

# When Citizens and Officeholders Meet

## Part 1: Variations in the Key Elements of Public Meetings

Todd Kelshaw and John Gastil\*

### Abstract

In recent years, thinking among public administrators and civic leaders has shifted from reliance on hierarchy and control in policymaking to a desire for collaboration and empowerment. With this shift have come new calls from civic reformers and public-minded officials for public participation in governance. This emphasis on participation by members of the public has necessitated the creation of novel venues for citizens and officeholders to meet. But do both lay and professional participants have the communicative attitudes and aptitudes conducive to effective collaboration in these new public meetings? In order to answer this question, we need first to take a look at public meetings in general. Here we develop a framework for examining the connections between key elements of such meetings, including goals, communication strategies, and task and relational outcomes. This essay, the first in a two-part series, provides a conceptual grounding that will facilitate the development of a typology of public meetings.

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In a 1992 *Public Administration Review* essay, Peter deLeon called for ‘the democratization of policy analysis’—i.e., for the movement of such analysis from a technical exercise to a participatory, democratic public practise. DeLeon argued that public managers and policymakers should not worry about ‘involving every citizen in decision making’, but rather should aim to ‘increase citizen participation in the articulation and formulation of public policy programs.’<sup>1</sup> Though deLeon acknowledged existing models for gathering public input, he was not optimistic that public hearings and other conventional modes would prove adaptable to public participation. He concluded that it will ‘not be an easy transition’ to truly democratic policy analysis.<sup>2</sup>

Thirteen years later, Harry Boyte reported in the same journal on how much the ground had shifted in the years since deLeon’s essay.<sup>3</sup> The emphasis now is on effective *governance*, which ‘involves collaboration and empowerment more than hierarchy and control’. There is increasing interest not only in the techniques of policy analysis but in the people involved—‘the toolmakers and tool users’, as well as the tools. In sum, Boyte said, ‘the shift can be conceived of as a move from seeing citizens as voters, volunteers, clients, or consumers to viewing citizens as problem solvers and co-creators of public goods’.

Other observers have reached a conclusion similar to Boyte’s, though they expressed it in different language. Roberts, for instance, argues that ‘a confluence of historical forces, economic trends, and changing political preferences has provoked a reexamination of public administration theory and practise’, and stresses the importance of ‘direct citizen participation’ in governance.<sup>4</sup> From another perspective, Denhart and Denhart observe that we have arrived at the ‘New Public Service’ model, in which public officials and agencies serve neither ‘clients’ (as

in the ‘Old Public Administration’ model) nor ‘customers’ (as in the ‘New Public Management’ model), but rather as full-fledged *citizens*.<sup>5</sup>

As the thinking in public administration and policy analysis moves further in the direction of citizen participation in policymaking, it would be useful to conduct a careful inventory of the diverse ways in which public officials and citizens actually *meet* one another in public settings. Face-to-face public meetings, along with increasingly popular online variants,<sup>6</sup> offer citizens and officeholders important opportunities to communicate directly with one another. In such settings, constituents and public officials may become personally acquainted, exchange information, talk together in dialogic ways about pressing civic problems, and perhaps even cooperate in deliberative policy development.

Given the new importance being assigned public meetings in democratic policy analysis and governance, one might reasonably assume that public meetings have been thoroughly explored in the scholarship of public administration, communication studies, political science, and related disciplines. Public meetings, however, are perhaps the ‘least understood methods of public participation in community planning’.<sup>7</sup> Without an adequate understanding of the purposes, components, and practises of public meetings, we risk diminishing their potential for fostering effective community engagement, policy development, and governance. Thus it is our aim in this paper to sketch a framework that public meeting designers and participants may use to reflect on their expectations and behaviors. Improved reflection, in turn, may enable citizen participants, facilitators, public managers, and elected officials to choose and apply effective communicative strategies more deliberately and thoughtfully.

As noted previously, the discussion that follows constitutes the first installment in a two-part series that aspires to enhance public meeting participants’ capacities for reflection and communicative efficacy. Together, the two pieces present a typology that identifies and describes seven generic forms of face-to-face public meetings between citizens and officeholders. This typology reveals the variety of face-to-face public meetings between citizens and public officials, particularly in terms of *participants’* expectations of meeting goals and communication processes. The version offered here represents an extension of an earlier one prepared for the Kettering Foundation<sup>8</sup> and used by public participation scholars in a number of fields.<sup>9</sup> This updated and modified version provides a more explicit conceptual basis than its predecessor.

The public meeting typology will appear in Part 2 of this article. Here, we lay some essential groundwork; first, by describing the general condition of democratic public meetings in contemporary American civic life, with particular attention paid to conceptions and functions; and second, by addressing some important general aspects of public meetings. These aspects include the different kinds of roles participants play; participants' understandings of meeting goals; participants' conceptions of communicative influence and content; and some modes of discourse that figure prominently in public meetings.

### **The Purposes and Practises of Contemporary Public Meetings**

Before discussing the particular context of *public* meetings, we begin with anthropologist Helen Schwartzman's distinctive perspective on meetings in general. Schwartzman proposes that meetings are important (yet taken-for-granted) communication events that both reflect and (re)create larger organisational structures:

When meetings are defamiliarized . . . it is possible to see how the local cultural worlds (which anthropologists have traditionally studied) and the larger political and economic systems that impinge on these worlds can both be examined in the contexts in which these worlds interact and are enacted... Meetings are often a context for these interactions and therefore this form provides researchers with a unique opportunity to examine both micro- and macro-level processes and dynamics.<sup>10</sup>

Schwartzman recommends studying 'why meetings exist and persist in specific organisational and cultural contexts, how meetings are used, and what the outcome of meetings is believed to be in particular settings'.<sup>11</sup> Her study focused on regular meetings within a complex organisation. In advancing her goal of 'defamiliarisation', we turn our attention, however, to the dynamics, practises, and conventions of public meetings between citizens and public officials.

The most common setting in which public officials and citizens meet is *regularly scheduled public meetings* of elected bodies, such as school boards or city councils. As Adams explains in his analysis of such meetings in Santa Ana, California, despite the fact that these meetings 'are not deliberative, and they are not an effective vehicle for rational persuasion', even such

mundane settings ‘provide a venue for citizens to carry out a political struggle to have their voices heard and recommendations heeded’.<sup>12</sup>

Another common point of reference for public meetings is the ubiquitous *public hearing*, in all its various forms. Often required by federal, state, or local statutes, public hearings give citizens the opportunity to express their concerns and address questions directly to public officials. At a typical hearing, citizens take turns speaking before a panel of government agency employees and elected officials.

Yet after witnessing countless hearings in the United States and abroad, Webler and Renn conclude that, generally, neither citizens nor policymakers value the public hearing process:

To a citizen, the thought of attending a public hearing immediately conjures up negative images. Citizens often picture the public hearing process as disempowering. Typically, attendance is slight. To regulatory officials, experts, and project sponsors, the public hearing hall is a battle zone. Legal obligations must be met, hopefully without raising the hackles of the local populace. A well-attended meeting is bad news.<sup>13</sup>

Complementing these older forms of public meetings and hearings are newer, more interactive and open-ended forms of public talk. In the past thirty years, governments across the globe have experimented with Citizen Juries,<sup>14</sup> consensus conferences and planning cells,<sup>15</sup> teledemocracy,<sup>16</sup> 21<sup>st</sup> century town meetings,<sup>17</sup> deliberative polls,<sup>18</sup> and many other processes that bring citizens and policymakers together.

One of our aims in this essay is to keep the well-deserved attention paid to newer deliberative processes from overshadowing the wider array of public meeting practises that continue to exist and, at times, serve valuable functions. Between conventional meetings and genuinely deliberative ideal types, there exist many kinds of productive public meetings, each with its own (to use Schwartzman’s phrase) ‘micro- and macro-level processes and dynamics’.<sup>19</sup>

As an example of this public meeting middle-ground, consider the case of public officials who consult with the public and affected stakeholders to manage difficult public problems. Roberts describes the experience of a Minnesota school district that convened a series of public meetings regarding budget shortfalls, looking to students, educators, and the community for ideas about how to save money and where to make cuts. Thousands of participants generated a

list of 4,000 suggestions from which fifteen school principals and nine district administrators developed final recommendations, which the school board approved unanimously and ‘with only brief discussion’.<sup>20</sup> The results of the meetings fed into a larger policymaking process, thereby promoting both a better-informed institutional decision and broader public acceptance of that decision.

Walters, Aydelotte, and Miller identify five reasons for involving citizens in decision-making: (1) *discovery* (‘aid in the search for definitions, alternatives, or criteria’); (2) *education* (‘educate the public about an issue or proposed alternative’); (3) *measurement* (‘assess public opinion regarding a set of options’); (4) *persuasion* (‘persuade the public to accept a recommended alternative’); and (5) *legitimation* (‘comply with public norms or legal requirements’).<sup>21</sup> Clearly, the term ‘public meeting’ encompasses a wide variety of public involvement processes that can serve one or more of these ends, and to varying degrees. Moreover, public meetings vary in terms of the problems they address (ranging from relational to substantive) and of the intensity of the emotional and/or ideological responses they elicit (from mild to intense). Consequently, achieving an adequate understanding of public meetings requires developing a means for distinguishing among various types. The first step toward drawing useful distinctions is to look more closely at the constituent elements of public meetings.

### **Aspects of Democratic Public Meetings**

To describe a given public meeting adequately—and, beyond that, to assess it and to offer communication prescriptions—one must be able to identify and understand its basic aspects. The following elements are endemic to all public meetings, though they vary widely: (1) the meeting’s general parties (the participants’ roles and the power currencies they typically rely upon); (2) the participants’ expectations and perceptions of a given meeting’s goals, the nature of the communication (its supposed content and direction of influence), and the framework for communication determined by contextual factors; and (3) democratic genres of talk.<sup>22</sup> We identify and briefly describe these elements here to provide a clearer sense of the varied qualities of public meetings and to identify the primary dimensions which we will use in constructing a public meeting typology.

Much of what we describe below will be familiar to readers who have witnessed or participated in public meetings. Because our intent is to sharpen our understanding of ‘taken-

for-granted’ practises and to ‘defamiliarise’ them, conceptual clarity is more important than concrete illustration. We pull apart the constituent elements of the generic public meeting before we reassemble them as a typology of varied meeting types.

### *The Parties*

Broadly speaking, participants in public meetings fall into two groups: government officials and members of the public. It is important to note, though, that such a simplistic bifurcation, if taken too literally, could inadvertently harm democratic civic life by perpetuating the impression that the perspective, interests, and priorities of public officials and lay citizens exist in opposition to each other, and thereby diminish the prospects for joint deliberation and the building of cooperative relationships. This risk is substantial enough to warrant returning to it in this essay’s concluding discussion. The bifurcation also implies that government officeholders and citizens are monolithic classes when in fact both comprise many sub-varieties. Whether a public official is appointed or elected, for example, affects his or her attitude, approach, and interactions.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, a simplified contrast does reflect certain real differences in various stakeholders’ *expectations* and *perceptions* with regard to personal identities, power currencies, communication preferences, goals, and so on. Moreover, it emphasises the defining characteristic of public meetings: that they are potentially competitive encounters between government officeholders and members of the general public—or preferably, efforts by the two parties to work *together*. A dualistic characterisation of the participants in public meeting as ‘government’ and ‘public’ is consistent with the generalising function of the public meeting typology we are developing.

As a general proposition, in public meetings there are four kinds of participants: *initiators*, *invitees*, *enablers*, and *facilitators*. All are stakeholders in specific and important ways.

Initiators. An ‘initiator’ is an individual or organisation that comes up with an idea for a particular public meeting. ‘Who dreamed up this event?’ is an important question to answer because the initiator often is recognised as enjoying ‘ownership’ of the meeting’s purpose, and hence entitlement to a certain amount of control over the agenda (and, perhaps, subsequent policy outcomes). Typically (but not always), a given public meeting takes place on the initiator’s physical, psychological, and/or socio-cultural ‘turf’, which may—in relatively competitive contexts, at least—coincide with real or perceived ‘home-field advantage’.

Invitees. Invitees are the potential participants whom the initiators ask to join them in discussion. Although the initiator may possess certain resources that that work to its advantage (control of the agenda, for example), the invitees are by no means powerless. Because their participation clearly is valuable to the initiator—there would be no point in calling a meeting if this were not the case—participation translates into the currency of power. If, for example, the invitees are public officials, the citizens who invite them presumably want something that is within the invitees' power to grant or withhold, e.g., policymaking authority, direct links to other government agencies, etc. Conversely, officeholders may invite citizens to the table in order to obtain fresh ideas or opinions, to create relationships that may benefit their own re-election agendas, to garner support for their plans, and so on.

Enablers. Of the four types of stakeholders identified here, only enablers need not actually be present at public meetings. Their 'participation' takes the form of providing logistical assistance or financial resources. Often, the initiator of a meeting is also the enabler, but not always. For example, if a citizen group demands that the city hold a public hearing on the topic of violent crime, the citizen group is the initiator, but city government, if it agrees to hold the meeting, probably will be the enabler.

Facilitators. A facilitator is typically the pivotal participant in a public meeting. As the one who 'runs' the meeting, s/he maintains adherence to the agenda and the ground rules, which shape the discourse that occurs, and regulates who can speak and when. Often the facilitator is, or has a direct link with, the event's initiator and/or enabler. Facilitation in this sense reflects both responsibility for the event and control over its context, structure, and modes of communication. On some occasions, initiators and/or enablers employ outside facilitators with special training. Professional consultants and mediators often are retained to run public meetings that concern technical topics (such as urban design) or sensitive political issues. Hiring a facilitator can relieve the initiator or enabler of the burden of running the meeting and afford her the chance to interact with other participants in a more egalitarian way—e.g., by listening attentively and responding to content rather than by trying to ensure that the discussion is fair and balanced.



*Participants' Perceptions and Expectations*

When people come together in a public meeting, they bring with them certain assumptions, preconceptions, and predispositions. The more diverse the group, the more dissimilar such 'understandings' are likely to be. Dissimilar understandings, in turn, manifest themselves as dissimilar perceptions and expectations. The result can be not only failure to make progress toward the purposes or goals of the meeting, but frustration on the part of participants in communicating with and comprehending each other.

The perspectives that participants bring to a public meeting grow out of their personal and shared experiences and are mediated by a shared 'language' that may vary substantially from group to group.<sup>24</sup> Participants' perceptions are the way they 'see' events and situations when these are 'filtered' through the 'lens' of their lived experience. Their expectations—what they believe will happen, what they want to happen, or what they fear will happen—are shaped by their perceptions of a meeting's genesis, purpose, rationale, agenda, format, and conduct. Thus both expectations and perceptions play enormous roles in the way public meetings play out, in terms of both process and products.

Four kinds of expectations and perceptions are especially noteworthy: *goals/outcomes*, *communication direction*, *communication content*, and *contexts* (physical, psychological, and socio-cultural).

Goals/outcomes. Any given public meeting is designed and conducted in order to achieve multiple goals (intended outcomes) that may be explicit, implicit, task-and-product-oriented, or aimed at building or maintaining a relationship between participants. Different participants may have different and even conflicting goals, resulting in a complicated dynamic that may either fuel or stifle productivity and satisfaction.

Typically, explicit goals are set by the meeting initiator and are acknowledged by all participants as legitimate (at least to some degree). In some cases, an initiator also has secondary goals that remain implicit and are advanced through the format selected and through the methodology employed by the facilitator. For example, an officeholder who convenes a meeting with the stated goal of disseminating information<sup>25</sup> may also care about building relationships with constituents, or even building relationships among her constituents. The secondary goal may be realised in the meeting's enacted talk, even though there is no mention of it in the meeting's title, promotional description, or formal agenda. Of course, invitees often bring their

own explicit and implicit goals with them to meetings, and these may conflict with the initiator's or facilitator's intentions, thus complicating conduct of the meeting and leading to unexpected or unwelcome outcomes.

Whether explicit or implicit, every goal involves primarily either the task-related or relationship aspect of a group's work.<sup>26</sup> Common task-related goals include the provision of information and the formation of public policy. Common relationship-maintenance goals include community development, managing moral conflict, and easing inter-cultural/ethnic tension.

Communication direction. It can be argued that communication is inherently interactive rather than simply active—by its very nature multi-directional rather than unidirectional.<sup>27</sup> Whether or not this is so, meeting participants' may have different perceptions and expectations of communicative direction and influence in the enactment of public meetings. Such differences may have consequences for the kinds of talk and the quality of talk that are possible. As Stewart and Logan remark, 'Even though most of us don't often think directly about how we define or understand communication, we do operate with implicit, unspoken definitions that leak out in our communicating'. These understandings influence our responses to the talk we hear.<sup>28</sup>

Meeting participants may have three basic kinds of expectations and perceptions about communication direction: (a) laterally from the government to the public; (b) laterally from the public to the government; and (c) bilaterally between government and public. The participants' expectations reflect their understandings of a given meeting's explicit goals, as addressed above, as well as their sense of what kinds of communication should be enacted to achieve these goals.

Communication content. What is sometimes called 'direction' of communication we will call here 'influence'. Specifically, it is the kind of influence that participants expect to see and will see as aligned with the meeting's communication content (as they expect and perceive it to be). There are three general kinds of communicative content: (a) information, (b) opinions/judgments, and (c) ideas.

(a) 'Information' is sometimes treated as brute data, as nuggets of fact that characterise a particular situation. In terms of Aristotle's typology of general discursive modes, information is 'forensic' (*dikanikon*) in that it pertains to the establishment of past or persistent facts, whether historical, juridical, or scientific.<sup>29</sup> This is not to say that information is 'objective' or cut-and-dried. As observers of scientific panels, courts of law, and other forensic events are aware,

assertions of fact can be strongly contested (and not unreasonably). Nevertheless, in disputes between participants over proposed facts, the parties assume that the objects of their disagreement are (at least potentially) knowable, demonstrable things.

(b) In contrast to the perceived objective nature of information, opinion is regarded as subjective, and as acceptably so. Opinions are solicited and offered in public meetings in order to move beyond forensic accounts of situations toward what Aristotle describes as ‘deliberative’ discourse (*symbouleutikon*).<sup>30</sup> Such talk involves the ‘working through’ of differences concerning two things: values (subjective assessments of assertions of fact) and policy prescriptions (future courses of action that reflect the desire to see certain values advanced or promoted). Opinions bring values to bear on facts. They provide a lynchpin between the forensic establishment of fact and the deliberative determination of policy.

Information, then is (as Weeks argues) ‘a necessary, but not sufficient condition for... judgment’. In order to arrive at a judgment (which serves as the basis for an opinion), one must ‘act on information’. Deliberation is ‘an application of creative intelligence and normative evaluation that leads ultimately to the formation of personal judgment’.<sup>31</sup> Significantly, we further distinguish ‘opinion’, understood as the result of personal deliberation and judgment, from interpersonally-constructed and -shared ‘*public* judgment’.<sup>32</sup> When people in communicative contexts deliberate together, personal judgment is transformed into public judgment. (In the course of public deliberation, personal judgments, and hence opinions, may change.)

(c) ‘Ideas’ are the most sophisticated and emergent of the three modes of communicative content. Information tells people what is real; opinion/judgment evaluates that reality; and ideas create the means by which the values reflected in judgments may be advanced or promoted and (it is hoped) realised. Ideas, in short, are the creative product of deliberation—they suggest new policies. They are thus analogous to the alternative choices that Burkhalter, Gastil, and Kelshaw believe are, and must be, generated by ‘face-to-face deliberation’.<sup>33</sup>

Contexts. When participants come together in public meetings, their interactions are affected by their perceptions of the physical, psychological, and socio-cultural contexts into which they are entering. Physical contexts have to do with the way time and location affect people. Psychological contexts concern individuals’ state of mind: feelings, attitudes, dispositions,

sensitivities, etc. Socio-cultural contexts involve historical and cultural circumstances and relationships and the norms that are built around them.

There is infinite variety in the contexts meeting participants may encounter. For our purposes, though, it is important simply to note, by applying the typology we have developed, we will endeavor to describe the general context of public meetings that are held in relatively ‘open’ societies characterised by democratic—perhaps even *deliberative* democratic—public expectations of citizens’ roles and influence. As Boyte notes, this general democratic context presumes that citizens play an *active* role in *shared* governance, in large measure through participation in public meetings.<sup>34</sup> Even when merely listening to public officials disseminating information, citizens participate, not as mere spectators to public dramas (which they may ‘review’ on Election Day), but as participants whose responses can be as varied as those of public officials.

### *Prominent Genres of Democratic Public Talk*

Democratic practise requires various kinds of discourse, each of which performs a different function. These range from closure (such as monologic enforcement of extant public policy or conveyance of information) to openness (e.g., dialogic conversation among all parties having a point of view, position, stake, or interest in connection with an issue). In so far as democratic activity seeks to temper tendencies toward the extremes of monological (authoritatively closed-ended) and dialogical (provisionally open-ended) kinds of talk across different discursive contexts, it is important to recognise how certain recurring genres may play out in public meetings.

A ‘genre’, as we use the term here, is a mode or form of talk that is conceived and enacted in a distinctive manner. The five key genres are *heresthetical address*, *rhetorical address*, *debate*, *dialogue*, and *deliberation*. Although it is beyond this essay’s scope to treat each genre in detail, it is helpful to distinguish briefly between those that have monological qualities and those that are potentially dialogic.

Monological genres. Monologism reflects the penchant for striving to control meaning, which is assumed to be closed-ended and authoritative. As Baxter and Montgomery explain, ‘Monologic approaches treat communication as one-sided and unvoiced. . . . [T]he focus is on sameness . . . a focus that creates a fiction of consistency and completeness’.<sup>35</sup>

The three genres of talk that tend to manifest communicators' effort to exert monological control in public meetings are heresthetical address, rhetorical address, and debate. 'Heresthetic' is 'the art of setting up situations—composing the alternatives among which political actors must choose'.<sup>36</sup> It is the communicative process of putting forward a matter for consideration. Communicators may use various rhetorical devices to define or 'frame' matters in particular ways. They may appeal to reason (*logos*), to emotion (*pathos*), or to their perceived standing (e.g., as persons in authority, having authority, or possessing a relevant authoritativeness) in relation to the matter to be considered (*ethos*).<sup>37</sup> Heresthetic and rhetoric can be applied in various discursive modes. But when the mode is one of 'address'—in which talk is conceived and enacted unilaterally (e.g., a report, a lecture, or a criticism)—they may be particularly effective tools for achieving and maintaining discursive control.

'Debate' is a confrontation between two or more monological addresses—what might be thought of as 'parallel monologues'<sup>38</sup>—that advance opposing viewpoints. Debate can be an effective means for addressing matters of public interest or concern, but it can also, when opposition becomes entrenched, limit productive engagement. When that happens, communicators typically take on the role of spokespersons or representatives of the groups with which they share a point of view, and usually direct their messages to the members of their group members or to those of an uncommitted outside group (such as 'independent' voters who remain undecided between two candidates for public office). They tend to speak in ways that convey an unchanging and unchangeable commitment to their point of view.<sup>39</sup>

Dialogical genres. On the (comparatively) open-ended pole of the public meeting discursive spectrum, interactants may engage in 'dialogue' or 'deliberation'. Dialogue marries the Greek words *dia* and *logos* to signify "meaning through"; that is, the emergence of joint understandings through participants engaging and interacting with each other.<sup>40</sup> Issacs characterises dialogue as 'a conversation with a center, not sides', that provides a 'way of taking the energy of our differences and channeling it toward something that has never been created before'.<sup>41</sup> As Anderson, Cissna, and Arnett clarify, 'dialogue implies more than a simple back-and-forthness of messages in interaction; it points to a particular process and quality of communication in which the participants "meet," which allows for changing and being changed'.<sup>42</sup> Dialogical communication is useful for building sophisticated understandings of complex cultural and social problems, and for bridging relational, cultural, and moral divides.

Deliberation exhibits important dialogical qualities (inter-subjectivity, openness, the relinquishing of control, treating the status quo as contingent and susceptible to improvement) and constructive dispositions (availability, flexibility, and commitment to the conversation). Deliberation is distinguished, however, by its emphasis on task closure (e.g., decision making), on the future tense (e.g., courses of action that might be taken), and analytic consideration of sound evidence.<sup>43</sup> In other words, in contrast to dialogue's open-endedness, deliberation is goal-oriented, requiring participants 'to weigh carefully both the consequences of various options for action and the views of others' in order to make good, joint decisions.<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusion

As theorists and practitioners of public participation in community-building and policymaking move from seeing citizens as merely 'voters, volunteers, clients, or consumers' to viewing them as 'co-creators of public goods',<sup>45</sup> it is crucial that those who interact in the settings where such public goods are made possess the ability to understand and reflect on their circumstances, and hence to make effective communication choices. This essay and its forthcoming sequel address the settings in which people come together to explore public needs, problems, issues, and so forth in order to co-create effective, widely-accepted public responses. These settings—face-to-face public meetings—have essential components and dimensions that vary considerably across particular events, and these variations have consequences for the ways in which people participate, relationally and substantively. The effort to recognise the defining characteristics of a public meeting is the first step participants should take.

In this essay we have laid the groundwork for presentation of a typology that distinguishes and names seven kinds of public meetings. This conceptual work begins with an account of the role of face-to-face meetings in contemporary democratic life. Despite the continuing rise in popularity of so-called 'deliberative democratic' approaches to public meetings, we emphasise that public meetings serve many purposes, some of which do not require deliberation or collaboration. The 'public meeting' as a category is not one-dimensional.

In order for people to participate effectively in a given meeting context, then, it is important to understand its design and function within the larger universe of public meeting formats and purposes. For this reason, we have tried to delineate the key dimensions along which public meetings vary, including participants' roles, their expectations and perceptions of goals, the

intended direction(s) of communicative influence and content, and the genres of talk most commonly enacted.

In the essay that follows, we will use the conceptual platform we have constructed to build a typological framework for understanding and reflecting on public meetings' diverse purposes and communicative modes. This typology describes seven kinds of public meetings with goals and processes that range in from the conventional and familiar (e.g., dissemination of information) to innovative and unfamiliar (e.g., collaborative management of complex community problems). The typology draws attention to who initiates a given meeting (and who is invited); its perceived primary purpose; the presumed direction of communicative influence; the essential kind(s) of communicative content; and the prominent genres of discourse that are enacted. By reflecting on these important features as they differ and combine in different ways across meetings and participants, we will prepare ourselves to make effective choices when designing and taking part in public meetings.

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> Boyte, H. (2005). Reframing democracy: Governance, civic agency, and politics. *Public Administration Review*, 65(5), 536-546. (P. 537)

<sup>4</sup> Roberts, N. (2004). Public deliberation in an age of direct citizen participation. *American Review of Public Administration*, 34, 315-353. (P. 327)

<sup>5</sup> Denhart, R. B., and Denhardt, J. V. (2000). The new public service: Serving rather than steering. *Public Administration Review*, 60, 549-559. (P. 554)

<sup>6</sup> See: Bonner, P. A., Carlitz, R., Gunn, R., Maak, L. E., & Ratliff, C. A. (2005). Bringing the public and the government together through on-line dialogues. In J. Gastil and P. Levine (Eds.), *The deliberative democracy handbook*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

<sup>7</sup> McComas, K. A. (2001). Theory and practise of public meetings. *Communication Theory*, 11(1), 36-55. (P. 36)

<sup>8</sup> Gastil, J., & Kelshaw, T. (2000, May). Public meetings: A sampler of deliberative forums that bring officeholders and citizens together. Prepared for and presented to the Kettering Foundation Public-Government Workshop, Dayton, OH.

<sup>9</sup> See: Adams, B. (2004). Public meetings and the democratic process. *Public Administration Review*, 64, 43-54; Leighninger, M. (2004). The Seven deadly citizens: Moving from civic stereotypes to well-rounded citizenship. *The Good Society*, 13 (2), 33-38; Levine, P., Fung, A., & Gastil, J. (2005). Future directions for public deliberation.

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<sup>10</sup> Schwartzman, H. (1989). *The meeting: Gatherings in organisations and communities*. New York: Plenum Press, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Adams, B. (2004). Public meetings and the democratic process. *Public Administration Review*, 64, 43-54. (P. 52)

<sup>13</sup> Webler, T. & Renn, O. (1995). A brief primer on participation: Philosophy and practise. In O. Renn, T. Webler, & P. Wiedemann, *Fairness and competence in citizen participation: Evaluating models for environmental discourse*. Boston: Kluwer Academic. (P. 24)

<sup>14</sup> Crosby, N. & Nethercutt, D. (2005). Citizens juries: Creating a trustworthy voice of the people. In J. Gastil & P. Levine (Eds.), *The Deliberative democracy handbook*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

<sup>15</sup> Hendriks, C. M. (2005). Consensus conferences and planning cells: Lay citizen deliberations. In J. Gastil & P. Levine (Eds.), *The Deliberative democracy handbook*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

<sup>16</sup> Becker, T. & Slaton, C. D. (2000). *The future of teledemocracy*. New York: Praeger.

<sup>17</sup> Lukensmeyer, C. J., Goldman, J., & Brigham, S. (2005). A town meeting for the twenty-first century. In J. Gastil & P. Levine (Eds.), *The Deliberative democracy handbook*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

<sup>18</sup> Fishkin, J. S. (1995). *The voice of the people*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>19</sup> Schwartzman, H. (1989). *The meeting: Gatherings in organisations and communities*. New York: Plenum Press. (P. 5)

<sup>20</sup> Roberts, N. (2004). Public deliberation in an age of direct citizen participation. *American Review of Public Administration*, 34, 315-353. (P. 126)

<sup>21</sup> Walters, L. C., Aydelotte, J. & Miller, J. (2000). Putting more public in policy analysis. *Public Administration Review*, 60(4), 349-359. (P. 352).

<sup>22</sup> We focus on democratic meetings, broadly construed, because we anticipate readers and researchers are principally interested in public meetings that occur within relatively free and open societies. That is, we hope to improve the practise of public meetings intended to fit within democratic political frameworks, rather than developing a theory and typology that would have to encompass even those meetings never intended to serve democratic aims. We do, however, recognize that there are public meetings that are markedly undemocratic and occur within authoritarian or otherwise repressive political contexts, such as those convened in the former East Germany. See Deess, E. P., & Gastil, J. (2005). Political discussion and the self-destructing state: An historical account of state-sanctioned talk in the German Democratic Republic from 1980-1985. Paper presented at the annual conference of the International Communication Association, Dresden, Germany.

<sup>23</sup> For an account of the differences between elected and appointed officials' attitudes toward public participation, see Frederickson, H. G. (1999). *How the community works: Officeholder perspectives on democratic self-government and the community*. Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation.

<sup>24</sup> Though the theory was built to handle larger purposes than this, Anthony Giddens's structuration theory effectively captures these ideas. People's understandings of society, themselves, and their fellow citizens are shaped and re-shaped through their interactions. See Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

<sup>25</sup> This kind of forum exemplifies what will eventually be described as a "public information" meeting.

<sup>26</sup> Benne, K. & Sheats, P. (1948). Functional roles of group members. *Journal of Social Issues*, 4, 41-49.

<sup>27</sup> See: Baxter, L.A., & Montgomery, B.M. (1996). *Relating: Dialogues and dialectics*. New York: The Guilford Press; and Shotter, J. (1993). *Conversational realities: Constructing life through language*. London: SAGE Publications.

<sup>28</sup> Stewart, J., & Logan, C. (1998). *Together: Communicating interpersonally* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: McGraw Hill. (P. 12)

<sup>29</sup> Aristotle. (1991). *On rhetoric: A theory of civic discourse*. (G. A. Kennedy, Trans.) New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>30</sup> Aristotle. (1991). *On rhetoric: A theory of civic discourse*. (G. A. Kennedy, Trans.) New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>31</sup> Weeks, E. C. (2000). The practise of deliberative democracy: Results From four large-scale trials. *Public Administration Review* 60, 360-372. (P. 361)

<sup>32</sup> Yankelovich, D. (1991). *Coming to public judgment*. New York: Syracuse University Press.

<sup>33</sup> Burkhalter, S., Gastil, J., & Kelshaw, T. (2002). The self-reinforcing model of public deliberation. *Communication Theory*, 12(4), 398-422.



- <sup>34</sup> Boyte, H. (2005). Reframing democracy: Governance, civic agency, and politics. *Public Administration Review*, 65(5), 536-546.
- <sup>35</sup> Baxter, L.A., & Montgomery, B.M. (1996). *Relating: Dialogues and dialectics*. New York: The Guilford Press. (P. 45)
- <sup>36</sup> Riker, W. H. (1996). *The strategy of rhetoric: Campaigning for the American Constitution*. New Haven: Yale University Press. (P. 9)
- <sup>37</sup> Aristotle. (1991). *On rhetoric: A theory of civic discourse*. (G. A. Kennedy, Trans.) New York: Oxford University Press.
- <sup>38</sup> Baxter, L.A., & Montgomery, B.M. (1996). *Relating: Dialogues and dialectics*. New York: The Guilford Press. (P. 46)
- <sup>39</sup> Chasin, R., Herzig, M., Roth, S., Chasin, L., Becker, C., & Stains, R. R., Jr. (1996). From diatribe to dialogue on divisive public issues: Approaches drawn from family therapy. *Mediation Quarterly*, 13(4), 323-344.
- <sup>40</sup> Bohm, D. (1996). *On dialogue* (L. Nichol, Ed.) London: Routledge. (P. 6)
- <sup>41</sup> Isaacs, W. (2002). A conversation with a center, not sides. In J. Stewart (Ed.), *Bridges not walls*. Boston: McGraw-Hill. Pp. 578-585. (P. 579)
- <sup>42</sup> Anderson, R., Cissna, K. N. & Arnett, A. (Eds.) (1994). *The reach of dialogue: Confirmation, voice and community*. Waverly: Hampton Press. (P. 10)
- <sup>43</sup> Kelshaw, T. (2007, March). Understanding abnormal public discourses: Dialogue and deliberation defined. Paper presented at the annual conference of the New Jersey Communication Association, Union, NJ.
- <sup>44</sup> Mathews, D. (1994). Politics for people: Finding a responsible public voice. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. (P. 110)
- <sup>45</sup> Boyte, H. (2005). Reframing democracy: Governance, civic agency, and politics. *Public Administration Review*, 65(5), 536-546. (P. 537)