Deliberations About Deliberative Methods: Issues in the Design and Evaluation of Public Consultation Processes

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ABSTRACT

A common thread weaving through the current public participation debate is the need for new approaches to public involvement that emphasize two-way interaction between decision makers and the public as well as deliberation among participants. Increasingly complex decision making processes require a more informed citizenry that has weighed the evidence on the issue, discussed and debated potential decision options and arrived at a mutually agreed upon decision or at least one by which all parties can abide. We explore the recent fascination with deliberative methods for public involvement first by examining their origins within democratic theory, and then by focusing on the experiences with deliberative methods within the health sector. In doing so, we are interested in answering the following questions “What are deliberative methods and why have they become so popular? What are their potential contributions to decision making in the health sector?” We use this critical review of the literature as the basis for developing general principles that can be used to guide the design and evaluation of public involvement processes for the health-care sector in particular.
INTRODUCTION

A convergence of activity among scholars and decision makers from a wide range of policy sectors appears to be taking hold of the public participation agenda. Where much previous attention has been given to normative discussions of the merits of, and conceptual frameworks for, public involvement, current activity seems largely focused on efforts to design more informed, effective and legitimate public participation processes with a strong evaluation component. Whether the decisions fall into the environmental, biotechnology or local government sphere, policy makers, regulators, experts and interest groups (as well as the public itself) have articulated the importance of involving the citizenry in the decisions affecting them and are grappling with the pragmatic issues of how to do this (Rowe & Frewer, 2000; Beierle & Konisky, 2000; Graham & Phillips, 1998; Pratchett, 1999; King, 1998; Leroux, Hirtle & Fortin, 1998). The motivations underlying this are diverse but typically arise from ideological (i.e., a desire to pursue democratic ideals of legitimacy, transparency and accountability) or pragmatic (i.e., a desire to achieve popular support for potentially unpopular decisions) roots (Rowe & Frewer, 2000; Abelson et al., 2001). Much of the current interest in participation methods can also be seen as a response to the prevailing view that public participation methods used in the past are no longer appropriate for current decision making processes or for the more educated, sophisticated and cynical publics.

A common thread weaving through the current participation debate is the need for new approaches to public involvement that emphasize two-way interaction between decision makers and the public as well as deliberation among participants. Increasingly complex decision making processes require a more informed citizenry that has weighed the evidence on the issue, discussed and debated potential decision options and arrived at a mutually agreed upon decision or at least one by which all parties can abide. An active, engaged citizen (rather than the passive recipient of information) is the prescription of the day. This current trend has emerged, in part, from the consumerist and customer-centered public sector management philosophy that characterized the 1980s and 90s. It also stems from a governance philosophy that fosters reciprocal obligations between citizens and governments and emphasizes participation for collective rather than individual purposes (Graham and Phillips, 1998; Pratchett, 1999).

Sparked by a renewed zeal for Athenian democracy and all its trappings (i.e., an informed, educated citizenry participating in all aspects of community life), deliberative processes are now routinely used in public participation processes in the environmental planning and management field and considered a means of enhancing institutional legitimacy, citizen influ-
ence, social responsibility and learning (Petts, 2001). This collection of deliberative methods, including citizens’ juries, deliberative polling and planning cells, is seen as a major improvement over traditional participation and consultation methods in its provision of opportunities for participants to become informed about an issue before their opinions on it are solicited (Pratchett, 1999). This is contrasted with the more superficial and uninformed input obtained through surveys, for example. By fostering a more engaged, informed and active citizenry, deliberative methods are also thought to lead to better decisions (Pratchett, 1999; Bostwick, 1999).

The deliberative paradigm has gripped the health sector to some extent, particularly in the U.K., where various research institutes and health authorities have experimented with different deliberative methods for involving the public in priority setting decision making. These efforts have included deliberative polling in the early 1990s, citizens’ juries in the mid-1990s (Lenaghan, New and Mitchell, 1996; McIver, 1998; Coote & Lenaghan, 1997; Lenaghan, 1999) and more recently, generic approaches that incorporate features of deliberation and discussion (Cookson and Dolan, 1999; Dolan, Cookson and Ferguson, 1999). In other jurisdictions, such as Canada, a variety of groups such as regional health authority decision makers, health policy researchers in academic and quasi-academic settings, and the media are exploring new methods for involving the public in health systems decision making that incorporate deliberative elements (EKOS, 2000; CPRN, 2001; Wyman, Shulman and Ham, 2000).

We begin by exploring the recent fascination with deliberation methods by examining its origins within the political theory and public participation literatures, and then focus more specifically within the health sector. In doing so, we attempt to address the following questions: “What are deliberative methods and why have they become so popular? What are their potential contributions to decision making in the health sector?” To address these questions we touch on the strengths and weaknesses of more traditional methods such as surveys, public hearings and focus groups as well as the empirical literature on deliberative methods that has accumulated so far. Finally, we use this critical review of the literature as the basis for developing general principles that can be used to guide the design and evaluation of public involvement processes for the health-care sector in particular.
METHODS

A literature review was used to gather and assess the most seminal multi-disciplinary works produced in recent years on two aspects of public participation:

i) public participation and consultation methods and practice;
ii) public participation theory and perspectives.

All searches were conducted in a variety of article databases\(^1\), using a set of predefined keywords\(^2\). Searches were limited to articles published in English and French since 1996. Appropriate articles were selected from among the successful searches, and supplemented by those recommended by colleagues or gleaned from bibliographies. Members of the research team read and summarized the articles using a standardized extraction sheet to elicit information about the context, use and evaluation of different methods.

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\(^2\)community participation and planning – 37 hits, citizen participation and health – 64 hits, public input and planning – 2 hits, citizen participation and health care – 24 hits, public participation and health care – 21 hits, public involvement and local planning – 1 hit, obstacles and citizen participation – 6 hits, public input – 16 hits, public involvement – 16 hits, barriers and community participation – 5 hits, barriers and citizen participation – 7 hits, obstacles and community participation – 4 hits, susan pickard – 10 hits, citizen participation and local planning – 7 hits, citizen participation and health and decision making – 8 hits, community participation and local planning – 3 hits, community participation and health education – 19 hits, community participation and decision making – 10 hits, public input and decision making — 1 hit, citizen participation and health education – 3 hits, public participation and health education – 1 hit, citizen participation and planning – 109 hits, public participation and health – 51 hits, citizen participation – 584 hits, citizen participation and health care and decision making – 0 hits, public, participation – 488 hits, public participation and health environ – 0 hits, public participation and local planning - 1 hit (already noted), barriers to citizen participation – 0 hits, barriers and public participation – 0 hits, citizen participation – 219 hits, citizen engagement – 0 hits, public involvement and health education – 0 hits, public input and health and decision making – 0 hits, public input and local planning – 0 hits.
DEMOCRACY AND DELIBERATION

“The essence of democracy itself is now widely taken to be deliberation, as opposed to voting, interest aggregation, constitutional rights, or even self-government. The deliberative turn represents a renewed concern with the authenticity of democracy: the degree to which democratic control is substantive rather than symbolic, and engaged by competent citizens.” (Dryzek, 2000, p.1)

While a comprehensive review of the political theory underpinning deliberation is beyond the scope of this paper\(^3\) a basic understanding of the theoretical principles of deliberation helps to inform our review of the empirical literature in this area. Taylor’s (1985) analysis of social theory as practice provides a useful backdrop for this discussion. Social theories (which include political theory) have the potential to do more than explain social life; they can also influence practice or its conduct because “they define the understandings that underpin different forms of social practice and they help to orient us in the social world” (Taylor, 1985, p.108). As we shall see, the widespread acceptance of deliberative democratic theory has had a powerful influence over democratic practices such as public participation and consultation.

What is deliberation?

“Deliberation refers either to a particular sort of discussion – one that involves the careful and serious weighing of reasons for and against some proposition – or to an interior process by which an individual weighs reasons for and against courses of action” (Fearon, 1998, 63)

As implied in the above definition, in theory, deliberation can occur with others or as an individual process; it is the act of considering different points of view and coming to a reasoned decision that distinguishes deliberation from the group activity. To most deliberation theorists and practitioners, however, deliberation within a group has become the defining feature of this set of methods. Collective discussion is viewed as the critical element of deliberation, one that allows individuals to listen, understand, potentially persuade and ultimately come to more rea-

\(^3\) For a more complete discussion of deliberative democratic theory see Dryzek (2000); Gutmann and Thompson (1996); Fishkin (1991; 1995; 2000); and Manin (1987).
soned, informed and public-spirited decisions (Fearon, 1998; Fishkin, 1991; Gutmann and Thompson, 1996; Manin, 1987; Bostwick, 1999; Habermas, 1984; 1996). As a social process, *authentic* deliberation relies on persuasion to induce participants’ reflection on and altering of views (Dryzek, 2000 Przeworski, 1998; Cohen, 1989). This is to be distinguished from other communication approaches such as coercion, manipulation or deception although critics have highlighted the inherent vulnerability of deliberative democracy to ideological domination and interest group capture (Przeworski, 1998; Stokes, 1998).

In the context of democratic theory, deliberation represents the swing of the pendulum away from representative, elite-driven politics to direct, citizen-driven politics. Deliberation is more than merely a discussion of the issues. Emphasis is also given to the decision that arises from the discussion process, and the process by which that decision comes about. Fearon (1998) considers the value of discussing issues before making a decision; specifically:

1. the provision of views on a subject that voting does not allow (and associated activities such as the ability to communicate intensity of preferences and the relative weights of preferences);
2. the opportunity to generate and consider a wider range of options or new alternatives that might not have been considered otherwise;
3. the opportunity to support or encourage more public-spirited proposals in contrast to those motivated by self-interest;
4. the opportunity to increase the legitimacy of the ultimate decision and to ease implementation or compliance with decision by giving everyone a say;
5. the improvement of the moral or intellectual qualities of the participants.

While there is widespread support for the basic tenets of deliberation and its emphasis on improving the accountability, legitimacy and responsiveness of decision making by building in popular control, these virtues conflict with other fundamental features of democratic participation such as political equality and representation. The size of cities and towns precludes full participation in the deliberative process as depicted by Aristotle in ancient Greece⁴ or the American Founding Fathers in the New England Town Halls. This requires the selection of “repre-

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⁴Of course, the Athenians did not include the entire citizenry either, excluding slaves and women from the town halls.
sentative participants” allowing critics to dismiss the outcomes of deliberative processes as unrepresentative (Gutmann and Thompson, 1996) while forcing the architects of the deliberative exercise to carefully consider who to involve.

**How has deliberation been used in public policy decision making?**

Deliberative features have been incorporated into a broad grouping of methods that include citizens’ juries, planning cells, deliberative polling, consensus conferences and citizens’ panels (see Appendix 1). Individual methods may differ with respect to specific features such as participant selection (i.e., statistically representative vs. purposeful sampling); the number of participants (i.e., a hundred vs. a dozen); the type of input obtained or the number of meetings. Common to all, however, is a deliberative component where participants are provided with information about the issue being considered and are encouraged to discuss and challenge the information and consider each others’ views before making a final decision or recommendation for action. In reviewing these methods (and attempting to categorize them as deliberative or not), we found that while some methods such as citizens’ juries and their German equivalent (the planning cell) have deliberation as their defining feature, other methods such as citizens’ panels and deliberative polls are essentially traditional methods with a deliberative element added to them.

Methods such as citizens’ juries, panels and consensus conferences have routinely been used on a voluntary basis to integrate technical information and values into planning and resource allocation decisions in the environmental, energy, education and local government fields predominantly in the U.S. and to a lesser extent, in Canada. In these settings, their basic purpose has been to provide a forum for “non-expert citizens, acting as ‘value consultants’, … to combine technical facts with public values into a set of conclusions and recommendations” (Beierle, 1999).

*Citizens’ juries* have been run in the U.S. and Germany since the 1970s. The jury method was developed by Ned Crosby, who has promoted and/or organized juries in a variety of settings including state level agriculture, water and welfare policy; President Clinton’s health care reforms; the federal budget; and candidate ratings (Smith and Wales, 1999). Basic features of the method include the selection of 12 to 24 participants to meet over several days as part of a single jury (i.e., one decision). Its German counterpart, the *planning cell*, has had more formal institutional support from government and agency sponsors who have commissioned the Research Institute for Citizen Participation to organize planning cells to provide input to policy making.
processes in the areas of local planning, national energy, technology and communication (Smith and Wales, 1999). In planning cells, deliberation takes place among approximately 25 randomly selected citizens who may meet several times. Results are compiled in a report which is presented to the sponsor, the media, and other interested groups. A modest accountability mechanism is built into the process that requires the sponsor to agree to consider the decisions produced by the planning cell (Coote and Lenaghan, 1997).

Citizens’ panels are similar to juries in their composition and task but can have more permanency with the same, or a partially replaced group, meeting routinely to consider and make recommendations or decisions about different issues or on different aspects of a single decision-making process.

Consensus conferences, developed in Denmark, are used in a variety of settings and typically involve a group of citizens with varied backgrounds who meet to discuss issues of a scientific or technical nature. The conference has two stages: the first involves small group meetings with experts to discuss the issues and work towards consensus. The second stage brings everyone together to present main observations and conclusions to a larger group that includes the media and general public. The consensus conference has been widely used in the health sector as a method for developing clinical guidelines. While lay participation is a feature of some consensus conferences in the health sector, they are more commonly used to bring experts together to establish and reach consensus about clinical guidelines.

Deliberative polling, as its name suggests, attempts to incorporate a deliberative process into the traditional opinion poll. Developed by James Fishkin in the early 1990s, the deliberative poll combines the strengths of a large representative, random sample while providing opportunities for discussion and deliberation over a 2-3 day period. Participants are polled before and after the deliberation. The large scale and significant costs associated with running a deliberative poll has resulted in its restricted application to national issues. Polls have been conducted on issues such as crime, the monarchy, the future of Europe and the U.K.’s National Health Service and in association with presidential campaigns in the U.S. Empirical studies of this method using pre- and post-deliberation polls suggest that participant views do change as a result of the deliberative process although it is unclear precisely how this occurs (i.e., through several loud and influential voices or through a fair and reasonable process). The outcomes produced from a deliberative poll are individual opinions (as with traditional polls) although they may be shaped by group deliberation (Fishkin, 1991; 1995; 2000).
Deliberation and Public Involvement in Health-Systems Decision Making

Experimentation with deliberative methods in health-systems decision making began in the United Kingdom in the early 1990s in response to the government’s white paper *Local Voices* and NHS policy requiring the public’s views to play a greater role in setting health care priorities (Department of Health, 1992). Traditional mail surveys of patients, providers and random citizens were the initial method of choice for eliciting the views of different “publics” with respect to perceived needs and priorities for health care resource allocation (Richardson, Charny and Hanmer-Lloyd, 1992; Bowling, Jacobson and Southgate, 1993; Heginbotham, 1993). Although a popular and conventional method for obtaining information from large groups of people about a range of subjects including needs, preferences and priorities for services, they are limited in their ability to communicate and obtain in-depth views about complex issues. In the case of priority setting, they typically collect information from largely uninformed members of the general public at a single point in time. Interviewer-administered surveys have had some success in addressing this limitation for issues felt to be too complex to be addressed through mail surveys (Donovan and Coast, 1996). These limitations have undoubtedly influenced the search for new public involvement methods. Broader objectives of stimulating debate, improving public understanding of complex health care issues, and the desire to achieve consensus around public and community values for health services priorities have likely provided an additional impetus to introduce deliberative methods into the highly politicized world of health service priority setting.

As discussed earlier, the citizens’ jury gained popularity in the health sector, particularly in the U.K., where numerous health authorities experimented with the jury method in the mid- to late 1990s for a variety of health care rationing and priority setting decisions. Several juries have dealt with questions of whom should set priorities and how; others were asked to allocate resources within a specific program areas or between program areas (Lenaghan, New and Mitchell, 1996; McIver, 1998; Coote & Lenaghan, 1997; Lenaghan, 1999; Smith and Wales 1999). Citizens’ panels have been used by U.K. health authorities as a method for incorporating community values into local decision-making processes (Bowie, Richardson and Sykes, 1995). Focus groups have also been used (in a limited way) as deliberative methods for obtaining the public’s views of priority setting in health care. In one health authority, a random sample of patients from two urban general practices was invited to attend two focus group meetings, two weeks apart, to assess the impact of the deliberative process on their views (Dolan, Cookson and Ferguson, 1999; Cookson and Dolan, 1999).
Although the bulk of deliberative processes have been implemented in the U.K., a variant of the deliberative polling method was used to obtain the views of different community representatives in Canadian communities about their potential interest in assuming an increased citizen role in local health decision-making in the Canadian health sector (Abelson, Lomas, Eyles et al, 1995).

**Evaluating Deliberative Methods**

Despite a multi-disciplinary literature that has been established from numerous policy sectors, the evaluative component of the empirical literature is sparse, with only a few studies undertaking any systematic or rigorous evaluation of deliberative methods using explicit criteria. Most empirical studies of consultation or participation methods focus on documenting how a particular method was used and the results obtained, with only the occasional reference to “lessons learned” or “recommendations for the future” at the end of the study. A few empirical studies, however, mount more rigorous evaluations by assessing their method against an explicitly stated framework or list of criteria and consider the context within which the method would be most effectively used (i.e., type of decision-making process, policy area, etc.). We briefly discuss this literature and highlight its key messages. Appendix 1 provides a brief description of each method, highlighting its strengths weaknesses and recommendations for future use.

**Citizens’ juries**

The most comprehensive evaluation of the citizens’ jury model in the health sector was undertaken by the King’s Fund Institute based on an in-depth review of six pilot citizens juries (including participant evaluations) (McIver, 1998). Major highlights of the report are summarized below:

**What issues are suitable for a citizens’ jury?**
Given the significant resources involved, citizens’ juries should only be considered when there is a substantive issue to consider (i.e., one that may have a significant impact on what and how services are funded, organized and delivered) and one that is ‘live’ rather than hypothetical. The issue should also be one that the health authority is willing and able to act upon regardless of the nature of the decision.

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5 Readers should note that the focus of our review is “current practices” in public participation which, given the trend described earlier, has necessarily biased our review toward studies of deliberative methods.
When should juries be organized?

It is recommended that juries be held at a later stage in the decision-making process when much of the background information has been collected to inform the process; alternative decision-making options are available and a coherent and comprehensive agenda can be constructed for the jury.

Designing the jury

To ensure the legitimacy of the process, lay representatives should be included in the process of formulating the question that is to be deliberated and the jury agenda. There should also be some flexibility and juror input into which aspects of the question will be considered and how the question will be addressed. Testing the question on citizen focus groups prior to the jury is recommended.

Other assessments of the citizens’ jury method provide some additional practical advice for those considering its use:

“The jury model appears to be more appropriate for choosing between clearly-defined options or for developing guidelines for decision-making, than for producing detailed plans or considering abstract ideas... A citizens’ jury is likely to be more useful if applied to an issue where views have not yet become entrenched”. (Coote & Lenaghan, 1997, p.)

“An authority considering a citizens’ jury should be clear about what kind of question or issue it wants to address, what interests are at stake, whether it is free to act on a jury’s recommendations and how much time and money it can spend on public involvement”. (Coote & Lenaghan, 1997, p)

While these assessments are clearly more focused on providing advice for its optimal use, there are several aspects of the jury method that warrant more critical analysis. First, the small number of citizens who can meaningfully deliberate at any one time has been raised as a potential weakness of the deliberative methods broadly and the jury method more specifically. Underlying this are issues of selection (given the extensive amount of time required to participate, whether paid or volunteer) and representation (i.e., can such a small number of participants adequately represent the range of views within a community or at a regional, or central level?). This “concern” may be more appropriately characterized as a trade-off between competing objectives for public consultation or participation processes. In other words, if a decision-making
authority’s objective is to immerse a small, select group of citizens in the specific aspects of a decision-making with the objective of providing informed, persuasively shaped input then it must be prepared to justify this approach, given the significant investment of resources required to mount a citizens jury, and the scrutiny that will be leveled at the “representativeness” of participants (Coote and Lenaghan, 1997; McIver, 1998; Dunkerley and Glasner, 1998).

The selection and role of witnesses in the jury process has also come under scrutiny. For jury issues that have a heavy scientific orientation, witnesses play a crucial role in the presentation and communication of technical information. Although expert medical and/or scientific witnesses play an obvious role, lay witnesses can also be helpful in improving the public’s understanding of complex principles but only, as one lay witness describes, if they are “to be used on an equal footing with professionals, with equal time and equal opportunity for questioning, …” (Dunkerley and Glasner, 1998, p.188). As with the juror selection process, consideration also needs to be given to the representativeness of witnesses (Dunkerley and Glasner, 1998). Precisely how this is done is less clear as there appear to be no pre-defined roles and responsibilities for jurors or jury organizers.

Let us pursue this line of argument further. Implied in its name is the notion that the citizens’ jury somehow mirrors its legal counterpart6. When comparing the two, however, it appears that the citizens’ jury and its associated activities only partially reflect the elements of a legal jury. For example, the actors involved and roles assigned in a legal jury include judge, jury, lawyers, witnesses and clients and the interactions between them. The citizens’ jury, however, appears to involve only a jury and witnesses. This raises the issue of how the jury interacts with witnesses in the absence of lawyers who play key roles in witness selection, preparation, questioning and cross-examination. While some of the citizens’ juries we examined identify roles for moderators and sponsors that include some of the tasks typically assigned to lawyers and judges, their roles and accountabilities are much less clearly defined than those in the legal system raising questions about the authenticity of the jury process and the heavy burden placed on the citizen to act as judge, lawyer and jury.

6 Readers may find it interesting to note, as we did, that we could not find any references in the literature to any theoretical or conceptual link between these two types of juries.
Citizens’ panel as a group deliberative method

Use of the citizens’ panel as a deliberative method has been a recent phenomenon in the health sector and, unlike the jury method, has not been subjected to any formal evaluation. Its similarity to the jury gives it potentially the same strengths of a strong deliberative orientation with the objective of obtaining informed input from participants. Small sample sizes and the lack of rigorous participant selection processes are also considered major weaknesses of the panel method although it appears to have had modest success in achieving more representative samples than citizens’ juries (Bowie, Richardson and Sykes, 1995). The repeated meeting and staggered membership features of the panel appear to have greater appeal than the one-off citizens jury to U.K. health authority decision makers who are more likely to want to consult with the same or equivalent group of citizens on numerous occasions as part of a single decision-making process (Shepherd, 2000). This approach would appear to have even greater resonance with an approach to deliberation that emphasizes the accumulation and synthesis of knowledge over several weeks or months rather than a few hours or days.

Citizens panels as an individual deliberative method

The traditional citizens’ panel is relevant to a discussion of deliberative methods as it captures our earlier discussion of the individual’s “interior process” of deliberation. The most comprehensive evaluation of the citizen survey panel (CSP) was conducted by Kathlene and Martin (1991). In their study, a random sample of 147 residents participated in a transportation planning process for the City of Boulder, Colorado involving multiple methods of citizen input (e.g., four mail surveys, 1 telephone survey and 2 in-home interviews) over a one-year period. Participant and decision maker assessments of the method found that “citizens’ panels can work well given the right context” (p.47). As with the jury method, the costs associated with citizen panels argue for their selective use in substantive areas of decision-making. In the case of this study, use of the panel was recommended for “new policy areas where community opinion and policy direction have yet to be determined” (p.61).

Participant evaluations

As with the health care system more broadly, most of the empirical data about the performance of public consultation and participation methods comes from those who participate in the process. Experiments with deliberative methods typically include a brief participant evaluation at the end of the study where participants are asked to provide their views on different aspects of the process, what they liked and disliked about it and how it could be improved. There have been few attempts to systematically and rigorously assess participant experiences with deliberative methods. While some studies measure satisfaction rates with the method and
its component parts, others have obtained more qualitative assessments through participant interviews. Evaluations of deliberative methods have generally been very positive. Most participants appreciate the opportunity to learn more about the specific issue about which their input has been sought as well as the health care system more generally. Many consider their participation in the group discussions to be the most valuable part of the experience (Fishkin, 1995). Other declared benefits appear to relate to some of the positive attributes of deliberation discussed by Fearon (1998) including the encouragement of shared learning, public-spirited proposals and the potential for the increased legitimacy of the ultimate decision.

In general, jurors tended to praise the fact that the models enabled them to meet new people from different backgrounds and perspectives, to learn about a new area, to participate in decision making, and to foster a sense of community (Lenaghan, 1999, 54).

Less enthusiastic supporters have identified several problems with the deliberative method focussing primarily on the informational aspects of the process and participants’ concern about the lack of impact their deliberations will have on the final decision. Finding the right balance between providing enough information to aid discussion without overwhelming participants is clearly difficult to achieve. Some participants felt they were being asked to process too much information, too quickly and without adequate time to ask questions of witnesses and consider all viewpoints before coming to a decision. Others were more concerned about what, if anything, would be done with their recommendations (Coote and Lenaghan, 1997; McIver, 1998; Lenaghan, 1999; Dunkerley and Glasner, 1998). Few participant evaluations raised the issue of domination by educated, articulate and strong personalities, a commonly cited problem in public involvement processes. This raises the question of whether these problems were alleviated in the design process or whether there may have been bias in the collection and/or reporting of participant evaluations.

A dilemma posed by the introduction of a deliberative democracy agenda (indirectly raised by participants who acknowledged the difficult yet stimulating work they were being asked to do) is that once exposed to the complexities of the system, participants become sympathetic to the challenges faced by decision makers who deal with these types of issues on a daily basis (Abelson et al., 1995). As citizens become more informed about the health care system and are exposed to the harsh realities of making difficult and highly politicised health care decisions, they may lose their lay perspective and their views may become more closely aligned with those of the “professionals” (Mullen, 2000). A balance is required between the creation of
an informed, engaged citizenry who can actively and effectively contribute to decision-making processes but who do not become co-opted (either formally or informally) by that process\(^7\).

\(^7\) See Selznick (1949) for an in-depth analysis of the sociological concept of co-optation in his landmark study of the Tennessee Valley Authority. He defines co-optation as “the process of absorbing new elements into the leadership or policy-determining structure of an organization as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence”. Although this definition does not explicitly address the issue of co-optation through deliberative democratic processes, it identifies the relevant issue of using a democratic process for pragmatic purposes.
KEY MESSAGES FROM THE EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

A key message from this literature is the general paucity of rigorous evaluations of public participation or consultation methods. The empirical findings that do exist, however, provide some helpful guidance in thinking about how different methods, including deliberative approaches, might be most effectively used to obtain public input.

**The characteristics of both the decision and the decision-making process should influence choice of methods and the overall design of the consultation process.**

This includes:

- the purpose and objectives of the process
- specificity of the issue or problem
- type of decision that needs to be made
- the stages of the decision-making process

At a most basic level, explicit consideration needs to be given to the purpose(s) of the process before deciding which method(s) to use. A process geared toward informing, educating and building capacity about primary care reform within a community, for example, will require a different approach than one focused on identifying and planning for the needs of mental health users. The empirical findings suggest that deliberative methods such as citizens’ juries are more effective when dealing with clearly defined issues of a substantive nature. Juries should be held at a later stage in the decision-making process once information regarding the issue has been collected to inform the process and when clearly articulated decision-making options are available. Other less formal deliberative methods such as citizen panels, focus groups or discussion groups are considered more effective for eliciting public values and considering more abstract ideas.
Consideration should be given to the array of interests and interest groups that are likely to mobilize around the issue

A number of the studies reviewed here identified the importance of considering those individuals and groups potentially affected by an issue and the extent to which they have mobilized around the issue. Such considerations have led to recommendations for the use of methods such as citizens’ juries and panels early on in a decision-making process before stakeholder views become entrenched. In some situations, the mere prospect of a jury being held or the process of juror recruitment can precipitate this type of mobilization. Deliberative methods such as citizen panels and citizen juries appears to be just as vulnerable to interest group mobilization as more traditional methods such as public hearings or meetings, particularly those where clear and identifiable recommendations are produced that are potential targets for mobilization.

Designing accountable and transparent consultation processes

The issues raised in the preceding paragraph raise the question of whether less transparent and accountable consultation processes are less likely to succumb to interest group mobilization and, if so, what this implies for designing these types of processes. Public consultation processes are frequently criticized for their lack of accountability and responsiveness to the public for the input obtained. Participants often wonder what happens to the views they provide and are increasingly cynical about the extent to which they are able to influence a process since there are rarely any explicit requirements for authorities to act on their input. Many participants never see the final report that contains their input. Some feel their input will never be acted upon due to the complexity of the decision-making process while others discover that their input has no chance of being used because the final decision is made by a group of decision makers who may be pressured to respond to other influences or perhaps because there was never any real commitment to involving the public in the first place. The extent to which a health authority is willing and able to act upon the public’s input, therefore, is an important consideration in deciding whether and/or how to obtain the public’s views (Litva, Coast, Donovan et al, forthcoming).

Careful consideration should be given to the selection of “representatives” and their role in designing consultation exercises

Each method discussed attempts (either explicitly or implicitly) to incorporate the views of a different representation of the public. Methods such as citizen juries or panels select participants to represent a microcosm of their community while other methods such as focus groups or surveys may seek out the views of a particular population through a stratified sampling process. Decisions are also made about whether to select participants who represent or reflect their community. Some methods assign communities the responsibility of representation through self-
selection by providing opportunities for involvement through open houses or public meetings. Determining the type of input that is desired is also an important influence on choice of method. Surveys are excellent tools for getting a broad spectrum of views if only at a superficial level. They are generally felt to be less effective at tapping into more abstract ideas such as values although their use in conjunction with focus groups and deliberative methods may increase the validity of these findings.

**There are no empirical studies that have systematically compared methods against each other**

The theoretical literature routinely compares and contrasts consultation methods to illustrate similarities and differences and to offer guidance about which methods should be used given a particular decision-making context. Further, the empirical studies reviewed here suggest that some methods may be preferable to others. However, to date there are no empirical studies that have compared one or more methods against each other or assessed the relative costs of these methods against their effectiveness. There are significant challenges to undertaking this type of research. At a practical level, it may seem inappropriate to compare a highly deliberative method such as a citizens’ jury to a population-based survey. How likely is it that such different methods would ever be considered for involving the public on a given issue? There may be room, however, for comparing similar approaches such as different survey techniques or different deliberative methods. Moreover, there may be some issues for which it is reasonable to consider such diverse methods as juries and surveys to compare the views of an informed vs. uninformed group of citizens. It would seem that a strong case could be made for this type of comparative research given citizen concerns about achieving “value for money”, their desire for “accountable consultation” (Litva et al., forthcoming) and decision-makers’ interest in low-cost high-yield consultations that do not divert significant resources away from service delivery. Learning more about what the public wants and expects from public consultation and participation processes will be an important input into this type of research agenda.

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8 Just prior to the publication of this working paper, we identified a study that compared three citizen participation approaches: mail surveys, community conversations and community dinners (Carr and Halvorsen, 2001). Although formal evaluation criteria were used in this evaluation, the findings are considered preliminary and not widely generalizable.
DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR THE DESIGN AND EVALUATION OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION AND PARTICIPATION PROCESSES

Building on the previous section, our literature review identified a small number of theoretical and conceptual studies that established frameworks or criteria for evaluating consultation and participation methods that allow us to move toward a more rigorous evaluation of public consultation processes.

Evaluation frameworks and criteria

Webler (1995) has developed one of the most comprehensive frameworks for evaluating deliberative participation methods in the environmental policy field. Two key goals for public participation, fairness and competence, are identified against which participation processes can be assessed. The fairness goal requires the equal distribution of opportunities to act meaningfully in all aspects of the participation process including agenda setting, establishing procedural rules, selecting the information and expertise to inform the process and assessing the validity of claims. The competence goal deals more with the content of the process. A competent process ensures that appropriate knowledge and understanding of the issue is achieved through access to information and the interpretation of the information. Competence also requires that appropriate procedures be used to select the knowledge that will be considered in the process.

The significance of Webler’s contribution to this body of knowledge is illustrated in the widespread use and adaptation of the fairness and competence principles in subsequent evaluation studies (Petts, 2001; Rowe and Frewer, 2000; Pratchett, 1999; Beierle, 1999; 2000; McIver, 1998; Smith and Wales, 1996; Crosby, 1995). By unpacking Webler’s principles even further, most evaluation frameworks consider four key components of the consultation process: 1) decisions about representation; 2) the structure of the process or procedures; 3) the information that informs the process; and 4) outcomes and decisions arising from the process. Table 1 considers these components and the evaluation criteria subsumed within each. Each of the table elements is briefly discussed below.

In addition to Webler’s path-breaking work, Beierle (1999) has developed a framework using “social goals” as the criteria against which participatory processes are assessed. The following goals are considered necessary to achieve the objectives of any evaluation or, in relation to Webler’s criteria, as necessary outputs of a fair and competent process: 1) inform and educate the public; 2) incorporate public values, assumptions and preferences; 3) increase the
quality of decisions; 4) foster trust in institutions; 5) reduce conflict among stakeholders; 6) cost effective decision-making.

**Representation:** All evaluation frameworks include some criteria about how representation issues might be assessed and emphasize the extent to which different types of representation can be achieved (e.g., geographic, demographic or political). Consultation processes may also be assessed against criteria that emphasize both access to a consultation (by providing equal opportunities) as well as clarity and legitimacy in the selection process.

**Procedures:** Assessing the extent to which the procedural aspects of a consultation process are legitimate, reasonable, responsive and fair are fundamental aspects of the evaluation process (Pratchett, 1999; Smith and Wales, 1999; Crosby, 1996). Legitimacy and responsiveness principles are assessed by considering questions such as: 1) What point in the decision-making process is public input being sought (i.e., is the public involved in significant aspects of decision-making such as agenda setting or in minor decisions only?); 2) At what level of the organization does the participation occur? (i.e., who is listening and ultimately responding to the public?). Evaluations of deliberative processes in particular would also assess elements of the process such as: 1) Was ample time provided for discussion? 2) Did participants have the opportunity to challenge the information presented? 3) Was mutual respect and concern for others emphasized throughout deliberations?

**Information:** Decisions regarding what and how information is selected, presented and interpreted are crucial elements of any consultation process and are therefore important evaluation principles to consider. Table 1 describes each of these components and also suggests a fourth category related to the quality of input obtained which emphasizes the information received by rather than provided to participants.

**Outcomes:** The final set of evaluation principles once again considers the issue of legitimacy (and accountability), this time in the context of decision-making itself rather than the consultation process. Evaluations should not only consider how well aspects of the consultation were handled. They should also assess the extent to which public input was incorporated into the final decisions; the extent to which consensus was achieved; how well final decisions were communicated to the public; and how well the decision-making authority responded to the input provided (i.e., what aspects of the input did they incorporate or not incorporate and why?).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Representation</th>
<th>Procedural rules</th>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Outcomes/Decisions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legitimacy and fairness of selection process</td>
<td>Degree of citizen control/input into agenda setting, establishing rules, selecting experts, information</td>
<td>Characteristics • accessibility • readability • digestibility</td>
<td>Legitimacy and accountability • of decision-making • of communication of decisions • of responses to decision or input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a representative sample?</td>
<td>Deliberation • amount of time • emphasis on challenging experts, information • mutual respect</td>
<td>Selection and presentation • who chooses the information • who chooses the experts</td>
<td>Degree of consensus achieved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant selection vs. self-selection</td>
<td>Credibility/legitimacy of process • What point in the decision-making process is input being sought? • Who is listening? (e.g., influential decision-makers or junior staff)</td>
<td>Interpretation • adequacy of time provided to consider, discuss and challenge the information</td>
<td>Plans for incorporating and/or implementing advice or recommendations into decision-making</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Resonance between theory and practice

A striking level of convergence is found between the theoretical literature about evaluation and how decision makers view successful consultation. In a recent study of regional health authority experiences with public consultation (Abelson et al, 2001), decision makers were asked to describe their views of what constitutes ‘successful consultation’. Issues of representativeness, fairness, and attention to ensuring consensus around the final decision featured prominently in their discussions, suggesting that the principles described above already have some acceptability among decision makers. Further discussion and application of the principles described here with decision makers at other levels within and beyond the health sector will move us further in the direction of identifying “best practices” in public consultation.
HOW WELL DO DELIBERATIVE METHODS FARE?

The application of this framework to our discussion of deliberative methods highlights several trade-offs that are inherent in choosing one approach over another. Deliberative methods such as citizens’ juries and group panels, for example, have the potential to meet some of the procedural rules principles described in Table 1. In attending to these goals, however, they are likely to sacrifice the principles of representativeness including the assurance of a fair and legitimate selection process, and the achievement of a statistically representative sample of the general or local population. Larger, multiple group processes with adequate attention given to fair participant selection processes may overcome these criticisms (McIver, 1998). Many of the features of the citizens’ survey panel described by Kathlene and Martin (1991) have the potential to address the representation problem raised here although individual level deliberation obviously sacrifices the laudable goal of group discussion.

While the issue of small, non-representative samples is an oft-cited criticism of the jury method, most of the unanswered questions about this method, and to some extent deliberative methods more generally, relate to the issue of how information is selected, presented and interpreted. As previously discussed, participants have concerns about the amount of information presented and the speed with which they are asked to digest and interpret it. Of more serious concern, however, is the public’s ability to judge the adequacy and quality of the information presented which places them at risk of being easily influenced or undermined (either intentionally or unintentionally) by jury sponsors, organizers or even witnesses. As Dunkerley and Glasner (1998) discuss in their evaluation of a Welsh citizens’ jury sponsored by the pharmaceutical company Smith, Kline and Beecham, “the motives of the sponsors may have been at odds with the democratizing philosophy underpinning the citizens’ jury concept” (p.187). This is not just a problem for citizens’ juries, of course, but for all deliberative methods because of their perceived strength in contributing to an informed public. An important question to ask of these then is “informed by whom and what?” Even with significant lay involvement in and control over the selection of experts and information, the history of public participation in the health sector demonstrates that the vast majority of the public will defer to the “experts” when it comes to these decisions because they may not have the knowledge and critical appraisal skills to adequately assess the information. This is not as much of a concern for processes where the experts and/or jury sponsors are committed to ensuring that all relevant information, research evidence and professional expertise is available to the public as part of its deliberative process. It is a concern, of course, if this is not the case and the experts or jury sponsors have more self-interested motivations for engaging in a deliberative process that is oriented less to the objectives of persuasion and more to those of coercion or manipulation.
Our review of the empirical studies of different methods provides some practical guidance for decision makers in this area. The small number of rigorous evaluations is, however, of concern for those looking to draw generalizable lessons to inform the design of more effective consultation processes. Indeed, more work is needed to unpack the meaning of effectiveness in the context of public consultation methods and to systematically assess various methods against pre-determined evaluation criteria. Some of this work has already begun in the fields of science, technology and environmental policy (Rowe and Frewer, 2000; Beierle, 2000; Petts, 2001). Researchers and decision makers in the health sector can contribute to this knowledge base by undertaking more rigorous evaluations of public consultation and participation approaches using clearly defined and agreed upon criteria. In the meantime, several key messages arise from the literature so far, to suggest that clear thinking about why you want to consult, with whom and about what will take participation practitioners at least part of the way. Deliberative approaches offer promise for achieving the goals of more effective, informed and meaningful participation. As their theoretical underpinnings suggest, they also have the potential to foster a more engaged, public-spirited citizenry. Decision makers considering the more widespread use of deliberative methods in the health sector are discouraged from embracing a single method such as the citizens’ jury or the deliberative poll. Instead, we encourage the consideration of deliberative methods as a general approach that includes some common features but one that needs to be tailored to different decision-making contexts and participants. More generally, we encourage decision makers to adopt strategies that let purpose drive method, for all public involvement approaches, whether deliberative or not.
REFERENCES


Litva, A, Coast, J, Donovan, J, Eyles, J, Shepherd, M, Tacchi, J, Abelson, J, Morgan, K. ‘The public is too subjective’: public involvement at different levels of health-care decision making. Social Science and Medicine, forthcoming.


Shepherd, M. Personal communication, 2000.


Appendix 1: Methods at a Glance

* NOTE: Shaded boxes represent deliberative methods, whereas the other boxes are non-deliberative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Description of Method</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>Recommendations for Use</th>
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| Citizens Juries | - group of 12-20 randomly selected citizens, gathered in such a way as to represent a microcosm of their community, who meet over several days to deliberate on a policy question  
- they are informed about the issue, hear evidence from witnesses and cross-examine them  
- they then discuss the matter amongst themselves and reach a decision | - creates informed, active, engaged citizenry  
- promotes "common good" as a societal objective  
- promotes self-transformation and development  
- provides opportunities to introduce new perspectives and challenge existing ones  
- more careful examination of the issue  
- promotes consensus building  
- promotes communication between government and governed  
- brings legitimacy and democratic control to non-elected public bodies | - no formal powers; lack of binding decision accountability to act upon decision /recommendation  
- exclusive - only a few individuals participate  
- resource intensive; time commitment for participants and organizers  
- potential problems lie in initial stages of preparation (i.e., jury selection, agenda setting, witness selection) - these have to do with representation (who participates?) responsiveness (what jury is asked to do); and information transfer (how jury is informed?) | - sponsoring organization should be clear about what issues it wants to address, how much it can spend on process, and whether it can follow through on the advice  
- should be designed for the public and not for special interest groups  
- better with value questions than technical questions  
- better for focused questions about concrete issues, than on large scale issues and should be part of a wider public involvement strategy  
- the development of the agenda should be overseen by an advisory board made up of key stakeholders |
| Citizens Panels | - randomly selected group of 12 citizens meet routinely (e.g., four times per year) to consider and discuss issues and make decisions  
- used to guide health resource allocation decision  
- panels act as "sounding boards" for governing authority | - proportion of panel members are replaced at each meeting (i.e., 4 members) to increase overall number of participants  
- multiple panels can be held and run to increase participant numbers (i.e., reduce exclusivity)  
- people benefit from discussion within groups, but also from discussing issues with family and friends outside of the panel |                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                      |
| Planning Cells  | - similar to a citizens' jury in form and function  
- sponsored by local or national governing authorities to help with the decision making process  
- discussions/deliberation take place in Cells of about 25 participants in size  
- results are articulated in a report that is presented to the sponsor, the media, and any other interested group  
- local/national sponsor has to agree to take decisions into consideration | - small size of individual cells and its non-intimidating nature allows for innovative ideas and active participation  
- participants represent all citizens and not special interest groups  
- anyone in the population has a chance of being selected to be a part of this process  
- makes decision making more accountable because they have to defend their position  
- resulting decisions are frequently implemented  
- can renew public trust in democracy | - problems defined by local authority  
- only useful for problems in need of unique decisions  
- accountability and long-term planning - decisions not always feasible  
- hard to keep bias out of information dissemination process | - can be used when other methods fail to resolve a conflict  
- best in situations that require an quick response to an urgent issue where there are a number of possible decisions that can be made  
- not suited for issues with a "yes" or "no" answer |
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<tr>
<td>Consensus Conference</td>
<td>a group of citizens with varied backgrounds meets to discuss issues of a scientific and technical nature · consists of 2 stages: 1) meetings with experts, discussions and work toward consensus (involves small group of people) · 2) conference during which main observations and conclusions are presented to the media and general public</td>
<td>process of communicating information about the conference topic provides a strong educational component · useful method for obtaining informed opinions from lay persons</td>
<td>recruitment method for stage 1 may not ensure representative participation · exclusive process for stage 1 · elaborate process requiring significant resources · multiple conferences may be required to ensure that broad, representative opinions are sought</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deliberative Polling</td>
<td>builds on the opinion poll by incorporating element of deliberation · involves larger numbers than citizens juries and may involve less time · measures what public would think if it was informed and engaged around an issue</td>
<td>provides insights into public opinions and how people come to decisions · seeks informed opinions, does not force people to reach consensus · large, random sample</td>
<td>incentives (e.g., honorarium, transportation) are important · requires a lot of preparation time · although sample size is large and random, ensuring representativeness is difficult</td>
<td>can provide useful insight into public opinion and useful input into public decision processes · complement to representative democracy · not good for crisis decisions · best suited to issues with options and about which the public is not knowledgeable</td>
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<td>Citizens Panels</td>
<td>consists of statistically representative sample of residents in a given area · most comprise several thousand citizens who represent the general population of an area · panel views are regularly sought using a survey instrument (e.g., postal, telephone surveys)</td>
<td>inexpensive and effective way to learn about citizens' needs and preferences · panel data can be analyzed for multiple purposes and disaggregated for sub-level analysis (i.e., ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic, geographic area) · opportunity to collect trend data through multiple surveys to monitor impact of policies over time</td>
<td>exclusivity of participant selection process · consultation agenda determined by decision-making body (i.e., top down) · under-representation of hard-to-reach groups who refuse to participate · panel members vulnerable to Hawthorne effect (i.e., over time they may be prone to sympathize with decision-makers...)</td>
<td>Due to the expense as well as the design, the panel is best suited for the development of major community wide policy documents · limit to new policy areas, where community opinion and policy direction have yet to be determined and mobilization has not yet occurred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>one time discussion of a particular topic · involves 6-12 individuals selected to meet specific criteria in order to broadly represent a particular segment of society · one-time face-to-face meeting structured to be informal to encourage open discussion among participants</td>
<td>successful focus group may lead to consensus and feelings of enrichment among participants · good venue for learning about needs of a particular group · remain largely informal, so participants can discuss issues in relaxed atmosphere · a good way to gauge the opinions of the public</td>
<td>private sector marketing roots limit ability to cover complex issues · lack of informed participants produces superficial discussion · potential for revealing and reinforcing social cleavages · selection criteria can create bias in eliciting opinions · limited number of participants limits representativeness of opinions · potential for ideas expressed to be influenced/shaped by interaction/exchange with others (especially those who are dominant) · resource intensive</td>
<td>can be a tool for encouraging discussion and deliberation, but needs to be used with much caution because of the problems associated with it</td>
</tr>
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| Consensus building exercises | · a process designed to help people reach a consensus by focussing on the issues themselves  
    · mediators are used to help people reach a consensus  
    · non-adversarial approach                                         | · helps people reach solutions they can all support  
    · provides time for people to get to know each other and their differing views |                                                                           | · typically used to bring stakeholders together to reach consensus over an issue  
    · round tables are one approach where traditionally adversarial groups are brought together to discuss an issue |
| Surveys                     | · solicit information from representative sample of citizens  
    · same questions are asked of ever individual surveyed  
    · there are a variety of survey types: postal, interviewer, telephone | · can reach large numbers of people  
    · if same questions are retained, can be used for longitudinal studies (e.g., monitoring change over time) | · the lists may not be representative or comprehensive  
    · questions need to be somewhat simple and straightforward, the information gathered then can be simplistic and superficial  
    · survey results are often not comparable  
    · the effectiveness of surveys are affected by the rates of response  
    · fundamental decisions have to be made before the survey begins and cannot be changed once survey has been implemented | · because this is a time consuming process, it is not a good method if quick results are required  
    · can be used during the beginning phases of a study (useful in detecting issues that need to be addressed) |
| Public Hearings             | · form of public meeting limited in size  
    · tends to involve only interested citizens  
    · usually experts and interested citizens  
    · presentations are made                                                | · potential to inform citizens  
    · potential for improved decision making  
    · potential to minimize conflict                                         | · may be dominated by special interest groups  
    · feedback obtained from this format needs to be treated carefully because it may not be representative of the community  
    · does not generate a sense of ownership  
    · excludes the inarticulate and perhaps disadvantaged groups               | · have a “pre-submission” phase which allows the public time to become familiar with the issues |
| Open Houses                 | · the public is invited to drop by at any time at a set location on a set day(s) and times  
    · they can speak with staff, view the displays set up in the room and break into small discussion groups | · relaxed atmosphere  
    · enables staff to tailor responses according to the needs/questions of the public  
    · allows for sensitive topics to be discussed  
    · develops links for the future | · potential for lack of clarity in purpose  
    · staff resource intensive                                               | · suitable for confrontational issues                                      |
| Citizen Advisory Committee  | · can be made up of a variety of different organizations (e.g. from governmental to public)  
    · intended to represent the broader public                              | · if committee is balanced, deliberations can be fruitful  
    · their advice should influence decision making process  
    · should also produce informed citizens, boost trust in institutions and reduce conflict | · not a representative group of people                                     |
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</table>
| Community Planning     | participation on a broader level to set policy agenda and to discuss citizens' vision for community and services provided in it  | • allows for underlying assumptions to be dealt with in a deliberative manner  
• emphasizes consensus building, collaboration and cooperation  
• formal outcome is a community plan but emphasis is on reaching a common understanding of issues and finding a shared vision for dealing with them  
• fosters connections/partnerships between different organizations  
• educative role | • may set/raise expectations that public bodies are unable to meet |                                                                                                                                           |
| Visioning              | similar to community planning but input sought is about broader "vision" for community services and less about specifics on how to achieve the vision  | • emphasizes consensus building, collaboration and cooperation  
• formal outcome is a community plan but emphasis is on reaching a common understanding of issues and finding a shared vision for dealing with them  
• fosters connections/partnerships between different organizations  
• educative role | • may set/raise expectations that public bodies are unable to meet |                                                                                                                                           |
| Notification, Distribution & Solicitation of Comments | simplest form of consultation  
• can involve the sending out of reports  
• may also involve other methods | • broad and representative in theory  
• transparency guaranteed through notification process | • questionable effectiveness in reaching some populations  
• risk that consultation will be dominated by the best organized groups with easy access to publication  
• despite the potential for broad participation, the interaction between concerned public and the authorities is often very limited, with no real possibility for dialogue or negotiation  
• transparency is threatened when solicitation of comments is targeted to specific groups  
• not enough time given to soliciting feedback (i.e. sham consultation) |                                                                                                                                           |
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</table>
| Referenda         | · the process wherein an issue is put to popular vote  
                   · can be initiated by governmental or other organizations, or sometimes the citizenry  
                   · results may or may not be considered binding | · incites discussion and interest  
                   · way to learn public views  
                   · way to get citizens directly involved with the legislative process  
                   · all voters have equal influence  
                   · can potentially involve all members of a local or national population  
                   · difficult for the government to ignore the results of a referendum | · results may not be representative if there is low voter turnout  
                   · wording can present problems  
                   · limited number of times you can use it (i.e. voter fatigue)  
                   · potential for undue influence if one organization has greater resources than another when campaigning for or against a proposed referendum  
                   · very costly process | · should not replace representative democracy  
                   · issue should be answerable by "yes" or "no"  
                   · issue should stand on its own (i.e. not so intertwined with another that it becomes impossible to answer)  
                   · need to inform citizenry on issue beforehand |
| Structured Value Referenda | · voting based method for eliciting public preferences  
                   · uses "decision analysis" principles where preferences are elicited by voters who select among specified alternatives  
                   · Key components: 1)select the policy decision; 2)structure objectives; 3)develop alternatives - technical process; 4)determine impacts of alternatives; 5)frame the questions; 6)select the voting task; 7)develop a communication program | · participants have a wider range of response options  
                   · easy to use and understand and useful for guiding policy  
                   · information disseminated and question wording may be more neutral than with traditional referenda.  
                   · voters have an easier time choosing among preferences because their alternatives are well defined and they are educated about these alternatives and consequences | · complex task and can require substantial resources  
                   · potential for undue influence over the wording by those who control the referendum  
                   · only those truly interested in seeking out preferences would employ this method  
                   · Decisions regarding what cost information and the number of alternatives to select from have the potential to bias the outcome of the vote. | · best for contexts with a specific issue and with a number of alternative answers  
                   · for this to be successful, political leaders will need to be willing to share control and listen to the advice given  
                   · can reduce cost of this process by combining it with an established electoral process  
                   · can be administered as a survey, but has the drawback of not attracting the same attention |
Deliberations About Deliberative Methods: Issues in the Design and Evaluation of Public Consultation Processes

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