The Legislator as Convener

Town Hall Meetings
- Legislator's role is to listen.
- Citizens talk to and learn from one another about issues they find important.

Collaborative Problem-Solving
- Legislator's role is to bring people together: to convene.
- Citizens participate in the process of resolving a contentious issue.
Why Collaborative Process?

21st-Century Problems.

- Government can't do it alone.
- Fragmentation of government organizations and programs, overlapping jurisdictions.
- All sectors need to work together to produce comprehensive solutions.

People may be ready to collaborate, but have no support structure to do so.

- Legislator invites the participants to work together.
- Legislator champions the advantages of integrating the resources of public, private, and non-profit sectors.

Source: Policy Consensus Initiative
When to Use a Collaborative Process

Are conditions favorable for collaboration?

- The problem has reached gridlock, and community "buy-in" is needed to reach a solution acceptable to all interest groups.
- Legislator conveners and government agencies are willing to develop a solution that may not require "legislating."
- The decision the group reaches will be honored and implemented.
- Community representatives with strong influence and who command a high degree of respect are willing to be involved.
- Key stakeholders can easily attend meetings.
- The issue is not so complex that participants can't master the information relatively quickly.

Source: Irvin and Stansbury, 2004
When to Use a Collaborative Process

Are conditions unfavorable for collaboration?

- The community does not recognize the issue as a problem, or is not aware of competing policy alternatives.
- The decision of the group is likely to be the same as the decision government would make without a collaborative process.
- *Any* decision of the group is unlikely to be implemented.
- There are so many competing interest groups that the process would become unwieldy.
- Key stakeholders may not be able to attend meetings: consider geographic distribution, socioeconomic distribution.
- The issue evokes strong opinions, but the community's learning curve is likely to be steep.

Source: Irvin and Stansbury, 2004
# Advantages of Community Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Community Advantages</th>
<th>Government Advantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decision Process</strong></td>
<td>•Education</td>
<td>•Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>•Opportunity to enlighten government</td>
<td>•Opportunity to build community trust</td>
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<td></td>
<td>•Active citizenship skills</td>
<td>•Build strategic alliances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcomes</strong></td>
<td>•Break gridlock</td>
<td>•Break gridlock</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>•Gain control over policy process</td>
<td>•Avoid worse battles</td>
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<td></td>
<td>•Better decisions</td>
<td>•Better decisions</td>
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## Disadvantages of Community Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision Process</th>
<th>Community Disadvantages</th>
<th>Government Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Time consuming</td>
<td>• Can be dull</td>
<td>• Time consuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pointless if decision isn't implemented</td>
<td>• Policy decision may be worse for community due to influence by competing interest groups</td>
<td>• Costly, May backfire and create hostility toward government</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Outcomes

- • Policy decision may be worse for community due to influence by competing interest groups
- • Possibility of bad decision that cannot be ignored
- • Lack of budget for implementation

Source: Irvin and Stansbury, 2004
Keys to Convening

**Be inclusive.** Engage a variety of people from different perspectives. If important players are left out, results developed by the group will be suspect.

**Meet in a neutral place.** The place needs to ensure an impartial process. When the issue is complex and divisive, get assistance from an experienced facilitator to plan and conduct the process.

**Be impartial.** In order to keep people participating, a convener should not favor one side or another, but rather try to find a solution all sides can embrace. If people think a convener is taking sides, they won't stay with the process.

Source: Policy Consensus Initiative
Keys to Convening

**Establish the purpose for the process.** Work with participants to frame the issues to open the way for discussion and problem solving.

**Direct, rather than dominate, the discussions.** Enable people to talk with each other, rather than talk only to you. It is helpful to have someone else to facilitate the discussions so you can listen and ask questions.

**Keep people moving.** Help keep participants focused and working together when their differences threaten to drive them apart.

Source: Policy Consensus Initiative
Keys to Convening

Demonstrate visible commitment. Even if you can't be present at every meeting, send signals of your on-going interest and provide feedback on the group’s progress.

Finally, make sure there's an outcome. The best outcomes involve concrete plans for implementation.

Source: Policy Consensus Initiative
Principles of Collaborative Processes

Transparency and Accountability
Decisions take place in the public eye.

Equity and Inclusiveness
All interests who are needed and willing contribute to solution.

Effectiveness and Efficiency
Solutions are tested to make sure they make practical sense.

Responsiveness
Public concerns are authentically addressed.

Forum Neutrality
Different perspectives are welcome; the process itself has no bias.

Consensus-Based
Decisions are made through consensus rather than majority rule.

Source: Policy Consensus Initiative
For More Information:

The Policy Consensus Initiative
www.policyconsensus.org
