CITIZEN-DRIVEN ADMINISTRATION

Civic Engagement in the United States

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This chapter addresses recent innovations in civic engagement that impinge most directly on administration, hence the title, "Citizen-Driven Administration." It develops an argument that the most important new forms of citizen involvement have occurred at the local level. The chapter first describes the historical context within which contemporary approaches to civic engagement in governance can be understood. It then adopts what may be a controversial position, by identifying local institutional reforms as the most significant recent innovations that actually drive administration, and presents the Los Angeles neighborhood council system as a major case study of these new approaches.

These institutional reforms are viewed as reflecting "citizen-centered" civic engagement. Particular engagement techniques that facilitate deliberation, either face-to-face or electronic in form, and collaboration of various kinds, are then viewed as necessary instruments for the effective implementation of local institutional reforms, but of lesser importance when used in isolation in an episodic fashion.[1] The chapter concludes with recommendations for moving forward with the next step in civic engagement development by linking local governance with state and federal government agencies. It intentionally avoids a more obvious approach of presenting an introductory overview of citizen participation or developing a "catalogue" of current techniques for deliberation and collaboration, but instead identifies three particularly innovative ones that may have relevance for advancing the effectiveness of citizen-centered civic engagement through the new institutional reforms at the local level.[2]

CITIZENS, GOVERNANCE, AND THE CONSTITUTION

The United States was founded with two minds with respect to the role of the citizenry in governance.[3] The perspective that gained dominance initially was that advanced by the Federalists and embodied in the U.S. Constitution. It provided for minimal direct participation by ordinary people in the formation of public policy, allowing the popular direct election of only one member of the House of Representatives. The Federalist position was based on a largely negative view of human nature summed up well in *Federalist Paper* 10. There humans are characterized as driven by passions, conflict, and self-interest. The Federalists argued that, given this kind of human nature, the likely result of direct participation by the mass of citizens would be the formation of destructive factions that would make governance difficult if not impossible. Consequently, the process of governing had to be buffered from direct influence by the citizenry.

The other mind with respect to civic engagement that was operative during the founding era was that of the Anti-Federalists, who held a very different view of human nature as being capable of civic virtue, cooperation, and rational deliberation. From their orientation, citizens should be as directly involved in governance as possible since participation was seen as the way citizens were developed in terms of both skills and regard for the larger civic good. Thus, the Anti-Federalists argued for the importance of keeping government local and close to the citizenry, where participation could occur more naturally and frequently.

The Federalists carried the day in the constitutional struggle, but not without concessions to the Anti-Federalist concern over centralized government removed from direct popular control. The first ten amendments to the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, were adopted to appease Anti-Federalist concerns. These two broad perspectives have remained with us throughout our history. The continuing interaction that has occurred during the past two hundred years between these two views of human nature and the role of the people in governance has had the effect of democratizing our Constitution and governance process. It has done so mainly by increasing the breadth of electoral participation to include African American men, women, and people eighteen years of age and older. Along with greater electoral inclusiveness we have gained the direct election of the U.S. Senate by the citizenry and the abolishment of the poll tax, which presented an impediment to low-income voters, especially African Americans in the South.

However, beneath the formal participation structures of government, which were focused almost exclusively on voting, there have been since the colonial era ongoing processes of direct self-government at the local levels. Alexis de Tocqueville (2007) described a web of voluntary associations that was a mechanism for combining the relative weakness of individuals in an egalitarian society into aggregations of power that could effectively solve problems, assert needs and preferences, and engage government. Tocqueville noted that these associations were the training grounds for citizenship and civic competence. In them, people learned how to associate their interests with those of others and to cooperate to achieve common goals, either through mutual self-help or by petitioning government. From the colonial era to the present, there have been myriad other self-organizing efforts including the committees of correspondence through which the Revolutionary War was organized, the Underground Railroad, which aided the escape of slaves from the South, militia organizations, communal societies, religious organizations, crime-prevention associations, good-government organizations, volunteer fire departments, and labor unions, among others.

Impetus for this kind of civil society participation in governance came not only from the Anti-Federalist impulses that were kept alive among us, but also from similar perspectives reflected in the democratic practices of Puritan communities that evolved into the New England town meetings, our tradition of voluntary associations noted by Tocqueville that were particularly necessary in frontier settlements, and the stream of ideas that constitute the Jeffersonian tradition of self-governance.

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND PROGRESSIVE REFORM

The watershed changes for these forms and traditions of civic engagement came at the end of the nineteenth century and in the early decades of the twentieth century. During that era, the American Progressive reform movement began the pivotal process of radically transforming the administrative institutions of government based on the norms of professionalism, efficiency, scientific management, and administrative management. The Progressives also accomplished constructive reforms of the electoral process that established the referendum, recall, and initiative in many states. One result was the creation of more opportunities for citizens to influence the electoral

process, but nothing beyond it that addressed the growing influence of the administrative agencies of government in the lives of the people.

In fact, a direct result of the Progressive institutional reforms was the creation of barriers against the influence of the citizenry on the day-to-day administration of government. In the Progressive program of reform, citizens were expected to vote for representatives, use the three new mechanisms for changing laws and elected representatives, but otherwise leave the administration of government services to the professional experts and their "scientific" methods. At a time when the de facto power of the bureaucracy was increasing dramatically, citizens were increasingly confronted by a technical professional role definition of the administrator that precluded the need for their lay input. Coupled with an emphasis on the "scientific" design of bureaucratic administrative organizations, this professionalization of administration established formidable barriers to anything like sustained civic engagement. There were countercurrents throughout this era moving toward more direct citizen engagement, particularly reflected in the work of Mary Parker Follett, most specifically in *The New State* ([1918] 1965), but they were unable to overcome the strong tide of Progressive reform.

CITIZENS AND THE PROFESSIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE STATE

By the 1960s, it had become obvious to many people in our increasingly diverse American society that their interests were not being addressed adequately, either by the professional experts or by elected officials. Interest groups had been identified by American pluralist thought in the early twentieth century as the best way to channel the interests of citizens to government in a complex, large-scale society such as the United States (Bentley 1908; Truman 1951). However, by the 1960s, Theodore Lowi (1969) and others (Parenti 1974) began to critique this thesis for its lack of support from the research on interest groups. By that time, the trend was toward single-interest groups with very narrow foci representing an elite with the power and financial resources to create effective lobbying organizations. During the 1960s and 1970s, the diverse interests in American society became more and more assertive—even aggressive—in relation to government at all levels, especially the federal government. The result was that the Progressive legacy of the professionalized administrative state came under fire.

Within the academy, the Progressive approach to the administrative role was also challenged by a series of authors beginning in the 1940s and with considerable force by the New Public Administration, which emerged during the late 1960s and early 1970s (Frederickson 1971; Marini 1971). The notion that a science of administration was possible was largely dismissed, and the assumption that administration could operate free of politics and value commitments was aggressively challenged. Also, the myth of the public administrator as simply following orders from the political policy makers was dispelled. It became increasingly clear that public administrators were exercising considerable discretion through their policy proposals, through participation in the policy-formation process, and most of all in the implementation of policy (Aberbach 1981).

As citizens experienced an inability to understand and influence the professionalized bureaucracy in the 1960s, frustration boiled over into action. Having been indoctrinated into thinking they lived in a democracy that provided government of, by, and for the people, citizens began to realize that what scholars were calling the "administrative state" was anything but democratic (Waldo 1948). Demonstrations, protests, civil disorder (sometimes involving widespread violence), and litigation combined to create a turbulent and uncertain environment in cities across the nation.[4]

The mass-based community organization movement launched by Saul Alinsky of the Industrial Areas Foundation in Chicago during the 1940s found fertile ground for its approach to civic en-

gagement in the turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s. Alinsky's approach involved the use of conflict to create change in government, almost exclusively at the local level (Alinsky 1969, 1971). He worked mainly with the poor and dispossessed using money that came largely from churches. Alinsky sought to identify communities that had little economic or political power and help them mobilize around the latent conflict between themselves and the power structure of society at all levels. His strategy was to raise latent conflict to the surface and focus explicitly on the adversarial relationship between low-income people and specific leaders in government, including both politicians and public administrators. He assumed that cooperation with government was not desirable because poor people would always be co-opted in the process. Behind Alinsky's approach was his experience in the labor movement. Having written a biography of United Mine Workers leader John L. Lewis (1949), Alinsky was attempting to apply a labor-organizing model to low-income communities.

This adversarial or conflict-based approach to engaging government typified much of the civic engagement action and theory during the 1960s and 1970s. Regardless of whether it followed Alinsky's theory, strategies, and tactics, the dominant view of civic engagement during this era was that power was a zero-sum game. For the citizenry to have more power, government would have to have less. It was assumed that government would never willingly relinquish power, so aggressive adversarial advocacy was believed to be necessary. This was true of the civil rights movement, the anti–Vietnam War movement, the student movement, the women's movement, and the environmental movement, as well as the community organization movement. The adversarial orientation of this time period can be clearly seen in Sherry Arnstein's (1969) classic article, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," which became one of the central reference documents for many pursuing the study of civic engagement during these years. In that essay, Arnstein presents a ladder model of citizen participation that comprises eight rungs, with "manipulation" and "therapy" at the bottom characterized as "nonparticipation." "Citizen control" and "delegated power" are at the top and identified as "degrees of citizen power" (217). The assumption clearly and starkly laid out by Arnstein, both in her model and in the accompanying text, was that power is an equation in which government loses power when citizens gain power.

The community organizing of the kind typified by Alinsky began to reveal its limits during the 1970s. Neighborhoods were small cells in the body politic and had limited power when they confronted citywide interests. One might well organize a neighborhood effectively and still lose over and over again in the contest for political power in the large urban centers of America. Poor people were always in the minority and regularly lost when confronting majority interests and power. Adversarial tactics might yield limited results for particular communities, but for anything involving larger scales when the interests of the poor and the affluent collided, the poor tended to lose.[5]

During the 1970s, a shift became evident that had begun during the later years of the War on Poverty of the 1960s: the increased adoption of legislative mandates for citizen participation at the local level, mostly embedded in federal statutes. The response of federal elected officials to growing and more aggressive demands for participation, at all levels of government, was to divert political pressure away from themselves and onto public administrators. They accomplished this strategy by writing into legislation specific mandates for the inclusion of citizens in the implementation of federal programs. Politicians were able to tell the activists that they had responded to their demands by adopting 155 federal mandates for citizen participation by the end of the Carter administration (Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations 1979). It was up to local public administrators receiving federal money to carry out those requirements.

These government-initiated, largely unfunded mandates worked with varying degrees of ef-

fectiveness. All suffered from a lack of resources for their implementation, and administrators' logical response was to comply at the minimally required level so as not to drain resources otherwise allocated for the operation of their programs. Administrators were put in a bind in which their most reasonable way out was to do just enough to comply with the legal mandates but not enough to make them work well (Cooper 1979).

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN THE 1980S

The 1980s reflected yet another shift, marked by the election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency. The noise in the streets had died down, the war in Vietnam had ended after the United States and its allies in South Vietnam were defeated in 1975, and the nation had been lulled into a more passive mode. Reagan appeared to care little for citizen participation beyond the voting booth and moved quickly to disarm those few in Washington, D.C., who were making serious efforts to carry out the legal mandates established during the Carter years. Creighton (1995), for example, describes how the Interagency Council on Citizen Participation was summarily shut down and its files seized by federal agents.

One finds a relative hiatus in the literature on citizen participation throughout the 1980s. It is not that nothing was written on the subject during this decade, but the diminution in the flow of literature and federal government activity is noteworthy (Creighton 1995). The action shifted during these years back to neighborhoods, self-help, and local government. Boyte's (1980) "backyard revolution" revealed a lot of nearly invisible activity at the small scale of neighborhoods in the form of mutual self-help, beautification, arts, and recreation organizations.

FROM GOVERNMENT TO GOVERNANCE: INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

A sea change in approaches to civic engagement emerged about twenty years ago and launched what remains the major innovation through institutional reform at the local level. The numerous new techniques of deliberation and collaboration since that time may be seen as providing support in its development and implementation. Toward the end of the 1980s, one began to hear an occasional voice that referred to governance as differentiated from government. Among the earliest of those voices was that of Harlan Cleveland, who argued that what we need more of is governance, not government (Cleveland 1988). Within the United States and in the international arena, this distinction was articulated with increasing clarity, arguing that the process of governing should no longer be understood as the sole business of government but as involving the interaction of government, business, and the nonprofit (or nongovernmental) sectors. The term *collaborative governance* is now one of the prominent topics in the public administration literature.[6]

Reflecting the governance approach, during these years new experiments in institutional innovation began to occur here and there across the nation between cities and their neighborhoods. The power of focusing on institutional design, clearly demonstrated by the Progressive reformers, was being redirected into the hands of citizens rather than operating exclusively under the control of professional experts (Cooper 1984). Officially recognized neighborhood council organizations emerged during the late 1980s and early 1990s in places such as Portland, Oregon; Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota; Dayton, Ohio; and Birmingham, Alabama. This general approach to institutional innovation was first articulated in Milton Kotler's (1969) *Neighborhood Government: The Local Foundations of Political Life.* In that work, Kotler called for the creation of legal jurisdictions at the neighborhood level that would function as units of government with

certain specified authority and powers. Prompted by the current interest in similar approaches to reconnecting citizens with governance in a more formal manner, Kotler's book was reissued in 2005 (see Cooper 2005).

Berry, Portney, and Thomson's (1993) *The Rebirth of Urban Democracy* documents and evaluates some of these innovative governance experiments in a piece of exemplary social science research carried out over several years. The authors studied five cities that have neighborhood council systems: Portland, Oregon; Dayton, Ohio; St. Paul, Minnesota; Birmingham, Alabama; and San Antonio, Texas. These were matched with ten control cities (two cities each) that did not have neighborhood council systems. Data were gathered on all of these cities using multiple rounds of surveys, interviews, and observation. The key measurement tool employed for comparison was an "index of community participation" (ICP), which the authors constructed from five indicators of participation.

Rebirth reports extraordinarily rich findings from Berry, Portney, and Thomson's thorough and systematic research. They note that much of the research on citizen participation in governance has had a pessimistic tone that generally blames citizens for not really being interested in participation and denigrates their potential contributions. Berry and coauthors suggest that "social scientists have largely given up on participatory democracy" (212). Contrary to that negative posture, these researchers argue that their data "show that when administrators make a good-faith effort to make citizen participation work rather than trying to undermine it, the performance of public involvement programs is dramatically different from that described in the literature" (212). Contrary to conventional wisdom in the social sciences, these neighborhood council systems do not increase conflict, but actually reduce it. Particularly relevant to the general trend of growing distrust and alienation from government, the authors maintain that these "neighborhood associations defuse hostility rather than create it." Further, "both regular and marginal participants in neighborhood associations actually had higher feelings of efficacy than did comparable populations of activists in conventional community groups." Also, it is of crucial significance that although a large proportion of administrators observed that this kind of citizen participation did cause delay, "they overwhelmingly felt that the benefits outweighed the costs" (213). Specific statistical findings from this research indicate that greater tolerance for others is positively correlated with greater participation. This is largely attributed to the learning that occurs through participation that increases "the attitudes necessary to maintain a strong democracy" (231). One of the strongest positive relationships found was between participation and the development of a sense of community that was independent of socioeconomic status.

Assuming people are more likely to act in the governance process if they believe it will make a difference, Berry, Portney, and Thomson's findings on efficacy are of great importance. They studied both internal and external efficacy, the internal form having to do with *feeling* efficacious and the external with *objective* accomplishments. Their data show a clear and significant relationship between participation in the neighborhood councils and both forms of efficacy. Relevant to knowing how to act in order to be efficacious, these authors found "that participation in face-to-face activities is highly associated with increased knowledge of local governance" (274).

Finally, consistent with the importance of the new institutional innovations represented by neighborhood councils, the authors found that "the correlations between knowledge and the level of community participation are consistently higher in the more structured than in the less structured participation cities" (275). The establishment of new institutional structures for participation at the neighborhood level is of crucial importance since they appear to yield greater participation, which, in turn, reduces destructive conflict and produces greater efficacy and political knowledge. There appears to be no similar evidence for any innovations at the state and federal levels that have had such significant salutary effects.

This kind of civic institutional innovation has now spread to a number of American cities, including Seattle, Washington; Columbus and Dayton, Ohio; New York City; Portland, Oregon; Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota; Birmingham, Alabama; Los Angeles, California; and a number of others.[7]

THE CASE OF LOS ANGELES: A GRAND EXPERIMENT IN INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

An extended treatment of Los Angeles is included here because the governance reforms adopted there in a new city charter in 1999 represented a major step in the development of these neighborhood-level civic engagement institutions to larger-scale urban areas. The system established there was the first in a major metropolis that attempted to create formal links to communities intended primarily for participation in governance rather than the decentralized delivery of services. This innovation was inspired by the work of Berry, Portney, and Thomson and represents one of those relatively rare instances of social science scholarship leading directly to major changes in government.[8] Los Angeles had experienced growing sentiment for secession from the city by the San Fernando Valley, which was subsequently joined by Hollywood, and the Los Angeles harbor area that included San Pedro and Wilmington. These subareas of Los Angeles had felt for years that the city had gladly accepted their tax money but very reluctantly provided needed public services. They felt alienated from the distant city hall government and distrustful of its leaders. The idea of neighborhood councils that seemed to have worked well in the medium-sized cities studied by Berry and colleagues emerged in the hearings on creating a new city charter as the item that attracted the most intense and widespread interest among residents of the city. Members of the charter reform commissions and the city council saw the creation of neighborhood councils as a way to head off the secession movements.

With broad support, a new charter was adopted by the voters in June 1999 mandating that a citywide system of neighborhood councils be organized from the grass roots up, allowing for considerable variation in form, structure, and size of the councils. People in each community were required to identify their own boundaries, design their own bylaws, adopt their own systems of financial accountability, and then request certification from the city Board of Neighborhood Commissioners. This appears to be the most formalized experiment in providing civic engagement at the grass roots that has been officially connected to the governance process. One requirement imposed from above is that each of the eighty-nine neighborhood councils must include all stakeholders within its community—that is, those who live, work, or own property within the specified area.[9] Each council initially received $50,000 annually to help support its work; that has now been lowered to $45,000 under the pressure of the current financial crisis.[10]

The Los Angeles neighborhood council system reflects the governance perspective of the late 1980s up to the present. This current institutional innovation orientation of civic engagement in the United States is still playing out, and it is unclear where it will lead. Berry, Portney, and Thomson (1993) have demonstrated the general effectiveness of these experiments in facilitating civic engagement in small to medium-sized cities. However, the results are not yet clear with respect to how this approach will work in large metropolitan complexes such as New York and Los Angeles. The research on the Los Angeles system shows mixed results. Some neighborhood councils are well organized and function reasonably, well while others are less successful. The major problems faced by the councils include difficulty in recruiting the participation of immigrants, renters, and young people. They vary considerably in the extent to which they reflect the composition of their constituents in the community and, therefore, in the extent to which they are

perceived as legitimate representative bodies. Many of the councils need help in building their capacity to deal with city administrative agencies and legislative processes.

The Civic Engagement Initiative (CEI), originally named the Neighborhood Participation Project, at the University of Southern California School of Policy, Planning, and Development conducted extensive research on the Los Angeles neighborhood council system for ten years (1996–2006) as it was debated, established in the 1999 charter, and developed through its first seven years of implementation. More than twenty scholarly journal articles, two PhD dissertations, and a series of policy briefs have been published on this research. (See the CEI Web site at www.usc-cei.org for a listing of these publications.) The main summative evaluation, available on the Web site, has been published as a policy brief by the CEI under the auspices of the Urban Initiative at the University of Southern California. It is titled, "Toward Community Engagement in City Governance: Evaluating Neighborhood Council Reform in Los Angeles" (Musso et al. 2007). The major findings at that point in 2006 were the following:

1. A citywide system of operating neighborhood councils had been successfully established during the five years since the Los Angeles Department of Neighborhood Empowerment was fully functioning under the new charter provision, with an implementing ordinance, and a specific plan in place. That was attributable to the enormous outpouring of energy and time by the people of Los Angeles, who volunteered countless hours doing the hard work of organizing their neighborhoods and preparing the required certification documents. Contrary to the myth that the people are apathetic and uninterested in participation, the residents of Los Angeles were eager to engage in the difficult process of organizing neighborhood councils even before they were approved. Unfortunately, the city was much less forthcoming with its support, staff and funding to assist those volunteers in accomplishing such an enormous task. More than eighty neighborhood councils had been certified by that time, seventy-four of which had accomplished the difficult task of electing boards and beginning the work of representing their communities to the city. Although there was substantial variation among the councils, the average number of constituents was thirty-eight thousand and the average board consisted of twenty-one members, most holding monthly meetings with committee work going on between full board meetings.

2. Based on surveys of the boards, it is clear that most of those participating in the organizing process are not newcomers to civic activity but people who have been relatively active in community and political life in their areas and the city. The board members are "more likely than neighborhood residents to be white, wealthy, highly educated, and homeowners" (Musso et al. 2007, 7). This was not unexpected given the resources, time, and commitment necessary to accomplish the required organizing. However, it does mean that the council boards may not reflect the demographic profiles of their communities and may not accurately reflect the views of their constituents. The CEI report cautions against focusing too narrowly on the inadequate degree of this kind of descriptive representation by the councils. Deficiencies of this kind in the composition of council boards do not necessarily indicate their inability to act on behalf of their communities. Berry, Portney, and Thomson found that the existence of neighborhood councils in the cities they studied increased trust in the municipal governance process even among those who did not participate but knew the councils existed.

3. The focus on the complex certification and board election processes may have drained energy away from outreach to the communities the councils represent, thus producing the lack of adequate representation identified in item 2. From the beginning of the organizing process there was a tendency to confuse outreach with organizing. Outreach involves the distribution of information through flyers, e-mail, posters in prominent locations, notices in community newspapers, and similar means of notifying people of the new councils. Organizing requires personal contact

in addition to the dissemination of information to persuade people to participate and to create social capital by establishing bonds of trust. In the early years there was insufficient organizing and too much reliance on outreach, perhaps due to the drain of resources devoted to the certification process. In some cases this has created a deficit in social capital that can be invested in the governance process.

4. It was assumed by the political leadership of the city that the creation of the councils would be a way of more effectively connecting the people to the governance process, thereby heading off secession by reducing distrust of government. However, during the early years the anticipated interaction between the neighborhood councils and city officials was slow getting started. This was mainly because the city was slow initiating some of the mechanisms that would encourage this interaction, such as the early notification system to let people know of planned city activity in their communities and the participatory budget mechanisms to involve citizens in the development of the annual city budget. Also, some elected officials had not fully embraced the neighborhood councils and tended to keep them at arm's length. The CEI study of the development of contacts between city officials and neighborhood councils showed that it "remained stagnant between our 2003 and 2006 surveys" (8). With respect to engagement with the city bureaucracy, most of those agencies were still dominated by personnel with the old Progressive-era technical professional role identities. They tended to see the new councils not as assets, but rather as annoying distractions from their main work.

5. The people of Los Angeles appear to have felt empowered by the creation of the neighborhood council system within a relatively short time, even though the city's performance had actually changed little. The CEI study reports that "the good news is that compared to 1998—the year before Charter reform was adopted—Angelenos feel better about the direction of the City and, in particular, the direction of their neighborhoods" (12). The subjectivity of this "feeling" of empowerment should not be dismissed lightly since it appears to be motivating people to continue pursuing more responsive engagement with the city.

Overall, the neighborhood councils seem to be developing the capacity to engage the city more actively and effectively since those early years, but there is considerable variation among them. During the charter hearing process, the Neighborhood Participation Project offered consistent advice to all parties that a "grand experiment" of this magnitude would take many years of work and development to create a neighborhood council system that could be expected to work well. At this point it is not clear how effectively the majority are engaging the city, but from time to time in recent years the councils have flexed their collective muscles in ways that suggest they are making considerable progress. The current mayor, Antonio Villaraigosa, has not offered strong support for the neighborhood councils, and when he tried to reduce the annual budget allocation to each council of $45,000 by about 75 percent as a way of dealing with the city's 2009 budget crisis, he learned quickly that the councils were able to muster strong support from across the city very quickly for retaining their allocations intact. The mayor backed down rapidly in the face of citywide opposition. Two similar citywide actions by the councils have concerned rate setting by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power and an attempt by the Los Angeles Police Department to begin charging fees for their responses to burglar alarms.

Several formal and informal elements of the system have emerged that have helped in building the capacity of the councils for collective action, sharing of information, and engaging the administrative agencies of the city. Regional and citywide networks have developed over recent years that serve the purposes of information sharing and collective action. The CEI report cites the existence of a "Citywide Alliance of Neighborhood Councils" (www.allncs.org) that meets regularly with city officials; "the Los Angeles Neighborhood Council Congress, the Valley,

Harbor and Northeast Alliances, and other issue- or identity-oriented networks." The report concludes that "these various neighborhood networks have increased the flow of information among community activists in the city's many sub-regions" (7). Since that report was published, "the Citywide Issues Group" that is oriented toward collective action has emerged (http://www.lancissues.org). A newsletter published by neighborhood council leaders that began in hard copy during the charter reform process as *Charter Watch* is now widely distributed in digital form as *CityWatch* and provides a regular flow of information about city and neighborhood council activities (www.citywatchla.com).

GOVERNANCE AND THE ADMINISTRATIVE STATE

In addition to institutional innovations, effective and sustained civic governance currently requires processes for engaging the administrative state. In the medium-sized cities studied by Berry, Portney, and Thomson, this is worked out neighborhood by neighborhood as the need arises. That approach is much less effective in larger metropolitan complexes since the administrative agencies are so large and therefore tend to be more insular. In cities like Los Angeles that were heavily influenced by the Progressive reform movement, these bureaucracies have been left to their own professional technical devices for decades and have become nearly impenetrable. Opening them up to diverse communities with different needs and preferences—in effect democratizing the administrative state—is not easy.

As the neighborhood councils came online in significant numbers in the early 2000s and got beyond the certification and board election steps, they turned their attention to service-delivery problems, and thus to the city departments and agencies. With a few notable exceptions, they encountered disinterest and resistance from the city bureaucracy. The CEI launched the Collaborative Learning Project (CLP) in 2003 to develop processes for establishing neighborhood council–city department working relationships.[11] The intention was to test the viability of collaborative, as opposed to earlier adversarial, approaches to these relationships. A process called "Learning and Design Forums" (L&D) was developed with the following key features:

1. One or more neighborhood councils and a single city department are selected to participate in a deliberative process over a period of several months concerning how public services will be delivered to meet the needs and preferences of the council area(s).
2. The selected council(s) and department are recruited through meetings with top management and council board members to explain the L&D process and gain formal commitment to participate.
3. The council(s) and department select participants as official representatives of their organizations.
4. Each group of participants meets to develop a statement about their experience over recent years in working with the other.
5. Three half-day sessions approximately one month apart are convened with the participants to deliberate over the contents of a written memo of understanding about service delivery as the key product of the sessions. The first session begins with presentations of the statements from step 4 above.
6. Each session is led by a professional facilitator with the main objective of developing a memo of understanding, but the ability and freedom to work with the required flexibility to assist each group of participants through the steps appropriate for its style and needs. This allows the action research team to sit on the sidelines, observe, and take notes.

7. Homework is agreed to by both agency and neighborhood council representatives at the end of each L&D session. This often takes the form of research, drafting proposals for the memo, seeking advice from constituents, and similar tasks. Sometimes this is done separately and at other times in joint task committees.

8. Surveys are administered before the first session and between sessions to assess the participants' views of the other side, including their responsiveness, trustworthiness, and willingness to work collaboratively. Participants are also asked to assess the performance of the facilitator and the overall progress of the sessions. A transcript of the notes on the overall flow of each session is sent out to participants between sessions for comment and correction.

9. Each session is debriefed with the facilitator and the research team immediately following its conclusion to determine strategy for the next session and any other interventions that may be needed.

The experience has been that this is a useful and effective model for moving toward opening up and democratizing the way administrative agencies work with people in communities. However, it was found that several elements are necessary to make the process successful:

1. A professional facilitator who has no vested interest beyond a successful working relationship between councils and agencies is essential. Considerable skill is required to break through the role definitions people bring to the sessions, resolve conflict, and maintain a focus.

2. The process works best when groups of three or four geographically continuous councils work together with one administrative agency. This provides a more diverse range of participants and establishes a geographic area of sufficient size to be more practical for an agency to address.

3. The inclusion of elected officials or their representatives is essential. Both neighborhood council and city department representatives appear to take the process more seriously when city council and mayoral staff members are present as observers. Also, it is important that elected officials not view the L&D process as something that might be threatening to or subversive of their authority, but constructive and collaborative with them.

4. A written memo of understanding to be signed by both sides provides a working focus for a product to be created by the end of the L&D process. It is a way of clarifying in a sustainable way what has been agreed to by both parties, who will take on particular tasks and determine how they will be done, deadlines for reports and meetings, changes in service delivery modes and types, and any other details that are part of the outcome of the L&D process.

FROM TECHNIQUES AND AD HOC PROJECTS TO CITIZEN-CENTERED CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

This institutional reform approach at the local level reflects well what is being called "citizen-centered" civic engagement. In a seminal study led by Cynthia Gibson in 2006, entitled "Citizens at the Center: A New Approach to Civic Engagement,"[12] the author argues that there is a shift toward a new approach to civic engagement that needs further development. This new emphasis is away from particular participatory techniques, specific projects, and particular problems to a citizen-centered approach to civic engagement. Citizen-centered civic engagement focuses primarily on the following:[13]

1. Cultural change instead of short-term solutions and outcomes. Gibson argues that the lack of a deeply rooted culture of civic engagement is the most fundamental problem rather than helping citizens influence the outcome of some particular policy issue or learn some new participatory technique. There are numerous techniques but an inadequate culture of engagement to sustain and effectively employ them.

2. Providing opportunities for "people to form and promote their own decisions, build capacities for self-government, and promote open-ended civic processes." Gibson maintains that this approach is contrasted with offering specific focused opportunities for citizens to "plug into" projects, events, techniques, and exercises "driven by outside experts, professionals, organizations, or those external to the community."

3. Approaches that are "pluralistic and nonpartisan." Building a culture of engagement requires interaction with diverse people holding a variety of beliefs and political perspectives. Deliberation using an array of techniques to create collaboration across partisan philosophical commitments and oriented toward some greater good is required to ground a culture of engagement that transcends attachment to some partisan viewpoint. Practice at that kind of collaboration can support all kinds of problem solving.

4. Transcending ideological silos. One of the things that repels citizens from collaborative participation is suspicion that some partisan political perspective is behind an engagement effort. Citizen-centered civic engagement is oriented toward the needs and concerns of citizens rather than the advancement of a partisan agenda. It is driven by problems and needs rather than political commitments.

5. Going beyond "the perennial and wearisome debate over which is more important or lacking—'service or politics'—that tends to dominate public discussions about civic engagement in the United States." Gibson argues that this is a false dichotomy that offers a simplistic choice. She maintains that there is a very large and complex territory between the two that connects them into a continuum that bridges volunteering at one end and voting at the other.

6. Doing more than just talking. The tendency to romanticize deliberation as the main element in democratic civic engagement, according to Gibson, may cause us to ignore the importance of achieving outcomes. Deliberation is an important part of the democratic self-governing process, but process sometimes overcomes product. People need to see that deliberating will lead to tangible results. Assuming that all problems can be addressed through talk seems "naïve, elitist, or simply unfeasible."

7. Understanding that citizen-centered approaches "do not replace politics or other democratic processes." They are not a substitute for government and political institutions. Gibson quotes David Mathews, president of the Kettering Foundation, as asserting that "organic, citizen-based democracy is not an alternative form of politics like direct democracy; it is the foundation for democratic institutions and representative government." Civic engagement at the grass roots provides a basis for connecting individual citizens to the process of representative democracy. It is the way citizens form collective opinions that can make representation work.

DELIBERATIVE PROCESSES FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT INSTITUTIONS

The new institutional reforms that have created ongoing permanent mechanisms for self-organized and self-directed civic engagement seem to best exemplify this citizen-centered civic engagement. These neighborhood-level citizen institutions represent a very significant shift away from episodic citizen participation provided and controlled by public officials and government agencies often referred to in the past as "citizen participation." Efforts at institutional reform have attempted to

move civic engagement from the ad hoc adversarial struggle of the 1960s and the government-initiated mandated participation of the 1970s to sustained participation in the governance process that seeks collaboration, even if there is conflict from time to time in the midst of officially sustained participation.

This is not the only form of contemporary civic engagement, but it is the most significant new dimension of the process. However, once these new systems are created, they need to make use of an increasingly wide array of options for techniques for deliberation and collaboration. Taken in isolation from sustained and embedded civic engagement channels, these methods amount to little more than tools for political and administrative dominance. However, employed by these new citizen-driven institutions, they may be seen as instruments for citizen empowerment. They are important parts of systemic approaches to civic engagement. New institutional structures alone are not sufficient to create effective civic engagement; processes for deliberation toward resolving conflict, reaching consensus, and making decisions are required.

The L&D process developed by the CLP has been discussed here as one example of techniques for deliberation and consensus building. There are many other specific techniques that represent innovations in the governance *process* that could effectively complement the innovations in governance *structure,* most of which are well-known among civic engagement specialists. These include the Kettering Foundation's National Issues Forum approach, the work of the National Policy Consensus Center, Choice Work Dialogues, Citizens Juries, Consensus Conferences, Study Circles, Deliberative Polling, and Citizen Assemblies. (See Lukensmeyer and Torres, 2006 for detailed review and discussions of these techniques and processes.) There are also electronic media such as Web sites, blogs, and social networking systems that can be effectively used within civic engagement institutions. For purposes of this chapter, three particularly promising approaches that could be employed effectively in the new local government institutions are reviewed briefly. The first is widely known in the United States, but the second two are less known here and taken from international experience.

1. America Speaks

This is the largest-scale and best-developed of the new approaches. America Speaks (AS), founded by Carolyn Lukensmeyer in 1995 as a nonprofit organization, conducts deliberation events that range in size from those with fewer than a hundred participants to some that involve thousands. These deliberations sometimes focus on specific local concerns and on other occasions engage broad national policy issues. The key to the approach employed by AS is that it "integrates state-of-the-art technology with small-group, face-to-face dialogue to allow thousands of people to deliberate simultaneously about important issues and come to shared priorities" (Lukensmeyer 2008, p. 1). Using combinations of multiple facilitated small groups in one or several locations, each member of which has a laptop linked to others at the table and to a central server, with theme managers who circulate among the tables and post information on large central video screens, information is exchanged and issues debated. AS has available more than four thousand trained facilitators who skillfully lead discussion and feed the ongoing viewpoints and information into a central system for ordering and display to the entire body of participants.

The AS approach blends together a combination of face-to-face discussion with anonymous information exchange similar to that which occurs in the Delphi technique developed at the Rand Corporation several decades ago. The value of face-to-face discussion is that it includes all of the nonverbal elements of that kind of deliberation, such as expressions of emotional intensity and of opposition or support; the value of anonymous exchange of information is that it excludes the

kind of "noise" or emotional distraction that occurs in face-to-face discussion due to personal at-tributes that may create attractions, aversions, or biases and may block or distort communication (Helmer-Hirschberg 1966; Helmer-Hirschberg and Rescher 1960).

AS has successfully conducted deliberation events dealing with a wide range of topics and in a variety of settings. It has conducted annual sessions to engage hundreds of citizens from the local elected councils in the development of the Washington, D.C. budget. AS provided a deliberative process for approximately five thousand participants in one large hall focused on how to redevelop the site of the World Trade Center in New York City, which was destroyed in the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. In 2008, AS produced twenty different deliberation projects across the nation ranging from fifty members in the Grantmakers for Children, Youth and Families Summit in Washington, D.C., to four hundred in New Mexico's Children Cabinet Town Hall Meeting in Albuquerque, New Mexico, to two thousand participants in the National Performing Arts Conven-tion in Denver, to twelve thousand people involved in a deliberation for Equal Voice for America's Families in Birmingham, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Thus, there is a great deal of flexibility and adaptability in the AS process (Lukensmeyer 2008). It employs technology, human facilitators, feedback processes from table groups to the full assembly, and opportunities for conflicting views to be identified and examined. AS designs its deliberative events to fit particular local situations and problems using the appropriate combinations of various types of resources.

Other uses of electronic communication media are also emerging but are still of secondary importance and have complementary roles to play similar to those of the other engagement pro-cesses mentioned earlier. The Obama campaign, and its use of Web sites, blogs, e-mail, and social networking sites, is often offered as an example of the effectiveness of these tools. They are useful for disseminating information, mobilizing people for events and actions, and to a limited extent sharing opinions about policy; however, since this chapter focuses on citizen-driven administration these techniques are most effectively used to complement the processes of local civic engagement institutions. The Obama campaign clearly saw the value of linking these process tools to their organizations on the ground, state by state and city by city nationwide. Community organization strategies that utilize these tools can be powerful. However, electronic process tools may be useful in stimulating movements and actions, as in the case of Iran following the questionable presidential election of 2009 with its use of Twitter and Facebook, but institutions are required for governance using these and other process techniques. Otherwise, they are more appropriately understood as election campaign techniques rather than instruments of civic engagement.

2. Participatory Videography

Sometimes approaches developed in one setting can be effectively adapted for use in others that are very different. That is the case with participatory production of videos by communities. The use of self-images that are created and controlled by members of a community through digital videography can be a powerful technique for generating deliberation, building support for certain policies or policy changes, and communicating with administrative agencies. It can be used effectively by any community, but especially those without strong resources in written communication.

The American Refugee Committee (ARC), an international nonprofit organization, has been employing participatory videography in refugee communities in Rwanda, Uganda, South Sudan, Liberia, and Thailand for four years with considerable success. ARC has been conducting pro-grams dealing with sexually transmitted diseases, and gender-based violence in refugee camps since 2004. In 2006 ARC began working in partnership with Communication for Change (C4C), a nonprofit community video-production organization, to build video production capacity into

refugee communities.[14] Named "Through Our Eyes," the project was intended to empower refugees by giving them the skill, through two weeks of training, to be able to produce their own videos. With self-produced video images they have been able to depict the problems of violence against women and girls through their own eyes as they experience them. Women tell their own stories about the abuse to which they are frequently subjected, and men talk about how they view those practices. These compelling videos, with legitimacy grounded in their own experience by their own people, are then employed by their own refugee leaders to generate deliberation about these problems, surface and address conflicts, and talk about behavior changes that are required. These videos also have become a means of projecting to organizations such as the U.S. Agency for International Development how the refugees themselves define their problems and the resources needed to resolve them. This is citizen-oriented civic engagement in a deeply compelling form.

The same videographic techniques might be used by communities within the United States, to communicate first with their own residents, but also with their own city governments about their problems and needs. Digital videography equipment has made it relatively easy and inexpensive to capture compelling images of everything from traffic congestion to housing dilapidation, to gang graffiti, to potholes in the streets, to trees that need trimming, to eyesores and empty spaces that call for attention. Videos can vividly depict both problems and opportunities. People who will never read a written report may watch a video. Since the participation of young people is lacking in neighborhood councils and similar organizations, this kind of image communication may be one way to stimulate their interest and engage their skills. Participatory videos have great untapped potential for enhancing citizen-centered civic engagement at the local level in the United States. One can imagine a municipal Web site on which videos from neighborhoods throughout the city might be found depicting through the eyes of the residents how they view the needs for city services, their perspectives on the built environment and the resident population, as well as planning alternatives. These videos could be accessed by city agencies and other communities to better understand the needs and viewpoints around the city. These could be easily updated annually, or even more often.

3. Participatory Mapping

This technique, also developed originally for use with nonurban populations in other parts of the world, involves the creation and control of self-images of communities by their own members, similar to participatory videography, but requiring no special equipment.[15] In this case, the technology is much simpler and involves the making of maps by communities to depict their own relationship to the space in which they live, again as seen through their own eyes. Kevin Lynch ([1960] 1965) used cognitive mapping techniques in cities as a research tool to identify the most significant elements of the built environment of cities as seen through the eyes of their residents.[16] Participatory mapping is used currently with communities in developing countries as an engagement or advocacy tool. Instead of relying on experts to define a community's map, residents do it for themselves. Residents meet together to talk about what important features of their community should be represented symbolically on a map they produce together as a way of asserting how they view their community. Both assets, such as groves of trees, parks, schools, businesses, libraries, and hospitals, and problems, such as toxic sites, illegal dumping areas, areas of high crime, failing roads, nuisance businesses, and unsafe intersections, might be included in a community's assessment of its situation. Creating the maps and getting reactions to them stimulate discussion among members of a community about how they view themselves.

For example, it might be richly enlightening, both to the neighborhood councils and to the

city agencies involved in the CLP mentioned earlier, if each side created maps that represent how they view the participating communities. Exchanging these symbolic representations might well generate discussion indirectly that would be too sensitive to articulate directly in verbal descriptions. A new map reflecting collaboration in planning public service delivery might be another useful product of the CLP negotiations to accompany a memo of understanding. Discussion and negotiation around symbolic representations such as maps may have the power to engage people with greater intensity and imagination than words alone. A combination of participatory videos, participatory maps, and the kind of technological tools employed by America Speaks could increase interest among a broader range of the population than is now typically represented in civic engagement institutions such as neighborhood councils.

CONCLUSIONS

The cutting edge of civic engagement for the foreseeable future will be in developing new institutional structures for engaging citizens in governance in a more continuous and sustained fashion. That will require creativity and work to design these new institutions in ways that are appropriate for each local context. Those who lead them will need also to develop skills in the civic engagement processes that help shape the life of those institutions. Structure and processes must complement each other. Beyond the local level, the next major challenge is to create new institutional structures that will link citizens to state and federal governments.

President Barack Obama has called upon civic engagement organizations around the nation to offer recommendations about what his administration should do to encourage civic participation. Based on the line of argument developed in this chapter, it is suggested that the following elements be included in a national strategy on civic engagement.

1. A White House Office on Public Engagement has already been established by President Obama on May 11, 2009 (White House, Office of the Press Secretary 2009). That office needs to be enhanced with direct linkages to state-level liaison people, and in some cases key people in the major metropolitan areas of the nation, especially those responsible for civic engagement institutions such as neighborhood councils and similar structures. The challenge for the administration is to develop civic engagement institutions appropriate for federal governance that are the equivalents of those emerging at the local level.

2. National leadership by the White House Office on Public Engagement is needed to help with capacity building and consultation among citizens, elected officials, and administrative agencies if representative democracy is to be opened to more direct engagement with the people, and the administrative state is to be democratized along the lines suggested in the discussion of the Collaborative Learning Project. Elected officials need to learn to work with citizens beyond election campaigns. Public bureaucracies will have to do business differently by reaching out to include the citizenry rather than resisting their participation. This will require federal grants and training opportunities to develop civic engagement skills and new national civic participation institutions.

3. The White House Office on Public Engagement should begin by sponsoring a series of large-scale deliberation events around major national policy initiatives to involve citizens in the policy development process rather than after policy is approaching final form. Nothing is so transparently a sham than calling for public comment with great fanfare after elected officials, administrative agencies, and interest groups (sometimes called the "policy iron triangle") have already been working together on a legislative proposal for months or years. The means for conducting these deliberation events is already well developed and working. The new institutions that ought to be linked to these processes exist at the local level in some places, but need to be created where they

do not. New institutional forms need to be designed for connecting local engagement institutions with various federal policy initiatives.

4. Incentives should be provided by offering priority points in federal grant making for cities that have created institutions such as neighborhood councils to engage citizens in communities in collaborative governance. Continuing to funnel federal grants into existing institutions of representative government will do less to encourage more direct civic engagement than if there are direct participation systems in place. If money is not connected to new ways of running our democracy, little is likely to change.

Significant progress in democratizing the administrative state through citizen-driven public administration is now within our grasp. The groundswell of interest in collaborative governance provides the larger context within which institutional reforms that turn the table on the Progressives may be possible. It is essential that we keep our eyes at that level of change in civic engagement, reaching for robust and sustained engagement of our people that will fulfill the promise of democratic governance for our time. Techniques come and go, but institutions abide and empower.

NOTES

1. Much of this material was used directly or adapted from portions of Terry L. Cooper, Thomas A. Bryer, and Jack W. Meek, "Citizen-Centered Collaborative Public Management," special issue, *Public Administration Review* 66 (2006): 76–88. Permission was granted by the editor in chief of *Public Administration Review* and my coauthors.

2. For a good introductory text, see James Creighton's *The Public Participation Handbook* (2005). Another recent how-to manual is Bob Graham's *America, The Owner's Manual* (2010).

3. This argument about these two perspectives has been developed in detail in Terry L. Cooper, *An Ethic of Citizenship for Public Administration* (1991).

4. See, for example, the treatment of alienation among the citizenry in chapters 1–2 of Cheryl King and Camilla Stivers, *Government Is Us* (1998).

5. I experienced this problem personally during my years as a community organizer for the United Methodist Church in the mid- to late 1960s in East Harlem, New York, and the Pico-Union neighborhood of Los Angeles. In Los Angeles, the low-income areas of the city were represented by no more than five members of the fifteen-member city council. Anytime their interests were at odds with the rest of the city, they lost.

6. The recent work by C. Sirianni, *Investing in Democracy: Engaging Citizens in Collaborative Governance* (2009), is one major example. A new comparative work on collaborative governance is Jung, Mazmanian, and Tang, eds., *Collaborative Governance in the United States and Korea* (2009).

7. Unfortunately, there are no comparative evaluations of neighborhood council systems across the United States that would provide a basis for identifying the best institutional forms for this approach. A problem in carrying out such a study is the importance of context in determining "best practices" in particular settings. *The Rebirth of Urban Democracy* (Berry et al. 1993) comes closest but focuses on neighborhood councils in only five medium-sized cities and was not intended to do that kind of analysis.

8. *The Rebirth of Urban Democracy* was read by a city council chief deputy who began to circulate it to others in the Los Angeles city government, including his boss and other city council staff members.

9. This means that one might be a stakeholder in more than one neighborhood council and that all residents, whether U.S. citizens, legal residents, or undocumented people, are eligible.

10. The 1999 charter provisions, the implementing ordinance, the plan for the system, and other information about the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners, specific councils, and other related matters can be found at the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment Web site: http://www.lacityneighborhoods.com/.

11. Terry L. Cooper and Thomas A. Bryer, "Collaboration Between Los Angeles City Departments and Neighborhood Councils: Findings and Recommendations from the Collaborative Learning Project" (policy brief published and distributed to neighborhood council leaders, city agency heads, elected officials, and interested scholars by the University of Southern California Urban Initiative, 2007). This policy brief is available online at http://www.usc-cei.org/?url=cbp.php. The full findings of the CLP to date are summarized on page 3 of that document. More detailed analysis and findings can be found in the articles by Cooper,

Bryer, Meek, and Kathi in various combinations as coauthors and authors in the reference list at the end of this chapter. The CLP was funded by the Hewlett Foundation, the James Irvine Foundation, and the USC Urban Initiative.

12. This report is based on interviews with "scores of leaders in the service/civic engagement field, as well as those outside this domain; culling the findings of scholarly research; and synthesizing numerous mainstream articles, websites, and publications" (Gibson 2006, 1).

13. The quotations from this section are drawn from pages 9–11 of the report.

14. See the articles by Lowen (2008), Molony, Konie, and Goodsmith (2007), and Cooper and Ward (2009).

15. See, for example, International Fund for Agricultural Development, "Good Practices in Participatory Mapping" (2009).

16. His best-known work, *Image of the City,* was based on cognitive mapping exercises in three major U.S. cities: Los Angeles, Boston, and Jersey City.

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