

The reported death was premature. It is hard to kill a valid process. Citizen participation is alive and well, but has surfaced in many different ways.

Our speakers will address citizen participation and their experience with it as staff members. You will note that the forms of participation are as varied as the agencies they advise.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE AMERICAN FEDERAL SYSTEM, by Dr. Bruce D. McDowell, Senior Analyst, Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations

The American federal system of government is based fundamentally, but not exclusively, upon the concept of representative democracy. That is, we generally elect our leaders and then expect them to govern.

However, there are two significant departures from this general concept. The first is that we reserve certain important opportunities for direct democracy: referendum, initiative, and recall. The second is that we increasingly have developed formalized methods of influencing the actions of our elected representatives and the administrators who work for them, in between elections. It is this latter set of continuing influence mechanisms that is generally referred to as "citizen participation."

The Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) prefers to encompass all the electoral options, and the formal influence techniques, and even the more informal or outside-the-system influences, in its definition of citizen participation. Using this expanded definition in its 1978 study of citizen participation, 1/ ACIR identified 31 different means by which citizens get involved with their governments, and eight different purposes for this involvement. Some of the purposes are strictly informational, while others actively support and constructively seek to improve governmental activities, and still others resist or attempt to overthrow current directions in government activities. Figure 1 lists the 31 forms of citizen participation identified by ACIR.

Figure 1

FORMS OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

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| <p>I. Organizational Forms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citizen Groups Special Interest Groups Specific Program Clientele Groups Official Citizen Committees | <p>II. Individual Forms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voting Being a Program Client Making Statements Working in Public Projects Campaigning/Lobbying Administrative Appeals Going to Court Demonstrations |
| <p>III. Forms of Information Dissemination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open Government Meetings/Speaker Bureaus Conferences Publications Mass Media Displays/Exhibits Mail Advertising/Notices Hot Lines Drop-in Centers Correspondence Word of Mouth | <p>IV. Forms of Information Collection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hearings Workshops/Meetings Conferences Consultation Government Records Nongovernment Documents Participant Observers Surveys |

ACIR, found a wide range of techniques being used at all levels of government -- federal, state, local, and regional -- and recommended that this broad approach be continued and enhanced. In short, ACIR believes that voting, by itself, is not enough to maintain responsive and responsible democracy in the American federal system.

The Role of Advisory Committees

The ACIR study found advisory committees being used at all levels of American government. There are thousands of them throughout the United States; some are temporary and some have continuing roles. Many have long histories; others are new.

Perhaps the most significant finding about advisory committees in ACIR's report was that, of all the citizen participation techniques we

identified, committees were required more often by federal grant programs than any other technique -- even more often than public hearings. Of 155 such programs requiring participation in the year 1978, 89 required advisory committees. And most of these requirements had been imposed since 1965.

Although ACIR has not updated its study since 1978, it is clear that advisory committees still play an important part in meeting federal-aid requirements. For example, a just-release study by the General Accounting Office (GAO) reports that citizen advisory committees generate the largest number of citizen ideas that are ultimately reflected in governmental decisions made under the Reagan-era block grants enacted in 1981, and these committees provide more satisfaction for citizens than any other technique being used. 2/ These block grant committees most often included individual citizens and service providers. Somewhat fewer committees had members representing special skills and interest groups, and a much smaller number included governmental officials.

Advantages of Advisory Committees

Advisory Committees have a number of advantages, as well as some disadvantages. The major advantages are:

- As representative bodies -- similar to legislative bodies -- advisory committees are easily adaptable to any size and level of government.
- They also can be designed to concentrate on specified topics and to bring special expertise or knowledge to bear on them, either through their numbers or through their focused fact finding and deliberative activities.
- In addition, these committees can be used to establish continuity of citizen involvement throughout a project, or even from project-to-project, thereby avoiding one of the biggest defects of citizens participation -- namely, involving citizens only in the latter stages of a project after most of the important assumptions, research, and proposals have been established.
- Advisory committees also offer the opportunity for citizens and governmental officials to work together closely in a way that develops mutual respect between them and can yield better-informed public policies.
- Finally, this two-way communication with the committee allows officials to get a better "feel" for the emotions, nuances, and reasons behind citizen views, and to explore alternative means of satisfying citizen needs and preferences in a give-and-take exchange not possible through many other citizen participation techniques.

Disadvantages of Advisory Committees

Despite these advantages, advisory committees, by themselves, do not meet all citizen participation needs. In fact, they can produce misleading and dangerous advice if relied upon too heavily or used carelessly. Here are some of the problems with advisory committees:

◦ The composition and credibility of the committees go hand-in-hand. Establishing the committee has the effect of anointing the "chosen" few who will have special influence on public policy. The days are gone when appointing a blue-ribbon committee is always the smartest thing to do. Sometimes that still may be best, but often a more cross-sectional approach may be more appropriate. Members with special expertise, or representing special interests, also may need to be included. And, if the committee is to be productive, it usually will have to be of limited size. Inevitably, then, many potentially helpful members will be left out. In the final analysis, a biased membership, or the perception of bias in the appointment process, may seriously damage the committee's credibility and impair the usefulness of its work. Perhaps several committees may be needed in combination to serve different purposes and to adequately represent diverse interests.

◦ Advisory committees may be expensive to operate -- especially if several are used and if they are well-staffed over a long period of time, and if the expenses of committee members (including lost wages) are reimbursed.

◦ The longer and more closely these committees work with the government, and the more fully staffed they are, the more likely they are to be perceived as being coopted by the government. Such a perception can damage their credibility. This raises the issue of independence. Should advisory committees have their own staffs and budgets, plus independent access to information, so they can play a "watchdog" role? If so, will that damage their relationships with the government they are advising? This is a dilemma that needs to be confronted.

◦ Routinely using advisory committees to delay action by requesting endless re-studies of issues also may damage their credibility.

Finally, some advisory committees may seek powers of their own, perhaps including the power of subpoena, power to publish independent reports, and power to make limited program decisions. Such efforts may grow out of a history of frustration if advisory committee recommendations are frequently ignored or overruled without explanation. If not redressed, these frustrations may lead citizens to abandon their advisory roles in favor of direct political, judicial, or civil disobedience activities.

Keys to Effective and Satisfying Citizen Participation

I conclude from my research at ACIR, and from over 25 years of practical experience in government, that there are three keys to successful and satisfying citizen participation programs:

- ° First, governments need to adopt the philosophy that citizens are experts, just as much as any other type of expert. No one knows better than the citizens themselves what problems they are experiencing and what remedies would be acceptable to them. Just as we expect a doctor to ask the patient to describe symptoms, and then insist that the doctor explain the options for healing before prescribing drastic surgery, we should expect government to listen carefully to its citizens' concerns and reactions.
- ° Second, advisory committees should be used only as one element in a balanced program of citizen participation including such elements as open public meetings, freedom of information, full media coverage, surveys, hearings, conferences, and more.
- ° Finally, citizen participation takes time, money, and effort. It's neither free nor painless. Government will get what it pays for. A half-hearted program will not generate a first-class citizen response. Only a substantial commitment of public resources and patience will yield the desired results.

1/ ACIR, Citizen Participation in the American Federal System, Report A-73 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government printing Office, 1980).

2/ U.S. General Accounting Office, Public Involvement in Block Grant Decisions: Multiple Opportunities Provided, But Interest Groups Have Mixed Reactions to States' Efforts, Report HRD 85-20 (Washington, DC; December 28, 1984).

CITIZENS ADVISORY COUNCIL - A NEW EXPERIENCE FOR PAT, by Michael J. Scanlon and presented by Larry D. Bowin, Port Authority of Allegheny County.

The Port Authority of Allegheny County -- popularly known as PAT -- has operated since 1964 in the greater Pittsburg area, providing transit service to an area of approximately 730 square miles and a population of about 1.4 million persons. On a typical weekday, PAT transports more than 300,000 riders.

The area served by PAT until a few years ago was one of the world's leading centers of steel-making and related heavy industry. Today it is an area in transition -- from blue collar to white collar. Although the