

# A CALL TO SCHOLARS AND TEACHERS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, PUBLIC POLICY, PLANNING, POLITICAL SCIENCE AND RELATED FIELDS

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We, the members of the Collaborative Democracy Network (CDN)\*, believe the emerging practices and models for deliberative and participatory governance are important new developments for the health of democracy. Intergovernmental and inter-sectoral networks bound by specific resource constraints are fundamentally changing the historic nature of public policy and administration at the local, state, national, and international levels. Integrating citizens into policy and decision-making processes is a major challenge for governance in the 21st century. We call on scholars and teachers in public administration, public policy, planning, political science, sociology, communication and related disciplines to meet this challenge through their research and teaching.

## **1. Deliberative and participatory processes are important new methods of governance.**

Broadly defined, deliberative and participatory governance refer to infusing legitimate government decision making with the reasoned discussion and collective judgment of citizens. These processes have also been termed collaborative democracy and collaborative governance.

Deliberative and participatory governance processes have been employed during all stages of the policy process, from planning and policy making, to implementation, compliance, and enforcement. They occur at all levels of government and civil society as governments, business, advocacy groups, non governmental organizations, and citizens seek to find new and better ways to approach the conflict-ridden process of public policy-making. Examples of processes include focus groups, study circles,

roundtables, collaborative policy-making, consensus building, new forms of town meetings, citizen juries and assemblies, issue forums, participatory budgeting, deliberative polling, choice work dialogues, cooperative management bodies, design charrettes, and other partnership arrangements.

Deliberative and participatory governance processes have characteristics that separate them from traditional “aggregative” governance (the counting of votes to select preferences). These include active citizen participation, sustained periods of deliberation, use and reliance on networks of organizations, collaboration among private, public, and non-profit organizations, a focus on civic learning, efforts to empower individuals, and efforts to foster individual exercise of voice. They aspire to reasoned discussion or discourse among citizens who come together as equals in a non-coercive environment to solve public problems. These processes differ from traditional public participation such as public testimony during an open hearing. Traditional governance processes limit the participation of individuals, organizations, and groups during policy and decision-making. An agency may conduct a public hearing after it has already made basic decisions about a policy proposal. An administrative law judge may limit what witnesses can say. Deliberative processes emphasize joint learning over one-way flows of information.

These processes vary on a number of salient dimensions. These include the degree to which they include the general public, occur in a public space, foster genuine deliberation, privilege different forms of discourse, are empowered by

government, and focus on creating policy specific outcomes. For example, they may include selected stakeholders with communities of interest or place deliberating in a private, confidential forum, or they may involve a cross-section of the electorate in a large-scale, public process. Smaller, more informal processes may focus on relationship building and storytelling to build trust. Larger public processes may involve more predetermined structure and favor logical, rational discourse over relationship building and may aim to provide specific policy recommendations to government or seek to build civic capacity and a shared community vision.

These processes also vary in the degree to which they use consensus-building and conflict resolution skills and processes, such as mediation and facilitation. Conflict is intrinsic to policy and decision making. As the number of participants in decision making increases, so too does the number of positions, interests, values, and points of view. During deliberation, participants consider multiple points of view, think critically about problems and potential solutions, and try to forge collective decisions that will serve the common interest. These processes may use conflict resolution skills to assist participants in expressing their preferences and uncovering and clarifying conflicts, as well as in reconciling differences or seeking integrative decisions.

## **2. We Need a Stronger Research and Education Agenda on Deliberative and Participatory Governance.**

Many scholars are actively working on deliberative and participatory governance, but we need to do more. Scholars and teachers need to work closely with practitioners to expand and enhance our research and curricula. A research and teaching

agenda should simultaneously enhance theory and practice, bridging the gaps between the two. The existing work is scattered across numerous disciplines. There are as yet no unifying frameworks for the study and teaching of deliberative and participatory governance. Building these should be a priority.

**Research.** There are many major research questions: Do deliberative and participatory governance processes achieve their objectives? If so, how? If not, why? Starting points for research and theory development include:

- Connections to policy making. How do these processes differ based on at what point in the policy process they occur and on the goals for their use? Are they most effective to help citizens clarify preferences early in policy-development or to help them choose among concrete policy options later? How does context shape process? Which processes are most appropriate at various stages of the policy process? At what point(s) during the public policy cycle are deliberative and participatory governance processes most effective? How do processes differ in terms of participation, representation, outcomes, effectiveness, etc. when used at various stages of the policy cycle?
- Process quality. Are the processes genuinely deliberative? Are there various levels of deliberation? What factors affect the quality of deliberation? What are the experiences of participants before, during, and after the process? How does scale impact process?
- Equality and representation. To what degree do participants have true equality in terms of knowledge, participation, power, and authority during the processes? What factors affect the decision of individuals to participate? How does this affect representation, diversity, and inclusion with respect to the full range of affected interests,

including latent interests? Who loses in these processes? How do these processes affect the discretion, power, and control of administrators and other public decision-makers?

- Evaluation and impact. What are the policy outcomes from these processes? Are outcomes substantively different? Do these processes enhance democratic accountability, deliberative capacity, civic learning, and citizen participation? How do these processes affect participants' perceptions about the legitimacy of policy, the policy process, and government? How and how effectively are decisions from these processes translated into real action? Are outcomes stable and sustainable over time? How and how effectively do deliberative bodies monitor the implementation of decisions?

- Institutionalization. When are collaborative processes appropriate for public decision making? The choice must depend on societal values and on the findings of research on the consequences of using collaborative methods. We need to know also what the current institutional obstacles to collaboration are. What steps need to be taken to integrate collaborative methods into public decision making? What steps are needed to institutionalize these methods so their use, when appropriate, can become a norm?

**Education.** Our curricula must prepare the next generation of leaders to establish the public spaces for deliberation. We must train students to better function in the new topography of public affairs and to give primary attention to the functioning of democracy. We must build a curriculum that:

- Moves beyond the passive model of citizens as consumers and evaluators of services, to a perspective that seeks active citizen participation in the design, implementation, and enforcement of policy.

- Educates those who work in governance on how to establish public spaces in which citizens can exercise voice and work with others to reconcile differences, to learn tolerance, to achieve solutions to problems, and to envision the collective good.
- Prepares students to create institutions and infrastructures that allow for the systematic, multi-directional flow of information between institutions, administrators, officials, and citizens.
- Nourishes the ethos of community and democracy and strengthens an open, positive, and collaborative civic culture to reduce the distrust and cynicism that currently pervades the public's beliefs about bureaucracy and government.

## Conclusion

Colleges and universities can and should play a key role in developing our body of research and our teaching to address deliberative and participatory governance. There are already many centers for research and practice nationally, many of them based within colleges and universities. There is active collaboration between the academy and communities of practice, but there could be more. The academic community can inform work on the ground and practice can ground the work of the academy. Academics can and should teach the next generation of leaders how to structure and use these processes. The public administrators, planners, and policy makers of the future need these skills.

We call on scholars and teachers in public administration, public policy, planning, political science, sociology, communication, and related fields to build our body of knowledge about and the capacity of our graduates to use deliberative and participatory governance.

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