

ALIGNING THE WORK OF GOVERNMENT
TO STRENGTHEN THE WORK OF CITIZENS:
A STUDY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATORS IN LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

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by

W. Barnett Pearce and Kimberly A. Pearce
bpearce@fielding.edu

Barnett Pearce is Professor Emeritus at Fielding Graduate University; Kim Pearce is Professor at De Anza College. Both are Principals of Pearce Associates, Inc. and Founding Members of the Public Dialogue Consortium

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We got trained back in the day to do things differently than we have to do them today. We all have to learn and develop new skills to be responsive to the communities of today as opposed to 30 years ago when I started...There is a different mindset today, a need to be responsive to the public in a different way than in the past. It is an evolutionary process and it has to start with us, the city managers. We are the ones who have to set the tone and the direction and be the champion. If we are not the champion, no one is going to be the champion, not even the council.” – Pat Martel, Manager, Daly City

It is part of our job to get the public engaged to give a meaningful voice and ultimately have control over their government...[civic engagement] is not in addition to, but it is the work...if we are going to be as good as we can be in serving the community. – David Bosch, Manager, San Mateo County

As citizens become more actively engaged in naming, framing, deliberating, and acting on the issues that affect them, public administrators are inevitably involved. But will they oppose, ignore, or actively support citizens? And if they support citizens, what should they do? And what changes will they have to make in their professional roles and institutional structures to do so?

Reflecting on his own work as a city manager (Cupertino, California), Dave Knapp said, It used to be that if you did something, you had to tell the public about it. And then it became, if you are planning to do something, you have to tell them about it. And then it became, if you are planning to do something, you have to offer them an opportunity to come in and say what they want to say. You don't have to do anything about it, but you have to give them the opportunity to come and have input. The model now is when you have an issue, you are better off to have the community weigh in on the definition of the problem, the possible solutions of the problem, and to actually affect the outcome of the decisions process.

In the title of one of its publications, the Kettering Foundation posed the question this way: *Public Administrators and Citizens: What Should the Relationship Be?* The authors offered this answer:

Citizens name problems, frame issues, decide questions, implement decisions, act, and learn. Local governments also name, frame, decide, implement, act and learn. Each democratic practice has its counterpart in a governmental routine. Aligning

governmental routines with democracy means to carry on the business of government in ways that strengthen the work of citizens (2007, p. 42).

Aligning governmental routines is not simply a matter of doing things differently, however. It involves what Matt Leighninger (2006, p. 223) described as processes in which “citizens and public servants negotiate new rules for their relationship.” We found that these renegotiations impact public administrators’ sense of themselves as professionals, their assessment of the risk of failure of particular projects, and their commitment to act responsibly in their official duties. As Pat Martel put it:

Civic engagement for me as a city manager is a different approach to the way that we manage communities. The old school fashion that I was brought up in was “government makes the best decisions for the people.” I think that civic engagement has taken us away from that model to one of a partnership between residents, community and local government, and this partnership creates opportunities for dialogue and conversation about public policy issues, about programs and services, and other kinds of issues or problems that confront a community.

The Kettering Foundation’s report “Innovations in Government Organizations” said that citizens’ difficulty in “finding organizations that will work with them as co-producers rather than as consumers of services” is “a fundamental problem of democracy” (2009, p. 1). We had the opportunity to study some public administrators who are learning how to meet citizens’ as they become more engaged in their communities.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Our general question is what do public administrators need to know and to do in order to promote and respond constructively to an engaged community?

In October, 2006, the Kettering Foundation invited 16 city and county managers for a two-day conversation about the roles of public administrators in deliberative democracy. They found that the managers understood that citizens do not always want to be led. Reflecting on these conversations, officers of the Foundation posed this question for managers: “how will they build relationships with these ever emerging citizen-based organizations rather than simply cater to the needs of customers waiting to be served?” The discussion of this question revolved round four themes: defining public engagement; timing; structuring relationships; and expectations and evaluation (Diebel, 2007, p. 15).

To sharpen our analysis, we treated as a testable hypothesis a statement in the postscript to the Kettering Foundation Report *Public Administrators and Citizens: What Should the Relationship Be?* (2007, p. 42).

We do not pretend to have a command of what professional administrators do. We do believe, however, that it is possible for public servants to carry on this kind of engagement without adding appreciably to their workload or mastering new skills. It

seems possible to align normal administrative routines with democratic practices so that the two are mutually reinforcing. (Emphasis added)

As we read it, this statement refers to public administrators' *orientation* to, *knowledge* about, and *abilities* in supporting civic engagement.

Although not all public administrators agree with this hypothesis, we were less interested in the percentages of those who do and don't agree than in what differentiates those who agree and those who don't. What *orientations* -- experiences, beliefs, values, fears or vested interests -- make some public administrators reluctant to support civic engagement and others willing to do what it takes to support it?

Public administrators' willingness and ability to align administrative routines with democratic practices by citizens may well vary as a function of their *knowledge* of what that entails. Can they differentiate authentic civic engagement from its various surrogates? Are they able to distinguish among various forms of civic engagement?

We were curious about the abilities required for public administrators who set themselves to align normal administrative routines with participatory democratic practices.

- 1) Can the re-alignment of administrative routines be accomplished without adding appreciably to administrators' workload?
 - (1) We pose the rival hypothesis that there will be at least a workload "bump" during the design and installation of the new administrative routines.
 - (2) In addition, we wonder under what circumstances public administrators can align their procedures with an engaged citizenry effectively and efficiently. What resources are available to them? Of these, which are the most useful? What new resources would facilitate their re-alignment projects with tolerable workload implications?
- 2) Are new skills required in a realignment of administrative routines consistent with participatory democracy?
 - (1) We pose the rival hypothesis that new administrative routines will necessarily involve the development of new communication skills. Some of these new skills, we believe, involve doing the same things (speaking and listening) differently but others involve doing different things (e.g., designing, intervening in and evaluating communication processes).
 - (2) If capacity-building for public administrators is necessary, what are the best practices by which it can be developed?

RESEARCH METHOD

Participatory action research is our research method. We took advantage of an opportunity to work with Common Sense California (CSC), a multi-party, nonprofit organization founded in 2005 whose purpose is "to help solve California's public problems by promoting citizens' participation in governance."¹ We offered our services in helping design and evaluate a

¹ Retrieved on December 28, 2009, from <http://www.commonsenseca.org>.

series of seminars for public administrators in exchange for access to those seminars and contacts and information gathered in other CSC projects. This study gathered three sets of data.

The primary data-set comes from our participation in developing, observing, and evaluating four seminars in California led by Pete Peterson, CSC's Executive Director, and Ed Everett, Co-chair of CSC's City/Regional Task Force. The title of the seminars evolved from "Leadership through Civic Engagement" to "Public Engagement: The Vital Leadership Skill for Difficult Times." Each hosted by the local city government, the seminars were offered in Santa Clara on March 6, Cupertino on July 30, San Luis Obispo on October 29, and Napa on December 7. Most of the approximately 325 participants were public administrators in city, county or regional government organizations; between 5% and 10% were elected officials; and about 1% were consultants/trainers specializing in civic engagement. One participant self-identified as "citizen."²

Our role in these seminars took several forms. We attended the meeting of CSC's City/Regional Task Force; we helped the presenters develop and revise the seminars; we participated in the first two seminars and were represented by our colleagues³ in the fourth; and we analyzed the survey given to participants after each seminar.

The second data set consists of eight interviews. Our analysis of the evaluations of the seminars contained some surprising findings that we wanted to explore in greater detail. In addition to being co-chair of CSC's City/Regional Task Force, Ed Everett is a former city manager in several California cities and is well-known and respected by his peers. We asked him for suggestions of participants in the seminars who were veteran public administrators and experienced with civic engagement. The interview protocol was designed to cover some of the same ground as the seminar evaluation, but to go much deeper.⁴

Grant applications for civic engagement projects comprised the third set of data. In 2008, the CSC issued a public call for proposals for two categories of grants: Common Sense Grants of

² These numbers are approximate. Although participants were expected to pre-register based on advertising focusing on city, county and regional staff, unanticipated participants attended each seminar. Usually, these were members of staff added at the last minute to the group coming from a department or an elected official who decided to come after hearing about it from staff.

³ Jennifer Mair and Janice Son, of the Public Dialogue Consortium. Jennifer and Janice gave a written report of their observations to us and to the presenters.

⁴ Interviews were conducted with David Bosch, Manager, San Mateo County; Magda Gonzalez, Deputy Manager, Redwood City; Clay Holstine, Manager, Brisbane; Jim Keene, Manager, Palo Alto; Dave Knapp, Manager, Cupertino; Nadine Levin, Assistant Manager, Mountain View; Mark Linder, Director of Parks and Recreation, Cupertino; and Pat Martel, Manager, Daly City. The interviewer was Jennifer Mair, Public Dialogue Consortium. The interviews lasted approximately an hour and were audiorecorded. Ms. Mair produced a written summary, consisting of some quotations and some paraphrases. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations attributed to these people are from their interviews.

up to \$25,000 and Catalyst Grants ranging from \$1,000 to \$7,500. Eligible applicants included four categories: 1) Mayors, City Managers, Assistant City Managers; 2) Executive Directors of regional governance associations; 3) School Superintendents and School Board Presidents; and 4) Executive Directors of non-profit organizations. Among other things, applicants were asked to give their definition of “civic engagement.” The CSC saw their role as coaching as well as funding; the application form listed the criteria for awarding grants, including “commitment” and “readiness.” Applicants were asked to answer these questions:

- Are you committed to “take your hands off the wheel” of the result of this process? While you may be very concerned about the particular issue, can you conduct this process without biasing the outcome?
- Have you reached a stage in the decision-making process where you are ready to begin involving citizens in the next several months?

CSC received more than 100 applications from qualified applicants. About 30 percent of these were excluded from further consideration because they did not meet the criteria of understanding civic engagement, commitment and readiness. We were able to read the remaining 75 application forms.

WHAT DO PUBLIC ADMINISTRATORS NEED TO KNOW AND DO IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

In 2008, Ed and Pete led an experiential learning session of the Association of Bay Area Governments on civic engagement that went well enough that they were interested in developing the idea further and offering it more broadly. They convened a meeting of the CSC’s City/Regional Task Force on March 5, 2009,⁵ to help them think through what such a seminar would look like.

The Task Force strongly supported the concept of the seminars, but had some productive differences of opinion about the target audience and content. They asked, should the desired participants be those afraid of civic engagement or those who, erroneously, think they are already doing it? As one participant put it, should the seminar say to those who fear civic engagement that it is not as bad as you think, or to those who think that they know what it is that there is more to civic engagement than that? The issue was put more generally as the desired ratio of the why, what, and how of civic engagement.⁶

⁵ The meeting ran from 8:30 until 2 pm and was hosted by City Manager Mark Knapp in the Cupertino Community Hall. Participants included Pete Peterson (Executive Director) and members of the Task Force Bev Perry (Mayor, Brea), Ed Everett (former Manager, Redwood City), Terry Amsler (Institute for Local Government), Rick Bishop (Executive Director, Western Riverside Council of Governments), Rod Gould, Manager, Poway), Bridget Healey (Assistant Manager, Indio), David Knapp (Manager, Cupertino), Ken Hampian (Manager, San Luis Obispo), Mark Linder (Director of Parks and Recreation, Cupertino), Seth Miller (CEO, California Center for Regional Leadership), Tim O’Donnell, (Manager, Brea), Mike Parness (Manager, Napa), Rich Ramirez (Manager, American Canyon), and Barnett Pearce and Kim Pearce (guests). Since no agreements were made about quotations, all citations to things said in this meeting are without attribution

⁶ We were pleasantly surprised at the congruence between this framing and the structure of our research questions.

The members of the Task Force agreed that a half-day seminar (8:30 am – 1 pm) should not be expected to deal equally with all three questions. A “wide-but-shallow” seminar was not seen as a viable option. They were adamant that civic engagement not be treated as just another gadget in the public administrators’ toolbox. They insisted that civic engagement requires a fundamental shift in public administrators’ concept of their jobs and relationships in the community and that it must be done “authentically.”

They recommended an introductory seminar designed to “hook” participants into civic engagement. The presenters should be satisfied if participants developed increased interest in and willingness to learn more about civic engagement. Indicators of success would include their accessing written and digital resources on a list given them during the seminar and expressing interest in participating in a second-level, more technical seminar (half-jokingly referred to as “Civic Engagement 201”) to be offered later. In order to accomplish these objectives, the seminar should be advertised widely to public administrators and should focus on the “why” and “what” of civic engagement, with only a bit of “how.”

The presenters followed this advice in the first seminar, but the evaluation forms showed that participants wanted more of the “how.” In our post-seminar re-design meetings, we discussed how we should understand this feedback. It might indicate that the “why” and “what” questions are sufficiently well-known and participants are ready to get on to practical questions of “how” to do civic engagement, or it might be that they have not sufficiently realized how fundamental a change is involved and are looking for the “new tool” for their toolbox. Based on anecdotal information from participants during the seminars and a careful reading of the grant application forms, we concluded that many public administrators have simplistic concepts of civic engagement. As a result, while there was a gradual increase in the amount of information about “how” to do civic engagement as the seminar series progressed, the strong emphasis on “why” and particularly “what” was retained.

ORIENTATIONS, OR WHY WOULD PUBLIC ADMINISTRATORS WANT TO BE INVOLVED IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

As shown in Table 1, the seminar was effective. No one said that they left the seminar not supporting civic engagement. Fifty-eight percent said that they came to the seminar seeking support for their commitment to civic engagement. Of these respondents, they were almost equally split between those who said that they were new to civic engagement and found specific information useful and those who said that they have been “nervous” about civic engagement and found the seminar reassuring.

Fears about civic engagement.

The seminar’s strategy was to acknowledge legitimate fears about civic engagement, give an explanatory story about them, and point to a preferred alternative. Participants were invited to work in small groups and share their “images/biases/stereotypes of the public.” During the activity, there was laughter and high energy, indicating that this tapped into something familiar to the participants. Using a “popcorn” technique, some of the table conversations were shared

with the whole group. Over the course of the four seminars, this list of “fears” was developed and intentionally re-framed as “why civic engagement is tough:”

- We don’t trust the public;
- It requires a new set of skills and different leadership mindset;
- It requires behavioral and attitudinal changes both by government and by citizens; and,
- It entails a perceived loss of our control of projects and policies.

In response to the question “given all that, why should we do civic engagement?” the presenters showed a 6 minute video comprised of vignettes of public-meetings-gone-wrong. In each segment, public administrators were being berated by citizens or struggling ineffectively while citizens were disrupting public meetings. This video was invariably accompanied by hoots and laughter, which we confidently interpret as indicating that the participants identified with the public administrators in the video. After the video, the presenters said “do we need to say more about why you might want to try something different?”

As we listened to the conversations in the seminars, we realized that we were being misdirected by the vocabulary in our research questions. We initially framed our questions in terms of “arguments” and “values” but the public administrators feared civic engagement because they didn’t trust the public, were uncertain of their abilities to perform this new role, and had substantive questions about whether the proper exercise of their professional responsibilities was met by ceding control over important issues to the public. On the other hand, they were willing to explore civic engagement because they were tired of being beaten up by members of the public and because they realized that they didn’t have the resources to perform their professional roles in the traditional manner. “Arguments” and “values” about democracy were not much involved; pragmatic purposes and sometimes-harsh experiences were.

We expected that public administrators’ reluctance to support civic engagement would be coupled with their roles as “the experts.” We did hear them say that they have expert knowledge, but their resistance to civic engagement hinged more on their commitment to fulfilling their responsibilities as government officials. Their hesitancy was based on their limited trust that the public will act with comparable integrity and responsibility.

Thinking that the relationship between public administrators and the public was along the lines of relative expertise, we anticipated hearing public administrators say “we don’t trust the public” because the public is uninformed or apathetic. While we did hear some of this, it was vastly overshadowed by something we had not anticipated. These public administrators cited the public’s unwillingness or inability to engage in civil conversations about public issues – among themselves and with government officials -- as a major impediment to civic engagement. They identified easily with the scenes of chaos and babel in the video, and almost all found a way of telling us a story from their own experience. From the public administrators’ perspective, the primary relational dimension between them and the public is the willingness and ability to participate in a responsible process for the common good.

Pat Martel, currently City Manager of Daly City, described a major project when she worked in another city that was de-railed by a small, vocal group of opponents who strategically disrupted forums, including planting people in each breakout group, dominating the discussion, and intimidating other participants. “It wasn’t an angry conversation with the city; it was often an angry conversation with other residents.” She learned that “our role should be more as facilitator than of decision maker.”

In another situation, elected officials allied themselves with small but highly vocal special interest groups who, in her judgment, came to public meetings only to make their voices heard, not to listen to others. Members of her staff lost their commitment to civic engagement because they felt caught between the most strident members of the public and the elected officials. They told Pat: “I am not going to take a risk or lead the effort. If the public has the power to go to a meeting and shoot down everything I have done, and the elected officials jump on the bandwagon with them, I’m not going to take that flak.” When Pat came to her present position, she began with an offsite meeting for staff in which she told them that civic engagement was going to be the normal form of business, that this was going to require substantial shifts in staff attitudes and behaviors, and that she would support them with training for themselves and for key members of the public and by hiring outside consultants and facilitators as needed.

A rationale for civic engagement.

The presenters gave a “brief history of citizen/government relations” to explain why, despite legitimate concerns, public administrators should support civic engagement. As shown in Table 2, in recent history, the dominant narrative of government/citizen relationships is that government is a “vending machine” providing outstanding service. One of the unfortunate effects of this model is that it transforms “citizens” into “consumers” and consumers:

- Give away their power to others;
- Allow others to define their needs (e.g., through marketing);
- Believe their needs can best be satisfied by the action of others (Wal-Mart; Nordstrom; Council; City Staff);
- Consume and don’t create;
- Think in terms of “I”/”me” rather than in terms of the welfare of the whole; and,
- (Worst of all) feel entitled.

Our observation during the seminars was that participants recognized these characteristics as part of their perceptions of residents-acting-badly.

To drive the point home, the presenters noted that “you” (the participants) are the vending machine in this story, and asked “what happens when someone puts their money into a vending machine and it doesn’t give what they wanted? They kick it! [Laughter] Have you been kicked? Well, that’s what the public is doing. They have been taught that government is a service-provider, and when it doesn’t provide the services they want, they feel entitled to kick you. And who taught them to think that way about government? We did, when we took on the ‘consumer satisfaction’ model. It’s time to do something different.”

We've reported this explanatory story at some length because participants found it powerful. As shown in Table 3, the story of the "vending machine" and the transformation of "consumers into citizens" was the single most frequent response to the question "What is the most important thing you've learned from this seminar?"

The preferred alternative story is that of a community in which government and citizens function as partners and in which residents are accountable to their responsibilities as citizens. This story marks a transition into the question of "what" is civic engagement. Mark Linder described this relationship by contrasting two cities in which he has worked. In one, the staff took the role of being the "fix it person...the person you come to" when you want something done. The unintended result was "civic engagement run amok." The residents continued in the roles of consumers, this time of civic engagement; the public administrators were "living on Red Bull," working far too hard because they had accepted the role of "servants" of the people. He contrasted this with the approach in his current position (Director of Parks and Recreation, Cupertino) in which there is a strong program of neighborhood "block leaders" who understand that they "are responsible for your block. You are the ones who need to know your neighbors."

KNOWLEDGE, OR WHAT DO PUBLIC ADMINISTRATORS KNOW AND NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

As the seminars progressed, less time was given to the question of "why" and more to the "what" and "how" of civic engagement. The CSC grant application forms included a question asking respondents to write their understanding of civic engagement. From reading these, we knew that definitions of civic engagement varied widely, and that some were wildly off the mark. Perhaps a third of the proposals were deleted from further consideration because the projects were deemed as not "civic engagement."⁷

This section of the seminar began with a list of things that civic engagement is not. Echoes of the grant proposals deleted from further consideration can be heard in this list:

- Selling the public on...;
- Getting votes for...;
- Convincing the public to....;
- A meeting to complain/find fault with...;
- A process where staff/non-profit controls outcome; and,
- Doesn't happen at council meetings.⁸

⁷ At least partly in response to the variety of (mis)understandings of civic engagement by those writing grant proposals, Pete Peterson posted on the CSC website an essay titled "What is 'legitimate' civic engagement" (<http://www.commonseca.org/projects/legitimate.php>, retrieved on December 29, 2009). In addition, Pete and other members of the Task Force coached proposers throughout the process, helping them to understand and implement a "legitimate" civic engagement project.

⁸ While not semantically parallel with other entries in this list, the final item expresses presenter Ed Everett's insistence that civic engagement is incompatible with the purpose and (California) regulations for City Council

No neat definition of civic engagement was offered. Rather, it was described in three ways.

Civic engagement is not all-or-nothing; match the form with the situation.

The presenters used a version of the IAP2 Spectrum of Participation⁹ to say that there are various forms of civic engagement; they used three of the IAP2's five forms: information, consultation, and active participation. They stressed that all three of these are legitimate; not all forms of civic engagement assign decision-making to the public. Our observations during the seminars suggest that this was a very helpful set of distinctions, and many participants were reassured that civic engagement is not an "all-or-nothing" activity.

Civic engagement requires renegotiating relationships.

New relationships between the public and the government were described in which the public acted like and was treated as being "citizens" rather than as "consumers." Unlike "consumers," citizens:

- Are accountable for and committed to the well-being of the whole community;
- Produce the future, rather than waiting, begging, demanding or dreaming of it;
- Choose to own and exercise their power rather than defer and delegate it to others; and,
- Acknowledge that sustainable change in a community occurs only when citizens are involved, committed and accountable for that change.

This description of the public contrasted with many of the participants' perceptions of the residents in their communities, but in a desirable way. It was clear that participants wanted a partnership with the public, if they could be assured that the public would act responsibly. Acknowledging that this was a stretch for many of the participants, the presenters focused on the new attitudes about the public that public administrators need to develop:

- The public is not the enemy; rather, they are our "life line" on really tough issues;
- The public has good ideas;
- The public is smarter than you think;
- The public is willing to help if approached correctly; and,
- The public needs some help in learning how to behave but loves well-designed and facilitated engagement, and will compliment you to the council or manager if they are honestly engaged.

meetings. He strongly challenges those whose idea of civic engagement is to redesign Council meetings, arguing – as did the Task Force – that authentic civic engagement requires a more radical restructuring of the relationship between government and the public.

⁹ <http://www.iap2.org/associations/4748/files/spectrum.pdf>. Retrieved on December 28, 2009.

David Bosch, Manger of San Mateo County, described how his relationship with the public evolved:

My thinking has changed a lot over the years. If you had asked me 10 or 20 years ago, I would have thought of [civic engagement] as more of a problem than something to be valued...When I first got into [public administration] 30 years ago, public agencies weren't sure they wanted much civic engagement or public involvement. The decision making process was more efficient and streamlined, with less public participation. We have gone through a sort of evolution in our thinking, recognizing better today that to be successful and to have broad public awareness and support we have to be deliberate in engaging our community as opposed to viewing it as an impediment or something to be minimized or avoided...To some degree, we are our own worst enemy in government – we talk about an apathetic public, the types of people who are attracted to government, and the services we provide. All of that is creating an “us” and “them” view of the public and government...It is part of our job to get the public engaged to give a meaningful voice and ultimately have control over their government...[civic engagement] is not in addition to, but it is the work...if we are going to be as good as we can be in serving the community.

The new relationship between government and citizens – described as “community as partner” and “citizen accountability” in Table 2 – requires changes by people in government that correspond to the public’s shift from “consumer” to “citizen.” This advice was given to public administrators:

- Your role should be that of a partner and consultant and not the expert who knows it all, because you don't;
- You have technical expertise but that doesn't mean you have the best or the only good ideas;
- Think about mixing your technical expertise, as a consultant, with citizens' values and knowledge of the city/neighborhood;
- You need to let go of “being in control” or “controlling the decision” which comes from our anxieties and fears that citizens will screw things up and you will be blamed; and,
- Listen much, much more than you talk.

Mark Linder described an experience that both supports and qualifies this advice. In one city in which he worked, the staff had “bought into the idea of ‘I am the fix-it person; I am the person that you come to.’” This resulted in a great deal of public participation. Staff would say to members of the public, “come on in and we will do all the organization with the flyers and outreach and all that you have to do is to show up.” But over time, the limitations of this approach became clear.

We (city staff) kept pushing the leaders of the public and those leaders pushed back because they didn't want to accept additional responsibility, they didn't like it when people not like themselves started participating in the process, and they thought it was city staff's responsibility for doing the ground work such as having individual meetings with their neighbors. So we finally did an evaluation and found that the people whom we were doing all this stuff for didn't like us and would actually do things that were detrimental to the process.

The problem was not the amount of civic engagement (if anything, there was too much of it), but the kind of civic engagement. He said that “the culture [in this city] has run amok in terms of civic engagement and active participation,” but there had not been a corresponding “culture change.”

He contrasted this situation with what is happening in the city in which he currently works. In working with block leaders, the city manager is very clear: “this is how it is going to be, folks. We own this community together; you have your responsibilities and we have ours.” As a result, block leaders do not have the sense that the city staff will run around and do things for me. Rather, their attitude is: “I am responsible for stuff out here and there is a staff at city hall who may be able to help me if I need some help, but I have to get to know my neighbors, I have to organize a block party. The city will give me some money to run it, but I have to set it up.” “It is a different orientation,” he judges, and this culture change depends on the role taken by city staff.

Members of councils (“the electeds” in the vocabulary of the participants) were coached about their roles in the changing relationships:

- You don’t have to know all the answers;
- Don’t always sit at the front of the room, head table; sometimes don’t even be in the room. Promote discussions and avoid question-and-answer sessions;
- You don’t have to control the situation or the outcome;
- You don’t have to and definitely shouldn’t talk all the time. Listen and let people know you are listening;
- Be open to the ideas of others;
- Know when to follow;
- Even though the Council is “the Decider,” there is more than one way to “Decide;” and,
- The Council can have more power and be more effective by setting boundaries, conditions, broad policy guidelines and minimum requirements and then standing back and letting the community decide how best to proceed within these frameworks.

These instructions were consistent with stories we were told when we spoke at greater length with individual public administrators. Jim Keene, City Manager of Palo Alto, was involved in large-scale projects during the 1980s that were stalled by “culture clashes” among various special interest groups in the public. He remembers thinking “I have the wrong training for this work. I need to learn how to deal with cultures; how people communicate; about language.” Twelve years ago, as Manager of the City of Berkeley, California, he was involved in a series of community meetings “in which the community looked slightly different in each meeting.” During a particularly hard session, a woman he knew got up to speak and he inwardly cringed (“oh, no! What is she going to say this time?”). She surprised him by reading a poem from Langston Hughes:

I play it cool
And dig all jive
That’s the reason I stay alive
My motto as I live and learn

Is Dig and Be dug
In return.

“I thought, my God, that is it! That is all that has to happen here: people have to listen to each other and also expect to be understood. I don’t mean to sound so soft or intuitive about this, but I really believe at the heart of civic engagement is the willingness to let down your defenses and reveal yourself in a way that people can experience you as a real person...”

He also learned that civic engagement doesn’t mean that the manager should allow just anything to happen. He worked in a city in which the staff invited participation but did not design the forms it would take. The result, he said, was “chaos.” Public administrators, he concluded, must become “designers rather than managers.”

We described this section of the seminars at length and explored it in depth in the interviews because participants said that they found it useful. The most frequent responses participants gave to the question “What is the most important thing you learned from this seminar” are summarized in Table 3. A careful reading of those themes indicates that a changed relationship between government and residents underlies most of them.

Civic engagement requires public administrators to rethink how they do their jobs.

Using slides depicting “the partnership wheel,” the presenters said that the most common way that public administrators conceptualize their tasks can be represented by a wheel in which the government is the hub and everything else – including the actions of citizens – revolves around it. They showed an alternative model, similarly based on a wheel, but in which the issue is the hub and government is one of the spokes revolving around it. The activities of citizens are another spoke in this model. This visualization supports the question of how government and citizens can act in partnership to address the issues confronting the community.

SKILLS, OR WHAT DO PUBLIC ADMINISTRATORS KNOW HOW TO DO AND NEED TO LEARN HOW TO DO?

Following the advice of the Task Force, the seminars deliberately gave little attention to the “how” of public administrator’s support for civic engagement. This section consisted of five stories of successful civic engagement, chosen to display a wide range of forms and topics. Consistent with other observations about the participants’ desire for more about the “how” of civic engagement, these examples were named in the evaluations as among the most important things learned in the seminars (see Table 3).

The Task Force had recommended that these seminars be thought of as C. E. 101 and, mindful that we might someday be designing C. E. 201, we paid particular attention to what participants thought they needed if they were to do more in support of civic engagement.

The most surprising finding of this study came from a question we added to the evaluation form after the first seminar (in Santa Clara). We asked participants to rank four responses to the question “What is needed if your community is to do more civic engagement?”

As shown in Table 4, the item most frequently ranked as “most important” was “increased skills in designing and facilitating civic engagement projects.”¹⁰

To explore this finding more carefully, we looked at each seminar separately, noting that the unequal number of participants might have skewed the results. As shown in Table 5, the result was very robust: “skills” was identified as the most important needed thing by most participants in two seminars (Cupertino and San Luis Obispo, both by wide margins) and as tied-for-second in Napa (by a narrow margin).

This finding intrigued us, so we made it a central part of our in-depth interviews with public administrators who have considerable experience in civic engagement (listed in footnote #4). They were asked to “Help us understand more clearly what skills are important” by rank-ordering this list of nine possibilities:

1. Staff members’ attitudes or orientations toward the public
2. Skills in the way members of staff speak and listen to each other and to the public
3. Skills in designing meetings
4. Skills in facilitating meetings
5. Skills in designing and managing civic engagement processes
6. Skills in working with external vendors who design and facilitate civic engagement
7. Skills in convincing other members of staff and/or elected officials to support civic engagement
8. Skills in gathering and reporting information gathered from civic engagement processes
9. Other skills not mentioned.

The rankings were done orally, with the interviewer recording the results. The interviewer asked “which of these do you think is the most important?” and followed up by asking “why?” The next question was “which of these is the next most important?” again followed by “why.” This process continued until the interviewer perceived the person being interviewed running out of energy in answering the follow-up “why” question; she then completed the ranking process.

We analyzed the rankings in three ways: distribution of the lowest (“most important”) ranks, average ranking, and analysis of what was left out of the list (responses to item #9, “other”).

Two skills (#1, “staff members’ attitudes or orientations toward the public” and #5, “designing and managing civic engagement processes”) were each ranked as most important by three respondents. Item #7, “convincing other members of staff/elected officials to support civic

¹⁰ Given the budget crisis in California and the disproportionate burden local governments are being required to take in providing services with insufficient resources, we were very surprised that “increased funding” was the least frequently chosen response in all three seminars.

engagement,” was ranked first by one respondent. One respondent chose item #9 and specified “skills in getting members of the public to listen to each other” as most important.

To get a richer description of what the respondents thought was important, we also looked closely at what they ranked second. Skill #2 (“the way members of staff speak and listen to each other and to the public”) was ranked as second-most-important by three persons. Two persons ranked as second-most-important skill #4 (“skills in facilitating meetings”). Three other skills were ranked second-most-important by one respondent: #1 (“staff members’ attitudes toward the public”); #3 (“skill in designing meetings”); and #5 second (“skill in designing and managing civic engagement processes”).

Aware that we are violating some principles of measurement,¹¹ we used some descriptive statistics to get a sense of the pattern of rankings. The average ranking is shown in the rightmost column of Table 6 and Table 7 displays the average rankings of the skills with proportionate spaces between them. This display in Table 7 shows four clusters.

- Skill #5 (“Skills in designing and managing civic engagement processes”) was in a cluster by itself, on average, described as a half-rank more important than the second most important skill.
- Skills #1 and #2 (“Staff members’ attitudes or orientations toward the public” and “Skills in the way members of staff speak and listen to each other and to the public”) were ranked second and third most important.
- Three skills comprised a middle cluster: #7 (“Skills in convincing other members of staff and/or elected officials to support civic engagement”), #4 (“Skills in facilitating meetings”), and #3 (“Skills in designing meetings”).
- Two skills were clearly ranked as less important: #8 (“Skills in gathering and reporting information from civic engagement processes”) and #6 (“Skills in working with external vendors”).

We asked those who ranked “skills in designing and managing civic engagement processes” as the first or second most important skill to describe what they meant. The responses did not show a consistent concept of what is meant by those skills. Better said, each person interviewed had a clear picture of what is needed, but those pictures were not the same as those of the other interviewees.¹²

¹¹ Rankings have no assumption about the size of the interval between ranks; they are ordinal numbers. The display in Table 7 enables visualization of the clusters of the ratings by treating the average ratings as if they were interval-level data.

¹² The interview protocol insured that follow-up questions were asked for the items ranked most important, but inconsistently for items ranked less important. However, we have enough evidence to show that the respondents interpreted at least some of the other items in ways that differed from each other. One possible interpretation of this finding is that respondents agree about their need to acquire skills but do not have a consensual grasp of what skills they need.

- Clay Holstine suggested intercity forums in which “best practices” can be shared, and learning these skills as part of the “professionalization” of the staff.
- Magda Gonzales saw these skills as in service to creating “a sense of community, connection and belonging among the public, and lead[ing] them to take ownership of the process.” She noted that the skills involved in developing this sense of community are not well learned “just by looking at best practices.” Experiential and contextual learning is required: members of staff have to be in the process to figure out what are the best practices for specific situations.
- Mark Linder wanted to add the term “evaluating civic engagement processes” to this desired skill set. Referring to an on-going contentious issue in his city, he said that what is needed is for citizens to be able to evaluate what is working and not working in the process in which they are engaged.
- Jim Keene challenged the naming of the skill set by proposing that we think of civic engagement as a verb rather than as a noun; he thinks the more frequently used vocabulary is problematic and that there is no common understanding of civic engagement. For him, the relevant question for public administrators is “what conversations can the city support that create stronger social and civic capital?” He suggested that City Councils adopt programs that would teach “Civic Engineering for the Common Good.”

Civic engagement and staff workload.

We asked whether civic engagement added to the workload of staff. In the seminars, the answer was given as “in the short run, yes; in the long run, no.” We wanted to explore this response in greater depth; so we asked the eight public administrators we interviewed “Does doing civic engagement in your community increase the workload for staff (or others)? If so: In what ways? Does this differ in terms of long-term and short-term workload: What steps have you taken to deal with increased workload? Is this different in the larger cities in which you’ve worked?”

The responses from our eight interviewees were remarkably consistent with each other and with what the presenters in the seminars said. All said that civic engagement increased their workload, at least initially. Clay Holstine laughed at the question and said “Oh, yeah! If it wasn’t for ‘process,’ I’d be golfing on Wednesdays!” Most (Bosch, Gonzales, Keene, Knapp, and Martel) said that it doesn’t increase workload in the long run; Dave Knapp even said that it decreases workload over time. Nadine Levine spoke of “opportunity costs” of time spent on civic engagement taking away from other tasks, but noting that the increased workload has been integrated into staff assignments and that investments of time early in the process result in savings later.

Apparently, the issue involves the way staff duties are aligned as well as on the simple quantity of time allocated to civic engagement. We explored the ways in which public administrators handle the workload issue.

- Magda Gonzales noted that the increased workload early in a project avoids financial and time costs often incurred later in projects derailed by vocal

- opponents. Her city has hired an external contractor one day a week and makes her available to her staff as a consultant/trainer/facilitator in civic engagement.
- Clay Holstine hired a full-time Administrative Management Analyst, whose duties are described as “public outreach and information.” He invited this person to join him for his interview for this project and frequently referred to her work in championing civic engagement among the staff and public.
 - Jim Keene described a continuing process of exploring ways of engaging more than “the usual suspects” in civic engagement. He is working with several outside vendors to explore the use of digital technology, novel meeting designs, and scientific sampling techniques.
 - Dave Knapp relies primarily on neighborhood block coordinators, who have been trained by the city to see themselves as leaders of their communities and partners with the city. To support them, he has a half-time Community Relations Coordinator in his office.
 - Nadine Levine describes the additional workload as “just part of the process” and talked about ways in which she shifted staff assignments to include their civic engagement work. Her city has a group of “capital projects people” who are project oriented and whose assignments shift depending on what major projects the city is undertaking.
 - Several focused on “capacity building” for the staff.
 - David Bosch said that he weighs the increased training and workload demands against the “opportunity costs” of not doing civic engagement.
 - Pat Martel said that a different skill-set and a different orientation to the work is needed, and stressed the role of the city manager as champion. “...we really need to be able to provide skills to the staff. We got trained back in the day to do things differently than we have to do them today. We all have to learn and develop new skills to be responsive to the communities of today as opposed to 30 years ago when I started.”
 - Nadine Levine noted that difference between the “ivory tower best practice” of how a process can go and the reality. She stressed the importance for public administrators to experience and witness civic engagement practices. Skills can be taught, but there are some learnings that need to come from experience.

We wanted to know if workload implications differed in smaller and larger cities. Although all of the people we interviewed are currently working in small-to-midsized cities, several had worked in larger ones in the past: Mark Linder spent most of his career as a senior administrator in San Jose, the nation’s 10th largest city with over one million residents, and Pat Martel worked for many years in the slightly smaller city of San Francisco. Both gave answers that we interpret this way: at least during this period of transition from the city government-as-service-provider to the city-as-partner-with-citizens, civic engagement is easier in smaller cities. Mark Linder addressed the issue directly: “San Jose is a 7500 member staff organization; Cupertino is a 160 member staff organization, so it is easier to permeate the city manager’s philosophy throughout the organization here than it is there.”

CONCLUSION

We were surprised and delighted to find so many public administrators sufficiently interested in civic engagement that they would attend a seminar, so many with sophisticated understanding and experience in civic engagement, and an innovative nonprofit organization (Common Sense California) actively promoting civic engagement.¹³

Public administrators question the public's will or ability to communicate responsibly in civic engagement.

Everyone involved in this study had personal experience with – or could relate to descriptions of – instances of the public-acting-badly and civic engagement-gone-wrong. These experiences were personally painful and often degraded the quality of decision-making and policy implementation in the communities for which they felt responsible. More than half of the public administrators who came to the meeting were looking for information and/or encouragement in doing civic engagement.

We were surprised to find that their fears were primarily based on perceptions that the public would not act well, and that they attributed the public's bad behavior to their lack of ability or willingness to communicate in responsible ways, rather than to perceived apathy or lack of information. Five of the eight people we interviewed took the opportunity to add to our list of skills (item #9). As shown in Table 6, four of these additions had to do with communication skills among the public. Two respondents (perhaps not completely seriously) suggested requiring a course in communication skills as a prerequisite for members of the public to participate in civic engagement events.

Public administrators think of civic engagement in the context of their professional responsibilities.

Public administrators take their professional responsibilities seriously, and this sometimes results in a qualified support for citizens working among and for themselves. Even public administrators who support civic engagement in principle do so with a sense of being ultimately responsible for how their department or city is managed, and want to ensure that civic engagement projects are done well. Jim Keene, Mark Linder, and Pat Martel said that, from the perspective of public administrators, civic engagement means well-designed and well-managed processes, not a retreat from professional responsibility. The alternative, in cities other than the ones in which they now serve, was “chaos,” stalled projects and a demoralized staff.

¹³ Perhaps this finding is unique to California; at least some colleagues have suggested that they would not have found it in other areas of the United States. In addition, the interest in civic engagement is certainly affected by the desperate fiscal situation in which California local and regional governments find themselves. These agencies are having to make difficult decisions, and public administrators would rather make them in partnership with the public than suffer the consequences of being “the Decider” for unpopular decisions.

One of the examples of successful civic engagement projects given in the seminars shows a way of designing a process that calls forth “citizenship skills” in the public while protecting the integrity of the decision-making process. Securing an affordable yet sufficient water supply had become a polarizing issue in one city. The Council developed a plan that evoked fierce resistance by vocal groups in the community. The City Manager’s solution was to appoint a Task Force, carefully selected to include an equal number of participants from both sides of this polarized issue.¹⁴ The Task Force was given a “frame” or “set of parameters:” they were given the resources of a professional facilitator hired by the city; a date by which they must render a decision; requirements for an “acceptable” plan that specified amount of water, rates of water flow, and cost to the city to set up and run; a budget for their work; and a promise that any information they wanted would be given to them. They were told that if they unanimously supported a plan that met these requirements, it would be implemented rather than the plan the Council had drafted.

The story has a happy ending. The Task Force succeeded in unanimously drafting a proposal that met the specifications and the City Council adopted this plan rather than the one that the Council itself had previously prepared. This new plan was accepted without further opposition by the various interested groups and it was, in the professional judgment of city staff, a better plan than that originally developed by the Council.

In Table 3, this story is indexed as “framing” or “setting parameters,” and was frequently mentioned as one of the things participants found most helpful in the seminars.

Public administrators are reassured by the experience of their peers and adaptable examples.

First person testimony by respected peers and adaptable examples of successful civic engagement are the most powerful ways of assuaging public administrators’ legitimate fears. In addition to our observations during the seminars and analysis of evaluations, we reflected on the attendance at the seminars. A fifth seminar was scheduled but cancelled because of insufficient enrollment. Why were four seminars virtually “sold out” (based on the capacities of the room) while the fifth had less than ten persons enrolling? We were able to eliminate other variables, such as cost, location and scheduling conflicts, and came to believe that the crucial distinction was the absence, in this single instance, of a public endorsement by a respected local public administrator known for his/her experience with civic engagement.

Civic engagement involves “culture change” and “authenticity.”

A consistent theme in the advice given by more experienced to less experienced public administrators is that civic engagement is not just another tool in the toolbox or “aligning normal

¹⁴ Some judgment was used in selecting members of the Task Force. Some outspoken proponents of the various positions were deemed unlikely to participate well in a deliberative process and were not chosen.

administrative routines with democratic practices.” It involves, as Mark Linder put it, a “culture change” in the government and in its relationships with the community.

As part of this culture change, public administrators have to shift their perceptions of and relationships with the public. Several participants described this relationship as a “partnership” in which the public and government officials are all part of a “community.” There is also an important change in public managers’ concept of their professional responsibilities; Pat Martel described this as accepting the role of “facilitator rather than decision-maker” and Jim Keene described it as identifying and supporting “conversations that ... create stronger social and civic capital.”

There are inherent tensions in the idea of government sponsoring citizens to do what citizens need to do for themselves. When this tension is handled well, public administrators are acting, as Jim Keene put it, “authentically.” However, there are some well-known ways in which this tension can be handled poorly. Perhaps the most obvious is that of calling something “civic engagement” when it is not. There are ways of disguising attempts to persuade the public, to deflect attention, or to exhaust the public’s energies in a futile attempt to take control of the decisions that affect them.¹⁵

Public administrators have powerful motivations to support civic engagement.

Experienced public administrators have developed a powerful narrative about civic engagement, one that grows intrinsically from their professional roles and work. This story begins with the experience of being the “service-provider” to dissatisfied “customers” – the “vending machine” metaphor with which they resonated so strongly. They know what it is like to be kicked around by an angry public. The benefits of a “culture change” to a “partnership” with the public in which all parties are working for the good of the “community” are obvious. The story of a shift to being a “facilitator” or “designer” of “conversations that create stronger social and civic capital” is clearly embedded in the new relationship between “civic engagement” on their side and the roles and responsibilities of “citizens” on the part of the public. They understand that “civic engagement” is a necessary leadership skill in the current environment.

Public administrators know that they need to develop new skills for supporting civic engagement, but are not sure what those skills are.

There was a constant call from the participants for more about the “how” of civic engagement. After each seminar, the presenters and we discussed this, based on the results of the evaluation forms. Consistent with the advice of the CSC Task Force, we consistently pushed back, believing that at least part of the interest in “how” was based on an insufficiently rich understanding of “what” civic engagement is.

¹⁵ Many of these were found in the definitions of civic engagement in the applications for grants that Common Sense California chose not to fund.

That said, we were keenly interested in what participants told us they wanted, and in the judgment of experienced public administrators about what they needed. We were surprised that “skills in designing and facilitating civic engagement processes” emerged as the single most frequently identified factor that would contribute to more civic engagement in their communities (Tables 4 and 5). We were surprised again when this ranking was confirmed by the eight people we interviewed (Table 6) and showed up again and again, in descriptions of the public administrator as facilitator, designer, or manager of civic engagement processes in their communities.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

This project is limited to public administrators in local governments in California, and more specifically, those who we contacted through their participation in events sponsored by the nonprofit group Common Sense California in 2009. All of the eight persons interviewed as follow-up to the seminar evaluations are from the San Francisco Bay area. In an unintended limitation, most of the people we dealt with are from smaller communities rather than the major cities, and there was an unplanned geographic bias toward California’s western, coastal areas and to the central and northern regions. A clear line of further research would look to other parts of California, include the major cities, and begin to look at larger governmental units. With appropriate funding and institutional access, the study should be expanded to other states.

This study only included people who have at least some bias in favor of civic engagement, however they might understand that concept. A second line of further research would look at those who declined to attend the CSC seminars, or have chosen not to promote or permit civic engagement in their communities.

A more subtle limitation is the worldview and discourse in which public administrators work and in which this research is done. We chose to report our findings in the discourse of the public administrators rather than trying to force it into the discourse in which our original hypotheses were framed. Continued research might focus on the discursive properties of “administrator-talk,” identifying the values, taken-for-granted assumptions, and evaluative criteria embedded in the way they approach their jobs.

NEXT STEPS

The preceding section discussed limitations of this study and offered suggestions about how to do somewhat the same study better. In this section, we offer three suggestions for doing other things based on the findings of this study.

Inscribe the “civic engagement stories” told by public administrators.

In the “conclusion” section, we summarized the story of civic engagement told by experienced public administrators. This story, and variations of it, seems very useful. Further work should support elaborations of such stories from two groups.

Public administrators who are knowledgeable and experienced. Our research allowed us to summarize this story. Further research should be designed to help experienced public administrators refine and elaborate this story, drawing on the methods of narrative research.

Public administrators who are not knowledgeable and experienced. The design of this study did not permit us to summarize the story/stories of those who do not support or do not have any experience with civic engagement. Using narrative research methods, these stories should be inscribed. The applications for grants submitted to Common Sense California are one already-existing data-base, and could be supplemented by interviews with appropriate public administrators.

Develop and offer “Civic Engagement 201” seminars as a way of refining our knowledge of what skills public administrators need to support civic engagement.

The clearest finding of this project is the desire of public administrators to increase their skills in designing and managing civic engagement processes. And yet, when invited to identify these skills, the eight people we interviewed gave a wide variety of responses.

One key to interpreting this finding lies in the difference between the seminar participants as a group and the eight participants chosen for the interviews. Over half of the seminar participants said that they needed (and received) knowledge or reassurance about civic engagement; the persons we interviewed were already knowledgeable, committed and experienced. It’s possible that many seminar participants were saying that they, themselves, need to develop basic skills in design and facilitation while the interviewees, whom we stipulate as already having these skills, were talking about skills that other people – e.g., those on their staff or the members of the public with whom they interact – need to acquire.

Or it is possible that our interview probed what our respondents know that they do not know. In our work as external consultants for civic engagement, we’ve found that the skills required are not obvious. Just as civic engagement requires a culture shift and negotiation of new roles and relationships, there is a necessary paradigm shift in the understanding of communication and of the skills appropriate for this new culture/relationship/roles.¹⁶

The preceding two paragraphs are speculative; they are reasonable extrapolations from the data developed during this study. Further research should replace that speculation with an evidence-based development of a curriculum for “Civic Engagement 201” seminars.

Include the public in seminars about civic engagement.

¹⁶ In our work as external consultants helping with civic engagement projects, we’ve given considerable thought to this possibility. K. Pearce (2002) described three levels of skills needed in civic engagement processes: in-the-moment facilitation skills, designing meetings, and designing and managing multi-meeting processes. W.B. Pearce (2008) described some of the “new repertoire” of communication skills that result when we think of communication as a way of negotiating roles and relationships, not just transmitting information from one place to another.

Perhaps the most glaring limitation of this study is the asymmetry between the finding that relationships between public administrators and the public are crucial and the method of data collection, which, with a single and unplanned exception, excluded members of the public. Our recommendation to include the public seems obvious, but will involve sophisticated conceptual and methodological designs.

In research. There are research designs that can study relationship-building processes and interactional processes between the public and public administrators. These methodologies should be used to trace the patterns of communication in which, as Matt Leighninger put it, “new roles and relationships are negotiated.” Among the many opportunities for such studies are the communities to which Common Sense California made grants.

In training. What would happen if the “Civic Engagement 101” seminars had included members of the public as well as public administrators? Could these seminars be designed to leverage the different perspectives of these participants? Or should there be a parallel set of seminars for community leaders? The single self-identified “citizen” who attended the Napa seminar described the value derived as “learning how government officials think.” That’s not a bad beginning in the negotiation of new roles and relationships.


TABLE 1

Responses to the question “Are you more likely to promote civic engagement as a result of this seminar?”

	Cupertino seminar	San Luis Obispo seminar	Napa seminar
Yes, C.E. is new to me and this seminar gave me specific information	14	17	13
Yes, I’ve been nervous about C.E. and this seminar helped by reassuring me	8	19	20
No, I’m already promoting C.E., and will continue to do so	17	29	18
No, I’m still not a supporter of C.E.	0	0	0

TABLE 2

Slide shown during the seminars about the historical evolution of citizen/government relations



A Quick Historical Overview: Citizen/Gov't Relations

Time Period	Governmental Form	Public Involvement
Early History	Town Hall	Community Minded/Involved
1800's to 1930's	Political Bosses	Controlled by Bosses
1940's, 50's, 60's	City Fathers	Passive Acceptance
1970 to 2009	Vending Machine	Customer
2010 to future	Community as Partner	Citizen accountability

TABLE 3

Most frequent responses to the question “What was the most important thing you learned from this seminar?”

Santa Clara seminar	Cupertino seminar	San Luis Obispo seminar	Napa seminar
Letting go of control of the outcomes; focusing on the process of civic engagement (8)	Framework for effective civic engagement (5)	Transforming customers to citizens (24)	Transforming customers to citizens (16)
Transforming customers to citizens (7)	Transforming customers to citizens (4)	Importance of solving issues as a whole community (13)	Ways of designing strategies for civic engagement (10)
Examples of successful civic engagement in practice (7)	Setting the issue at the center of the process rather than the government as the center (4)	Examples of successful civic engagement in practice (11)	Collaborating with citizens (8)
Clarification of what civic engagement is and is not (6)	Asking stakeholders what they are willing to do (4)	Hope (5)	Framing/setting parameters and letting citizens work within them (6)
Ways of designing strategies for civic engagement (5)	Importance of solving issues as a whole community (4)	Setting parameters and letting citizens work within them (5)	

Entries are the names of themes; the parenthetical numbers are the frequencies with which participants in the seminars mentioned those themes.

The question was open-ended. Some respondents wrote several comments, others only one or none. In this table, the unit of analysis is the comment, whether one of several by one respondent or as the only comment provided. The authors did a thematic analysis after each seminar that was part of the data on which revisions were made to the subsequent seminar; as a result, the seminars evolved. For example, the Napa seminar had considerably more information about “ways of designing strategies for civic engagement” than did the Santa Clara seminar. Despite this, there are strong similarities in the results.

TABLE 4

Responses to the question: “What is needed if your community is to do more civic engagement?”

	Ranked first	Ranked second	Ranked third	Ranked fourth
Increased funding	21	15	23	54
More confidence in civic engagement processes	44	26	29	18
More knowledge about civic engagement processes	46	28	33	15
Increased skills in designing and facilitating civic engagement processes	65	42	27	5

After the first seminar, this question was added to the evaluation form. These data are only from the seminars in Cupertino, San Luis Obispo, and Napa. Approximately two-thirds of participants completed the form, but not all respondents rated all four options. A total of 176 participants indicated their first choice.

TABLE 5

Responses to the question “What is needed if your community is to do more civic engagement?”
by participants in each seminar

	Cupertino seminar	San Luis Obispo Seminar	Napa seminar
Increased funding	4 th (4)	4 th (11)	4 th (6)
More confidence in civic engagement processes	3 rd (11)	2 nd (18)	2 nd (tie) (15)
More knowledge about civic engagement processes	2 nd (12)	3 rd (17)	1 st (17)
Increased skills in designing and facilitating civic engagement processes	1 st (19)	1 st (31)	2 nd (tie) (15)

The numbers in parentheses in this table indicate the number of respondents in the indicated seminar who ranked the item on the left as “first,” or most important, in answer to the question in the title of this table. The ordinal numbers in the cells of this table indicate how each of the items on the left compared to the others in terms of the number of respondents who ranked it “first.”

TABLE 6

Rankings of skills most important for public administrators who promote and facilitate civic engagement

	Bosch	Gonzalez	Holstine	Keene	Knapp	Levin	Linder	Martel	Rank
Attitudes toward public	1	4	1	5	8	2	3	1	2 nd (3.1)
Speaking and listening	2	5	4	6	4	3	2	2	3 rd (3.5)
Designing meetings	4	3	6	2	7	5	5	6	6 th (4.8)
Facilitating meetings	7	2	7	3	2	6	4	5	5 th (4.5)
Designing/facilitating C. E. processes	3	1	2	1	5	4	1	4	1 st (2.6)
Working with external vendors about C. E.	9	7	5	8	9	8	7	8	8 th (7.6)
Convincing other staff to support C. E.	5	6	3	4	6	1	6	3	4 th (4.25)
Gathering/reporting information during C. E.	6	8	8	7	3	7	8	7	7 th (6.75)

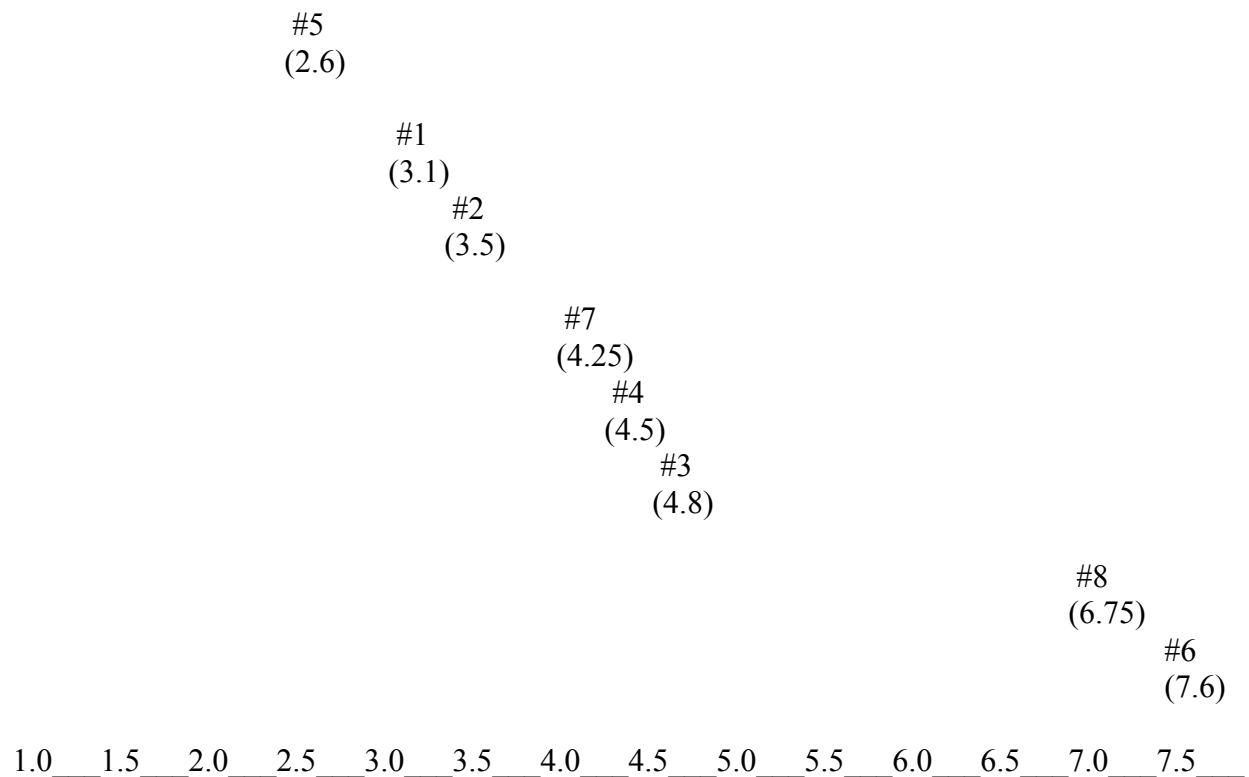
Numbers beneath the names of the interviewees are their rankings of the eight skills listed in the left column. The right-most column contains the over-all rankings of the skills. The numbers in parentheses are the average rankings of each skill.

Five interviewees wrote in additional skills:

- Bosch ranked as #8: a public skilled in civic engagement;
- Keene ranked as #4B: skill in supporting citizen-to-citizen dialogue and community-building;
- Knapp ranked as #1: skill in getting members of the public to listen to each other;
- Linder did not rank but cited: “adaptive leadership” thinking in which leaders turn work back to the community; and evaluating C. E. processes and making adjustments; and,
- Martel ranked “as #2 or #3:” skills for citizen participants.

TABLE 7

Distribution of average ranking of most important skills in civic engagement



In this chart, the skills are indicated by their number on the list ranked by the interviewees (#5 is the fifth skill on the list) and the parenthetical numbers are the average ranks of the numbered skill. Four clusters are identified: #5 is in a cluster by itself; #1 and #2 are the second most important cluster; #7, #4, and #3 comprise the middle-ranked cluster; and #8 and #6 comprise the least most important skills.

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