

Track 2: Community Engagement Task Force

Notes from presentation by Archon Fung August 29 2007 - City Hall

At the request of the Minneapolis Track 2 Community Engagement Task Force, Professor Archon Fung presented to the group prior to their regularly scheduled meeting.

Professor Fung is an Associate Professor of Public Policy at Harvard University Kennedy School of Government. More information about Professor Fung is available on the Web at: http://www.archonfung.net/

A copy of the presentation Dr. Fung presented Aug. 29, "Deepening Urban Democracy: reasons and Strategies for Citizen Participation," is available on the Web at: http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/communications/docs/fung_presentation.pdf

Neighborhood Revitalization Specialist (NRP) Director Bob Miller introduced Professor Fung and stated that Professor Fung's specialties are citizen participation, community engagement and social justice.

Presentation notes:

Minneapolis has one of the richest states of neighborhood life of anywhere in the country.

The Neighborhood Revitalization Program is distinctive in that it funds neighborhood-level decision making.

I will talk broadly about ways to organize citizen participation and will address questions.

Reasons for participation (These are good reasons but I will offer my own as these are not a good starting point):

- Informed decision-makers
- Build good citizens
- Social capital
- Joys of participation

A different view of this is that participation is a way to correct the ways that government is broken and make democracy work better overall...make peoples' lives better in a just and equitable way.

The civil process – The chain of representative government works for a lot of problems but it also breaks sometimes. Participation supplements and complements representative government.

Democratic deficits and real problems

- 1. **Unstable Preferences** Issues for which citizens don't really have clear views, such as better schools or lower taxes. The chain presumes people know what they want.
- 2. **Low accountability** even if the citizens want something, sometimes elected officials will do what is right for themselves.
- 3. **Low information and capacity** Even if we know what we want and elected officials want the same thing, maybe offices of government aren't broad or powerful enough to get the job done.

I will give ides for engagement that help with each of these deficits

When you think of community engagement, think of the problem you're trying to solve and then think of what kind of civic engagement will fix what is broken.

Archon Fung presentation notes from August 29th, 2007

Institutional Alternatives

In 1969, Sherry Arnstein created a <u>Ladder of civic participation</u> ranging from citizen control to manipulation. It's important to think about when you think about what kind of citizen participation you want.

A lot of participation is about manipulating the people at some meeting to think what you want them to think.

Some is therapy to help people feel better about the decision that has already been made.

Some is to inform – why we zigged instead of zagged.

Some is consultation.

Placation is doing something people want to get them to settle down.

Sometimes there are partnerships, delegated power and citizen control. NRP is a little bit like these last ones. Sometime informing and consultation is ok, but sometimes, citizen control is what you want.

Democracy Cube – Menu of Institutional Alternatives

Three questions:

- 1. Who is in the room? Elected officials, everybody, randomly selected people, expert administrators public meetings are open to anyone but are self selected in that only those interested will come.
- 2. How do they make decisions?
- 3. How influential are they?

Lay stakeholders – elected board members, a particular kind of stakeholder in a way that the average citizen is not.

How do they participate? – 90 percent of people just listen. A few express opinions at public hearings. With some kinds of citizen engagement, people try to learn to modify opinion. Sometimes, people vote and bargain. At some meetings, people deliberate – offer reasons and arguments and people are open to listening. Most decisions in cities are made by public agencies, technical experts – the public participates through public hearings and listening or expressing opinions. Some thoughts may or may not be incorporated and it's hard to know.

Kuna, I daho as an example of addressing unstable preferences – the city was growing rapidly. The population was mostly white. The city faced growth issues and the school board thought they needed to build another school so they floated a \$14 million school bond. There was a lot of misunderstanding about it and it failed. The school board thought it was a slap in the face. They convened a civic engagement process—study circles—to get diverse participants from across the city to talk about the pros and cons of the bond over several months. There was increased awareness about the necessity of the bond and it passed a year later. When people sat down and talked about it, it stabilized public opinion. So for some issues, when there is a lot of public concern, study circles can help people figure out what they really want. They recruited people actively to get diverse representation. It was organized so that people deliberated with each other. It doesn't empower, it still just advises, but it solves a lot of problems with public backlash.

New York City after Sept. 11 as an example of addressing low accountability – They had to decide what to rebuild. It was dominated by a few players. All initially favored a commercial revenue-generating development. There was a very large public meeting in Sept. 2002 about what should be built. There were 4,500 people there. They organized people into dinner-table-size groups and had them work on a series of problems. They presented six ideas from the Port Authority. People voted against all six. It turned out that it got a lot of press and increased accountability. In the long-term things went back to business as usual but for a year or two there was a potent community engagement process.

Chicago Police Department as an example of addressing low capacity – How to engage through departmental apparatus? In some police models, the whole point is to get the police officers away from the community because there was too much corruption. Get the officers in cars. It was about control of individual police. Three strategies were used: preventative patrol, rapid response and retrospective investigation. It turns out the strategies were not effective when you have a real crime problem. By the 1980s, people realized it didn't work so a lot of places moved toward community policing. In Chicago, they reorganized the police department so police stayed with neighborhood areas longer. They instituted resident participation by having opening meeting in every neighborhood where police met with residents and they encouraged deliberative problemsolving—developed a list of priorities and plans to solve problems. There was more decision-making at the neighborhood level to identify problems, develop strategies and implement strategies. Residents were more involved. Priorities and problems come from grassroots—incorporated into a management style. This is an example of when citizen participation occurs through an agency, it does have good effects. Chicago shifts from professional making all the decisions to lay stakeholders who show up at the meetings every month. They engage in deliberative problem solving, which determines are resources are allocated.

Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program

Funding has been quite progressive—poorer neighborhoods get more money to spend.

One of the initial criticisms of NRP is that it is dominated by white homeowners but if you look at spending patterns, it doesn't really appear that it is biased toward white homeowners. Redirection neighborhoods spend a lot on housing, but not as much for homeowners. What we see is spending money in ways that benefit others.

Lessons for closing

- The right way to think about community engagement is as a complement to representative government.
- Civic engagement always begins with a problem. It solves problems that everyone cares about.
- The most common methods we have don't work very well.
- The successful methods are very complex.
- Civic engagement is a huge endeavor.

Dangers

- Exclusion and unequal participation
- Ignorance and incompetence if we create empowerment, maybe they'll make the wrong decision.
- Too many evening to maximize participation, create areas of participation and ask people to participate when there are important issues.
- Failure of political will many innovations in participation suffer from failure of political will. Political leadership gets weak knees because the process of civic engagement makes their life harder. Politics is always part of the equation.

Not in the U.S. but in other places such as Porto Alegre, Brazil, the city allocates the infrastructure budget through the community level. The Mayor loves the system. It was a very competitive electoral process, so there was a promise to create the participatory budget. He got elected, created the system, and people loved it and kept electing him. That kind of a cycle hasn't' been created in the U.S. as far as I know.

Questions from the audience

Q. It all depends on dissemination of information. Can you help us with information on that?

Fung – In the work I do on information transparency policies, I think a lot about dissemination. You need to think about how the audience will or will not use the information. Be attentive to - what bits of information do people want? One piece of information—campaign finance information—is important but what does it really do? It doesn't create more meaningful differences. Before investing time, money and energy into public information, think about what, who and how will it make decisions different.

Q. Who should be formal in included or excluded? I think that no one should be excluded but how do you deal with that logistically?

Fung – Participation is what participation does. What is the end goal? If the city's policy is that the city is going to allow people to do stuff, the city, in exchange for that, need to have some assurance of appropriate representation. The important thing is to overcome exclusions. Determine which legitimate interests are not showing up and get them to show up.

Q. What do you do about affinity groups? Who does the city talk to?

Fung – It's important to make sure that whatever community engagement is there is inclusive. If you don't see that in a neighborhood group, you should put pressure on the neighborhood group to be more representative. Because some democratic process is happening through that body, the city could say it's not representative. Or you could have a planner decide and the planner will ask the neighborhood group and the affinity group, but who's to say the planner will strike the right balance.

Q. How do you hold groups accountable for appropriate deliberation?

Fung – The idea is to get the power down to these levels. The way I think about it is to think of it as shared power or responsibility between different levels of government and neighborhood organizations. You do get a lot of autonomy but in exchange for that, owe the public some accountability for performance and process. The office needs to monitor whether or not the process in inclusive and deliberative. It's hard to do, but it can be done. "Accountable Autonomy" – we need to engage in a conversation about why you chose A, B and C.

Q. How do you take results and plug that into the governance process—citizen feedback results in doing something differently?

Fung - In some cases, for example, study circles become more integrated into agencies. It's self-correcting. If people get blown off, they will stop coming.

Q. What do you tell people about Minneapolis?

Fung - I think there's a problem with political will. The problem of political will is not as straight forward as one might think. It's not all about authority. There's a conceptual problem—an inability to think through; not being able to look forward to say: how can this make our democracy work better. I think the City Council is on the Council because of public service. You're not going to get rich. We need to provide an image of how their role works hand-in-hand to make democracy work better

Q. Have you encountered problems with schools, that schools are somebody else's problem?

Fung - It has to happen within the context of the school system. There has been talk of mayoral control. I think this would not be very effective. It's looking for a silver bullet that doesn't exist. The long road is getting parents involved.

Q. Can you comment on if you've seen examples of multi-jurisdictional collaboration and funding levels dedicated for community engagement?

Archon Fung presentation notes from August 29th, 2007

Fung - I haven't seen this but I think it's a very good idea. Wherever these things work, they are expensive. Democracy is not cheap. I haven't seen a line item for that like some cities have for art.

Q. Your previous answer implied that the city should talk to neighborhood groups and not affinity groups. Why not talk to both?

Fung – For complex decision making, you need to get people to where a problem is at. You need to get people to think, "I'm not here just representing this group." A geographic group is more likely to be able to do that. The affinity group will have the political identity of that affinity. In some cases, for discussion about what the affinity group is identified with, it's good to go to them. It's pretty hard to solve with procedure and say "as long as we crank through this procedure, it will be legitimate."

Q. Can you expand on your answer and define on community engagement in Minneapolis and define the lack of political will?

Fung – I don't know you r politics well enough to call that. I know Minneapolis is special because a large amount of money was allocated for community engagement at one point. There are a lot of reasons why that level of money might not be coming. It seems like one of the reasons the city has such healthy neighborhood community engagement is because of that money. Other cities are surprised by that. One friend of mine asked, "why would you want to give neighborhoods any resources?" It takes money to sustain organizations and make participation matter.

Q. What general resources or cities could we look to for ideas?

Fung – One place where community engagement is fairly effective—they don't get to spend money but they have some influence—is Seattle. LA is less mature. There is a book by Jeff Berry called "The rebirth of Urban Democracy." If you look and compare, Minneapolis does way more. I don't know of models of the homerun. There is no city like that. There's no packaged answer. Every city is different and the innovations in every city have problems. It's a work in process.