When Citizens and Officeholders Meet[1]

Part 2: A Typology of Face-to-Face Public Meetings

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Abstract

This essay is the second in a two-part series that introduces a framework for differentiating among various face-to-face public meetings. The first piece identified key elements of public meetings pertaining to participants' roles, expectations of communicative influence and content, and prominent discursive genres. This second essay utilizes those elements to build a typology of seven general kinds of public meetings. These meeting types range from conventional forms—with relatively simple goals of information expression—to innovative models that enable collaborative problem solving between lay citizens and public officials. Each of the seven types are compared with one another and illustrated with examples. Using this framework, public participation theorists and practitioners can more readily understand the circumstances, purposes, and likely outcomes of any given public meeting.

Keywords: Communication, discursive genres, face-to-face public meetings, typology

As conceptions of civic life in democratic societies move from viewing citizens as mere "voters, volunteers, clients, or consumers" to "problem solvers and co-creators of public goods," there is growing interest in direct citizen participation in governance (Boyte, 2005, p. 537). As a result, the theory and practice of public meetings has become more important than ever. But with limited academic and professional analysis of public meetings within public administration, communication studies, political science, and related disciplines, planners and participants are ill equipped to foster conditions for effective contact between citizens and officeholders. To remedy

this situation, we aim to provide a framework for understanding and effectively conducting public meetings across a variety of contexts.

We begin where we left off in our previous essay, "When citizens and officeholders meet (Part 1): Variations in the key elements of public meetings" (Kelshaw & Gastil, 2007). Having already provided an expository treatment of public meetings' most important communicative aspects, we present and discuss a typology of seven generic kinds of public meetings. The first section of this essay explains the typology's basis and discusses the variables that provide its framework. The second section presents the typology, with the seven generic public meetings comparatively described and illustrated with examples. In the final section, we draw out implications for theorizing about and practicing public meetings. Ultimately, we aim to equip planners and participants with tools for understanding and reflecting on their interaction in public meetings and for making effective communication choices that increase the likelihood of satisfying, effective public engagement.

The Making of a Typology: Determining Factors

When officeholders and citizens come together to address public issues, they find themselves in particular settings consisting of various elements. As described in the first essay in this pair, these include the following ingredients: the participants' roles; their expectations and perceptions of meeting goals, communication (direction and content), and contexts (physical, psychological, and socio-cultural); and genres of enacted democratic talk. Looking at how these various elements typically combine helps us understand the general types of public meetings, setting aside the particularities and discursive subtleties of individual meetings or more specific designs.

A framework with which to classify meeting-types is very useful in that it may explicate public meetings' basic functions and qualities, allowing descriptive understanding within general contexts and promoting reflection and conscientious choices in practice. A typology may be especially useful for those who wish to create novel venues for political contact between officeholders and citizens.

Of public meetings' various elements, three provide the typology's framework. Each of the typology's seven public meeting forms is determined by: (a) who initiated the meeting (the government or the public); (b) the direction(s) of communication influence that participants expect and/or perceive; and (c) the kind(s) of communicative content that participants expect and/or perceive (which overlaps with the initiators' and/or planners' primary goals and the

event's prominent genres of talk). By identifying these variously combined elements, planners may understand and reflect on the given meeting's generic context, and thus recognize communicative attitudes and strategies that are particularly appropriate and effective. Participants, in the course of a meeting, may be able to identify incongruities between communication-related expectations and behaviors, and make adjustments accordingly.

Meeting Initiation

A public meeting brings together two kinds of participants: government officials and members of the general public. Above all else, it is important to recognize whether a meeting is initiated by a government body/official, citizen group/individual, or both (in partnership). This factor profoundly affects the event: the potential for the meeting's content to find its way into public policy; the relative emphases on task and relationship dimensions of group work; the degree of formality of procedures and contextual elements; the frequency and regularity of event recurrence; and the heterogeneity of citizen and governmental participants.

First, whether a public meeting's initiator is a member of the government or the public may affect the degree to which citizens' recommendations and raised issues find their ways into policy decisions or administrative rulemaking.[2] Meetings initiated by officeholders who genuinely seek public input, for example, might result in more direct citizen influence than that of citizen-initiated meetings. Although citizens are likely to be relegated to advisory roles in either case, advice directly solicited by officeholders within institutional frameworks may have more immediate impact on policymaking.

A public meeting's point of origin may also affect the relative emphases on task and relationship dimensions of group work (Benne & Sheats, 1948) insofar as the initiator controls the event's primary/explicit goals (and perhaps even secondary/implicit goals) and has direct influence on the facilitator's methods. This kind of control, for example, may be very influential in antagonistic psychological and socio-cultural contexts, since it has everything to do with "turf" and the availability of currencies that accompany "home field advantage." In more collaborative public meeting contexts, invitees may view the initiator as a "host" and themselves as "guests"—metaphors that certainly affect the qualities of interaction as well as the kinds of tasks and relationship building that occur.

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[2] We chose to focus on policy decisions at this juncture. We recognize that many meetings deal with relationship development, information conveyance, and other things that are not overtly related to policymaking.

Third, who initiates a public meeting may affect the event's formality with regard to mandated procedures and stratified roles. Government-initiated events may have institutionally prescribed procedures that are intended to be replicable. For instance, state officials touring towns for a series of community meetings may value uniformity of agendas and procedures. This both simplifies event preparations and guarantees fairness across localities. Some citizen-led events employ standardized, replicable procedures, as well. Examples are citizen forums prepared using the National Issues Forums' published guidelines and hands-on training (National Issues Forums, 2001).

A fourth possible consequence of who plays the role of initiator may be the regularity and frequency of event recurrence. Government-mandated public meetings might recur more regularly than citizen-initiated events. Whereas citizen-led public meetings typically have no legal mandate and are contingent on available funding, the frequency and regularity of institutional public meetings are often prescribed in official procedural bylaws. For example, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development requires communities that receive annual block grants to hold annual public meetings. These meetings are implemented to inform expenditure plans (ultimately created by public officials). Even if no citizens attend planning meetings, however, the government's requirement is fulfilled so long as the meeting has been properly advertised. In this sense, high frequency and regularity should be not assumed to correlate with effective civic participation. But, from a pro-deliberative democratic perspective, having more opportunities for citizens and public officials to meet is not a bad thing.

Finally, the public meeting initiator may affect the degree of ideological heterogeneity among participants. Meetings that are initiated by citizen bodies may, in some circumstances, attract civic participants who are affiliated with those particular interest groups. In such cases, participating citizens may share special interests and ideological agendas, giving the citizen body a fairly homogenous (rather than pluralistic) voice and creating potential for oppositional relationships between citizens and officeholders as holders of distinct positions. Likewise, some government-initiated meetings include only invitees who have been pre-screened or hand-picked in accordance with a particular agenda. This is not the case in public meetings—regardless of whom the initiators are—that are composed of citizens selected by random sample (Fishkin, 1995).

Expected/Perceived Direction of Communication Influence

This typology's dualistic conception permits a necessary simplicity for creating general classifications. In treating citizens and officeholders as two distinct, unitary bodies, communication is understood as occurring between or among them. A more subtle treatment would account for intragroup/interpersonal communicative influence in addition to intergroup influence because all participants potentially affect (and are affected by) each other, regardless of group membership. However, the simplicity achieved by highlighting intergroup communication is useful because it coincides with the intended or presumed goals, procedures, and outcomes of various public meeting-types. By focusing description on intergroup communication, it is easier to recognize citizens' and officeholders' respective roles, relationships, and communicative behaviors across general meeting types.

As previously described, expected or perceived communicative influence may be understood in three ways—unilaterally from the government to the public, unilaterally from the public to the government, or bilaterally between the two groups. This simplified but practical conception reflects participants' basic understandings of meeting goals, which are manifested in presumptions of communicative influence between officeholders and citizens. The presumed communication direction(s), in turn, affects the quality of a public meeting's enacted communication—its processes, relationships, and outcomes. In other words, how participants think about communication—what they assume about how it "works"—shapes the qualities of the lived communication itself. As Stewart and Logan note,

> 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, especially in conflict. . . . Since the way you think about something determines what you see, and what you see determines the responses you make, it's important to have an accurate definition of communication so you can make responses that help you communicate effectively (Steward & Logan, 1998, p. 12).

Here, "accurate definition of communication" may be replaced with "appropriate definition of communication," given that different public meetings have different contexts that require different communicative understandings and enactments.

In some public meetings, organizers presume that communication flows in a single direction from one group to the other. For example, an event may be conceived as an opportunity for

citizens to voice their opinions (either at the government's request or the public's insistence), or, conversely, for the government to present information to citizens (again, either by public request or the government's initiative). In either case the primary communication is conceived as active (rather than interactive) and linear (rather than bi-lateral) in a way that reflects participants' understandings of the meeting's basic goal—the expressive transmission of communicative content from one group to the other. This objective presumes that the conveyed information, opinions/judgments, or ideas will somehow influence the receiver in what O'Keefe (1988) calls "expressive" ways.

An event's communicative influence may otherwise be presumed as bilateral, insofar as the meeting's fundamental goal requires mutual influence between officeholders and citizens. This intended reciprocity is exemplified in meetings that engender cooperative problem-solving strategies, as when participants confront pressing issues and contradictory perspectives in the context of moral conflict (Burkhalter, Gastil, & Kelshaw, 2002; Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). Participants reflect on this contact as interactive and relatively non-linear, or bilateral. Although the public meeting may experience perceived bursts of information transmitted linearly from one group to the other, its primary communicative mode is understood as collaborative interaction through which participants may jointly develop shared understandings. Bilateralism is enabled though democratic discourse genres that are potentially integrative, such as dialogue and deliberation. These interactions are understood as "constitutive processes" (Deetz, 1994, p. 573) through which participants "negotiate" joint understandings (O'Keefe, 1988).

The intended or presumed direction of influence affects relationships between citizen and officeholder groups, including the centrality of certain participants and resulting power relations. Consider the following three examples.

In one hypothetical public meeting, citizens sponsor a public meeting with the intention of learning information from a panel of officeholders. In this case the panelists are likely to be privileged as central participants. Perhaps they occupy a stage at the front of the room and enact roles of presenters or discussants. Once the presentation is concluded they may respond to questions and comments from citizens in the audience.

In a second hypothetical public meeting, officeholders implement a "public hearing" to solicit public comment (Graham, 2001; McComas, 2001). As in the prior example, the officeholders appear as a panel at the front of the room, perhaps on a riser. In this case, though,

the majority of the meeting's expressive talk comes from the floor. Citizens may take turns speaking for allotted periods of time. Perhaps specific comments are met with applause and cheers of agreement from other citizens. The officeholders may take written notes and are not typically expected to respond (although they may in some instances). As in the first example, participants tend to understand their communication as fulfilling an expressive function.

In a third hypothetical public meeting, citizens and officeholders sit together at a roundtable to discuss a community problem. The table is literally round. This creates a setting conducive to egalitarianism and cooperation since all positions are proxemically equal. The environmental setting and procedural informality (e.g., open discussion) encourage bilateral communication between officeholders and citizens, and multilateral interaction among all participants. In such a meeting participants are more likely to reflect on their communication as transactional and synthetic. They emerge from the interaction not just with revised relationships, but also with new understandings or perhaps more sophisticated commitments to their prior opinions (Gastil & Dillard, 1999).

Communicative Characteristics and Goals

Whereas a public meeting's participants are the "who" and the communication direction is the "how," the communicative content and goals are the "what" and the "why." What are participants talking about, and for what purpose? These are crucial pillars of the meeting typology's framework.

As addressed in the first piece of this two-part series, there are three general forms of communicative content: information, opinions/judgments (values), and ideas. These three, respectively, increase in deliberative sophistication. Information, although potentially very contestable, is often understood as brute data that are expressed by communicative actors rather than negotiated between or among interactants. They concern past or present facts, and are thus forensic in nature. Opinions and judgments are comparatively more deliberative and messy; whereas informative facts are potentially provable in objective terms, values are ultimately subjective things. Opinions and judgments rely on information as a basis, and thus are a step higher in sophistication. The third kind of communicative content is ideas, which are even more deliberatively complicated in that they build upon values. Whereas opinions/judgments pertain to what meeting participants consider as good, just, and so on, ideas serve to transpose such values into future courses of action. In this sense, ideas in public meetings move participants toward

policy decisions and are thus the most deliberative and complicated of the three communicative forms.

The expected and perceived forms of communicative content pertain directly to the goals that meeting initiators and planners have in mind. A given meeting's primary goal is identified by considering both the presumed communicative content and the anticipated direction(s) of communicative influence. If a meeting's content is primarily about information, then the initiators, planners, and facilitators may identify the chief goal as to either convey or solicit information that might aid in understanding of public problems. If the presumed communicative content is opinions/judgments, then the goal may be identified as expressing or soliciting values. Finally, if ideas are added to the communicative content mix, and if the presumed direction of communicative influence shifts from monologically unilateral to dialogically and deliberatively bi-lateral, then the primary goals may be to set a mutually agreeable agenda, to steer the development of public policy, to build public commitment and to legitimate policy initiatives, and/or to integrate information, values, and ideas toward innovative and inclusive policymaking.

All of this—the prominent forms of communicative content, the direction(s) of communicative influence, and the explicit goals of a given meeting—both affect and reflect the genres of talk that participants enact. As described in the first piece of this two-part series, there is a variety of typical speech genres in public meeting contexts, ranging from monologic to dialogic in nature. Relatively monologic, or unilateral and control-oriented, discourses include heresthetical address (concerning the raising of issues), rhetorical address (concerning the framing of issues), and debate (concerning the competitive confrontation of opposing attitudes). Relatively dialogic discourses are bi- or multi-lateral in direction and more collaborative in style, and include the speech genres called dialogue and deliberation. Dialogue is used to manage relationships and complex moral conflicts, and is generally open-ended (i.e., not requiring closure, such as a binding decision); deliberation is used to brainstorm and evaluate policy ideas, and generally moves participants toward some kind of resolution in the form of a policy decision. The prominent modes of discourse in a given public meeting manifest participants' expectations and perceptions of goals, communication direction, and communicative content. The more unilateral the communication direction and forensic the communication content, the more monologic the speech genres are likely to be. Conversely, if the communication direction is more

bi- or multi-lateral and the communication content is more deliberative, then the enacted discourse genres are likely to be more dialogic.

A Typology of Public Meetings

Bringing all these considerations together, the typology shown in Table 1 identifies seven kinds of public meetings. This categorization foregrounds differences in a given meeting's event initiator, intended communication direction (influence), and perceived communication content. It also considers two important related characteristics—the initiator's primary objective and the prominent modes of discourse that are likely to occur.

In this section, we explain each generic type and provide examples. Once again, our aim is not to characterize all possible forms of public meetings across time and space, but rather to highlight those public meeting types that are most common (and relevant) to the contemporary situation of public managers and policymakers in modern, democratic societies.

Vicarious Public Meetings

Citizens' groups initiate these events with the basic goal of soliciting information about government policies (and officeholders' opinions about such policies). Communication is presumed to flow unilaterally from the government to the public. The primary form of communication content is information, but values may be expressed as well.

Citizens in vicarious meetings aspire to learn from the officeholders' perspectives and information bases. This is why the public meeting-type is termed "vicarious." The label pertains to the initiating group's explicit goal, which is to experience the knowledge, understandings, and perspectives of officeholders. The hope is to gain insight into their world, and thus develop more informed understandings of public problems and policymaking. Citizens tend to act as silent listeners with the possible exception of posing brief questions or comments (typically following officeholders' presentations). Although citizens may pose challenging questions or comments that advance their own perspectives and attitudes, participants' attention remains primarily on the substantive content of officeholders' responses.

Government officials in vicarious meetings are privileged speakers. If one officeholder is featured in the event, she or he is likely to attend the meeting with a prepared presentation. If two or more officeholders are involved they may deliver individual presentations or participate in a

Table 1. A Typology of Face-to-Face Meetings of Public Officials and Citizens

Meeting Type	Initiator (in CAPS) and Expected Direction of Talk/Influence (Shown by Arrow)	Primary Expected Communication Content	Primary Communication Purpose as Perceived by Event Initiator(s)	Characteristic Genres of Talk
Vicarious	govt → PUBLIC	Information	Information Gathering	Heresthetical and Rhetorical Address
Informational	GOVT → public	Information	Information Dissemination	Heresthetical and Rhetorical Address
Advisory	govt ← PUBLIC	Opinions/ Judgments	Expressing Values	Heresthetical and Rhetorical Address, Debate
Consultative	GOVT ← public	Opinions/ Judgments	Soliciting Values	Heresthetical and Rhetorical Address, Debate
Grassroots	govt ←→ PUBLIC	Opinions/ Judgments, Ideas	Setting Agenda, Influencing Policy	Dialogue, Deliberation
Invitational	GOVT ←→ public	Opinions/ Judgments, Ideas	Building Public Commitment and Government Legitimacy	Dialogue, Deliberation
Collaborative	GOVT ←→ PUBLIC	Information, Opinions/ Judgments, Ideas	Combining Information, Values, and Ideas to Make Decisions	Dialogue, Deliberation

moderated panel discussion or debate (in those less usual cases when opinions are at issue). Officials typically occupy the front of the room and face an audience of citizens. This physical set-up reflects and maintains the sense of officeholders and citizens as distinct categories.

Citizens learn vicariously about the experiences and knowledge of officeholders in many ways, not all of them in face-to-face settings. For example, watching officials discuss policy on C-Span may satisfy citizens' informational needs. The primary benefit of face-to-face meetings, though, is that citizens have opportunities for verbal and nonverbal feedback. They can pose questions and comments and thereby garner specific and appropriate information. In addition to this substantive benefit of face-to-face vicarious meetings there is a relational dimension through which citizens may encounter their public officials as "real" people instead of faceless bureaucrats or issuers of televised sound bites and, conversely, officeholders are reminded of their accountability to the otherwise anonymous people for whom they speak in policymaking.

A general example of a vicarious public meeting is when a university invites a public official to present the annual commencement address. Although much of the presentation may concern non-political topics, frequently officeholders do address current events, public issues, and policy proposals. When sitting presidents offer commencement addresses, they often use the events (and the media exposure) to announce new policies or defend existing ones. For instance, in 2002 President Bush used an invitation from West Point to offer a commencement address to shape public opinion on how to counter terrorism through an aggressive foreign policy.[3] In vicarious events such as this, citizen audiences gain exposure to the speakers' attitudes on some public issues. Citizens have opportunities to see and hear the officeholders in person, which demystifies the public figures and provides insight into their characters as "real" people.

Informational Public Meetings

Public information events are similar to the vicarious variety in that the presumed information flow is from the government to the public, and the expected communication content is primarily informational. But unlike vicarious events, officeholders or government agencies initiate public information meetings. Their explicit goal is to use heresthetical and rhetorical address to inform and perhaps influence the public on a particular topic or set of issues.

Informational events have much in common with vicarious meetings; citizens fulfill roles of empathic listeners while officeholders do most of the speaking. The major difference between the two meeting types is that the government initiates the event. The change in this factor may

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[3] The full text of the address is available online at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html.

affect a number of variables, including rigidity of the event's structure and procedures, the heterogeneity of citizen participants, event recurrence, and so on.

An example of an informational public meeting is the United States Forest Service's 2002 tour of nineteen towns and cities in Idaho to present information about its statewide "roadless area" policies. As the promotional material for this meeting tour stated,

> The Forest Service will hold two rounds of public meetings on the Roadless Area Conservation DEIS. The first round of public meetings, which will be held during the last two weeks of May, will be to provide information and answer questions about the DEIS only. No verbal comments will be accepted at the first round of public meetings, although individuals can submit written comments (United States Forest Service, 2002).

Although the subsequent round of public meetings "provide[d] an opportunity for individuals to provide verbal comments," this first series was limited to a public information function (United States Forest Service, 2002). Whereas citizens could ask questions and provide written comments, their communicative roles largely involved listening. The government officials were the primary expressers.

Advisory Public Meetings

Like vicarious meetings, citizens initiate advisory public meetings. These meetings, however, differ in their motivating goal and presumed direction of communicative influence. In this type of public meeting, citizens advise officeholders with the hope of informing public policy. Accordingly, the fundamental direction of intended or presumed influence is from the public to the policymakers.

Citizens are privileged as the central expressive communicators in advisory meetings. They may, though, compose an audience-like body while the officials enjoy a privileged space at the front of the room. (This condition may be due largely to citizens outnumbering officials, so the proxemic arrangement may be a product of environmental factors such as room size and layout. It does, though, reflect and maintain a certain power distinction between citizens and their legislators or executives.) Citizens' expressions may be structured in various ways in advisory meetings. For example, citizens in forums that resemble public hearings[4] typically take speaking

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[4] So-called "public hearings" are government-initiated rather than citizen-initiated meetings. Thus public hearings are instances of consultative (rather than advisory) public meetings. Regardless, citizens may design advisory public meetings to resemble public hearings in structure and procedure.

turns (either by waiting in line for a microphone or by registering prior to the event for a speaking slot) and have limited time allotted for their comments (Graham, 2001). In less procedurally-formal events, citizens may raise their hands to be called upon by a moderator or a public official at the front of the room. If turnout is low, there is an opportunity for a more conversational approach and less oppositional proxemic arrangement; however, the focus remains on citizens expressing their opinions and ideas to officeholders rather than on reciprocal exchange. In some cases (such as the Gulf Coast Legislative Town Meetings, described below) citizens actually deliberate together in small groups while officeholders listen in.

Officeholders are the listeners in advisory meetings. They may listen attentively and take notes. They are not generally expected to issue feedback, although they may be compelled to do so by angry citizens who level criticisms or charges. Citizens expect officeholders to relinquish their own voices and to listen to what the citizens have to say during advisory public meetings.

An example of advisory meetings is Town Meetings convened by the Community Leadership Institute at the Gulf Coast Community College in Panama City, Florida. The motivating premise is that citizens need not just interaction with community leaders, but also to exert direct influence on policymaking. The result is an ongoing series of public forums that "give citizens the opportunity to articulate their legislative priorities, suggest ideas for future legislation, and to discuss the pros and cons of bills that are likely to come up during the next legislative session" (Gastil & Kelshaw, 2000, p. 18). As advisory meetings, officials' speaking roles are minimized with respect to citizens' articulations and—more prominent in these particular events— deliberative discussion among citizens. In the end, the Gulf Coast Legislative Town Meetings are designed to achieve the basic advisory goal—citizen input in policymaking.

Consultative Public Meetings

Like advisory events, consultative meetings aim to inform government officials of the public's attitudes. Government agencies or officeholders, however, initiate these events to solicit citizens' opinions/judgment about public problems and policymaking. Although polls provide alternative means for collecting civic input (both for policymaking and campaign strategizing), consultative public meetings may produce comparably more subtle qualitative data. Furthermore, consultative meetings have another benefit over polling: they bring citizens and officeholders into physical contact. This allows relational and community benefits beyond the basic consultative task. Putting human faces with the perspectives being articulated allows

citizens and officeholders to become more familiar with each other as people. Polls, surveys, and other forms of individualizing consultation cannot accomplish this.

Citizens in consultative meetings do most of the speaking. Although government facilitators or moderators may provide background information, heresthetically and rhetorically bring issues into focus, and ask probing questions, attention is on what the citizens have to say. Citizens may convey information and offer suggestions, but the focus is on their opinions/judgments and ideas about public problems and policies. Citizens may talk together in relatively conversational, dialogic, or deliberative manners while officeholders listen.

Officeholders in consultative meetings—as in advisory meeting-types—are fundamentally listeners. However, given that they are the facilitators and that they have specific goals in mind, they may be more proactive in setting the agenda and framing the issues. Consultative meetings may begin with presentations given by officeholders, in a manner similar to that of public information meetings. Presentational content may provide a common knowledge base and motivate citizens' comments and discussion. Facilitators in some consultative meetings may go beyond simply listening and asking questions; rather, they often serve as focus group-style moderators by recording citizen comments for future reference and managing the flow of discussion.

An example of a consultative meeting is the King County (WA) Sheriff Office's Community Forum on Biased Policing—Racial Profiling. The announcement for this series of meetings in various communities during July and August, 2001, read:

> The King County Sheriff's Office Wants to Hear From You! Does the King County Sheriff's Office practice or condone racial profiling? Do deputies unfairly allow their biases and opinions to influence their police work? What has your experience been? Should we do something about it? Please come to a Community Forum at your local precinct to let us know. We've scheduled four public meetings, one at each of our precincts in Maple Valley, Kenmore, Burien and Shoreline. All of these community meetings begin at 6 p.m. The schedule is posted below. The meetings will be held in accessible locations and reasonable accommodations are available if you call ahead (King County, 2001).

The focus in these meetings was largely on citizens' speech. The explicit purpose of this series of consultative public meetings was to garner citizens' accounts of their experiences (to explore a public problem in informational ways) and solicit ideas about what, if anything, the Sheriff's

Office should do. There was also, perhaps, a public relations initiative below the surface goal. If so, this initiative had a rhetorical dimension, insofar as the Sheriff's Office intended to persuade the public of two things: that it was aware of a possible problem within its sphere of control, and that it was willing to address this problem proactively. Generally, consultative public meetings have merits that are byproducts of their expressed goals of soliciting public input. For instance, they may demonstrate to citizens the government's willingness to reach out rather than remain an insular body apart from the public.

Finally, the regularly scheduled meetings of public officials, such as school boards and city councils, provide a special kind of quasi-consultative meeting. The principle purpose of these meetings is for public officials to meet with one another. Doing so in public is more a reflection of a statutory requirement for openness than of an attempt to spark policymaker-citizen interaction. Nonetheless, these meetings typically include a period during which officials effectively consult with the public, inviting comment from attendees. This public talk provides officials with information about citizens' views on current issues and other matters not yet on the official agenda, and it gives citizens a chance to support or scold their public officials (Adams, 2004).

Grassroots Public Meetings

Citizens initiate grassroots public meetings with the goal of engaging officeholders in dialogue about moral conflicts and/or deliberation about public policy. Talk may feature either open-ended (relational) or task-related qualities, or both. Communication flow is presumed to occur bilaterally between officeholder and citizen groups, and perhaps multilaterally among all participants.

Citizens in grassroots meetings establish the agenda (the issues to be discussed) and the process. In terms of the actual discourse, however, citizens and officeholders have shared responsibilities to speak and listen. Grassroots meetings mark a departure from vicarious, public information, advisory, and consultative meeting types in that they do not privilege expressive (unilateral) talk. The talk that takes place during grassroots meetings is comparatively more interactive and conversational. This makes citizens and officeholders mutually accountable for managing the interaction's content and inclusiveness.

An example of a grassroots public meeting is the Cambridge (MA) Civic Forum. Three non-profit groups (the Cambridge Multicultural Arts Center, the Cambridge Center for Adult

Education, and the Center for Civic Networking) founded the Cambridge Civic Forum in 1993 in response to an apparent disconnect between citizens' concerns and public policy, planning, and agenda. The goal of the public meetings was to bring diverse community members and officials together to "learn from each other, hear and be heard, share visions and concerns, engage in constructive dialogue, collaborate on defining a common vision and participate in generating an action plan for the City's future" (Gastil & Kelshaw, 2000, p. 24).

Over a period of several years, formal forums were held semi-annually, each addressing a different specific issue (e.g., environmental sustainability in the local community). Approximately one hundred people participated in each event. Following an orientation by a citizen facilitator, participants were broken into small groups for roundtable discussions. The event then bounced back and forth between small group work and large group sessions. Scheduled breaks permitted participants to confer informally with members of other small groups, and to explore dimensions of the issues that did not come out in their particular group discussions. According to an organizer, the events had concrete outcomes. These included better-informed public officials and a general sense of satisfaction and successful civic involvement on the part of citizen-participants (Gastil & Kelshaw, 2000).

Invitational Public Meetings

Invitational meetings are similar to grassroots meetings, but are initiated by the government instead of citizens. The goal is to invite citizens into conversation with officeholders; to interact dialogically about moral conflicts or deliberate about public policy. Talk may be either open-ended (dialogic) or task-related (deliberative). Communication flow is presumed to be bilateral between officeholder and citizen groups, and perhaps multilateral among all participants.

Citizens and officeholders in invitational meetings share responsibility for managing content and inclusive talk. In this sense, the communicative behaviors of both groups are comparable to those in grassroots public meetings. In invitational events, though, the government is responsible for determining the agenda and the formal procedures.

An example of an invitational public meeting is Look Up Gaston (NC), a series of countywide events created to engage diverse community members in dialogue with officeholders about emergent socio-economic problems. Rick Smyre conceived of this project in 1981. Smyre was then an official on the Gaston Chamber of Commerce and a local school board member. It took two years of planning to enlist 854 officials from all over the county to implement a series

of local workshops. These workshops were invitational in the sense that they were conceived and implemented by government officials. They were also explicitly dialogic, in that their goals were to spur citizens and officeholders to talk collaboratively, both in the identification and understanding of problems (many involving the region's dying textile industry) and in the brainstorming of possible solutions.

The success of this series of meetings prompted Smyre to establish the Center for Communities of the Future. This ongoing network of national and international public officials and citizens forges various venues for interactive discussion about capacity building in an information age, and features the creative and facilitative work of diverse officeholders in various regions of the United States and other nations. Participants pay particular attention to the intersections of local and global issues, and many officeholders and citizens of diverse locales find opportunities to talk together (Gastil & Kelshaw, 2000).

Halvorsen provides another example with the "focused conversations" that the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) organized in the upper Midwest.[5] At these events, members of the general public and community leaders "sat at separate tables in small groups and answered questions over dinner. At least one USFS employee sat at each table, listened to the discussion, and answered an occasional question" (Halvorsen, 2003, p. 536). As measured by pre- and post-discussion questionnaires, participating in these meetings made attendees more likely "to believe the USFS is responsive to the public" (p. 539).

Collaborative Public Meetings

Collaborative public meetings have much in common with grassroots and invitational public meeting types, but they mark a much more defined partnership. Citizens and government work together in the invention and implementation of collaborative public meetings, so there is a mutual understanding of stakes, goals, appropriate processes, and outcomes. As with grassroots and invitational meeting types, collaborative public meetings carry the presumption of bilateral communication flow between officeholders and citizens, and potential for multilateral flow among all participants. They make collaboration possible because they are organized, purposeful events with an inclusive membership that feature a series of interactive discussions within a specified timeline (Roberts, 1997; Roberts & Bradley, 1991).

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[5] The exact location is withheld by the researcher at the request of the informant.

Officeholders and citizens share responsibilities of event conception and facilitation. Likewise, they share responsibilities of speaking and listening in ways that manage discussion content and inclusive interaction. Participants share a stake in the outcomes of the meetings. These meetings, more than other types, are potentially dialogic and/or deliberative in that they may feature either collaborative talk about open-ended moral conflicts or collaborative derivation and decision of public policy, or both.

An example of collaborative public meetings is the Decatur (GA) Roundtables. Although this project was sparked by residents' concerns about local issues and initially conceived by civic activist Jon Abercrombie, the Roundtables were designed and implemented collaboratively by Abercrombie, other community members, and local public officials. Whereas the citizens in this case handled much of the Roundtable design, the city provided financial support. Officials such as Mayor Elizabeth Wilson also worked energetically to mobilize citizens to participate, particularly in the African American community. Due to tensions in the community, it was crucial for the government to be actively involved in the Roundtables' preparation. "In the context of [conflicts], [the government] felt that they had to do something," Abercrombie surmised. "Sometimes it's a motivation to at least be able to say, 'Look, I tried to do something'" (Gastil & Kelshaw, 2000, p. 28).

The Decatur Roundtables took place over several successive sessions. In each, participants were placed in small "study circles." Group members were told, "If somebody in your group already has your point of view and another doesn't, move to another group" (Gastil & Kelshaw, 2000, p. 29). Group members collaboratively analyzed problems and brainstormed possible solutions. The meeting series culminated in an "action forum." In this event, the various study circles' policy recommendations were clustered into categories. Task forces were then created and assigned to each cluster for further investigation. A major outcome of the collaborative public meetings in Decatur was the eventual implementation of several task force recommendations. An important residual effect is that the roundtable discussion style of public talk began to replace traditional modes in Decatur's civic culture, such as public hearing formats that feature unilateral expression rather than more transactional discourses like dialogue and deliberation.

Conclusion: Implications and Applications

As public administrators and community leaders become increasingly concerned with collaborative approaches to civic issues, there is heightened need not just for newfound participatory and deliberative democratic understandings and attitudes, but also for appropriate communication competencies. With these needs in mind, we aim to defamiliarize public meetings in conceptual and applicable ways by providing a framework for clear thinking about what people want to accomplish in such events and how they may effectively—and cooperatively—do so. This public meeting typology distinguishes seven kinds of events, each with particular combinations of role-relationships, perceived goals, expected directions of influence, communication contents, and characteristic discourse genres. Our objective in conducting this explication is to bring attention to otherwise unacknowledged features of public meetings, including: participants' roles; expectations and perceptions of goals, directions of influence, communicative contents, and contexts; and some prominent genres of talk. In doing so, we hope to give public meeting planners and participants means for reflective recognition of not only what is happening in their meetings, but also what should happen—and how the latter can be helped along communicatively.

The typology is built as a general framework so that practitioners may better understand, compare, and distinguish their meetings according to form. For this reason, the typology starts by distinguishing just two categories of participants—public officials and lay citizens. This dichotomy is maintained in the typology's first four forms: vicarious, public information, advisory, and consultative. In this sense, these kinds of events preserve traditional understandings of citizens' and officeholders' "places" in civic life, as well as an oppositional dynamic that keeps them distinct and removed. The first two—vicarious and public information meetings—are the most traditional and simple, in that they concern information (the least emergent kind of communication content) being transmitted unilaterally from one group to the other. The advisory and consultative meeting-types are relatively more deliberative in that they concern participants' opinions and judgments. These kinds of content are less concrete and more ambiguous than information, so they require more synthetic engagement from participants who must work through any ambiguities and incommensurabilities that arise. But, in their expectations of unilateral message transmission between distinct classes of participants, these meeting-types maintain traditional divisions and limit collaborative governance.

In an interview with one of the authors, a city administrator emotionally described the oppositional and sometimes hostile ways in which citizen-participants of public meetings often talked to her: "What they fail to understand is that I'm a citizen too!" (Kelshaw, 2003). Accordingly, the simplistic dichotomy that our public meeting typology relies upon is, if taken too literally, potentially harmful to public meetings' dialogic and deliberative potentials. If we maintain expectations and oppositional stances throughout the varied contexts of civic life, we will limit the possibilities for true democratic contact. This is why it is very important to observe how the typology's last three forms—grassroots, invitational, and collaborative—break from tradition and offer new ways of thinking about and practicing public governance.

Grassroots, invitational, and collaborative public meetings feature bilateral communication flow. This means that planners and participants of such events expect opportunities for interaction, including modes of contact that are potentially transformative. Subject to transformation are participants' understandings of public problems and their prospective solutions, as well as their identities and relationships. Influence is no longer viewed as something that is controlled by one party, to be imposed on the other; now it is understood as a force that is mutual and reciprocal. And it is not just the direction of communication that makes these meeting-types more subtle and rich. The communication content transcends transmitted information and expressed opinions, taking the form of worked-through ideas. Ideas can be addressed thoroughly only as participants develop adequate understandings of conditions (information) and problems (values/judgments). Thus, these meeting types can synthetically develop new ideas by having citizens and officials work jointly through problems, perspectives, and solutions via more dialogic and deliberative modes of talk.

Though we celebrate the higher-end forms of public meeting that disrupt traditional expectations of monologic contact between officeholders and citizens, we also wish to stress that there are appropriate times and places for all of the seven meeting-types. In other words, democratic public-governance requires an array of discursive modes to manage its incredible range of substantive and relational needs. The key to effective public-governance, then, is to know what kinds of meetings and talk best serve a given situation or problem. It is our hope that this typology of public meetings will increase planners' and participants' capacities for understanding and reflecting on their communicative experiences. In the end, the typology's

value will be demonstrated it if helps citizens and officials more effectively meet with one another in public life.

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