. Based on the participants' negative reactions to the initial plans, the media all but called the initial plans dead. This widespread coverage made a significant impact on the decision-making climate.

Sustain and Institutionalize Citizen Voice

Though significant, one 21st Century Town Meeting™ alone does not make a robust public participation structure. The whole intent of AmericaSpeaks' work is to create mechanisms that allow citizens greater and more regular voice in public decision making. Thus, AmericaSpeaks projects are designed with an expectation that deliberation will be ongoing through a variety of formats and mechanisms.

Immediately following the July 20 and 22nd forums, *Listening to the City* hosted an extensive two-week online dialogue that closely mirrored the design and set-up of the face-to-face meeting. The goal of the online dialogues was to involve citizens who were not able to participate in the face-to-face meetings and reach more citizens. The online dialogues engaged more than 800 people in 26 small, diverse discussion groups. Participants had a valuable opportunity to expand upon and react to the outcomes of the earlier dialogue. Roughly 10,000 messages were exchanged in these dialogues and participants prioritized ideas through 32 online polls. Key decision makers responded to the outcome of the dialogues and experienced the possibilities that this medium offers.

In late 2002, the LMDC and the Port Authority decided to use more traditional engagement tools to channel public input on the designs from the international competition. These efforts, while focused on drawing diverse populations from the region, did not incorporate deliberative tools but solicited individual comments and preferences through the design display comment cards and public hearings. Although no one in certain, many assumed the LMDC and the Port Authority made this decision out of concern that another *Listening to the City*-style meeting would delay the rebuilding process. However, AmericaSpeaks' track record

clearly demonstrates its capacity to design **21st Century Town Meetings™** that are appropriate for later stages in the decision-making process. Another *Listening to the City* easily could have provided an avenue for substantive public input while respecting the decision-makers' timeline.

Since *Listening to the City*, the Civic Alliance has continued to be directly engaged in the rebuilding effort. The Civic Alliance has sustained citizen voice in the decision-making process by advocating for the key principles identified by *Listening to the City* participants and its civic members. Additionally, the Civic Alliance continues to alert participants to significant developments and opportunities to influence the rebuilding process as they emerge.

CONCLUSION

The events of 9/11 profoundly affected the American public, stimulating powerful emotions and strong convictions. AmericaSpeaks' 21st Century Town Meeting™ proved an effective mechanism for channeling this widespread concern into the formal decision-making process. Further, the meeting demonstrated how civic engagement could strengthen the governing approaches throughout New York City and the region. As a result, there is significant interest in and commitment to ongoing civic engagement in New York City using new public engagement tools.

Listening to the City demonstrated that it is possible for thousands of citizens to come together and deliberate on the difficult issues surrounding the rebuilding of the World Trade Center site and reach a consensus that created a breakthrough in an extremely difficult and complex decision-making process. Decision makers demonstrated that they can and will in good faith respond to the collective voice of the public on important matters in which huge stakes are at risk.

New York City should be extremely proud of both the process and the outcomes of *Listening to the City*. The meeting challenged all of the conventional wisdom about the public (they won't participate, they will only think of their own self interest, they cannot deal with complex issues) and decision-makers (they won't listen, they only listen to special interest groups, all the real decisions have already been made). Instead, citizens and decision-makers worked together through the 21st Century Town Meeting™ to come to a new understanding about what should happen at the World Trade Center site and what the parameters of the designs for rebuilding should be.

Listening to the City was a powerful demonstration of a new way of conducting public business. This type of civic engagement can strengthen the governing processes of all communities if our public leaders have the courage to institutionalize such processes

that bring together diverse citizens committed to true collaboration and decision-makers committed to real listening.

AUTHORS

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NOTES

1 Hamill, P. (2002, July 22). Thrilling Show of People Power. Daily News.

2 Hamill, P. (2002, July 22). Thrilling Show of People Power. Daily News.

3 More information about AmericaSpeaks can be found at www.americaspeaks.org.

4 For a full list of the Civic Alliance members visit www.civic-alliance.org.

5 The Citizen Advisory Committee included representatives from the following organizations: Arab American Anti-Discrimination Committee, Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, Asian Americans for Equality, Asociacion Tepeyac, Central Brooklyn Churches, Children's Aid Society, City Project, Common Cause, Community Boards 1,2, & 3, Council of the City of New York, FDNY, Global Kids, Good Jobs New York, Greater New York Labor-Religion Coalition, Housing First!, Imagine New York, Neighborhood Economic Development Advocacy Project, NJ Association of Railroad Passengers, NYC Environmental Justice Alliance, NYC Partnership, NY Immigration Coalition, NY Jobs with Justice, New York New Visions, NY Women's Foundation, Nkiru Center for Education & Culture, Partnership for New Jersey, SEIU Local 32BJ, and Wall Street Rising.

6 Unless noted, all references to results from Listening to the City include data from both the July 20 and July 22, 2002 meetings.

7 An electronic copy of the participant guide can be downloaded from www.listeningtothecity.org.

8 Result of a keypad polling question administered at the end of the program.

9 Wyatt, E. & Bagli, C. (2002, July 22). Officials Rethink Building Proposal for Ground Zero. New York Times.

Listening to the City Online Dialogues: Overview and Observations

Cliff Figallo, Jed Miller and Marc N. Weiss

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the planning and creation of the Listening to the City Online Dialogues that took place between July 30 and August 13, 2002, shortly after the face-to-face event at the Jacob Javits Center. The participants in the 26 dialogue groups were residents of New York City and its immediate area. The dialogues focused on two things: the plans for redevelopment of the World Trade Center site and the surrounding business district and neighborhoods of Lower Manhattan, and the creation of a permanent memorial for the victims and heroes of 9/11.

The dialogues took place in small groups using a message board interface in which participants could read and respond to each others' comments whether they were online at the same time or not. The "asynchronous" system allowed members to participate when it was convenient, and to spend time deliberately composing their responses. Half of the small groups were assigned an active facilitator and half were not. This paper describes the context of the event, how its producers prepared for it and how it actually played out, concentrating on what was learned about online facilitation techniques.

BACKGROUND

Listening to the City (LTC) was conceived by AmericaSpeaks and its partners as "an interactive, high-tech town meeting" in which residents of New York City and the surrounding area sat at tables in small, facilitated groups to collectively consider 6 concept plans for the redevelopment of the World Trade Center site, and to discuss ideas for an appropriate permanent memorial for 9/11. In the late spring of 2002, as planning for LTC continued, its founder, Carolyn Lukensmeyer approached Web Lab to explore the idea of a citizens' dialogue online that would, in essence, adapt the agenda-driven format of LTC for asynchronous conversations using Web Lab's highly structured Small Group Dialogue technique (SGD).

The Listening to the City Online Dialogues (LTC-O) were planned to accommodate 2,500 participants. Each small group would be assigned 30 members, which worked out to about 83 groups. Because half the groups were to be facilitated, this meant that at least 42 volunteer facilitators would be required.

Figallo was retained by Web Lab to recruit, orient and coordinate facilitators. Recruitment was a process of networking within online communities and posting to several email lists read by facilitators. Another emailing went to people who had volunteered to facilitate at the face-to-face event and had online experience. Within two weeks more than enough volunteers had responded.

The selection criteria for facilitators were a blend of documented background, Figallo's familiarity with the person's previous work, and our intention to observe different facilitation styles in action. Some of the selected volunteers had formal mediation and dispute resolution training and worked in that field professionally, others had extensive online group facilitation experience, and a few came with training and experience moderating online groups. Two of the selected facilitators had served as facilitators at the Javits Center meeting.

Figallo set up a private online area for the facilitators and the Web Lab team, which would include WL founder Marc Weiss, WL community director Jed Miller and consultant, Cynthia Schmae, hired to recruit and manage a small team of "monitors." This paid team would patrol the dialogue space in shifts, reporting on significant discussion themes, watching for inappropriate behaviors, and performing "housekeeping" tasks required in managing online communities. In our private discussion forum – the Facilitators' Den – we shared ideas and projections of what might be good to know going into the event. We would use the Den as a place to share ideas and knowledge, as well as to explore solutions to problems encountered during the dialogues.

Methodology and Approach

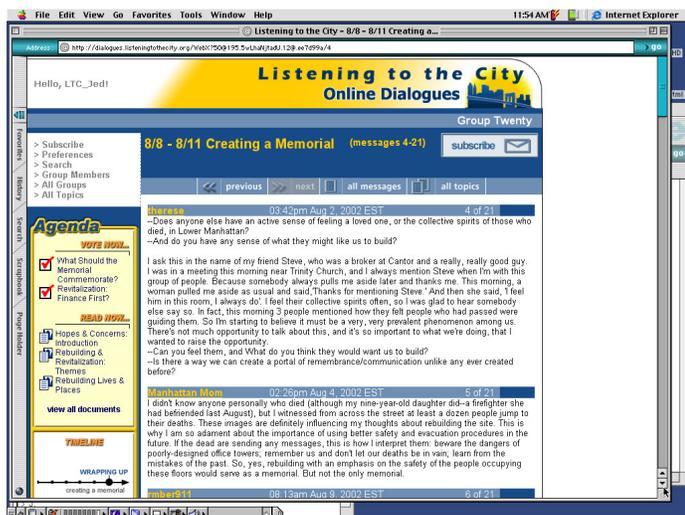
AmericaSpeaks' 21st Century Town Meeting model combines small group facilitation with modern communications technology, including facilitated 10-person tables, a volunteer

"reporter" using a networked laptop, and electronic keypads for each member to input demographic information and poll responses. A "theme team" identifies common and powerful ideas from the comments being fed from the laptops at the tables. And these "themes" become the basis for further polling questions. The results are projected onto large video displays minutes later.

The Web Lab and AmericaSpeaks teams worked closely together to design an event that retained the substance, goals and agenda of the face-to-face event and adapt it for online participants so as to capitalize on the strengths and opportunities offered by the Internet.

Among the unique elements of the online discussion were the opportunity to explore the issues in much greater depth than the one-day in-person deliberations; the ability to include people who couldn't be available on July 20th; the opportunity for participants to take part at personally convenient times over a two week period; the possibility that discussions in different groups could "cross-fertilize;" and the value of the Internet as an "instant archive" – a permanent record -- of all comments posted by all participants.

The goal of Web Lab's Small Group Dialogue technique format is to promote civil discussion by assigning participants to small groups in which only members can create new topics or post messages. This dramatically raises the level of accountability by lowering anonymity and making the "success" of a discussion the responsibility of participants, rather than an outside authority. Although previous Web Lab dialogues were entirely unmoderated, they consistently generated a greater sense of group loyalty and personal investment than found in most standard open-ended Web-based discussions.



Web Lab had demonstrated the capacity of this technique to create unusually thoughtful self-facilitated dialogue online, in earlier dialogues on volatile issues including interracial relationships, the Clinton impeachment and reactions to 9/11 and its aftermath. Two outside evaluations funded by the MacArthur and Markle Foundations and conducted in 1999 and 2000 confirmed many of Web Lab's expectations and observations about the desired effects of the model.

Presented with a unique opportunity for learning, Web Lab and AmericaSpeaks decided to assign half of the LTC-O groups an experienced facilitator, while relying on the other half to govern themselves, as in previous Web Lab events. Monitors would only intervene in these unfacilitated groups in extreme circumstances, for example if a conflict threatened to disrupt discussion. An important aspect of the post-event analysis would be evaluating the difference in performance between the facilitated and non-facilitated groups. Two separate academic analyses are currently being undertaken to address these questions, and Web Lab is seeking funding for further study.

LTC-O groups were composed of 30 members instead of the 10 at LTC. This larger size had proven effective in prior Web Lab events to ensure sufficient participation in an ongoing online event. People who wanted to participate registered online by providing their names and email addresses, as well as key demographic information (gender, age, ethnicity, etc.) and checking boxes indicating their relationship to 9/11. In consultation with the planners of the live event, Web Lab configured the SGD software to create online groups so that each was as demographically diverse as possible, and so that people in high priority categories (e.g. relatives of victims, workers or residents of downtown Manhattan, those living outside of Manhattan) were evenly distributed among all groups. As with the Javits Center meeting, the criterion for inclusion was having a living and/or working relationship with New York City, with a special emphasis on Lower Manhattan. To bring new voices into the process, people who had attended the Javits forum were not included in the online dialogue.

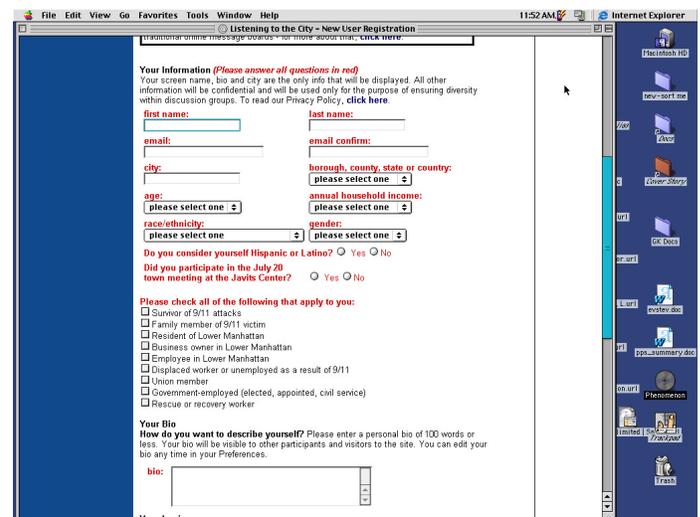
LTC Online – Roles and Responsibilities		
Role	Name	Responsibilities
Web Lab Executive Producer	Marc Weiss	oversee project, develop dialogue agenda and background materials, co-direct online dialogues
Web Lab Director of Dialogues	Jed Miller	oversee project, create member communications, manage facilitation and monitor teams, manage web development and design for dialogues, co-direct dialogues
Facilitator Coordinator	Cliff Figallo	hire, train and manage facilitators, co-direct dialogues
Facilitators	14 remote Facilitators	direct facilitation in 1/2 LTC online groups, regular reports to Facilitator Coordinator
Dialogue Manager	Cynthia Schmae	hire, train and manage monitors, co-direct dialogues
Dialogue Monitors	7 remote Monitors	daily monitoring and as-needed intervention in all LTC online groups, regular reports to Dialogue Manager
Civic Alliance to Rebuild Downtown NY Liaison	Petra Todorovich	coordinate dialogue agenda, reporting, policy decisions with online team
AmericaSpeaks Liaison	Joseph Goldman	coordinate dialogue agenda, integration of online and face-to-face events, event reporting, and policy decisions with online team
AmericaSpeaks President	Carolyn Lukensmeyer	oversee adaptation of dialogue agenda, integration of online and face-to-face events, event reporting, and policy decisions with online team

The plan was to present the agenda so that all groups would begin discussion of new major topics at the same time, and would move through those topics together. Background information, framing questions, etc. were adapted from the live event, to be posted by each facilitator and by the participants themselves in the unfacilitated groups. The deliverable to the New York planning bodies would be a report consisting of major themes, polling results, demographic profiles and representative quotes posted by citizens.

To deal with social or technical problems, an escalation procedure was put in place, with facilitators reporting directly to the Facilitation Coordinator (Figallo). Using email, the occasional phone call and interaction in the Den, a comprehensive communications network was available for following and managing the dialogues, around the clock if necessary.

The Interface

The screen design presented a left-hand column containing links to key materials, including documents and diagrams about the city's redevelopment plans, polling questions and results, etc. The actual discussion text appeared in the wider main area of the screen. After logging in, each participant would see a list of existing topics for his or her group, along with a "start a new topic" button. Within each topic, participants could read messages posted by others in their group and could type into a text box to post responses. After posting a message, participants had 30 minutes to edit and/or delete their own posts. Only Web Lab's administrative team could modify posted materials after that.



Participants could only create new topics and post messages in their assigned group. The agenda was scheduled to roll out over the course of the two weeks. Monitors would report observed

discussion themes, and the Web Lab administrative team – with advice from AmericaSpeaks and the Civic Alliance – would compose polling questions to gather participant preferences on agenda topics and to answer key questions from the planning organizations.

Pre-launch Preparations

After the July 20 event at the Jacob Javits Convention Center, the press reports that reverberated across the nation told of the citizens' overwhelming rejection of all six WTC concept plans. It was on the crest of this reaction that the most people responded to the links and email invitations to join LTC-O.

Facilitators were emailed a "manual" including the planned agenda, schedule, and list of contacts. We informed facilitators that they would receive standard language to post in their groups announcing each step of the discussion agenda. This advance distribution would allow enough time for people living in various time zones and on various schedules to prepare to lead their groups and stay in synch with the others.

It became clear in the final week before LTC-O that we would not reach the anticipated 2,500 registrations. An overall focus on the face-to-face meeting among LTC partners and constraints on budget and time had limited the online recruiting effort. The reduction in expected numbers required us to reduce the number of facilitators. As of the scheduled launch date, we had enough registrations to create 22 groups, assigning facilitators to 11 of them. We launched with 13 facilitators, including 2 teams of co-facilitators for two of the groups. Our LTC partners asked us to offer registration for late-starting groups, so a few volunteers remained "on standby."

While waiting for launch, the Web Lab team continued to work on the language to be used in presenting the agenda. The response of citizens at the Javits Center had changed the tenor of the discussion and it was clear that the online dialogues would be qualitatively different from the face-to-face dialogues.

In the first place, the six concept plans presented by the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation had met with almost unanimous disapproval and no longer provided a timely or effective platform for discussion. We adjusted the framing of the online dialogues to focus on the "Elements" of these plans, the location of a memorial, the use of public space, the development of the surrounding area, the tensions between commercial renewal and neighborhood revitalization, etc.

Second and more importantly, the text-based medium of the Internet, and the 14-day span of the dialogues offered participants a chance to explore issues with greater nuance and complexity, and allowed us to generate new polls in response to the evolving conversation. So, for example, while both Javits

and online participants were polled on a similar question ("How important is it to add a major symbol or structure to the Lower Manhattan skyline?"), in the online dialogue we were able to ask several follow-up questions (see sidebar below). One result was far stronger support for the idea that tall towers should be built to replace the WTC.

Differing Styles, Different Results

Group facilitation practice varies depending on the circumstance of the occasion and the philosophy of the facilitator. The need to recruit people trained in dealing with online group interaction, and to do so within a short timeframe, led to the selection of people representing a wide variance in understanding of the facilitation process. Though we did not require each candidate to describe that personal understanding, we discovered during the LTC dialogues just how varied were the assumptions coming into the event.

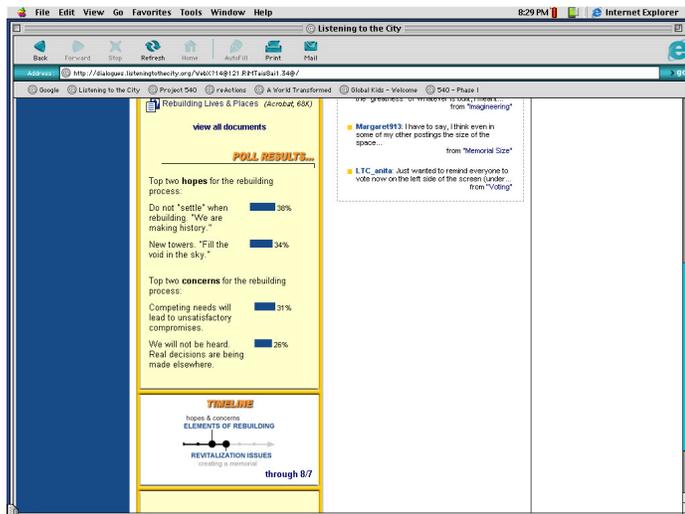
The most glaring variables were the degree to which the facilitator took an active part in the group conversation and the amount of guidance – as opposed to support – that the facilitator provided in advancing the deliberative process. Based on a subjective impression of group participation, cohesiveness, tolerance of opposing viewpoints and focus on issues set forth in the agenda, the author suggests that the following practices were effective in fostering a collaborative spirit while preserving the sovereignty of each individual's viewpoint:

- Establishing one-to-one relationships by greeting each group member and responding to them by name
- Establishing a group identity by initiating the dialogue with statements emphasizing tolerance, support, civility and a greater cause
- Exercise of restraint in posting to allow room for others to converse.
- Selectively placed and worded posts that served to stimulate others to post.
- Timely summarization of discussion to affirm the ideas and opinions being expressed.
- Bringing in facts and helpful information to the discussion to help members form opinions and make choices.

The Dialogues

As we launched, a couple of factors unique to online facilitation proved to have noticeable impact on the dynamics of certain groups. We officially launched two hours later than planned, and by that time several facilitators were no longer available to post welcoming messages (messages could not be posted until the system set up groups). In addition, facilitators had been instructed to create distinctive online names (for example, "LTC_Bob"), but some failed to comply, and assigning their host privileges took extra time. Thus, the members of several groups arrived in an apparently unfacilitated group until the facilitator was able to log in.

Facilitators who logged in immediately created opening topics and established their roles as hosts before the regular participants logged in for the first time. They welcomed members, asked them to introduce themselves, and presented the first agenda item ("describe your hopes and concerns"). Some also created topics where members could ask questions about the interface or process. In facilitated groups where the facilitator did not arrive early, there was some uncertainty, but in several cases a member took the initiative and started discussion using the agenda description from the welcome email that all members received.



In two facilitated groups, it seemed that the late-arriving facilitator never quite gained the role recognition that other facilitators had established. In one case, a domineering member reframed the agenda to focus solely on rebuilding the WTC towers as they were or taller. This "Tall Towers" position was loudly represented in several other groups, even to the point, in one, of drowning out other perspectives.

Significant Observations

The LTC-O process did not include the establishment of objective criteria for evaluating which groups were most effective and which factors made them so. But a re-reading of the group dialogues, noting various aspects of their activity—facilitator presence, timing and style and the general tone of conversation, e.g., the group's tolerance for conflicting views or degrees of confrontation—has led Figallo to make the following observations based on his role as facilitation coordinator and his long experience in managing online communities:

- The Small Group Dialogue approach is effective in stimulating productive dialogue among motivated participants. It sets boundaries on membership and time commitment, which help to build familiarity and trust (the same people will be present from beginning to end) while requiring focus (the agenda for discussion is limited).
- Groups were more collaborative in tone when there was 1) the steady presence of a facilitator or 2) at least two members who served as emotional stabilizers, or both of these. The most successful facilitative voices regularly injected humor and eloquence into the dialogues, and offered behavior modeling and positive reinforcement to a variety of viewpoints. The most collaborative groups had larger sized "core groups" of members who were involved in conversations and posted regularly through the dialogues. Core group sizes varied from 9 to 15 with the average being about 12 active members.
- While some groups were slower to evolve in the absence of a designated facilitator, most unfacilitated groups established norms of leadership and contribution, fueled by the presence of a handful of engaged members and ad hoc leaders, and prompted by the email newsletters which were "broadcast" to all groups, presenting suggested starter material for use by unfacilitated groups with each major discussion topic.
- For some facilitators, the agenda-driven format of the event handicapped their accustomed style of group-led conversation. As they expressed it, the rigid schedule felt out of synch with the natural group discussion rhythms. Some issues ended up rushed through while others, as introduced according to the planned timetable, were repetitive of topics already discussed.
- Nearly half of the LTC-O participants had never before been involved in an online dialogue. This may account for the "shyness" factor that saw participation range to as low as 50% in some groups. (Technical problems and limited access to the Internet, mostly due to vacations, certainly also

contributed to non-participation.) However, Web Lab is extremely excited by this demonstration that citizens with little to no experience with online discussion can easily become effective contributors to an online deliberation.

- In spite of the fact that we programmed the software to sort participants so that each group had a similarly heterogeneous mix, the postings of the most active members of each group strongly influenced the “personality” of their group. The most active members generally included the trained facilitators, but also included the most (and least) collaborative of the members.
- The presence of family members or close associates of people killed on 9/11 was a significant factor in some groups, and less in others. These participants, their stories, and their strong feelings about honoring the memories of their loved ones, sometimes tempered the political rants of other participants. But the emotional tenor of those exchanges also may have inhibited the more practical discussions of redevelopment in some groups.
- Facilitators who greeted each group member individually and continued to address them by name in the dialogues stimulated more focused dialogue and greater participation. Facilitators who chose to be less present and involved in the conversations did not stimulate such participation.
- Groups that had “fact-fetchers” to post Web links to relevant information and articles were more likely to engage in collaborative problem solving than simply spouting opinions. The most effective facilitators pointed to helpful information and created topics where such information could be collected and referenced.

Conclusions

Listening to the City Online produced powerful dialogues around a highly emotional topic. Judging from members’ communications during and after the event, it was frustrating to some but rewarding to many. Much was learned about how such online dialogues can be produced to further civic deliberation.

As with any asynchronous online community, those who had the most time and interest in the subject tended to be over-represented in the dialogues. This may have served as a disincentive to others to post their viewpoints due to feelings that sparse expressions would have less value. Some explained that their ideas had already been stated, so why bother to repeat? In Figallo’s past practice, he has referred to this dynamic as the “postocracy,” where those who post the most become de facto agenda setters even if not everyone agrees with them. This effect can often limit civility and deter wider participation. Two possible ways around this might be to impose a daily or weekly

post limit on individual members, and/or find ways to elicit the range of opinions from the entire group on an ongoing basis

Good facilitation techniques can reduce the negative effects of highly unbalanced group participation, but particularly in political debates, an authority’s attempts to socially enforce more equitable participation can be counterproductive. The facilitator often slips into an argumentative loop with one person while the other group members feel a diminished sense of agency. In one group a troublesome member repeated a “spammed” message across several of the group’s topics. Marc Weiss (Web Lab’s Executive Producer) tried telephone diplomacy, attempting to reach accord with the person. But our efforts made little difference, and we decided to cut off his access to the dialogue for the good of the group. The group expressed more support for this action than objections, though a couple of vocal members referred to the expelled poster as a “martyr” to the Tall Towers cause. This situation may be improved by making better use of the online message board technology. Limits to the number of posts by one person in a time period could prevent the flooding of screen space by an individual. If each member of the dialogue group is allowed only one or two posts per topic per day, and if each post is limited to a maximum length, the possibility of domination by a minority would be reduced and less vocal members would feel more empowered.

Another notable characteristic of the dialogues was the strong motivation of members to tell their personal stories, and to lead off with their strongly-felt opinions about the redevelopment or the planned memorial. These opening conversations were powerful, but they often advanced the topics of discussion ahead of the scheduled agenda. Spreading that agenda across two weeks was thus not always compatible with many members’ sense of urgency. Indeed, more members logged in and posted significantly more messages in the first week than in the second. By Day 14, participation had tapered off in almost all groups, with about half as many members posting messages as had posted during the first week. In the future, a pre-dialogue survey of registered members could sense to what extent the participants feel “charged” with opinions and predispositions that would affect the progression of a discussion agenda. Based on the pre-event survey, the dialogue agenda could then be adjusted to anticipate the behavior of the group.

LTC-O can be seen not only as a valuable contribution to the decision-making process of New York City’s planning bodies, but also as a powerful prototype of online civic deliberation on issues of emotional importance to a population. The presence of an experienced and effective online facilitator in a group does not seem to be as important as good communication and facilitation modeling for the small groups as a whole. This is important when looking at the potential of scaling online civic deliberation for much larger populations dealing with more

widespread issues such as national healthcare or social security. Online groups can be self-facilitating if the agenda anticipates the population's priorities, if communications properly prepare participants for their dialogue, and if the software interface is configured to help balance participation among the members.

MORE INFORMATION

Listening to the City Online Dialogues

<http://dialogues.listeningtothecity.org>

Web Lab

<http://www.weblab.org>

SGD EVALUATIONS FOOTNOTE

An evaluation of Reality Check, the small group dialogue about the Clinton impeachment, was released in February 2000.

Entitled, "**Changing the Nature of Online Conversation,**" the report by social scientist Steven Schneider concluded that "The technical and social changes implemented in this project created an atmosphere of respect, learning, community, and positive relationships unusual (to say the least) in the online world."

A subsequent evaluation, released in November 2000 and entitled "**Transforming Dialogue: Web Lab's Explorations at the Frontiers of Online Community,**" compared Reality Check with the American Love Stories dialogues (conducted in conjunction with a PBS series about an interracial couple).

In a section summarizing their conclusions, authors Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard wrote: "Surrounded by a universe of contention and combat, dialogue participants modeled another way to disagree, understand, and work out accommodations.... Participants were protected by the dialogues' structure, and its ethos of mutual respect and conscious commitment from outside incursions such as flame wars."

Both evaluations are available on the Web Lab website at

<http://www.weblab.org/sgd/evaluation.html>

AUTHORS

Cliff Figallo was named Director of one of the groundbreaking manifestations of virtual community - The WELL - in 1986, and for six years he managed its grassroots experimentation with group creativity and conversation. As a business, he brought The WELL to a steady break-even state, no small feat in those days. For the past 8 years, Cliff has alternated consulting with titled positions, guiding companies such as America Online, Genentech, Andersen Consulting, Salon.com and Cisco Systems in new directions of many-to-many interaction and collaboration. His more recent work has focused on relationship-building between organizations and their constituents and between businesses and their customers. In 1998 he wrote *Hosting Web Communities*, a book that is widely referenced by online community managers, academic instructors and those

investigating the possibilities of the community approach. Contact at fig@well.com

Marc N. Weiss, Executive Producer, Web Lab, spent a lot of time in old media -- a lot of time -- before new media came along to make life interesting again. As a kid, he was addicted to TV and he started making experimental films in college. Beginning in 1969 -- and well into the 90's -- Marc was pretty much consumed with the production, distribution, programming and promotion of independent documentaries. He was also a freelance writer, with articles in *Rolling Stone*, *Variety* and *Mother Jones*. He created P.O.V., the award-winning public TV series, in 1987 and was its executive producer through 1995, when he founded P.O.V. Interactive. From there it was a hop, click and a jump to Web Lab.

Jed Miller, Director, Collaboration & Community, Web Lab, grew up in Manhattan, where he learned that everyone has an opinion. Jed is working on the current projects and the ongoing development for the newest version of Small Group Dialogue. He has built communities on AOL, NYTimes.com, abuzz.com and audible.com. Six years online have shaped Jed's belief that the Internet is foremost an "identity engine": It enables us to be who we already are and to build safe outposts in the speculative territories of who we may be. It is the medium and we are the message.

Listening to the City, NYC: One Facilitator's View

Karen Brill

ABSTRACT

An overview of and reflections on the event by one of the facilitators

KEY WORDS

Deliberative Democracy, Facilitator, Facilitation, Rebuild, Community, Dialogue

More than 4000 people from NYC and the tri-state area gathered on July 20th 2001 at the Jacob Javits Convention Center to play a role in rebuilding Lower Manhattan. Over the course of this day-long forum, participants in "Listening to the City" deliberated options for redeveloping the World Trade Centre site and considered the critical issues that must be addressed to help people rebuild their lives in the aftermath of September 11 and memorialize those who were lost. What follows is the experience of Karen Brill, a management consultant with experience in Toronto and a volunteer facilitator at the event.

From the minute that I opened the electronic call for volunteers to facilitate this magnificent effort to hear citizen's voices in the process to rebuild Lower Manhattan, I knew I had to be there.

I was driven, like so many others to do anything, to help, support, contribute to the recovery of NYC in the aftermath of 9/11. I have had the privilege of working in New York over the last 18 months. I have wept at street shrines, missing posters, memorials, photo exhibits and sometimes just walking in the Financial District and recognizing the dust. I have been to ground zero twice. I have listened to New Yorkers tell their stories of how they have been changed. I knew being part of this project would change me.

I was also driven by sheer curiosity at the possibilities. How far can we go with participative large group interventions? Bringing 5000 people together for a public conversation on a highly emotional topic ought to answer that question.

Background

"Listening to the City" is a project of the Civic Alliance to Rebuild Downtown New York, a broad-based coalition of more than 85 groups committed to devising strategies for the redevelopment of Lower Manhattan. This 21st Century Town Hall Meeting was designed and facilitated by America Speaks, a non-profit organization with expertise in drawing community involvement.

The public conversation was attended by decision-makers and leaders who will ultimately decide the future of Lower Manhattan including officials from the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the State of New York and the NYC Mayor's Office. The results of this forum will be presented to these leaders in order to guide their work.

The logistics of the event left me in awe of the organizers. Apart from mundane decisions like, "What facility has enough washrooms to accommodate this crowd?" this was a massive effort of recruiting a volunteer workforce of 500 facilitators, as well as hundreds of site and technical support people, planning for diversity of language and demographics, and the development of the technical capability to record and process thousands of data. The magnitude of the task by itself could mean either a very public failure or a defining moment for public meetings for decades to come.

Facilitator Orientation

I arrived at the Jacob Javits Centre at 7 p.m. in the middle of a sudden deluge that transformed streets into rivers within 10

minutes. This was the third session of the day, scheduled for 3 hours and intended to get this eager group of volunteers all rowing in the same direction. The session was opened with a message from Ruthann Prange from America Speaks. She spoke of the tension that exists between the excitement of being involved in such an unprecedented opportunity in public meetings, and the awareness that we would not be together if the terrible events of September 11 had not taken place. This dichotomy with all the associated conflicting feelings is difficult for facilitators to hold and yet creates the dynamic tension that can result in great things. It is a message which I would recall many times throughout the experience.

The organizers set the context with a powerful short film with scenes of the immediate aftermath of the attacks: the swirling office papers, clouds of dust, faces of shock and disbelief, the World Trade Center site on September 12. In seconds I was transported back to that day. My eyes filled. I knew why I was there.

The work began with a variety of speakers detailing the key organizations, an overview of the program, table facilitator basics, resources inside and outside the room, computer and keypad use and, finally, the design and flow of the day. The role of the facilitator is to create a group climate where people feel free to contribute, influence and be influenced and build on each others' ideas. Without this role in the small discussion tables of 10 – that is, 500 tables of 10 - the meeting would feel like a disorienting spectacle rather than a truly participative process.

By 10:30 people were avoiding asking any questions that might prompt a long answer. We adjourned at 10:45. I crawled back to my hotel for a very few hours.

The Day

Back to the JJCC early to organize materials and generally be available to participants as they enter for a half-past nine start time. Registration begins at 7:30 a.m. – but it's Saturday so everyone shows up by 9:15. You can't register 5000 people in 15 minutes, so some do and some don't. My table (#359) fills out. Judy is a teacher in an arts school and agrees to be the lap top recorder. Sasha and Suzanne are architects. Jean is retired and from Brooklyn, Marcia used to live in NYC and came in from New Mexico, Andre and Marianne are dating and committed to being involved in what happens in their neighborhood. They are all experienced and articulate people. I'm thinking that this might work.

The process is highly coordinated by a lead facilitator on a central stage. Carolyn Lukensmeyer, President of America Speaks, organizes the room, announces next steps and gives instructions that are viewed on the jumbo-tron screens. The agenda is aggressive. After introductory remarks by

representatives of the Civic Alliance, demographics of the room are established using electronic polling devices - the ones used on *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* One group member offers that this feels a bit like a game show. "If you are female, press "1". if you are male, press "2". The results are almost immediate and projected on the screens. We are 53% female and 47% male. Press "1" if you are African-American, "2" if you are Asian, "3" if you are Caucasian. We are low in African-American representation. Carolyn Lukensmeyer says that the organizers will have to work harder to hear Black voices in future meetings. We move into the first group discussion.

We talk about the group's hopes and concerns for the rebuilding in Lower Manhattan. This is the time when our small groups start to work it. My group seems open to each other, and reach general agreement on most points. These are recorded on a laptop, reviewed and sent electronically to the "Theme Team" to identify common data.

Among the themes that emerge is the hope that the memorial will be an inspirational and serene place that respects this now-sacred ground. Of great concern is that this unique opportunity to remake the city will be lost, that the process will not represent the diverse needs of the community only those of the Financial District; that community development will be lost in an effort to accommodate tourists. These points become the touchstones for the rest of the day's work.

Presentations by the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation offer brief overviews of the six site options. The group is asked to accept the design parameters established by the Port Authority (e.g. most difficult to swallow are the Commercial office space requirements of 11 million square feet) and explain which features of the design they like and dislike. Participants then selected the single most important piece of advice that they wish to give planners from among the themes of that discussion. The top two as polled electronically were:

1. Preserve the tower footprints as a "remarkable symbol".
I have a distinct feeling that the developers who ignore this advice do so at their own peril.
2. Building should contribute a visual focus to the skyline, just as the twin towers did.

The number one ranked theme among the features the group disliked is, "The schemes are not ambitious enough, nothing here is truly monumental."

Here is a turning point. As more than 50% and in some cases as high as 69% of this 5000 person crowd ranked each option as "Poor" the decision makers heard, "go back to the drawing board". The lead facilitator departed from the agenda to ask one more question. What is missing for you from these site options? One participant at my table expressed it very well, "The twin towers, although architecturally imperfect, were inspirational

symbols of human endeavor. The building of these tallest structures put technology way ahead of the times. These options are just a bunch of shorter buildings. They fail to capture the human spirit and imagination.”

I am not given to sympathizing with developers and architects, yet they were set up for this cold response from citizens by virtue of the strict parameters of the design: 11 million square feet of commercial space; 600,000 square feet of both retail and hotel spaces. The debate over the terms of the lease has just begun. It is clear that this crowd believes this development and site is too important to be controlled by someone's 99-year lease signed in July of 2001.

From this point we were changing the tone. Asked to reflect on the Memorial Mission Statement, we were shown a video on remembering 9/11 and memorials from around the world. Initially, the group had nothing to add as it had been crafted by a coalition of families who had lost loved ones. I encourage the group by reminding them that they had been asked for input. The families want to ensure that the statement is inclusive and they can't gain that perspective if they don't receive feedback.

The group makes some important suggestions. First, offering that the number of deaths may actually be higher than stated as homeless and illegal workers may also have been killed. Second, to reorder the statement so that the emotion comes before the facts, statistics of who and what was lost.

It is now mid-afternoon. Don't let it be said that Listening to the City brought thousands of people together to waste their time and miss the opportunity to wring every last bit of input out of them. We now talk about how to revitalize Lower Manhattan for people, employment and transportation. There was a list of needs that came forward: affordable housing, expansion of the transit services, promotion of diverse businesses, job creation.

The day ended with assurances by Lower Manhattan Development Corporation's Lou Tomson and Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff that they would respond to citizen's concerns. Asked if they believe their voices would have an effect on decision-makers, 33% of the citizens in the room were very confident or confident, 45% were somewhat confident.

It's 4:00. My group has given their best. Time for a photo.

Reflections for Facilitators

My advice for facilitators involved in public meetings? The control of time has to be tight if you are going to give all members at the table an opportunity to speak. This is paramount. The instructions, although introduced succinctly by the lead facilitator and supported by the jumbo screens, needs to be reframed, positioned, or explained further in order to have the

group focus internally on themselves and each other. There needs to be a lot of clarification, group polling for general agreement, reading back of data before sending it forward. There is a need for light moments and serious ones and this is part of the balance the facilitator holds between loss and renewal.

One subtle point is that although it looks as though all the work has been done for you, this is not passive facilitation. Facilitators need to be very active forming and transforming the group's climate – building their confidence by listening, offering control when it is needed by staying on track and judging when to stay quiet and let the conversation flow.

Was this a success that can be replicated? I have seen the future of democracy and it is inclusive – more public conversations with more of the public.

Today I received an email from Judy, the Manhattan teacher. She has been hearing the various reports and reading related New York Times articles written about Saturday. “They have been accurate ... and for some reason that surprised me.”

The organizers of this massive dialogue deserve resounding congratulations for a remarkable experience and having succeeded in actually listening to the city.

AUTHOR

Karen is Vice President of exper!ence it inc., a Toronto based consulting firm that specializes in leadership simulation and experiential learning. She consults to a broad range of organizations including financial services, telecommunications, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, government and health care. Her practice focuses on the implementation of change initiatives, organizational learning, team development and strategic planning. Her experience as a professional facilitator and coach helps her to work collaboratively with clients and support individuals and teams in achieving their key objectives.

Karen earned her Masters of Education, specializing in Adult Learning from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. She is a Director of the Global Facilitator Services Corps and an active member of the International Association of Facilitators. Karen was a volunteer facilitator at Listening to the City in July of 2001. Contact at: 107 Boardwalk Drive, Toronto ON M4L 3X9. Tel. (416)699-6107. E-mail: karen@experienceitonline.com

Helping the Masses Find Their Way

Wendy Lowe

On Saturday, July 20, 2002, I had the extraordinary honor of serving as a neutral facilitator for the largest town meeting in history in our nation's largest city—New York City. The focus of the discussions was twofold: 1) how the World Trade Center property should be redeveloped and 2) how to envision a suitable memorial on the site of the human tragedy that we now call 9/11.

The planners of this town meeting, an organization called America Speaks, put out a call for help: they needed 500 (!) trained facilitators to volunteer. Along with four other Idahoans, I heeded that call, joining facilitators from all 49 other states and six other nations. As I explained to the people that I facilitated that day, I felt compelled and honored to help. I wanted them to know that I was there representing all Idahoans who still share their pain, who still want to help.

We accomplished a lot on Saturday, demonstrating democracy at its best. Using very sophisticated technology, we collected input from almost 5,000 people. The decision-makers were there for the entire day, listening and observing. The decisions are a long way from final, but each facilitator helped a table full of people articulate their reactions to six different alternatives that have been drafted.

The issues addressed are mind-boggling to those of us who live here in the west. Manhattan Island is already more densely developed and populated than most places in the world. As I walked along the streets of the city, it seemed to me that every single space is already being used. Yet the owners of the land on which the World Trade Center stood are legally obligated (having signed 99-year leases only a year ago) to provide some 11 million square feet of office space; 600,000 square feet of hotel space; and a like amount of retail space. Transportation, utilities, and services must be restored. It is not an option, like Wal-Mart moving from 17th Street to Hitt Road here in Idaho Falls, simply to build somewhere else.

At the table I facilitated, there were people from varied walks of life, all still living in the city: Jim, Rose, Susie, Brian, Helen, Louie; people just like us. They introduced themselves by telling their street addresses or what they were doing when it happened on September 11th. One was a young mother named Joan who has four children 6, 7, 10, and 11, two boys and two girls. Joan's husband was a fire fighter. He went in to do his job, and never came out again. Joan cried some, talked some, and reflected a lot; she cares very much about what happens on the site where her husband lost his life. She and the others at "my" table talked all day, shared their hopes and concerns, ideas and suggestions. They agreed on some things, disagreed about others, and, bless their hearts, treated each other respectfully. Democracy in action.

The options that have been developed are complicated, yet still just conceptual designs. The architectural firm that developed that developed the six options described and explained each in detail. The meeting participants scrutinized the six options, considering and reacting to each detail. Media reports on the event imply that the participants rejected all six plans; that is a vast oversimplification. The people at my table found much to like and much to dislike in all six options. None were deemed perfect; none were dismissed.

Some people felt the memorial should make a statement about democracy, liberty, and freedom, akin to the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC. Some liked the idea of putting a major arterial street underground, so there would be more space on the surface to work with. Some wanted a tree planted for each person who died. Some suggested that every effort must be made to return the site to economic vibrancy, restored as a dynamic place where people can live, work, and perhaps even someday, return to normal. Some cared little about restoring office space, preferring the idea of a vast open, green space where people can go to grieve their loved ones. (Some 1,000 families have nothing to bury, no cemetery to visit.) Some believed the skyline should be restored, exactly as it was before, to make a

significant statement communicating the indomitable spirit of our nation. Others consider the footprint of the two towers to be hallowed ground that must forever convey a sense of honor and respect for the 2,830 people who were killed by terrorists. One person said, “The site must make a statement that they didn’t win, that we are invincible.” Joan said, “But they did win.” Who could disagree with her? Around one in ten of the participants there that day had lost a family member on 9/11; all at my little table agreed Joan and others like her must be party to any plans that move forward.

It will be very, very hard to figure out what should happen next. The six plans represent a good first attempt, but it is obvious much work is needed to weave the positive features of each into a final plan. I am so pleased that the people who will make the decisions recognize the need to involve the public, especially those who were most affected by the tragedy. My sincerest hope is that a deliberate, inclusive process will result in finding a way to proceed that will restore the spirit and greatness of Lower Manhattan, without ever losing sight of the victims and the survivors. I was honored to serve, in my small way.

AUTHOR

Wendy Lowe is a public participation specialist who works for Jason Associates Corporation in Idaho Falls. She works with the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory Citizens Advisory Board, the Upper Snake Sage Grouse Local Working Group, and occasionally, the Bonneville County Museum Board of Directors. Contact at: wlowe@jason.com

"Listening to the City" - A Powerfully Personal Affirmation

Monika K. Moss

ABSTRACT

A personal account of the inspirational impact of AmericaSpeaks' "Listening to the City" meeting on July 20, 2002 in which Moss voices her learning, her commitment and her hope for communities all over the world to work collaboratively with leadership to find creative solutions to complex issues and problems.

I have lamented not being at many historic events in my life. I was only a few years old, and don't remember being at the March on Washington, when Martin Luther King Jr. gave his "I have a dream" speech. I was told that I was there. I was too young for Woodstock and much of the civil rights protests of the 1960's. I always wanted to be 'there' and make a difference in the world. On July 20, 2002, I was "there" in NYC, the day power yielded enough to begin to listen to the people. The Port Authority of NY/NJ and the Lower Manhattan Development Corporations' leadership listened in a new way. It wasn't with anger. It wasn't by force. And it wasn't one sided. That day, there was sincere dialogue and communications between leaders and about 5000 citizens. The leaders moving to rebuild lower Manhattan were "listening to the city".

I arrived at the Javits Center at 7:30 that morning. I walk into a huge room thankful that someone had made a map that allowed me to find my table. I began doing what others around me were doing, getting everything ready for the people who would sit at my table. There was a moment when I paused to look up. And I saw a sea of tables, three football fields deep, with 499 other people doing just what I was doing. There were hundreds of other people getting ready - counting things, checking lap tops, testing audio-visual equipment, talking to the press, checking bathrooms, making sure there was enough of whatever they were in charge of. The sheer magnitude of what was about to happen overwhelmed me in that moment.

Soon thousands of individuals drifted into the room. They came from all the diverse backgrounds that you can imagine. Every race, ethnicity, religion, educational, profession, ability, and cultural background imaginable was present. Each person seemed to be carrying some shred of hope that their voice would be heard and that their presence would make a difference. They

joined the same energy and diversity that was embodied by the facilitator's who anxiously awaited their arrival.

My group was unique and quite similar to the other groups of 8-10 that sat at the other tables in this gigantic room. There was immense skepticism at my table of diehard New Yorkers all of whom had been dealing with the social issues of the city long before 9-11. There was a housing lawyer, a social worker, a counselor, an architect, a retired lower manhattan residents, none of whom had directly lost a loved one or job on 9-11 and all of whom are working, living with or supporting others who had lost everything. They came despite their skepticism, in case there was a chance that the power brokers would actually listen to what they had to say. They came well informed with their newspaper clippings and their no nonsense tell-it-like-it-is attitude that I so appreciate about New Yorkers. They came in search of like minded people to connect with, as they tried to make sense of what was absolutely going to happen. The WTC site would be rebuilt.

So, this little group worked to cooperate with the agenda by discussing the questions according to the facilitator's instructions. They yielded time after time to my gentle prodding to stay on course. It was difficult for them to wait until the end of the day to talk about the social impact and ramifications of the proposed plan. And when the time came to talk about "Rebuilding Lives", the issues they came to discuss, it was like a dam was opened up.

The participants at the table were concerned that they and others like them would not be able to afford to live in a redeveloped Lower Manhattan. Disgusted by developers "who had the nerve to call \$2,000 per month for an efficiency apartment, affordable", they talked about what might be considered truly

reasonable. Our counselor talked about the social service needs as many of her clients were still homeless, jobless and afraid. They no longer felt safe going into tall buildings much higher than the 30th floor. This little group had strong opinions about transportation, civic amenities, the environment and safety. While other tables were finished this discussion quickly, my group was just getting ready to do the ‘deep dive’ and add another layer of complexity to their discussion when time was announced. Again, they yielded to my efforts to keep them on time and on task. They parted with mixed feelings and some assurance from the podium that their input had been taken in.

Later that evening, the facilitators gathered at a hotel bar for casual debriefing. As I floated among the different configurations gathered, I was amazed by the diversity and power of our experiences. The range was astounding as was the healing that had taken place on the individual, group, and community levels as surmised by the stories facilitator’s shared over wine and chicken wings.

I was honored and deeply moved as I participated in the “Listening to the City: Remembering & Rebuilding”. The America Speaks’ session was supported by 500 facilitators from across the country and 22 foreign nations. Over 5000 New Yorkers gathered in good faith to talk about how to rebuild Lower Manhattan after September 11th.

If you were to ask me what happened in NYC on July 20, 2002, I would say - a miracle. That such a meeting could happen was the first miracle. And I imagine thousands of little miracles happened throughout the day as people shared their experiences and were witnessed by others. At every level I can imagine, things changed because a group of courageous people came together to support the leadership in Lower Manhattan in stretching their ability to listen to the voice of the people affected by 9-11 and those who will be affected by the rebuilding of Lower Manhattan and the World Trade Center (WTC) site. As a result, the new WTC site plans have a different look and feel to them. The leaders have reached a new level of creativity in dealing with their contractual obligations that were once a driving force in the planning. And the power and politics continue, yet with a new framing and new insights into the possibilities and the dilemmas of their charge.

And I also am changed. I am affirmed in my belief that groups and communities know what is needed and can hold the complexity of the issues communities face. I am clear that they need support in overcoming all of the forces that often block these kinds of meetings. I am affirmed in my quest to create inclusive and participatory change processes. This meeting, affirms my awareness of a shift that has taken place over the last 15-20 years. In the 80’s, I was lucky if I could get a nonprofit board to include department heads in the planning process. Now, community leaders are much more open to including their

diverse stakeholders in the process. After participating in this meeting, I am more committed to this community building work than ever before. It has affirmed my personal path in ways that I don’t have words. And I am grateful.

Now the challenge for me is to engage leaders in my community and those in which I work to be as bold as the leaders in NYC in supporting this kind of participation. We know that this kind of participation increases commitment, unleashes creativity, increases buy-in, empowers communities, widens the diverse circle of voices heard and engaged. As Carolyn Lukensmeyer of AmericaSpeaks noted, it is democracy at work. And the reality is that this kind of process is time consuming, expensive, and risky for leaders.

However, as I write this personal account of my experience, the work of creating systemic change at every level of society is upon us. Education reforms, local redevelopment efforts, and the retooling of social service delivery systems is taking place in every neighborhood, city, county, and state. The problems are complex and often overwhelming. The diversity of stakeholders, opinions, agendas and strategies are more numerous than I can count. I don’t have the answers but I know the power of this kind of process can have in finding them. This process allows us the listen to each other differently. Only then can we hold the complexity and creatively needed to seek true solutions that have a chance of benefiting everyone.

For it to work, leadership must begin to see that their power will be strengthened by engaging and using the wisdom of their community. They must be sincere, honest and candid about the kind of input they want to receive from the public and how they will use it. This is my work. This is the work of many of the facilitators that came to support AmericaSpeaks on July 20, 2002.

I have lamented not being at so many historic events. And I will always remember that I was at this one - July 20th, 2002 when leaders gathered 5000 of its citizens and began “listening to the city”.

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Listening to the City and the Public Process: Experiences of One Person and One City, and Broader Implications

Paul Epstein

ABSTRACT

Personal and group challenges in facilitating the event. Implications of LTC and other public participation efforts.

I had both strong personal and professional interests in Listening to the City (LTC). I live and own a business three blocks from the World Trade Center site—that’s my neighborhood they were talking about. Also, I am personally and professionally committed to citizen engagement, and to government accountability for transparent decisions and for reporting measurable progress toward desired outcomes. My personal and professional perspectives come together as a member of the Civic Alliance to Rebuild Downtown New York (the main sponsor of LTC), a coalition of over 75 civic and community organizations for whom I now volunteer as chair of a working group. This essay is in two parts, reflecting both my personal and professional perspectives. In part one, I relate my personal experience with LTC as both an interested participant and as a facilitator, and comment on the implications of my experience for the AmericaSpeaks process. In part two, I review key limitations of LTC and the public process in general in Lower Manhattan decision making, and broader implications for citizen engagement in public decision making, whether in New York or other communities. I close by selectively updating events in Lower Manhattan rebuilding decision processes through mid-July 2003, and exploring whether there is still hope for us to “get it right.”

Part 1. My Personal Experience

Unlike many of the 500 volunteer facilitators at LTC in July 2002, I am not *primarily* a facilitator in my work, although I have been professionally trained in facilitation. Depending on the engagement, I occasionally design and facilitate sessions for clients, often as part of larger projects that include analytic work recalling my early years as an engineer and current career as a management consultant. So, coming into LTC, I saw two

personal challenges: Maintaining a facilitator’s neutrality despite my intense personal interest in the subject, and should the going get difficult, finding the resourcefulness and skill to make the experience successful for participants. My approach to these challenges was to be a participant in the initial LTC event in February, where I could spill my guts about rebuilding Lower Manhattan. Having gotten that out of my system, I hoped I could hold my tongue and be a neutral facilitator at the bigger event to come. I also planned to pay close attention to the AmericaSpeaks process in the initial LTC event, so I might effectively facilitate it later.

My experience in February 2002

In the first LTC event, we focused on principles and values for rebuilding Lower Manhattan and establishing a memorial. I participated at a table of people with professional or managerial backgrounds, including designers, architects, investment bankers, and a high-level New York Fire Department officer. All participants at my table were closely connected to the subject at hand either because of their profession, the proximity of their home or workplace to the World Trade Center, or (especially for the fire officer) their personal relationship with victims. Our range of ages and professional sensibilities were narrow, and we quickly found ways to effectively communicate among each other and articulate our group responses to the framing questions on the agenda. It felt as if our table was having a high-powered discussion. When consensus answers across all tables were posted by the content-analyzing “theme team,” it was exhilarating to see our table’s exact words come up on the big screen time and again. The whole time, I kept my eye on our table’s facilitator, who was smart enough, with this group, to

stay mostly in the background, and serve mainly as an instruction-giver and timekeeper. "Piece of cake," I thought.

My experience in July 2002:

Piece of cake. Yeah, right! I had not realized that the February LTC process seemed so smooth to me largely because I happened to sit at a table that could facilitate itself through the uncomplicated agenda. In July, I would learn how resourceful I could be, and how robust the AmericaSpeaks process is, when the facilitation challenge is much greater, and things go wrong. My table in July looked quite different from my table in February. The ages of participants varied widely, spanning three generations. Also, they came from a much broader range of communities (from Harlem to suburban Long Island), racial and ethnic backgrounds, and work and life experiences, than those at my table in February. For example, four elderly women from Brooklyn and Queens were the only ones to have raised families, and they had experienced very different worlds of work from the middle-aged and young professionals in the group, including one graduate student. Unlike my February group, this group did not personally connect with each other right away.

Additional challenges in July had to do with the highly-packed agenda. There were a lot of technical information and issues to address, especially about six alternative "concept plans" for the World Trade Center site prepared for the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC), which co-sponsored the event with the Civic Alliance. Also, with the event's eight-fold increase in size since February, technology problems were more frequent, especially in my section of the room. So, in addition to facilitating participants who did not naturally communicate well with each other, I had to keep an eye on how our table computer was behaving. When our computer went down, I had to look around at nearby tables' computers to see if our whole area of the vast room was suffering the same problem, or if we had a localized problem so I needed to get the attention of a roving technology assistant.

It was just when I was sneaking a peek at other tables' computers when I was blindsided by a *facilitator's nightmare*. Two professional women, including one who had been our crack computer reporter (when the darn thing was working), announced they were moving to another table because they had been insulted by a man who joined our table late and could not bear him. In other settings, when personal situations have arisen, I, as most facilitators would, have suspended the agenda, helped people resolve personal issues enough to resume working together, and then moved them back to work, looking ahead to agenda items we could skip or shorten to make up time. But that does not work when you have to follow the same agenda, in the same real time segments, as 499 other tables. So, to cut our losses, I bid the two women adieu, and allowed a minute for the "accused" to explain himself so the remaining participants

would feel comfortable working with him. He did, they said "let's move on," and we got back on track. But we needed a new computer reporter. An elderly woman from Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, volunteered. It was soon apparent that her skills were none too good. But anytime someone suggested replacing her, she grabbed onto that laptop and insisted on keeping that role. She had just taken computer classes at a senior center, and she was determined to put her new "skills" to use. So a couple of us kept looking over her shoulders, and helped her capture and transmit our table's discussion. "Don't worry about typos," we'd tell her, but we'd watch to make sure her input was at least intelligible, and followed our meaning. I figured the theme team would never pick our phrases to display, but, with help from me and a participant, at least our intrepid reporter would send forth the essence of our table's ideas. When the whole room's consensus responses were posted on big screens, I kept looking for themes similar to what our table expressed, and would point those out to our group, even though the language was very different. As they saw some of their ideas getting through, their energy level increased.

Even when we were not fighting technology or inter-personal problems, I had to play a much more active role than the facilitator I observed in February. The people at my table had very different language and communication styles. They often understood the plans and questions on the agenda at very different levels. I had to work hard to help some participants grasp what was before us, and to translate ideas expressed by each person so others would understand. Early on, I tried to get people who understood issues sooner to act as "resources" and explain things to others. However, the tyranny of the tight agenda kept breaking that strategy. Halfway through the proceedings, I was already exhausted and running on fumes. But then I noticed a new dynamic develop. Without my asking, the young grad student started explaining facts about the plans to the elderly women in language they understood, and several participants started picking up on my suggestions to use added print materials provided to help understand issues. Soon, I was not working so hard to get everyone close to the same level of understanding, and we could focus on participants' different preferences and priorities. Then, the older women started helping the younger people rephrase their technical ideas into plain language. We had become a "team."

At the end, I stopped doubting my facilitation skills when several participants told this old engineer that they were sure I was a social worker. I felt a bit disappointed that, unlike in February, the profound statements all came from other tables. But I kept telling myself that my table's contributions were just as valid as others', if less pithy. And whenever I doubted the value of my participants' experience, I would think of our elderly computer reporter from Bay Ridge, and see her face beaming with pride as the event ended. It was hard work, but worth it.

Implications of my personal experience for the AmericaSpeaks process

My experience demonstrated that the AmericaSpeaks process is robust. Despite all the technological and personal difficulties my July 2002 table experienced, the process worked for my participants. The experience demonstrated that ordinary citizens with a variety of backgrounds can grapple with complex issues that some may think are too technical for them, engage in effective discourse, and provide reasoned ideas and opinions to contribute to public decisions. The experience also demonstrated the need for careful preparation (e.g., table print materials), plenty of staff or volunteer assistance (e.g., technology assistants), and structure (e.g., a clear roadmap to the process) to help keep problems from throwing tables hopelessly off track. Finally, while some tables (such as my table in February) can run themselves, I learned in July that even with its nifty technology, this process is completely dependent on skilled, resourceful table facilitators.

Part 2. Local Limitations and Broader Implications

Back to reality: Limitations of Listening to the City

It has been well documented that the July 2002 LTC had a dramatic short-term impact. The LMDC and Port Authority (PA) of New York and New Jersey (which owns the World Trade Center site) soon threw out the six concept plans. They had no choice. The media was there in force. Thousands of participants who were reasonably representative of the region engaged in reasoned discourse and roundly rejected all six plans. However, it is still unclear whether the citizens of Lower Manhattan and the New York region will get rebuilding plans and decisions that are responsive to their needs and desires. The July 2002 LTC was a one-time effort, which necessarily can only have a limited influence on a lengthy public decision process. And there was no real public discussion after LTC of what participants really said, except that they did not like the six plans. The LMDC and PA took away a narrow message—that the designs were not inspiring—and commissioned teams of architects and planners of international renown to develop new plans. However, they still required the teams to follow a “program” for the site almost the same as before, which required replacement of all or almost all of the lost office space and even more retail space than was lost. It was that super-dense, limited-use real estate program that many LTC participants objected to.

Just before the LMDC released new plans, the Mayor of New York unveiled a “Vision for Lower Manhattan” that addressed most of downtown beyond the World Trade Center.¹ While he avoided specific plans for the Trade Center site, the mayor clearly voiced opposition to the program to restore all the office and retail space to one site,² and instead wanted to invest in public infrastructure, public amenities, and housing, with an aim of more distributed development across Lower Manhattan. The

mayor’s vision includes a plan and funding approach that would involve buying out private leases of the World Trade Center³; the leases have been the PA’s main stated reason for sticking close to its original program. Also, the Civic Alliance held a four-day planning and design workshop in which three teams developed plans addressing three alternative visions for Lower Manhattan and the region.⁴ So alternatives to the LMDC-PA program had emerged in the public realm. But the public would not be given an effective forum to consider these alternatives.

In December, the LMDC announced it would not support another LTC, but would put new plans on view on the Internet and in a prominent public space, would take written comments (on paper and a website), and would hold public hearings. The Civic Alliance attempted to raise private funds for an LTC event that would consider the mayor’s vision, the Civic Alliance workshop plans, and the nine new LMDC site plans. But the Alliance fell short in funding pledges. As a result, the public process was limited to one-way communication of people to the LMDC, with no discourse among participants or between participants and the public agencies, and no alternatives to the LMDC program on the agenda. The Municipal Art Society (MAS), a Civic Alliance member, tried to create public discourse about the new plans by quickly organizing “Imagine NY II” workshops over two evenings. Back in the Spring of 2002, MAS had gotten thousands of people involved in visioning workshops called Imagine NY.⁵ In January 2003, about 300 Imagine NY II participants viewed the LMDC plans, then met in small facilitated groups for two hours to provide feedback, which MAS consolidated and reported to the LMDC. While mostly focusing on the LMDC plans, the report noted that participants voiced concerns that a broader vision for Lower Manhattan was needed as a context for World Trade Center site decisions, and that the mayor’s vision was often raised by participants.⁶ However, limitations of discussion time, funds, and lead time prevented the outreach needed for large-scale, regional representation, or the opportunity to view and consider alternative plans in any detail. I attended Imagine NY II and was glad it was held, but it did not present a real opportunity for detailed public consideration of alternatives to the LMDC-PA program.

While thousands of comments were submitted to the LMDC by late January, most of the public hearings were poorly attended. The LMDC and PA officials expressed disappointment that most speakers at the hearings did not address the specific plans, but either complained about the limited public process, or spoke to specific narrow interests.

Limits of participation absent a transparent public decision process

The story of how the public process about rebuilding Lower Manhattan has been unfolding since Listening to the City has

more lessons for public discourse and decision making than can fit in one essay. I will focus here on just one: public participation is limited in its effectiveness when public decision processes are unknown.

Would another LTC event to consider the new LMDC designs and alternative visions have had the dramatic citizen influence of the July 2002 LTC? Possibly. But there's no assurance that influence would last. Because, ever since the LMDC was created by the state shortly after September 11, 2001, the LMDC and PA have never made their decision processes public more than one or two steps at a time. While rebuilding Lower Manhattan in the wake of the terrorist attacks is unprecedented, developing a "critical path" timeline of key decisions over a multi-year period is clearly possible.⁷ Using such a timeline, public agencies, elected officials, and the civic community could work out a long-term, iterative public engagement process that includes a variety of participation methods, each appropriate for the nature of the different kinds of decisions and stakeholders involved at each step. By not making such a timeline public, the LMDC and PA limit public participation to a reactive mode, rather than a mode that engenders trust and stimulates public visioning and real collaboration. Not knowing what is to come, individuals and stakeholder groups have little choice but to focus on each decision point or interim plan put forward from the perspective of "how does this affect me?," with little incentive to develop collective wisdom or solutions that benefit most people and interests. The result is inevitably a public process of winners and losers that not even the most highly skilled facilitator could turn into "winners and winners." By not revealing long-term processes, the LMDC and PA keep closely held control over decisions. But they run the risk of losing public trust, and having to depend on the raw power of their authority to impose solutions. Perhaps they will implement their solutions anyway, or perhaps they will face protesters lying under bulldozers, unending legal battles, and loss of political will.

Broader public process implications for New York and other communities

When a long-term, multi-stage public decision process is known, not every step along the way should include an LTC-type event. The AmericaSpeaks process is very effective, but it is also expensive and consumes a huge amount of civic energy. As the Civic Alliance learned, funding for large-scale events like LTC is not always available. It is best to reserve such events for the most strategic points in a public decision timeline. There are many other public participation processes available, from forming advisory committees that engage representative groups of stakeholders, to holding multiple facilitated public forums over time (e.g., Imagine New York I), to many more. The key is to combine these approaches in cost-effective ways to engage various stakeholders when it is most important to do so, as a decision process proceeds. Some people, especially those with most at stake, will want to be involved continually. Others will

only want to become engaged occasionally, when an issue is compelling to them and they think they can make a difference. A good long-term participation approach will provide opportunities for both. Occasionally, an event such as LTC may be just what is needed.

The idea that it is a public agency's job to make complex problem solving or decision making processes clear and transparent to the public and all affected stakeholders is not new. As early as 1981, the Institute for Participatory Management and Planning, which has long helped public officials develop informed consent in solving complex, often controversial problems, made this job an integral part of its list of things public officials must do to "establish the legitimacy of your process."⁸ This is an important implication for building public trust in any public decision making process. After all, how can citizens trust a process they don't know?

Even if a public decision process is quite common, because it recurs every year or two such as many government budget processes, citizens deserve an opportunity for robust engagement. The growing trend among governments to establish repeatable "managing for results" cycles, including strategic planning, budgeting, performance measurement, and feedback of results to improve operations and policies is increasing the number of strategic cyclical public decision points. Citizens should be given effective ways, better than traditional public hearings, to participate in these cyclical processes, as these decision processes influence the vast majority of public services (especially at the state and local level) that affect everyday quality of life. Effective public discourse can add value to these processes, as a few government organizations have learned. For example, Prince William County, Virginia, uses multiple public engagement processes every four years when, by local ordinance, it does a major revision of the County Strategic Plan. Between strategic plan revisions, the County frequently surveys for citizen satisfaction and perceptions, and provides ways for citizens to build their capacity for effective involvement, including a free Citizen's Academy for residents who express a strong interest in becoming active in community affairs.⁹ Another example is the District of Columbia government, which, since 1999, has used extensive public engagement to inform strategic planning and budgeting. The District's strategic planning process has included a series of large-scale technology-enhanced town meetings designed and facilitated by AmericaSpeaks, to engage citizens in setting goals and identifying priorities. Major funding shifts have been made by District officials in the budget process to reflect citizen-identified priorities.¹⁰

Is there still hope for Lower Manhattan?

Despite recent weaknesses of public participation concerning rebuilding decisions for Lower Manhattan, there may still be

hope for improving the public process, and the effectiveness of planning and rebuilding decisions, as time goes on. From the perspective of achieving better public processes and more responsive decisions, both positive and negative signs abound. On February 27, 2003, a leadership group of the LMDC and PA, with representatives of the governor and the mayor, selected a design by Studio Daniel Libeskind as the master plan for the World Trade Center site. While the Libeskind plan includes the entire LMDC-PA real estate program, it does not depend on constructing much, if any, of the programmed office space in the early phases of development. Market weaknesses may delay construction of new commercial space for many years, allowing the future possibility of revisiting at least part of the program for the site in a way that includes better public engagement and discourse. Rumors of a possible land or development rights swap between the City of New York and the PA have come and gone several times, and may resurface again. If that comes to pass, the mayor's role will be strengthened, and City citizen participation requirements, that the PA and LMDC are exempt from, may come into play. On the other side of the coin, the governor of New York has been pressing for quick action to enable groundbreaking for major plan elements in time for the 2004 Republican National Convention in New York. The pressure to start rebuilding quickly increases the leverage of the private developer who is the main leaseholder to the site, who has been voicing plans to use insurance money to build all the large office buildings in the program on a steady schedule, regardless of market conditions. By July 2003, the developer had brought his own architect to the table (from a firm that was a finalist in the competition won by Libeskind), and the press has been reporting on behind-the-scenes disagreements between Daniel Libeskind and the developer, leading to speculation that the Libeskind design, which emerged from public processes, could privately be changed beyond recognition.

Whatever happens among the power brokers, members of the civic community will continue their efforts to keep the process open. The Civic Alliance Working Group for a Lifecycle Performance Scorecard for Rebuilding Lower Manhattan, which I chair, is exploring how to develop metrics for evaluating major issues addressed by the Civic Alliance as a way to determine, first, how well public and private plans for redeveloping Lower Manhattan meet criteria established by civic groups. Then, over the years, a scorecard could be used to track whether those plans get built, how well they work, and what public outcomes are achieved. If a practical scorecard is developed, cooperating public and private entities involved in rebuilding could use periodic scorecard results as a feedback tool for gauging redevelopment progress and making improvements during implementation. Citizens could also be encouraged, from time to time, to "recalibrate" the scorecard's evaluation criteria to keep the scorecard consistent with changing public needs and citizen priorities. The Civic Alliance could also potentially use a scorecard to call the media's attention to progress (or the lack of

it), problems, and key issues in redevelopment over time, to keep the public eye on the public process.

The Scorecard group has already developed a draft approach to evaluate public participation, based on published work of the Chair of Political Science of Pace University, who joined the Scorecard group, using the idea of a scale that ranks participation approaches based on how "passive" or "active" they are in engaging people and building collaboration and trust.¹¹ The Civic Alliance, constituent members such as the Municipal Art Society, and other civic groups have been sponsoring and planning additional opportunities for the public to become engaged, including proposed Civic Alliance issue forums and workshops for "Beyond 16 Acres" (the size of the Trade Center site] to stimulate open consideration of planning for redevelopment of *all* of Lower Manhattan.

In the meantime, in June 2002, several required Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) processes were launched by public agencies, offering a more technical and legalistic, but important, way for the public to become engaged. In early July 2003 I sat in on several Civic Alliance meetings to develop an initial response to the LMDC "draft EIS scoping document" (which precedes the actual draft EIS). My initial impression from those meetings is that the EIS processes are likely to become more contentious—with demands for more thorough consideration of alternatives, and open challenges to criteria and methods of impact evaluation—than they otherwise would have been had the public processes since July 2002 been more open and deliberative. With better public processes *after* the July 2002 Listening to the City, there might be greater consensus on plans and programs among a wider range of stakeholders, leading to less reason for people to challenge EIS documents. But perhaps some good will come of that contentiousness. With the governor's desire to get rebuilding started quickly, perhaps he will persuade the LMDC and PA to adopt reasonable project changes put forward by civic groups, in order to avoid lengthy delays due to EIS challenges. Finally, over time, there is still hope for improving citizen engagement for many projects and issues to be decided beyond the immediate World Trade Center site over the years ahead. So stay tuned. We may yet get it right.

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information technology, language interpretation and translation, probation, and courts. He co-leads the Citizen's League Governance Team, which, under Sloan Foundation grants, has developed an "effective governance model," and used the model to document how communities have achieved "results that matter" to their citizens. Mr. Epstein's many publications include the widely-used text *Using Performance Measurement in Local Government*. Contact at: Epstein and Fass, 140 Nassau Street, Suite 9C, New York, NY 10038-1526, Telephone (212)349-1719, Fax (212)349-4054, email epstein@pipeline.com

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Listening and Learning: The 21st Century Town Hall Meeting

Robin Drotleff

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the Listening to the City event from a social-psychology perspective. Ethnocentrism and xenophobia are discussed as barriers to effective human interaction. The author identifies aspects of the 21st Century Town Hall Meeting event that work toward breaking down barriers between people with different perspectives toward the goal of mutual understanding and solution-building.

KEYWORDS

Ethnocentrism, Xenophobia, Town Hall Meeting, Facilitation, Listening to the City

It becomes increasingly clear to many students of man and of the contemporary scene that the crucial difficulty with which we are confronted lies in the fact that the development of man's intellectual capacities has far outstripped the development of his emotions. Man's brain lives in the twentieth century; the heart of most men lives still in the Stone Age. The majority of men have not yet acquired the maturity to be independent, to be rational, to be objective....how can mankind save itself from destroying itself by this discrepancy between intellectual-technical over-maturity and emotional backwardness? (Fromm, P xiv)

Erich Fromm wrote these words in 1966 as part of an updated release of *Escape From Freedom*, a book he originally published in 1941. I recently came across this quote when I signed up to take a psychology class and had the opportunity to read for a second time this classic work on contemporary society. For those of you who have never been inclined towards psych classes, Erich Fromm was a psychologist and philosopher of the psychoanalytic school who was heavily influenced by world events at the time he was doing his work; specifically, the rise of Nazism in Germany. In *Escape from Freedom*, Fromm provides a compelling and thought-provoking explanation for why, and in what circumstances, people (and whole societies) will turn towards authoritarian leadership. It was in the 1970's when I first read this book, and as a young college student my reaction

to the book ran along the lines of, yes, this was an interesting bit of ancient history...but the Nazis were gone and so this was of another era. Reading this book again, in the post-September 11 world, I am struck by the need for us to revisit Fromm's writings. There is much that his work has to say about the conditions that lead to a society finding solace in an authoritarian government, and an essay could easily be written about the rise of authoritarian leadership in the terrorist world. My focus, however, is on the ideas expressed in the quote above; on the dangers inherent in a world where humanity has the intellectual and technical capacity to destroy the planet yet our emotional development is lagging far behind. We have the capacity to build skyscrapers and 747's, and yet as a people we also seem to be burdened with the emotional immaturity that drives us to resort to violence to resolve our differences.

I must say that last July when I flew across the country to participate as a facilitator at Listening to the City, I was not thinking such thoughts. Rather, I was excited to be given the opportunity to "do something" to help New York after the September 11 attack, and I also knew this would be a fascinating opportunity to learn more about large-scale public meetings. I work as an organization consultant at a utility company in California, and have attended several large-scale public events, but nothing approaching the size of Listening to the City's expected 4,000 participants. My thoughts ran from, "*how on Earth are they going to pull this off*", and alternately, "*God*

please don't let me blow it". For anyone who was in attendance, I am sure they will all say the logistics of the event were remarkable and they did indeed pull it off, and for myself, I think I can safely say that while I didn't do everything just the way they told me to (everything was happening so fast!), I think I got the important things right. I left New York feeling enormously inspired and puffed up with pride for the people of New York City. At the same time, I felt very grateful for the opportunity to see history in the making. As I look back, I realize I saw history being made in two ways. In one way, I was there to watch as the residents of New York City struggled to create a post-September 11 future for Lower Manhattan. But in another way, I also saw history being made as I witnessed what must be the largest facilitated meeting ever held, one that demonstrated a methodology that I believe holds a great deal of potential for helping us to address some of the complex issues that we face as a nation and as citizens of the planet.

The 21st Century Town Hall meeting model provides participants with the opportunity and the necessary supportive structures to enable them to sit down and talk with people who see things differently than they do.

It is this type of methodology that I think our increasingly globalized world is going to need if we are to loosen the boundaries of ethnocentrism and xenophobia that plague us as a people. It is a very common human experience to bear an innate fear and/or distrust of people who are different than we are, and it is also very common for people to believe that their way of life is superior to all others. I believe that these human predispositions are a piece of the "emotional backwardness" that Fromm was concerned with. Ethnocentrism and xenophobia are discussed in a fascinating book written by Carol Sagan and Ann Druyan called *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, where they trace the biologic and evolutionary basis for these behaviors and provide a very convincing argument that at one time it was beneficial for the human species to be able to identify and avoid contact with other humans who were even just slightly different than one's own group. I won't go into all the details of their work, but briefly, they postulate that the principles of evolution that enable a species to adapt to its environment work better in relatively self-contained small populations. They go on to state, "There seems to be, then, a reason-at the heart of population genetics and evolution...for xenophobia (and) ethnocentrism....So the next time you hear a raving demagogue counseling hatred for other, slightly different groups of humans, for a moment at least see if you can understand his problem: He is heeding an ancient call that - however dangerous, obsolete, and maladaptive it may be today - once benefited our species." (p. 256)

The Listening to the City event (and the 21st Century Town Hall model) provide great examples of our technical advancements; the computers and voting devices at every table, the huge video screens and the seemingly instantaneous tabulations. Yet at the same time, some very fundamental human processes are at work. We are asked to sit at tables of 10, specifically designed so that a diversity of viewpoints are present. We are asked to listen to each other and to work together to summarize our table's opinions. We are asked to study a problem before making a decision. We are asked to try to set aside self-interest and consider the needs of multiple stakeholders when proposing solutions.

Let me for a moment speak to how this looked at my table, where three residents from the area around the World Trade Center Site, three people from a homeless shelter, an environmentalist, and two people from out of town came together for the day to discuss the future of the WTC site. At first, the diversity of viewpoints was a bit nerve-racking for me as their facilitator. When the day began, I was joined at my table by the neighborhood residents, then the two out-of-towners. Everything seemed pretty cohesive until the three from the homeless shelter arrived. They arrived with buttons and posters and other items promoting their cause, and I was instantly put on edge with concern that they might have come to push an agenda at our table, and that this might make it difficult for me as the facilitator. As the day went on however, I realized that they were very sincere in wanting to participate in the proceedings and that my initial concerns were unfounded. The value of having them with us was two-fold, as participants in providing their reactions to the proposed WTC site plans, but also their small group served as a visible reminder to the table; as you do your planning, don't forget about us. The environmentalist arrived at our table a little bit later in the morning, and her participation also served a unique purpose; she gave us a whole new perspective to consider and a reminder that there were many stakeholders in this event and many different ways to consider what the new buildings could look like and what messages could be revealed to the world through their design. The methodology we experienced that day helped this diverse group of strangers talk through some very emotional issues, where each had a different story to tell and a different opinion on how to go forward, but through carefully planned discussion topics, they left as friends with much broader understandings about the needs and interests of others. This is a very healthy experience, is it not? These human experiences don't really make it into the official report of the event, but are a significant outcome nonetheless.

The 21st Century Town Hall Meeting model is not a means to address every public policy decision. It has very significant limitations. The event was reactive ("what do you think of these plans") and it didn't require that differences of opinion be resolved or specific actions going forward be identified. The

event is also very expensive, and from my experience in working with large-scale events, it is often very difficult for leaders to commit to this approach due to their understandable hesitancy to involve such large numbers of people. To some extent, the Listening to the City event was nothing more than a very large focus group, and I do not know how far you could extend this methodology beyond *focus group* to real *consensus decision-making*.

Despite these concerns, I remain very supportive of this methodology. The 21st Century Town Hall Meeting model provides participants with the opportunity and the necessary supportive structures to enable them to sit down and talk with people who see things differently than they do. I think that these types of events should be seen as important and much needed learning opportunities, and that what the participants learn about themselves and others through this process is the true and lasting benefit of the day.

Humanity has the intellectual and technical capacity to destroy the planet yet our emotional development is lagging far behind. We have the capacity to build skyscrapers and 747's, and yet as a people we also seem to be burdened with the emotional immaturity that drives us to resort to violence to resolve our differences.

As I write this, coalition forces are dropping bombs on Iraq. Is war a necessary evil? I don't know the answer to that. But I believe our higher aspiration as a species is to get along with each other and stop the killing. I think this is crux of what Fromm was pointing out to us; that we need to learn how to use our brain-power to do more than create greater technology, we need to recognize the need for our species to mature emotionally and to turn our brain-power to the development of methods that can enable us to do that. Or, as Sagan and Druyan put it, do we accept the claim that we are "condemned, without hope of reprieve, to live out our lives in a barely disguised chimpanzee social order?" (p. 415)

Please don't get me wrong. I am not suggesting we try to hold an open forum with Saddam Hussein and his like. All I am suggesting is that the development of methodologies that bring people together to resolve complex problems is a good thing; a hopeful thing. And I hope that someday, maybe not in my lifetime, and maybe not in my son's, but that someday we will have developed into a species that chooses listening and learning over bombs and bunkers.

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Tips for Facilitating a Group Dialogue When You Don't Speak the Language of the Participants.

Michelle M. Charles

ABSTRACT

In the majority of instances, save for an exceptional few, community dialogue facilitators take for granted the ability of forum participants to communicate proficiently in English. Given the meteoric rise in the numbers of Spanish-speaking Americans, however, those of us working with the public who are English-speakers can no longer assume that we have the ability to choose to partner exclusively with all English-speaking citizen groups. More than likely, the field will increasingly experience opportunities for language exchanges. The purpose of this essay is to illustrate one way that language diversity can impact the facilitation of a community forum event.

KEYWORDS

Hispanic, Translator, Spanish-speaking, Foreign Language

Miguel, a construction worker in Manhattan, wanted to offer his skills to the rebuilding efforts. Mercedes came to voice her concerns about the lost housing that resulted from the attacks. Angel was concerned about replacing lost jobs. Lissette said the issue that has been most troubling to her since the September 11 attacks is the environment, namely the now circulating poor air quality that has been affecting her breathing and the breathing of others she knows in her Lower East Side neighborhood. They all hoped that participating in the day-long town hall meeting would ensure that their concerns would be addressed.

I facilitated this discussion where Miguel, Mercedes, Angel, Lissette and other participants all expressed deep concerns about the way the Port Authority and various political leaders were planning to move ahead with New York's plans for redeveloping Lower Manhattan post 9/11. Throughout the day my participants weighed in on how the planned redevelopment could now best meet the community's basic needs like housing, jobs and safety while still incorporating a "sacred" space to memorialize the victims of that tragic day. Of the hopes that participants expressed, they all agreed that it was important for the developers to design a more walkable community balancing out the mostly commercial environment that had once isolated sections of residential life there. They discussed the possibility

of building park space. Participants also deliberated on the idea of offering tax incentives to businesses, both large and small, as encouragement to re-invest in the area, thus bringing much needed jobs.

Throughout the day, we kept notes on our discussion. During the occasional large group reports, the participants were pleased to discover how closely their conversation had been falling in line with the overall general consensus reached at the event for how this now devastated section of the city should be rebuilt.

The expressed hopes and concerns for redevelopment that came out of Listening to the City were wrapped in great cloaks of emotion and resolve. As a volunteer facilitator at the event, I had to push participants to think clearly about their options and opinions. I had to probe their memories about the tragedy and their experiences since in order to help them to create meaning as a way for them to build common ground for action. Add to this complexity the fact that participants had to express their deeply rooted thoughts and feelings literally in front of the whole world via the international contingent of journalists positioned everywhere in the convention hall, and it becomes clear why it was important for me to contribute time to this event.

In any deliberative discussion about community issues, the facilitator's key responsibility is making sure that everyone present in the group has an opportunity to be heard. The facilitator is also responsible for ensuring that participants consider the issue according to the multiple perspectives that aren't necessarily present in the group – even if those perspectives are disagreeable to some. Successfully managing these tasks is a mental juggling act for the facilitator. It is a feat that requires focused attention to participants' every word and their intonation of those words as they dialogue with one another. A good facilitator must have a command of the English language that allows her or him to deftly summarize, paraphrase and recast what a perspective seems to say; or is the English language such a vital part of the work?

Shifting My Thinking

When I arrived at eight o'clock on the morning of the event, I went to my assigned table and proceeded to fill the participant folders with the appropriate English language hand-out materials in the way that I was instructed to do at orientation the night before. By 8:30 A.M., my prep work was done. I double checked the folders to make sure all of the materials were accounted for and then proceeded to wait for people to arrive. At about eight-forty-five, a young woman came to the table. We exchanged greetings and, as I was about to engage in some small talk, she added that she was my translator for the day. At first, I flinched. I felt for sure she was mistaken. I thought, "She must be at the wrong table". We checked our table assignment numbers and they matched – #223. I probed further to make certain she was correct about my facilitating a conversation among a group of people who would not be talking to me in English because, as I explained to her, I did not speak Spanish. She showed me her credentials as proof. I surrendered. Until that moment, all my thoughts and all my preparations had been, quite naturally, in English. By the time I had set myself to imagining the skills I would need to summons to lead a bi-lingual conversation through a third party, the clock inched towards eight-fifty-five. I had five minutes to remove all the English language printed materials from the group members' folders and replace them with a set written in Spanish. After briefly rolling my eyes and thinking, "Why me?", I took a deep breath and chalked the oversight up to a planning glitch. It was a point of detail that might have been better attended to by organizers, but wasn't. There was nothing I could do about the miscommunication at this point except to ignore it and spring into the appropriate action.

10% of the over 4,000 participants registered as 'Hispanic'.

While my translator went off to identify and switch the materials in the folders, I privately worked to reorient my thinking. I was determined to give the forthcoming participants what I had driven over four hours through torrential rain from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to give them – my best – no matter what language barriers stood between us. What I am about to share with you are some of the lessons I took home with me from this experience coupled with some advice for how you might approach the work of facilitating a deliberative group discussion without knowing the language of the participants.

Recruiting Translators

When participants were asked to register their race and ethnicity for the purposes of gauging the representation of groups at the event, 10% of the over 4,000 participants registered as "Hispanic". The ten percent present in the convention hall was considered a strong showing for Hispanics. It was fully half of the 20% of total Hispanics in the general population as reported by a recent New York Regional Census Data report.

This meant that approximately 400 people of Spanish decent gave up their Saturday in July to join in the all day event to add their voice to the decision-making process for rebuilding Lower Manhattan.

I had ten of those folks at my table. All of them were adult immigrants. And, apart from the translator and one other participant in the group, I was the only person who spoke fluent English. Or, should I say, I was the only person who did not speak fluent Spanish. I did, however, have previous experiences working with Spanish-speaking forum participants in the neighborhood communities of Philadelphia. While the particulars of my previous experiences were different from this event, the overall approach and outcomes were very much the same.

For Listening to the City, a cadre of coordinators made arrangements in advance of the event to have a translator or two present at every table where non-English speakers were assigned. It seemed, through an informal survey of my translator, that the foreign language volunteers brought in for the event were recruited from arenas in which people were generally highly educated or they worked in white collar professions. It appeared that none were necessarily trained dialogue facilitators, though.

In comparison, my experiences with recruiting foreign language speakers for forum work in Philadelphia involved both tapping the National Issues Forums network for a trained, paid facilitator to actually moderate the discussion on one occasion and tapping a local community organizer who was already working with this language population to translate the dialogue on another.

In your relatively small scale, basic community forum setting, you should likely expect to follow the opposite path of the Listening to the City coordinators and recruit volunteer translators through your community's more labor intensive grassroots networks as I mentioned was done once in Philadelphia. The National Issues Forums network may be an option for you, but in the possible absence of funding, tapping the local grassroots networks seems a more probable opportunity.

Along with community group funding issues, when convening a forum, you must recognize the limits of working with professionals as volunteers. These individuals often do not have the time to help with a local community event. Alternatively, a grassroots recruitment effort will likely yield concerned citizens who probably have more to learn than to offer, but their schedules will likely be more amenable to yours. You must decide which avenue for recruitment works best for you. Whatever your recruitment decision, there remain a few key fundamental points that are important to remember about working together in a forum.

Work With Your Translator

First, the person you invite to translate for you would ideally be a native speaker of the language of the dialogue participants. My event translator lived in New Jersey but she was originally from Venezuela. If you choose to work with a non-native speaker who is a proficient or fluent conversationalist, be prepared for some minor communication gaffes. Since much of the nature of group facilitation requires the drawing out of meaning from the statements, opinions and ideas expressed by the participants about what are often blindingly emotional issues, you will need someone who is able to use the language to paint a picture of the complex thoughts and feelings that are being conveyed. This characteristic affords you a measure of authenticity and credibility with the group as well as positively impacts clarity of communications. A native speaker of the language can best relay the appropriate meaning, details and tone of the conversation to you from the participants. For example, at my table, after participants made their statements, the translator used various English words and turns of phrases to convey people's concerns about their neighborhoods' lingering environmental problems since 9/11. It gradually became evident to me through the expression of their comments (which were brief in comparison to the English language translations) that participants had specific vocabulary words in their native tongue that captured the nuances of language involved in discussing such concepts as "pollution", "breathing difficulties", "debris", "dust", "apartment building air vents" and "clean-up". My translator struggled visibly to make me understand all the participants' perspectives on these specific areas of concern. A non-native speaker may struggle even more to capture the nuances of these concepts and may end up substituting a more broad translation for what a

participant may have originally expressed as a very particular concern.

Once you have recruited a translator that will best help you accomplish your work, set aside time before the forum to meet with this person and become comfortable with the situation.

Resist the urge to dictate. In my Philadelphia experiences I had to restrain myself at times when the dialogue seemed to go on without my direction. This occurs, of course in English language settings as well, but in those settings I am able to listen to the exchanges and determine at what point I should interject. Not so in a foreign language forum. You have to go over the process together from beginning to end with your translator to determine who will do what and how.

A good facilitator must have a command of the English language that allows her or him to deftly summarize, paraphrase and recast what a perspective seems to say; or is the English language such a vital part of the work?

At the Listening to the City event, my translator and I decided on the following process. Once I posed an initial discussion question through her, (i.e. "What are your concerns about these development plans?") I would listen only to her for the responses. I would not speak again until my translator addressed me. I made eye contact with the participants as they spoke and I remained attentive to intonations (like when questions were asked) and nonverbal communications, but I held no false expectations about culling my information directly from them. I awaited my speaking queues from the translator. Since I had the best intuitive grasp of identifying the discussion's themes and formatting them in data recording, I let her speak fluidly while I tracked the themes on a notepad. I did not interrupt her translation of the dialogue except for the rare instance when I needed clarification of a comment or when I wanted to pose a follow-up question – both of which I did through her. When the allotted time was over for responding to this segment of the daylong dialogue, I passed my handwritten notes to her to transcribe onto our group's laptop computer while I prepared to introduce the next segment's materials.

In a community forum that does not have the added complexity of a laptop for data recording you can track the important points of your discussion on a flipchart (similar to what I just described doing using my notepad). This process requires that you are comfortable appearing to play a somewhat supportive role in relationship to the translator. You must permit her to assume the more prominent stance with the group in order for the discussion to flow freely; but remember, just because you are physically in

the background, mentally you must remain in charge. Your translator and the group will still be looking to you for direction. Once you sense that the original question you posed has been discussed as fully as possible by the group, pose your next question to the translator for her to relay. Let the conversation resume and repeat the procedure.

Try On The Language

Perhaps an important, fun and practical way to break the ice and connect directly with your group is to ask your translator to teach you one or two key phrases in the language like, “Como esta usted?”, and “pagina” which means “page”. When I spoke these phrases to participants, they clearly expressed appreciation to me for the effort. I think they also found my pronunciation amusing. Trying on the language with participants also helps to build trust between you and the group. You become more than an “expert” figure. You become a part of the group activity.

Extend this sense of group trust to the translator. Do not second guess what she is telling you from the group or what she is telling the group from you. Constantly checking up on an assistant who is brought on to handle a responsibility is frowned upon in almost any shared working situation. It's micromanaging. When you speak your group directions, for example, speak directly to the translator, don't speak into the air or shift your eye contact between the translator and members of the group as you announce next steps. These nonverbal cues will send mixed signals to the group. It will disrupt people's sense of trust in you as their liaison to the real experts on the issue and it will distract them from the work of dialoguing.

Be precise in your thinking and English language use – avoid using idioms and slang. Make your translator understand how the process is unfolding so that she in turn can make the group understand. People will stare at you while they wait to hear the next steps, or they may turn and chat amongst themselves – this is likely not a sign that people are lost as to what they are supposed to be doing. Remember that the participants volunteered to attend the discussion and they are not only interested in the process, but they are also interested in working with you to get their voices heard.

Encourage People to Help One Another Understand a Concept.

When the first occasion arose in the group where a concept about the design teams' redevelopment plans came up, I found it a challenge not easily overcome. Even my translator had a difficult time exacting clear meaning of the plans' ideas that would help move the discussion along. After each Lead Facilitator update, everyone in the meeting room was told what the next general topic of discussion would be for an hour. Although my participants heard the translation of the general

announcement through their United Nations-style earpieces, it was up to me to guide them through that phase of the day using, in this instance for example, the six detailed maps of Lower Manhattan that were provided, representing the six concepts for redevelopment. I posed the question to the translator, “Given your hopes and concerns, what advice would you give developers about these plans?”. She posed the question to the group. Participants then began to pour over the various maps to discern what was different about each of them, what parts of one or another plan they would remove or replace, what would they keep or insert into another plan? – all within the context of the issues they had previously raised about their hopes for what a rebuilt Lower Manhattan would mean for them and their concerns about what developers and leaders might not consider in the redevelopment process. The maps were copied onto 11x17” paper and stapled together. They were unwieldy and extremely detailed, down to the thin beige dotted lines that represented where a pedestrian overpass would go in one. The maps' respective titles were not readily apparent on the pages. Did they like the “Memorial Square” plan, or the “Promenade” plan? This was an instance where, clearly, I would gain nothing by translating every question or every verbalized introspection. I decided that this was small group work and I let the participants talk together to comb through the maps and plans and discuss the pros and cons of their elements amongst themselves. This was, after all, why they came. They weren't there to hear me talk or have me slow down their thinking with my interruptions. As participants pointed out plan details to one another and considered what the options might mean for them and their individual concerns, I familiarized myself with my own set of maps in preparation for when the group was ready to deliberate on the choices. Occasionally I asked the translator what her sense of the group was on the activity, but I knew I had to just let them work directly with one another to sort out the issues.

Trying on the language with participants also helps to build trust between you and the group. You become more than an ‘expert’ figure.

When the participants were ready to deliberate on the redevelopment plan options, I was faced with the task of engaging in a deep and emotional conversation about an intricate handout that I could not speak to directly. In American culture, we look squarely into a person's eyes when we talk to him or her. Even a speaker at the head of a crowded room will make eye contact with different individuals throughout the room as a way of making a personal connection with others or of acknowledging a thought. Being in America on that day, I felt I could at least assume that the group would largely share this dominant cultural conversational style.

Maintain Eye Contact with Participants

All of us around the table were well aware of the language barrier that existed between myself and them. But the languages themselves were not what was important to the discussion. It was the *messages* that participants needed to get across about their hopes and concerns that were important. One very important message that I, as the facilitator, was responsible for conveying to participants was how important they were to this decision-making process and how they could trust that I would get their thoughts across intact to the planners. I kept this charge in mind as each participant in turn expressed to the group and alternately to me what they were thinking. My translator interpreted their words for me as different speakers finished their statements, but as the speakers themselves were talking, I maintained eye contact with them. In their eyes and facial gestures, for example, I could read whether they were expressing determination, ambivalence, sorrow, frustration or pleasant excitement. Participants in turn could read whether their emotional expressions were indeed registering with me. Maintaining eye contact provided participants with a level of validation for speaking out. When the translator interpreted the comments for me, I could then respond to her with a measure of context about the speaker's intentions for their comment. I could reasonably probe for meaning with questions like, "And that upsets you?", if I noticed their brows furrow at some point; or, if I noticed a speaker's eyes widen, I might gauge anticipation or excitement by asking, "So what do you want the developers to add in their plans?". Make eye contact as well with the others in the group intermittently while the speaker is speaking. In this way, you can gauge where there might be disagreement or agreement with an idea.

The languages themselves were not what was important to the discussion. It was the messages that participants needed to get across about their hopes and concerns that were important.

Set Your Expectations as High as You Do with Native English Speakers.

Perhaps the most uncomfortable part of the event for me was during the breaks when we were not focused on any one topic and we could talk casually amongst ourselves. This sort of down time occurred most markedly towards the end of lunch when my translator took a few minutes for herself and wandered off. There was one other woman at the table who spoke fair English, but it would have been rude of me to immediately turn all of my attention to her. She was also already engaged in her own side conversation with a woman with whom she had arrived that morning. I overcame this discomfort by trying to chat up the other participants using the same topics I start out with when I

am in an all English-speaking setting. I was limited relying heavily on hand gestures and smiling as I pointed to the materials around the table and the room – the maps, the overhead screens where the updates were being displayed and the plethora of television cameras and reporters who were stationed behind us, not to mention the backdrop of the other 4,000 people in the room. I would utter phrases such as, "Are you OK?", or, "Do you like this?". People responded to me with nods or would utter English phrases themselves such as, "Yes. This is good", or they would point to the screen or the reporters in return and either nod their head and smile back at me showing a positive reaction or shake their head while waving a hand, showing a negative reaction. We even uttered some short, but recognizable phrases to one another around the issues of jobs and housing as they had been brought up earlier.

The key for me was to not let our truncated exchanges during these unchaperoned moments color my expectations for the depth and breadth of the participants' understanding of and input on the city's redevelopment plans. If I had allowed these awkward exchanges to set the tone for my expectations of the group work, then I could have inadvertently turned these willing and eager citizen participants into a disengaged and disenfranchised public.

Gladly, however, this was not the case. The event's large group updates demonstrated for us how closely our table work fell in line with the majority English speaking groups' work. These update moments turned into moments of solidarity for us as a group. Their points were getting across. During the electronic polling sessions, where tables registered their consensus on recommended changes to the developers' plans in the same way they had registered their ethnicity and race, my participants "high-five-d" one another in reaction to the polls that were reflective of their opinions. It was an affirmation of their collective hard work paying off and of their voices being recognized in the English speaking majority. At the end of the day, my participants left expressing satisfaction about their having attended the event.

It was important for Listening to the City to know that my participants had come to stake their claims in the dialogue process. It was important for them to know how differences of language need not be barriers to effective communications or action. It was important for me to be reminded of that as well. With our nation's rapidly changing demographics, expert facilitators in community dialogue will be increasingly faced with addressing foreign language communities' needs for training and assistance in American democratic practices. Perhaps the lessons learned I have shared in this essay will be helpful in smoothing the way for those partnerships to occur.

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The 21st Century Facilitator at "Listening to the City": Applying a Real-Time Model of Facilitation Planning and Rapid Rapport-Building

Arthur Friedman

ABSTRACT:

This article describes how the 21st century facilitator conquers the immense challenge of planning and facilitating large-scale, one day public meetings characterized by short, pre-event planning windows and compressed discussion timeframes. Through the use of a corresponding real-time set of highly effective rapport-building tools and a new 6 step Facilitator Planning Methodology, a facilitator can understand and evaluate a facilitation's design and pitfalls in real-time during a short pre-event orientation and then rapidly build group cohesion in a one day facilitation which allows no margin for error. This paper provides an overview of the "Listening to the City" town hall meeting used to test this methodology. Then, a facilitator toolkit of rapid rapport-building techniques is presented. This toolkit is comprised of Active Listening tools, Applied Behavioral Modeling tools, and a multi-faceted view of conversation called "the Three Streams of Communication". These tools are highly effective in developing rapport quickly between the facilitator and the group and among group participants. A 6 step Facilitator Planning Methodology is described in detail; this planning mechanism aids facilitators in identifying potential design problems before these problems impact the facilitation and rapport-building process and prevent or limit the quick summarization and capture of discussion data. The methodology also emphasizes the importance of establishing facilitator credibility at the beginning of and throughout a facilitation. Finally, the article provides a summary discussing the challenges and tasks facing facilitators planning to lead real-time public citizen summits occurring in compressed timeframes.

KEY WORDS:

Active Listening, AmericaSpeaks™, Applied Behavioral Modeling, City Planner, Citizen Summit, Communication, Facilitator, Facilitator Credibility, Facilitation, Facilitation Planning, "Listening to the City", Lower Manhattan, New York, Orientation, Planning, Public Forum, Rapport, World Trade Center, 21st Century Facilitator

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has descended upon us with an advent of light speed changes in technology, telecommunications, and the media. Within this context, the emergence of new forms of participatory democracy in emotionally charged settings is transforming the traditional use of facilitation requiring facilitators themselves to change and adopt new approaches and techniques. While the traditional facilitation allows facilitators a longer window for planning design processes, knowing and studying participants in advance, and conducting the actual facilitation, the new setting poses formidable demands and time sensitive challenges.

In a public forum or citizen summit, a facilitator will be required to lead a group of strangers of diverse race, sex, religion, age, and income in the discussion of various, often emotionally charged, topics relating to redevelopment, jobs, housing, health care, education, and public safety. This discussion will occur in a compressed, one-day timeframe. The huge challenge for the facilitator will be to elicit valuable citizen input for stakeholders sponsoring the event. To accomplish this, the facilitator will need to create group rapport so that these strangers can become an effective working team. This rapport must be created quickly as the group will be tasked with achieving consensus on majority views, capturing minority views, and summarizing and inputting key discussion points into a laptop PC in short, often 30 minute, time periods.

In leading a group through these cooperative tasks to produce the desired results, a facilitator must achieve rapport as quickly as possible with each member of the group. Also, the facilitator must build cohesion of the entire group so individual members will feel safe, speak up, and actively participate in the daylong discussion. This especially applies to highly charged, emotional public settings.

This new mode of facilitation is real-time; there is not any margin for error. The facilitator must come in and get the pulse of the group quickly. He or she must build rapport rapidly as there is one day to capture citizen input, and then, the facilitation is over. A facilitator either succeeds or doesn't. There is no going back and correcting errors, using a week long meeting to build rapport, or molding a group of people slowly into an effective team.

In addition to the above, a facilitator, in this new setting, often does not design the structure and group exercises of the facilitation; instead, the facilitator must use a design created by a third party. Without prior knowledge of this design, the facilitator must attend a pre-event orientation which represents the only opportunity to obtain facilitation goals and objectives and review the third party design structure and process.

Most importantly, during this orientation, a facilitator will need to dissect and analyze the actual mechanics of the proposed design structure at the same time the information is received. These design mechanics include the use of technology such as laptop computers and handheld polling devices, clarity and allotted timeframes of participant exercises, operational procedures, and the physical environment of the actual facilitation. All of these mechanics can negatively impact and impede the flow of communication and building of rapport within a group. Therefore, potential design problems must be identified quickly upfront during the orientation, and solutions and backup contingencies must be created in rapid fashion.

This challenge of understanding and evaluating the design in an incredibly short, pre-event window in real-time is followed by the actual real-time facilitation which may be the next day.

To conquer this seemingly huge challenge, the 21st century facilitator must be equipped with a corresponding real-time set of highly effective methodologies and rapport-building tools which can be used to plan a public participatory facilitation, critique a third party design, identify pitfalls, and rapidly build group cohesion in a one day timeframe.

This article provides the 21st century facilitator with this planning methodology and set of rapport-building tools which can be utilized to build group rapport quickly in real-time, highly visible, public facilitations. These tools and this planning

methodology were used at "Listening to the City", a large-scale public town hall meeting.

The next section presents an overview of "Listening to the City" and describes this unique facilitation and rapport-building challenge. In Section III, a "facilitator toolkit" of specific rapport-building techniques will be provided. These verbal and nonverbal tools are highly effective in eliciting participant discussion in real-time mode. These tools are used in conjunction with a multifaceted view of communication which allows the facilitator to interpret how well the rapport-building process is being achieved. Section IV presents a six step Facilitator Planning Methodology which was developed for facilitating citizen town hall meetings. The methodology was applied at "Listening to the City" and explains how a facilitator must prepare and strategize for a real-time facilitation; it can be utilized when the facilitation's structure and design is created either by the facilitator or by a third party, e.g., *AmericaSpeaks*TM. This Facilitator Planning Methodology views facilitator credibility as a key strategy which is planned before and established throughout a facilitation. The framework discusses strategies and rapport techniques for building group cohesion using real-world examples from the "Listening to the City" experience. Emphasis will be placed on how these techniques were applied rapidly to achieve group rapport within a compressed timeframe. Finally, Section V presents a summary discussing the challenges and tasks facing facilitators planning to lead real-time public citizen summits.

II "Listening to the City": The Facilitation Challenge

On July 20, 2002, the Civic Alliance to Rebuild Downtown New York held "Listening to the City", the largest town hall meeting ever assembled in the history of the United States at the Jacob Javits Center in New York City. Five thousand people attended this daylong meeting to discuss plans for rebuilding the World Trade Center site and lower Manhattan which were devastated by terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Participants included people from New York City's five boroughs, Long Island, Westchester, three New Jersey counties, and Connecticut. The focus was to elicit citizen input in four areas:

1. Hopes and concerns for rebuilding lower Manhattan and people's lives impacted by the attack
2. Advice to city planners on specific features of six proposed World Trade Center (WTC) architectural plans
3. Feelings and issues related to memorializing the WTC site, and
4. Solutions for renewed economic development, employment, transportation, housing, parks, and culture.

*AmericaSpeaks*TM, a strategic planning organization which holds large-scale public participation meetings, designed "Listening to the City". Prior to the event, they selected 500 group facilitators from over 1000 applicants to work with their management team

in facilitating the event. These facilitators represented all fifty states and several other countries; most facilitators were from outside the New York Metropolitan area. As one of these group facilitators, this writer led a table of participants in a discussion of the four program areas outlined above.

"Listening to the City" posed one of the most exciting yet challenging and complex facilitations this facilitator has ever experienced. As the largest participatory event of its kind, the sheer magnitude and logistics of the event took on historic proportions. Over 200 press organizations provided national and international coverage; the political, financial, and emotional stakeholders were either watching or participating in the outcome of this event.

The event's program agenda was designed with a mixture of guest speakers and table group discussions for the four program areas. A lead facilitator led the overall agenda and introduced speakers. Each of the 500 table facilitators had to listen for any modifications to the program. These changes were mostly in the area of discussion timeframes which will be described later in Step Five of the Facilitation Planning Methodology.

Each table facilitator appointed a Computer Recorder who paraphrased key discussion points and typed them into a laptop PC. Each facilitator sat next to the Computer Recorder and performed quality control of the summarized content. Both majority and minority discussion views were captured. This promoted group cohesion as dissenting viewpoints were captured as part of the input and not dismissed.

A "theme team" received input on each topic via a laptop PC located at each of the 500 tables in the main room. This team summarized the input from a central database and displayed the results on large screens to the entire audience. To then poll the audience, *AmericaSpeaks*TM provided each participant with use of a wireless keypad to answer questions on participant profiles, design likes and dislikes, and advice to city planners. Summarized results were polled for prioritization. Each group facilitator operated within this overall context and feedback loop. Individual table group discussion represented the key focal point and input which "Listening to the City" was designed to capture.

To prepare facilitators, *AmericaSpeaks*TM provided a choice of three four-hour orientation sessions on Friday, July 19, 2002. This facilitator selected the 2nd (afternoon) session as it provided organizers with a "dry run" and a chance to work out answers to difficult questions. This facilitator strategy of selecting the 2nd session also allowed a pre-event, evening window for reviewing rapport techniques and the six proposed WTC site plans. These rapid rapport-building tools are described next in Section III.

III. A Facilitator Toolkit of Rapid Rapport-Building Techniques

To succeed in real-time public facilitations, the 21st century facilitator needs a pre-selected toolkit of rapid rapport techniques which can achieve group cohesion quickly in a compressed timeframe. The facilitator must be well versed in the use of these rapport tools and should be comfortable switching between tools as appropriate. This section describes this toolkit for nontraditional facilitation which was used successfully at "Listening to the City".

Two of the most effective categories of real-time rapport-building tools are Active Listening and Applied Behavioral Modeling (Adams & Brown, 1985, 1990).

Active Listening is comprised of three "verbal" tools: paraphrasing, probing, and summarizing. Paraphrasing is where the facilitator repeats, in his or her own words, the message and feeling of the participant and checks to confirm that his or her understanding is accurate. In probing, the facilitator requests more information regarding a participant's thoughts and/or feelings. "Open-ended" questions may be used to elicit feedback. Summarizing is where the facilitator summarizes his or her understanding of the attendee's ideas, position, or progress and asks if the summary is accurate.

These three active listening tools were used repeatedly at "Listening to the City" to clarify attendee viewpoints quickly and summarize the discussion for computer input. Paraphrasing and probing were often used together before an initial summary was proposed; the process was iterative. For example, this facilitator used paraphrasing and probing to delineate key participant feelings and content in discussing improvements to the memorial mission statement to be engraved on a plaque at the WTC site. These tools helped to capture quickly the attendees' thoughts as some participants struggled to translate feelings into words.

In addition to active listening, rapport can be established between two or more people by minimizing differences on a "nonverbal" level (Adams & Brown, 1985,1990). In this category of Applied Behavioral Modeling techniques, differences are reduced between the facilitator and another person by "matching" or "mirroring" his or her posture, gesture patterns, voice (tone, rhythm, pitch, and speed), breathing (speed, location, and depth), and/or representational system. (The latter refers to Neuro Linguistic Programming's use of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic words to match and mirror the other person's "eye accessing" cues.)

To establish maximum rapport between a facilitator and an attendee, a facilitator's objective is to use the three active listening tools while reducing differences on as many nonverbal

levels as possible. At "Listening to the City", this facilitator established rapport by mirroring attendees' gesture patterns and voice speed while issues were being discussed, probed, and summarized. The result of this action was the creation of a rhythm in the conversation with attendees feeling they were being heard.

During a facilitation, these verbal and nonverbal tools can be applied effectively if the situational context is accurately interpreted. The latter can be accomplished utilizing a technique called, "The Three Streams of Communication" (Brown, 1985, & Hutchinson, 1990). In this multifaceted view of conversation, any discussion or dialogue can be viewed simultaneously from three perspectives: the Stream of Process, the Stream of Content, and the Stream of Emotions.

In the Stream of Process, communication is viewed in terms of "how" the facilitator and attendees are addressing an issue. For example, how much time is there to discuss the issue and build rapport? Is a meeting occurring face to face or by phone? Are there interruptions in the conversation which are disrupting rapport-building and limiting citizen input?

The Stream of Content focuses on "what" the facilitator and participant are addressing. Does the content or subject matter require clarification? Is more data needed?

The Stream of Emotions views a conversation in terms of the feelings the facilitator and attendee have during the facilitation including feelings about any issues. What are the emotions connected to this rapport-building attempt? What are the attendee's feelings about the content, the facilitator, or the process? Are feelings adversarial?

During any group conversation, all three communication streams are occurring at the same time. To be successful in any facilitation or rapport-building situation, a facilitator needs to pay equal attention to all three streams; often, attention to the Stream of Process and the Stream of Emotions is neglected with primary focus solely directed on the Stream of Content. The facilitator should be observing nonverbal behavior including body language, facial expressions, gestures, and eye contact as indicators of the Stream of Emotions. By monitoring the three communication streams of a discussion, a facilitator has an opportunity to accurately interpret what is occurring in the conversation and quickly assess how well rapport is being achieved between the facilitator and the attendees and among the attendees as a group.

In reference to a public participatory meeting, the Stream of Process must be monitored so there is enough time within a given discussion topic for everyone to speak and for viewpoints to be summarized and input into the computer. Likewise, the Stream of Content must be managed to ensure that conversation

stays focused on the subject matter and does not wander or get bogged down in extraneous details. Finally, a facilitator must view the Stream of Emotions so any underlying emotional issues are surfaced and rapport can be achieved.

In Listening to the City", this facilitator identified strong participant feelings against the proposed WTC site designs and used that energy to encourage participants to verbalize their concerns and identify design features that they wanted.

Armed with this facilitator's toolkit of rapid rapport-building techniques, the 21st century facilitator can employ active listening, applied behavioral modeling, and the concept of "the Three Streams of Communication" to establish rapport quickly in real-time. When used together, these techniques allowed this facilitator to achieve group rapport in a compressed timeframe of one day at "Listening to the City". The tools were applied in facilitating a very diverse group of individuals. This group became a highly successful and cohesive mini-community by the close of the event and worked together as an effective team. At the close of the meeting, table participants expressed approval of the day's events, applauded each other, and exchanged contact information.

The next section of this article presents a Facilitator Planning Methodology. This methodology provides a structured framework for planning to facilitate a public meeting in real-time, critiquing a facilitation's design in terms of rapport obstacles, and applying the just described rapport-building tools.

IV. Facilitator Preparation and Strategy: A Six Step Facilitator Planning Methodology

This section describes a six step Facilitator Planning Methodology which was developed to prepare for facilitating citizen summits such as "Listening to the City". The goal of this methodology is to produce the most successful facilitation possible by creating a thorough understanding of the facilitation context to maximize use of rapport-building and group cohesion techniques. The methodology provides strategies for analyzing a design's structure, participant exercises, and procedures; it identifies potential obstacles to group rapport-building and the subsequent impacts on effectively capturing citizen input during a public facilitation. The methodology can be applied to a design structure developed either directly by the facilitator or by a third party, i.e., *AmericaSpeaks*TM. The framework is especially useful for preparing a facilitator to analyze a facilitation design presented at an orientation session and quickly anticipate design problems so that backup and contingency plans can be developed.

The six facilitator planning methodology steps are:

1. Assess the Big Picture
2. Define the Facilitation's Goals and Objectives

3. Identify the Discussion Content and Gain Expertise
4. Analyze the Facilitation Design and Procedures to Identify Rapport-Building Obstacles
5. Identify Internal and External Impact Variables, and
6. Establish a Facilitator Credibility Strategy.

The methodology posits that these six steps, consisting of the big picture, goals and objectives, the content, the design, internal and external variables, and facilitator credibility, are all intrinsically interlinked with establishing group rapport and creating an effective working group of individuals. In the field, this methodology provided a framework for organizing the content of *AmericaSpeaks*TM orientation in real-time and delineating key information.

Each Facilitator Planning Methodology step and associated strategy are explained in the following paragraphs with examples provided from the "Listening to the City" case study. Rapport-building techniques, discussed previously in Section III, are presented where appropriate.

Step 1: Assess the Big Picture

The first step describes how a 21st century facilitator should initially approach facilitating a public participatory facilitation. The facilitator sizes up, at a high level, the overall context and importance of the outcome to an organization or group of people. To do this, the facilitator gathers pre-facilitation data on six items including:

- Location
- Date
- Time
- Duration
- Participants (and associated characteristics), and
- Facilitation Background.

An orientation session can provide answers to the first four meeting logistics items above. This was true for "Listening to the City". In reference to participants, knowing or obtaining a pre-assessment of the attendees and their goals aids the planning of a successful facilitation and represents a key Big Picture component. A facilitator in a traditional facilitation may personally know attendees before a facilitation especially if he or she consults internally to an organization. Or, the facilitator may have a pre-assessment of participants or may be working with attendees who share a common goal such as receiving leadership training, defining requirements for an information system, or visioning a better lifestyle.

However, what is unique about and most challenging of public participation facilitations is that table participants are not profiled in advance. This represents a challenge for facilitators as it is not known who will attend the event, what the hot personal issues will be, and what the attendee group dynamics will be like.

At "Listening to the City", orientation leaders informed facilitators that attendees would encompass a wide demographic range of diversity in terms of gender, age, household income, race, ethnicity, and geography. However, there was not advance knowledge of specific table participant profiles in terms of:

- Demographic characteristics
- Personality types
- Influencing styles
- Emotional stability
- Personal objectives / agendas
- Subject matter knowledge and expertise, and
- Data vs. non-data personality preferences.

All of these attendee profile characteristics can impact the success of a facilitator in establishing rapport between the facilitator and the group and among group members. To solve this knowledge gap, a key strategy for facilitating public meetings is to gather attendee profile data in real-time as table participants arrive and interact.

In the "Listening to the City" case study, table members were diverse and included a sculptor/3D visual artist/professor, a past president of the New York World Futures organization, and a director with the Port Authority of New York. This facilitator encouraged group members to assist each other in summarizing their discussion points for computer input. This direction allowed these different personalities to emerge and then adjust to each other's styles and cultural backgrounds in the context of performing cooperative tasks. For example, attendees helped an Asian participant summarize his ideas as he was not fluent in English. This cooperative strategy was an important aid in rapidly learning about attendees, forming a working team, and achieving group cohesion quickly as the event progressed.

The sixth Big Picture component is Facilitation Background. This component highlights a facilitation's importance and place within the overall economic, political, and/or historic concerns of the stakeholders sponsoring the event. It allows a facilitator to understand, in advance, which facilitation issues and

accompanying decisions will be important to discuss; this, in turn, can validate the effectiveness of the facilitation as a whole.

To thoroughly understand the high level context and background of "Listening to the City", this facilitator read, "A Planning Framework to Rebuild Downtown New York" by the Civic Alliance (2002) two weeks prior to the event. This allowed this Maryland facilitator to quickly come up to speed on New York City specific issues, the big picture for Lower Manhattan, and specific recommendations for transportation, pedestrian walkways, and economic and cultural redevelopment. This information supported the facilitator as an aid in fostering table discussion on the WTC site plans especially in the area of transportation hubs. Also, this background work enhanced facilitator credibility. Table attendees received their background data via a Civic Alliance Participant Guide provided in their event packets.

Step 2: Define the Facilitation's Goals and Objectives

In this step, a facilitator must identify the key goals and objectives of the facilitation so that group discussion is kept focused on producing the desired results for stakeholders. Most importantly, identifying goals and objectives prior to a facilitation enables a facilitator to plan the overall direction of the discussion and avoid any pitfalls in rapport-building. This is critical in real-time facilitation as there is not any time to make-up for either off-topic discussion or communication gaffes which impact building group cohesion and delay capture of citizen input. It is imperative that the 21st century facilitator obtain these goals and objectives during the orientation.

In the "Listening to the City" orientation, *AmericaSpeaks*TM (Lukensmeyer, 2002) stated that:

The goal of "Listening to the City" was to obtain advice for city planners in four program areas:

1. Hopes and concerns for rebuilding
2. Review of concept plans
3. Feelings on the memorial mission statement, and
4. Solutions for rebuilding lives.

The two objectives were:

1. To look at the features of the plans, and
2. To create an environment where everyone felt safe.

In the "Listening to the City" case study, this facilitator first gained knowledge of the goals and objectives during the

orientation session. The next day, people came to the town hall meeting intending to vote on the six proposed WTC site plans which had been published ahead of the event on CNN's website. Knowing the day's objective, this facilitator steered the discussion away from plan voting and, instead, focused the group on evaluating the features of the plans such as a proposed memorial site, walkways, promenades, transportation hubs and corridors, museums, etc. This strategy succeeded in achieving the first objective.

Also, advance knowledge of the goals and objectives avoided a potential conflict. One of my attendees arrived early and brought his own proposal for a WTC site. He wanted to distribute typed copies and have my table discuss his proposed design. Initially, this facilitator was resistant to the idea and concerned about the impact to the facilitation. However, in quickly reflecting on the day's first objective, this facilitator realized that the proposal could be evaluated in terms of features. The attendee's private agenda was turned into a group positive by cutting a deal. The participant was allowed to present his proposal during the site option discussion in exchange for summarizing his design into a few sentences for PC input. This strategy allowed the group to discuss an alternative other than the six plans and inspired group creativity and heightened participation. To further build rapport with the attendee, this facilitator agreed to give organizers a full copy of the proposal.

To address the second objective of creating a safe environment, facilitators had to be sensitive to the emotional topics of building on the WTC footprints as well as defining the design and message of the memorial. By allowing participants to express their feelings, monitoring the "Stream of Emotion", and ensuring all were involved in each discussion theme, this facilitator rapidly achieved a safe group environment which validated attendee emotions.

After assessing the big picture and defining the goals and objectives, a facilitator must next identify the content and subject matter of the facilitated discussion.

Step 3: Identify the Discussion Content and Gain Expertise

While it is not always necessary for a facilitator to be an expert on the content of the facilitation, the greater the knowledge of the subject matter, the easier it is for the facilitator to understand, paraphrase, and summarize key points. This capability improves the flow and rhythm of communication between the facilitator and attendees which in turn aids rapport-building. Also, in terms of communication, the facilitator can better manage the "Stream of Content" by recognizing discussion areas requiring further clarification or by providing additional data.

In the "Listening to the City" case study, an architect provided facilitators with a one-hour overview of the six WTC site plans during the orientation session. To further my content knowledge, this facilitator also studied large site plan handouts in-depth the night before the facilitation. This strategy of boosting personal knowledge of the content allowed this facilitator to answer specific attendee questions during a comparison of the six plans. As a result, facilitator credibility was increased among participants and communication of the content kept flowing.

At the close of the orientation, the facilitators were polled as to how many were interested in the architect's overview. Surprisingly, about 50% of the facilitators tuned out this content as they were not "data people". This observation indicated there were high odds that table attendees also might tune out the site plan presentation. Therefore, when this tuning out occurred the next day, this facilitator picked up the rhythm and intensity of the site plan discussion. This planned strategy succeeded in keeping the conversation moving and generating table input for the planners.

This "data" vs. "non data" personality profile can be identified real-time during a facilitation to better manage group conversation and maintain high group interest.

In addition to identifying content knowledge, the facilitator must identify how the overall facilitation design will affect communication flow, rapport-building, and the generation of citizen input. This challenge is presented in the next section.

Step 4: Analyze the Facilitation Design and Procedures to Identify Rapport-Building Obstacles

In Step 4, the facilitator defines both a facilitation process and participant exercises which will generate the required discussion to meet stakeholder goals and objectives. In traditional facilitations, the facilitator either designs or co-designs the design process and exercises to meet the goals of client engagements. However, for public participation facilitations, a third party is often hired to create the design. From the perspective of the 21st century facilitator, the pre-event orientation now becomes critical in planning the facilitation and represents the only opportunity to review the design. During the orientation, the facilitator must analyze the design in real-time simultaneous with receiving the design overview. This is especially difficult as large-scale public facilitations are now making extensive use of technology to record citizen input; problems with this technology must be anticipated especially in terms of disrupting group discussion and facilitator attention.

The Facilitator Planning Methodology uses three strategies to review an external design; they are:

1. Evaluate the proposed process design for logical flow, consistency, and mechanics. This includes identifying any possible interruptions, distractions, barriers, or technology problems which may impede rapport-building, disrupt discussion, and prevent or limit the generation and capture of citizen input.
2. Evaluate if the participant exercises and directions will be readily understood and prepare clarification examples in advance if needed.
3. Identify the time allotted for each discussion topic and the opportunities for and constraints on rapport-building and dialogue.

For "Listening to the City", *AmericaSpeaks*TM designed the process and program activities. To be successful, this facilitator needed to gain a rapid understanding of *AmericaSpeaks*TM design and procedures in order to anticipate direct impacts on the facilitation, communication, and rapport-building process.

My design analysis identified the following seven key concerns:

1. Heavy reliance on use of a laptop PC
2. Numerous facilitator manual procedures including table material setup
3. Importance of the person selected as Computer Recorder
4. Short allotted discussion timeframes
5. Required inventory of wireless keypads to prevent theft
6. A working lunch without scheduled personal breaks, and
7. A requirement for the facilitator to hold cards to obtain tech / Area Facilitator support.

Each of these concerns are briefly discussed below.

Use of the PC was of major concern. To minimize potential problems the day of the event, this facilitator reviewed the mechanics of the laptop PC operation at the end of orientation. These mechanics were seen as possibly interfering with the facilitation and rapport-building process and distracting attendees from the focus of conversation. A second concern was that, in the design, the PC functioned as the key mechanism used to physically capture and send citizen input to the database. Therefore, any PC problems could affect capturing the data or capturing it within the allotted discussion time periods. At "Listening to the City", the PC did malfunction. This facilitator kept the group focused on the exercises and succeeded in minimizing the problem. (The PC problem is discussed in more detail in Step Five.)

Due to a short planning window, this facilitator reviewed the manual procedures enroute to the event. Facilitators were required to assemble citizen information packets at the table; this procedure did reduce additional preparation time before the event began.

The Computer Recorder serves an important role at the table. After some table participants, who use computers often, displayed heavy resistance to serve as Computer Recorder, this facilitator influenced an executive assistant to take on the role. She proved to be outstanding in typing rapidly and accurately summarizing and capturing discussion input. This kept our internal table facilitation process moving forward smoothly.

In addition to the potential PC impact, another major design concern was the short timeframes allotted for each discussion topic. A strategy quickly emerged that, in order for the facilitation to proceed smoothly, this facilitator would have to monitor the length of each attendee's conversation. For example, if a session was allotted 30 minutes, conversation would need to be limited to a few minutes per person to ensure that each person had an opportunity to speak. This strategy worked successfully at the actual session, and each table attendee had an opportunity to participate.

Concerns regarding the inventory of wireless keypads and scheduling of personal breaks were handled through simple instructions to participants.

The seventh design concern was that the procedure of holding tech/Area Facilitator help cards while trying to facilitate would interrupt the group or distract the process. This impact was minimized by continuing to facilitate while holding the cards until help arrived.

As we have seen, analysis of a facilitation design can aid a facilitator in identifying design specific concerns. Since this analysis is conducted in real-time, a facilitator has a short window in which to prepare solutions for possible problems. Step 5 of the Facilitator Planning Methodology next presents other variables which can impact a facilitation.

Step 5: Identify Internal and External Impact Variables

Step 5 uses the output of Step 4's design and procedure analysis to further identify key facilitation factors which interrupt execution and the building of a smooth process flow.

To achieve this process flow, an adept facilitator must act as a project manager. That is, he or she **guides** a group of people in a process to produce rich and clearly defined and documented content while, at the same time, **managing and controlling** both internal and external variables. These variables can negatively disrupt and detract from the facilitation and rapport-building attempt.

First, internal and external impact variables are presented below. Then, specific problems which occurred at "Listening to the City" will be provided along with adaptive facilitator strategies.

An "internal" variable is defined as a factor directly related to the conversation which is taking place. Examples of internal variables which can disrupt a facilitation can include:

- Troublesome or argumentative personalities
- Participant side conversations
- Off topic discussion
- Out of scope discussion
- Conversation bogged down in minor details, and
- Discussion of current problems instead of future visions.

A facilitator is also challenged by "external" impact variables. An external variable is defined as a factor which impacts hearing or seeing the conversation or impacts focused participation of the attendees. Examples of external factors can include:

- Cell phone interruptions
- Acoustics and room structure/layout which affect hearing/seeing the conversation
- Operational mechanics and problems with laptop PCs, display screens, projectors, video equipment, lights, and microphones
- Outside noise and personnel interruptions, and
- External events which affect the emotional state and attention of participants.

The facilitator must manage all of these internal and external variables to:

- minimize disruption of the facilitation process
- ensure citizen input is summarized and captured, and
- create a rhythm of rapport-building and group cohesion.

In real-time facilitation, the 21st century facilitator must plan to identify the possibility of all these internal and external variables **prior to** the actual facilitation. The only opportunity to do this is during the orientation and any available timeframe prior to the event. The facilitator should, as much as possible, develop prearranged behavioral responses to these variables and should develop contingency and backup plans. Of course, the facilitator also must be resourceful during the actual facilitation and draw on his or her own repertoire of rapport-building techniques as the situation unfolds.

The facilitation at "Listening to the City" had a number of internal and external variables which required this facilitator to be resourceful in resolving problems, maintaining group rapport, and ensuring citizen input was captured. Several examples are noted below. Note that rapid rapport techniques and the Three Streams of Communication were highly useful strategies in mitigating problems and distracting factors.

Two internal variables and facilitator adaptive strategies included:

1. A participant's private agenda to present their own WTC site design to the group.

Adaptive Strategy: The participant's energy became a positive for group cohesion when the presentation was allowed in exchange for summarizing the proposal into a few sentences for discussion and computer input. This action resulted in the facilitator building quick rapport with the participant. Also, the facilitator and table attendees used active listening techniques of paraphrasing, probing, and summarizing to understand the participant's proposed site design.

2. Participants' reluctance to serve as Computer recorder.

Adaptive Strategy: Influence skills were used to locate a willing participant for this important discussion role.

Six external variables and facilitator adaptive strategies included:

1. The laptop PC could not upload data during the event.

Adaptive Strategy: The laptop PC was the critical tool in the process design for transmitting table discussion data to a centralized database. When the PC problem still was not fixed when the first exercise began, the entire table displayed a heightened stress that hard work and effort would be minimized, and input would not be captured and included in the event's proceedings. Being concerned that group rapport-building would be impacted severely, this facilitator maintained intense pressure on the Area Facilitator and the events' technical team to either fix the problem or find a workaround. Finally, the problem was resolved by recording discussion input on a diskette for later upload into the theme team's summarized proceedings database.

In this situation, attention to the Streams of Content and Emotion warned the facilitator early of an emerging group concern. Then, the facilitator took assertive action which allowed the rapport-building process to continue undeterred. This problem was used as an opportunity to build rapport between the facilitator and the group. A facilitator should respond and respond quickly when aware of an entire table's Stream of Emotion. By representing the group's concerns in a serious manner, the facilitator mirrored the attendees'

emotional level and demonstrated respect and active listening.

2. The waving of colored cards by the facilitator to obtain tech and Area Facilitator support.

Adaptive Strategy: Minimized this participant distraction by continuing to facilitate while holding the cards in the air until help arrived. This facilitator maintained focus on the attendee faces rather than looking at the cards and stayed focused on the Stream of Content. This, in turn, helped keep participants focused on the discussion.

3. Participants were late arriving at my table as a security and food line bottleneck caused delays.

Adaptive Strategy: Repeated facilitator introduction to establish facilitator credibility with all members of the discussion group.

4. "Listening to the City" began late compressing the discussion exercise timeframes.

Adaptive Strategy: Managed the Stream of Process throughout the day while carefully monitoring the progress of group cohesion. Kept discussion focused on the appropriate content. The length of each attendee's discussion was monitored so all table members had an opportunity to speak and sufficient time remained to summarize and capture citizen input.

5. The guest speaker did not acknowledge audience's skepticism that the day's input would make a difference.

Adaptive Strategy: Performed active listening to the guest speaker's content and noted the faces and reaction of group participants. During subsequent group discussion, monitored the Stream of Emotion and mirrored attendees' emotion and concern.

Note: The input from "Listening to the City" was used by city planners and, with other input, resulted in the scrapping of the six WTC draft proposals and the hiring of new design teams.

6. The press filming and interviewing attendees.

Adaptive Strategy: My attendees were not interviewed as my table was located more toward the central podium. It is important to note that this external variable can disrupt a facilitation and participant discussion and requires management of the Stream of Process.

Step 6: Establish a Facilitator Credibility Strategy

The Facilitator Planning Methodology views facilitator credibility as a key strategy which is planned before and established throughout a facilitation. In Step 6, the facilitator develops a plan to establish credibility with attendees and decides where and when in the process design this strategy will begin. This step's deliverable is a prepared, short, introductory backgrounder stressing prior facilitation work, professional experience, educational background, and any relevant subject matter expertise. This presentation is developed prior to the

facilitation and should be rehearsed for crisp delivery with a display of confidence.

For example, the night before "Listening to the City", this facilitator prepared a short background presentation listing his credentials for the facilitation. This included prior facilitation work, education, experience defining user requirements, and knowledge of urban planning issues. This presentation proved critical as table guests included a sculptor/3D visual artist/professor, a past president of the New York World Futures organization, and a director with the Port Authority of New York. As some attendees were skeptical of the six proposed WTC site plans, this facilitator was challenged by an attendee with his own site plan concerning the validity of the day's program. This occurred before the facilitation even began.

Although the exact timeframe in the design had been identified for presenting the facilitator introduction, this challenge required giving the presentation immediately and repeating it for later arrivals. Credibility needed to be established immediately on the spot to ensure cooperation. As mentioned previously, the proposal was allowed for group discussion in exchange for the attendee agreeing to boil it down and briefly summarize it for the proceedings. However, this facilitator was asked to demonstrate his own ability to summarize ideas in order to gain the attendee's agreement and trust.

In terms of strategy, this facilitator began the facilitation by openly declaring his goals and intent. This included stating that the facilitator would be neutral and was not allowed to vote on any issues. Also, because of the tight timeframes, each person could only get a few minutes to speak per exercise in order to allow everyone to participate. Everyone was asked to cooperate in limiting their discussion and asked to agree to this goal. The group responded favorably to this request and was especially sensitive to ensuring that the Computer Recorder, who was busy typing, had her opportunity to speak.

Furthermore, the participants were informed that the primary goal for the day was to treat each other with respect. This facilitator committed to ensuring he would meet any special requests including food requirements. Also, as this facilitator had stated he worked as an IT management consultant, the group looked to him to resolve a laptop PC crisis. By persistently attacking the problem, further credibility and trust was gained. This facilitator acknowledged each participant at the end of the day, and the group applauded each person and exchanged email addresses.

Establishing facilitator credibility as soon as possible is essential in leading a group of people through a facilitation process, achieving the desired output, and building group cohesion. Adams notes that in Kinlaw's model, "Stages For Exerting Influence", a person can successfully make initial contact with

participants during the "Moving Together" stage using the key components of credibility, rapport, and confidence (Adams from Kinlaw, 1985). Participants look to their facilitator for leadership and problem resolution as well as for feelings of trust and safety being established within the group.

Again, in this real-time "Listening to the City" facilitation, facilitator credibility, combined with a repertoire of active listening and applied behavioral modeling techniques, was critical in rapidly building rapport with a table of participants with whom the facilitator had no prior knowledge.

V. Summary

The new 21st century facilitator must be equipped with effective rapport-building tools and planning methodologies to facilitate public forums and citizen summits of diverse individuals addressing often emotionally charged topics. As table group members are asked to work together, reach consensus, and produce summarized discussion for PC input, the facilitator is tasked with building rapport quickly among discussion group members to create a working team.

These one day, real-time summits are dynamic and situational and involve huge stakeholders making decisions based on the public input they receive. The real-time mode of these events is causing facilitators to think and act differently about planning, designing, and leading facilitations. During these events, facilitators must keep participants on task and must be highly aware of and ready to respond to any process design mechanics which impede communication. When problems arise, adaptive strategies may need to be created on the fly as the time pressure of short allotted discussion windows may not allow every participant to speak and interact. As these events make greater use of new communication technologies, the facilitator must also be prepared to anticipate and deal with a very non-traditional set of problems.

This article has provided a means for the 21st century facilitator to successfully facilitate a real-time, one day public forum. A facilitator toolkit of rapid rapport-building techniques has been described which successfully achieved group cohesion quickly at the "Listening to the City" town hall meeting. This set of Active Listening and Applied Behavioral Modeling tools, in conjunction with the Three Streams of Communication, can effectively build rapport and provide the facilitator with multiple perspectives of group discussion. Based on this metacommunicative feedback, the facilitator can gain a deeper understanding of group dynamics and respond immediately to further develop group rapport between the facilitator and the group and among attendees.

This article has described how a new, six step Facilitator Planning Methodology can provide facilitators with a framework

for planning a facilitation for a real-time public event. This methodology was applied successfully at the complex and unique challenge of "Listening to the City"; it enabled a facilitator to use an orientation session to his advantage:

- To delineate key goals and objectives
- To identify and mitigate potential problems caused by design mechanics and internal/external variables, and
- To prepare adaptive strategies which foster group cohesion in a real-time compressed timeframe.

This structured methodology proved especially useful as the facilitator used a third party process design at "Listening to the City". It is hoped that this planning methodology's approach to identifying and organizing key design criteria will be of value to facilitators in the field.

This article has discussed how the Facilitator Planning Methodology's six steps, consisting of the big picture, goals and objectives, the content, the design, internal and external impact variables, and facilitator credibility, are all intrinsically interlinked with establishing group rapport.

The rapid rapport-building toolkit and methodology have been field tested and have worked extremely well even though each public forum provides a unique set of challenges. With the growing success of public facilitation, companies and organizations may decide to sponsor one day, quick turnaround facilitations to get results fast. Given this, both the real-time, one day facilitation and the 21 century facilitator may emerge as the norm as opposed to the exception.

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From Honolulu and Albuquerque to New York City Table 98 - Reflections from the Sea of Cortez, Sonora, Mexico

Helen Juliette Muller

“The witness has the authority that no one else has.” (Wiesel, 2002)

This statement captures why I volunteered to be a facilitator. I wanted to be involved, to lend my expertise, and to make a substantive contribution to the process of recovery and rebirth from September 11. As a qualitative researcher, I knew that by being at the Listening to the City (LTC) event I would establish a more intimate connection to the tragedy. New York City (NYC), moreover, is an anchor in my family history. In the late 1800s, my grandfather ran the city’s first metal arts plating company in Lower Manhattan. My father, born in 1890, grew up in Harlem and acquired his Ph.D. from Columbia University under the guidance of Thomas Hunt Morgan and the “fly lab” group in 613 Schermerhorn Hall. In 2000, my daughter began her academic career at the New School University as a faculty member. She witnessed September 11 as the first World Trade Center (WTC) tower fell and her faculty meeting was evacuated to the streets in Lower Manhattan only to watch the second tower collapse. I vividly remembered her fear and terror and the aftermath; she was safe but others were not so fortunate.

I felt a sense of excitement about being part of a unique experiment in citizen involvement that offered a constructive response to the reconstruction necessitated by violent destructive acts. I hoped that my email application would be selected as I responded to the request for volunteers. There seemed to be a lot of conditions but they fit me – experience with facilitating multicultural groups and sensitivity to dealing with strong emotions. Could this historical event capture the essence of what I knew to be meaningful citizen participation based on my extensive work with participatory planning in the Hawaiian Islands? That was the best professional experience of my life and a foundation for my future career as an academic. I now professed in a small-scale way, in the classroom and as a management faculty chair, what I had practiced in the 1970s

with our vigorous team who had worked to effect citizen participation.

In Hawaii, our team of community organizers, community health planners, public health students and professors, together, facilitated the organization of consumers into a network of “subarea health planning councils” on the island of Oahu. With a tiny budget, we utilized the framework of the Comprehensive Health Planning Amendments (1966) and later the National Health Planning Act (1975) to mobilize citizen participation in health services decision-making for local communities and, then, for the entire state. Over a seven-year period we set up a model citizen participation program in health services planning that was legislated into state law (Hawaii State Act 178-1977). We believed that consumer participation enhanced the growth and development of the individuals involved and that it increased the capacity of communities to make informed decisions over requisite health services that met their needs and pertained to particular geographical and cultural variations. As a result of our heartfelt efforts in the 1970s, eight community based health planning councils became actively involved in health policy setting throughout the state.

In New Mexico, moreover, in the 1990s, I advocated that the management curriculum at the University must more closely fit the needs of students who, often, came from the state’s culturally distinctive communities. For example, I championed the inclusion of the study and practice of “workforce diversity” into required undergraduate and graduate coursework. When American Indian students voiced their concerns that course work did not prepare them to return to their native communities, I worked with the native students to establish the first university course in the nation on American Indian Business and Management.

The LTC event, hopefully, would provide a new opportunity to work with the public – a similar process to what we labored with in Hawaii - but a different venue with modern technology, a larger scale, and all compressed into a single day! Could this unprecedented one day event really make a difference in people's lives and in the future of the city?

Values, Beliefs, and Skills

The essence of democracy is the involvement of its citizens in decision-making. At the facilitator training seminar, Carolyn Lukensmeier said that the core message of the LTC event was that “democracy works.” Sherry Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation that, so often, I had referred to in my doctoral studies, identified many types of citizen involvement from minimal to maximum and from cooptation to genuine. Citizen participation was the core premise underlying federal initiatives and community action in the late 1960s and 1970s such as the Community Action Programs (1964), Model Cities Programs (1966), health services planning programs mentioned above, and the Indian Self-Determination Act (1975). Even though a lot of community politics had prevailed around the implementation of such legislation there was relatively calm and little press coverage compared to the following. Saul Alinsky's (1969) community action was confrontational; Cesar Chavez organized citizen boycotts to support the farm workers; Martin Luther King made use of nonviolent demonstrations to place civil rights on the national agenda, and Betty Friedan, Bella Abzug et al facilitated consciousness raising groups in the women's movement.

Now, at the turn of the century, citizens seemed to be less inclined to exercise their fundamental democratic rights to influence public policy and even to vote. Were we losing our perspective on how fortunate we are to live in a democracy? Had David Korten's (1999) warnings become a reality – did corporations rule the world, I wondered, relegating citizens to conspicuous consumers indebted to credit card companies, victimized by advertising, and oblivious to the plight of poorer and totalitarian nations where few rights exist?

Democracy at work requires an intense commitment by public policy makers to let voices be heard and to provide people with requisite information upon which to make informed choices. Democracy is a continuous process – a work in progress; it is not a product that is completed or accomplished. For citizens to engage and believe in the process of participation, public officials must listen with open minds and demonstrate willingness to act upon people's input. This we did effectively in Hawaii by creating community-based health planning councils throughout the state. Whether in town hall forums or small group settings, facilitators of such participation must share common beliefs. I wondered whether these would be present at the LTC event:

- Valuing each person's unique perspective
- Respecting the right of each person to participate
- Creating opportunity for people to participate
- Believing people can make informed decisions over the course of their lives
- Providing people with the requisite information upon which to make decisions

The “fathers” of group dynamics and organizational change theories that formed the cornerstone of much management theory also valued these fundamental premises. After all, Kurt Lewin (1951) had left Nazi Germany. Warren Bennis (1976) and Herb Shepard (1981) et al's interest in *group dynamics* was from the perspective of each person's right and capacity to participate in group decision making and they argued that such processes could be observed, studied, and improved upon to foster group and organizational change. These were the foundations upon which my academic degrees were based and the premises of my professional work – I treasured the notion of being a change agent whether in Hawaii, New Mexico, or a day in NYC.

Meaningful participation does not just happen. I knew that certain skills were needed by citizens or consumers to be effective participants in any policy decision process because the kinds of societal problems with which policy makers, planners, and citizens must contend are inherently “wicked” – such problems are ill-defined and they rely upon elusive political judgments for resolution (see Rittel & Webber, 1973). Based on my professional experience such skills may include (adapted from Hayakawa & Muller, 1978: 31-33):

Awareness and knowledge – continual exposure to a wide range of knowledge about the issues, knowledge about constituents needs, relevant regulations and laws, and knowledge of the network of organizations and people and positions surrounding the issue so that an informed opinion can be rendered.

Role definition - defining one's point of view on the issues, understanding and learning others' points of view, formulating a group opinion or position that addresses constituents' needs, and articulating the position before diverse persons, organizations, public officials and professionals.

Organizational dynamics - parliamentary procedure, information analysis, identifying and utilizing resources within the group, defining planning and political strategies, group decision making, working with group

conflict including comprise and collaborative techniques, respecting alternative points of view.

Staff support - emotionally intelligent staff with requisite expertise essential to meaningful citizen participation efforts whether volunteer or paid. Staff who provide support services have to be willing to offer their own opinions but then to defer to citizen groups' decisions; staff must be clear that their role is facilitative.

LTC Observations

The Training Session

The tone that Carolyn Lukensmeier set at the facilitator training seminar was critical: "keep the experience close and humane" for the participants, she said. The spirit and the intention of the event were to emphasize families, emergency workers, and employees in Lower Manhattan, and to hold constant the notion of tragedy and the emotions around grief. The facilitators, she said, needed to remember that those people who lost the most may not be at the table and our job was to uphold integrity, spirit, safety, and intention. Already, sixty to seventy people, we were told, had worked full time for four months on making the event a reality. It was a massive undertaking and over 200 news outlets over the world would provide coverage.

Daniel Stone of America Speaks said that the LTC was the most sensitive, most emotional, and most complex event that he had worked on. People, he informed us, were in different stages of grief; they wanted to move forward and see action, they did not want to relive what happened. Furthermore, there was enormous sensitivity on the part of victims' families around building on the footprints of the North and South towers. The "big challenge for tomorrow" was for the LTC organizers and facilitators to present and manage complex information and then to make the connection with human values. Another staff member reminded us that the LTC event was part of the healing process and that facilitators "are the human face at the table...we must ensure the process and dignity at the table." We had been put on notice. My skills at empathic understanding with victims' families, I realized, would be drawn from both my professional training and my own experience with my parents' death and dying and from my compassionate understanding of their own, dramatic escapes from Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia – but they had survived. I strongly desired to rise to the occasion of the LTC event in the right frame of mind and with strong heart.

The human face at the training session where 150-200 of us packed into a long rectangular room was to be found in our fellow facilitators who, for the most part, sat silently and listened attentively and with strong emotion for three and one half hours. Being continuously talked to and asking few questions was

unusual for process-oriented folks like us. I was impressed with the American Speaks trainers' steadfast confidence in our collective expertise, given the enormity of the task before us, but at that point, they had no other choice! They trusted us to make the event work for thousands of people in ten hours and to balance the complex agenda of detailed information giving and wide ranging discourse with steadfast caring for delicate emotions. Brief introductions en masse permitted us facilitators to be recognized by region and by profession. Astonished, I joyfully recognized the Hawaii delegation of three women who had flown over 5000 miles to bear witness also. I recalled how each one of these women had touched my life several decades ago either through friendship, by public health profession, or by introduction to my first community organizing experience. I had come full circle from Pearl Harbor to New York City and back – the threads of my life became interwoven in this extraordinary volunteer experience.

The Event

Our group at table 98 was vocal and highly interactive. Each person came with a different agenda. I was impressed with their knowledge and I hoped that my lack of familiarity with NYC would not be a disadvantage but I reminded myself that my reason for being a facilitator was my expertise in the *process*. When the 70 year-old Polish immigrant architect from the Bronx announced that he had come because he objected to the WTC plans, I wondered whether the tone of our group could turn sour. When an experienced young woman from Brooklyn who was an urban planner and had attended a prior event announced that she would be the computer recorder, I considered whether she would enter her ideas or those of the group. I knew that a family member of a WTC victim was assigned to our table; I questioned whether I could display empathy without being overly attentive. When a facilitator at an adjacent table asked me how to handle a delicate situation at her table, I eagerly reached out with emotional support and advice: a very young, distressed, fiancée who had lost her future husband in the WTC disaster brought a long typed letter that she wanted dealt with – how to be inclusive of her agenda without losing the other participants at that table? I offered that each person needed attention and that to single out one person's concerns over the other might compromise the integrity of the LTC design and process.

I quickly realized that other facilitators might have more complex issues than my table exhibited and I settled down into a neutral, supportive, even handed manner of keeping the agenda going, assuring that each voice had substantive input and that there was a balanced dialogue. I practiced drawing people out and giving reinforcing feedback that their opinion mattered. Keeping a balance among comments so that everyone could fully participate was important. When some individuals tried to dominate conversation, I would gently suggest that we needed other voices expressed. Such careful intervention worked – the

group worked together not against one another. At the end, I was heartened when one Table 98 member offered that the experience went well because I had assured that each person at our table had a voice.

Carolyn kept us all on track; table participants were in a constant paper shuffle; lunch came and went; the hand held remotes for voting worked; time evaporated. I was surprised that the officials from the Lower Manhattan Development Authority and the Port Authority appeared to be all white men. I was taken aback. NYC was one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse cities in the world, how could this possibly be? I could not help but think, again, about the dialogues I frequently had with students and colleagues about white male privilege. Hawaii was the only place where I had lived in which people from many different ethnicities held powerful positions (politically and organizationally) and where women were often in charge. I remembered with dismay when I returned to the mainland – California – for doctoral studies, my professors were all white males. In New Mexico, moreover, with the second highest proportion of non-white residents after Hawaii, white males still dominated the business sector and the higher-level positions at the university. The American Indian tribes, just like native Hawaiians, were the poorest people in the state. Anglo-Americans continue to find it hard to share power. Was this type of privilege or the nature of privilege somehow connected to the events of September 11? People who are denied access to power become frustrated and, at times, angry. Certainly, most Saudi Arabians, who live in a tightly controlled theocracy with patrols of religious police, are denied access to democratic processes – and some of them became terrorists (see Wright, 2004).

Carolyn and the facilitators' facilitators (who oversaw a region of the tables) kept us all together. She was extraordinarily well connected to the day's agenda and extraordinarily sensitive to the varying emotions of the 4000 plus people in the Jacob Javits Center. The day flowed seamlessly and the individual parts all fit well together. The staff of American Speaks attention to detail demonstrated brilliant foresight. The world was watching us. The sentiment in the hall was clear – people overwhelmingly did not support the proposed site plans. They wanted more simplicity and more attention to the memorial. Financial interests, many commented, appeared to overshadow the site designs. Concerns expressed by people at my table and others questioned whether the officials on-site would really listen to the voices being expressed. The polling results clearly demonstrated that those present did not have much confidence that their voices would truly be heard. Some tense moments transpired in the hall and at our table. Quick and decisive responses by the NYC public officials in the room that they would reconsider and seek new site designs indicated that the LTC process was working and that modern technology had helped to make the responses of participants at the massive event instantly available to both

officials and the rest of us. We facilitators were tired but we felt gratified that our twelve-hour day had helped the voices in the city to be heard.

Further Reflections

I write this essay on sabbatical leave here in Northern Mexico, in a tiny *pueblito* on the Sea of Cortez, far away from NYC and the events of September 11; life is much the same as it was hundreds of years ago. I reflect upon the fact that Hernando Cortéz, the conquistador (a European terrorist in his days), dramatically changed the lives of indigenous people (Todorov, 1984). In the early 1500s, he brought death, destruction, disease, the Church, and some innovations, but not democracy to this region. The local Seri Indians who, historically, fought the Spanish and then the Mexican, now lived in remote impoverished communities up the coast prideful of their culture and mindful that they still fight modernity to fend off assimilation.

Only recently, when the PRI ruling party was roundly defeated, after about 80 years in power, and President Fox and the PAN party rose to office did democracy finally become evident in Mexico. The local *pueblito* mayor, however, is appointed by the elected mayor of the State capitol; there is no means for people here to exercise democratic rights except in state or national elections (people are required to vote in national elections). By contrast, we in the U.S. are privileged to have a participatory democracy that can work locally and to have a myriad of nonprofit organizations, comparatively well funded and well staffed, that monitor and facilitate citizen action and the dissemination of information (like America Speaks).

From my first viewing of the WTC site plans on television in Albuquerque, I thought them limited in design with little choice of alternatives. While at the LTC event, I began to think that we (facilitators and participants) might have been co-opted (Arnstein, 1969). Was this event a set up by Port Authority officials responsible for the WTC site leases? There was much prior dissent around the six plans before the LTC event. It could be that this massive experiment in citizen involvement around tragedy was viewed as a solution for getting out from under the constraints of the lease. Sensible persons independent of such financial entanglements would certainly argue for better choices of site designs – this was apparent to the participants at Table 98 and many others. Had public bureaucrats truly been so detached from public sentiment that they had not realized its initial skepticism? This was hard to imagine and the thought lingered with me. Perhaps these issues could have been resolved earlier and the event used to further public dialogue on more substantive WTC site and community reconstruction alternatives. The 70 year old Polish immigrant architect at our table was right – the choices put before us showed no remarkable creativity and lacked a competitive nature.

In sum, the combination of small group facilitation and grand scale public dialogue coupled with historic tragedy and input on public policy does reflect and reinforce our democratic tradition. The LTC event permitted concerned and grieving people to come together to contribute their ideas and their skills to reconstructing the WTC environs. Even though in the synthesizing and voting process many individual ideas seemed to be merged into broader categories, at the individual tables, each participant's voice was heard, acknowledged, and appreciated. The outcome of the LTC event demonstrated that fractured lives and deep public sentiment can rise above financial interests. The one day event had accomplished a great deal; it was vitally important because citizens had voiced their concerns and public policy leaders did listen to the voices of the city and had to publicly declare a reconsideration of the site plans on that day. It was a privilege to bear witness and to contribute to this extraordinary event.

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Behind Open Doors: Lessons Learned from Facilitating Public Participation at Large Scale Events

Tinka Markham Piper

ABSTRACT

Listening to the City is a valuable blueprint for planning and facilitating future meetings. This paper is divided into two sections, public participation and small-group facilitation. Each section discusses best practices that emerged from the event. In the area of public participation, three best practices include create a climate that encourages input; clarify the parameters and impact of involvement; and provide information to participants about the proposed topic. In the area of small group facilitation, three best practices include recruit participants from a range of demographics to encourage diverse viewpoints; provide training for facilitators despite their experience; and make available additional resources during the event.

KEYWORDS

public participation, group facilitation, leadership, lessons learned, training, involvement, best practices, decision-making

Over the past year, New York City has received accolades for its resiliency, spirit and determination. But on the morning of July 20, 2001, the city truly did seem its best. On that morning, over 6,000 people throughout the country and even the world gathered at the Jacob Javits Center to participate in a dialogue about the rebuilding of Lower Manhattan. Included in this impressive number were 5,000 participants, 500 facilitators, hundreds of volunteers, counselors, politicians and media. But the common denominator was being an interested citizen, and one who believed in participation as a powerful tool for action.

I was one of the 500 table facilitators in the event and it was a privilege to participate in such an inspiring day. The “Listening to the City” event provides an intriguing arena to examine how public participation and small group facilitation can engage the public in decision-making. The event combined face-to-face dialogue and the benefits of small discussion groups with innovative technology and large-scale public participation.

The historic event is a valuable blueprint for planning and facilitating future meetings. This paper is divided into two sections, public participation and small-group facilitation. Each section discusses best practices that emerged from the event. In the area of public participation, three best practices include create a climate that encourages input; clarify the parameters and impact of involvement; and provide information to participants about the proposed topic. In the area of small group facilitation,

three best practices include recruit participants from a range of demographics to encourage diverse viewpoints; provide training for facilitators despite their experience; and make available additional resources during the event.

Public Participation

This section describes three best practices for public participation including create a climate that encourages input; clarify the parameters and impact of involvement; and provide information to participants about the proposed topic. For each best practice, there is a discussion of its actual application at “Listening to the City,” followed by a summary of overall lessons learned for planners and facilitators at future events.

Best Practice 1: Create a climate that encourages input

Application

The main room, as large as a football field, contained 500 tables, eight large viewing screens and a central stage. There was a sensitive attention to detail to create a dynamic, supportive and lively atmosphere within the large and potentially impersonal space. Large and beautiful wall hangings of New York City landmarks hung on all the walls, on loan from the New York Historical Society. Live, soothing music was performed on the central stage as participants entered the room. Each table had a

bright solid color tablecloth numbered with a clearly marked sign, a computer and reading material for each participant. The abundance of information on each table communicated industriousness, the computer, efficiency and accountability. Kleenex was available in the event of potentially difficult moments.

Throughout the day, the lead facilitator and presenters evoked a sense of respect and appreciation for all participants and highlighted both the remember and rebuild aspects, the core themes of the day. Remembrance was captured by commemorating the tragic events that had brought the group together--family members, displaced workers and residents were present at each table, a short video about September 11, 2001 was shown and a family member read a "Memorial Mission Statement." There was a focus on rebuilding through the design presentations and the individual table discussions structured around the future planning of Lower Manhattan.

Lunch was delivered to each table for a "working lunch" that further contributed to the industrious mood. At the end of the day, participants were given a poster of New York City as a thank you for their efforts.

Lessons Learned

An essential question to consider when planning a large-scale public participation event is: What kind of climate needs to be created to stimulate conversations and encourage people to feel as if their input is valuable? Creating an appropriate atmosphere is an essential task so that the meeting space reflects the task at hand. A good discussion needs a good setting.

In creating a supportive space, several details are important: comfortable chairs, availability of food and beverages, well-marked bathrooms, good lighting and acoustics, and occasional breaks for participants to move around. While all of these details make participants more at home, there also needs to be a visual focal point, a sense of leadership and a common goal represented within spatial terms.

It is equally essential for presenters and facilitators to communicate a sense of professionalism, respect and appreciation for participants. As a facilitator at an individual table, a sense of openness can be reflected in the initial establishment of rapport when meeting and integrating participants. Within the day's agenda, time should be set aside at the beginning to allow for table interaction among participants. Individual nametags are helpful to establish a first-name basis among participants. Presenters should communicate their enthusiasm and dedication to the task at hand, thank participants for their efforts and welcome them to share their views in meaningful dialogue.

Best Practice 2: Clarify the parameters and impact of involvement

Application

Throughout the day, several participants questioned the impact of their involvement, wondering how their input might actually influence decision-makers, especially since there was widespread public suspicion that decisions had already been made. Some of their questions included: "What is our impact, really? Who is listening to us? What happens to the information that we are sharing today?"

A number of these questions were addressed by brief presentations from key stakeholders (representatives from Port Authority and the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation) but participants still wondered if their feedback would end up in a "...dusty filing cabinet," as one man at my table put it. The use of technology and instant compilation of feedback broadcasted on the giant screens helped to alleviate some concerns. At the event's closing, a "Preliminary Report" was handed out to each participant, outlining issues discussed during the day. Participants were extremely impressed by the speed and detail of the report; its contents assuaged concerns about their impact on the decision-making process. I overheard a participant at a neighboring table, "Hey, look! Here is one of our table's quotes, six hours later, written down and everyone else is reading it..." A final, even more comprehensive report was made available on the "Listening to the City" website a few weeks after the event.

At the end of the day, representatives from the Mayor's Office and the Port Authority reflected what they had heard from the participants to convey that they were "listening to the city." Overall, while many participants left feeling that their comments would be incorporated along the way, some still feared that despite the great effort, their voices would remain unheard.

Lessons Learned

In public participation events, it is important to make explicit at the beginning of the day how feedback generated during discussions will be used—who will receive it, how it will be incorporated into a decision-making process, and how long this process will take place. While planners may be uncertain exactly how public feedback will be analyzed and implemented, it is essential to establish specific channels of distribution so that it is clear what kind of information needs to be gathered at the event. Participants want to know where their views are going and who is going to listen to them. "Listening to the City" was able to use state-of-the-art technology to facilitate real time feedback during the event. This is an ideal scenario, but if such technological tools are not available, planners should still devise low-tech feedback methods. These may include oral announcements, flipchart use, or post-event publishing and broadcasting in local media.

While providing participants as much concrete information about the feedback process, it is also critical to acknowledge concerns about not being heard. This acknowledgement validates fears and builds credibility among participants that planners and facilitators understand their concerns.

The participation of key stakeholders in a public forum communicates that there are important decision-makers who are listening. At "Listening to the City," the presence and participation of multiple key stakeholders was essential in alleviating some concerns about "...not being listened to by the power guys..." as shared by one participant. Additionally, public officials and key stakeholders may also circulate a room and sit in on individual group discussions to be an authentic part of the dialogue.

At the end of the event, it is essential to create the time and space to reflect back to the participants what has been heard. Whether this information is shared in a verbal or written format, it is necessary that some form of summary or "next steps" is discussed.

Best Practice 3: Provide information to participants about the proposed topic

Application

AmericaSpeaks believes that "*democracy is informed decision-making.*" Accurate and comprehensive information enhances participation in a legitimate decision-making process. There was a clear and focused effort to educate participants about the twin efforts of "remembering and rebuilding" Lower Manhattan to allow for informed dialogue. For example, specific presentations were given to instruct participants about rebuilding the World Trade Center site (providing the context for regional and Lower Manhattan and outlining the six concept plans). To inform participants about the memorial process, a family member shared a draft of the "Memorial Mission Statement" that will be used to guide the memorial design process. Also, a short video that memorialized September 11th and highlighted other prominent national and international memorials was shown.

Each participant received a packet of written material at their seat including a "Listening to the City" participant guide that outlined the diverse elements of the effort (transportation infrastructure, economic development and employment, housing, parks and culture, and creating a memorial), maps of Lower Manhattan, and information on all the key stakeholders and decision-makers. This compilation of background material, proposals and ideas assisted the process of informed dialogue. However, on the facilitator's end, the biggest challenge was how to help participants deal with complex and potentially emotional information and still remain connected at the human level. Each participant brought specific values, beliefs and concerns that were essential to incorporate in discussions at each table.

Lessons Learned

When planning a public participation event, it is essential to ask, "What do participants need to know in order to be informed decision-makers?" and "Who or what can communicate this information?" and "How much information is too much?" When discussing specific proposals, it is essential that everyone have the same material to learn from so that views are grounded and supported by material. This way, relevant factual information can be considered from multiple points of view. At the same time, it is necessary to take into account the different ways that information can be shared and match it to the situation and the audience. Information can be communicated via written materials, oral presentations and videos or films. Literacy levels of participants should be taken into account.

Some overall helpful written materials may include a participant's guide that outlines the key information needed for the day (including questions to stimulate thought and conversation); background data on the specific issue (history, impact and challenges); and worksheets for participants to gather thoughts and jot down ideas. Participants should be given ample time to absorb the information provided. It is important to set a limit to how much information is presented. Can participants digest this material within an introductory phase of the event?

Small Group Facilitation

This section describes three best practices for small group facilitation, including recruit participants from a range of demographics to encourage diverse viewpoints; provide training for facilitators despite their experience; and make available additional resources during the event. For each best practice, there is a discussion of its actual application at "Listening to the City," followed by a summary of overall lessons learned for planners and facilitators at future events.

Best Practice 1: Recruit participants from a range of demographics to encourage diverse viewpoints

Application

One of the most promising characteristics at the event was the impressive diversity of participants. As a facilitator, my table included two family members who had lost their daughter, a police officer, two residents of Lower Manhattan, a political activist, an elementary school teacher, a musician, an architect and a minister. There was significant cultural, ethnic, gender and income diversity at the table. As a result of extensive recruitment strategies, a similar heterogeneity was apparent at many of the tables. The diversity at each table mirrored the diversity of the entire room and let participants hear a range of concerns even in small groups.

Lessons Learned

One of the most significant experiences for participants is the sense of community and dialogue that is fostered at their individual groups. This dialogue relies on bringing diverse people with varying experiences together, and this diversity is the result of concerted outreach and recruitment strategies. Advertising for events can occur through newspapers, television and radio programs, community outreach, canvassing and the identification of key opinion leaders may be effective in assisting with recruitment for hard-to-reach populations. A key ingredient for a dynamic facilitation experience is the wide participation of people so that a mixture of gender, age, household income, race, ethnicity and geography is truly represented in the conversation.

Best Practice 2: Provide training for facilitators despite their experience

Application

The 500 facilitators at the event came from all 50 states and several foreign countries and represented academic institutions, consultant groups, government agencies, non-profit organizations and the private sector. Each facilitator participated in a four-hour training on the Friday before the event that was available several times during the day to accommodate schedules.

The comprehensive training included introductions from the lead facilitators and planners, a description of "Listening to the City" project, an overview of the program and a detailed review of the facilitator guide. In the middle of the training, an icebreaker was helpful in demonstrating the diversity and commitment of the facilitators. The exercise enabled facilitators to learn about one another's home location, occupation and relationship to the events of September 11th.

Since there was a strong media interest in the event (over 200 media organizations were represented), the trainers discussed guidelines for working with the media, especially regarding potentially disruptive behaviors to the table and participants' and facilitators' rights about being filmed or interviewed. Brief presentations were also given by a mental health counselor who discussed potential difficulties participants might experience and resources available to address these needs. A technology expert explained the computer and keypad use, and following the training, facilitators were invited to test out computers and ask additional questions. In addition, at the end of the actual event, facilitators met in groups of 10 or 15 with their Area Facilitator to debrief the day's events. The debriefing provided an opportunity for all facilitators to share experiences and provide feedback from the day.

Lessons Learned

While facilitators may come with impressive and diverse experience, it is essential to provide training regarding the particular event. A comprehensive training may include an introduction to the planners and key stakeholders, background information on the event, the day's agenda and an overview of the event's goals. An additional helpful training tool is a Facilitator Guide that outlines program activities, table facilitator tasks and materials. Finally, it is important to discuss the key role that a facilitator plays in educating and informing a group about an issue. While neutrality is a key aspect of a facilitator's role, they are often required to provide essential information and answer specific questions and need to be equipped to perform this function.

During the training, facilitators have the chance to meet one another and get a clearer sense of the actual program and their responsibilities. These interactions may foster an initial sense of teamwork among facilitators. This sense of solidarity and commitment to the goal of deliberative democracy may strengthen their group role at the event. Facilitators may help one another during set-up, provide problem-solving assistance or answer questions. When recruiting facilitators, one may assess previous experience in teams or teamwork capacity.

If possible during the training, it is helpful to walk through the actual space with facilitators so that they can visually prepare themselves. And after the training, as accomplished at "Listening to the City," a debriefing session is a helpful tool for facilitators to share experiences and provide recommendations for planners for future events.

Principle 3: Make available additional resources during the event

Application

There was an abundance of additional support and resources provided during the day to enhance the facilitation experience. The room was divided into four areas, each headed by a Floor Manager. Each of the four areas was further divided into clusters of 10 tables with an assigned Area Facilitator. Technical support was quickly and easily accessed as facilitators were given red and green cards to hold up in the event of questions—red for an Area Facilitator, green for computer assistance. Counselors were available throughout the room in the event that a participant needed additional emotional assistance or just a break. Volunteers brought lunches to each table and assisted with clean up.

Additional resources also included language specific tables for Spanish-speaking and Cantonese-speaking participants, sign language translators, large print and Braille materials, assisted listening devices, childcare, and access transportation for

disabled participants. In the lobby, constituent booths were set up for participants to get information on personal issues and problems that they wanted resolved but could not be addressed in the table discussion. Finally, nine experts from the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation were available to facilitators if participants at tables had technical issues about the proposed plans or questions that facilitators couldn't answer.

Lessons Learned

What additional assistance might facilitators need to do their job well? It is important to anticipate specific needs that participants may have, especially ones that facilitators may not be able to fulfill themselves. The type and volume of resources depends on the nature of the event and the needs of both participants and facilitators.

Many facilitators might feel that they are not technologically savvy, inexperienced in dealing with grief, unable to speak Spanish or unfamiliar with a particular area (i.e. New York City). However, by providing computer assistance or mental health counselors or translators or maps, facilitators can continue their work at their tables, feeling confident that they have resources at their disposal if the need should arise. Additionally, in the event of a medical emergency or abusive or disruptive participants, an emergency response service or security presence should be available.

Conclusion

There was a tremendous public consensus after "Listening to the City" that it was both a historic and exemplary event for creating public dialogue. Subsequent events, including the elimination of the initial six proposals and the establishment of a new design competition, demonstrated the influential extent of public dialogue. Public participation at the Javits Center had been tremendously effective in affecting a public decision-making process; participants truly altered the course of events for the redevelopment of Lower Manhattan.

The challenge of any large-scale public event is about integrating the part into the whole. How do you make the individual feel connected to the small group? How do you integrate the small group into the whole convention? And how do you make the convention an integral part of the larger city? These six lessons learned are intended to sharpen how we participate and contribute as citizens.

a. An essential question to consider when planning a large-scale public participation event is: What kind of climate needs to be created to stimulate conversations and encourage people to feel as if their input is valuable?

b. In public participation events, it is important to make explicit at the beginning of the day how feedback generated during

discussions will be used—who will receive it, how it will be incorporated into a decision-making process, and how long this process will take place.

c. At the end of the event, it is essential to create the time and space to reflect back to the participants what has been heard.

d. When planning a public participation event, it is essential to ask, "What do participants need to know in order to be informed decision-makers?" and "Who or what can communicate this information?" and "How much information is too much?"

e. The challenge of any large-scale public event is about integrating the part into the whole. How do you make the individual feel connected to the small group? How do you integrate the small group into the whole convention? And how do you make the convention an integral part of the larger

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Listening to the City on the M34

Deborah A. O'Neil and Margaret M. Hopkins

ABSTRACT

This article describes a unique experience of spontaneous public participation following the Listening to the City event. The authors, facilitators at Listening to the City, found themselves experiencing that event from an entirely new vantage point as they rode a bus filled with participants from the event and non-participants across New York City. They share their reflections on the power of positive public engagement in which they participated during that cross-town bus ride.

KEY WORDS

public participation, facilitator, participant, Listening to the City

“Democracy begins in human conversation. The simplest least threatening investment any citizen may make in democratic renewal is to begin talking with other people about these questions, as though the answers mattered to them.” (Greider, 1992, p. 411)

This is the story of a remarkable bus ride across New York City in the late afternoon of Saturday, July 20, 2002. While riding a cross-town bus we experienced democracy at work, the power of positive public engagement, in unforeseen ways. Through our conversations on that bus, we became more consciously aware of participating in a true dialogue with a community of strangers.

At 4:30 p.m. we walked out of the Javits Convention Center feeling exhilarated, overwhelmed, grateful and exhausted. We had both spent the last 8 hours working as facilitators for the Listening to the City event. Listening to the City was a forum created for citizen participation in the conversation about the redevelopment of Lower Manhattan and the creation of a memorial to the victims of September 11th. Over 4,000 people had gathered that day in the cavernous Jacob Javits Convention Center on the west side of Manhattan to take part in the conversation about the future of lower Manhattan. Being facilitators of 10-person table conversations at this event had been an extraordinary experience. Throughout the day we participated in the heartfelt sharing of thoughts and feelings from diverse stakeholders. While participants came from different places for various reasons, we were all remarkably unified in our resolve and hope for the future. Listening to the City enabled us to understand and appreciate our connections with one another.

Now that the event was over, we were hurrying to get across town to the upper east side of Manhattan for another commitment. The only means of transportation from the convention center is either a taxicab or the M34, the 34th Street cross-town bus. Since there were no available cabs, we walked over to the bus stop at 11th Avenue and 34th Street planning to take the bus across the city. We thought it would give us the opportunity to sit quietly, reflect on our day, and share what we had experienced as facilitators at the event.

We rounded the corner to find an extremely crowded bus stop. A bus pulled up bursting with people from the event who must have boarded at 12th Avenue. We got on amidst a cacophony of noise, people talking and jostling for positions as they flooded onto the bus. People were packed like sardines and the two of us ended up standing amid strangers in different parts of the bus.

What unfolded was a totally unexpected but powerful debriefing experience. High energy, animated conversations had sprung up among small groups of people all over the bus. Because people were standing so close together, whether you started as part of a conversation or not, you soon became part of it. There were multiple, organic, amorphous conversations in process. Individuals were remarking to each other “Oh, you were just at Listening to the City?” “Yes, you as well?” “Yes, what did you think about the day?” “Wasn’t it powerful?” “So many people...” Comments followed such as “It was so important for me to be here today because I care so much about the city.” “I am really hopeful that something will happen.” “I feel so excited about what happened today.” “I am so hopeful, but not so sure, you know how sometimes these things go when the

politicians get involved.” As people got on and off and we became even more physically separated, we would periodically look for each other and exchange a wave and a smile.

Another event that was shaping the dynamics of the M34 bus crowd was an explosion at a downtown Con Edison generator earlier that afternoon. It had been announced at the convention center during Listening to the City. Because the cause of the explosion was unknown at that point, there had been a heightened sense of “Oh my god, what was that? Are we being attacked again?” A day of powerful and moving conversations at Listening to the City combined with this news about a mysterious explosion added to the emotional intensity of people’s exchanges on the bus. It also caused practical concerns about how people were going to get home, because subways south of 34th Street were shut down and the city streets were gridlocked.

It was clear from listening to Cindy, Gloria and others on the bus that Listening to the City and the subsequent bus ride were healing experiences. The social contexts of the event and the community of strangers on the bus had transformed the trauma of September 11th into a process of renewal and hope for the future of the city.

We were both still wearing our Listening to the City badges that prominently identified us as facilitators. Amidst the continual shifting of people and positions, Margaret ended up standing next to a young woman (Cindy) who was seated, who looked up and noticed her badge. Cindy thanked Margaret for volunteering as a facilitator. Margaret was taken aback because she felt privileged to be there and certainly wasn’t expecting thanks. She told Cindy that she felt compelled to contribute her time for such a meaningful event.

Margaret asked Cindy what had brought her to the event. Cindy said she had lost her brother at the World Trade Center on September 11. Margaret said she could only imagine the courage it took for her to attend. Cindy replied that she felt she had to be there, that she needed to make sure that her voice and his voice were heard. At that point, both Margaret and Cindy got tears in their eyes and Margaret told her how much she admired her for being there and Cindy again thanked Margaret for being a facilitator. Cindy reflected that the day had been overwhelming and painful, but she felt as though some momentum had begun. She was encouraged by the direction the discussion had taken and hopeful about the direction the officials would take based on

citizens’ input. While the event reminded her of her family’s loss and how sad she was, it also gave her a vision to look forward to. The conversation then turned to what each did for work and where each lived. Cindy got off the bus at 7th Avenue and they said good-bye, take care and thank you, having shared a few intimate moments on a crowded cross-town bus reflecting on their shared experience.

At the same time in another part of the bus, Deb was engaged in a conversation with an older woman who walked with a cane (Gloria). It was very difficult for Gloria to maneuver herself on the crowded bus so Deb helped find her a seat and shielded her from the jostling bodies as the bus proceeded east across 34th Street. Gloria found a seat toward the front of the bus and Deb eventually ended up sitting down next to her. Gloria noticed Deb’s facilitator badge and asked where she had come from, why she had volunteered to facilitate, and what her experience of the day had been. Deb in turn asked her why she had been there. Gloria said she worked at a social services agency in lower Manhattan and that it was critically important for her to make sure she represented the voices of the people she served who did not have the opportunity or the means to be at the event.

This conversation lasted from 10th to Madison Avenues and ranged from the power and the excitement of being part of Listening to the City to practical concerns about how Gloria would get home to the Bronx since the subways were unreliable due to the generator explosion. She decided that taking an express bus up Madison Avenue was her safest route home, said good-bye and thank you to Deb, and slowly made her way out of the bus.

It was clear from listening to Cindy, Gloria and others on the bus that Listening to the City and the subsequent bus ride were healing experiences. The social contexts of the event and the community of strangers on the bus had transformed the trauma of September 11th into a process of renewal and hope for the future of the city. Throughout history, rites of healing have traditionally taken place in social settings, providing an awareness of group identity and cohesion for those involved (Bloom, 1998).

A woman (Veronica) who had not attended Listening to the City boarded the bus in Herald Square at 6th Avenue. She was simply trying to get downtown for dinner with her niece. She immediately said “Oh my goodness, this is an awful mess” and then realized that the subway problems and power outage weren’t the main topic of the bus conversations. The animated conversations on the bus were about Listening to the City. Veronica didn’t know about the event and so she started asking questions, “What was it? What happened? How did everyone get involved?” Five or six people repositioned themselves to answer her questions and bring her up to date.

That conversation among strangers shifted Veronica's focus from the personal inconvenience of the stalled subway system to an entirely different event. In boarding that particular bus, she had entered a community of positive engagement. It was not a bus full of New Yorkers complaining about the inconveniences of city life, but a bus packed with people continuing to openly shape a shared meaning of their experience. Veronica got off at Park Avenue to find a cab downtown. Those of us engaged in conversation with her had no doubt that when she finally met her niece for dinner, her Listening to the City bus ride would become a topic of their conversation as well.

That bus ride created an entirely new context for us to become meaningful participants in the public dialogue in a very personal way. The boundary between the facilitator and participant roles became permeable, allowing an even deeper level of engagement and dialogue to occur. We became full participants in creating a shared meaning of our experience with our fellow passengers.

Cross-town bus rides are never fast, but because of the generator explosion, power outages and the subway shutdown, people were streaming up from the subways at 8th, 7th, and 6th Avenues and pouring into the streets and onto the bus, slowing the bus even more. Due to the unusual circumstances, people who had not attended Listening to the City and boarded the bus as it went across town were treated to their own personal experience of the event by virtue of engaging in the dialogue with people who had been there. It was a visceral experience, something that could not have been provided by watching coverage of the event on the evening news. It was clear from these conversations that participants from the Listening to the City event were energizing and engaging non-participants who happened to board that particular bus. Emotions are contagious (Hatfield, Cacioppo & Rapson, 1994). The more open people are and the more they express their heartfelt feelings, the more readily others will experience similar contagious emotions (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002). The contagion of positive public engagement and emotional expression was evident on that bus ride.

Prior to boarding the bus, we were looking forward to sitting together and catching up on our respective Listening to the City facilitating experiences. A teeming bus full of participants from the event was not what we were expecting. Instead of debriefing as facilitators, we experienced the event again from a totally different perspective. The bus ride presented an interesting vantage point from which to view our roles, because

we were able to express our thoughts and emotions in a way that had not been appropriate in our capacity as facilitators during the event. Our roles during the event had been to facilitate participants' conversations and allow their voices to be heard. On the bus, we continued to encourage others to voice their opinions while also feeling freer to include our own. The emerging, engaging conversations on the bus helped both of us filter our thoughts and feelings through the experiences of our fellow participants. In effect, we had become participant-facilitators.

That bus ride created an entirely new context for us to become meaningful participants in the public dialogue in a very personal way. The boundary between the facilitator and participant roles became permeable, allowing an even deeper level of engagement and dialogue to occur. We became full participants in creating a shared meaning of our experience with our fellow passengers. We freely shared our thoughts and feelings about the power of participating in Listening to the City with strangers, who had suddenly been transformed into members of a caring, mobile community proceeding across town. Through the development of shared meaning, we achieved a sense of commonality of purpose (Smircich, 1983) with the community of people on that cross-town bus.

We never did end up talking to each other during that ride. We rode the bus all the way to 3rd Avenue which took almost 90 minutes. By then the crowd on the bus had thinned. The dominant conversation for the entire cross-town trip had been the experience of Listening to the City, with people who had been there and those who had not as people got on and off the bus. When we departed the bus, it felt as though we were being given a fond farewell by our dearest friends. People said "Good-bye, take care, get home safe, thank you so much for being here." People who had just met were caring about each other in deep ways by virtue of the common powerful experience of Listening to the City and its continuation on that remarkable bus ride.

We learned two valuable lessons from participating in those conversations on the M34. The first was a potent reminder that, as individuals, we have a tremendous impact on others. Our thoughts, feelings, emotions, behaviors and actions can positively affect how other people experience and remember an event. The contagion of powerful emotions was evident on that ride. The second lesson was a realization that our hearts had been opened in deep ways at Listening to the City. We were not fully aware of this until we became part of the moving dialogue on the M34. The art of facilitating a group process necessitates keeping a fine control over one's thoughts and feelings even as those thoughts and feelings are deeply engaged. The bus ride gave us the space to explore our thoughts and feelings in real time, rather than debriefing our facilitation experience in a more

traditional analytical fashion. The result was a richer level of analysis and insight for both of us.

Our bus ride allowed us to expand our collective experience, by engaging in multiple dialogues as we rode across the city. The M34 was a metaphor for extending the dialogue that had begun at Listening to the City, rippling that experience out across town.

Typical New York City bus rides proceed with people staring out the window, reading their newspapers, or perhaps a few passengers engaged in quiet conversation. But this was no ordinary bus ride; this was a moving microcosm of Listening to the City. It was a bus of engaged citizens united in a powerful experience, co-creating something new together in an energetic, lively way. Our bus ride allowed us to expand our collective experience, by engaging in multiple dialogues as we rode across the city. The M34 was a metaphor for extending the dialogue that had begun at Listening to the City, rippling that experience out across town. That moving dialogue was representative of the thousands of conversations that would happen that night across the city and beyond. It was a powerful experience of spontaneous public engagement that we will never forget.

“The search for honest conversation, like other aspects of the democratic experience, can be its own reward... It opens a path to self realization grounded in social relationships – knowing others on terms that are reliable and enduring” (Greider, 1992, pg. 411).

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The Press Didn't Get It

Edward S. Ruete

The presence of the press at the *Listening to the City* event was palpable, powerful, and almost oppressive. The organizers did the best they could to keep the press from negatively affecting the dynamics of this huge and hugely important event. But still the press hovered around the edges, filled the camera platform to groaning capacity, stuck microphones and cameras in people's faces. They even took over some of the tables that were late in filling up, crowding out the people who had come to hear and be heard.

The press was necessary. If people were to know what had gone on, if the 9 million people of New York, the 300 million people of the United States, and the 6 billion people of the world were going to feel represented by the 5000 citizens who gave voice to their hopes and concerns and by the 600 volunteers and paid professionals who made it possible, the press had to be there to report on the process and the results.

I just wish that the press had gotten it.

They got all their interviews early, before the event began. All the participants were milling about and spouting their going-in positions. The reporters and camera crews looked for the people with the posters, the placards, the t-shirts, the handouts, the petitions, and the rolled-up drawings of their own designs. The guy on crutches who brought two guitars that were decorated with patriotic designs got a lot of attention. So did the people who were going from table to table with their petitions. These were the people the press interviewed: I saw it going on all around me as I waited for someone to come to my table. They got demanding, quarrelsome, argumentative, adamant sound bites. They studiously avoided getting any sense of the process. I was approached by several camera crews, but when they found out I was one of the facilitators, they said, "Thanks anyway," and took off. I didn't even get a chance to find out what it was about their perception of my role that made me undesirable to talk to.

Then the meeting started. Everyone sat down, and the magic started happening. People started to listen. People realized that they had much more power as part of a process of learning and sharing than as a solo voice harping on a demand. People spoke of their needs, shared their ideas, explored possibilities with one another. The animosity, the militant activism, was drowned out. It wasn't shouted down by the crowd, but quieted in the minds

and hearts of each of the 5000 individuals who became part of a larger voice. Not a voice of conformity, but a voice of unity that had room for a diversity of themes and tones and overtones. And the people who were charged with the planning heard that voice, heard the unity and the diversity, and changed their plans.

But by then the press was gone. The horde of cameras of the early morning had dwindled to a handful. On the 6:00 o'clock news, all you heard were the adamant interviews of the early morning. You didn't get any sense of the magic. You didn't get any sense of the changes, the connections, the sharing.

One writer for the *New York Daily News* got it. Pete Hamill said that the kind of excitement that was in that room was too subtle for television, not visual enough. "The energy in the room could not be photographed but it was as real as the tables and chairs and computers."* It wasn't sound-bite democracy, it was real democracy in action, and that doesn't make good press. So the press didn't get it. And if the press doesn't get it, then most of the people won't get it, either.

Listening to the City was *my* memorial to the victims of 9/11. Whatever the memorial ends up being, whatever they end up doing with the rebuilding and revitalization of lower Manhattan, the fact that the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation and the Port Authority cared enough to listen is my memorial. The fact that they recognized the power of group facilitation and commissioned a facilitated meeting is my memorial. The fact that over 550 table, area, and overall facilitators from 50 states and 11 foreign countries came to help is my memorial. The fact that the organizers put out the qualifications and trusted us to be honest with ourselves about our abilities before we applied is my memorial. The fact that 5000 people came together to learn, share, listen, and set aside their positions long enough to share their needs and concerns is my memorial. The fact that they felt listened to, that some very powerful and influential people were forced to change their minds and rethink their positions, and did so publicly, is my memorial. And it was a beautiful memorial. I wish more people could have seen it, felt it, understood it.

I wish the press, which serves as the eyes and ears of the people, had gotten it.

AUTHOR

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NOTES

*Hamill, Pete, "Thrilling Show of People Power," *The New York Daily News: SPORTS FINAL Edition*, July 22, 2002, p. 8.

"Listening to the City" Why Is It So Important?

A Few Notes from a Volunteer Facilitator

Esther Hernandez-Medina

ABSTRACT

Using anecdotes from her experience as a volunteer facilitator, the author shows why she thinks that "Listening to the City" (LTC) offers an important model of civic engagement. LTC is helpful for anyone interested in this field in, at least, three ways: (1) LTC showed that it is possible to address complex and emotionally charged issues on a very big scale; (2) LTC reaffirmed that there is a significant group of people interested in volunteering their time and efforts to support citizens in that endeavor; and, (3) LTC constitutes a good example of the importance of careful design and implementation. In other words, "Listening to the City" offers several sources of learning and motivation to those interested in supporting citizens' engagement; not only in the United States but also in other countries around the world.

The fact: more than 5,000 people including participants, facilitators and public officials in a huge room full of energy for creativity and change. The place: the Jacob Javits Center in New York City. The date: July 20th, 2002. The purpose: to hold an inclusive consultation in which New York citizens could respond to six redevelopment proposals for the World Trade Center site presented by the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation and the Port Authority. But the question is what is it that makes "Listening to the City" (LTC) so special? Why is it that important after all? Given my role as one of the international facilitators invited to be part of this experience, I want to make a small contribution to continue answering these questions.

I think that LTC is an important model because it helps anyone interested in increasing civic engagement in at least three ways: (1) LTC showed that it is possible to address complex and emotionally charged issues on a very big scale; (2) LTC reaffirmed that there is a significant group of people interested in volunteering their time and efforts to support citizens in that endeavor; and, (3) LTC constitutes a good example of the importance of careful design and implementation. In other words, "Listening to the City" offers several sources of learning and motivation to those interested in supporting citizens' engagement; not only in the United States but also in other countries around the world.

Difficult Issues, Deep Emotions and Big Settings: Can They Be Combined?

Coming from a small developing country with a rather adversarial political culture, I have faced some of the constraints related to promoting deliberative practices. One of those constraints is that in order to gain legitimacy and try to have an impact on public policies, it is necessary (although not

sufficient) to involve a significant group of participants. But organizing deliberative consultations with great numbers of participants is a rather intimidating task. The success of "Listening to the City" reminds us all that it can be done and learning how to do it might be crucial for our democracies.

I worked in the Dominican Republic helping to organize two major consultations: the National Dialogue (November 1997 – March 1998) and the Preparatory Consultations for the Second National Conference of Judges (September – December 2000). The former included more than 4,000 participants who were part of debates in their cities and towns, regional consultations or at the final National Dialogue Assembly. The latter convened more than 1,000 attendants to 9 regional consultations around the country. Both processes were highly participatory, both were convened by public officials as an input for public policy results, and both of them gave voice to people who are usually not taken into account in decision-making processes: women, representatives from grassroots organizations, people from rural areas, the poor, the disempowered, the ones left behind.

Nevertheless, in both cases it was necessary to follow a schedule with a set of smaller gatherings to make the process manageable and give representation to distinct geographical realities. In other words, in spite of the number of participants involved in the entire process, none of those consultations included a single event comparable to the scale of "Listening to the City". For example, the biggest of them, the National Dialogue Assembly in Santo Domingo, the capital city of the Dominican Republic, gathered approximately a thousand people.

Therefore, the two experiences mentioned above shaped my perceptions about what "Listening to the City" might be. I was already familiar with "America Speaks" model but on a smaller

scale. One of my classmates at the Kennedy School, an "America Speaks" member Joe Goldman, led the organizing team that put together the MPP Town Hall Meeting¹. Being part of that team exposed me to their methodology. And I had also heard about massive events organized by America Speaks such as the "Citizen Summits" in Washington, DC².

But I was still curious about how we were going to manage having a meaningful conversation with 5,000 participants at once. Moreover, I was a little bit concerned about my role as a facilitator and how successful "Listening to the City" would be in dealing with so many deep emotions following the tragedy of September 11th, 2001. Nevertheless, the very possibility of taking part in such an important project of public participation greatly inspired me and I tried to stay open and confident.

The fact is that "Listening to the City" surpassed, by far, any of my more optimistic expectations. First of all, the level of interest and attention of the participants was impressive. At some points, the people at my table would engage so deeply in our dialogue that the rest of the convention center seemed to fade away. For example, even being at one of the few tables located right next to the reporters, I was surprised that the presence of the media did not disrupt us. Whenever they would come and tape one of our participants, we would let them do their work without getting distracted or anxious.

Secondly, being in a conversation at one of the 500 tables at "Listening to the City" also gave the people at my table what I perceived as a sense of belonging and support. When I reflected on this days after the event, I thought that this sensation was the product of seeing others engaged in the same mood. People at all the tables were also nodding at each other, many other faces were also captured in silence trying to understand where the other person was coming from. And many others were also speaking up putting their hearts and minds in every word.

But it was not only that. It was also the energy of all of us struggling to listen to each other's perspectives and emotions. That energy was so high it filled the room with a sense of empowerment and boldness; the kind of boldness I saw in the participants at my table who were willing to expand their most cherished beliefs when confronted by the views offered by others. My favorite example was something that happened almost at the end of the day. There was one moment in the general program for the families of the victims to read a mission statement proposed for the future memorial:

Memorial Mission Statement

We create this memorial to honor the 3,042 innocent lives lost in the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001 when American Flight 11 and United Flight 175 crashed into and destroyed the World

Trade Center Towers, American Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon in Washington, DC, and United Flight 93 crashed in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, and when the World Trade Center was bombed on February 26, 1993. These were attacks on our loved ones, our cities, our nation, our way of life and our very freedom. We respectfully honor those who died and those who survived and carried on, those who came to help and those who risked their lives to save others, and those brave and compassionate citizens from around the world who stood with us in our time of need.

For all who come to learn and understand, we dedicate this memorial to the unfulfilled dreams of those lost, of our country and the strength of our democracy, to our resolve to preserve and open, diverse and free society, to our determination to remain ever vigilant in order to safeguard our nation and to those people around the world who unite with us in a joint quest to end hatred, ignorance, intolerance and strife and promote peace.

One of the few male participants at my table, a U.S. citizen married to an Italian woman also present in the conversation, expressed his concern about the statement not being inclusive enough. His argument was that it seemed to treat the 9/11 events as an exclusively American tragedy and did not allow enough room to acknowledge the tragedies caused by terrorism in other countries and the support received by the United States from so many parts of the world. Being from another country myself, I agreed with his view but given my role as a facilitator, I did not want to influence the participants in any way. Therefore, my response was to ask the others about their views on the issue. The reaction of several women at the table reflected the depth of the emotions at play that day. One of them was particularly vocal about the fact that they agreed with the mission statement as it was because the attack was directed to the country precisely "because it is the United States".

The time for voting came and there was no consensus on whether the mission statement was or not sufficiently inclusive so I proposed to send the other suggestions we had about the statement without including that issue. While we were watching the results on the screen, I remember myself feeling a little bit disappointed about our time constraints. It seemed that the tight schedule would not allow us to go over that disagreement exploring its deepest implications. Then I remembered what deliberation is all about: the willingness to change our own ideas due to the reasoned exchange of arguments with others³. But that definition was not sufficient, it could not capture the richness of what I saw. Almost an hour and a half later, we were discussing a totally different topic and the woman who had so passionately defended the families' statement as it was, stared at the man who had challenged it and said, "Now I understand what you meant". We all shared a brief moment of silence before she went on to

explain why she had changed her mind. For me that pause represented the very essence of that day.

Volunteer Facilitators and Staff: Why Were We There?

Several weeks before the event, people who had signed up to be volunteer facilitators started to receive information about the status of our request and the characteristics of the event. The people from America Speaks repeatedly thanked us for our desire to help in every email. They provided information and guidelines for our role. And announced training sessions to build upon our own backgrounds as facilitators. But after all that cyber communication, it was not until the night before the event that I could feel the sense of camaraderie and complicity given by "being in this together". It was then when I could really experience the reason why all of us, the "Listening to the City" staff and facilitators, were offering our time and expertise for this event.

I was late to my training session after being delayed by the rain during my bus trip from Washington, D.C. As excited as I was to be finally close to the big day, I was also tired and not particularly happy about having to arrive at my friends' place at 11 pm and then going back at the convention center at 7 am. The Jacob Javits Center was mostly empty when I arrived that night and I followed the signs to get to the training room. There I saw the first of the many smiles that would accompany us during the following hours. "Thank you so much for doing this" was the man's response to my apology for being late. I was surprised and also thankful. I told myself "this should definitely be the place". When I entered the room and saw the diversity of people paying attention to the screen, there was a confirmation in the air that I had finally arrived "home".

All those facilitators, including blacks, whites, Native Americans, Latinos, women, men, younger and older folks, had also arrived from so many different places (as far as Australia) because of the same reason. For me, part of this reason was the desire to help New Yorkers to learn from this difficult moment and move forward without forgetting the past. But collectively it was also about our desire to learn from the participants at the event. And what we wanted to learn was not only about their feelings and opinions on how to rebuild the World Trade Center site. I think that we, the "Listening to the City" staff and facilitators, also wanted to confirm to ourselves the incredible value of public deliberation, citizens' participation, conflict resolution and the like. In that single training room, there were so many years of experience, there was so much wisdom combined with humility and passion I felt the event started that very night.

Attention to Details without Losing the Big Picture: An Epilogue

Finally, I want to acknowledge the impressive care with which America Speaks handled the logistics, the methodology, relations with the press, and all the other pieces of the very complex puzzle that means putting together any process of public participation. Moreover, being able to do so without losing track of "what do we want to accomplish by doing this?" is extremely difficult. Doing so on such a big scale to address so emotionally charged and complex themes is exceptional beyond any doubt. America Speaks managed to do all this and their achievement constitutes a source of inspiration for all the people who believe in citizen participation.

As I said at the beginning, I have been part of other civic engagement experiences in my country. All of them were powerful and well-intentioned efforts. But in many something was missing. The initial euphoria receded when public officials started again to confront our institutional limitations. That euphoria also went away when people who had started to feel empowered went back to their homes to fulfill their basic needs. And, above all, when the inertia dictated by short-term priorities moved further away the chance for institutionalizing channels of participation. Sometimes the energy and resources needed to put a consultation process together are so great that we can easily lose track of the end objective of institutionalizing deliberation as part of our everyday life as citizens.

In this regard, one of the limitations of any deliberative process is that there is a high risk to lose those who feel more disempowered in the conversation. This risk is higher in one-shot events such as "Listening to the City". For example, my main failure as a facilitator that day was not being able to retain one of the participants at my table. As a female representative from a union of restaurant employees who lost some of her coworkers on 9/11, this person felt that her voice would not be heard in that setting. She thought that the presence of people not directly affected by the tragedy would weaken rather than strengthen the possibility of having real changes derived from the conversation. I think that the lessons we draw from "Listening to the City" should include not only the decisions that were actually made (and their outcomes) but also the other options that were considered along the way and the potential limitations of the model.

This is why for me, the great success of "Listening to the City" reminds us all about the importance of paying attention to the means without losing track of our objective: to engage citizens in exercising their rights and duties on a regular basis. Paradoxically, that means that we also need to be aware of the risks of this type of intervention. Massive and complex one-shot events are not the solution to every situation. Not only because there are various types of public participation designs⁴ but also

because there are several conditions that need to be evaluated before initiating any of them: timing, nature of the issue, likelihood of getting and sustaining public officials' commitment, among many others.

My view is that continuing to share the lessons from the different stages of this experience will enrich our understanding of the pros and cons of this and other models of public participation. Building up an active network with LTC volunteer facilitators and staff can also enhance the ongoing debate on these issues. Finally, the very fact of having this journal as a space for reflection represents another opportunity for this conversation. Current events all over the world remind us that deliberation is more necessary than ever and we still have a long way to go.

AUTHOR

Esther Hernández-Medina completed her B.A. in Economics in 1993, and her M.A. in Gender and Development two years later at university INTEC in the Dominican Republic. She has worked as a researcher, program coordinator and lead facilitator of various projects in the non-governmental, public and academic sectors in the Dominican Republic. Three of those projects were nation-wide participatory processes. She recently graduated from the Master in Public Policy program at Harvard University; where she co-taught courses in Organizing. And she is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in Sociology at Brown University. Her research interests include gender, race and development, citizen participation, the impact of social movements on public policies, and democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean. She can be reached at Esther_Hernandez-Medina@brown.edu

NOTES

¹ The "MPP Town Hall meeting" took place at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University in April 2002 and was organized to help students, staff and professors in developing a vision for the Master in Public Policy Program. This event was the first of its kind at the school and had almost 180 participants: approximately 58% were students in their first year, 29% were MPP students in their second year, 11% were professors teaching in the MPP core curriculum, 1% of professors not teaching in the core and 1% of staff members. The initiative has been adopted by the school's administration and now the idea is to mainstream it as a permanent mechanism for consultation and decision-making through the student government (KSSG). See final report "MPP Electronic Town Meeting. Report of Proceedings".

² Before "Listening to the City", America Speaks had already organized "Americans Discuss Social Security" with 45,000 citizens engaged in forums in 25 states; the "Citizen Summits" in DC with 3,000 in the first one and another 3,000 in "Citizen Summit II"; the "Youth Summit" also in DC with 1,400 young among others. See <http://www.americaspeaks.org>

³ In a deliberative process, "Equitable decisions depend upon parties agreeing to which is fair rather than pushing for as much as they can get. Effectiveness relies upon individuals remaining open to new information and proposals rather than doggedly advancing pre-formulated ones. And learning at individual and group levels depends on people being able to alter their opinions and even their preferences" Fung, Archon & Wright, Erick Olin. 2001 "Thinking about Empowered Participatory Governance" (Introduction) in Fung, Archon & Wright, Erick Olin (ed). *Deepening Democracy. Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance*, p. 34.

⁴ "Listening to the City" reflects one of those models, the "electronic Town Hall meeting" promoted by America Speaks. Archon Fung offers an interesting classification including the following types of "mini-publics": (1) the *Educative Forum* such as the deliberative polls, National Issue Forums, and Study Circles; (2) the *Participatory Advisory Panel* such as the Citizen Summits, Citizen Juries, etc.; (3) the *Participatory Problem-Solving Collaboration* including examples such as the Habitat Conservation Planning, Local School Governance and Community Policing and (4) the *Participatory Democracy Governance* with examples such as the Participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil and "democratic decentralization" in Kerala, India. See Fung, Archon. *Recipes for Public Spheres: Eight Institutional Design Choices and Their Consequences* (forthcoming).

Critiquing AmericaSpeaks' Process and Alternative Approaches as Paths to "Collective Intelligence"

Tom Atlee

Keywords

As one of the largest participatory public dialogue events ever held, AmericaSpeaks' Listening to the City program provides a rich opportunity to explore the roles of dialogue, deliberation and diversity in generating collective intelligence¹.

I was not present at the event, but I do have some experience with AmericaSpeaks' 21st Century Town Meeting method. I was a San Francisco volunteer facilitator in their massive 1998 national Americans Discuss Social Security (ADSS) program. With fellow facilitators in the Center for Group Learning, I wrote a substantial report to organizer Carolyn Lukensmeyer about our experience. And in October 2002 I participated in the AmericaSpeaks-run sessions at the first National Conference on Dialogue and Deliberation in Alexandria, Virginia.

I studied reports and participated in online dialogues about the Listening to the City experience, as a result of which I was invited to submit this article.

Focusing on Collective Intelligence

Democracy and public engagement often look different depending on whether one's goal is enhancing collective intelligence or furthering individual expression and mass participation. Much of this article explores these issues.

Proponents of the former suggest that we need more collective intelligence as our collective technological and economic powers grow. Empowered by such modern miracles as nuclear missiles, biotechnology, and global financial markets, the consequences of collectively stupidity² can be catastrophic.

It behooves us to understand more about how various forms of public engagement enhance or impede collective intelligence. This paper explores factors such as the relative roles of various players (e.g., citizens, experts, powerholders), the numbers and diversity of people involved, the quality of their dialogue, the use of technology, and the amount of time available for collective reflection.

Claims in this paper are grounded in growing evidence that high-quality public policies and proposals can be both created and evaluated using the considerable collective intelligence exhibited by groups of diverse citizens in generative dialogue³ which, when necessary, is informed by diverse experts from across the spectrum of opinion. (Co-Intelligence, n.d.; Atlee, 2003a; Crosby, 2003; Renn, Webler, & Wiedemann, 1995; Joss & Durant, 1995; Fishkin, 1995)

Comparing the AmericaSpeaks Model and Co-Intelligence-Oriented Citizen Dialogue and Deliberation

I have for years found the AmericaSpeaks approach a stimulating counterpoint to my own work on citizen deliberation and dialogue as a route to collective intelligence. Underlying both approaches is a desire for greater citizen engagement, a respect for the potential contribution of citizens through dialogue and a belief that citizen deliberation has a vital role to play in democracy and governance—including direct input to decision-makers. Both approaches are also characterized by a respect for small-group dialogue and a belief in reflecting the products of collective inquiry back to the community from which it came. But the two approaches differ in significant ways that reflect different democratic assumptions, worldviews and values. These differences make comparisons potentially instructive.

If I were to oversimplify the differences, I might summarize them as follows:

- Collective intelligence-oriented practitioners tend to focus on the synergistic collective intelligence that occurs in high quality small-group dialogue as the greatest resource for democracy. They prefer democratic designs that cultivate that small-group intelligence and then use it to stimulate broader conversation and participation and to shape policy and public consciousness.

AmericaSpeaks, in seeming contrast, starts from a belief in the ultimate power of direct mass participation. It uses small group dialogues primarily to enhance the participatory nature of the

gigantic forums it organizes. What happens in any particular small groups at an AmericaSpeaks event is visible only to that group's participants and, in extract form, to the "theme team" of summarizers.

- We who focus on collective intelligence tend to believe that the potential collective intelligence of citizen dialogue and deliberation is constrained to the extent it is forced to operate within the bounds of pre-ordained questions, options, categories, agendas and timelines. While some constraints (especially deadlines) are often unavoidable, we can learn a lot about a convenor's values by how much constraint they are willing to establish in which areas in exchange for what benefits.

AmericaSpeaks values immense and very participatory events with coherent outcomes. While we respect how brilliantly they've designed the constraining structures they use to produce coherence from the conversations of thousands of people, we believe this often involves significant loss of potential collective intelligence. In particular the sheer numbers demand efficient technologies that require participants to address the same questions at the same time and go along with what are inevitably reductionist summaries of their often significantly varied responses. Nuances are lost rather than delved into.

Furthermore —and this critique is by no means limited to AmericaSpeaks —there is a sense that public deliberations must be carefully framed and channeled to prevent "unrealistic" or useless outcomes or to reassure public officials frightened by the loose cannon of ignorant, angry public opinion. While these concerns are reasonable in the adversarial battleground of modern politics, we may question whether they provide strong foundations for building an *empowered deliberative democracy*, especially since enough is now known about collective intelligence to address legitimate concerns about the collective stupidity of citizens.

- Collective intelligence-oriented practitioners tend to believe that the wisdom needed by democracy will arise through generative interaction between the differences that naturally reside in the full-spectrum diversity of communities and issues. Thus we seek participatory models in which the membership of the small groups is intentionally constituted to reflect the diversity of the community. Furthermore, issue-oriented deliberations should give participants access to the full spectrum of information and diverse opinion about the issue —through both briefings and consultations with experts⁴ —in ways that stimulate dialogue to provoke deeper insight and creative engagement among participants.

The informational diversity in AmericaSpeaks programs is usually presented as choices between existing options rather than as stimulants to thoughtful interactions that may lead to new options. There may be brief interactive consultations with stand-

by experts, but these are minimal, except if an expert happens to be present at one's table. Furthermore, participant diversity is distributed over the whole forum rather than being concentrated —by design —in each small group dialogue, so interaction among intentionally diverse citizens may not be as great as it could be. And although efforts are made to include demographic diversity, the open-invitational nature of the process makes it hard to ensure that attendees constitute a fair cross-section of the community.

- Many collective intelligence-oriented practitioners believe in the primacy of the citizenry as the legitimate source of both power and wisdom in public affairs. Both this power and this wisdom are intrinsic but require certain conditions to manifest in their best forms. We believe it is the project of democracy to create those conditions. Experts, officials and powerholders must be on tap to the citizenry, not on top of the decision-making. So we are drawn to models that —while tapping the gifts of experts, officials and powerholders —leave the ultimate authority with what Alexander Hamilton (1788) called "the deliberate sense of the community."

Most public processes seem to operate on the assumption that it is the job of big players to develop the options that citizens should learn about, choose among or approve. The processes used by the big players to create those options seldom invoke the considerable (albeit usually latent) collective intelligence of the citizenry.

The AmericaSpeaks process is equivocal on this point. Usually it focuses citizen input on the options articulated by experts. But in its Listening to the City program, citizen input from the first iteration influenced the experts, who brought new designs back to citizens in the next iteration. And yet, we seldom see AmericaSpeaks help citizens climb the ladder of their collective intelligence to innovative possibilities that escape the confines of conventional wisdom.

From this perspective let us explore some strengths and limitations of AmericaSpeaks' Listening to the City program.

Some Strengths and Limitations of AmericaSpeaks' 21st Century Town Meeting Process

Strengths

- It involves hundreds or thousands of diverse people who experience it as a far more engaged form of citizenship than they are used to.
- It embeds experts and decision-makers in the midst of hundreds of ordinary citizens, giving them a powerful democratic context for their decision-making. (I believe the inclusion of decision-makers *as peer participants* in

dialogue is one of AmericaSpeaks' most significant innovations.)

- It is brief enough (one day) to encourage participation by people who are busy or hard-pressed.
- It tends to generate an extraordinary amount of public attention, compared with other common civic involvement exercises.

Limitations

- It is extremely expensive, even while involving volunteer facilitators.
- It constrains its conversations within the bounds of pre-established questions and proposals (although participants are free to reject them), rather than generating inquiry and creativity within broad issues or topics.
- It does not provide sufficient time and resources to deal with the narrative and emotional content of hot (controversial, traumatic) issues like the WTC disaster. Nor is there sufficient time to explore the full ramifications of such an event, nor to creatively seek new options for the future, nor to explore the consequences of various options. As Margo Menconi, one of the Listening to the City facilitators said in an online discussion,

The very first questions about [the site plans] were 'What do you like about the plans?' and 'What do you not like about the plans?' Then [table participants] had 20 minutes to discuss this. So figure it out: 6 plans, 8 people at my table, and a million details to consider, especially using a chart with 5 specific categories laid out (memorial grounds, public space, buildings, West Street & residential/cultural). What kind of quality input do you expect given the situation? And the answers from these questions will go into informing the next plans.... We didn't have time to get to the dislikes...[or even what they liked] regarding residential/cultural. (Menconi, 2002)

Important mixes of strengths and limitations:

From a general collective intelligence perspective, ongoing, periodic, or iterative processes allow for more collective learning over time than one-time events. AmericaSpeaks tends to do one-time events. However, the Listening to the City program involved two major events—the second providing an iteration of the first—as well as a subsequent dialogue online in which non-attendees could engage. While not an institutionalized ongoing process, this approach provided significantly more iteration over a greater period of time than a one-time event.

The technological dimension of the AmericaSpeaks process is both a blessing and a curse. On the positive side, it allows a remarkable amount of progress to be made, given the short time, masses of people and volume of ideas and responses being generated. On the other hand, its efforts to integrate wildly diverse information—using both quantitative (voting) and qualitative (theme-summarizing) approaches—sometimes obscure nuances that, in a less orchestrated, higher quality conversation could blossom into deeper insights and novel options that might prove to be better than what the group started with.

The diversity of participants in Listening to the City was not truly reflective of the community(ies) involved. Of course, this criticism can be leveled at any public forum. AmericaSpeaks went to some trouble to include adequate diversity, with some success, and they were conscious of their shortcomings in this regard.

One Different Approach Weaving Together Diverse Methods to Increase the Potential for Collective Intelligence

The AmericaSpeaks process allows well-framed dialogue through which thousands of citizens can produce coherent one-time input for decision-makers. I would like to present an alternative approach that arises from the values and assumptions of a citizen-based collective intelligence perspective. This alternative uses methods tending to offer more open-endedness, a focus on smaller group dialogues, and/or more iterations, increasing the likelihood of greater collective intelligence.

I will illustrate this alternative approach with a thought-experiment model (steps 1-6, below)⁵ that is based on a number of existing processes and designs that I will describe briefly below. All the democratic processes described here are in current use in various places around the world. (Atlee, 2001 rev 2002; Atlee, 2003a; Co-Intelligence Institute, n.d.) My purpose is to show how a program can be built using a variety of methods in synergistic ways to produce better outcomes than any of them could produce alone.

These are the methods I will include in the thought experiment:

(a) Dynamic Facilitation - A highly creative, nonlinear group process well tested in business and government, which is just beginning to be used in community applications. It engages head, passion, intuition and creativity, all at once, and handles conflict elegantly. (Rough, 2002; Atlee, n.d.[b]; Atlee, 2003a, pp. 74-79)

(b) Wisdom Councils - Randomly selected dynamically facilitated citizen councils which explore and articulate the general state of the community/society on behalf of its populace

and stimulate a sense of "We the People" in the citizenry. These are just beginning to be tested, with promising results. (Rough, 2002; Atlee, n.d.[e]; Atlee, 2003a, pp. 173-176)

(c) Citizens Juries - Randomly selected small citizen panels designed to deliberate on public issues, proposals or candidates in consultation with experts and partisans. Hundreds have been held worldwide. (Crosby, 2003; Renn, Webler, & Wiedemann, 1995; Jefferson Center, n.d.; Atlee, 2003a, pp. 146-155)

(d) Consensus conferences - Randomly selected small citizen deliberative councils designed to deal with technical issues. They hear diverse expert testimony in a public forum, after which they deliberate to a consensus. An official practice of the Danish Parliament's Board of Technology, dozens of unofficial consensus conferences have also been held worldwide. (Joss & Durant, 1995; Atlee, n.d.[a]; Atlee, 2003a, pp. 156-164)

(e) World Café - 4-6 people at each of many tables talking about questions that matter and getting up and moving to different tables every hour or so. Hundreds have been held worldwide. (World Café, n.d.; Atlee, 2003a, pp. 82-84)

(f) Listening circles (a.k.a. talking stick circles and council process) - 4-20 or more people sitting in a circle and passing an object (e.g. "talking stick") around. Whoever holds the object speaks from their heart while others listen. Based on common tribal practices, thousands have been held worldwide by non-indigenous people, with many variations. (Zimmerman & Coyle, 1996; Baldwin, 1998; Atlee, n.d.[c]; Atlee, 2003a, pp. 65-68)

(g) Open Space - Self-organized gatherings of people interested in the same topic with no advance agenda, speakers or workshops. Attendees create their own workshops and conversations. Hundreds have been held worldwide. (Owen, 1997; *Welcome to Worldwide Open Space!*, n.d.; Atlee, 2003a, pp. 79-81)

(h) Plan for a Healthy Democracy - A Citizens' Jury® of 12-24 citizens consults with a "televote" panel of 600-1000 citizens based at home. This proposal is based on broad experience with its various elements, but has yet to be tried as a coherent process. (Atlee, n.d.[d]; Crosby, 2003, pp. 265-264; Fishkin, 1995)

A Though Experiment: A Possible Multi-Process Approach to Public Deliberations about the WTC

Building on the processes above, we can imagine a multi-process program that looks something like this:

1. Hold 3-6 parallel dynamically facilitated exploratory Wisdom Councils, each composed of one or two dozen randomly selected citizens. They all start with the same question —something like "What kind of memorialization of the World Trade Center

tragedy and heroism would be most appropriate?" —although there are no restrictions on where they end up. Have facilitators help the participants explore what they really think, feel and want, to dig deep and be creative.

2. Widely publicize their findings and recommendations —and some stories about changes the participants went through —in all their differences and similarities. This helps the public vicariously experience⁶ profoundly generative dialogue (and perhaps even catharsis) among diverse parties. It has the effect of including millions of people in the deliberations —arguably even more effectively than the effort to convene thousands in a single room.

3. Generate further public dialogue about the findings and recommendations of the Wisdom Councils by organizing web dialogues, world cafés, open space conferences, listening circles, etc. —perhaps even AmericaSpeaks events. Hold contests for "best ideas" stimulated by the Wisdom Councils. Give anyone who wants to participate a chance to put in their two cents. Catalyze a rich field of empowered thought and expectation. Provide opportunities, resources, time and attention for sharing stories and emotions from the WTC disaster and its aftermath. Make sure everyone knows that all this is only the beginning. You are trying to raise the dialogic intensity, engagement and expectation of the population as a whole. Simultaneously, you are creating a pool of thousands of people who have participated in dialogues on this subject, from which you can choose participants for subsequent small-group Citizens' Juries, as follows:

4. Partly from the pool of participants in the Wisdom Councils in (1) —and partly from the public who participated in the dialogues in (3) —randomly pick one or two dozen citizens to form a Citizens' Jury (or consensus conference). This type of citizen deliberative council is specially designed to brief participants on the specialized knowledge needed to understand a technical subject (such as a new WTC site structure). They hear and cross-examine competing experts who clarify the range of facts and opinions about the issue and what might be done with it. The randomly selected citizens filter all this through their (i.e., their community's) values and everyday experience. By ensuring diversity of —and generative dialogue between —both citizens and experts, this method serves to uncover and process the blind spots, contradictions and potential synergies present in and among the various perspectives, resulting in greater wisdom by the whole than any part could offer alone.

In the case of the WTC, experts might include (among others) representatives of victims' family groups, local community and business groups, relevant local and regional government officials, and those responsible for the WTC site and contract commitments related to it. In this process, their role would be to

advise We the People who, democratically speaking, are the proper final authority on what should happen next.

5. Part-way through the deliberations in (4), do a Plan for a Healthy Democracy process linking the Citizens Jury by teleconference to a large (600-2000 people) randomly selected televote audience who have studied briefing materials on this subject, but are not as well informed as the Citizens' Jury. Have them discuss various options, asking questions and sharing the logic of their preferences. Then have the televote audience vote (non-binding) on various options being considered by the Citizens' Jury.

6. The Citizens' Jury (or consensus conference) does its final deliberation and produces one or more recommended options that are submitted to authorities, the press, and the public. These might even be subject to a subsequent vote by the population involved, after being informed of the panelists' findings, recommendations and reasoning.

Note that this imagined program unfolds in iterative waves of engagement and that it synergizes diversity, small group work, widespread public participation, option creation, expertise and voting in very different ways than the AmericaSpeaks model.

A Generic Approach to Generating Citizen-Based Collective Intelligence

What I've described is a program design that *could* be applied to any issue. Of course, its expense would probably cause it to be reserved for the hottest (most significant and controversial) issues. More routine issues could be handled well with one Citizens' Jury or consensus conference done with official blessing and publicity, especially if subsequent citizen panels were convened to review implementation.

But my purpose in exploring this is not to promote a specific public participation program (i.e., the thought experiment above), but rather to use it to illustrate *a different way of thinking about public participation* that could inform the development of a wide variety of programs in different circumstances. This new way of thinking can be summarized as the following generic approach:

Create programs that feature high quality small group dialogues among deliberately typical citizens — and use the outcomes of those dialogues not just to increase participant awareness and to inform public officials, but to raise the general level of collective intelligence being applied to public affairs by the whole community or country.

Broad use of this approach would result in a major transformation of politics and governance. Let us imagine, for

example, that officially established Wisdom Councils of randomly selected citizens are held regularly each year (or more often) in New York City and other communities —and in every state —and for the nation as a whole —to explore and comment on the quality of collective life and the functioning of governance at all these levels. They would regularly articulate the public's evolving deliberative judgment and vision in very public ways, so that all the society's activities would operate in the whole-system-consensus context created by these diverse councils. This would radically alter the topology of possibilities within which all other citizen deliberations and official activity took place.

When such a Wisdom Council came upon an issue they didn't know enough to address, they could request that their city (or state, or nation) convene an issue-oriented Citizens' Jury or consensus conference to research it and recommend what The People (after informed deliberation) wanted regarding that issue. Furthermore, citizen panels could also be convened to monitor the performance of public officials, to evaluate the views of candidates or to evaluate ballot initiatives and legislation (Gastil, 2000, pp. 137-163; Crosby, 2003, pp. 71-108; Atlee, 2003c).

In fact it seems quite possible to create a system deeply informed at every level by citizen deliberation, particularly through the institution of such ad hoc, interacting, official citizen deliberative councils as Wisdom Councils, Citizens' Juries, consensus conferences, Gastil's citizen panels, etc.

I suggest that citizen deliberative councils would, if they were widely understood and used, greatly enhance collective intelligence and thus the ongoing process of whole communities or countries learning how to collectively serve their collective needs and dreams.

Although mass participation is not the bottom line of this vision of collectively intelligent democracy, it is an essential ingredient. Everyone has an equal chance of being chosen for a council. Everyone is watching the activities of the most important councils unfold, and is talking about them. Stories of participants' engagement and change stimulate diverse members of the community to evolve towards the common good. Evocative ideas raised by the councils trigger conversations throughout the community and political action to push sensible solutions into policy. And out of such an engaged population, the next wave of council members is selected, creating a feedback loop through which the citizenry can watch itself evolve...

But can a small random group — such as these ad hoc citizens councils — really be a legitimate voice for We the People?

If we wish to address the concerns that are behind this question, we need to first realize that these citizen deliberative panels are

not being set up as dictators, nor are they representatives. They have neither enforcement powers nor persistence, since they dissolve as soon as their statements are released. They are simply a way for the community or country as a whole to inform itself in a dependable way, to reflect on its public concerns, and to develop its latent collective intelligence.

The legitimacy and power of these councils depends totally on:

- their diversity, which is demonstrably the diversity of their community or country, so that most citizens can "see themselves" in the participants;
- the obvious fairness with which they are selected (usually randomly), and with which they are informed about the issues they study (often overseen by diverse partisans);
- the high quality of their process, in which all views are clearly well heard and issues thoroughly and creatively explored;
- the recognizable common sense, wisdom, or utility of the recommendations that naturally tend to result from all that;
- the fact that the population is actively encouraged not to blindly accept but to engage with and respond to the statements of such councils; and often
- the official mandate given them by the citizenry or their representatives, establishing them through ballot initiative, constitutional or charter amendment, legislation, etc.; all adding up to
- broad agreement that they can stand in for the community, just as a jury or a president does—an agreement often augmented by publicity surrounding a council's formation, proceedings, findings and recommendations.

But there remains the question of numbers. Citizen deliberative councils tend to have only 12-50 people in them. Something about that disturbs our democratic sensibilities. It seems too little. This is a common and important concern. There is insufficient space in this paper to address it. However, it has been addressed elsewhere. (Atlee, 2002)

A Creative Tension: Numbers Versus Differences

There is a creative tension in democratic theory between the quantitative standard of mass participation and the qualitative standard of well-handled diversity. This tension is most visible in discussions of voting and polling on the one hand, and deliberation on the other.

Voting and polling are *quantitative* ways of creating *static snapshots* of public opinion. Most voting arrangements (although, oddly enough, not public elections) require a quorum—and then that moment's majority opinion wins. In polling, certain numbers of respondents have been proven to reflect the momentary opinion profile of an entire population.

However, *deliberation* is different. It is dynamic rather than static, and qualitative rather than quantitative. People *change* during deliberation. They change their opinions, their feelings, their relationships, their stories—especially when they're engaged creatively with peers who hold different perspectives. (Fishkin, 1995)

And so whereas polling is most reflective of the population's opinions when pollsters *survey a large number of people*, public deliberation and reflection are most reflective of the population's potential collective intelligence when they *engage participants creatively with appropriate diversity*.⁷

In both input and output, polling is quantitative and deliberation is qualitative. From a collective intelligence perspective, having many participants does not necessarily generate deepened understanding—but well-engaged diversity does.

Nothing stops us from combining processes that focus on handling appropriate diversity well with processes oriented towards mass participation. Our multi-process thought experiment allowed for both citizens juries (each one using 12-24 people for five days) and an AmericaSpeaks 21st Century Town Meeting (5000 people for one day). However if we are focusing on handling diversity well, we will tend to use processes that pull together maximum diversity in small groups because that's how the most generative dialogues can happen.

We're talking a lot about diversity. How much and what kind of diversity are we dealing with? Significantly, diversity plays a different role depending on whether our process involves majority voting or creative consensus.

In voting, it makes a tremendous difference how many members of each partisan group show up. A position will win or lose depending on how many supporters it has. So fairness dictates that a representative sample of the larger population's demographics be proportionately present at the table so that minorities are neither invisible nor can dominate. This is all about numbers, quantity.

In contrast, creative consensus processes are not about one side winning but about all parties discovering shared insights and creating mutually satisfactory solutions together. Not only is this not a *quantitative* standard, but *this shared discovery can only happen if minority views are valued as much as majority views*. How many people hold a particular view at a particular time is

irrelevant. At each point in the process, people's differences are handled as resources for deepening collective understanding and creativity—a process through which people's views change and tend to converge. So the exact numbers of people involved matter less than the presence or absence of diverse perspectives *and* the ways the process protects and engages every perspective that presents itself.

Unfortunately, politically hot varieties of human difference (gender, race, class, etc.) often eclipse more nuanced forms of human diversity. Some of these nuanced differences—including cognitive style, experience, interpersonal skills, creativity, worldview, etc.—may play a greater role in collective intelligence than the hot button differences. Yet we need to include all those forms of diversity.

How do we do that? The virtual infinitude of human diversity causes some people (Rough, 2002) to prefer completely random selection over scientific selections by demographic category. They maintain that that a repetitive or iterative random selection process will—over time—tend to embrace an ever-expanding variety of human diversity.

The Importance of Researching Democratic Collective Intelligence

In this paper I've tried to outline some of the many factors relevant to building a collectively intelligent democracy, and the need to raise our sights beyond the usual standard of "public participation." I've also noted that democratic collective intelligence may well be vital to our collective survival.

AmericaSpeaks represents one of the most ambitious efforts to conceptualize participation as serious deliberation among hundreds or thousands of citizens linked into official decision-making processes. However, its limitations suggest we may be wise to explore other approaches to participation—including periodic, specially mandated and selected small group deliberations designed to influence both public discourse and the established structures of governance.

Both approaches seek to move us toward an effective deliberation-based, co-creative democracy. Greater progress will be possible the more we theoreticians and practitioners move beyond our favorite approaches to build multi-process theories and programs together. We need more shared inquiries among ourselves to develop greater understanding of the underlying issues, dynamics and possibilities we're all working with. The collective intelligence perspective offers one framework for productively pursuing those inquiries.

Among the questions that need more research and collaborative inquiry are the following:

- What are the key underlying dynamics (and contextual dynamics) that make various group processes and community programs succeed or fail?
- What are the strengths and limitations of various process approaches and democratic methodologies? How can we use answers to that question to design synergistically dynamic multi-process programs?
- How do we enable citizen deliberators to access truly balanced information in ways that help them be both realistic and creative in addressing social issues?
- How do we deal better with the many dimensions of diversity?
- What makes citizens and communities value, practice and demand dialogue and deliberation to deal with their collective affairs?
- How can we more dependably identify the *collectively intelligent* will of The People on various public concerns?
- How do we ensure citizen deliberations get translated into results in the real world?

Every major citizen forum is an opportunity to further our understanding of these things—but only if we use it as such. The explorations in this journal are a strong step in the right direction.

Author

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Notes

1 Collective intelligence can be defined as the capacity of a group, organization or community to manifest demonstrable intelligence that significantly exceeds the intelligence of any of its constituent individuals or partisan groups. It does this, in part, by engaging the diverse resources (intelligence, experience, perspectives, information, etc.) of those constituents in synergistic ways (especially through dialogue, deliberation and other communication and networking systems).

Collective intelligence also often depends on systemic factors like the collection of statistics (and other forms of collective perception), storage of information (and other aspects of collective memory), systems of answerability and checks on concentrations of power (so the intelligence of the whole is not parasitized by the interests of more powerful parts of the whole), etc.

In this article I include collective wisdom in my definition of collective intelligence. Elsewhere I treat the two subjects independently. Making those distinctions here would unduly complicate this article. Suffice it to say that wisdom is an extension of intelligence that includes big-picture, long-term, multiple-viewpoint perspectives, as well as the "multiple intelligences" of heart, spirit, intuition, etc. Collective wisdom is the collective capacity to tap those larger realms together or as a whole group, community or society.

2 Collective stupidity is a collective, not individual, phenomenon. Brilliant people determined to undermine each other—or simply unable to relate usefully to each other—tend to generate group behaviors readily recognized as stupid, if not insane. Systemic factors—such as measuring the well-being of a society by how much money it spends or concentrating control of mass media in a few hands—can also generate stupidity at the collective level. Again, this stupidity is a characteristic of the system, not of the individuals involved, and is manifested in whole-system behaviors (environmental destruction, wars, depressions, etc.).

3 Generative dialogue is here defined as conversation in which the actual, available and relevant diversity of views, stories, information and possibilities are well enough heard and explored that participants tend to shift towards deeper understandings and relationships and a greater sense of common ground from which they can then seek new approaches that benefit all involved.

4 There are many types of expert. Issue experts clarify who believes what about the issue and why; what the dynamics of the issue are; what options are under consideration; and likely consequences and trade-offs. Some issue experts focus on the technical dimensions of the issue, others on its social ramifications. Process experts help the group deepen its collective insight through dialogue or various exercises (such as values clarification exercises, brainstorming, or creating scenarios that explore consequences). Finally, citizens, themselves, are experts: individually they are authorities about their own experience, and collectively they are authorities about the values and sensibilities of their community. Citizen expertise can show up through the testimony of people affected by the issue, or directly in the thoughts and feelings of citizen council participants.

5 I call this a "thought experiment" rather than a proposal because it is intended as an example of the sort of multi-process program that might be done, rather than as a specific multi-process program that should be done. For some further thoughts and an invitation to co-create better multi-process theory and practice, see Atlee (2003b).

6 "Vicariously experience": Written, audio and video stories (both fiction and documentary) help people imaginatively "experience" events or conditions that they have not experienced directly. Many people will shift their own opinions if they read or watch compelling news reports about high-quality dialogue in which diverse citizens worked through their differences about public issues. Their expectations about what is possible in political life may also change in positive directions.

7 The term "appropriate diversity" is meant to include (a) the spectrum of diverse facts, perspectives and options related to the issue under consideration and (b) the diversity of people in the larger community wrestling with that issue. Diversity of people is usually measured demographically and accomplished by random selection (often with a stratified sampling). I believe informational diversity should embrace at least three or four of the most

predominant views, with a smattering of lesser-known but usefully different perspectives to challenge dominant assumptions and open people to possibilities "outside the box." However, what is "appropriate" in any given case is always subject to debate.

Listening to the City and the Goals of Deliberative Democracy

William J. Ball

ABSTRACT

Listening to the City is critically reviewed from a participant-observer perspective. The event is placed in the context of four key goals of the deliberative democracy movement. Comparisons are made to a Deliberative Poll, a similar, but much smaller event. Listening to the City was a very powerful event, a landmark in the deliberative democracy movement. However its success in influencing policy outcomes somewhat masks its unrepresentative nature and the limits of its ability to promote the civic education goals of deliberative democracy.

KEYWORDS

deliberative democracy, Listening to the City, representation, Deliberative Poll, civic education

Listening to the City immediately stands out as a landmark event in the deliberative democracy movement in two ways. Its first distinguishing characteristic was its massively bifurcated scale. The event operated simultaneously at the macro level of a town meeting of more than 4000 people and at the micro level of ten person discussion tables. The second unique feature was the issue at hand--rebuilding the World Trade Center--which had a combination of immediacy and emotional import for the participants, an appeal to the press, and a direct connection to the decision-making process that has not been found before in deliberative forums in the U.S. These unique and powerful characteristics direct the following examination (from the perspective of participant-observer) of the Listening to the City event as an implementation of key goals in the deliberative movement.

Within a general notion of citizen empowerment in public decision making, the deliberative democracy movement strives to achieve four primary goals, as laid out by the political theorists Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson (1996):

1. To *legitimize collective decisions* by considering citizen claims based on their merits and by making special effort to include the excluded,

2. To *encourage public-spirited perspectives* in participants by leading them to public-oriented reasoning and away from reasoning based on self-interest,
3. To *reduce the scope of moral conflict* among participants by identifying elements of common ground in opposing views, narrowing the difference between "us" and "them," and
4. To *reduce the number of mistakes* in decision making by exposing preconceptions to open challenge, using the inherent diversity of views among the public and the pressure of face-to-face justification to subvert implicit policy premises.

The four goals target three different elements of the democratic system: the moral acceptability of the process of decision making (goal 1), the civic education of the participants (goals 2 and 3), and the quality of the outcomes of decision-making (goal 4). How Listening to the City addressed goals of the deliberative movement is best considered at the macro level of the event as a whole for the goals 1 and 4, and at the micro level of the individual table for goals 2 and 3.

The Power of the Event at the Macro Level

Listening to the City had an immediate and obvious impact on the direction of decision-making about the rebuilding effort.

Despite their best efforts before and during the event to ensure that participants did not stray from the narrowly-defined architect's program, by the end of the event the planners admitted that they needed to rethink the parameters of the entire project. The dissatisfaction of participants with the narrow scope of choices they were being offered was audibly palpable throughout the event and universally reflected in the next day's media reports as well as the changed, less prescribed direction the entire planning process took after the event (on the latter, see Wyatt, 2002). As noted by [021211] and [0302036] in the current volume, the event included a diverse cross-section of the public who realized the power of their combined voices in redirecting the planning for the site. In this sense, the outcome of Listening to the City was clearly a fulfillment of the deliberative goals of including in the planning process previously excluded voices and subverting mistaken preconceptions, thereby improving the quality of outcomes.

Success by deliberative democracy projects in achieving these goals is not the norm. For example, the much smaller Deliberative Poll¹ (140 participants) conducted in New Haven, Connecticut in March 2002 (and also observed by the author) produced very different results. Carefully composed from an invited representative sample of the regional population and conducted with neutrality towards the issues under discussion (municipal tax sharing and airport development) the results of the poll appear not to have had an impact on appropriate decision-makers. Indeed many local officials rejected the event out-of-hand as irrelevant or fatally biased (Straw, 2002). The experience of the New Haven Deliberative Poll is much more typical of the negative findings of the limited research literature on the impact of deliberative democracy implementations in the U.S. (Guston, 1999).

The success of Listening to the City in influencing outcomes was largely due to the political power generated by its large-scale, immediate and clear results, and high issue saliency to participants, the media, and decision-makers alike. This in spite of the pressures to get a finished plan on the table. In comparison to the New Haven Deliberative Poll, the lesson is an old but somewhat troubling one for democratic theory: the "street power" of the aroused *demos* is stronger than the scientific democracy of representative polling, even when both are played out within the civil and humanistic environment of deliberative practice.

The macro-level power of Listening to the City poses a challenge to the traditional concepts of representation in American democracy. In contrast to the tenants of traditional polling, Listening to the City had open attendance and thus constituted a self-selected sampling of opinion. While participants were reasonably representative of the population *demographically*, they were the self-selected group who chose to devote a day of their life to deliberating on the topic and thus not

representative in terms of the *intensity of their interests*. As Fiorina (1999) argued, the demands of devoting a full day to public deliberation on the time of contemporary citizens all but ensures they will not be representative of the population as a whole in the intensity and polarization of their political views. Complicating managing the heightened passions of those in attendance, Listening to the City was also much shorter in duration than is typical of other, more representative, deliberative implementations such as Deliberative Polls, driving its participants to register opinions after very brief deliberations.

Thus Listening to the City represents the very form of democratic process founders like James Madison feared, and which he argued in his Federalist Papers would be rendered impossible by the size and complexity of the proposed American Republic. The contemporary technology and process that America Speaks brought to bear at Listening to the City powerfully resurrected a direct democracy reflecting the passions of the moment of a large but self-selected group of people--passions that the founders worked so hard to banish from our system by constructing a system of distant and indirect representation. Of course the conditions that led to Listening to the City's impact on outcomes are rarely likely to exist. Yet given the demonstrated power that the event clearly places before us, it becomes doubly important that theorists and practitioners alike strive to reincorporate this kind of direct self-selected representation into broader democratic theory, in particular the way in which it bears on moral acceptability of the process in legitimizing collective decisions.

The Limitations of the Event at the Micro Level

The micro level, the level of the individual discussion table at Listening to the City, prompts more careful consideration of how the civic education goals of deliberative democracy (promoting public spiritedness and reducing the scope of moral conflict) were advanced within the context set by the macro level.

The facilitation experience at my table presented typical problems in small group facilitation. One problem was, in complete accord with Fiorina's (1999) predictions, the advocate of an extreme viewpoint that attempted to dominate the discussion: a participant from the immediate neighborhood of the World Trade Center would not take into consideration the broader perspective of others and abruptly left when it became clear that the rest of the group was beginning to discount his position. A second problem was the emergence of two "experts," an urban planning student and a lawyer familiar with commercial real estate law who (unconsciously) dialogically de-empowered the rest of the table by pushing the deliberation toward technical fact-based discussion and away from a value-based discussion in which all could feel equal expertise.

However the most troubling problems for the deliberation movement's civic education goals were the limited time available for deliberation (which, among other things, prevented the effective resolution of the first two problems) and the general sense of individual inefficacy among participants as the recommendations of the small group became lost in the massively aggregative process of the interactive polls. For example, by the end of the day, the participants at my table were much more interested to see if any of our table's specific inputs showed up on the display screens than in the overall outcome of the deliberation process (and disheartened that they had not). The day ended with a sense that the *collectivity* probably would have an impact but not that any one *individual's* role in the democratic process had changed. While there was time for the general rejection of the architects' plans to emerge, there was not sufficient time or freedom to build common ground out of the disagreements among deliberators at the table.

Indeed, the massively bifurcated scale and short schedule of Listening to the City in practice reveals a possible conflict among the goals of the deliberative movement which has not been sufficiently considered in the past. At the macro scale the event was about legitimizing collective decision making and improving the quality of outcomes. At the micro scale civic education goals needed to be advanced, as noted above. Yet the experience of the table facilitator was an experience of being caught in the middle between these two worlds, pressured between the expectations projected from a distant podium of the event organizers to conform with their polling schedule and the decision-makers to conform with their desired outcomes on the one hand, and the desire by the participants at the table to fully deliberate with each other on the other hand. While the printed event program presented a balanced schedule between these competing demands, in practice the time for true deliberation to reduce conflict was severely squeezed by the need to complete the schedule of speeches and polls. Certainly the individual tables had no freedom to alter the timeline of events during the day.

This experience is in strong contrast to what could be observed at the New Haven Deliberative Poll, where a series of small groups and large plenary sessions were spread over a much more relaxed schedule of two days and events were more driven by the interests of the participants. Also the small groups and their facilitators met in individual rooms, generating a much freer deliberation. Yet in New Haven, while polling indicated some opinions of participants shifted, there was no sense that the people thus assembled were making a real difference. The sense of collective accomplishment that was so clear at Listening to the City was absent. Thus, as the field moves forward, we need to consider if there is an inherent dilemma: does the large scale, rapid turn around, and decision-maker involvement of Listening to the City preclude effective civic education? Does the small scale, open deliberation, and lack of buy-in by decision makers

in the Deliberative Poll preclude legitimizing collective decisions and improving policy outcomes?

Conclusions

Some implications can be drawn from the experience for staying more true to the goals of the deliberative democracy movement in the future, particularly its civic education potential:

5. *More attention to a less self-selected initial representation of views.* This would require a version of the more complicated, two-stage process used in Deliberative Polls of inviting the attendance of participants demonstrated (through a pre-event poll) to be representative in both demographics and in the nature and intensity of interests. However it would result in a more scientifically and politically representative forum, increasing the legitimacy of the outcome.
6. *A more complex blending of deliberative scales.* Introducing intermediate levels of aggregation and feedback to participants into the deliberative process would allow people to see the impact of their views on the direction of the event as a whole, improving its civic education potential by increasing participants' sense of individual efficacy.
7. *A more open schedule with less expert testimony.* More time allotted to individual table discussions would allow more true deliberation, permitting mediation of polarized interests leading to the emergence of a greater sense of common ground and a stronger creation of community among participants.
8. *A physical setting with a less abrupt transition between the micro and macro scales*—such as multiple rooms of 10 to 20 tables. While the view of 500 deliberative tables in one room was powerful, the strong central control techniques it necessitated depressed deliberative potential, reducing the autonomy of table moderators to encourage the growth of public-spirited perspectives and reduce the scope of moral conflict within their groups.

The same high technology employed at Listening to the City (specifically, wireless networks used for automated polling and two-way communication of presentations, feedback, aggregation, and results) could be used to create a less bifurcated, more truly deliberative event. This would still permit a powerful, large-scale impact on public policy to emerge while improving the sense of personal efficacy among the participants and helping to transform their conception of effective citizenship.

The above critique should not be construed to conclude that Listening to the City was an unsatisfactory implementation of deliberative democracy. To the contrary, it is a landmark accomplishment of the deliberative democracy movement, very publicly demonstrating that citizen deliberation can influence

policy outcomes in a positive manner. It represents the state of the art in effective participatory planning at the largest scale, opening the possibility of simultaneously satisfying all four of the major goals of deliberative democracy.

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NOTES

¹ : Deliberative Poll is a trademark of the Center for Deliberative Polling (see: <http://www.la.utexas.edu/research/delpol/>).

Participant Interests: How Well Were They Reflected in the Outcomes?

Mary Dumas

ABSTRACT

In the case of many public involvement processes, participants' feedback can be marginalized by missed opportunities to identify underlying interests due to lack of time provided for dialogue or to develop commonly held views due to the premature use of ranking exercises and the structure of small group reporting. The *AmericaSpeaks* meeting design used at the "Listening to the City" events provided for reporting of both shared and minority views as captured by participant recorders followed by the immediate synthesis of 500 small groups' outputs by a "theme team" that identified shared, strongly held views from this data and developed key themes and subsequent polling statements for participant voting. This essay explores the meeting design's methods for assuring that participant interests and shared views were accurately represented in the themes, polling statements, and final findings.

KEY WORDS

Accuracy, Design, Interest-based dialogue, Minority perspectives, Reporting, Theme team

Just how do 5000 people exchange views, identify key issues, explore interests, and develop strongly shared views that reflect the diversity of participants' interests in one day? The "Listening to the City" event's aim—to gather 5000 participants for a meaningful dialogue and to identify strongly shared views across the diversity of perspectives regarding complex planning activities related to the re-development of the World Trade Center site—was ambitious to say the least. The essential question the program design raised for me was how successfully would participants' interests be identified and with what accuracy would these interests and the strongly shared views be reflected in the key themes synthesized from 500 small groups' feedback, as well as the final event findings provided to decision-makers. I had an intriguing look into the *AmericaSpeaks* 21st Century Town Meeting™ model as both a table facilitator for a group of 10 passionate citizens during the July 20 event involving 4300 participants and as a member of the team synthesizing participant feedback from all tables during the July 22 event for 200 participants.

When decision-makers utilize input gathered through large-scale public involvement activities to inform policies or actions that will affect the greater community the public needs assurance that the methods used to gather ideas and convey preferences provide for a meaningful level of input and accuracy in reporting. In the case of many public involvement processes, participants' feedback can be marginalized by missed opportunities to identify underlying interests due to lack of time provided for dialogue or to develop commonly held views due to the

premature use of ranking exercises and the structure of small group reporting. For example, small group reporting methods for minority perspectives have an effect on the development of the full group's shared views. A minority perspective expressed in one small group may in fact be shared by parties in other small groups, yet if this minority view is not forwarded from the small group and integrated with the other minority views such shared views may not be considered in subsequent ranking exercises or reported in the overall findings simply due to the division of participants in the room. The *AmericaSpeaks* meeting design used at the "Listening to the City" events provided for reporting of both shared and minority views identified in the small groups, thereby increasing the opportunity for minority views to be considered in the synthesis of participant feedback. The reporting methods used for the small groups and the synthesis of these outputs by a "theme team" are critical transactions of information that should be examined for accuracy.

The scale of the "Listening to the City" events, both in number of participants and complex planning issues to be addressed in one day, presented challenges for the small group to achieve a meaningful, human level discussion on core values and interests, per our facilitation orientation instructions. I wondered how well parties would move to an interest-based level of dialogue, even with skilled facilitation. In addition, I questioned whether the reporting methods used in the small groups and subsequent synthesis by the "theme team" would truly reflect the interests and shared views of participants. I observed the model from both my perspective as a table facilitator and "theme team" member.

Other than an intensive five-hour orientation to the meeting design and agenda the day prior to the first session, I did not have previous experience or knowledge of the “AmericaSpeaks 21st Century Town Meeting™” design.

Identifying Underlying Interests in the Small Group

The small group I facilitated was comprised of six passionate residents of neighborhoods around Ground Zero, two residents from other New York communities, and two individuals who were employed in Manhattan. The participants were patient yet skeptical regarding the decision-makers’ intent to utilize the feedback provided by participants as they settled in for the day’s work. Group members also expressed skepticism regarding the meeting process and its ability to accurately capture their perspectives. This skepticism was expressed through questions regarding what the computers and keypads were for, whose ideas they would be voting on, and if they would be concepts that had been developed by the event sponsors.

The “Listening to the City” event's aim -- to gather 5000 participants for a meaningful dialogue and to identify strongly shared views across the diversity of perspectives regarding complex planning activities related to the re-development of the World Trade Center site -- was ambitious to say the least. The essential question the program design raised for me was how successfully would participants’ interests be identified and with what accuracy would these interests and the strongly shared views be reflected in the key themes synthesized from 500 small groups’ feedback, as well as the final event findings provided to decision-makers.

Participant skepticism regarding the meeting process began to dissipate with the opening activities of keypad polling. The immediate visual display of compiled participant demographics on large screens throughout the meeting room had an interesting impact on group members. The wonder of technology coupled with the knowledge of who was represented in the room seemed to heighten the participants’ interest in the process, as demonstrated through increased attention on the lead facilitator and reduced focus on the printed materials at the table during this portion of the meeting. The initial polling exercises contributed to the bonding of this small group’s members and appeared to increase their buy in to the process.

Throughout the day I noted communication behaviors that contribute to and demonstrate the development of a meaningful dialogue exploring core values and interests. The complex issues and information that participants needed to cover within a one day period presented a potential challenge to the group’s ability to reach an interest-based dialogue among strangers. Participant fatigue was also a potential influencing factor on the quality of dialogue.

Table members used the complex resource information as a common point to work from rather than a source of tension or debate regarding the content. Some group members relied on other members to gain a clearer understanding of the material. This increased the active communication between group members, which was demonstrated by individuals orienting one another to the maps and actively seeking confirmation of a neighbor’s understanding of the information before moving on to the next resource item in the packet. These repeated exchanges increased the discussion among members and reduced participant’s behavior of talking directly to the facilitator or table recorder.

The group members then moved more deeply into discussing the interests each held regarding the information and options they were reviewing, as demonstrated by the use of clarifying questions pertaining to neighborhood impacts of the clean up or transportation planning approaches. This was a topic all members knew well—why the issues were important to them. Very early on in the morning session group members were speaking directly to one another in effort to understand other members’ hopes, concerns, and needs, as well as to express their own. These attributes are characteristic of a meaningful dialogue based on interests.

Despite the number of complex planning issues, the long day, and the relatively short time period for group bonding, this small group did engage in a meaningful dialogue based on the underlying interests of what was important to members and why.

I speculate that the experience of a shared traumatic event may have significantly contributed to the group’s ability to bond quickly and move to an interest-based dialogue. While there were not direct family members of victims in our group, two group members who live in the neighborhood had lost friends and acquaintances. Interestingly, these parties’ interests did not trump other group members’ input or carry more weight during the development of the group’s shared views.

An interest-based dialogue is characterized by discussion that focuses on participants sharing why their ideas and views are important to them as opposed to simply stating preferences as final outcomes, preferred actions, or rankings options as high, low, or in a priority order. All members of this small group worked actively to increase their understanding of how proposal

elements would impact other members' stated interests. Such exchanges were demonstrated through the use of probing questions to better understand how rebuilding the transportation system would impact the day to day living of a group member that lives in Tribeca, as well as a member who commuted to Lower Manhattan from outside to the city for work. While the meeting design relied on participant ranking of polling questions developed through the synthesis of the 4300 participants' output, the dialogue this group engaged in prior to the development of the themes used in these ranking exercises was successful in revealing the underlying interests of members in this small group.

Identifying and Reporting Strongly Shared Views

The reporting of each small group's dialogue was dependent upon self-selected participant recorders who were responsible to type the group's shared and strongly held minority views into laptop computers stationed at the table. Periodically throughout the discussion, the participant recorder sent the information via a networked computer system to the "theme team's" bank of computers. The theme team was "composed of volunteers and AmericaSpeaks staff that identified the strongest concepts from the discussions and reported them back to all participants (Markowitz 2002)." These transactions of small group input – recording, synthesizing, and developing themes and polling statements – are the crucial components in the "AmericaSpeaks 21st Century Town Meeting™" design that impact the accuracy of final findings. I was fortunate to examine these elements of the design as both a table facilitator and a member of the "theme team" during the smaller, Monday event.

The use of a self-selected participant recorder had an interesting contribution to both my buy-in to the meeting design, as well as the participants. My concerns regarding the use of a participant recorder were centered on the individual's ability to impartially record the group's strongly shared and minority views, participate in discussions as fully as desired, and accurately record the group's findings while dealing with the distraction and technical challenges of the networked system. I regularly use electronic flipcharting when facilitating large groups and thought my performance of this task could provide better assurance that the content forwarded from the table was consistent with the common and minority views expressed and all participants would be able to fully engage in the dialogue. I was surprised to find that the participant recorder served as a bridge between the group members and the technology being used; it appeared to contribute to the group members' perception that the information provided to the "theme team" was really coming from them. The pace was daunting for our recorder and through the use of paper notetaking I was able to support her in keeping up with both conversation and content. This may have increased the accuracy of the recorded content, though I did not

have keyboard controls to influence the actual text typed and forwarded to the "theme team."

During the facilitators' debrief on July 20 I asked other table facilitators how successfully the reporting tasks were accomplished at their tables. We learned that some tables in the room did not have operational laptops due to technical difficulties so reporting had to be done through hand written notes. A few facilitators shared experiences of participant recorders not consistently typing in the shared views expressed within the group. At one table, the recorder forwarded his personal views even though other group members did not share these views. Due to the recorder having control of the send key, the facilitator was not able to block or change the content before it was forwarded to the "theme team" for synthesis into the larger body of responses. Recorder accuracy is a variable in the meeting design that is likely to have an impact on the overall themes developed for the polling exercises, and ultimately the feedback presented to decision makers. The use of trained, impartial facilitators to serve in this role would likely increase the accuracy of small group reporting.

As a "theme team" member I was able to directly observe and participate in the review of participant feedback, identification of shared views, and development of theme statements all of which would occur in time periods of 40 to 60 minutes.

The opportunity to join the "theme team" on July 22 was one of the highlights of my time in New York. Each table of participants was linked to a bank of computers where the "theme team" reviewed the electronically recorded material from all the small groups. Participant recorders were responsible to capture the strongly shared views on one page of the computer notepad and strongly held minority opinions on separate page. The "theme team" used all of this information to identify the key issues and develop the themes for later preference polling by the full group. I offered my services to the "theme team" on July 22 and was pleasantly surprised to find other volunteers working the table along with the AmericaSpeaks staff. This transparency in the process increased my confidence that those responsible for developing the themes from participant input were appropriately independent of the sponsors.

As a "theme team" member I was able to directly observe and participate in the review of participant feedback, identification of shared views, and development of theme statements all of which would occur in time periods of 40 to 60 minutes. The smaller number of participants on Monday's event enhanced my ability to observe this element of the meeting design.

Accuracy of the statements developed by the “theme team” is critical as these statements form the basis for subsequent participant polling exercises. The synthesis of small group outputs into themes and polling statements involved a number of steps. Each member of the “theme team” was assigned a distinct review task on a given agenda item. For example, for an agenda item concerning transportation options one person would track all of the comments addressing pedestrian issues and interests and another person would address public transit, etc. Each individual was responsible to identify the issues that were raised repeatedly and thereby reflective of a shared view of participants. The “theme team” member then summarized these themes into brief statements, preferably capturing quotes from participant comments to accompany them. Members swapped these draft lists of statements to identify redundancies and provide editorial suggestions. The statements were returned to the person of origin to finalize before forwarding on to the team member responsible for development of the display slides. During each agenda item one member of the team was responsible to review the minority strongly held opinions that were coming in from the small groups, identify recurrent themes, and develop brief theme statements as well.

All of the key theme statements identified from the synthesis of participant responses were projected on large screens for participant review. The main facilitator asked for participant confirmation that the statements accurately represented what the table recorders had reported. While at the larger event on July 20th no significant dialogue arose to alter the content, at the smaller July 22nd event participants engaged more actively in this step of the process. I was impressed by the responsiveness of the main facilitator and “theme team” to immediately integrate the feedback provided. Once the lead facilitator received buy-in from participants on content, the keypad polling commenced and was later reported out as percentages of participant preferences on this specific list of options.

The “*AmericaSpeaks* 21st Century Town Meeting™” design does address key elements of small group reporting that directly impact the accuracy of shared views. The review of minority opinions and integration of recurrent themes among these contributes to the accuracy of the overall shared views identified from participant input. The inclusion of a participant confirmation step in the meeting design also contributes to the accuracy of the themes used for subsequent polling and the final reporting to decision-makers. This confirmation step is a critical element in the design, though it should not be the only step in confirming accuracy. Depending on the size of the group the meeting agenda may not have the necessary flexibility to allow participants a meaningful opportunity to provide clarifications. The need to keep the session on schedule is likely to prohibit the lead facilitator from probing for full confirmation in extremely large groups, such as the New York City event of 4300 participants. One potential antidote would be to add an

electronic reporting step that provides all small groups the opportunity to electronically confirm or add missed themes rather than relying solely on the use oral confirmation.

Exploring Accuracy in Program Findings

How successfully were participants’ interests identified and with what accuracy were these interests and the strongly shared views reflected in the key themes synthesized from 500 small groups’ feedback, as well as the final event findings provided to decision-makers? As a table facilitator working with this model, I found that the participants I worked with were able to reach an interest-based level of dialogue. This attribute of their discussions likely contributed to an increased understanding and appreciation of other parties’ interests. Many of the participants shared that they left the meeting with a changed perspective on how best to re-develop the World Trade Center site, which is likely due to an increased understanding developed through learning that took place throughout the day.

The cover letter accompanying the “Listening to the City Report of Proceedings” indicates, “the public also reached a broad consensus on a planning framework for the site and Lower Manhattan...” Such a characterization of findings provides a compelling recommendation to decision-makers and underscores the importance of assuring the accuracy of reporting, synthesis, and final feedback developed through the use of the meeting design.

Post event analysis of the small groups’ recorded outputs, “theme team” synthesis, and polling statements is an additional step that could be added to the meeting design to insure the final findings presented to decision makers have the higher degree of accuracy. Such an analysis should include a comparison of all recorded input from small tables against the theme statements developed by the “theme team” from both the strongly shared and minority views pages, as well as the polling questions. If this is prohibitive as part of the implementation of the model in direct client contracting, further research could be conducted on these elements along with final report proceedings to better test the accuracy of the methods used in this meeting design. Continued analysis of the “*AmericaSpeaks* 21st Century Town Meeting™” design for large scale public policy dialogue would increase the confidence of both decision makers and the public that final findings represent participant inputs and are accurately based on thoroughly identified shared views to the highest degree possible.

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Reflections from Down Under on the Biggest Deliberation in History

Lyn Carson

ABSTRACT

This paper is a personal and cautionary reflection on the *Listening to the City* project, from an uninvolved, distant observer. The author examines the problems inherent in large-scale consultations and the impact of scale on representativeness and deliberativeness. She does so from her perspective as an Australian practitioner and researcher, hoping to draw upon the best of US participatory experiences. She speculates on an alternative to large-scale face-to-face consultations that would suit the Australian political culture: using small scale consultations, coupled with e-democracy, simultaneously, across the breadth of the vast Australian continent.

KEYWORDS

Deliberation, Random selection, Representativeness

One participant speculated that *Listening to the City* ‘may have been the largest group-facilitated event in the history of the Earth’. The biggest and the best emerges from the U.S. it seems. The participant’s speculation should have impressed but instead I found the claim faintly disturbing. Perhaps it is because I live on a very large island (and a very tiny continent) in the middle of a vast sea. Big, in the Australian psyche, denotes emptiness or remoteness or hubris. We seem not to equate *big* with *best* and become rather anxious in the midst of density or scale, maybe because our nation is young or perhaps because of the immensity of this empty land. Therefore, the cast of thousands assembled in a single room, deliberating on the future of Manhattan post-9/11, was reminiscent of the thousands who were unnaturally stacked together in those twin towers that were so swiftly ripped apart. Margo Menconi noted the difficulties that can arise as the scale of a consultation increases, when time is of the essence, when consensus is required from thousands and discussion becomes superficial (from a *Listening to the City* on-line discussion). John Carroll has commented upon the symbolism of the twin towers: a grand-scale, self-aggrandising monument that individualism has inspired and that fanatics now despise (Carroll 1993, 2002).

This paper, then, is a personal and cautionary reflection on the *Listening to the City* project, from an uninvolved, distant observer, albeit one with experience of small-scale and large-scale consultation projects. I would hypothesize that consultation processes are at their weakest when participants leave the intimacy and depth of their small-group discussions and link into plenary sessions to become viewers and victims of a spectacle. Often the media coverage of the main event is superficial and this was certainly my observation with Australia’s first two deliberative polls. Attentive listening and productive deliberating occurred in the small anonymous groups and this was interrupted by the display of celebrities and egos and television cameras in the combined sessions. For that reason, I am intrigued about scale—how to combine the strengths of small group work with large-scale outcomes that have credibility. In this paper, I do not want to engage in a critical analysis of *Listening to the City* or to sustain an agonistic argument. I want merely to offer a few reflections from afar, reflections that are necessarily inadequate because of my absence from the real event.

I wonder about the power of thinking *small* and how we might appreciate the power of amalgamating many small acts. However I also recognise that we must meet this

challenge of scale. This tension about democracy and size has parallels with Atlee's suggestion (in this issue) that 'collective intelligence', not 'collective stupidity' could be cultivated in an ongoing, iterative way. Politicians, especially leaders of nation-states, know how to activate collective stupidity on a large scale, usually through fear. The Iraqi War provides an excellent, contemporary example of such oligarchic activity. In stark contrast to any political, corporate or media manipulation by 'the few' is the 'magic' that so many people noted in that room in late July, 2002. This magic that is so easily sparked amongst small groups of informed citizens is the antidote to fear and that magic is simply democracy 'breaking out' (Blaug 1999). A democratic 'break out' is magic and it is readily available and it is quite inexpensive. It requires simple ingredients: independent, skilled facilitation; adequate, accessible information; group-defined guidelines for engagement; and a willingness to participate. I suspect that these ingredients were there in bucket-loads at the *Listening to the City* event. Of course, it does not have to be the biggest or 'best ever' to qualify as magical (Yankelovich 1999). It can happen in a community hall or boardroom or classroom (or, on rare occasions, in parliamentary assemblies), and it can make you want to weep with joy (the nature of democratic 'break outs' is described very accurately in Blaug 1999:131-140). I suspect that we *all* want to work and play with people who have daily experiences of democratic 'break outs' in public and private spaces. I also think we have few skills to enact these moments. Therein lies the challenge. *Listening to the City* was a brave attempt to meet that challenge: to wrestle practically with the dilemma of size and democracy that has often been posed by political theorists (Dahl & Tufte 1974).

Consultation processes are at their weakest when participants leave the intimacy and depth of their small-group discussions and link into plenary sessions to become viewers and victims of a spectacle.

Large-scale events are not necessarily the only way to deal with complex decision making involving large populations. Electronic communications that occur at breath-taking speed can provide one alternative approach and *Listening to the City* exploited this consultation tool. My interest here is with the face-to-face component and Ancient Athens offers an interesting precedent for a large-

scale, face-to-face, democratic process. Randomly-selected citizens routinely met in public spaces to make important decisions. Thousands of Athenian citizens were involved (as long as the citizen was not female, not a foreigner, not a slave, not too young—some things never change!). Coincidentally, the numbers are similar to those embroiled in the *Listening to the City* event. The salient feature of Athenian decision making that distinguishes it from *Listening to the City* is this: thousands of citizens stood and listened and voted. The Athenian model, often touted as truly democratic, positions the citizen in a role that is very similar to the role of current voters who remain mostly passive and watchful and have limited opportunities for participation (Urbinati 2000). Like Athenian citizens, current voters are listening to speakers who are skilled in rhetoric. So, though the Athenian assembly was highly representative, it was not deliberative. It was a good example of direct, representative democracy (the sort of democracy we experience now through plebiscites, initiatives and referendums) but citizens were given few opportunities to develop their deliberative capacity. This is what we need more of: deliberative designs that build citizens' deliberative capacity. *Listening to the City* gave some real insight into how a deeper understanding could be cultivated amongst contemporary voters, deeper than that which was available to Athenian citizens¹.

How might we strengthen our weakened representative systems and draw on the example provided by *Listening to the City*? Australia, for example, has a proud history of democratic practices so we yearn for expressions of genuine democracy. We were second in the world to grant women the vote (in South Australia, in 1894), second only to our near-neighbour, New Zealand (in 1893). Australia's compulsory voting system is seen as a relic by those who engage in voluntary voting with disappointingly low voter turn-outs. The compulsion in the Australian system is a requirement to enter the voting arena, not a compulsion to cast a vote². There is a belief in Australia (and only a handful of other countries), that this is surely the minimum responsibility that a country should expect from its citizens in exchange for the provision of rights. Australia pioneered the secret ballot and this was known as the 'Australian ballot' before it was broadly embraced throughout the world. Sadly, such proud traditions are being eroded by US-inspired electoral 'performances' with expensive presidential-style elections based on personalities, party 'brands' and very little attention to public policy. Australia seems to have mostly avoided corporate-sponsored

politicians but has not avoided the unfortunate trend toward ‘audience democracy’ (Manin 1997).

Like Americans, Australians have flirted with deliberative democracy—that powerful, revolutionary notion of democracy as informed, inclusive and discussion-based. We have borrowed US methods such as deliberative polls, citizens’ juries and televotes, as well as European methods such as consensus conferences and people’s panels. We’ve tried them all and practitioners know that they work. These experiments have mostly been community-based initiatives because the concept of state-led democratic ‘break outs’ seems to be too threatening for our elected ‘representatives’. When the Australian Government experiments with consultative mechanisms it tends to ‘steer’ the process. This is what the current Prime Minister did when he convened a Constitutional Convention to consider the possibility of Australia becoming a republic. A large-scale process such as *Listening to the City* would have done a far better job. Australia is a huge country so modifications would need to occur to cope with the challenges presented by our geography. Perhaps we could have trialed a combination of Peter Dienel’s planning cell model (Dienel 1995), i.e. convening many simultaneous small-scale events across the country but drawing on the *Listening to City* ingredient of an electronically-mediated theme team?

Globally, amongst countries that have adopted representative government, a problem exists. Elected representatives are *not* representative. Even the most cursory overview of politicians would tell us that they do not reflect our populations (unless the population is mostly older, educated, affluent, white males). Diversity is simply not evident in our parliamentary assemblies. We need to find ways to hear these missing voices and capture diverse preferences. Of course, we are not short of robust methods, we are short of political will. There are some creative alternatives to the present system of representative government: for example, John Burnheim’s *demarchy* (1975), Leigh Gollop’s *people’s assemblies* (2002), Callenbach & Phillips’ *citizen legislature* (1985). All are striving to enact a deliberative and representative system to overcome the flaws of our current oligarchic model.

Unrepresentative politicians (especially those who have obligations to campaign funders), can become skilled abusers of power and we need to find mechanisms to interrupt that abuse. When deliberations are convened they need to address this problem of *unrepresentativeness* that

politicians prefer to ignore. Recruitment based on self-selection or invitation does not address this recurring problem though it is certainly an improvement. It is a truism (with its roots in Ancient Greece) that those who seek power should be denied it.

The Athenian model, often touted as truly democratic, positions the citizen in a role that is very similar to the role of current voters who remain mostly passive and watchful.

Random selection certainly helps to overcome this vulnerability (Carson & Martin 1999). Randomly-selected participants rarely arrive with hidden or open agendas and easily set aside their own self-interest in pursuit of the common good. Clearly if marginalised voices are to be heard we must be wary of deliberative processes that attract only ‘the incensed and the articulate’. I heard echoes of this from the *Listening to the City* event though thankfully the missing voices were few. I wonder whether random selection might have located these missing voices? Random selection offers the potential to capture reluctant draftees; working with this reluctance is an important aspect of any inclusive consultation. The results are doubly gratifying for organisers when disempowered citizens become the most vocal supporters of inclusive processes (Carson & Martin 1999) and when these citizens become more politically active (O’Neill 2001).

The designers of *Listening to the City*—the biggest and the best example of a deliberative process at work—seemed to have defied the power-saturated nature of unrepresentative city planning (and also included power holders in their journey). It was a bold attempt to show what a democratic ‘break out’ on a large scale might look like³. I have, of late, drawn upon the example of *Listening to the City* in my teaching, research and practice of deliberative democracy. From here on out I know that I want to focus on small-scale organisational and community break outs in democracy, building these into larger regional or national responses. I recently designed an alternative approach to involve diverse communities in complex, public policy formulation and I note that the Co-Intelligence Institute’s model⁴ (simultaneous citizens’ panels coupled with public conversations and televotes, which in turn mirrors the Plan for a Healthy Democracy⁵) comes close to my design. If we are all coming up with similar approaches it might indicate that there is ‘collective intelligence’ at work after

all! Having recently helped to convene the world's first citizens' jury/televote combination in Australia on a rather dry, complex policy issue (container deposit legislation, see Carson et al 2002), I now have a sense of the potential of citizen-based, deliberative designs⁶ in addressing the big policy issues, especially if Peter Dienel's simultaneous planning cells model is employed as well (Dienel 1995).

I keep thinking of that wonderful cartoon with a single person saying 'what can one person do?', surrounded by hundreds of others, all saying 'what can one person do?'. If I extrapolate this belief to hundreds and thousands of small groups saying 'what does one small democratic break out prove?', then I know that the answer is: so much more than the expected results from a single room, a single event, and thousands of people experiencing a single democratic break out. However the potential for a combination of small and large scale processes can take my breath away, so thanks for being so adventurous, America.

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NOTES

¹ Ned Crosby has explored a very interesting combination of deliberative methods and voting in *Healthy Democracy* (2003).

² Voters can spoil their ballot paper or leave it blank and this has been used by protestors, for example, writing 'no dam' across their ballot paper during an election in which a contentious dam was planned for a wilderness area.

³ The New York event was replicated in Perth, West Australia, in September 2003, with *Dialogue in the City*, convened by the Department of Planning and Infrastructure <<http://www.dpi.wa.gov.au/dialogue/>>

⁴ Mentioned in X's [paper 021035]'s essay in this issue; also see <http://www.co-intelligence.org>

⁵ See www.healthydemocracy.org

⁶ A term used by Carolyn Hendriks (building on John Dryzek's work) which captures the essence of citizens' juries, consensus conferences and planning cells—consultation methods that work toward consensus decision making.

Public Participation after 9/11: Rethinking and Rebuilding Lower Manhattan

Donald P. Moynihan

ABSTRACT

This article examines how and why public participation influenced decisions on the rebuilding of Lower Manhattan in the aftermath of the attacks of 9/11. Public officials used a number of different types of public participation, which varied in terms of breadth of citizen involvement and in terms of influence on the decision process. The most successful approach were the Listening to the City forums, where small-group facilitation and innovative technologies combined to provide a clear statement of values and preferences that public officials could not ignore. However, despite the success of the Listening to the City forum, the influence of public participation would later decline as public officials sought to conclude and control the decision process.

KEYWORDS

participation, New York, planning, decision-making, World Trade Center

Introduction

This article examines how and why public participation influenced decisions on the rebuilding of Lower Manhattan in the aftermath of 9/11. The scope of the task, and the level of public interest and involvement, offer an extraordinary case that illustrates the possibility of citizen participation for major public decisions. Facilitators played an important role in this process at the Listening to the City (LTC) forums.

To understand the ultimate contribution of this facilitation it is necessary to assess the nature of LTC along a number of criteria: the representativeness of participation, the nature of the discourse, and the impact of public feedback on public decision-making. A well-established claim in organizational theory and political science is that decisions are iterative processes rather

than stand-alone events (Cohen, March & Olsen, 1972; Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). It follows that a public participation forum should be judged not as a standalone event, but in the context of its involvement in an ongoing decision process, and its eventual impact on the decision outcome. This article therefore narrates the wider decision process of rebuilding Lower Manhattan, and identifies the role of public participation in shaping this process. In doing so, I draw on two models: the first assesses the quality of participation; the second seeks to explain the attitudes public officials held towards participation. The findings underline that while the public participation allowed citizens to redirect the decision process at one point, their influence was not sustained. Public officials became anxious to create consensus on a feasible plan, and subsequently reduced the scope of public participation as the process moved toward a conclusion.

The Context for Planning after 9/11

How to rebuild Lower Manhattan after the attacks on the World Trade Center? This question posed an extraordinary challenge to planners and decision-makers. The scope of the decision was enormous, arising from the degree of damage and the size of the rebuilding task. The attacks also gave the decision process both international visibility and a highly emotional subtext. Citizen involvement in public decisions is frequently marked by apathy, allowing the dominance of a handful of vocal groups and/or ceding decision authority to public officials. In contrast, 9/11 prompted huge numbers of citizens to feel a desire and right to participate in deciding how to repair the damage inflicted in the attacks. Public officials sought to meet this desire without becoming overwhelmed by it. They allowed a relatively high level of citizen involvement in the decision process, but retained government discretion in choosing the final plan.

The participatory nature of the process was at odds with the New York City's tradition of authoritarian decision-making in planning (Caro, 1974; Gillespie, 2002). This participation reached a high point with LTC, an event that moved the New York Times to editorialize: "Public participation in the design of public space in New York City is too often confined to the streets or the courts. On this singular occasion, people who cared urgently about what happens to the World Trade Center site had a chance to respond without staging a demonstration or filing suit."

This break with the past was partly due to the extraordinary nature of 9/11, the associated sense of public interest and purpose, and the undeniable claims of victims' families. Remains of over half of the dead were never found, leading many families to call for either the "footprints" of the towers or the entire 16 acres that were damaged to be treated as a "sacred space." Rebuilding this area was never an issue that public officials could decide without citizen involvement, as indicated by the number of organized and individual ideas volunteered on the redesign. Public officials and news outlets received hundred of unsolicited designs, and a number of projects, such as New York New Visions, and Imagine New York, collected thousands of different visions from professional and non-professional designers.

If the decision process was marked by strong public interest, it was also marked by a complex tangle of public, private and non-profit authorities and interests (Wyatt, 2002a). The primary governmental actors involved were the Lower Manhattan Development Commission (LMDC) and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PA). The LMDC was created in November 2001 to oversee the rebuilding of Lower Manhattan, and to distribute federal funds for this purpose. Seven of the 11 LMDC Board members were appointed by Governor Pataki, and four by outgoing Mayor, Rudy Giuliani. After Mayor Michael

Bloomberg was elected, the Board was expanded to 16, to include four Bloomberg appointees and an eighth Pataki appointee. The PA is a quasi-governmental organization, overseen by the states of New York and New Jersey, and is the legal owner of the space where the World Trade Center stood. A major complication that would form a seemingly rigid parameter on rebuilding was the legal and financial position of the PA. Months before 9/11, the PA signed a 99-year lease for the World Trade Center to private developer Larry Silverstein for \$120 million a year. In the contract Silverstein received 11 million square feet of commercial space, 600,000 square feet of hotel space and the same amount of retail space. After 9/11, Silverstein wanted to quickly rebuild the original amount of space allocated to him, claiming he was both contractually entitled and obliged to do so.ⁱ The PA was acutely aware of both of these legal and financial commitments. Money generated by the World Trade Center represented a substantial portion of the PA's operating revenue.

The tangle of authorities made it unclear over who had final responsibility over the development. Throughout the process relations between the LMDC and PA were strained. The LMDC's greatest leverage was the money it would funnel from the federal government. However, since the PA was the legal owner of the site, the LMDC could not legally compel the PA to accept any particular plan. When the LMDC originally sent out a call for proposals from design firms, the PA interceded on the grounds that the LMDC lacked authority to make such a decision about PA property. By April 2002 the two organizations had drafted a "cooperation agreement" that structured how they would work together, but did not resolve the key question as to who would make the final decisions on what would be built on the 16 acres.

A slew of non-profit organizations also became involved, including those representing the families of victims, local residents and businesses, and the urban design community. The families of the victims were the strongest proponents of basing any rebuilding around a memorial. Throughout the decision process these families would criticize the LMDC for not giving them adequate influence in the design of the memorial (Haberman, 2002), notwithstanding LMDC efforts to include the families and other stakeholders by creating a series of advisory boards and publishing a schedule for public meetings.

Mayor Rudy Giuliani sided with the families by declaring that the entire 16-acre space should be preserved as a memorial. However, incoming Mayor Michael Bloomberg, the LMDC, and the PA made it clear that this was not an option. The real estate was too valuable, and too central to economic development and downtown revitalization. Over 100,000 jobs disappeared with the collapse of the Trade Center, creating an impetus to find structures that would bring those jobs back to Manhattan. For these reasons the possibility that the entire 16 acres would be

reserved for a memorial was rejected by the key decision-makers, and was never presented to the public as an item for debate.

Listening to the City

The most prominent non-profit to emerge was the Civic Alliance to Rebuild Downtown, a coalition of 85 civic, labor, business and environmental groups and academic institutions that was spearheaded by the Regional Plan Association. The alliance promoted the concept of a structured participatory forum, convincing public officials to include such a meeting as part of their decision process. On February 7 2002, the Civic Alliance staged the first LTC meeting, contracting with the non-profit AmericaSpeaks to design and facilitate the meeting. Using communication technologies to foster deliberative public participation, AmericaSpeaks had already organized “21st Century Town Meetings” of thousands of citizens in other cities, most notably as part of Washington D.C.’s strategic planning and budget process (Moynihan, 2003). The February meeting utilized the same technologies for 500 people and would later be employed for the July meeting of 5000 people.ⁱⁱ City, state and LMDC officials spoke to the meeting, reacting to what they had heard.

The LMDC and PA officials believed that the LTC model they had witnessed could be a useful way to include public participation in the planning process. On April 24 the LMDC and the Civic Alliance announced the intention to schedule another, much larger, LTC forum, based on the model of the February meeting (Wyatt, 2002b). At that meeting, the LMDC and PA would present the work of Beyer Blinder & Belle, the firm tasked with producing designs of the 16-acre space for public comment.ⁱⁱⁱ

Even before the LTC meeting, the viability of the proposed designs was under question. The LMDC and PA released six proposals on July 16, the Tuesday before LTC. Almost immediately the designs faced criticism. Architecture critics labeled the designs mediocre. Mayor Bloomberg called for residential space – the six designs contained none. The New York Times ran an editorial entitled “The Downtown We Don’t Want” upon the release of the plans.

Participants at the July 20 and 22 LTC meetings, held at the Jacob Javits Center, were similarly underwhelmed by the designs, finding them lacking in ambition. In large part, the architects were the victims of the parameters they faced. The PA and Silverstein had pushed the designers to replace all of the commercial space lost. At the same time, architects were discouraged from designing buildings of a similar height of the original twin towers, since it would be difficult to find companies willing to place their workers in such high-level space. The result was a dense and uninspiring thicket of

buildings that added little to the city skyline. Cheers went up as low polling results for each design were projected on large screens at the meeting. There was consensus between participants that a spectacular and symbolic design was required to reinvigorate the New York skyline. While disagreement may have existed on what this design might look like, participants made it clear that it was not contained in the six designs presented. They made it so clear, in fact, that at the end of the meeting representatives of the LMDC and PA vowed to go back to the drawing board, and even revisit the parameters that the PA had put in place for the original designers.

The high profile of the issue, the size of the meeting, and perhaps the novelty of the technology used at the forum drew extensive press coverage. As a result, the rejection of the designs was amplified across the nation, and the world, in headlines too stark to be ignored: “Rigid Ideas Hinder Plans of WTC Site” (Boston Globe); “Ground Zero Ideas Get Short Shrift in New York” (The Guardian); “Trade Center Plans Panned” (San Francisco Chronicle); “Plans for WTC Ripped” (Daily news); “Thousands in New York Give WTC Plans a Resounding Boo; Proposals for Site Called Too Dense, Too Large, Too Boring” (Washington Post).

Assessing the Range and Level of Participation

This section analyzes the quality of LTC, using a typology of participation from Moynihan (2003). This typology is based on the primary goals espoused by the participation literature: that participation should be representative and foster meaningful citizen involvement. The first element of the typology is the *range* of citizen involvement, indicating the extent of representative participation. The range of involvement is narrow when only a handful of citizens or a particular socioeconomic group dominate decision-making. The range becomes broader with the involvement of interest groups, and is most representative when a large number of citizens representing different socioeconomic groups are directly involved. A second primary goal of participation is that government provides for genuine discourse with its citizens and takes their input seriously. The second aspect of the typology is, therefore, the *level* of citizen involvement. The level of participation can be divided into three steps: pseudo participation suggests a token effort at fostering public involvement; partial participation suggests that citizens are consulted, but with limited impact; full participation indicates that citizens have an authentic discourse with government, and their views are taken into account.

Table 1 represents the dual goals of representative and full participation, drawing from fairly well established standards and models in the public participation literature, most of which share similar values (e.g., Arnstein, 1969; Pateman, 1989).^{iv} The typology considers the public in terms of their involvement and impact in setting public decisions. Moving left to right on Table

1 increases the range of participation, and moving top to bottom increases the level of participation. The top left-hand box portrays participation as symbolic and restricted to a handful of citizens. The bottom right-hand box presents the fulfillment of the dual goals of participation.

Table 1: A Typology of Citizen Participation

	Representativeness	
Level	Narrow	Broad
Pseudo	<p>Decisions: lack transparency, made by public officials</p> <p>Participation: symbolic, using a handful of citizens</p>	<p>Decisions: made by public officials</p> <p>Participation: symbolic, but involves large diverse group of citizens</p>
Partial	<p>Decisions: made by government elite with limited influence of chosen interest groups</p> <p>Participation: interest groups exert influence; most citizens lack opportunity to participate</p>	<p>Decisions: made by public officials, with limited influence of participation</p> <p>Participation: large diverse group of citizens engage in limited discourse with government</p>
Full	<p>Decisions: made by public officials and chosen interest groups</p> <p>Participation: interest groups exert substantive influence, most citizens lack opportunity to participate</p>	<p>Decisions: made by public officials with strong influence of participation</p> <p>Participation: large diverse group of citizens engage in meaningful discourse with government</p>

How does LTC and other types of public participation involved in the decision process to rebuild Lower Manhattan fare according to the standards of broad and full participation? Prior to LTC, two types of participation existed. First, non-profit organizations organized a realm of opportunities for citizens to offer their views, and in some cases specific rebuilding designs. Many of these discourses were detailed, informative and of value to the participants, but none appeared to influence public decision-makers, who selected their own design teams to come up with suggestions, and maintained the commercial space parameters demanded by the PA. Second, the LMDC had also organized a series of participatory opportunities, relying on advisory councils, traditional public hearings and written

feedback. Each of these approaches had problems of representativeness: the advisory councils were by their nature narrow rather than public discussions; hearings did not monitor who participated; written feedback, particularly internet feedback, tended to exclude those with lower socioeconomic status. Use of traditional public hearings and written-feedback had the further disadvantage of failing to create a meaningful iterative conversation that influenced public policy (King, Feltey & Susel, 1998).

In contrast to these other participatory approaches LTC fares quite well. Representativeness of a broad group of ordinary citizens was an explicit goal of AmericaSpeaks, and simply recruiting thousands of citizens guaranteed some level of representativeness. At the same time, the nature of the event demanded special recognition for some groups, and a special effort was made to ensure a disproportionate representation of victims’ families. AmericaSpeaks employed a grassroots outreach firm to ensure geographical and ethnic representation, and compared the demographic data of participants with that of the city as a whole to assess representativeness. The data suggests the efforts to ensure representativeness were largely successful and ensured diversity, but with a number of notable exceptions that meant that the meeting was not perfectly representative. The meeting was representative in terms of the age of residents (excluding children). Caucasians and Asian/Pacific Islanders were well represented, but African-American and Hispanic groups were underrepresented. In terms of income, middle-income residents were adequately represented, but low-income residents were underrepresented. In terms of geographical background, the event drew disproportionately high number from Manhattan, 18% from Brooklyn, with no other borough or region achieving over 10% (The Civic Alliance, 2002).

The other aspect of the typology is whether meaningful participation took place, influencing public decisions. Again, LTC fares well. The structure of LTC helped ensure that conversation was meaningful. Trained facilitators played a key role, encouraging members of the small groups to contribute during the day-long experience. The use of specific topics, computer feedback and polling summarized the results of these conversations into concise points. Traditional public hearings are frequently poorly coordinated and lack a clear sense of conclusion, offering poor and ambiguous feedback to decision-makers. Facilitators ensure that many who might not otherwise comment do so, and help to articulate their perspective. The clarity of the results from LTC provided inescapable conclusions to decision-makers. The dialogue was also intelligent, even by the standards of experts. Robert Ivy, editor in chief of the Architectural Record, commented: “Astonishingly, the public talked about design. Their voices varied as they waded into unfamiliar waters, but it was clear that they expected more; as

reported in the press, the phrase was for a 'more ambitious' plan" (Ivy, 2002).^v

Even if the dialogue was intelligent and meaningful, were the authorities actually listening? In a number of ways, the decision agenda presented to the public had already been structured by the LMDC and the PA. Some issues were off the agenda, such as turning the entire 16 acres into a memorial or park. The public was asked to react to designers chosen by the LMDC and the PA. These designs were all guided by the parameters established by the PA, specifically in relation to the amount of commercial space required.

Despite the structured decision agenda presented, LTC still had a real impact on the decision process. Participants largely rejected the designs they saw. At the conclusion of the meeting PA and the LMDC officials promised they would take into account the feedback they had received. They acknowledged that the designs presented to the public were not popular, and vowed to reexamine the parameters set by the PA. The timeline for devising a final design was extended, and during this time the parameters were renegotiated. An October 2002 meeting between officials from the PA, the LMDC, the city, state and White House, saw the PA reduce its demands on the scope of rebuilding, agreeing to allow anywhere from 6.5 million to 10 million square feet of office space on the site, as long as the remaining space was on other parcels of land nearby (Wyatt, 2002c). The LMDC had already planned to invite an additional round of design submissions from around the world, but these architects were now given greater discretion in terms of the parameters they faced. A New York Times editorial page concluded that "public opposition saved the city from the ordinary."

Why Participation: An Instrumental Approach

Why did decision-makers from the LMDC and PA decide to involve the public as extensively as they did in the first place? To answer this question we examine the instrumental benefits and administrative costs that public decision-makers are likely to be concerned with. Table 2 lists a variety of costs and benefits of concern to administrators when deciding the extent to which they include the public (Moynihan, 2003).

Table 2: Administrative Costs and Instrumental Benefits

<p>Direct Administrative Costs</p> <p>Actual and opportunity cost of time and effort of administrators in coordinating participation</p> <p>Costs of informing citizens about participation opportunities</p> <p>Costs of educating citizens on issue</p> <p>Administrators must deal with confrontation and conflict arising from participation</p>	<p>Administrative Self-interest Costs</p> <p>Possible loss of control of decision agenda, a source of power and prestige for the administrator</p> <p>Loss of influence over policies that shape tasks for administrator</p> <p>Reduced program stability, regularity and routinization of decisions</p> <p>Decision Process Costs</p> <p>Participation creates excessive administrative delays, slowing the process of making decisions and implementation</p> <p>Reduces the ability to reach consensus and decision closure</p>
<p>Decision Outcome Costs</p> <p>Decisions will be less timely</p> <p>Citizens may lack knowledge to make good decision based on the expert viewpoint of the administrator</p> <p>Participation unsuited to dealing with complex and technical issues; technical and scientific information may be overlooked</p> <p>Public involvement can deter innovation and new policies</p> <p>Public may emphasize short-sighted goals</p> <p>Decision may be more inequitable due to lack of representativeness of participants</p> <p>If public is unwilling to make tradeoffs this restricts governments ability to inflict losses on groups. Unwillingness to make tradeoffs can lead to pursuit of the many constituent interests rather than overall public interest, and requires compromises that allow each group to gain, which will likely raise the absolute costs of decisions</p>	<p>Instrumental Benefits</p> <p>Programs, informed by citizen preferences, will be more targeted and effective</p> <p>Additional and innovative ideas in how to deliver public services</p> <p>Government accorded increased sense of democratic legitimacy in public perception</p> <p>Greater acceptance of public decisions</p> <p>Possibility of co-production, leading to more effective program outcomes</p> <p>Public may support administrators position on a particular issue</p> <p>Involving civil society in the provision of public services</p> <p>Achievement of participation mandates (where appropriate)</p>

Costs may be classified as direct administrative costs, self-interested administrative costs, decision process and decision outcome costs. Direct administrative costs are the costs placed on administrators when coordinating participation, and include the actual costs of time and resources devoted to participation, and the forgone opportunity of devoting that time and effort elsewhere (Kweit & Kweit, 1981). Administrative self-interest costs arise from the public manager's potential loss of control of the decision agenda, which in turn reduces administrative power and autonomy over day-to-day activities. Managers who wish to maintain program stability (McNair, Caldwell & Pollane, 1983) or are concerned with shaping bureaucratic activities and carving out an interesting policy-making role (Dunleavy, 1991) are likely to resist participatory processes that determine the policy agenda. Decision process costs are the variable costs involved in making the decision. Administrators view participation as slowing the process of making a decision, and likely to reduce the potential for gaining consensus (Nelkin, 1984). Finally, administrators may profess that participation damages the quality of the decision outcome. Poor decisions may emerge due to a lack of knowledge or expertise on the part of the public, who will offer criteria and values that may conflict with bureaucratic or expert-defined rational criteria for decision outcomes (Cleveland, 1985).

The instrumental perspective is not, however, solely limited to costs. Administrators might perceive a series of instrumental benefits to participation. Public input can provide information that helps managers improve public efficiency—either through better resource allocation choices, or through information that leads to improvement of the processes of public service provision. In addition, public input may offer innovative solutions to public problems that would have not emerged from traditional modes of decision-making (Koteen, 1989). Since many public programs require some level of cooperation from citizens, involvement of the public in setting goals is likely to provide more informed goals, raise acceptance of programs and may even provide the possibility of citizen-administrative co-production (Thomas, 1995). Another instrumental benefit is to generate support among members of the public for administrators and public programs. Public agencies are particularly likely to seek public support in times of weakness or environmental instability, to counter negative political or public attitudes (McNair et al., 1983; Kweit & Kweit, 1980). The creation of participatory forums may be therefore designed to increase the perception that public organizations are more consultative, lending an air of democratic legitimacy to the activities of the organization (Frederickson, 1982). The instrumental perspective presented here therefore predicts participation on the basis of (and only to the extent that it produces) net instrumental value to decision-makers, rather than

the proposition of increased involvement based on democratic rights and norms.

Rebuilding Lower Manhattan after 9/11 was a high profile issue that was framed in the emotional context of an enormous loss of life. Decision-makers knew of the intense public interest in involvement. Indeed they were criticized for a failure to demonstrate transparency in the decision process right from the beginning, and continued to face criticism even after LTC (Muschamp, 2002). An array of civic efforts to engage the public were launched very early on, placing substantial pressure on the LMDC and PA to be perceived as inclusive. But decision-makers also feared that high levels of public involvement had the potential to derail the decision process and fail to generate a solution. After witnessing the first LTC meeting in February, the LMDC and PA saw this mode of participation as a means to involve the public in a structured and innovative way.

Up to the LTC meeting, the benefits for involving the public were high relative to administrative costs. The level and intensity of public interest meant that decision-makers could not reserve absolute discretion on the outcome on the grounds of expertise. They had to acknowledge and respond to public values. Failure to do so would have seriously damaged the sense of democratic legitimacy of the decision process. A need to demonstrate democratic legitimacy in decision-making occurs in times of extraordinary circumstances or dramatic change (Moynihan, 2003; Olivio, 1998). While it would be difficult to ever find a real consensus on a final design, it would have been extremely difficult to generate acceptance of such a design had the decision process not been perceived as fair and open. Decision-makers could also hope to involve civil society to organize participation in the issue to gain a greater understanding of what the public hoped would be achieved. Participation, therefore, made sense to decision-makers early in the decision process.

After Listening to the City

The immediate aftermath of LTC and its impact on the decision process were described above. The timeline was delayed and design parameters renegotiated as an international design competition proceeded, with nominations selected by an LMDC-appointed jury. As a result, nine new designs were presented for public view at the Winter Garden at the World Financial Center on December 18. The entrants included leading architects from around the world, and the visionary nature of the designs were widely applauded as a welcome contrast to the mediocrity presented at the LTC meetings.^{vi}

The LMDC decided not to create another LTC meeting to evaluate the nine designs, preferring to rely on other participatory forums, including advisory commissions, a series

of smaller public hearings, comment cards at the Winter Garden, and internet comments. Comment cards and internet commentary drew thousands of responses, but the weaknesses of these forms of participations has already been discussed.

The largest of the public meetings, held on January 13 2003, also failed to live up to the standards set by LTC. The LMDC organized the meeting to gain feedback on the new designs unveiled in December. Instead, the meeting was dominated by long-held complaints on other matters, including the need for low-income housing, calls for restoring the twin towers, and accusations that bureaucrats had dominated the decision process. The lack of careful facilitation to guide participants exacerbated the failings of the traditional public hearing: comments were wide ranging, non-iterative, often unrelated to the designs at hand, and came from single-issue proponents, rather than members of the general public (Wyatt, 2003a).

The meeting also suffered logistical problems that underlined the need for organizational capacity for public participation. Seven hundred people turned up at the meeting at Pace University in Manhattan, but lack of outreach meant that only 60 people attended the five other meetings simultaneously occurring in city boroughs. These other meetings were intended to connect to the Pace University meeting through audio-visual technology, but the connections failed, eliminating the intended effect of one large virtually-connected meeting. At the main meeting, technical problems also hampered discourse. Microphones failed, as did a slideshow to present the new designs. Further, there was little effort to create or even track demographic or other forms of representativeness.

The decision not to include another round of participation drew criticism from the press and the Civic Alliance (Hittrich and Haberman, 2002). The LMDC and PA had retreated from the broad and meaningful participation of LTC to more traditional and less effective forms of participation to make the final decision. What explains this shift, given the widely perceived success of the July LTC? In this period of the decision process we see the costs of participation looming larger for public officials, in terms of time, potential loss of control of the outcome, non-experts making decisions, and the unwelcome transparency of the conflict between the PA and the LMDC.

The original designs presented in July were intended as a starting point, and the fact that they were largely rejected slowed, but did not devastate, the decision process. As decision-makers moved closer toward a final design, they were reluctant to expose their choices to a similar rejection. Consensus on the “best” single design would be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve, and might not reflect logistical realities or commercial needs. The electoral cycle played a role in elevating the importance of a swift and clean resolution to the decision process. Governor Pataki was the single most powerful actor in

the process, with shared control of both the PA and LMDC. He had faced criticism from opponents and the press during his reelection campaign for a lack of leadership and the slow pace of progress (New York Times, 2002, Wyatt, 2002c). Once reelected Governor Pataki pushed for a more ambitious timetable for making a decision on rebuilding Lower Manhattan (Wyatt, 2002d).

Public involvement had already delayed the selection of a design, and could do so again. Public involvement might also expose the tensions between the two main decision-makers in the process, the LMDC and PA (Wyatt, 2002c). Throughout the decision process, these two main actors, and the lessor of the WTC, Larry Silverstein, had been at odds, but had attempted--sometimes unsuccessfully--to keep their disagreements from view and resolve them in private. After the July meeting the LMDC pushed the PA to loosen its demands on designers. The PA had hired its own firm of architects to design the buildings and infrastructure surrounding any memorial, increasing ambiguity over which organization would have the greatest influence on the final design (Haberman and Gittrich, 2002).

Robert Yaro, head of the Civic Alliance warned that continued public involvement was needed because of the “dueling plans” of the different organizations (Gittrich and Haberman, 2002). The decision on selecting two finalists from nine international designs was made by a committee dominated by LMDC, PA representatives, but also including a Deputy Mayor of New York City and an aide of Governor Pataki. The ad-hoc nature of the committee was criticized as further evidence of the exclusion of public input, and indicative of a decision process that was made up as it went along (Wyatt, 2003b).

The two finalists were Studio Daniel Libeskind, and the Think Group. On February 25, the LMDC site-committee voted to select the Think Group, but was overruled by a committee including LMDC representatives, the Port Authority, the city and the state. The PA judged Libeskind’s design more feasible to construct. Mayor Bloomberg preferred the street life and associated economic development it created. Governor Pataki believed that the Libeskind design reflected the wishes of survivors and the families of the victims (Wyatt, 2003c).

On February 27, the world was told that Studio Daniel Libeskind’s design would form the blueprint for the rebuilding the site of the World Trade Center. Libeskind’s selection can be interpreted partly as recognition of the often-imperfect public participation in the process—both Libeskind and the Think Group were among the most publicly popular designs, and a welcome contrast from the drab architecture presented at the LTC. But the finalists were also chosen because they were among the most logistically practical of the nine designs on offer, mixing both avant-garde architecture at their center with

fairly conventional commercial building opportunities in the surrounding area (Goldberger, 2003).

Even after selection, it remains uncertain to what extent Libeskind's design will ever be completely realized. The PA and LMDC jointly hired Libeskind, declaring that he would have oversight of almost all of the redevelopment at the site, and that his master plan would form the basis of rebuilding. However, Larry Silverstein reasserted his rights to rebuild the site according to his requirements. He announced that a modified version of Libeskind's 1776-foot tower would remain, but that he would choose another architect to oversee the rebuilding and to design the surrounding office buildings that made up the bulk of the property. Silverstein hoped to increase the number of office buildings to five, one more than in the Libeskind design, and similar to a previous design commissioned by Silverstein, but rejected at LTC (Dunlap & Wyatt, 2003).^{vii}

Conclusion

As a single event the LTC forum was an enormous success. At the center of this success was a network of facilitators from across the United States and beyond. The intensive use of these facilitators allied with innovative technology to produce a participatory forum that incorporated thousands, led to meaningful dialogue, and shaped public decision-making. This size and clarity of feedback gave LTC a level of influence and quality of discourse that other public meetings or forms of participation fail to produce.

If the success of participation is partly dependent on organization and the contribution of facilitators, it is also dependent on the willingness of decision-makers to listen. The LTC forum was only one part of a wider decision process, a process that varied in terms of degree of public involvement at different points. Administrative willingness to sponsor and listen to such a forum is determined by instrumental rather than normative factors. At an early phase of the decision process administrators judged it worthwhile to take into account public feedback. This decision had much to do with the extraordinary nature of the decision process in question, and the need to add legitimacy to this process through public involvement.

Extraordinary situations are, by definition, rare, reducing the likelihood that participation events like LTC will become the norm in public decisions. Convincing officials to listen is harder than competently organizing participation. At a later point in the same decision process, decision-makers recalculated the costs and benefits of public involvement, determined that they wished to reach a clear and feasible conclusion relatively quickly, and discounted the importance of participation. The weight of legal, economic and logistical demands reduced the emphasis on transparency and democratic legitimacy in the decision process. The case demonstrates that even with strong citizen

involvement, decision outcomes will still reflect the demands and interests of different public agencies and private stakeholders.

The rebuilding is likely to continue for a decade. It remains unclear who has ultimate authority over the project, and the extent to which public wishes will be reflected. The actors involved publicly discussed terms such as "partnership" and "consensus," but differences in opinions remain on the degree to which the Libeskind design will be implemented. While the decision process imperfectly allowed public participation, the result was to select a model that had earned a measure of public legitimacy. Now the selection process gives way to the implementation process, and it remains to be seen whether public decision-makers sector will ensure that the vision selected will be respected, or whether Lower Manhattan will be fashioned according to private demands.

The extraordinary context of 9/11 should not exclude the potential for a similarly facilitated public involvement in other types of decisions. The case demonstrates that, to a large degree, the quality of public participation depends on how well it is organized. The decision process following 9/11 gave us LTC, but also offered examples of poorly organized and unproductive participation. In contrast, AmericaSpeaks has facilitated successful participation forums not just for the rebuilding of the World Trade Center, but also for the seemingly more mundane issues of strategic planning and budgeting (Moynihan, 2003). Clearly, facilitators can provide a critical public service in this arena.

The lesson from the LTC experience is not only that smart and well-organized public participation can influence public decision-making—it can—but that a decision process is long, even without considering the additional risks posed by implementation. High involvement in one part of the process does not guarantee high overall citizen influence of the outcome. Well-organized participation is more likely to draw administrative attention, and both must be sustained *throughout* a decision process if the public is to be heard.

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NOTES

ⁱ During the process Silverstein was engaged in a legal dispute over the amount of insurance he could claim for the attack, and subsequently use for rebuilding. Part of the PA's reluctance to reduce its demand to replace the commercial space was to not undermine Silverstein's case, and therefore reduce the amount of money for rebuilding.

ⁱⁱ The logistics, process and atmosphere of LTC are better described elsewhere by firsthand participants and organizers. It is worth noting, however, that the participants did not simply vote on the designs presented. Before comparing of these designs, the participants spent an afternoon session discussing the social and economic issues relevant to public planning.

ⁱⁱⁱ It was subsequently revealed that at least four of the six designs presented by Beyer Blinder Belle originated with other architectural firms, although their involvement was not publicly disclosed at the time (Muschamp, 2002).

^{iv} One example is the popular IAP2 model of the International Association for Public Participation. Both Table 1 and the IAP2 model assume a logical and desirable movement from limited public participation to highly active participation, and use degree of public influence on decisions and quality of dialogue as important criteria. A difference between the two models is that Table 1 adds representativeness as a criterion. However, the IAP2 model is more useful for prescriptive purposes, since it identifies a range of specific participation tools for each step between informing and collaborating with citizens. The IAP2 model can be found at <http://www.iap2.org/practitionertools/spectrum.html>. Accessed, June 12, 2003.

^v After the "live" Javits Center meeting was completed, LTC launched an two-week online discussion with 818 participants. As in the live event, the format was structured: 26 discussion groups were tasked with discussing the themes and responding to polls on issues that arose at the Javits Center. But the nature of the online discussion allowed participants more time to consider issues, develop an opinion, offer new ideas and engage in an iterative and meaningful dialogue. Interestingly, the majority of those involved said that at least some of their opinions had changed as a result of the dialogue. The online dialogue was overshadowed by the live events of the Javits Center. It received less attention, and it appears doubtful that

absent the Javits Center event the decision process would have been so significantly altered. The participants were also less representative in terms of race and income than at the Javits meeting. However, the dialogue was a model of its kind, and certainly compared favorably with the LMDC's own online approach to participation, which was to simply allow members of the public to e-mail comments to the organization.

^{vi} The nine designs included two firms whose earlier designs were already presented at the July LTC meeting: Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, who were under contract to Larry Silverstein, and Peterson Littenberg Architecture. . Skidmore, Owings & Merrill dropped out of the competition, but remained under contract with Silverstein, who insisted that the final winners would have to work with his architects. The Peterson Littenberg design was applauded as being the most practical in terms of infrastructure design, but was criticized as retro and unimaginative in terms of building design.

^{vii} As this debate continues, the search for a memorial has begun, with the LMDC sponsoring a competition for a memorial design to be placed on the site. The LMDC selected a panel to judge entries, and rejected the possibility of public decisions on choosing between entries (Wyatt, 2003d). Instead, the public would participate in forums where they talked to panel members about their hopes for a memorial, but would not play a role in choosing specific entries. Deciding on a memorial is a different type of choice from that of rebuilding the World Trade Center—it does not have the same effect on economic development, and neighborhoods, and therefore public involvement is less pressing. A memorial also does not seek to replace the potent symbol of the Twin Towers, and may therefore have less of an emotional pull on the public. Although some, including the New York Times editorial page, lamented the failure to involve the public in the memorial design, the issue did not generate the same press coverage or public discussion that the rebuilding process had over the previous year.

Creating a Hearing for the Listening: Steps to Increase the Effectiveness of New Forms of Public and Private Participation

Eric W. Allison, Mary Ann Allison

ABSTRACT:

In this paper, we use some of the experimental interventions in the decision-making processes surrounding the rebuilding of Lower Manhattan (New York City) and the design of public memorials after the terrorist activity which took place on February 26, 1993 and 9/11 (September 11, 2001) to examine several new participative processes. The intent is to begin understanding when such collaborative governance might be effective, what the key components of these processes are, and—most important—why public and private decision makers might wish to use them. We offer some preliminary views of criteria and welcome comments and suggestions from others interested in participatory governance and collaborative processes.

KEY WORDS:

9/11, America Speaks, facilitation, feedback, governance, Lower Manhattan Redevelopment, LMDC, participatory democracy, participatory process, public participation, memorials, urban planning

INTRODUCTION

[The American Planning Association] proposes an iterative planning process [for the World Trade Center Site] over a period of time that allows for new alternatives and approaches to be explored and the public input considered in decision-making.

—New York New Visions (nd, nymva.aiga.org)

Trust has a reverse side: it must be earned as well as given.

—Command and Control (US Marine Corps, 1996, p. 114).

The experience of facilitating two of the approximately forty tables of 600 diverse New Yorkers gathered to hold a *Conversation about Rebuilding Downtown New York (Conversation)* on February 7, 2002 was at the time both tiring and exhilarating. Although we both have well over twenty years in the art and discipline of working with groups, this was our first experience with the *America Speaks* process.

The power of the process and technology developed by *America Speaks* were evident in this precursor to the larger July 20 and 22, 2002 *Listening to the City (Listening)* events (in which 5,000 New Yorkers participated) as well as *Listening to the City Online* (800 participants in 26 online groups between July 30

and August 13, using a web-based small group process developed by Web Lab). A parallel and complementary public participation process—*Imagine New York (Imagine)*—was sponsored by a coalition of public and private organizations and sought to bring together members of the public to share their ideas and visions for rebuilding downtown Manhattan.

We were delighted to participate but ultimately disappointed by the lack of significant change in the larger processes which the *Conversation*, *Listening*, and *Imagine* events were designed to influence. Although these processes were powerful for the participants and appreciated by those with experience in facilitation or interested in participative processes, those making the decisions did not choose to significantly change the traditional decision-making process and become actively engaged in a more open, iterative public course of action.

While it is easy to jump to blaming the decision makers for not being more visionary (and to be honest, we've done our share of that), we take the position that it doesn't matter who is "right" or "wrong" in this matter of changes in process and decision

making or who “should” have listened or who “should” have acted differently.

We argue that those who are interested in developing effective participative processes must be able to explain *how* new collaborative and participative processes work, *what* the critical elements of such processes are, and *why* decision makers, both public and private, might wish to take them into account. As Spinosa, Flores, and Dreyfus put it in their seminal work, *Disclosing New Worlds: Entrepreneurship, Democratic Action, and the Cultivation of Solidarity*:

The virtue of a citizen, as opposed to a subject or any other kind of member of a state, is that a citizen exercises the skill involved in *changing what fellow citizens do by changing the way society understands and treats certain phenomena*. We call the exercise of this skill *interpretive speaking* (italics added, Spinosa et al., 1997, p. 88).

Key to the conversation, as experienced facilitators know, we must be able to describe clearly why decision makers should want to go through the trouble of changing their behavior; we need a succinct version of that old standby, *wiifm*—what’s in it for me.

Our purpose in this paper is to invite others to join us in an exploration of these elements. To provide a concrete example and a context with which we are familiar, we chose to examine some of the responses to the terrorist activity which took place on February 26, 1993 and 9/11 (September 11, 2001) in New York and the decision-making processes for rebuilding Lower Manhattan. We want to say, at the outset, that when working with this or any historical tragedy, we understand that we will never know the full story and that there are many other events worthy of study.

Background#1: The Owners, Established Players, and their Objectives

To understand the process, it is first necessary to understand that the decision makers in the case of redeveloping Lower Manhattan are the *Port Authority of New York and New Jersey* and the *Lower Manhattan Development Corporation*. The World Trade Center (WTC) site belongs to the *Port Authority of New York and New Jersey* (PA). The PA’s objective throughout the process has been to replace the revenue once generated by 11 million square feet of office space and 450,000 square feet of retail space—revenue needed for operations and to pay bonds.

The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation was established after 9/11 to plan the redevelopment of Lower Manhattan, a wider mandate than the WTC site. This is how they describe themselves:

The LMDC is a joint State-City corporation governed by a 16-member Board of Directors, half appointed by the Governor of New York State and half by the Mayor of New York City. LMDC is funded by \$2.78 billion in grants from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. LMDC is charged with ensuring that Lower Manhattan recovers from the attacks and emerges as a strong and vibrant 24-hour community (www.wtcsitememorial.org/overview/about_lmhc.html, nd).

The LMDC and PA are, respectively, a state and a bi-state agency (the Port Authority is a joint venture of New York and New Jersey). Effectively, both Agencies report to the Governor of New York. Although the Port Authority is a bi-state agency, with regard to the World Trade Center Site, the Governor of the State of New Jersey is not exercising significant authority.

Background #2: The Influencers and Their Goals

The *Listening to the City* sessions were arranged with the Civic Alliance, one of several voluntary associations of citizens and groups concerned with the aftermath of 9/11 and the rebuilding of downtown New York City.

The organizations that sought to influence the decisions surrounding the redevelopment of Lower Manhattan including the WTC and the 9/11 memorial can loosely be grouped into two categories:

- one being advocacy groups putting forward a point of view
- the second being groups and NGO’s (non-government organizations) seeking to advance and, in some cases, actually to provide public participation in the process.

There was considerable overlap in objectives but a clear difference in methodology. Many of the advocacy groups strongly recommended additional public involvement of the type that was actually provided by NGOs in several limited participatory events (*Conversation, Listening, and Imagine* prominent among them) that were both pro bono and outside the formal decision-making process.

Advocacy Groups

The first group includes *WTC Residents Coalition, Rebuild Downtown Our Town* (R-DOT), *New York New Visions* (NYNV), and many others. A brief description of each will serve to highlight the types of advocacy involved. The WTC Residents Coalition is made up of people who live in the immediate vicinity of Ground Zero, primarily across the street in Battery Park City, and were concerned about the impact on them of developments at the WTC site. R-DOT is made up of residents and merchants of the wider downtown area with many of the same concerns in principle but different concerns in

execution. New York New Visions is a coalition of twenty-one design and planning organizations, including the American Institute of Architects and the American Planning Association, who sought to influence the process and principles that would govern the design and planning of the rebuilding of the site and went on to criticize and praise subsequent design ideas based on those principles. All of these groups, including others not mentioned, were organized and advertised themselves as representing a particular geographic or philosophical point of view.

These advocacy groups engaged in meetings with the LMDC and PA and sought—and gained—publicity, especially newspaper coverage, of their points of view. The extent to which they contributed to and influenced the work within the two agencies is unknown. Certainly NYNV, presenting itself as neutral to the results of the design competitors but also as fellow professionals seeking to help the process, had substantial success in that LMDC adopted many of the design and planning principles (see Figure 1 below for an excerpt) presented in their January 2002 white paper verbatim.

Figure 1. An Excerpt from the New York New Vision's

Principles for the Rebuilding of Lower Manhattan

An Effective and Inclusive Planning Process

[Point 2] Accomplish the plan through a participatory process:

The plan should be accomplished through a participatory process involving government, the private sector, affected communities, and the public. Rebuilding will require an open, transparent process to decide what to do with the WTC site and Lower Manhattan. Planning for this and other redevelopment areas will also require recognizing community assets and developing a place-based consensus among community members, the business community, agencies, and other stakeholders. This must include due acknowledgement of relevant rights and responsibilities of existing WTC landowners and leaseholders.

The first step in developing plans will be to design a participatory framework. The goal should be definition of commonly shared vision, agreement on principles, and establishment of guidelines. Such a framework would include the following:

- A process for developing a vision for rebuilding based on maximum possible consensus, in an expedited manner and with adequate public input.
- Soliciting public input through outreach, including focus groups, the Internet, cable television, and other means, and incorporating that input into the planning process.
- A schedule for achieving public approvals, including environmental and agency approvals, with analysis of alternatives and impacts integrated into the process.
- Analysis of options developed through the public process not only by clients and approval bodies but also by an Advisory Group of architects, planners, designers, and other relevant professional groups.
- A public education program focusing on planning and design principles using exhibits, panel discussions, electronic and print media, and other forums. Coordination with events and forums advanced by the Civic Alliance, Imagine New York, members of New York New Visions and other groups.
- Clearly defined participant roles during the planning process.
- Use of interactive meetings, web sites, electronic media and other techniques for presenting material, receiving comments and discussing options.

On the other hand, the LMDC and PA generally ignored the call, also in the white paper, for a genuinely open, iterative, and participative public process. How much they and the public participation groups influenced the closed door planning within the two agencies beyond that is an open question.

Groups Providing Public Participation

The second group is those organizations who sought to supply the public process lacking in the LMDC and PA decision making process. These include the two America Speaks

public fora (*Conversation and Listening*) and *Imagine NY*. As the surrounding articles and essays in this issue of *The Group Facilitation Journal* describe the *Listening to the City* goals, processes, and facilitator experiences, we will not provide a detailed review of the process here. (Table 1 provides a summary of some of the key features of these fora.) Even though they invested their time and energy, participants were—appropriately as it turns out—skeptical that their voices would make a difference (see table 2).

Table 2. Confidence in Effectiveness

Listening to the City	Listening to the City Online
<p>How Confident Are You That Your Voice Will Be Heard?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 10 % Very confident ▪ 23% Confident ▪ 45% Somewhat confident ▪ 21% Little confidence ▪ 10% Zero confidence ▪ 1% No opinion 	<p>How Confident Are You That Your Voice Will Be Heard?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 5 % Very confident ▪ 14% Confident ▪ 39% Somewhat confident ▪ 21% Not so confident ▪ 10% Zero confidence ▪ 1% No opinion
<p>Combined Results from July 20 and 22 Listening to the City Fora. <u>Source:</u> Listening to the City: Report of Proceedings available at: www.listeningtothecity.org/background/index.html</p>	<p>Results from Listening to the City Online. <u>Source:</u> Listening to the City: Final Polls reported at dialogues.listeningtothecity.org/WebX?writeDocument@65.h56aaiQcctb.8@.ee7c37f!doc=11</p>

America Speaks and the Civic Alliance addressed the issue of how the results of these participatory sessions would be used during the sessions themselves and in the follow-up reports in several ways:

- they included as many decision-makers and politicians in the actual process as possible (not as many as might have been hoped chose to accept the invitations);
- they asked participants to assess their level of confidence in the willingness of key decision makers to hear the information gathered;
- they published a report, sent it to key decision makers and made it accessible to anyone who has access to the Internet; and
- they invited members of the press to observe and report on the sessions.

Similarly, *Imagine New York* produced reports widely distributed and available on line.

Unfortunately, while these reports have been distributed and the key decision makers have surely studied them, there has been little or no direct response or continuation of the public participation process—effectively there has been no hearing for the *Listening to the City* results.

To be fair, however appropriate, these interventions were not officially requested nor more than lightly sponsored by the PA and the LMDC. As they were what we call “pasted on,” it should not be surprising that they might not become an integral part of the decision making process.

Results Thus Far: How Much Public Participation Has Taken Place and What Changed as a Result?

The Plans for Lower Manhattan

The decision making process, as it has actually happened thus far, has been far from the democratic processes advocated by the NYNV principles or the members of the various organizations or fora. The LMCD and the PA theoretically answer to the state legislatures but in practice answer only to the governor(s). The result is that they operate with no real requirements for public scrutiny or participation.

The process laid out by the LMDC envisioned a competition by invited architectural/ planning consortia followed by a winnowing down process resulting in a final plan for the site. One of the criteria was that each plan include a space for the 9/11 memorial but the design of the memorial(s) itself was not

to be included. Early on it became clear that the two agencies were not entirely in sync and this uncertainty as to how much the PA plans to follow the designs of the LMDC still remains, though public harmony was quickly re-established after some early missteps. The LMDC did convene a number of advisory committees—Transportation, Memorial, etc—but made it clear that the committees were strictly advisory and all members were appointed by the LMDC. Often, in fact, the meetings turned out to be a means of updating the committee members about decisions already taken rather than opportunities for input.

The first competition was a disaster. The conceptual nature of the plans and the lack of vision involved were met with overwhelming condemnation from the public and the media. The few public hearings conducted made it clear that the ideas presented were too timid and pedestrian to fly—and the results from the July *Listening to the City* sessions reinforced this. The timetable was junked and a new competition was announced. A jury was organized to select the finalists, unlike the original competition where the selections were made internally.

The *Listening to the City* sessions were held shortly after the new competition started. Both public and private decision makers observed at least some of the process and a few fully participated in the process. John Whitehead, chairman of the LMDC, reported that he was moved by what he observed at the July sessions, commenting “This is what the terrorists didn’t understand,” he said. “This is what they didn’t know. It’s absolutely beautiful,” (Civic Alliance, 2002, p. 2). Without doubting his sincerity in this statement, in our opinion what Mr. Whitehead doesn’t understand is that it is not enough to observe and to listen, it is critical to *use the information directly and to report back* to those who gave of their time, intelligence, and experience, the decisions made as a result. And, for those who value participatory processes, it is our job to help Mr. Whitehead and others understand why they might want to do this.

The LMCD was responsive to the numerous public comments in drafting the second request for proposals for the design of the overall site. And, it spent considerable time and money to exhibit the competition designs for public review. However, the three-step process—draft, comments, final—allowed for commentary but provided no mechanism for feedback to those commenting nor any say in the final decision. When the plans from the finalists in the second competition were made public, the new designs were greeted with relief and acclaim. This time there was evidence of vision and innovation.

The process, however, was still neither democratic nor iterative. No public hearings were held. The LMDC and the PA decided against a third America Speaks event to comment

on the new plans. The designs were posted on the LMDC web site and exhibited at the Winter Garden in the World Financial Center across West Street from Ground Zero. Visitors to the Winter Garden could fill out ballots and vote on which plan they preferred. Visitors to the web site could do the same. There was no assurance, implied or stated, that the public point of view would prevail.

Instead, a panel made up of PA and LMDC insiders was appointed to decide which plan would go forward. The panel selected that proposed by the THINK group, one of the two or three that had received the most number of votes as well as much favorable press. George Pataki, the governor, had previously publicly stated that he liked the rival plan of Studio Liebeskind (as had Michael Bloomberg, the mayor of New York). The governor chose to ignore the recommendation of his own panel and chose Studio Liebeskind's design for the site.

The Memorial Process

A separate memorial(s) competition, open to anyone over 18 years of age who wishes to submit concepts and registers by May 29, 2003, is now underway. Access to the competition is provided by a *World Trade Center Site Memorial Competition* website (www.wtcsitememorial.org), sponsored by the LMCD. There is a \$25 submission fee. The invitation to compete, signed by the governor of New York and the mayor of New York City, emphasizes the values of liberty, participation, and democracy:

On behalf of all New Yorkers, we welcome your participation in the World Trade Center Site Memorial Competition.

Memorials serve so many essential functions: they give us a context for remembering the past, engaging the present, and reflecting on the future. We are seeking to honor the lives lost in the attacks of 9/11 on New York City - and on Washington, DC and the flight that ended in Shanksville, PA - as well as during the attack on the World Trade Center on February 26, 1993. We also need to commemorate the resilience as well as the grieving of survivors, co-workers, neighbors, and citizens profoundly affected. *The values of liberty and democracy transcend geography and nationality, and they must be given physical expression as we reimagine Lower Manhattan.*

By taking part in this competition, you have already helped to heal our City and demonstrate once again, New York does not stand alone (www.wtcsitememorial.org/overview/invitation.html).

As currently structured, the winner of this competition will be decided using the same process as was used in the deciding upon the redevelopment plan for the WTC site.

Participative Processes: Advantages and Disadvantages

The Difficulties: What Pain Does More Participative Process Bring?

Because many leaders—including us when we are in our leadership roles—find it easy to see the disadvantages of “letting the public in,” it is important to acknowledge these disadvantages, which sometimes, *but not always*, may be turned into advantages. Disadvantages of participative process include but are not limited to:

- it takes longer;
- it is more difficult and expensive to manage;
- leaders and decision makers have less control of the process, although, in many cases, they continue to be held accountable;
- participants may have unrealistic expectations;
- it requires special training;
- it requires technological supporting infrastructure;
- there is more personal exposure, risk of scrutiny, and possible embarrassment; and
- the leaders give up some of their status and power (important to most people, not only our current leaders).

As Russell Long, who had both personal and public reasons to study democracy and power, put it: “Democracy is like a raft. It won't sink, but you'll always have your feet wet.” (Telemanage, nd).

Wifim? Why Might Decision Makers Want to Include More Participative Processes?

As robustly participative processes are slow, expensive, and difficult, it is crucial to be clear about the benefits. Whole libraries have been written about the benefits of democratic government (De Tocqueville, 2001; Elster, 1998; Fukuyama, 1995; Gutman & Thompson, 1996) and over the last 20 years significant research in the business world (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999; Fulmer, et. al, 2000) has demonstrated that corporations with participatory governance had dramatically better financial results than their nearest competitor using less inclusive feedback mechanisms.ⁱ

Potential benefits can be explored at two levels: 1) at the group level, where decisions are made and implemented and 2) at the level of the individual citizen participant, who may

wish to influence the decisions made on behalf of the group. Any list of potential benefits must, of course, be analyzed and confirmed taking the specifics of the situation into account. Potential benefits of using a participatory process include but are not limited to:

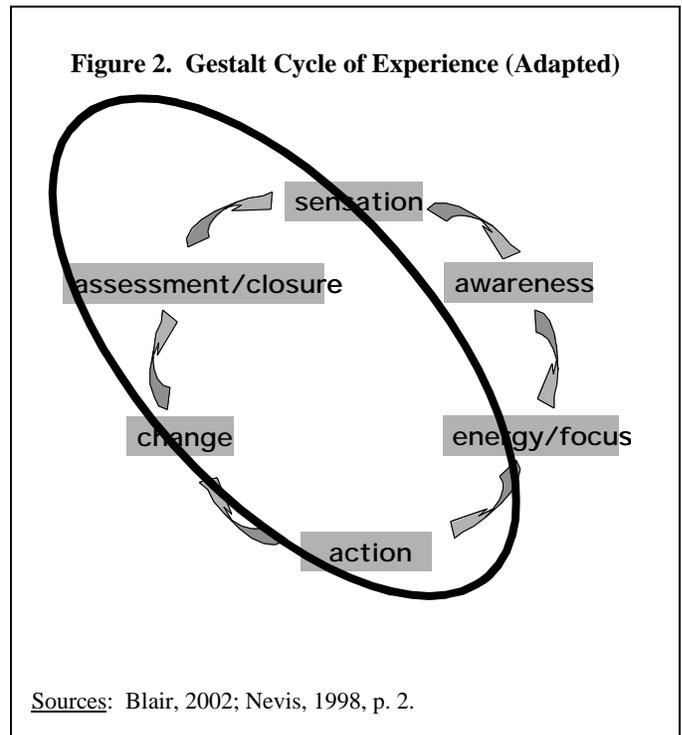
at the group and decision-making level

- it legitimizes decisions, especially in a democracy (Gutman and Thompson, 1996) ;
- it improves the quality of the decisions and reduces the number of mistakes made, in some cases actually saving time (Kelly and Allison, 1999);ⁱⁱ
- it builds in support for the implementation, especially important when the task is substantial and implementation will be both lengthy and expensive (America Speaks, nd);
- it provides a method and the time for people to learn from each other and come closer to consensus; Gutman and Thompson describe this as “reducing the scope of moral conflict” (1996); and
- it enables leaders to embody the values they espouse, supporting both integrity (“practice what we preach”) and what Nevins (1998) working in the Gestalt tradition calls the modeling approach to leadership;
- it engenders more broadly shared responsibility for decisions and accountability for implementation (Spinosa, Flores, & Dreyfus, 1997); and

at the individual level

- it provides a space for citizens to reflect, learn, mourn and celebrate—and, in all of these processes, as individual human beings, *to be acknowledged and to be heard*;ⁱⁱⁱ and, sometimes,
- it provides representation—a say in the decision making.

Those advocating that decision makers adopt more inclusive processes have the task of acknowledging the difficulties and being articulate spokespersons for the benefits. In our experience, for the most part those in authority are intelligent, hard working people who are interested—even eager—to learn about and implement more effective ways of proceeding. For example, during one of the New York New Visions Task Force meetings, one of us (Eric) was able to provide a list of benefits for including representatives from the families of the victims in the LMDC discussions. The LMDC decision maker



concerned spent time investigating these ideas and made the effort to let Eric know s/he found the conversation helpful.

Why is participative governance important? The social context and theoretical perspective

While there is abundant literature (Bar Yam, nd, and Mainzer, 1994 as examples) on the changes in the environment in which our social systems—including government agencies such as the LMDC—function, we need only to reflect on our daily lives to bring into awareness the dramatic changes between the nature of our lives and those of our parents and grandparents. Among the most prominent and pertinent are:

- increases in technology permitting increased travel for work, pleasure, terrorism, and unconscious contagion, as well as migrations for work opportunities or participative citizenship;
- dramatic increases in communications, computing, and networking technology, not only enabling but, for all practical purposes, insuring contact—whether or not desired—among all people living on the planet Earth;
- the emergence of a global economy, in which competition comes from previously unexpected quarters and the economic health of each continent affects the others; and

- the amount of available information can be overwhelming. Some communications experts have estimated that the Sunday *New York Times* includes as much information as many 19th century people absorbed from outside their villages in a lifetime.

These changes not only are a part of the conditions which precipitated and made possible the terrorist activity in the Northeastern United States on 9/11, they also create a new social environment which makes top-down bureaucracy—the primary form of social organization for governments, businesses, and other organizations in the Western World during the twentieth century—less effective than is desirable. To put it bluntly: top-down bureaucracies are not inclusive enough to develop effective solutions to today’s challenges and, at the same time, are too slow to react to today’s pace. Many governments and businesses struggle with organizational structures which are behind the times and make the people inside them less effective than they might otherwise be.

Complex systems (Bar Yam, 1996; Mainzer, 1994), communications (Johnson, 1997; Lévy, 1997; Rheingold, 2002) and business scholars (Battam, 1998; Kelly and Allison, 1999; Senge, 1994) have documented the emergence of new forms of organization such as networks, participative governance, alliances, clusters, as well as new processes and technologies to support these new forms. America Speaks provides one such supporting process. There is considerable evidence that our organizations—both governments and businesses—will become more participative or eventually be superceded.

Bureaucratic structures were developed to meet the needs of the environment in the twentieth century: more information than previous centuries but not as much as today. Middle management emerged to help process information and send it to senior managers and owners and then to communicate and implement decisions once they were made. Similarly, the process of electing senators and representatives to make decisions on behalf of citizens arose during a time when technology—especially communication technology—did not enable a more robust participative process. Unlike some scholars and practitioners, it is not our contention that hierarchy will vanish: there are good reasons to think that governments and businesses will continue to require focal points, coordination, and resource providers. However, the level of individual participation in the process and the nature and responsibilities of those in hierarchical functions is—and will continue—to change.

Here we are making the argument that changes in technology and the environment of human beings not only enable but require new models of participative governance for both the

public and private sectors and that *Conversation, Listening, and Imagine* are examples of such models in the public sector. Thus far, in our assessment, while many people report benefits on the individual level, the larger decision making processes which the *Conversation, Listening, and Imagine* programs were designed to influence have been little changed.

Creating a Hearing for the Listening: The Role of Facilitators

We believe that skilled facilitators with an interest in increasing the effectiveness of public participation in the democratic process—because of their expertise and their practical experience—are well placed to generate a greater appreciation for the benefits of participative processes (often labeled *collaborative* processes in the business world) as well as to assist leaders in making more effective use of the results. To do this, we need clear and concise mental models and a shared language to describe the essential processes and technologies, along with examples of successful, or partially successful, participative-collaborative interventions.

Criteria for and Examples of Participatory Processes

Table 1 (below) is a summary example of the criteria model we are building. In it we review five participative-collaborative implementations with a focus on three nonprofit fora related to rebuilding Lower Manhattan (*Imagine, Listening, and Listening Online*) and two business-related methodologies (Real-time Feedback and TEC). The table includes eight of the twenty-five criteria we’ve collected to date. In our experience, successful participative interventions are likely to have a defined process that has been tested and enhanced over time and that is continuously evaluated against a set of criteria or goals. These interventions are generally supported by trained facilitators and multiple forms of technology or systems and include closure/results tracking as well as feedback on their own components and processes (feedback on the feedback mechanism)

As the table shows, one size doesn’t fit all. The criteria and design must be appropriate to the situation.

We invite interested facilitators to make us aware of other processes and to join with us in enriching a list of criteria to be used in working with leaders and participants.

Table 1: Sample Features of Participative-Collaborative Processes

Facilitated Collaborative Process	Purpose/ Participants	Level of Process/ Timing	Key Criteria	Facilitator Expertise	Technological Support	Closure Processes/Results Tracking	Feedback on Components and Process
<p>Imagine NY I, II, and III</p> <p>The Municipal Art Society of New York and partner organizations</p> <p>(face-to-face, supported by technology)</p> <p>www.imaginewyork.org</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <u>Purpose:</u> Public participation in rebuilding New York ▪ Coalitions and campaigns ▪ <u>Participants:</u> citizens, diversity desired 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thoroughly-designed process ▪ Separate online support ▪ <u>Timing:</u> I: Event-based (230 public workshops) and online gallery of ideas; II (2 days of workshops); III (workshops summer 2003) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Diverse participation (both demographics and geography, not limited to NYC) ▪ Record and display all ideas submitted ▪ Develop multiple visions reflecting the rich diversity of the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Substantive training of volunteer facilitators and scribes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ On-line data gathering ▪ Data gathered at workshops and processed off site after workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All suggestions collected ▪ Ideas collated by theme; themes and visions described in reporting documents ▪ Reports actively distributed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Feedback on process requested at workshops ▪ Requested from policy makers
<p>Listening to the City America Speaks</p> <p>(face-to-face, supported by technology during the sessions)</p> <p>www.americaspeaks.org</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <u>Purpose:</u> Effective governance ▪ <u>Participants:</u> citizens, diversity and population matching desired 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Well-thought out and tested meeting process ▪ Leaders actively encouraged to participate ▪ <u>Timing:</u> on-going instantiated in projects (<i>Listening</i> one set of events: February and July 2002) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Content ▪ Credibility ▪ Strategy ▪ Citizen voice ▪ Impact ▪ Public space ▪ Engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Extensive training and experience for primary facilitator ▪ Support facilitators, recruited from experienced facilitation practitioners, lightly vetted and trained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Polling boxes ▪ Immediate data processing ▪ Large screen display 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Emerging results reported real-time ▪ Reports actively distributed and available on line ▪ No control of government implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Feedback on process gathered in meetings ▪ Requested from policy makers
<p>Listening to the City Online Web Lab</p> <p>(technology, sometimes facilitated online)</p> <p>www.weblab.org</p> <p>Also of interest by Web Lab using the same model: e.a.9.11</p> <p>(everything after 9.11 for high school students)</p> <p>www.globalkids.org/ea911/index.html</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <u>Purpose:</u> Use of the web for small group discussion of public issues ▪ <u>Participants:</u> citizens with online access' diversity desired 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus on innovative small group dialog via the web ▪ <u>Timing:</u> on-going instantiated in projects (<i>Listen</i> one set of online groups) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Size (small groups) ▪ Time (limited time to increase commitment and closure) ▪ Accountability (belonging and self-regulation) ▪ Efficiency (reduces need for moderation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some groups not facilitated (half of those in Listening Online) ▪ Optional facilitators lightly trained and vetted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delivered primarily through web software ▪ Software designed to provide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Closure prompted in facilitated groups and by end times ▪ Transcripts and summary reports available on line 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Feedback at the conclusion of each group ▪ Funded research conducted periodically

Facilitated Collaborative Process	Purpose/ Participants	Level of Process/ Timing	Key Criteria	Facilitator Expertise	Technological Support	Closure Processes/Results Tracking	Feedback on Components and Process
Real-time FeedbackSM The Allison Group (half face-to-face; half technology) www.allisongroup.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Purpose:</u> Organizational effectiveness (business, government, and nonprofit) <u>Participants:</u> two versions: 1) everyone in an organization or team (cross-organizations) or 2) senior teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process design based in complex systems theory Leaders agree to participate actively, use the information, and receive coaching Participants receive training <u>Timing:</u> continuous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continually changing Multiple closure mechanisms Inclusive Anonymity protected; identity encouraged Inflows of energy Fast and easy Embedded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extensive training of experienced facilitation practitioners On-going education Facilitators certified On-going feedback on facilitators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online data gathering software, configurable to organization patterns Reports distributed to all participants via email Online data base for detailed investigations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reports every 2 weeks with historical data; searchable data base on line Disciplined response mechanisms Closure table format custom to each organization Results tracked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal feedback on the process every 3 months Informal feedback on-going Participants encouraged to shape the mechanism
TEC: Chief Executives Working Together (mostly face-to-face, supported by technology) www.teconline.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Purpose:</u> Business performance and CEO life satisfaction <u>Participants:</u> CEO peers (revenue and size criteria) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific meeting format with built-in closure Participants coached to increase participation effectiveness <u>Timing:</u> continuous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group peer problem-solving and support Disciplined tracking and accountability Individual coaching Information and experts of rated value 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extensive training of experienced facilitation practitioners On-going education Facilitators vetted On-going feedback on facilitators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online goal tracking Working group communication facilitated Global exchange of contacts and problem solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disciplined Tracked within each meeting and over time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular and disciplined, continual Both in-person and web-based All components available for rating (which is encouraged)

Working with Leaders: Top-Down Support for Bottom-up Processes

In an oxymoron that we have come to accept through experience, it often requires a courageous leader acting in a top-down hierarchical manner to establish the conditions in which “bottom-up” robust collaboration can take place. When they can speak from experience, using clear and concise mental models to describe the processes and technologies, facilitators can assist government and business leaders to better understand why public involvement is not only appropriate but also more effective as well as how to engage in the process in ways that will make it most effective for everyone, including themselves. Thus far in our experience, we have found it more effective to ask leaders to participate (fully) in a session before we explain the background theory, model, and criteria. With a personal understanding of at least one example of a participative process, leaders are better equipped to understand and apply the model.

Facilitators must be able not only to provide the process but also must be able to explain:

- the conditions which make collaborative and participative processes both possible and desirable,
- the criteria for effective participative processes, including the benefits of technological support and disciplined processes (which we sometimes label “invisible technology” because it is difficult for leaders to identify its importance and value),^{iv}
- the reasoning behind the design of any specific process, and
- the risks and rewards.

In short, what works, why it works, why it is needed, and what consequences—both positive and negative—are likely.

Participant Education and Responsibility

Of course, facilitators must support participants in their learning as well. It is neither appropriate nor useful to make impossible demands. With participation comes responsibility. Participant responsibility is enhanced when they come to understand the full participation model as well.

CONCLUSION

Although a powerful step, thus far the participatory interventions in the redevelopment of Lower Manhattan have not been as effective as we might wish because they are still

external—pasted ineffectively on—to the central decision making process. We all have work to do. And, whatever our roles in the process, this work lies in earning trust.

For official decision makers this work lies in learning how to incorporate and respond to new forms of participation. The process of responding directly to the information—letting those who contributed know how the information was used and what decisions were made as a result—is a powerful first step. Although it was more than fifty years ago that Norbert Weiner (1954) in his ground-breaking book, *The Human Use of Human Beings*, made clear the requirements for feedback and closure in effective organizations and social systems, many government and business leaders have not yet incorporated the practice of closing the loop in their work.

Research, theory, and practical experience all support the idea that interventions—particularly those which ask people to make recommendations and express opinions—are more effective when the results are used in the decision-making process.

For facilitators, the work lies in taking responsibility for working the full process (see Figure 2 for a view of the process adapted from the Gestalt tradition). In our view, facilitators are responsible for more than simply dumping the results of our participative interventions into a system which has no way to deliver the results which we “promise” our participants and then blaming others for not delivering. We must work as hard to support leaders, earning their trust, as we have worked to support participants.

We have not focused on participant responsibilities in this paper. Nevertheless, we encourage citizens to balance their recommendations with the willingness to be accountable for their share of the implementation and results.

Directions for Further Research

In addition to continuing to document and understand participative-collaborative processes, we are especially interested—when enough time has passed to permit frank responses to interview questions—in learning from the officials and decision makers how much and in what ways they were influenced individually and collectively by the participative interventions around the rebuilding of Lower Manhattan.

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FOOTNOTES

ⁱ Although the focus here is the public sector, we will also include some models from the private sector to enrich the discussion and support transfers of learning both ways.

ⁱⁱ In the case of the plan for redeveloping Lower Manhattan, the decision makers might not have had to throw out the first competition and start over again had they used a more participative process in the beginning—not only saving embarrassment but also time in the long run. We ourselves have experienced the pain of not having time to do it right the first time but having to make time to re-do it.

ⁱⁱⁱ In appropriate circumstances, it may support emotional closure (Nevins, 1998).

^{iv} Eve Middleton Kelly, director of Complexity & Organisational Learning Research Program at the London School of Economics, uses the label “enabling infrastructure.”