

Multi-Sector Involvement Vital to Giving Programs

The other issue surrounding volunteerism and philanthropy deals with quality rather than quantity. Whatever the level of giving in a community, the impact will be greater if the public, private and non-profit sectors have worked together to identify long-term directions and goals for their giving programs. Now that the non-profit sector fills a major niche in meeting community needs, its leaders need to plan, budget and set goals just like their counterparts in the other two sectors. Integrated strategies of this kind are needed to both increase available resources and the effectiveness of their use.

In using the Civic Index, it is important to stress that this action tool consists of ten interrelated components. One cannot, for example, effectively evaluate citizen participation without examining community information sharing or conflict management and consensus building mechanisms (two other Index components) at the same time. Likewise, it is hard to imagine a strong response to the issues of volunteerism and philanthropy without also looking at local capacity to provide effective leadership (another component). Therefore, to make best use of the Index, it is critical to examine the full range of components and to appreciate how they influence each other.

The League is convinced that as more governance responsibilities fall on those at the local and metropolitan levels, this type of critical self-evaluation and capacity building will be an important step toward achieving civic excellence.

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A New Ladder of Citizen Participation

by **DESMOND M. CONNOR**

Citizen participation is a many-splendored thing, but is one that has its price. When its many and diverse practitioners start to discuss alternative approaches to specific issues, the result sometimes resembles the Tower of Babel, with all the busy builders quite unable to communicate with one another. What follows seeks to provide a shared perspective for dealing with the following strategic issues which often arise in designing and managing public programs:

- What are the various types of public participation?
- Which are appropriate for a specific situation?
- If a given approach does not work, what next?
- Is there a logical progression from one kind of public involvement to another?

This short article addresses these questions based on a broad range of projects in a variety of settings over the past 15 years. No one theory is behind this approach, but rather an eclectic mixture of what seems to work in field practice to prevent and resolve public controversy about major issues.

Arnstein's Ladder

In July 1969, Sherry R. Arnstein published "A Ladder of Citizen Participation" in the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*. Ms. Arnstein drew on her considerable experience with federal social programs—urban renewal, anti-poverty, and Model Cities, for example. She declared at the outset that her typology was "designed to be provocative" and focused on the redistribution of power as an essential element in meaningful citizen participation.

Arnstein's ladder consists of eight rungs—two levels of non-participation (Manipulation and Therapy), three degrees of tokenism

(Informing, Consultation, and Placation) and three degrees of citizen power (Partnership, Delegated Power and Citizen Control). She illustrated the characteristics of each type with examples from well-known federal programs.

Arnstein acknowledged that her scheme had some limitations:

- Citizen power is not distributed as neatly as the divisions used suggest;
- Some significant road blocks are omitted, such as the racism, paternalism and resistance of some power holders and the ignorance and disorganization of many low-income communities; and
- Instead of eight rungs, the real world of people and programs might require as many as 150 to cover the range of actual citizen involvement levels.

In addition, it is fair to observe that:

- The diagram addresses urban, black ghettos rather than a range of urban, suburban and rural situations; and
- The citizen participation/rungs on a ladder analogy suggests no logical progression from one level to another, one building to another.

Indeed, in a discussion with Ms. Arnstein in Washington, D.C. some 10 years ago, she declared that if she had known the article would be reprinted more than 20 times, she would have written it somewhat differently. This landmark article, nonetheless, has influenced thousands of readers, for many of whom it is very relevant.

My objective in the next section is to outline a new ladder which will apply to a broad range of situations and whose elements have a cumulative effect.

A New Ladder

The purpose of this ladder is to provide a systematic approach to preventing and resolving public controversy about specific policies, programs and projects whether in urban, suburban or rural settings and whether governmental or private sector in sponsorship.

Education

The foundation of any program to prevent and resolve public controversy must be an informed public. Proponents, actual or potential, governmental or corporate, cannot afford to have substantial propor-

tions of their key constituencies ignorant of their objectives, activities, effects and plans.

Education in this case usually calls for a long-term, low-profile, and relatively low-cost program; existing educational resources, such as schools and public affairs media programs, can often be used. The key point is to provide people with a sound knowledge base before an issue arises. Once anxiety and hostility reach high levels, educating those affected becomes almost impossible.

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A mutual education process is essential—senior executives in the proponent's organization need to have a systematic appreciation of their various constituencies, just as the latter need knowledge of the proponent and each other. These activities can often be carried out by an in-house public affairs unit. Monitoring the knowledge possessed by each party about the other parties should probably occur annually so that needed improvements can be planned and implemented.

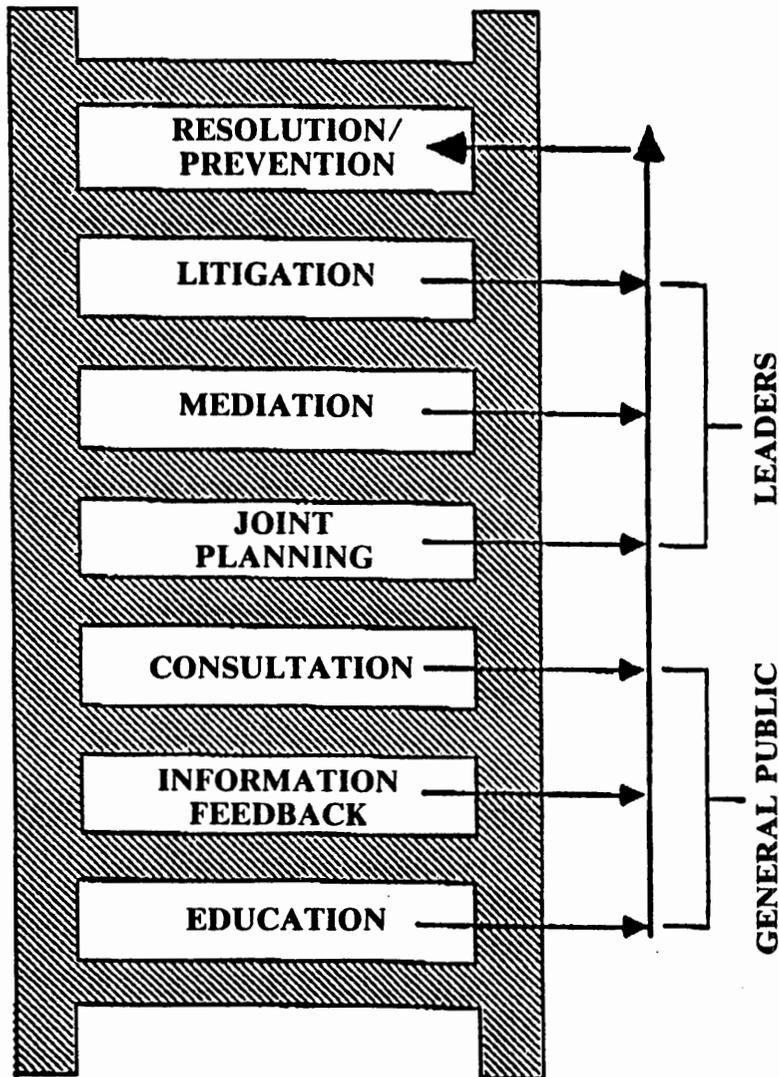
In many cases, when a sound informational base has been developed in the policy, program or project, its announcement will be met by general understanding and acceptance. In short, Education leads to Prevention (see figure one). If this does not occur, information specific to the situation should be provided and responses sought as outlined below.

Information Feedback

When the constituencies affected by a proposed change indicate they do not understand and accept it, an Information-Feedback program is the next step. Information about the proposal is disseminated and, at the same time, people's views on the proposal and its alternatives are solicited. Formal and informal media may be used to spread the information; reply-paid postcards and a telephone hotline may be employed to gather feedback.

A key factor in this strategy is to have an accurate appraisal of what

Figure 1



each party knows and believes about the proposal and one another. Useful techniques include community and organizational profiles and sample surveys. This information audit will disclose not only information gaps, but may show the presence of negative myths and stereotypes (e.g., "engineers only heed cost-benefit analyses") which must be confronted.

The response to this Information-Feedback activity may provide a clear and feasible solution to the issue, perhaps leading directly to Resolution on the ladder. If not, the more comprehensive and powerful strategy of consulting with those affected may be required.

Consultation

This approach is employed when: 1) A preceding Education program has not generated informed support by most of the members of key constituencies for a proposal; 2) when an Information-Feedback program failed to develop general understanding and acceptance of a proposed solution; or 3) when the gap between current knowledge about, and acceptance of, a proposal seems too great to be bridged by an Education and Information-Feedback program.

Consultation involves the solicitation of:

- Additional solutions to the issue than originally envisaged by the proponent;
- Further potential evaluation criteria than initially contemplated;
- The views of interested and informed people on the evaluation criteria (these must be weighted); and
- The technically sound and economically acceptable alternative solutions (these must be ranked).

Consultation is an advisory process. The proponent may accept or reject the views expressed by the public, but at least these are now clearly identified and can be addressed in more relevant ways than before consultation occurred.

Techniques appropriate for Consultation include responsive publications, open houses, planning workshops, advisory groups and reference centers. In many cases, more than one cycle of activities will be necessary, like an introductory phase followed by alternative generation and evaluation phases.

An effective Consultation program will often lead to the Resolution rung on the ladder. However, if jurisdictional issues are involved, an accompanying Joint Planning project may also be needed.

Joint Planning

When a party involved with a proposal has legal jurisdiction over some aspects of the area affected, it should be involved as a partner in a joint planning process (i.e., have more than a merely "advisory" role). This situation occurs with municipalities, counties and state and federal agencies.

When several organizations need to be involved in joint planning, it is highly desirable to work with them in the so-called "one window" approach. As authoritative representatives of each agency meet in a planning workshop and work through a shared definition of the situation, the alternative solutions and an evaluative procedure, there are many opportunities to maximize creative solutions and minimize inter-organizational game playing. Competent process leadership of the planning workshop by someone other than the project manager is often a vital success factor.

Major public programs often work at three levels: an Information-Feedback process for the general public, a consultation process with the leaders of key interest groups and a Joint Planning process with relevant jurisdictions. Keeping each of these phases synchronized with the others is a continuing challenge, especially when the public program must itself be kept in step with ongoing engineering, environmental and economic planning components.

The cumulative effect of the foregoing four approaches may well accomplish Resolution. If not, a great many issues have probably not been settled, leaving a relatively small number of difficult problems which may now be addressed through Mediation.

Mediation

Mediation, based on a long tradition of labor-management applications, has recently been applied to resolving environmental and land use issues as a more cooperative approach than lengthy and costly legal actions. A neutral, third party leads the others through a conflict-resolving process often resulting in compromise solutions.

Effective mediation is most likely when: The conflict is mature; power is balanced between (usually) two parties; negotiation is seen by both parties as inevitable; and the agreement can be revised later if necessary. In many environmental disputes, some of these conditions are absent—power is unbalanced, there are multiple parties, litigation is an alternative and the agreement reached is irreversible.

The adversarial relationship inherent in a legal action and court decision often leaves both parties feeling antagonistic towards each other. Some kind of bridge-building activity is then required before the Resolution stage is reached.

There are two common types of mediator. One is the technical expert, who argues the specifics of alternative solutions, and the other is the behavioral leader, who focuses on mutual acceptance and understanding among those involved, creative problem-solving and negotiating processes.

Mediation may well lead to Resolution, but if not, there is still recourse to the law.

Litigation

This traditional method of conflict resolution still has a place, despite criticism that it is often slow, costly and divisive. In many cases, a lawyer resolves disputes before court action is taken by adopting a mediating role. There is a small but growing number of lawyers who specialize in dealing with environmental issues.

The opportunities afforded for legal solutions depend greatly on the legislation in place in a given state, country or province—class action suits are more difficult to pursue in Canada than in the United States. Nonetheless, environmental legislation is growing in both countries and is supported by growing public opinion, according to recent surveys.

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Resolution/Prevention

In many organizational cultures—governmental and corporate—decisive action is a strong value; preventing and resolving public controversy may be seen as a sign of weakness. In these cases an organization-development process may well be needed to identify, evaluate and modify the organizational culture so that it is more appropriate for the current and expected social environment.

Prevention may be accomplished not only by the education strategy discussed initially, but also by the public affairs technique of issue management or the application of a consumer-oriented marketing program. The recent development of public sector marketing is particularly relevant for government agencies.

Some of the advantages of preventing public controversy about a proposal are: savings in time and cost for implementation; technically better proposals as a result of public consultation, regardless of the format used; avoidance of a negative image by the organization; and improvement in morale among the organization's staff and related agencies.

Resolution of a controversy about a proposed policy, program or project implies acceptance by most of the parties involved of the agreed solution. It should be noted that acceptance does not imply vigorous support. The proposed remedy may simply be the "least worst" alternative. It may well be more costly and restrictive to the proponent and have a number of unwanted features depending on the constituencies affected, yet it is generally judged to be better than the other options examined, including the "do nothing" option.

Effectively resolving an issue requires that most of those involved have a sense of equity about the solution (i.e., that it is basically fair to those involved). If inequitable, the agreement is likely to fall apart during or after implementation.

Conclusion

This ladder of citizen participation is designed to orient managers and others to the many approaches available to prevent and resolve public controversy about various proposals. It implies that:

- There is no one best way to design and manage a public participation program—it must reflect the specifics of the given situation;

- There is a cumulative relationship between the rungs on the ladder—each successive rung builds upon the previous one;
- At times, several approaches will be used simultaneously in order to meet the needs of the parties involved;
- A complex economic, social, cultural and political issue will not be resolved by a news release and a public meeting; a systematic process appropriate for the specific situation must be designed and implemented.

Sources

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