

Improving Public Involvement in Decision Making: A Pilot Project

This article includes the description of a pilot project and an issue booklet developed to assist communities or organizations to respond to difficult public issues.

Project Overview

Based upon the interest shown during consultation with a cross-section of citizens in a community in B.C., Jan Inglis and Margaret Steele of the Integrative Learning Institute initiated a pilot project in the community. The purpose of the project was to test a community process for responding to complex public issues. The project was based on a nine-step process researched and developed by Dr. Sara Ross, president of ARINA, an international non-profit organization offering resources to foster social change. The process, called TIP: *The Integral Process for Working on Complex Issues*, was designed to assist citizens in uncovering the many layers and perspectives involved in public issues, and in weighing out the trade-offs among various approaches in order to make well-informed decisions and take action.

Background on the Process Used

Issues facing citizens, whether at a local or global level, are becoming increasingly complex and cannot be responded to with the normal “yes” and “no” decision-making structures typically available to us. Complex issues (e.g. rising health care costs, impacts of development, poverty and crime etc.) have many facets and implications, much of which goes unseen in the busyness of our day-to-day lives. But we cannot collectively make good decisions on things we have not collectively seen, and seen in context with other issues, as issues seldom appear in isolation. Unfortunately, we have become habituated to coming together in short term forums that do not offer the time, focus or structure to reveal the underlying facets of the issue we are attempting to address. Such forums often become platforms for promoting opinionated debate and we end up arguing for or against something and trying to convince others of the “rightness” of our views or the “wrongness” of theirs. Council and citizens may end up in situations of blame and distrust. Often we argue over solutions when there has been no agreement as to what the question is as most issues have many sub issues within them. This all leads to community frustration and piece meal decisions which may be sabotaged later.

Complex public issues require a systemic process designed to help citizens see and mutually sort through the interconnected web of related issues and choose their question of greatest concern. If this process is also designed as an integral approach, it will raise awareness that issues need to be looked at in a way that supports a whole picture of the issue. An integral approach looks at individual actions and beliefs as well as the cultural values and institutions which have

quietly developed over time that also can create and perpetuate the issue. A multi-perspective approach recognizes that there are many voices in a community and many different perspectives, all of which are legitimate. The costs and consequences of acting from these different perspectives need to be carefully considered and weighed out against each other in a process called **deliberation*** in order to arrive at an informed decision.

***Deliberation** is something we do individually when we make choices whether about where to take the family vacation or buying a fridge. We consider options, weigh them out, and arrive at a decision we can live with. A Public Deliberation is structured to support the public to make considered choices about complex public issues. If well designed it brings people's best selves forward so they can generate the quality of consideration so necessary for comprehensive decision making and coordinating actions. This process can be used to assist decision making for any complex public issue from. This process is designed based on research of adult learning and development, and behavioural science and The Integral Process for Working on Complex Issues.

Deliberative forums can be conducted in a variety of ways. A common design is for people to gather for about three hours and talk in break out groups of, ideally, about ten people with a moderator and note taker. Each group is given a brief booklet outlining four common perspectives of how to respond to this crisis. The goal is to use the insights and information developed through the deliberation. People can use this new knowledge to arrive at well-considered, shared understandings that will inform their decisions and actions.

Just one action by one expert, cannot alleviate complex issues. Therefore we need to develop multiple action responses that can be taken by multiple actors (individual or organizational). TIP is a systemic, integral process designed specifically to produce these comprehensive results.

A trained facilitator can assist a community or organization to follow the sequence of steps in TIP which include citizen mapping of troublesome issues, focusing on the root causes of a priority issue, generating new solutions and subsequent framing, deliberation and action planning. When a community or organization deliberates issues which have been framed in this way, they are more likely to move toward better informed decision making. Using this nine-step process allows people to see how the issue developed in the first place and creates a structure to consider proposed solutions through different perspectives. Well-designed deliberation also supports the weighing out of the possible costs and consequences inherent in choice work. This greatly cuts down on unexpected reactivity or even the sabotaging of decisions later.

What Happened in the Pilot

The pilot project consisted of working with a diverse group of participants with a broad background of experience including city council, downtown business,

waste management, economic development, non-profit organizations, urban planning, and post secondary education.

Phase 1 ran from February to April 2006, meeting for six 2.5 hour sessions with two follow up meetings for evaluation and consideration of Phase 2. Phase 2 consists of a moderated public deliberation in which the general public is invited to come together for approximately 3 hours, to consider an issue, look at various ways of approaching it and weigh the cost and consequences of their choices. An issue booklet (described below) is provided to each participant beforehand. Trained moderators guide small groups of participants through the deliberation of the approaches. This results in a shared sense of knowledge and ownership of the issue, awareness of implications and trade-offs, which can then lead to alignment in decision-making and action.

In Phase I, the group looked at all the issues of concern in their community (affordable housing, economic development, drug use, managing change etc.) They could have chosen any issue to work on but, after reflection, they chose to address the big topic of “managing change” as they felt it was very pertinent to Nelson at this time. After going through the process steps to assist prioritizing, they felt that a sub issue, “public involvement in decision making”, needed to be addressed as it was preventing the community from dealing well with decisions regarding managing change. The question they formed was:

How do we as a community improve our involvement when important public decisions need to be made?

In order to consider multi-perspective responses, participants looked at this question from four common perspectives and proceeded to create an issue booklet documenting these perspectives and the approaches they would take to address the issue. The following table describes the process in detail and the reasoning behind each step of the process.

Review of Phase One

What We Did	Why We Did It
1. Identified all the topics of concern in Nelson and Area and their interconnections. Participants listed all the things they had concerns about from downtown parking, drug use, affordable housing to economic vision, managing change etc.	Complex issues never occur in isolation, and we need to see them in context with the other issues and dynamics that influence them. This is helpful in stepping back, getting a long view together and taking a systems approach in responding to the issue.
2. Looked at the interrelationships among all the topics of concern identified in step 1. Participants created a map by drawing arrows between the topics to indicate the	Public issues grow out of history, with some issues underlying others; some are more like symptoms and some like causes. To make good decisions it is helpful to see these layers.

directional flow of impacts.	
3. Chose a topic out of this “map” of concerns based on its importance to them: participants chose “ <i>managing change</i> ”.	Public choice work is about real issues that matter to people. Sorting and choosing together can help focus commitment and ownership, and keeps this from just being an intellectual “out there” exercise.
4. Looked at all the aspects of that topic: impacts, causes, effects, behaviors and attitudes which keep it going.	Need to see the nature of the topic: what makes it problematic, how we help keep it problematic through how we think, and what we do individually or through institutionalized behavior
5. Picked one aspect from the list of impacts and causes. Participants chose <i>Problematic interactions</i> feeling that how the community interacts makes it difficult to do the kind of work and make the kind of decisions that are needed to <i>manage change</i>	Usually communities or organizations flounder because they try to work with huge topics that are complexes of many interconnected issues hidden within them. Participants go through an iterative process of refining the topic into a crisp issue question making it much more manageable.
6. Brainstormed new action responses that could help shift the <i>problematic interactions</i> in the community. These included: some individually initiated volunteer actions, some policy, and some which required the whole community to deliberate. From this list participants chose the specific action they wanted to focus on as <i>involvement in decision making</i> They turned this into an issue question: <i>How do we as a community improve our involvement when important public decisions need to be made?</i>	When we know what behaviors and attitudes create and maintain the issue as a problem, we can then look at what new behaviors and attitudes could support a positive change. Sorting, choosing and reasoning together is an important component of aligning to take new actions. We need to agree on the question before we can hope to reach agreement on solutions.
7. Looked at answering this question from 4 different, commonly occurring, perspectives.	A complex issue cannot have just one response but to lead to comprehensive action needs multiple responses. With any issues, there are many ways of seeing and understanding it. We need to anticipate these and surface the tensions between these options.

8. Created templates including motivations, assumptions and specific actions for each of the 4 approaches.	Different perspectives lead to different understandings of what makes a good action or solution. All the actions are valid and understandable when we see the perspective they flow out of.
9. Compiled an 'Issue Booklet' which was an overview of: -why they felt that city and surrounding area had a problem with managing change, -how improving involvement in public decision making was related to that being problematic, -and descriptions of 4 different approaches to improving that involvement	Often community people arrive at a public forum without seeing the clear step-by-step overview of what the issues and options are. An Issue Booklet, developed by a diverse cross section of the community provides the documentation necessary to support deep consideration and comprehensive decision making.
10. Deliberated in the small group, hearing each other weigh out responses to the 4 ways of approaching the issue question. The participants felt that the whole community should deliberate the response to the question <i>"How do we as a community improve out involvement when important public decisions need to be made?"</i>	We need to hear each other's way of making sense of issues, how we see choices, and together develop an understanding of implications. We need to consider the trade offs we are willing to live with. When this is all on the table we can move towards informed decision making and action planning.
11. A steering committee is required to support this project going to the larger community for deliberation and coordinated actions (Phase 2).	Community wide deliberation requires involvement for investment for getting the word out, making the issue booklet available, training moderators and recorders for small break out groups, and coordinating follow up action plans.

All sessions were recorded, a written documentation was developed and given to all participants with a summary given to media. This process is meant to stay in the community as a means of expanding individual leadership capacities in addition to providing a method of responding to any issues, and, over time, seed a civic culture capable of comprehensive decision-making and action

Upon completion of the process, participants felt this had been a valuable experience for their own learning and a useful process for the community to use in dealing with common complex issues. Some remarked at being surprised that they had been able work together as well as they had considering that some members had experienced being on opposite sides of issues in an adversarial

way in previous public interactions. Some members said it was the best method they had seen for group processing of difficult topics. All the participants felt the community would benefit from having this question and issue booklet go to broad public deliberation, i.e. **Phase 2**. Some felt that this issue would attract many residents of Nelson, while others were concerned that it was too 'soft ' an issue, not tangible enough to seem significant to certain parts of the community. Although the pilot project indicated that the process was considered to be of value, there were outstanding questions of who might initiate and fund such a process so that it could operate across silos of interest in the community and engage multiple stake holders.

Although some funding was offered to implement Phase 2, several participants felt they could not commit further time beyond their original pilot project commitment to form a steering committee that could move the process forward to public deliberation. Therefore, the pilot project concluded at the end of Phase 1. However, the issue booklet is completed and if there is sufficient interest available in the future, the Integrative Learning Institute is willing to assist the community in taking this issue or other issues forward to public deliberation. ***See issue booklet attached below.***

Issue Booklet

*Developed by the
Pilot Project
January – March 2006*

What is the Concern: managing change



Why is this a Problem: there is difficulty developing and implementing plans to create a future



What Would Help: improve our involvement when making public decisions

Question for Public Deliberation:

How do we improve our involvement when important public decisions need to be made?

Summary Description of the Overall Issue

We are experiencing change in our community and in our lives. We don't feel we have enough control over this change as it seems to be imposed on us from the outside. As a community, we don't manage this change well and are reactive to it. This prevents us from developing a plan for sustainability and compromises our future. But we want to create and implement plans so we can have a future we choose. We cannot do this because we are not working well together to create this future. That causes us stress in such areas as rising house costs, transportation problems, lack of access to health care, loss of economic opportunity and a change in sense of community. This is difficult to address since, due to our "quick fix", fickle mindset, we lose our formal leadership every 3 years and our volunteer leaders are burning out and feeling overwhelmed. We cannot go forward when there are communication problems between city government and citizens and between regional district and city with each blaming the other. We make this worse when we isolate, guard turf, compete over small pots of money, boycott businesses and get self-interested with tunnel vision. We feed this problem through divisiveness, competitiveness, judgment, frustration and apathy. If we are not able to deal with this type of interactions we will be even less able to manage change and feel less in control of creating a future we want.

To manage change well we need to create new actions which will allow us to change our pattern of interactions. Some new actions can be spontaneous voluntary ones that any individual or group can do, some require policy or structural change and some require broader community decision making. This problem affects most of us and requires that we improve our involvement when making public decisions.

Our issues question therefore is:

How do we improve our involvement when important public decisions need to be made?

We need to find a way to deal with this question. The reason that this or any complex question is difficult to respond to is that there are always several perspectives involved. These need to be understood and be included in what we consider or deliberate. We therefore looked at this issue question from four different valid approaches and created distinct templates of assumptions, actions and implications which will guide our deliberation. We will not manage change well if we are unable to deal with the tensions and trade offs which occur when we weigh out choices. Deliberation allows the different perspectives and the tensions between them to be seen and understood so we are making informed decisions of what we can live with.

Following pages include templates of the four Approaches framed as preparation for deliberation:

How do we improve our involvement when important public decisions need to be made?

Approach 1: We can rally significant public awareness of our issue to make our position known, and require a response from others.

People may favour this approach if they assume that:

- You can lose your rights if you cannot strongly advocate for them.
- Numbers and volume are powerful tools to use when advocating your concern

People who favour this approach believe it is best because:

Networking, communicating, being high profile and credible are important skills when you need to gather people to advocate for a cause you feel is going unheeded. Examples of such issues might be if a building with historic or nostalgic value is proposed to be torn down, or a natural area is proposed to be paved over or put to some other use, or if a new road is proposed that changes the landscape, or if a zoning variance is requested. Groups need to develop a unified voice to be persuasive and attract others of like mind. We need to learn how to develop and present our positions so as to be hard on the issue not on the people in order to avoid creating lasting divisions. Leaders need to find ways to have their finger on the pulse of public concerns to notice when an issue warrants attention. Government needs to be quickly responsive in an open non-judgmental way when public concern is raised. This public involvement process can be given merit as it is immediate, inexpensive, and a very responsive method of managing change.

Sample Actions that a diverse array of actors could take to implement this approach effectively (include which actors would have to be involved):

Actions Related to Policy or Structural Change

- City Council and Regional District schedule a 15 minute time and adequate room for a “Group Advocacy” period at the beginning of every 6th meeting
- Any advocate organization may obtain a permit to put a banner over Main Street if they have the support of #__ citizens
- City council adopts a policy stating that any group that gathers signatures of __ citizens favouring a particular decision is entitled to an official public hearing and potential vote on the issue.

Voluntary “Do Now” Actions (not requiring public decision-making)

- newspapers write articles with factual information
- organize a phone tree/email tree to get people to come out to public meetings
- start a letter-writing campaign
- organize a door-to-door lobby (canvas)

- *make people scared of what they are going to lose*
- *organize a speaking tour of service clubs*
- *bring in recognized experts to speak at public meetings*
- *people who are impacted organize special events/forums (e.g. pregnant mothers rallying to get maternity ward)*
- *people affected by the issue participate in radio interview*
- *organizers offer free rides to events/rallies*
- *people who are impacted organize special events/forums (e.g. pregnant mothers rallying to get maternity ward)*
- *“stack” the mikes at public meetings/gather many people to speak at public meetings*

<i>This approach may be worrisome to others because:</i>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Feeling threatened by special interest groups lobbying or boycotting my business</i> • <i>Organizing the” in group” takes too long and is too much work</i> • <i>Fear of system breaking down, lack of accountability and threat to stability of status quo</i> • <i>Logic of decisions can be lost because of emotional lobbying by anyone, even those with no investment to lose</i> • <i>Feels like a band-aid approach to what needs a bigger systemic approach</i> • <i>Promotes the sense that there are “good guys” and “bad guys” if we fall into being hard on people instead of issues</i> • <i>Forces ‘either/or’ decisions</i> • <i>Not inviting in other groups could lead to unintentional marginalizing</i> |
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<i>A range of trade-offs that different actors would have to make under this approach:</i>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We might win but at what cost to ongoing relationships</i> • <i>We would gain venues for public involvement but could turn our streets and meetings into protest zones</i> • <i>Information gets out but it is only from one perspective</i> • <i>People would be more involved but they would have greater expectations, so their hopes for change might be dashed if nothing happens</i> • <i>Gain some inclusion but may lead to some exclusion</i> • <i>Increase involvement but emotionalize the topic, adds a bias and could lead to sensationalizing</i> • <i>Increase involvement but maybe making opposition stronger (the backlash that comes from the ‘stronger you are, the stronger the resistance will be’)</i> • <i>Forces an’ either you are on the bus or off the bus’ requirement for sense of belonging in community</i> |
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How do we improve our involvement when important public decisions need to be made?

Approach 2 : We can choose good leaders, and be responsible citizens

People may favour this approach if they assume that:

- *There are right ways and wrong ways to do things*
- *The “right” answer is clear and should be obvious to everyone*
- *Those in roles of authority have the responsibility to make decisions as they deem fair and right*
- *Rules and regulations will ensure accountability*

People who favour this approach believe it is best because:

We need to learn how to make informed choices when we vote and ensure we have leaders who are capable of making wise and just decisions for the common good.. Public meetings need to be well publicized and we need to learn how to organize them so that the objectives are met and decisions are made in an orderly fashion. Our civic leaders have a lot of information to deal with to make decisions. Most information can be made available to the public. Citizens need to read it to be informed if they are going to voice an opinion so that it provides helpful input to civic decisions. Busy citizens do not need to be involved in every decision if they are not impacted by them or if they are too mundane, that is why we have elected officials and staff. Existing laws already dictate public involvement processes, and we need to follow these to avoid mayhem. Citizens need to take responsibility to understand and abide by the municipal regulations. Relying on known laws and the officials responsible for public affairs is a predictable way to manage change to ensure a stable future.

Sample Actions that a diverse array of actors could take to implement this approach effectively (include which actors would have to be involved):

Actions Related to Policy or Structural Change:

- *Council/regional district adopt policies to webcast all regular meetings and to arrange for live broadcasts on radio and tv*
- *City Council establishes neighbourhood associations with clear terms of reference and responsibilities for citizen involvement*
- *City Council forms a citizen audit committee to regularly review all applications for zoning variances to ensure accountability to OCP*
- *Adopt a policy that makes it mandatory for all citizens to vote in municipal elections*
- *City task force developed to create list of indicators of ethical municipal leadership*

Voluntary “Do Now” Actions (not requiring public decision-making)

- *Form a citizen’s watch group that ensures that members of the public know where the minutes of public meetings (council, school boards, regional district) are available*

- *Individuals take responsibility to seek out information on legislation, policies etc.*
- *Write letters to editor to defend elected people or processes to support the status quo*
- *Ensure regulations are clearly adhered to (e.g. independent observers at elections)*
- *Use neighbourhood associations to gather and disseminate information*
- *Disempower the voice of people we don't agree with by not inviting their participation*
- *Use terminology to discredit those we disagree with (like "special interest groups") that negates their credibility; use terminology that promotes the "right" view*

This approach may be worrisome to others because:

- *The few citizens who might be willing to volunteer on an audit committee would get burned out fast, and then who would serve?*
- *A policy making voting in municipal elections mandatory interferes with my freedom to chose*
- *Neighbourhood associations become too territorial*
- *Minority groups may not be heard (hungry, homeless, poor); some regulations exclude participation (e.g. need a fixed home address)*
- *Survival takes all our time; we have no time to show up at public meetings and no time to do research to become informed*
- *Government gets in the way, I should be able to do what I want when I want*
- *Bureaucratic leadership and regulations threaten common sense, forming narrow perspectives*
- *Dependency on leaders stifles innovation, creative solutions and the ability to "dance with change"*

A range of trade-offs that different actors would have to make under this approach:

- *Neighbourhood associations would increase participation but it might be "groupthink" in nature and could divide the city into competitive groups*
- *A citizen audit committee improves involvement but this adds to the workload of city staff and could slow down the decision-making process*
- *Mandatory voting could mean people would vote even if they were uninformed*
- *We could have a list of ethical standards for leaders but who would enforce them?*
- *We have clear leadership roles but lose innovative grassroots involvement*
- *Gain a clear leadership centre but it can become self perpetuating and defensive unable to respond to change*

How do we improve our involvement when important public decisions need to be made?

Approach 3: We can become strategic and efficient in making decisions to maximize opportunities

People may favour this approach if they assume that:

- *People are motivated to get involved when they see the benefits*
- *There is an efficient cost effective way to get things done*
- *Expertise is really helpful*
- *We don't want to get bogged down in unnecessary rules and process*

People who favour this approach believe it is best because:

We need to be involved in things we are excited about, which provide diverse ways for participating, self expression and challenge. Citizens and elected leaders need to keep abreast of new ideas in order to make the best decision and not miss opportunities. We need to learn innovative and creative ways to make proposals that attract involvement, support public understanding and acceptance so that we can all move ahead. Good public decisions can be like good business decisions. Creating atmospheres for friendly competition and incentives generates multiple options, for citizens and leaders to choose. People need to take individual responsibility to know how the political and economic system works and speak to those who are influential and have expertise when they want to affect how a decision gets made. The community needs to be responsive to the stimulus of constant change and learning in a global community and will need to keep up to speed by making decisions that are innovative and adaptive.

Sample Actions that a diverse array of actors could take to implement this approach effectively (include which actors would have to be involved):

Actions Related to Policy or Structural Change

- *City includes funding in annual budget to contract experts to develop multi media presentations to inform citizens of upcoming economic development opportunities*
- *City sends staff to special training to learn about effective practices for public involvement in decision-making*
- *School system partners with city to tap into "youth idea incubator" to develop creative public involvement concepts*
- *Regional district and city funds a "solutions" essay contest for improving public involvement*

Voluntary "Do Now" Actions (not needing public decision-making)

- *Local education bodies embrace notion that Nelson is a learning community and hold forums to promote new ideas*

- *Create incentives for people to attend public meetings and community events (prizes, food, transportation, child care)*
- *Hold competitions to generate ideas on specific decisions (logos, essay contest, “solutions” contest)*
- *Startle people out of their apathy by strategic sensationalizing, using extreme tactics etc*
- *Create polished marketing, multi-media presentations to provide information*
- *Organize a conference to provide education and create more openness, mind change (e.g. on green building techniques to educate retailers, architects etc.)*

This approach may be worrisome to others because:

- *Only the charismatic individuals or ideas will be given attention*
- *Distrust of outside experts who might not know “our” community*
- *Fear of losing out in a strategic and efficient competitive environment*
- *Youth just do not have enough grounded experience to be consulting on important public issues*
- *Level of public involvement and self-education to engage may be onerous; don’t have time*
- *It will change the status quo; no consistency in decision-making, could lead to chaos*
- *Not all public decisions are business decisions; taking a business approach could result in decisions being made based on economic considerations but not in best interest of the public*

A range of trade-offs that different actors would have to make under this approach:

- *We gain input from outside expertise but could be misled by inapplicable, alienating or glossed-over information (e.g. that is not from “our” culture)*
- *Although community meetings could benefit from trained city staff facilitation, staff are already required to wear too many hats*
- *We could get swept up in strategies and effectiveness, involving ourselves in new opportunities but could lose the existing foundation of our community*
- *We gain new opportunities from innovation and quick responses but could lose well thought out implementation plans*
- *We gain cost-effectiveness but lose quality decision process*

How do we improve our involvement when important public decisions need to be made?

Approach 4: We can foster collaboration and include a wide spectrum of the community in discussions

People may favour this approach if they assume that:

- *The people have the collective wisdom to know what needs to change in order for the system to work better*
- *We all benefit from open sharing relationships*
- *Working together well takes time*

People who favour this approach believe it is best because:

Public involvement requires a culture of acceptance and transparency in decision-making. The community could be seen as a system of diverse perspectives all of which are important. Ensuring the inclusion of the voices of the more vulnerable is a responsibility we all need to learn to take. We need to create situations in which we learn to listen to all perspectives and decrease our tendency to argue and debate. Through citizen initiated gatherings we can share our wisdom and concerns with elected leaders to support wise decisions. Leaders and citizens need to develop a partner relationship and shift to appreciating informal as well as formal leadership. Working together to find diverse solutions requires learning, commitment and planning, and should not be expected to happen right away. We need to find methods to weigh out the pros and cons of important decisions and not jump to quick fix solutions or expect our leaders to do so. We need to think long term, and proactively regarding managing change and sustainability.

Sample Actions that a diverse array of actors could take to implement this approach effectively (include which actors would have to be involved):

Actions Related to Policy or Structural Change

- *Community College creates a program to train facilitators for leading forums, discussion groups etc. to ensure diverse perspectives are heard*
- *Council adopts a publicly supported policy for a community engagement and communication process*
- *City includes funding in annual budget for 1 public forum each year on community capacity building for decision making*
- *Non profit organizations adopt policies to model collaborative approaches within and across organizations (e.g. Social Planning, Chamber of Commerce)*

Voluntary “Do Now” Actions (not needing public decision-making)

- *A citizen initiated forum is held with the media regarding how information can be distributed in a way that engages, informs but does not inflame*
- *Organize a series of open forums for putting out information, gathering input and making decisions*
- *Organize informal, small kitchen parties to share information and collect wisdom*
- *Build community capacity with facilitated small group discussions*
- *Create a system for follow-up to harness the energy from events, demonstrations etc*
- *Get everyone to the table to develop a common voice, common focus*

<i>This approach may be worrisome to others because:</i>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Our elected leaders should be the ones in charge of governing, not the collective</i> • <i>Job responsibilities of city officials become more time consuming if there is more public involvement</i> • <i>The autonomy of my non-profit society might be threatened in a collaborative environment</i> • <i>It is threatening when parameters for decision-making are too vague</i> • <i>Emphasis on the collective is confining (would drive an individualist “batty”)</i> • <i>Idealistic to think that everyone has the ability to participate in a collaborative process to generate that collective wisdom</i> • <i>No one would listen to my expertise; my expert input is not respected</i> |
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<i>A range of trade-offs that different actors would have to make under this approach:</i>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Organizations may want to model a collaborative approach but would that be enough to spread it throughout the community?</i> • <i>Might get quantity of participation but may not get coherent quality of participation</i> • <i>We want to be open but get taken over by special interest groups, leading to “fake consensus”</i> • <i>Public forums would increase opportunities for public involvement but could be expensive delay decision-making and end up missing deadlines and/or nothing gets done</i> • <i>More information gets out but who ensures everyone receives it equally and in an unbiased way?</i> • <i>Good public participation but may only happen when there is a public threat or hot issue and then it is too late to develop collaboration</i> • <i>Public forums would increase opportunities for involvement but may end up raising expectations and may not lead to solutions, just more talking and talking</i> |
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Approach 5: Aligning Towards a Decision. What are we willing to live with having considered all of these views?

The focus of a public deliberation is not about choosing the best approach. All the previous approaches (1 -4) are given consideration so that they all inform the creation of a new comprehensive approach that the group is willing to live with knowing they have given a thorough look at the many causes and implications. This supports communities to align towards actions and decreases the likelihood of voices being left out which might lead to later reactivity.