

## Training Resources

For Neighborhood Boards and  
City Commissions in Eugene





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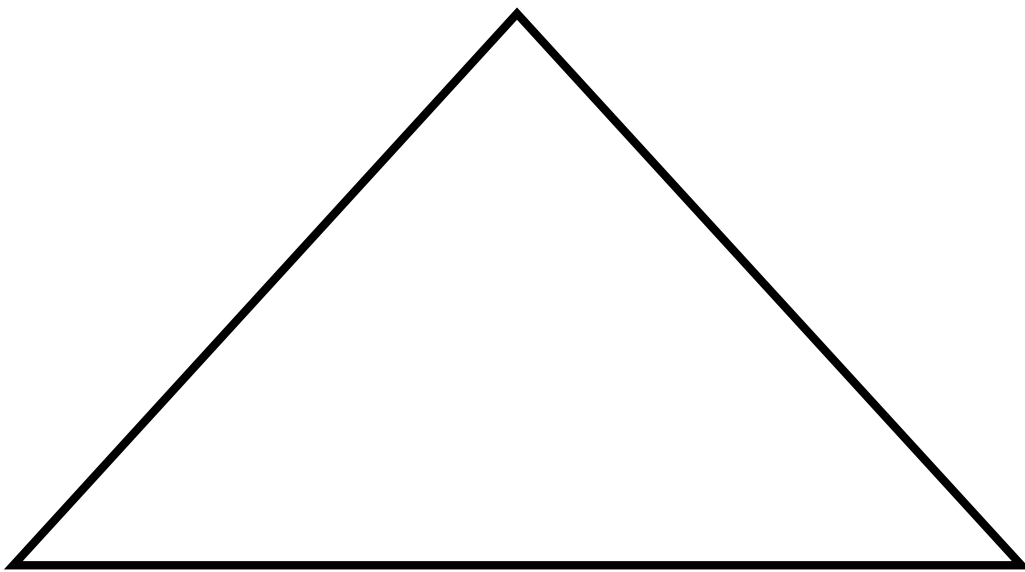
# Meetings and Facilitation



# The Trinity of Meeting Preparation

## Purpose

An effective meeting without a clear sense of purpose would be fairly miraculous. A meeting without a clear sense of purpose is almost certainly draining and may be damaging.



## Authority

An understanding of what the group is responsible for, and whom they are responsible to, will provide clarity and direction and help prevent wasted work.

## Representation

Having the correct people at the table, at the correct time, for the correct reasons can make or break a meeting. Having the **wrong** people at the table can be inefficient and even damaging.

It is important to have clarity in these three areas in order to both have an effective meeting and prevent possible damage to future working relationships!

## ***Defining the Purpose of the Meeting***

**What is the reason for this meeting being held?**

**What does the group expect to accomplish?**

**What will be changed or different after the meeting?**

### **Purpose is NOT:**



- The vision, mission, etc.
- The project or overarching goal
- An individual person's agenda

### **Purpose should be:**



- Explainable
- Attainable
- Meeting specific
- Agreed upon by the group

## **Questions for Defining Purpose**

What we would like to see accomplished **this meeting**:

*(explicit = product, recommendations, decisions, learning, etc.)*

*(implicit = relationships, changes in attitude, morale, etc.)*

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These accomplishments would **further the overall mission / goal(s)** by:

*(discard any **tangential** ideas)*

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The following accomplishments are *mandatory* **this session**:

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The following accomplishments are *optional* **this session**:

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Does the group have all the **resources** and **information** needed to accomplish these goals by *the end of the session*? (if not, I need to bring, find out, contact, invite or double-check..)

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Accomplishing **x** is **essential before** accomplishing **y**:

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The **priority** for the desired accomplishments are:

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Are the desired accomplishments reflected **on the agenda**?

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**I understand what we are trying to achieve and am ready to help the group  
have a productive meeting!**

### **Are there new members?**

- Have they received orientation materials?
- Have they had the chance to ask questions?
- Are they included in the communication(s) method?
- Do they know all the logistics (when, where, etc.)?
- Were they sent a reminder?
- Are they included in the materials count?
- Has time been worked into the agenda for introductions, Q&A, etc?

### **Are there guests / presenters?**

- Do they have all the information they need to be effective?
- Have they confirmed?
- Were they sent a reminder?
- Has the agenda been adjusted for adequate time?
- Do they need any supplies or materials?
- Have arrangements been made for the needed items?

## ***Authority***

What is the group charged with doing?

What is the group responsible and accountable for?

What is the group not responsible for or unable to do?

### **Defining Authority Should:**



- Help to limit the scope of the problem, question, or purpose
- Help define necessary steps or communication channels
- Prevent unnecessary work
- Allow group members to understand how their work will be used

### **Some Types of Group Authority:**

- No authority – the meeting is for the purpose of information dissemination.
- Fact-finding – the group is charged with researching a specific issue.
- Providing recommendations or feedback – the group is charged with advising external decision makers but the group will not be making the decision.
- Partial authority – the group is semi-autonomous but accountable to or limited by external forces.
  - Decision-making authority
  - Implementation authority
- Total authority – the group is completely in charge of decision and implementation without depending on external forces.

# AmericaSpeaks - Facilitator Resources

## Facilitation Overview

Facilitation is a way of providing leadership without taking control. A facilitator’s job is to get others to assume responsibility and to take the lead. Facilitators make their contribution by:

- Providing a process that helps participant use time efficiently to make high-quality contributions.
- Creating an environment where participants enjoy a positive, stimulating conversation in a respectful manner.
- Guiding group discussion to stay on track.
- Providing a means to collect all input from the participants.
- Making sure assumptions are surfaced and tested.
- Supporting participants in managing their own interpersonal dynamics.
- Managing disagreement or conflict using collaborative methods.
- Helping the participants communicate effectively.

## Best Practices and Facilitation Skills

All good facilitation relies on judgment in the moment as to how best to move the conversation forward. In a given situation, some or all of the following skills and techniques can be helpful:

<b>FACILITATION SKILL</b>	<b>EXAMPLE OF INTERVENTIONS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Warm up group prior to engaging in dialogue</li> </ul>	<p>“I am xxx. I will be facilitating the conversation, inviting everyone to participate and assuring that your thoughts and ideas are entered into the computer. Let’s go around and quickly give your name and where you are from.”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allowing participants to reflect</li> </ul>	<p>Before we start, let’s take a minute to individually consider our own thoughts about the discussion question and our responses. Write your ideas on page x in the Yellow Booklet.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain your role, as well as the purpose and process of the meeting</li> </ul>	<p>“I volunteered to facilitate a table discussion because I believe in this process, xxx . As a facilitator, my job is to encourage constructive dialogue so that everyone can actively participate. I will stay neutral and not share my own ideas or opinions throughout the day. So let’s go around and quickly give our answers to these four questions...”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting up discussion</li> </ul>	<p>So our task in the next 20 minutes is to explore the question of...</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drawing out participants</li> </ul>	<p>I want to make sure that we get a chance to hear from everyone. Let’s give ____ a chance to speak up if they would like...</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen actively and paraphrase</li> </ul>	<p>Look people in the eye, use attentive body language and paraphrase what they are say. “Let me see if I can repeat your point in slightly different words. I want to make sure I understand what you are saying.” Or “Are you saying....?”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stay neutral</li> </ul>	<p>Focus on the process and avoid offering your opinions about the topic under discussion. Give examples that are in the materials rather than from your experience.</p>

## AmericaSpeaks - Facilitator Resources

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respectfully cutting someone off to equalize participation</li> </ul>	I appreciate the ideas and enthusiasm and I want to see if we could get some other folks into this conversation as well...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listening deeply</li> </ul>	So what I hear you speaking to is a concern about...do I restate that accurately?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exploring different points of view</li> </ul>	So ____ has talked about the importance of X, and ____ has raised some concerns with X, I'm wondering how others see it.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Testing for support among ideas</li> </ul>	There seem to be several people who share the view that...what level of consensus does this reflect?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Balance content and process</li> </ul>	It is time to move on to the next discussion question because there is an important vote coming up...If there is time to get back to this discussion we will do that...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Managing the allotted time</li> </ul>	We need to get back on track; we have about 5 minutes left and I want to see if there are any other key ideas that we've not heard so far...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Testing for clarity/shared agreement on laptop entry</li> </ul>	Does this statement convey what you've been saying about...in what way can it be re-written to more accurately reflect our conversation?

### Best and Worst Facilitator Practices

<i>Some Of The <u>Worst</u> Things A Facilitator Can Do</i>	<i>Some Of The <u>Best</u> Things A Facilitator Can Do</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remain oblivious to what the group thinks or needs</li> <li>Tell the group what to do</li> <li>Use leading questions (for example, <i>"Don't you think..."</i>)</li> <li>Not listen carefully to what is said</li> <li>Lose track of key ideas</li> <li>Try to be the center of attention</li> <li>Get defensive</li> <li>Put down people</li> <li>Unassertively manage conflict</li> <li>Let a few people or a community leader dominate</li> <li>Never check how the meeting is going</li> <li>Be overly passive on the process</li> <li>Push ahead on an irrelevant agenda</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create an open and trusting atmosphere</li> <li>See yourself as a servant to the group's needs</li> <li>Make the participants the center of attention</li> <li>Speak in simple and direct language</li> <li>Work hard to stay neutral</li> <li>Display energy and excitement</li> <li>Treat all participants as equals</li> <li>Make notes that reflect what participants mean</li> <li>Listen intently to totally understand what is being said</li> <li>Periodically summarize a complex array of ideas so that they form a coherent summary</li> <li>Know how to use a wide range of discussion methods</li> <li>End on a positive and optimistic note</li> </ul>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Let discussion get badly sidetracked</li><li>• Be insensitive to cultural diversity issues</li><li>• Use inappropriate humor</li><li>• Evaluate what the group says or does (instead, ask them to evaluate their own thinking, decision-making, analysis, etc.)</li></ul>	
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### AmericaSpeaks' Table Facilitator Skills and Qualities

Skilled volunteer table facilitators are crucial to the success of AmericaSpeaks' town meetings and the work is varied, challenging and fun. Facilitators are responsible for drawing out equal participation from their table of ten participants, focusing the group's conversation and holding respectful space for differences of opinion and communication styles.

Specifically, table facilitators 1) ensure that every participant has a productive experience in discussing the focus questions at their table and 2) capture the essence and nuance of table discussions so ideas can accurately be reflected in feedback themes and in the final report. To achieve these two goals, facilitators maintain the following roles and responsibilities during the meeting:

- Establish ground rules and get participants engaged in the conversation
- Maintain focus on discussion questions within the program sequence
- Ensure participants are/remain engaged and can safely share their views
- Encourage balanced participation and depth of ideas
- Capture key points on laptop and submit ideas consistently
- FACILITATORS DO NOT:
  - Insert own opinions
  - Act as content expert
  - Disagree with participants through verbal and nonverbal communication
  - Drive conversation according to own areas of interest

AmericaSpeaks' volunteer facilitators take every measure possible to ensure that the discussion is not biased and to provide a neutral space for the meeting participants to understand the information and make judgments about this difficult set of issues. This includes adhering to AmericaSpeaks' commitment to neutrality and modeling the following skills:

- Experience facilitating small group face-to-face deliberation, building toward consensus, while holding respectful space for difference
- Able to adhere to a tightly-timed program, but also able to respond to real-time changes in design and directions from the lead facilitator
- Deep listening skills, ability to hear both unique individual voices and also collective themes
- Comfortable with diversity on many dimensions

## AmericaSpeaks - Facilitator Resources

- Comfortable with the expression of strong emotions and able to support this expression, integrating the substantive content back into the conversation
- Able to stay in a neutral facilitation role despite any personal opinions regarding the content of the conversation

### Statement of Neutrality

AmericaSpeaks takes pride in its reputation as an honest and neutral advocate for public participation. We play a unique role in the policymaking process by serving as a non-partisan convener of forums that provide the public with an opportunity to make decisions about important issues without fear of manipulation or bias. Our ability to help citizens and elected officials come together around tough public issues is dependent on our commitment to maintaining this neutral role.

### Differentiating Process and Content

A facilitator’s role is to manage the process and leave the content to the participants. When a meeting leader is neutral on the content and actively orchestrates the action, he or she is acting as the ‘process leader’ or facilitator. The differences between Content and Process include the following:

<b>Content: What</b>	<b>Process: How</b>
The Content of meetings is what is discussed. The content is expressed in the flyers and the agenda. Because it is the verbal part of the meeting, the content is obvious and typically consumes the attention of the participants	Process deals with how things are discussed: the methods, procedures, format and tools used. Because the design of the meeting is done beforehand, not all are aware of the careful attention to process.

### The Differences between Debate and Dialogue

The facilitator helps create a safe environment for being honest and for truly listening to one another. The intent is dialogue, not debate. When people are encouraged to advocate for their beliefs and attempt to “be right,” opportunities for dialogue are diminished. The differences between Debate and Dialogue include the following:

<b>Debate</b>	<b>Dialogue</b>
Assumes there is a right answer and you have it	Assumes that many people have pieces of the answer and that together they craft a new solution
Combative: participants attempt to prove the other side wrong	Collaborative: participants work together toward common understanding
About winning	About exploring common ground
Listening to find flaws and make counter-arguments	Listening to understand, find meaning and agreement
Defending assumptions as truth	Revealing assumptions for re-evaluation
Critiquing the other side’s position	Re-examining all positions
Defending one’s own views against those of others	Admitting that others’ thinking can improve on one’s own

## AmericaSpeaks - Facilitator Resources

Searching for flaws and weaknesses in other positions	Searching for strengths and value in others' positions
Seeking a conclusion or vote that ratifies your position	Discovering new options, not seeking closure

### Common Communication Tips for Maintaining Good Conversations

There is no single formula for a good table discussion. Some are lively and full of creative dissent, while others may be thoughtful and quick to arrive at consensus. In either case, good table conversations are safe, balanced and constructive. To achieve this, the facilitator's goal is to listen and connect with participants without questioning their right to their unique opinions. The following sample statements and facilitator techniques can draw people out and get deeper discussion:

- **Encouraging:** Can you tell me more about that?
- **Clarifying:** What is it about this specifically that feels problematic to you?
- **Summarizing:** Let me see if I understand what you have just said...
- **Acknowledging:** I can see you feel upset right now; it is okay to respectfully express emotion.
- **Open Questions:** What would you like to see happen? How can you express that as a recommendation?
- **Reframe:** One of our ground rules is to avoid personal attacks, can you re-state that in different language so that we can understand the important point you want to make?

### Ways to Adjust Communication for Different Personality Types

- Keep your language simple
- Maintain a patient presence and posture
- Try to clarify messages in light of what may seem like the intent
- When in doubt, ask for clarification
- Do not assume that an inability to communicate easily reflects a lack of ideas – draw them out

### When Someone Tries to Dominate the Conversation

Often people tend to dominate a conversation for a couple of reasons: 1) They may have a tendency not to clue into others; 2) They don't feel they've been properly heard or understood; and/or 3) They feel very strongly about advocating for their ideas and positions. Some suggestions to minimize the negative impact of dominating participants include:

- Summarize what you have heard and ask if there is anything you are missing
- Acknowledge the importance of their perspective and let them know that it has been captured in the computer and will be included in the theme team's work
- Maintain consistent eye contact with them and speak directly about the need to get "all of the voices" into the conversation
- If repetitive points are made, ask what new information they can add so that you can compare this perspective to others at the table

## AmericaSpeaks - Facilitator Resources

### Four Body Language Signs to Watch for and What They Mean

If participants at the table disengage, often you will notice this first through their non-verbal communication. Here are some signs to look out for that can help you “invite people back into the discussion” if they check-out:

- General facial misbehavior (grimacing, frowning, rolling eyebrows, etc) – someone’s emotional reactions are ahead of their ability to manage them and they may need to be validated or acknowledge
- Arms folded/turned away – (if not resting) Folding arms may indicate a feeling of resistance or protection against some sort of verbal attack or disagreement with others’ views
- Lack of eye contact – someone is uncomfortable or searching for understanding
- Sighing/heavy breathing – someone does not have words to match their thoughts and feelings

### Techniques for Defusing Tense or Explosive Situations

- Be attentive and patient: Keep in mind that s/he will become less angry as you let him or her vent and express him/herself.
- Be sincere: Empathy and validation can defuse the situation if they are expressed genuinely.
- Be calm: Try to remove your own anger or fears from the discussion.
- Allow person to vent: If they are not making an unsafe situation for anyone, allow an angry person to let off steam and release the anger and use your communication skills to direct it to productive statements that can be recorded.
- Try to get listener’s attention: An angry person wants to know that others are paying attention--use your body language to show this.
- Allow them to be heard: An angry person wants someone to listen to his or her point of view--validate the feelings you hear so that the speaker can know you appreciate how angry s/he is –do this as long as their expression does not adversely impact others or take more time than is fair/balanced.
- In addition to the above, you can also:
  - Look for the value of the input and acknowledge it.
  - Avoid responding defensively
  - Ask open-ended questions to channel emotion
  - Ask clarifying questions; summarize
  - Invite them to take a break if they need to gather their thoughts
  - Refer to ground rules, agenda, task, and/or desired outcomes and indicate that the behavior appears to be taking the group away from its task or is counter to the ground rules
  - Ask for cooperation and state what you want

Some of these concepts are based on the *Facilitation at a Glance* by Ingrid Bens, 1994

Source: <https://sites.google.com/a/americaspeaks.org/oboe-facilitators/meeting-materials>

# IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



	<b>Inform</b>	<b>Consult</b>	<b>Involve</b>	<b>Collaborate</b>	<b>Empower</b>
<b>Public participation goal</b>	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
<b>Promise to the public</b>	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
<b>Example techniques</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fact sheets</li> <li>▪ Web sites</li> <li>▪ Open houses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Public comment</li> <li>▪ Focus groups</li> <li>▪ Surveys</li> <li>▪ Public meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Workshops</li> <li>▪ Deliberative polling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Citizen advisory committees</li> <li>▪ Consensus-building</li> <li>▪ Participatory decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Citizen juries</li> <li>▪ Ballots</li> <li>▪ Delegated decision</li> </ul>

# Representation

# 2010 Boards and Commissions Member Demographics

## 2010 BCC Members

Committee:	# of members	(Ward)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	UGB
Budget Committee	8	0	2	3	0	0	0	1	2	0	0
Civilian Review Board	7	2	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Historic Review Board	5	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Human Rights Commission	11	3	3	1	1	0	0	1	2	0	0
LRAPA Board of Directors	3	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lane Workforce Partnership	13 ( 8 n/a)	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1
Library Board	8 (1 n/a)	2	1	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	0
Metropolitan Wastewater Management Commission	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Planning Commission	7	1	1	2	0	2	0	0	1	0	0
Police Commission	10	2	2	1	1	2	1	0	0	0	1
Sustainability Commission	12 (1 n/a)	2	0	1	2	0	0	2	2	2	2
Toxics Board	7 (1 n/a)	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Wilamut Natural Area Citizen Planning Committee	15 (5 n/a)	2	1	1	2	1	0	3	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>108 (16 n/a)</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	

## 2010 BCC Demographics

	Budget Committee	Civilian Review Board	Historic Review Board	Human Rights Commission	LRAPA	L.W.P.	Library Board	M.W.M Commission	Planning Commission	Police Commission	Sustainability Commission	Toxics Board	W.N.A.C.P. Committee	Totals
<b>Sex</b>					1 n/a							1 n/a		
M	5	4	3	5	3	9	2	1	5	6	9	2	6	<b>60</b>
F	3	3	2	6	0	4	6	1	2	4	3	4	9	<b>47</b>
<b>Age</b>						10 n/a	2 n/a					2 n/a	3 n/a	
19-25	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
26-35	1	1	1	3	0	0	2	0	1	2	2	3	2	<b>18</b>
36-45	4	5	1	2	2	1	2	0	0	4	3	0	1	<b>25</b>
46-55	0	1	1	2	0	2	1	1	3	1	4	1	4	<b>21</b>
56-65	2	0	2	3	0	0	0	1	3	3	2	0	3	<b>19</b>
65+	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	<b>6</b>
<b>Ethnicity</b>														
African American	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>3</b>
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Asian/ Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Did not respond	0	2	1	3	1	11	2	1	1	1	1	3	4	<b>31</b>
Hispanic	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	<b>2</b>
Middle Eastern	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>2</b>
Multiracial	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	<b>4</b>
White/ European American	6	2	4	4	2	2	5	1	5	8	11	3	11	<b>64</b>

Continued on reverse side





# CITY OF EUGENE

## *PUBLIC PARTICIPATION FRAMEWORK*



*A living document that will continually evolve with staff experiences and community needs*



*Public involvement that will enhance outcomes and build and unify support for decisions is much more than setting up and facilitating meetings. It requires sustained quality investment and pays off dividends in trust that can withstand the imperfections of political processes.*

–City of Eugene City Hall Master Plan  
Public Involvement Final Report

## **SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **WHY A PUBLIC PARTICIPATION FRAMEWORK?**

The City of Eugene strives to provide equitable services for all of its constituents. By involving the public in identifying priorities and solutions, the City can better understand community concerns and ensure they are reflected in city policies, practices, and programs. Public participation also helps maintain the vitality of democracy and can lead to better solutions with greater community buy-in.

While many of us have specialized training or years of experience in public participation, others of us have only just begun. This framework can help you think about, plan, and execute public participation activities. It specifically presents suggestions for how to be culturally competent in your activities and is grounded in the City’s Vision:

*Diversity and Equity are core value of the City of Eugene where diversity and human rights are integral parts of all city programs. We are committed to working with our community to make Eugene a safe, dynamic and livable place. As a municipal government, we recognize our position of power and privilege and the influence of our actions on our community. It is our responsibility to ensure equitable outcomes in decision-making, policies, and service delivery for everyone. To ensure these outcomes, our workforce needs to reflect the community we serve and possess the skills to deliver culturally competent services.*

**Cultural competence** refers to an ability of organizations and staff to interact effectively with people, families, and communities of all cultures (i.e., race/ethnicity, disability, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, age, or sexual identity). A key component of this ability is not assuming to already know how others would like to be treated. The City of Eugene is committed to this principle of treating all members of our community as *they* would like to be treated through listening and dialogue.

## SECTION 3:

# PRINCIPLES FOR INTERACTING AND ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Currently, the City of Eugene has not adopted formal policies on public participation; however, the Diversity and Equity Strategic Plan includes an action item to create citywide guiding principles for public participation. During the outreach CPW conducted for the Diversity & Equity Strategic Plan, community members shared their perspectives on how to best interact with and engage them in city policy and program discussions. The following principles were heard across all communities and should serve as a starting point for developing city-wide guiding principles. While these principles relate to interacting and engaging with the community, the City might want to develop principles for developing the public participation strategy or program.

1. ***People do not want to be studied.*** People want to be treated as people, not research subjects. Public engagement is a reciprocal activity in which you want to gather information from the public and the public wants to be heard and respected. Consider the language you use and how you frame and ask questions. Generally, it is more effective to use questions tailored to individual's ideas and concerns and to ask them in a conversational manner.
2. ***Listen to people's story.*** Many people just want to be heard and believed. Rather than directing responses, let community members tell their story. If you listen to what they have to say, the information that you are looking for is often embedded within their stories. A one-sided conversation (i.e., you talking and not listening) will negatively impact your current participation activity as well as future ones.
3. ***Use established community networks.*** Engage established community networks to disseminate information and develop a relationship with that community. Eugene is full of active leaders trying to make changes in their respective communities and who serve as a "gatekeeper" into specific communities. They can help city staff tap into the already established community networks by introducing staff to other people or by actually inviting community members to events. Many people are more likely to participate in a meeting or discussion if they are invited by someone who they already know and trust. However, connecting people takes time; City staff need to be cognizant of the time that it takes community leaders to help them and should try to develop a reciprocal relationship that supports and adds value to both parties.

4. ***Spend time building relationships.*** Spending time developing relationships builds trusts and will enhance the quality of communication between you and the community. Commit to spending time on the relationship building phase before you start to conduct “official” city outreach. For example, attend community meetings and events, which may require you to work outside of regular staff time including nights and weekends. Although the relationship building requires effort and time, the connections will facilitate greater ease in your public involvement processes in the future.
5. ***Recognize diversity within various communities.*** Each community, whether it is Latino, LGBTQ, Asian, or African American, has a great diversity within it. Not all Asian community members, for example, are the same. Do not assume that all Asian community members have the same issues and like to be communicated with in the same way. This is where the fundamental building block of cultural competency comes in – *ask, do not assume.*
6. ***Learn about the community you want to involve. Do not operate from preconceived notions.*** Develop an understanding of any past or present, positive or negative relationships the group you want to conduct outreach with or involved might have with the City. Some groups feel hurt by the City or feel like the City is not “on their side.” Ask other city staff what they know and talk to community leaders. You must balance acknowledging the historic issues while at the same time trying to move the relationship forward. As with recognizing the diversity within communities, it is important here to ask questions and not to assume.
7. ***Demonstrate results from public involvement.*** Outreach and involvement is good, but it must be backed with action. Participants want to know what happens to their input. Does it make a difference for them to be involved? What happened in the project or process? Community members who have participated in conversations surrounding issues that remain unsolved may have become discouraged and might be less likely to want to participate in the future. To prevent this discouragement, demonstrate how input will be used to address the issue of concern. If input is only being used to assess the situation, it should be made clear from the beginning.

## SECTION 6: COMMUNITY CONTACTS

Throughout this framework we have stressed using existing community networks to assist you with your public participation. Knowing how to tap that existing network is the hard part. Lane Community College and the University of Oregon have already created wonderful directories that we did not try to duplicate and serve as a good starting point.

**LCC's Diversity Yellow Pages** (<http://www.lanecc.edu/diversity/vlibrary/directory.html>).

**UO's Multicultural Resource Framework** (<http://www.uoregon.edu/~codac/mrg/>).

In addition, we have compiled a list of community organizations, identified by people participating in our involvement process, which serve diverse populations within Eugene and are not listed on the LCC nor UO resource directories. Together these three resources provide a broad list of organizations serving specific communities. However, this is a living document and organizations will change and new ones will surface. This list should be updated continually to ensure accuracy.

### **African American/Black Community**

Back2Back (Community Alliance of Lane County)	221-1375, 485-1755	<a href="http://www.calclane.org/">http://www.calclane.org/</a>
Grace Memorial church	342-2638	1492 W 2nd Ave
Powerhouse Worship	484-3960	<a href="http://www.phworshipcenter.org">www.phworshipcenter.org</a>
Asian		
Eugene Chinese Church	338-0810	631 E 19th Ave Eugene, OR 97401
Eugene Japanese Baptist Church	998-1534	<a href="http://www.eugeneintl.org/ejbc/">http://www.eugeneintl.org/ejbc/</a>

### **Latino**

AMIGOS	746-6022	<a href="http://amigosmsc.org/">http://amigosmsc.org/</a>
Juventud Faceta (Youth Group)	746-6022	<a href="http://amigosmsc.org/">http://amigosmsc.org/</a>
Eugene-Springfield Solidarity Network	736-9041	<a href="http://www.solidaritynetwork.org/">http://www.solidaritynetwork.org/</a>
Social Justice Committee of Unitarian Universalist Church	988-0277	<a href="http://www.uueugene.org/index.html">http://www.uueugene.org/index.html</a>
CAUSA	503-984-6816	<a href="http://causaoregon.blogspot.com/">http://causaoregon.blogspot.com/</a>
Downtown Languages	686-8483	<a href="http://www.downtownlanguages.org">www.downtownlanguages.org</a>
LCC ESL Program	463-5253	<a href="http://www.lanecc.edu/esl_iesl/esl.htm">http://www.lanecc.edu/esl_iesl/esl.htm</a>
Siempre Amigos	349-0301	944 5th W Ave Eugene OR 97402

## Arab American

Middle East Outreach Council 343-1007

## LGBTQ

Queer Eugene.com Community Resources website only <http://www.queereugene.com/community/resource/>  
Page  
The Gender Center 541-870-5202 PO. Box 12140 Eugene Oregon 97440

## Women

United Way 741-6000 <http://www.unitedwaylane.org/>  
Eugene Chamber of Commerce 484-1314 <http://www.eugenechamber.com/>  
CASA of Lane County program 984-3132 <http://www.casa-lane.org/>  
Religion/Faith Based  
The Jewish Community Relations Council 465-6937  
Temple Beth Israel 485-7218 <http://www.tbieugene.org/>  
Church of Latter-Day Saints Seminary 687-9419 768 E 16th Ave Eugene, OR 97401  
Dharmalaya 342-7621 356 Horn Ln Eugene, OR 97404  
Lane Interfaith Alliance 747-3887 <http://www.interfaitheugene.org/>

## Low-Income

Lane County Health & Human Services 682-4035 <http://www.lanecounty.org/HHS/default.htm>  
United Way 741-6000 <http://www.unitedwaylane.org/>  
NEDCO 345-7106 <http://www.nedcocdc.org/>  
Veterans Memorial Association 338-4074 <http://www.vfw.org/>  
St. Vincent DePaul 342-7728 <http://www.svdp.us/>  
Metropolitan Affordable Housing 683-1751 <http://www.metroaffordablehousing.org/>  
Food for Lane County 343-2822 <http://www.foodforlanecounty.org/News/index.html>  
  
CSC- Young Fathers Program 345-3628 <http://www.cslc.org/youngfathers.html>  
ext.312  
Looking Glass 485-8448 <http://www.lookingglass.us/>  
Eugene Service Station 461-8688 <http://www.svdp.us/eugene-service-station.php5>  
  
First Place 342-7728 1995 Amazon Parkway Ct Eugene, OR 97405  
Eugene Mission 344-3251 1542 West First Avenue Eugene, OR 97440  
Station 7 689-3111 <http://www.lookingglass.us/pages/Services/agencyoverview.htm>  
  
Shankle Safe Haven 741-7726 <http://arch-way.net/thelane/bin/Page.cgi?id=wb1812>  
  
Volunteers in Medicine 685-1800 <http://www.vim-clinic.org/default.htm>  
RiverStone Clinic 682-3550 1640 G St Springfield, OR 97477

Lane County Mental Health	682-3608	<a href="http://www.lanecounty.org/HHS_mntlhlth/default.htm">http://www.lanecounty.org/HHS_mntlhlth/default.htm</a>
Royal Avenue Shelter	461-2845	<a href="http://www.sheltercare.org/pcm.html">http://www.sheltercare.org/pcm.html</a>
Buckley House	343-6512	<a href="http://alcoholism.about.com/od/tx_or/qt/or112.htm">http://alcoholism.about.com/od/tx_or/qt/or112.htm</a>

## Seniors

Senior and Disabled Services	682-4173	<a href="http://www.sdslane.org/">http://www.sdslane.org/</a>
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## Youth

Youth Action Board	342-8336
Youth Justice League	682-6785

## Disability Community

Oasis	342-6611	<a href="http://www.oasisnet.org/">http://www.oasisnet.org/</a>
ShelterCare	686-1262	<a href="http://www.sheltercare.org/index.html">http://www.sheltercare.org/index.html</a>
Lane Independent Living Alliance	607-7020	<a href="http://www.lilaoregon.org/">http://www.lilaoregon.org/</a>
Senior and Disabled Services	682-4173	<a href="http://www.sdslane.org/">http://www.sdslane.org/</a>
Lane County Mental Health	682-3608	<a href="http://www.lanecounty.org/HHS_mntlhlth/default.htm">http://www.lanecounty.org/HHS_mntlhlth/default.htm</a>
Lane County Developmental Disabilities Services	682-3892	<a href="http://www.lanecounty.org/HHS_devdis/default.htm">http://www.lanecounty.org/HHS_devdis/default.htm</a>
Lane Transit District – Accessible Transportation Committee	682-6100	<a href="http://www.ltd.org/search/showresult.html?versionthread=aae36e5c094e0bd400c636cd8138b57c">http://www.ltd.org/search/showresult.html?versionthread=aae36e5c094e0bd400c636cd8138b57c</a>
City of Eugene – Adaptive Recreation Services at the Hilyard Community Center	682-5311	<a href="http://www.eugene-or.gov/portal/server.pt?space=CommunityPage&amp;control=SetCommunity&amp;CommunityID=234&amp;PageID=0">http://www.eugene-or.gov/portal/server.pt?space=CommunityPage&amp;control=SetCommunity&amp;CommunityID=234&amp;PageID=0</a>

## Handout 2: Effective representation (legitimacy) Involving people directly affected by the advocacy issue or problem

Advocacy can be carried out by the people affected by an issue or problem, by other people representing them, or by both groups together. Advocacy is often more powerful if those affected by the problem or issue are involved with or lead the process.

If we advocate by representing others, we need to ensure that we represent their opinions and interests fairly. This means having a very close relationship with these affected by the problem or issue, a deep understanding of the issue, and permission from those affected by the problem or issue to advocate on their behalf. Having permission or the 'right' to advocate for other people is known as 'legitimacy'.

It is also important to ensure that advocacy work is supported by the mission or aims of our organization, by senior managers, and by any external funders.

Why it is important to involve those directly affected by the advocacy issue, from early in the planning process

- They will have expert knowledge of the issue or problem
- They can suggest workable solutions based on direct experience of the problem
- They can view a problem from a different perspective
- They are often highly motivated, because they are directly affected by the issue
- Affected individuals and groups will gain more skills and confidence
- It is a good opportunity to reduce stigma against people living in poverty.

### Problems caused by lack of legitimacy

Involving those affected by the problem or issue late, superficially ('tokenism') or not at all can result in:

- identifying irrelevant issues
- suggesting solutions which do not solve the problem, or make the problem worse
- public disagreement
- loss of credibility for the organizations and individuals involved in advocacy
- increased stigma and legitimized exclusion and non-involvement of those affected by the problem or issue
- disempowerment of those affected, so they are less in control of their own situations.

### Methods of involving those directly affected by the advocacy issue

Finding a way of genuinely involving those directly affected by the advocacy issue will greatly strengthen the advocacy work in the long term. But it may take more time in the short term, especially if they are very busy, frequently ill, do not trust you, are hard to identify and reach, or challenge your ways of working.

People affected by the problem or issue can be involved at all stages of advocacy: defining the problem or issue, planning, implementation and evaluation – as advisers, implementers or managers.

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# Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life

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## *Implications for Clinical Practice*

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Derald Wing Sue, Christina M. Capodilupo, Gina C. Torino, Jennifer M. Bucceri,  
Aisha M. B. Holder, Kevin L. Nadal, and Marta Esquilin  
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*Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage in such communications when they interact with racial/ethnic minorities. A taxonomy of racial microaggressions in everyday life was created through a review of the social psychological literature on aversive racism, from formulations regarding the manifestation and impact of everyday racism, and from reading numerous personal narratives of counselors (both White and those of color) on their racial/cultural awakening. Microaggressions seem to appear in three forms: microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation. Almost all interracial encounters are prone to microaggressions; this article uses the White counselor – client of color counseling dyad to illustrate how they impair the development of a therapeutic alliance. Suggestions regarding education and training and research in the helping professions are discussed.*

**Keywords:** microaggression, microassault, microinsult, microinvalidation, attributional ambiguity

**A**lthough the civil rights movement had a significant effect on changing racial interactions in this society, racism continues to plague the United States (Thompson & Neville, 1999). President Clinton's Race Advisory Board concluded that (a) racism is one of the most divisive forces in our society, (b) racial legacies of the past continue to haunt current policies and practices that create unfair disparities between minority and majority groups, (c) racial inequities are so deeply ingrained in American society that they are nearly invisible, and (d) most White Americans are unaware of the advantages they enjoy in this society and of how their attitudes and actions unintentionally discriminate against persons of color (Advisory Board to the President's Initiative on Race, 1998). This last conclusion is especially problematic in the mental health professions because most graduates continue to be White and trained primarily in Western European models of service delivery (D. W. Sue & Sue, 2003). For that reason, this article focuses primarily on White therapist – client of color interactions.

Because White therapists are members of the larger society and not immune from inheriting the racial biases of their forebears (Burkard & Knox, 2004; D. W. Sue, 2005), they may become victims of a cultural conditioning process that imbues within them biases and prejudices (Abelson, Dasgupta, Park, & Banaji, 1998; Banaji, Hardin, & Rothman, 1993) that discriminate against clients of color. Over the past 20 years, calls for cultural competence in the helping professions (American Psychological Association, 2003; D. W. Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992) have stressed the importance of two therapist characteristics associated with effective service delivery to racial/ethnic minority clients: (a) awareness of oneself as a racial/cultural being and of the biases, stereotypes, and assumptions that influence worldviews and (b) awareness of the worldviews of culturally diverse clients. Achieving these two goals is blocked, however, when White clinicians fail to understand how issues of race influence the therapy process and how racism potentially infects the delivery of services to clients of color (Richardson & Molinaro, 1996). Therapists who are unaware of their biases and prejudices may unintentionally create impasses for clients of color, which may partially explain well-documented patterns of therapy underutilization and premature termination of therapy among such clients (Burkard & Knox, 2004; Kearney, Draper, & Baron, 2005). In this article, we describe and analyze how racism in the form of racial microaggressions is particularly problematic for therapists to identify; propose a taxonomy of racial microaggressions with potential implications for practice, education and training, and research; and use the counseling/therapy process to illustrate how racial microaggressions can impair the therapeutic alliance. To date, no conceptual or theoretical model of

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*Editor's note.* Lillian Comas-Díaz served as the action editor for this article before Derald Wing Sue joined the *American Psychologist* Editorial Board as an associate editor on January 1, 2007.

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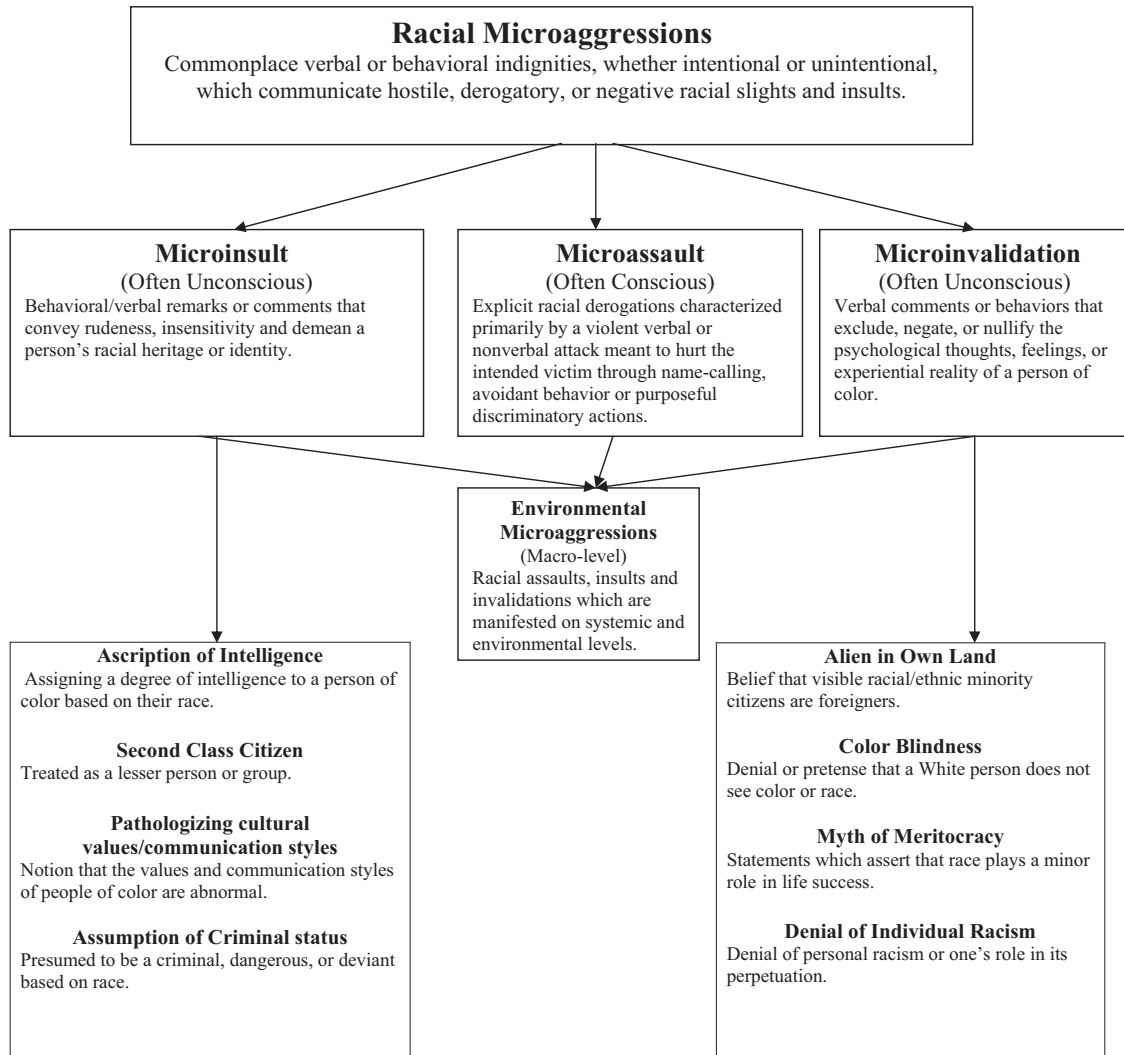
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**Table 1**  
*Examples of Racial Microaggressions*

Theme	Microaggression	Message
Alien in own land When Asian Americans and Latino Americans are assumed to be foreign-born	"Where are you from?" "Where were you born?" "You speak good English."	You are not American.
	A person asking an Asian American to teach them words in their native language	You are a foreigner.
Ascription of intelligence Assigning intelligence to a person of color on the basis of their race	"You are a credit to your race."	People of color are generally not as intelligent as Whites.
	"You are so articulate."	It is unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent.
	Asking an Asian person to help with a math or science problem	All Asians are intelligent and good in math/sciences.
Color blindness Statements that indicate that a White person does not want to acknowledge race	"When I look at you, I don't see color."	Denying a person of color's racial/ethnic experiences.
	"America is a melting pot."	Assimilate/acclacurate to the dominant culture.
	"There is only one race, the human race."	Denying the individual as a racial/cultural being.
Criminality/assumption of criminal status A person of color is presumed to be dangerous, criminal, or deviant on the basis of their race	A White man or woman clutching their purse or checking their wallet as a Black or Latino approaches or passes	You are a criminal.
	A store owner following a customer of color around the store	You are going to steal/ You are poor/ You do not belong.
	A White person waits to ride the next elevator when a person of color is on it	You are dangerous.
Denial of individual racism A statement made when Whites deny their racial biases	"I'm not racist. I have several Black friends."	I am immune to racism because I have friends of color.
	"As a woman, I know what you go through as a racial minority."	Your racial oppression is no different than my gender oppression. I can't be a racist. I'm like you.
Myth of meritocracy Statements which assert that race does not play a role in life successes	"I believe the most qualified person should get the job."	People of color are given extra unfair benefits because of their race.
	"Everyone can succeed in this society, if they work hard enough."	People of color are lazy and/or incompetent and need to work harder.
Pathologizing cultural values/ communication styles The notion that the values and communication styles of the dominant/White culture are ideal	Asking a Black person: "Why do you have to be so loud/animated? Just calm down."	Assimilate to dominant culture.
	To an Asian or Latino person: "Why are you so quiet? We want to know what you think. Be more verbal." "Speak up more."	
	Dismissing an individual who brings up race/culture in work/school setting	Leave your cultural baggage outside.
Second-class citizen Occurs when a White person is given preferential treatment as a consumer over a person of color	Person of color mistaken for a service worker	People of color are servants to Whites. They couldn't possibly occupy high-status positions.
	Having a taxi cab pass a person of color and pick up a White passenger	You are likely to cause trouble and/or travel to a dangerous neighborhood.

**Figure 1**  
*Categories of and Relationships Among Racial Microaggressions*



nearly everyone born and raised in the United States inherits the racial biases of the society, and that the most accurate assessment about whether racist acts have occurred in a particular situation is most likely to be made by those most disempowered rather than by those who enjoy the privileges of power (Jones, 1997; Keltner & Robinson, 1996). According to these findings, microaggressions (a) tend to be subtle, indirect, and unintentional, (b) are most likely to emerge not when a behavior would look prejudicial, but when other rationales can be offered for prejudicial behavior, and (c) occur when Whites pretend not to notice differences, thereby justifying that “color” was not involved in the actions taken. Color blindness is a major form of microinvalidation because it denies the racial and experiential reality of people of color and provides an excuse to White people to claim that they are not preju-

diced (Helms, 1992; Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Browne, 2000). The flight attendant, for example, did not realize that her “not seeing color” invalidated both passengers’ racial identity and experiential reality.

***Dilemma 3: Perceived Minimal Harm of Racial Microaggressions***

In most cases, when individuals are confronted with their microaggressive acts (as in the case of the flight attendant), the perpetrator usually believes that the victim has overreacted and is being overly sensitive and/or petty. After all, even if it was an innocent racial blunder, microaggressions are believed to have minimal negative impact. People of color are told not to overreact and to simply “let it go.” Usually, Whites consider microaggressive incidents to be

# White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack

by Peggy McIntosh

Through work to bring materials from Women's Studies into the rest of the curriculum, I have often noticed men's unwillingness to grant that they are over-privileged, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged. They may say they will work to improve women's status, in the society, the university, or the curriculum, but they can't or won't support the idea of lessening men's. Denials which amount to taboos surround the subject of advantages which men gain from women's disadvantages: These denials protect male privilege from being fully acknowledged, lessened or ended.

Thinking through unacknowledged male privilege as a phenomenon, I realized that since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there was most likely a phenomenon of white privilege which was similarly denied and protected. As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage.

I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male

privilege. So I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks.

Describing white privilege makes one newly accountable. As we in Women's Studies work to reveal male privilege and ask men to give up some of their power, so one who writes about having white privilege must ask, "Having described it, what will I do to lessen or end it?"

After I realized the extent to which men work from a base of unacknowledged privilege, I understood that much of their oppressiveness was unconscious. Then I remembered the frequent charges from women of color that white women whom they encounter are oppressive. I began to understand why we are justly seen as oppressive, even when we don't see ourselves that way. I began to count the ways in which I enjoy unearned skin privilege and have been conditioned into oblivion about its existence.

My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. My schooling followed the pattern my colleague Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out: whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow "them" to be more like "us."

I decided to try to work on myself at least by identifying some of the daily

**I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group.**

effects of white privilege in my life. I have chosen those conditions which I think in my case *attach somewhat more to skin-color privilege* than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographical location, though of course all these other factors are intricately intertwined. As far as I can see, my African American co-workers, friends and acquaintances with whom I come into daily or frequent contact in this particular time, place, and line of work cannot count on most of these conditions.

1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
3. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
4. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
5. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
6. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
7. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.

*Peggy McIntosh is Associate Director of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. This essay is excerpted from her working paper, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies," copyright © 1988 by Peggy McIntosh. Available for \$4.00 from address below. The paper includes a longer list of privileges. Permission to excerpt or reprint must be obtained from Peggy McIntosh, Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, Wellesley, MA 02481; (781) 283-2520; FAX (781) 283-2504.*

8. If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege.

9. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can cut my hair.

10. Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.

11. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.

12. I can swear, or dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.

13. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.

14. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.

15. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.

16. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.

17. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.

18. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to "the person in charge," I will be facing a person of my race.

19. If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.

20. I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children's magazines featuring people of my race.

21. I can go home from most meetings

of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.

22. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of race.

23. I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.

24. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.

25. If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.

26. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more or less match my skin.

I repeatedly forgot each of the realizations on this list until I wrote it down. For me white privilege has turned out to be an elusive and fugitive subject. The pressure to avoid it is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy. If these things are true, this is not such a free country; one's life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own.

In unpacking this invisible knapsack of white privilege, I have listed conditions of daily experience which I once took for granted. Nor did I think of any of these perquisites as bad for the holder. I now think that we need a more finely differentiated taxonomy of privilege, for some of these varieties are only what one would want for everyone in a just society, and others give licence to be ignorant, oblivious, arrogant and destructive.

I see a pattern running through the matrix of white privilege, a pattern of assumptions which were passed on to me as a white person. There was one main piece of cultural turf; it was my own turf, and I was among those who could control the turf. *My skin color was an asset for any move I was educated to want to make.* I could think of myself as belonging in major ways,

and of making social systems work for me. I could freely disparage, fear, neglect, or be oblivious to anything outside of the dominant cultural forms. Being of the main culture, I could also criticize it fairly freely.

In proportion as my racial group was being made confident, comfortable, and oblivious, other groups were likely being made inconfident, uncomfortable, and alienated. Whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence, which I was being subtly trained to visit in turn upon people of color.

For this reason, the word "privilege" now seems to me misleading. We usually think of privilege as being a favored state, whether earned or conferred by birth or luck. Yet some of the conditions I have described here work to systematically overempower certain groups. Such privilege simply *confers dominance* because of one's race or sex.

I want, then, to distinguish between earned strength and unearned power conferred systemically. Power from unearned privilege can look like strength when it is in fact permission to escape or to dominate. But not all of the privileges on my list are inevitably damaging. Some, like the expectation that neighbors will be decent to you, or that your race will not count against you in court, should be the norm in a just society. Others, like the privilege to ignore less powerful people, distort the humanity of the holders as well as the ignored groups.

We might at least start by distinguishing between positive advantages which we can work to spread, and negative types of advantages which unless rejected will always reinforce our present hierarchies. For example, the feeling that one belongs within the human circle, as Native Americans say, should not be seen as privilege for a few. Ideally it is an *unearned entitlement*. At present, since only a few have it, it is an *unearned advantage* for them. This paper results from a process of coming to see that some of the power which I originally saw as attendant on being a human being in the U.S. consisted in *unearned*

*continued next page*

**White Privilege,**  
*continued from p. 11*

*advantage and conferred dominance.*

I have met very few men who are truly distressed about systemic, unearned male advantage and conferred dominance. And so one question for me and others like me is whether we will be like them, or whether we will get truly distressed, even outraged, about unearned race advantage and conferred dominance and if so, what we will do to lessen them. In any case, we need to do more work in identifying how they actually affect our daily lives. Many, perhaps most, of our white students in the U.S. think that racism doesn't affect them because they are not people of color; they do not see "whiteness" as a racial identity. In addition, since race and sex are not the only advantaging systems at work, we need similarly to examine the daily experience of having age advantage, or ethnic advantage, or physical ability, or advantage related to nationality, religion, or sexual orientation.

Difficulties and dangers surrounding the task of finding parallels are many. Since racism, sexism, and heterosexism are not the same, the advantaging associated with them should not be seen as the same. In addition, it is hard to disentangle aspects of unearned advantage which rest more on social class, economic class, race, religion, sex and ethnic identity than on other factors. Still, all of the oppressions are interlocking, as the Combahee River Collective Statement of 1977 continues to remind us eloquently.

One factor seems clear about all of the interlocking oppressions. They take both active forms which we can see and embedded forms which as a member of the dominant group one is taught not to see. In my class and place, I did not see myself as a racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth.

Disapproving of the systems won't be enough to change them. I was

**The question is: "Having described white privilege, what will I do to end it?"**

taught to think that racism could end if white individuals changed their attitudes. [But] a "white" skin in the United States opens many doors for whites whether or not we approve of the way dominance has been conferred on us. Individual acts can palliate, but cannot end, these problems.

To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these taboo subjects. Most talk by whites about equal opportunity seems to me now to be about equal opportunity to try to get into a position of dominance while denying that *systems* of dominance exist.

It seems to me that obliviousness about white advantage, like obliviousness about male advantage, is kept strongly inculcated in the United States so as to maintain the myth of meritocracy, the myth that democratic choice is equally available to all. Keeping most people unaware that freedom of confident action is there for just a small number of people props up those in power, and serves to keep power in the hands of the same groups that have most of it already.

Though systemic change takes many decades, there are pressing questions for me and I imagine for some others like me if we raise our daily consciousness on the perquisites of being light-skinned. What will we do with such knowledge? As we know from watching men, it is an open question whether we will choose to use unearned advantage to weaken hidden systems of advantage, and whether we will use any of our arbitrarily-awarded power to try to reconstruct power systems on a broader base. ■

# The Promise and Challenge of Neighborhood Democracy:

Lessons from the intersection of  
government and community

*by Matt Leighninger*

*A report on the  
"Democratic Governance  
at the Neighborhood Level"  
meeting, organized by  
**Grassroots Grantmakers**  
and the **Deliberative  
Democracy Consortium**,  
with assistance from the  
**National League of Cities**  
and **NeighborWorks  
America**, on November  
11th, 2008, in Orlando, FL*

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## PREFACE

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I am delighted to introduce **The Promise and Challenge of Neighborhood Democracy: Lessons from the Intersection of Government and Community**. This report grew out a meeting that Grassroots Grantmakers and the Deliberative Democracy Consortium organized in Orlando last fall with help from the National League of Cities and NeighborWorks America. **Democratic Governance at the Local Level** was the topic, with discussion focusing on what Portland, Minneapolis, Los Angeles and other cities that have experimented with creative ways to engage citizens in public decision-making and problem solving are learning.

With this report, we are continuing and hoping to expand the discussion that began in Orlando. I believe that when you read the report, you will agree that Matt Leighninger, Executive Director of Deliberative Democracy Consortium and primary author of this report, has done a wonderful job of using the questions and ideas from the meeting as a springboard for future discussion.

If you are wondering why Grassroots Grantmakers is interested in how city governments are thinking about local democracy and why we're intrigued by the possibilities associated with a wider discussion of the themes that are highlighted in this report:

- ▶ Grassroots Grantmakers is a network of place-based funders that invest in active citizenship, build civic capacity and increase community resiliency. Our roots are in philanthropy, but our vision includes local governments as important place-based funders who are currently under-represented in our community of practice.
- ▶ Many of the issues that surfaced in Orlando are the same issues that regularly surface within our network. If we're dealing with the same issues but from different perspectives, imagine the opportunities that could unfold if local government funders and place-based philanthropies could work on these issues together!
- ▶ In some places, it's not that easy to be involved, while in other places it's easier, with many "on-ramps" for active citizenship. We would love to see local governments and local philanthropies think together about how accessible active citizenship is in their community, and join together to build more on-ramps and dismantle roadblocks. We're hoping that this report will spark some of those conversations.

Many of the participants in the Orlando meeting have commented on drafts of this report. Matt and I want to offer special thanks to Terry Amsler (Collaborative Governance Initiative, Institute for Local Government, League of California Cities), Kara Carlisle (W. K. Kellogg Foundation), April Doner (SCOPE), BongHwan Kim (Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, City of Los Angeles, CA), Paul Leistner (Office of Neighborhood Initiatives, City of Portland, OR), Mark Linder (City of Cupertino, CA), Bonnie Mann (National League of Cities), Reemberto Rodriguez (NeighborWorks America), and Sergio Rodriguez (Retired City Manager, Miami Beach, FL) for their thoughtful comments.

I hope that you will read this report with an eye to continuing the discussion and share with us where the discussion leads.

**Janis Foster, Executive Director  
Grassroots Grantmakers**

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## WHY THIS MEETING?

### THE NEIGHBORHOOD ROOTS OF ASCENDANT, WIRED, GLOBAL DEMOCRACY

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For some time, a fundamental shift in the attitudes and capacities of ordinary people has been affecting local politics. Though it has been largely overlooked by national observers, this shift has created new tensions between local officials and their constituents, and inspired a new wave of civic experimentation in local governance.

In 2008, the frustrations and political potential of active citizens became one of the central stories in an historic presidential election. By recruiting three million volunteers—and more importantly, by giving those people much more meaningful responsibilities and opportunities than in any previous presidential election—the Obama campaign tapped into, and helped to reveal, the nature of 21<sup>st</sup> Century citizenship.<sup>1</sup>

The success of the Obama campaign, and the advent of the administration's Open Government Initiative, suddenly put citizens in the spotlight. It illuminated some of the critical questions we face:

- ▶ What kind of long-term relationship do people want with their government?
- ▶ How can temporary organizing strategies—whether they employ online technologies, or face-to-face meetings, or both—be incorporated in the way communities conduct their public business?

- ▶ Can the energy of 2008 be sustained in ways that will strengthen our democracy?

(It is important to note that the first two of these challenges were apparent well before the 2008 election; the national spotlight on these issues may fade, but citizens, public officials, and public employees will still be grappling with them for the foreseeable future.)

To answer these critical questions, we need to look at what is happening, and what could happen, in neighborhoods. There are three main reasons for this. First, the style of organizing that the Obama campaign deployed (reflecting the candidate's background as a community organizer) is a fundamentally local, even neighborhood-based approach. The tactics of network-based recruitment, small-group meetings, and citizen-led action planning (and even the use of the Internet to aid these activities) were all honed through years of work at the local and neighborhood levels.

The first practitioners of these strategies were traditional community organizers, but over the years a much broader array of local leaders, including elected officials, city managers, school administrators, planners, community foundations, and police officials, have used and adapted these tactics to engage residents in public decision-making and problem-solving.<sup>2</sup> The Obama campaign itself relied heavily on an extensive local infrastructure; the incredible scale of the effort could not have been achieved without 'boots on the ground' in thousands of neighborhoods.

DEMOCRACY IS INCREASINGLY  
GLOBAL, BUT IT MAY ALSO BE  
INCREASINGLY LOCAL.

Second, though the Internet has given people the chance to connect with colleagues and counterparts all over the world, some of the most dynamic applications of the new technologies are situations where online communication builds on, and complements, local connections. Online neighborhood forums, which are proliferating rapidly, illustrate some of the ways in which technology is enriching—not replacing—face-to-face interaction. “When we talk about social media, we are talking about social change that happens online AND on land,” says Allison Fine, author of *Momentum: Igniting Social Change in the Connected Age*. Democracy may be increasingly global, but it may also be increasingly local.

Finally, the experimentation with neighborhood governance that has occurred in a handful of cities over a thirty-year period represents a tremendous, and often overlooked, source of knowledge about these questions. Starting in the early 1970s, local governments in places like Portland, Oregon, Dayton, Ohio, and Saint Paul, Minnesota created neighborhood council systems as a way of engaging residents in public decision-making and problem-solving.<sup>3</sup> The history of these neighborhood governance structures offers a rich legacy of successes, mistakes, strengths, and weaknesses that can inspire and inform democracy reform at every level of government.

These assumptions provided the rationale for a meeting entitled “Democratic Governance at the Neighborhood Level: What Have We Learned?” The gathering was held on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2008, in conjunction with the National League of Cities conference in Orlando, Florida. The meeting focused on three neighborhood governance systems as case studies: the district

## WHAT IS A “NEIGHBORHOOD”?

The word “neighborhood” still resonates with many people as a connotation for community and a way to assert pride of place. But it seems to have different meanings in different places. Some people think it is an outdated term that applies only to urban settings—or to some bygone era when neighbors interacted more often, and had more in common, than they do today. Some of the participants in this meeting still emphasized the word, highlighting it in titles like the Strong Neighborhoods Initiative or the Los Angeles Neighborhood Council system. Others seemed not to use it at all. Regardless of whether they used “neighborhood” in their work, however, the participants were all focused on ways of connecting and empowering people who live in fairly close geographical proximity to one another—while they might disagree on the rhetorical usefulness of the term, they all believed in the value of neighborhood as a way of thinking about governance and democracy.

coalitions and Office of Neighborhood Involvement in Portland, Oregon, the Neighborhood Revitalization Program of Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the Los Angeles Neighborhood Council system. In addition to the representatives of these three structures, the meeting also included elected officials from other communities, academic researchers, program officers at foundations, employees of local governments who work extensively with neighborhoods, and people representing nonprofit organizations or coalitions that work on issues of democracy and citizenship. (For a full list of participants, see Appendix 1.) The organizers of the meeting were Grassroots Grantmakers and the Deliberative Democracy

Consortium, with assistance from NeighborWorks America and the National League of Cities. (For more information on these organizations, see Bob's Rules page Appendix 2.)

The meeting participants brought with them some basic convictions about neighborhoods and democracy:

1. Neighborhoods are “where the people are”—neighborhoods aren’t the only hubs for community, but they may still be the most important ones;
2. Neighborhoods are where conflict between residents and government is on the rise—over local land use decisions, crime prevention and policing strategies, traffic, environmental concerns, school closings, and so on;
3. Neighborhoods are often where new leaders first emerge;
4. Neighborhoods are the most immediate access points for confronting a wide range of public problems—and leveraging a host of community assets;
5. Neighborhoods are where you can foster cooperation, collaboration, and public work involving residents, government, and other groups;
6. The neighborhood is at least one important arena where government “of, by, and for the people” can actually happen, on a regular, ongoing basis (rather than every once in a while, when a crisis occurs or a major decision approaches); and
7. The neighborhood is a setting where politics can be reunited with community and culture—a place where people can maintain

social connections, exercise political power, and feel like they are part of something larger than themselves.

Though they came at the topic from many different vantage points, all the meeting participants agreed that, when it comes to democracy and local governance, neighborhoods matter. The question they all faced was whether, and how, innovations in neighborhood democracy could help communities address the challenges and potential of 21<sup>st</sup> Century citizenship.

WHEN IT COMES TO  
DEMOCRACY AND  
LOCAL GOVERNANCE,  
NEIGHBORHOODS MATTER.

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## NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL SYSTEMS: DINOSAURS OR THE WAVE OF THE FUTURE?

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The ‘first wave’ of neighborhood governance structures can trace their origins to the protest movements of the 1960s and the “War on Poverty” initiated by the Johnson Administration (particularly the federal Model Cities program). It was evident that urban areas were facing some daunting challenges, and it was also clear that a new set of active citizens had emerged, challenging existing power structures, voicing their own interests and priorities, and demonstrating some of the early potential of citizen-centered governance.

Many cities responded—either on their own or through the Model Cities program—by creating new systems for decision-making at the neighborhood or ward level. They established official committees, with names like “neighborhood councils,” “priority boards,” or “neighborhood action committees,” that gave citizens a say in decisions that affect their neighborhood or ward, and sometimes on city-wide policies as well. These standing bodies have usually operated by monthly face-to-face meetings, though there are now many different variations. They have also been funded and staffed in different ways: in some cases, neighborhood councils have received city funding to hire their own staff; in other places, city employees working out of City Hall, or a district office, provided administrative assistance to the neighborhood councils. A central idea behind the creation of all of these structures was to provide a political arena, and agenda, that was open to the ideas and concerns of ordinary people. “Maximum feasible participation” was one of the key terms in the Model Cities legislation.

Many of these structures fell by the wayside in the 1980s, once the Model Cities program had ended and the funding priorities of local governments changed. Moreover, critiques of the value and effectiveness of these systems started coming in from several different quarters, most notably in a book by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan entitled *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding: Community Action in the War on Poverty*. However, a number of the systems survived, and even expanded, in the 1990s. *The Rebirth of Urban Democracy*, published in 1993, described this renaissance, responded to Moynihan’s critiques, and clarified the strengths and weaknesses of the structures in Dayton, Portland, Saint Paul, Birmingham, and San Antonio.

## WHAT IS A “CITIZEN”?

The word “citizen” has a rich history in American democracy. However, it can also be a confusing word to use. Sometimes it is defined in a narrow, legal way, meaning only those people who hold U.S. passports or are eligible to vote. In this guide, we will use a broader definition: citizens are simply the people who live in that neighborhood and have a stake in its success.

Meanwhile, a ‘second wave’ of neighborhood governance structures began to emerge in the late 1990s. This second cadre is much larger and more diverse, including smaller communities like Basalt, Colorado, Roanoke, Virginia, and Santa Rosa, California, as well as large cities like Los Angeles and Houston. These developments were driven by the local dynamics of the citizen-government relationship; in most cases, a major controversy erupted over land use, budgeting, or election procedures, prompting local officials to give more power and authority to neighborhoods as a way of appeasing angry residents.<sup>4</sup>

The meeting on “Democratic Governance at the Neighborhood Level” focused on three of the most notable neighborhood governance systems:

- ▶ **Portland, Oregon** (*presenting*: Brian Hoop, director of the Office of Neighborhood Initiatives; Cece Hughley-Noel, Southeast Uplift; and Paul Leistner, Portland State University)—Portland is home to 95 formally-recognized, independent neighborhood associations, covering the entire city. These neighborhoods are divided into seven coalitions.

tion areas. District coalition offices in each coalition area provide technical and community organizing assistance to their member neighborhood associations. The district coalitions receive funding from the City of Portland. (Five of the district coalition offices are independent nonprofits; two are staffed by city employees. All the district coalitions are directed by boards of neighborhood representatives.) The city's Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI) provides support services to the district coalitions, neighborhood associations, and other types of community organizations. ONI oversees the grants that provide the bulk of the coalition funding—traditionally about \$1.2 million each year total for the seven district coalition offices. Portland's system also includes 40 neighborhood business district associations. Starting in 2006, Portland's system expanded to engage city-wide community organizations that work with people of color or with immigrants and refugees. The City of Portland Office of Neighborhood Involvement funded leadership training and community organizing by these groups and began to encourage partnerships between these groups and between these groups and traditional neighborhood associations (Information excerpted from Paul Leistner, "Hopes and Challenges of Democratic Governance: Lessons from Portland, Oregon.")<sup>5</sup>

- ▶ **Minneapolis, Minnesota** (*presenting:* Bob Miller, director of the Neighborhood Revitalization Program, Debbie Evans, Neighbors4NRP, and Tom Bissen, Whittier Alliance)—Established in 1990 by an act of the state legislature, the Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP) is an investment

program that has provided millions of dollars to 72 neighborhood organizations for all kinds of public priorities, including housing, parks, commercial corridors, schools, libraries, bike paths, tree planting, and mass transit. Residents and other neighborhood stakeholders create Neighborhood Action Plans (NAPs) that describe the neighborhood they want in the future and the goals, objectives and specific strategies that will help accomplish their vision. NRP then provides funding to each neighborhood to help implement their approved plan. NRP was designed as a 20-year experiment and will run out of money in 2009; the Minneapolis City Council has voted to replace NRP with a new Department of Neighborhood and Community Relations (DNCR) and an oversight body called the Neighborhood and Community Engagement Commission (NCEC).<sup>6</sup>

- ▶ **Los Angeles, California** (*presenting:* Greg Nelson, former director of the Los Angeles Department of Neighborhood Empowerment)—The Los Angeles Neighborhood Council system is the largest of its kind in the nation. In 1999, Los Angeles voters approved a new City Charter that established a citywide system of neighborhood councils and created the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment to support and guide them. Currently there are 89 independent neighborhood councils throughout Los Angeles, which are organized by community leaders who want the opportunity to actively participate in city government. Neighborhood councils are official city entities; they are advisory bodies to the mayor, city council, and city departments on issues of concern in that neighbor-

hood, as well as issues that affect all of the city's residents. Each neighborhood council is allotted \$50,000 each year to spend on its own initiatives, including community beautification and outreach to the broader stakeholder base. Neighborhood councils are managed by a governing body of people from their own neighborhood who meet on a regular schedule with public input and transparency. They have the ability to select their own boundaries, choose their leaders, determine their agendas, and prioritize their needs. Leaders who volunteer to participate in the neighborhood council system go through the process, much like city elected officials, of being elected by the people in neighborhood council elections. Each year, the department, in conjunction with the neighborhood councils, hosts two Congress of Neighborhoods events. The Congresses provide neighborhood council board members and other stakeholders an opportunity to come together to network with other community leaders and gain valuable information and knowledge for the improvement of their communities. The mayor, in partnership with the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, sponsors an annual Budget Advisory Process where surveys on budget priorities are collected from thousands of stakeholders.<sup>7</sup>

There seemed to be broad agreement among the meeting participants that none of these three systems—or any other existing neighborhood governance structure, for that matter—represented a perfect answer to the question of how to restructure the citizen-government relationship to meet 21<sup>st</sup> Century conditions. It was clear that there were successes and

limitations that any democracy reformer could learn from. The more pertinent question might be whether these permanent systems are indeed on the right track: can we envision improved, evolved structures emerging from these civic experiments, or will these systems end up as minor offshoots, dead ends in the development of democracy? "I think we can learn some useful lessons from these communities," says Terry Amsler, director of the Collaborative Governance Initiative at the League of California Cities. "But ultimately I wonder if they are going to survive. Are these 'permanent structures' the wave of the future, or are they really dinosaurs?"<sup>8</sup>

As the meeting participants grappled with this question and discussed the main lessons from the three presentations, they named a number of strengths and weaknesses of neighborhood council systems:

**Strength:** Neighborhood councils give a much broader array of people a legitimate voice in public decisions made at the neighborhood and local levels; they tend to have strong roles—sometimes formal, sometimes informal—in policymaking, and some receive various kinds of funding from City Hall.

**Weakness:** Many neighborhood councils were originally envisioned as mini-city councils, and they often replicate the limitations and disadvantages of city councils—but with fewer resources and less authority.

**Strength:** Though they are a legitimate part of the local policymaking process, most neighborhood councils seem to remain independent from the process and from City Hall; they can provide what Paul Leistner calls "a formally recognized community organizing vehicle."

**Weakness:** The set of people involved in the typical neighborhood council is generally not as diverse—by age, race, income, or other demographic variables—as the neighborhood they represent. In some places, community organizations that have more diverse memberships now vie with neighborhood councils for access, legitimacy, and funding.

**Strength:** Neighborhood councils can provide accessible ‘on-ramps’ to participation for people who might not otherwise see themselves as participants in governmental processes or decision-making.

**Weaknesses:** Neighborhood councils can provide another roadblock to participation unless they are designed, and operate, with the goal of increasing rather than just managing participation.

**Strength:** Some neighborhood councils are able to recruit large, diverse numbers of people, particularly for special meetings on timely issues.

**Weakness:** Most of the time, most neighborhood councils are not particularly successful at recruitment, find it particularly hard to attract people to regular monthly meetings, and now rely on a very small core of volunteers.

**Strength:** Some neighborhood councils have adopted very participatory, productive meeting formats; instead of Robert’s Rules of Order, they use “Bob’s Rules” (see back cover).

**Weakness:** Many neighborhood councils continue to use traditional meeting formats (such as Robert’s Rules). The jargon, strict procedures, and inattention to storytelling and personal experience that are evident in these formats makes them particularly unwelcoming to younger people, more recent immigrants, and

others who have not typically been involved in local politics.

**Strength:** Many neighborhood councils are engines of “public work”: they have produced all kinds of tangible outcomes through collaboration with City Hall and other groups and also through their own volunteer effort and energy.<sup>9</sup>

**Weakness:** News of these tangible outcomes, and how they came about, is often not communicated in an adequate or systematic way, either within the neighborhood or across the larger community.

**Strength:** Many neighborhood council systems are effective at getting informed, detailed input from residents to their city councils, zoning boards, school boards, and other decision-making bodies—this makes for smarter policy and often seems to defuse controversies before they arise.

**Weakness:** The expectations for how local officials will use the input they receive are often unclear, and lines of accountability between neighborhood councils and City Hall are often blurry—leading to frustrations on both sides.

**Strength:** Some systems create connections between leaders of different neighborhoods and create opportunities for them to work together on decisions or projects that affect the whole community.

**Weakness:** In most cases, this cross-neighborhood collaboration is limited to a smaller number of neighborhood leaders. Cultural differences between neighborhoods sometimes make communication and cooperation more difficult. Furthermore, even though most public issues are

ROBERT’S RULES OF ORDER  
VS. “BOB’S RULES”

now regional in nature, the notion of collaboration among neighborhoods across a metropolitan area is still largely unexplored.

**Strength:** There are now some interesting examples of online technologies being used to facilitate and strengthen discussion, deliberation, and action planning within particular neighborhoods.<sup>10</sup>

**Weakness:** Most of the experimentation in online neighborhood networks has not been connected with, or supported by, formal neighborhood council systems. Most neighborhood councils continue to rely almost exclusively on face-to-face meetings and have not explored online strategies that could complement and enrich their current efforts.

**Strength:** Advocates of longstanding neighborhood council systems often say that the work has changed the culture of the community, making dialogue and collaboration a powerful public habit.

**Weakness:** Critics say that these democratic habits are apparent only among the people involved in the councils, rather than the general public—and that expanding and sustaining this sense of collaborative culture requires a great deal of planning and persistence.<sup>11</sup>

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## OTHER APPROACHES TO NEIGHBORHOOD GOVERNANCE

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In addition to the permanent neighborhood structures, there were two other approaches to neighborhood governance represented in the room. First, some of the meeting participants had helped to organize temporary, large-scale initia-

tives that enabled residents to address a major public issue. These kinds of efforts have been led by many different types of organizations, and are usually supported by a broad coalition of groups. Sometimes the sessions are spread over several weeks, sometimes they take place in a single day. Most of these projects aim to engage a diverse critical mass of people in a neighborhood or all across a community.

Second, many of the participants had been involved with government-led efforts to involve residents in specific policy decisions. These activities are similar to temporary organizing initiatives in the sense that they are tied to a policy debate that usually subsides once the decision has been made; however, they are different in that the public officials and employees may come back to the community again on the same or other issues in the future—there is some kind of ongoing commitment by government to working more intensively with the public.

In the last fifteen years, both of these other approaches to neighborhood governance have proliferated even more rapidly than the neighborhood council systems. Face-to-face meetings are still the most common type of interaction in these efforts, but the use of online formats is rising dramatically. Both the temporary organizing efforts and the government-initiated projects are just as dependent on local political dynamics as the more permanent structures.<sup>12</sup>

Just like the neighborhood council systems, these community- or government-initiated organizing efforts are experiments in local democracy, but they are rarely described in those terms. They are focused on issue-related goals, such as: resolving a school redistricting question; balancing a city budget; making land use decisions; address-

ing racism and race relations; or preventing crime. (These are usually, but not always, community-wide rather than neighborhood-focused efforts.)

Overall, these other two approaches seem to have certain advantages over the permanent council systems, particularly in the areas of recruitment and group process techniques such as facilitation, issue framing, and action planning. But they have disadvantages as well: the recurring government-led initiatives have the strongest connection to the policymaking process, but they are often narrowly focused on the policy questions of the moment, and do not encourage residents to devote their own energy and time to solving broader public problems. The temporary projects sometimes have greater difficulty affecting policymaking processes, but probably their greatest shortcoming is simply that they are temporary—even in situations where they’ve been extremely successful and have produced a range of tangible outcomes, they often don’t lead to structured, long-term changes in the way citizens and governments interact.<sup>13</sup> During the meeting, there seemed to be some agreement that combining the strengths of all these approaches might be the most promising path for innovation.

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## TENSIONS IN NEIGHBORHOOD DEMOCRACY

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Following the presentations of the Portland, Los Angeles, and Minneapolis examples, the participants shifted to a broader conversation about the challenges and opportunities they

were facing in their work. This discussion incorporated the experiences of all three approaches to neighborhood governance.

A number of interesting tensions emerged in the conversation:

**Shared governance or just blurred governance?**—Some of the presentations on the permanent structures emphasized the ways in which those systems had helped residents “get rid of” drug dealers, prostitutes, and other people deemed undesirable to the neighborhood. Other meeting participants objected to this language, and began to raise questions about equity and gentrification. “Aren’t prostitutes citizens too?” one person asked. Others argued that moving criminal activity out of the neighborhood simply shifted the burden to other neighborhoods, without addressing the underlying causes of crime.

“AREN’T PROSTITUTES CITIZENS TOO?”

There seemed to be an underlying tension in this discussion around who, exactly, was being empowered by these permanent neighborhood structures. In the view of some participants, giving small, homogeneous sets of “professional citizens” a greater degree of control over public policies and local problem-solving efforts might actually be detrimental to neighborhood democracy, and to the interests of younger, poorer, or less educated residents. In some cases, public officials may even be using the neighborhood councils to avoid having to acknowledge or consider the ideas or concerns put forward by other residents. “If we just give power to independent neighborhood groups, we may alienate or harm those on the fringes,” one person argued. Ques-

tions of race were also lurking in this discussion, as participants described situations where organizations made up mostly of people of color—predominantly African-American or Hispanic church congregations, for example—were at odds with neighborhood councils made up primarily of white residents.

This discussion illustrates the two sides of decentralized public decision-making. When local government delegates responsibilities and legitimizes active citizens, neighborhoods may be better able to tap into their own resources and direct public services in ways that are more helpful to residents. Proponents call this relationship “shared governance.” On the other hand, if neighborhood leaders are not themselves operating in democratic ways, the result might actually be ‘blurred’ governance, where the lines of accountability are increasingly unclear, and disadvantaged residents have even less power and control over the decisions that affect their lives.

***The ‘involvers’ vs. the ‘involved’***—Another interesting tension centered on situations where local government employees had been successful in engaging a much broader, more diverse set of residents. The meeting participants who worked for local or county government seemed to have a great deal of process knowledge, and shared long lists of tips and techniques. It was clear that these professionals had had success involving “under-represented groups” in addition to “the usual suspects.” They took pride in their work, felt it deserved more support, and spoke with some frustration of the need to win more funding and legitimacy for their efforts within City Hall. “Our greatest challenge,” one person argued, “is building the political will necessary to support creating more independent, participatory structures.”

There was, however, a strong reaction to this argument from a set of participants who felt that it positioned public employees as the “involvers,” and everyone else as the “involved.” This framework, they felt, put citizens in a more passive, reactive, less powerful role, and ceded authority and initiative to government. “There is a basic, recurring problem in our field,” one person said, “of professionals prematurely taking on that role [of involver] as well as neglecting to recognize both the capacity and the importance of residents themselves playing that role.” As a result, many public involvement efforts seem to overemphasize the needs of policymakers—and minimize the voices of citizens. A few of the process tips seemed almost to infantilize residents: one suggestion was that organizers “not only provide food for the meetings, but make sure it is visible from the doorway.”

**SUBTLE VARIATIONS IN THE ATTITUDES OF ORGANIZERS: “MAKE THE EXPERIENCE WELCOMING AND PRODUCTIVE” VS. “MAKE SURE THE FOOD IS VISIBLE FROM THE DOORWAY.”**

For similar reasons, this set of participants also pushed back against the pitch for more funding to support involvement work by public employees. “Money should follow engagement, not other way round,” one person said.

One aspect of this dispute about the ‘involvers’ and the ‘involved’ seemed to center on who should “own” and direct democratic governance. The public employees in the group believed they were doing critical democracy-building work. Some of the other participants were worried that

“engagement” was being consolidated, in some cases, as a purely governmental service. Even in the most successful efforts, attracting the widest variety of people, it was unclear to these critics whether the work was actually creating democratic spaces for citizens, or simply making the policymaking process somewhat more informed, somewhat easier, and somewhat less contentious. Are residents being engaged, or simply managed?

Another aspect of this tension had to do with money as a sign of legitimacy and government responsiveness. Many participants were concerned about democratic governance structures or strategies that fail to give residents any meaningful say on how funding and services are allocated. These participants agreed that “People only get engaged when they have control of resources,” and that if the involvement had no effect on how money was spent, then it simply wasn’t authentic.

Both aspects of the discussion suggested the need to rethink the roles and expectations for the ‘involvers’ and the ‘involved.’ If this dispute is any indication, it may be that public employees who do involvement work are too focused on the “political will” of public officials and not attentive enough to the “public will” of the community as a whole—and that to strengthen this public will in favor of participatory local democracy, communities need to make ‘involving’ a more broadly shared, jointly owned activity rather than a professional practice.

***Democratic leadership in a republican system—***

A third topic that attracted considerable attention had to do with leadership and leadership training. Many of the meeting participants cited the ways in which training could help people shift from the “old model” of decision-making

(described as “decide and defend” or “tell and sell”) to a more democratic model that emphasized “listening and building joint consensus.” Participants talked of the need to help new leaders learn how to recruit residents, facilitate meetings, plan collaboratively, ‘frame’ issues for discussion, and manage volunteers. Training was seen as a logical supplement for neighborhood governance activities, which can provide a key stepping stone for emerging leaders to ‘find their voices,’ make connections, and learn new skills.

It was also clear that the expansion of leadership training had run up against some unforeseen challenges. First of all, some participants mentioned the fact that “many people in formal leadership positions [public officials and others] never had leadership training of any kind”—and that new neighborhood leaders often faced this “culture clash” between the way they were being trained to operate and the prevailing leadership practices in City Hall, and in local politics generally.

Second, some participants argued that public officials viewed leadership training, and neighborhood governance efforts generally, as a threat more than an asset. According to the participants, some officials felt that encouraging new leaders might simply create new political rivals: “Why help to build up the person who’s just going to run against me in the next election?”

Finally, a few participants described scenarios in which neighborhood leaders moved

**“WE’VE BEEN DEVELOPING BETTER PRACTICES, WHILE (IN MOST CASES) TREATING THE STRUCTURES AS A GIVEN. BUT THE STRUCTURES NEED TO REFLECT THE PRACTICES.”**

on to elected or appointed positions in local government—and promptly “forgot” the more democratic leadership practices they had been trained to use. These new leaders claimed to be the voice of their neighborhoods or constituencies, but they didn’t directly involve those constituents in decision-making. It wasn’t clear to the meeting participants (and it is not clear to other observers and researchers) what is driving this dynamic. It may be that the structures and processes of governing play an even stronger role in affecting behavior than we realize, and that newly elected leaders are more likely to adapt to the system than try to make the system adapt to them and their neighborhoods.

These claims suggest that training people in “democratic” skills is a valuable activity—but one which may be at odds with the political realities of a “republican” system. “We need to reframe this work,” said one participant. “We’ve been developing better practices, while (in most cases) treating the structures as a given. But the structures need to reflect the practices.”

**Democracy and community**—There was also a great deal of interest in the interplay between democracy and community. Through their work to engage residents, many of the meeting participants had realized the importance of providing social and cultural reasons—food, music, time to socialize, chances to interact with young people or praise their achievements—for residents to take part in meetings or associations.<sup>14</sup>

Participants also pointed out that the failure to build community had created competition between neighborhood councils and other kinds of neighborhood groups. The smaller, homogeneous, overtly political councils were encounter-

ing resistance from groups that had community at their core—churches, clubs, ethnic associations—and were beginning to assert themselves in the political realm. Because these emerging groups provided their constituents with more reasons to participate, their memberships were often larger than the number of people involved in the councils—and therefore they could claim to represent a more authentic neighborhood voice to city council and other decision makers.

Other participants argued that while these other neighborhood groups might sometimes attract larger numbers of people, they usually weren’t any more participatory or deliberative than the neighborhood councils. In Portland, the city council has voted to acknowledge and fund ethnic and cultural organizations representing “traditionally under-represented groups” in the same way they have supported district councils in the past. During the meeting, participants wondered whether these organizations could, or should, be required to follow guidelines designed to ensure that they were actually engaging larger numbers of people in democratic ways.

Overall, the meeting participants agreed that we “need a better understanding of the connections between, and principles for, democracy and community-building.” There was broad support for the contention that, ultimately, “community

ARE THE ‘INVOLVERS’ CREATING LIMITED, PURELY POLITICAL ARENAS OR BROADER, MORE WELCOMING AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY SPACES?

can exist without democracy—but democracy can't exist without community." The problem, many of them believed, was that local governments and other 'involvers' who didn't understand these connections were creating limited, purely political arenas rather than broader, more welcoming and sustainable community spaces. They pointed to history and language as two critical elements. "Neighbors need to feel that their stories (and history) are known and valued," or the political opportunities they are given will seem superficial and temporary. And when 'involvers' use terms like 'empower' and 'give' they may be inadvertently be minimizing the role of residents, and giving them the sense that if they enter into public life, they will be there merely as the guests of government.

**Top-down or bottom-up?** Given these difficulties, some participants wondered whether trying to create new structures for citizens was a good idea after all. One participant asked: "Are we falling prey to our own 'social engineering,' self-serving approach?" In some cases, experimenting with neighborhood governance 'from the top down' seemed to have created structures that were too inflexible and government-directed to allow any room for community ownership or neighborhood initiative. In other places, a more 'bottom-up' approach seemed to have created a "parallel system—another level of government" that was culturally incompatible with City Hall and the official political process.

As the participants grappled with these challenges, they seemed to gain some clarity on the 'top-down' vs. 'bottom-up' question. Participants noted that the most successful examples of neighborhood governance—whether they were permanent structures or more temporary organizing

efforts—seemed to illustrate the power of people moving in both directions. The belief that "change needs to come from both 'bottom-up' and 'top-down,'" seemed to strike a chord in the room. The most promising arenas for public life would be ones that were created jointly, or at least had enthusiastic support, by both community leaders and neighborhood residents. "Basically, we need something in between traditional city council meetings and happenstance barbershop talk," said one participant.

The participants also reaffirmed the need to keep going—to keep learning from past lessons, keep trying new innovations, and keep experimenting with neighborhood governance. Not every experiment will be successful, but letting things stand as they are is not an option either. As one person put it, "Will democracy flourish if you leave it alone? Probably not."

**"WILL DEMOCRACY FLOURISH  
IF YOU LEAVE IT ALONE?  
PROBABLY NOT."**

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## **BETWEEN CITY HALL AND THE BARBERSHOP: NEW DIRECTIONS FOR NEIGHBORHOOD DEMOCRACY**

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**T**he "Democratic Governance at the Neighborhood Level" meeting gave us a fairly comprehensive look at the main achievements of people working in the realm of neighborhood governance, as well as the main challenges that lie ahead. The lessons they have learned should be reassuring to local

leaders and others who are grappling with the seismic shift in citizen attitudes and capacities. Furthermore, some of the interesting tensions that emerged in the conversation can help us envision more vital, sustainable structures for neighborhood democracy.

**Conclusion 1: “We know how to do a lot of this stuff.”** The most obvious finding of the meeting was that some of the most common, basic worries about involving citizens are unfounded. The concerns that “we don’t know how to bring a diverse set of people to the table,” or that “we don’t want to set up yet another shouting match” are not the main challenges we face. By and large, the participants in this meeting knew how to answer those initial questions, and a number of others, through the application of:

- ▶ process knowledge about recruitment
- ▶ process knowledge about running meetings (giving people a chance to feel heard, and keeping outspoken participants from dominating the discussion)
- ▶ knowledge about how to encourage and coordinate public work
- ▶ leadership training to impart process knowledge to a broader array of people

There was a great deal of confidence in the room that residents could almost always be involved in effective and meaningful ways, at least within the confines of a particular issue or decision during a specific period of time. As one person put it, “we know how to do a lot of this stuff.”

The meeting participants—and most of the other experienced practitioners in this field—have moved on to the next set of obstacles. The current frontiers for neighborhood gover-

nance have more to do with structural, long-term challenges, such as:

**Conclusion 2—This work has to be jointly “owned” and directed.** Some of the difficulties and tensions in the meeting centered on the question of who ought to be in charge of, and accountable for, neighborhood governance work. It was evident that every community needed people with the kinds of skills listed above, but there were no easy or universally applicable answers to the question of how the people with those skills ought to be supported, funded, and legitimized. Should public employees working out of City Hall, or district offices, be the main neighborhood governance workers? Or should neighborhood leaders, either through paid positions or volunteer efforts, be doing most of the work?

The consensus seemed to be that either of these variations (and others) might work as long as a broad array of neighborhood and community organizations and leaders, along with public officials and employees, all had some significant degree of ownership and authority within the system. In most communities, the first, most basic step in building this joint ownership might be to begin convening the various kinds of ‘involvers’ who are working at either the neighborhood or city level to engage citizens in different arenas for decision-making and problem-solving. Those people ought to then begin talking with neighborhood leaders and community organizations. As this conversation unfolds, and as people explore different options for neighborhood governance, the main question on the table ought to be “What’s in this for citizens?” How can these spaces or opportunities affirm and support the capacity of citizens to help improve their neighborhoods and communities? And what other reasons—be they social, cultural, or political—

will compel people to take part in public/community life?

**Conclusion 3—We need ways to ensure that democratic practices are being used by neighborhood leaders and groups.** Even though the meeting participants felt that, when it comes to productively involving residents, “we know how to do a lot of this stuff,” the participants also felt that most neighborhoods still aren’t using much of that process knowledge. For a variety of reasons, neighborhood council members and other neighborhood leaders are still operating in fairly undemocratic ways—and this propensity is contributing to the problems and tensions relating to equity, community, and leadership.

Three ways of dealing with this challenge surfaced at the meeting:

- ▶ Developing new mechanisms for tracking, measuring, and reinforcing accountability in neighborhood governance. In most places, it is difficult to find even the basic facts about involvement processes: How many people came to a particular meeting? How were they recruited or notified? How well did those people match the demographic mix of the neighborhood? How was the meeting run? What were the main recommendations to emerge? What did the city commit to doing, and what did the neighborhood groups commit to? Cities and neighborhoods which can keep track of these basic details, and make them available on the Internet, might build in incentives for neighborhood leaders to recruit more broadly and run their meetings more democratically. This approach would also put more pressure on City Hall, neighborhood groups, and other organizations to follow up on the commitments they make.
- ▶ Several participants mentioned the need for a multi-pronged strategy: providing a number of different “on-ramps” to participation in public life, rather than relying solely on neighborhood councils or any other structure. Different approaches are needed to meet the diverse interests and priorities of residents, and to engage people “where they are,” on their own terms.
- ▶ With such a system in place, public officials, public employees, and other leaders would be in a better position to encourage and expect democratic practices by neighborhoods. Some cities, like Los Angeles, already have accreditation processes for neighborhood councils, but those systems focus mainly on legal requirements like California’s Brown Act rather than considerations that would reinforce democratic practices. A related idea that emerged in the meeting was for local governments and neighborhoods to agree on “memos of understanding” about how they were going to operate.
- ▶ Some of the meeting participants reacted strongly to any measure that would try to “enforce” the use of democratic practices by neighborhood councils or other groups. They felt that a more promising answer was leadership training that provided those skills—and particularly training programs that included public employees and public officials along with neighborhood leaders. These kinds of joint training programs, like the one operated by the Neighbors Building Neighborhoods initiative in Rochester, New York, might help make democratic practices more prevalent within government, not just in neighborhoods.

**Conclusion 4—We need those democratic practices to be applied in the workings of government—not just neighborhoods.**

This recommendation about joint training was part of a larger sentiment that successful neighborhood governance relied in part on more effective city-wide governance. Many of the tensions that emerged in the meeting related to the difficulty of maintaining ‘pockets’ of democracy—in neighborhood settings, or in temporary processes dealing with a particular issue or decision—within communities that tend to operate in more undemocratic ways. There were three ideas that had currency among the meeting participants:

- ▶ Providing democratic skills, and more facilitative understanding of leadership, to public officials and other public employees, rather than just a select group of public engagement specialists.
- ▶ Changing the way public meetings (city council proceedings, school board meetings, land use hearings, and so on) are run, so that they foster more deliberation and give more people a chance to be heard.
- ▶ Developing new mechanisms that will connect neighborhood structures with city-wide decision-making.

It is important to note that while the meeting participants were enthusiastic about providing new democratic spaces and opportunities for citizens, they did not have any illusions about full participation: they did not entertain visions of democracy in which 100% of the population is involved, on every issue or decision, 100% of the time. They were, however, convinced of the need to expand participation—not only in terms of numbers, but of diversity—far beyond current levels. Even 10% of a neighborhood or commu-

nity, provided it was a relatively representative group, could be an enormously valuable and catalytic force.

The participants also felt that dramatically expanding participation—whether to 10% or to any other target—would require a broader array of involvement opportunities than most communities currently offer. Regular monthly meetings might continue to be the mainstay of neighborhood councils and other groups, but as one participant put it, “we can’t privilege the meeting as the only place for making decisions.” Successful neighborhood governance will probably require a more “layered” approach in which residents can participate in monthly meetings, larger gatherings held every few months, online forums, and other kinds of events.

The conclusions and ideas that emerged from the meeting seemed to suggest a richer, more nuanced vision of neighborhood democracy: a more complete answer to what citizens want from their government (or, more accurately, from jointly supported public life). This vision was built around seven core ideas:

1. “Democracy needs **a place to sit down**”<sup>15</sup>—and to enjoy food, music, culture, and conversation.
2. Those democratic spaces should be **powerful**: arenas where citizens can bring concerns, build on assets, affect policy decisions, and work with government and with one another.
3. Those democratic spaces should be **natural hubs for community**: they may be situated in neighborhoods, but they may also be centered on schools, workplaces, online networks, and other places “where the people are.”

4. Those democratic spaces should be **jointly supported, funded, and legitimized** by local government, civic associations, foundations, and other groups—but above all, they must be “owned” by the citizens who sustain them.
5. **Process is important:** truly democratic spaces require proactive recruitment practices in order to reach people who have felt shut out of public decision-making, or who don’t feel that public life is “for them;” and formats that give people the chance to learn, share experiences, consider policy options, and—above all—to feel that their opinions matter.
6. Maintaining democratic spaces requires **democratic skills**—recruitment, facilitation, framing, action planning, volunteer management—and citizens and public employees need opportunities to learn and hone these skills together.
7. Democratic **governance** requires more democratic **government:** flattened hierarchies that work across silos and are agile enough to respond to, and partner with, citizens.

## ENDNOTES

1. Harry Boyte has described the civic elements of the Obama campaign in several of his writings, including “The Work Before Us is Our Work, Not Just His,” *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, May 3, 2009.
2. For a much more in-depth description of these developments, see Matt Leighninger, *The Next Form of Democracy: How Expert Rule is Giving Way to Shared Governance—And Why Politics Will Never Be the Same* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006).
3. The best description of the first wave of neighborhood council systems is *The Rebirth of Urban Democracy*, by Jeffrey Berry, Kent Portney, and Ken Thomson (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1993).
4. See Chapter 8, “Sharing the Buck: Communities Rethink Public Finances and Public Responsibilities,” in Leighninger, *The Next Form of Democracy*.
5. Information provided by Paul Leistner; for more, see Leistner and Amalia Alarcon de Morris, “From Neighborhood Association System to Participatory Democracy—A Broadening and Deepening Public Involvement in Portland, Oregon,” forthcoming in *National Civic Review*.
6. For more, see [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org).
7. Thanks to BongHwan Kim, Director of the Los Angeles Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, for this information; for more, see [www.lacityneighborhoods.com](http://www.lacityneighborhoods.com).
8. Amsler’s Collaborative Governance Initiative is a great resource on democratic governance issues and challenges—see [www.cacities.org/index.jsp?zone=ilsg&section=coll](http://www.cacities.org/index.jsp?zone=ilsg&section=coll).
9. For a more comprehensive description of “public work,” see Harry Boyte and Nan Kari, *Building America: The Democratic Promise of Public Work* (Temple University Press, 1996).
10. See Steven Clift, “Sidewalks for Democracy Online,” in *Rebooting America* (Personal Democracy Press, 2008) or at <http://stevenclift.com/?p=152>.
11. See Archon Fung and Elena Fagotto, “Sustaining Public Engagement: Embedded Deliberation in Local Communities,” forthcoming from the Kettering Foundation.
12. Projects initiated by government often get off the ground sooner, and they are often better able to attract a broad range of supporting organizations, at least at first. On the other hand, these projects can be polarizing—residents may perceive (rightly or wrongly) that a strong government role means that public officials are trying to advance a “City Hall agenda,” rather than welcoming a range of different views to the table.
13. These projects are almost always focused on a policy issue or decision, rather than the health of local democracy writ large, and so the participants generally spend little or no time talking about what a more productive, sustained relationship between citizens and government might look like. These limitations of temporary organizing efforts inspire some of the interest in neighborhood council systems; the limitations of neighborhood councils generate interest in the temporary efforts.
14. One of the most advanced examples of a neighborhood structure that incorporates social and cultural components is the Jane Addams School for Democracy in Saint Paul, Minnesota. See [www.janeaddamsschool.org](http://www.janeaddamsschool.org).
15. This quote is popularly attributed to the political theorist Hannah Arendt.



# Decision making

## TWO PERSPECTIVES ON CONSENSUS

### An Alternative to Robert's Rules

By Del Suggs

Mention "**Robert's Rules of Order**" to any assembled group, and you will get a collective groan. "Robert's Rules" is a part of our lives as leaders-- it's even written into the bylaws of most organizations. Is there an alternative to Robert's? Yes, there is.

Many organizations across the country are adopting a meeting process called "**Consensus.**" It's effective and efficient for most groups, and it doesn't require the learning curve of "Robert's Rules" for new members.

"Robert's Rules" was first published in 1870, and incorporated the so-called parliamentary procedure as used by Congress. It was presented as the best way to run a meeting. Perhaps it is the best way to run large meetings, conventions, Congress, and other rowdy assemblies. But for smaller groups, it's rather confusing with its formal motions, debates, precedence of some motions over others, and more.

**Consensus** is a simplified method of discussing an issue and reaching an agreement. It is important to understand that consensus doesn't mean that everyone must be in agreement. It does mean that everyone has to be willing to accept the agreement that is reached.

It works like this: an idea is brought to the floor. It doesn't have to be a motion, or even a formal proposal-- just an idea. The idea is discussed, and likely it will be improved from the input of others. When a general agreement appears, you test for consensus by stating the current version of the idea. If everyone agrees, you've reached consensus. If there is dissension, then you can continue the discussion until a more acceptable version is reached. When you've reached consensus, or when there is a willingness to accept the current proposal, then-- in those familiar parliamentary terms-- the

"motion is approved."

In reality, this may likely be the way your organization already operates. And, after you've already reached consensus, you revert back to parliamentary rules, asking for someone to make a formal motion, a second, and then calling for a vote to make it "official." If you were using Consensus, it would already be done.

Mark Shepard has an excellent introduction to [Consensus](#) here. Then, if you like the concept, there is another, more formalized guidelines available [here](#).

Check this out, and see this alternative to "Robert's Rules Of Order" doesn't make more sense for your organization.

### **The Tyranny of Consensus**

by M. Treloar, originally printed in Clamor Magazine #20 (May/June 2003), [www.clamormagazine.org](http://www.clamormagazine.org)

When election results were reported in Iraq in mid-October, 2002, it became clear that President Hussein could have taught President George W. Bush a few tricks about stuffing the ballot boxes. All 11,445,638 eligible voters stood by their Saddam. By definition, consensus had been reached.

No sane organization from anti-war or activist circles in the U.S. stood up at the time to defend those results as either democratic or honest. Yet the process by which most meetings are conducted in those same circles is as un-democratic as the charade that was conducted in Iraq.

We are referring to 'consensus process'. It is the current practice of the anti-war and anti-globalization movements and other progressive and radical organizations on this continent.

Many Clamor readers will recognize this scene, whether they have experienced it in a black bloc of five crusty punks trying to figure out how to attack a line of police or at a gathering of hundreds of well-

dressed and respectable Green Party members trying to craft a resolution to Congress. The group gathers, a proposal is put before the body, and someone interjects, we have to use consensus process.

In its purest and most common form, it requires that all members of the meeting agree with the proposal. Those who do not agree are usually given a few options: They may block, or stop the proposal. Or they may step aside, which means that they will not stop the proposal. Or they may withdraw from the process altogether. Finally, they may attempt to come up with a new proposal that will win the approval of the entire meeting.

Consensus process is undemocratic. It is unwieldy. It is usually time-consuming. It is easily subject to the whims of the facilitator. It is frequently just another tool of manipulation when white activists work with communities of color.

Consensus process seems designed to promote disruption of meetings by individuals. In the last few months, the author of this article has seen a meeting of thirty people organizing against state repression brought to a halt by one person, new to consensus process, who invoked a principled block. In yet another meeting, this one to decide the fate of Copwatch in Portland, four experienced pacifist organizers kept a meeting of community organizers and activists stalled for a full four hours, merely by blocking and refusing to recognize the clearly stated mandate which had been apparent to everyone in the room in the first half-hour.

The first meeting had abysmal facilitation, with people tossing the task around the room like a hot potato; the second meeting had skillful facilitators, widely respected in the community, who hung in till the end. Yet no matter how skilled the facilitator, the flaws embedded in consensus process allow an individual or minority to dominate the outcome of any meeting.

### **The Myth of Inclusivity**

A major ideal of consensus process has always been: (our emphasis)

people to be able to express themselves in their own words and of their own will.

The tedious nature of consensus process and much of the foo foo associated with it has the effect of driving away the very people who most desire democracy and social change.

People who have homework, one or two jobs, children or elderly parents to deal with, lovers to kiss, meals to make and eat or all of the above are not eager for five hour meetings, especially when two hours would accomplish the same goals.

Anyone who has ever seen a group of young, usually white activists begin to practice consensus process with all of its frills in meetings where mainly working class or poor people are present has undoubtedly witnessed a lot of "What the f\_\_\_?" looks being exchanged. Dropping a whole new culture, with coded words such as "vibes-watcher" and secret signals, such as "twinkling" (wagging fingers to indicate assent), into discussions that affect people's lives, is one reason though not the only one that some well-meaning activists never get invited back to meet with "real" people.

Here are recent scenes from Portland: A white anti-globalization activist explaining to an African American community organizer at a meeting against police brutality that clapping was "violent" and voting was "competitive." A neo-liberal Democratic female mayor, noted defender of the same police who routinely shoot Black and Latino men, threatening to remove those who clap at public City Council meetings and instead, asking that the audience "twinkle."

There is also a notion embedded in consensus process that everyone will eventually agree if they talk about it long enough. This premise comes as a complete and unpleasant surprise to many groups with roots sunk in the working class or communities of color. Allowing meetings where any one or two individuals, including the police who are sent to infiltrate, can outweigh the wishes of hundreds of community members seems suicidal to these groups. Organizations that have learned by painful experience that there are clear divisions

in society have also learned that no group in history has ever given up its wealth or power through consensus process.

### **So Why Consensus?**

It's easy to see why consensus process was invented as an alternative and why it has such appeal to young anti-globalization or peace or environmental activists. Most of those who invoke it have attended meetings where Robert's Rules of Order was used or misused to bludgeon minority blocs or even majority groups that are challenging the status quo. Anyone who has seen an organization or meeting split because of a 50 percent-plus-one vote being enforced and leading to suppression of the minority would want a less divisive process. Anyone who has borne the brunt of tedious, long-winded harangues (usually from men) will want a more disciplined, yet inclusive process.

Democracy is not easy. Nor is it only enforceable by a written set of rules, despite our need for those. Robert's Rules of Order, as any who has taken time to study their history would know, arose as an attempt to prevent "the uselessness of attending meetings which began late and dragged on overbearing chairmen and ruthless small cliques."

### **What Does Democracy Look Like?**

But the alternative to Robert's Rules of Order being strictly enforced should not be a system where a clear minority must withdraw a sincerely held position in order not to obstruct action. Often minorities are proven right by the course of history. Allowing their position and vote to stand while a majority vote determines the group's action is a workable alternative in many cases.

Some simple steps are in order for our movements. In the Bay Area and elsewhere, anarchists and other activists have undertaken to train decent facilitators for their meetings. Recognizing the importance of this skill, which can be learned by those willing to do so, is a first step for any serious movement. Many of the techniques advocated by consensus process are worth preserving, such as those which call first upon people who have not spoken to go ahead of those who would

Speak incessantly.

But if the facilitators are learning a basically flawed model, even a great facilitator won't be able to preserve democracy.

Many activist organizations have recently been driven to chuck out the model of pure consensus process that this article has criticized. They are moving to a much more realistic model where an attempt is made to reach consensus. Once that fails, as it frequently does, the group moves to a vote, setting a threshold of three-fourths or 80 percent in some groups.

This model recognizes that the goal of most activist groups is action. The minority is allowed to retain their position without apology and is also guaranteed a record of their position.

Some have suggested different rules for affinity groups and collectives, which typically are small in number and demand a high degree of unity, versus organizations or coalitions, which may be hundreds or tens of thousands in number and demand less unity. If a group of five people is risking arrest or injury or prison together, then consensus makes perfect sense, as does the ability of one person to block an action. When two or three or more lovers are trying to work out their relationship, few of us would suggest taking a vote.

But when five thousand people are busting to go out on strike, then allowing five dissenters or fifty to stop it makes no sense. As those of us who have gone through such struggles know, the possibility of victory recedes fast when there is only a simple majority. It is a legitimate and not simple question to ask what should be done when there is no super-majority available, when there are 55 percent in favor, 40 percent against and 5 percent completely undecided. Different organizations will choose different thresholds for decision-making. Starting off with an absurd standard of total agreement will guarantee only frustration or defeat.

None of the uprisings and organizing of the past that we honor would have occurred if they had used consensus process. Whether it was the

Stonewall Rebellion, the Selma bus boycotts, the Flint sit-down, the Underground Railroad, the storming of the Bastille or the high school student walkouts and sleep-ins that are happening in Portland as this is being written, we can be certain of a few things. In order to accomplish those efforts, people argued, they probably prayed and cried and, with their back to the wall, decided to act. But they didn't wait for consensus.

It is time to face this reality if we wish to change society.

## **MEETINGS – DECISION MAKING**

### **Getting “unstuck” strategies:**

1. Take a short break and ask everyone to come back fresh in a few minutes.
2. Break the group into pairs or triads and have them discuss how to create acceptable and superior alternatives to the suggestions under question.
3. Move on to another agenda item and later return to the issue on which the group is divided.
4. Suggest a backup method such as the group leader or another member making a decision that can be viewed as “temporary” until the group is able to review it at a later point in time.

*The Jefferson Westside Neighbors board uses Robert's Rules in their meetings. The following article explains basic Robert's Rules processes.*

## **Tips for smooth-running neighborhood meetings**

by Paul Conte

We all enjoy smoothly-run neighborhood meetings that accomplish a lot and end on time. Productive meetings also encourage more of our neighbors to attend regularly, not just when some "hot" topic is on the agenda. Observing standard practices for conducting discussions and voting is one key to well-run meetings.

At neighborhood meetings we have both informational discussions and we conduct business, such as adopting neighborhood organization positions on various land use, policing, transportation, and other issues. The standard way we conduct business is to discuss and adopt or reject motions that are presented by the board or by a person attending the meeting. What follows are a few basics that will help you be part of our next *well-run* JWN meeting.

**Prior notice.** The JWN bylaws encourage advance notice before the neighborhood association votes on motions. The JWN Executive Board publishes the agenda for each meeting and motions related to an published agenda topic can be voted on at the same meeting. Any JWN member can add new topics to the agenda at any meeting, but votes on related motions generally can occur only at the *next* meeting. (By a two-thirds vote of members present, a motion can be voted on at the same meeting.) If you want to vote on something, you should request the Executive Board consider the topic for a future meeting's agenda or you should present the topic at one meeting and indicate an intent to vote on related motions at the next meeting.

**Main motions.** When the Chair has called on you and no other main motion is being considered, you can say: "I move that ...[whatever the group is to decide]." At this point, some other person must say, "I second the motion," before it can be discussed.

**Clarifying a motion.** It helps to have a clear, concise statement of a motion's intent. If you have time, jot down the wording and hand it to the Chair when you make the motion. The Chair can often help by taking a few minutes to refine the wording. A typical approach is for the Chair to say something like: "If you [the person making the motion] have no objection, can we restate the motion as ... [the suggested restatement]?" During this clarification process, the Chair may also consider suggestions from other individuals. Of course, neither the Chair nor anyone else should attempt to use this informal process to steer a motion in a direction that's not acceptable to the person who made the motion. Keep in mind that this informal clarification process should occur *before* discussion of the motion begins. From that point on, an amendment is required, as explained below.

**Discussing a motion.** Once a main motion is under consideration, discussion begins. Obviously our meeting time is limited, so discussion on a motion has to be limited, as well. JWN meetings operate somewhat informally, so the Chair should

generally suggest how to allocate time. For example, the Chair might say: “If there’s no objection, shall we limit discussion on the main motion to 10 minutes and then see if we’re ready to vote?” If the motion presents a larger issue which a number of people may support or oppose, the Chair might suggest a more structured approach by first asking how many people would like to speak. The Chair can then divide the available time up, as in: “Eight people have expressed a desire to speak and we have 20 minutes allocated to this agenda item. If there’s no objection, shall we limit each person to 2 minutes and then proceed to a vote?”

When you speak, be brief and discuss *only* the motion before the group. If you’ve already spoken once, you’re not entitled to speak a second time until everyone else who hasn’t yet spoken has their turn. If the discussion is dragging out, speak more than once only when you have genuinely new information to present and which you truly think will change the way others vote. If a discussion becomes lengthy, the Chair can try to bring it to a close by saying: “We seem to be revisiting the same information and our discussion has now run 20 minutes. Is there any objection to bringing the matter to a vote?”

**Amendments.** If, during discussion of a main motion, you want to change some part of the motion, you must wait until you’ve been called on by the chair and then say: “I move to amend the motion as follows ... (the proposed change).” An amendment to a main motion also requires a second. Once an amendment is made and seconded, it becomes the topic of discussion. Only one amendment at a time can be considered; multiple amendments can be discussed and voted on in turn. (You can also have an amendment to an amendment, following a similar process as an amendment to a main motion. But this process can get confusing and should be used infrequently.)

Once a motion has been made (possibly with some refinement help from the Chair), seconded, and is under discussion, the motion can be altered only by passing an amendment. The person who made the motion *cannot* simply accept changes on his or her own (a practice sometimes called a “friendly amendment”). The Chair can facilitate amendments intended to clarify a motion and which the Chair suspects have universal acceptance by saying: “If there’s no objection, can we amend the motion as follows ... [the proposed change].” If a single person objects, however, the formal amendment process is necessary.

**Cutting off discussion.** If you want to cutoff discussion on a main motion or amendment and have the group vote immediately, you must wait until you’ve been called on by the chair and then say: “I call the previous question.” Calling the question requires a second and a two-thirds majority vote. Note that you can’t just shout “I call the question” as a way to stop discussion. Unless otherwise stated, a call for the previous question during discussion of an amendment applies *only* to cutting off discussion of the amendment itself and doesn’t cutoff further discussion on the main motion.

**Voting.** When no one else wants to speak or a call for the previous question has passed, the Chair repeats the motion or amendment. (If the vote is on a main motion that has been amended, the Chair should restate the motion as it was modified by the amendments.) The Chair first asks all those in favor to raise their hands; then

asks all those opposed to raise their hands. When the outcome of a vote appears likely to be strongly in favor or opposed, the Chair may ask for a voice vote instead of a show of hands. The Chair and Secretary record the results. (Note that the Chair doesn't ask for "abstentions" since this is meaningless except in a roll call vote.) After a vote is taken on an amendment, discussion resumes on the (possibly amended) main motion.

**Rules of order.** JWN currently follows a widely-used set of meeting rules known as Robert's Rules of Order. There are many other actions, for example, tabling a motion, that a group can use in the conduct of its business. Because these rules can be quite complex, however, a common practice in JWN meetings is for the chair to ask consent to proceed in a particular way appropriate to the situation at hand. For example, the Chair might say: "I think it would go more quickly if we first take a straw poll on the preferred date for the painting party. Is there any objection?" If anyone present objects, then the formal process of a motion, discussion, and vote has to be followed. This approach allows the Chair latitude to proceed somewhat informally, while still preserving the procedural safeguards of the formal rules of order.