

The question of participation: toward authentic public participation in public administration.

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How can the processes of public participation be improved? This study uses interviews and focus-group discussions to look for some answers. The results suggest that improving public participation requires changes in citizen and administrator roles and relationships and in administrative processes. Specifically, we need to move away from static and reactive processes toward more dynamic and deliberative processes. The article suggests some practical steps to achieve these changes.

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The appropriate role of the public in public administration has been an active and ongoing area of inquiry, experimentation, revolution, and controversy since the birth of this nation. The contemporary movement to examine the role of the public in the process of administrative decision making has come about in response to problems in the latter half of this century and as a result of concern on the part of citizens, administrators, and politicians over citizen discouragement and apathy (Box, 1996; Putnam, 1995; Timney, 1996; Thomas, 1995). As both citizens and their leaders have noticed, "participation through normal institutional channels has little impact on the substance of government politics" (Crosby, Kelly, and Schaefer, 1986, 172).

Many citizens, administrators, and politicians are interested in increasing public participation in public decisions. Efforts to do so are currently underway across the country. However, there is considerable evidence to suggest that these efforts are not effective (Crosby, Kelly, and Schaefer, 1986; Kathlene and Martin, 1991; Kweit and Kweit, 1981, 1987; Parsons, 1990). Some efforts appear to be ineffective because of poor planning or execution. Other efforts may not work because administrative systems that are based upon expertise and professionalism leave little room for participatory processes (deLeon, 1992; Fisher, 1993; Forester, 1989; White and McSwain, 1993).

The question of how to engender effective and satisfying participation processes is the central issue in this research. Our findings indicate that effective, or authentic, public participation implies more than simply finding the right tools and techniques for increasing public involvement in public decisions. Authentic public participation, that is, participation that works for all parties and stimulates interest and investment in both administrators and citizens, requires rethinking the underlying roles of, and relationships between, administrators and citizens.

In the first section of this article we examine the question of the necessity or desirability of more effective participation by reviewing the literature in U.S. public administration and identifying the relevant contemporary issues for both administrators and citizens. The current model of the participation process is presented and critiqued in the second section, using the concept of authentic participation as a starting point for moving toward more effective participatory processes. We then turn to identifying the barriers to effective participation as seen by our research participants. Strategies for overcoming the barriers are discussed, and implications for the practice of public administration and citizenship are suggested in the last section. Following a grounded theory model (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), this article is organized around the themes that emerged from the literature review, interviews, and focus group discussions (see the Methodology Box).

The Necessity or Desirability of More Effective Participation

The role of participation in public administration has historically been one of ambivalence. Although the political system in the United States is designed to reflect and engender an active citizenry, it is also designed to protect political and administrative processes from a too-active citizenry. It is within this context that participation in the administrative arena has traditionally been framed.

In recent times, interest in public participation in administrative decision making has increased as a result of a number of factors, not the least of which is that a citizenry with diminished trust in government is demanding more accountability from public officials (Parr and Gates, 1989). There is also a growing recognition on the part of administrators that decision making without public participation is ineffective. As Thomas indicates, "the new public involvement has transformed the

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work of public managers...public participation in the managerial process has become a fact of life. In the future, this may become the case for even more managers, since the public's demand for involvement does not seem to be abating" (1995, xi). Thomas suggests that under contemporary political and economic conditions, we can no longer not include the public in public decision making.

Paralleling the increased practitioner interest in public participation, contemporary theorists have increasingly focused on participation in their theories of the role, legitimacy, and definitions of the field in what some call "postmodern" times (Frederickson, 1982; Stivers, 1990; Cooper, 1991; Farmer, 1995; Fox and Miller, 1995; Wamsley and Wolf, 1996). In an attempt to find a way to bridge the problems of traditional models of public administration, some researchers call for shifts in the governance process. Stivers calls these changed relationships "active accountability":

Administrative legitimacy requires active accountability

to citizens, from whom the ends of government derive.

Accountability, in turn, requires a shared framework for

the interpretation of basic values, one that must be

developed jointly by bureaucrats and citizens in real-world

situations, rather than assumed. The legitimate

administrative state, in other words, is one inhabited by

active citizens (1990, 247).

Although there is theoretical and practical recognition that the public must be more involved in public decisions, many administrators are, at best, ambivalent about public involvement or, at worst, they find it problematic. In an increasingly global and chaotic world, administrators are grappling with issues that do not seem to have definitive solutions, while still trying to encourage public involvement (Kettering Foundation, 1989). The issues traditionally facing administrators, "the more malleable problems, the ones that could be attacked with common sense and ingenuity, have in recent decades given way to a different class of problems -- 'wicked problems' -- with no solutions, only temporary and imperfect resolutions" (Fischer, 1993, 172). Administrators need guidance and help in addressing these "wicked problems" but find that the help they seek from citizens often creates new sets of problems. As a result, although many public administrators view close relationships with citizens as both necessary and desirable, most of them do not actively seek public involvement. If they do seek it, they do not use public input in making administrative decisions (as indicated by a 1989 study conducted by the Kettering Foundation). These administrators believe that greater citizen participation increases inefficiency because participation creates delays and increases red tape.

As the Kettering Foundation study shows, an "undeniable tension" exists between the public's right to greater involvement and the prerogative of public officials to act as administrative decision makers (1989, 12). Citizens report feeling isolated from public administrative processes. Although they care about the issues facing their communities and the nation, citizens feel "pushed out" of the public process (Kettering Foundation, 1991). Citizens mistrust public officials and administrators. National opinion polls show that citizens' distrust of government is on the rise: 43 percent of citizens reported a lack of trust in government in 1992 while 70 percent reported distrust in 1994 (cited in Tolchin, 1996, 6). This distrust often leads to citizen cynicism or what Mathews (1994) calls impotence and causes interest in participation to decline (Berman, 1997).

Some citizens feel their concerns will be heard only if they organize into groups and angrily protest administrative policy decisions (Timney, 1996). NIMBYs (Not In My Backyard groups) have challenged administrative decisions on a variety of different issues in recent years (Fischer, 1993; Kraft and Clary, 1991), creating no end of trouble for people trying to implement administrative decisions. Citizens involved in these protest groups are confrontational in their participatory efforts because they believe administrators operate within a "context of self-interest" and are not connected to the citizens

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(Kettering Foundation, 1991, 7).

The participants of our study, administrators, activists, and citizens alike, agreed that participation is necessary and desirable. One citizen told us that participation was "the necessary opportunity to be a part of something bigger than oneself, a part of our responsibility to our community." An activist said, "it is very important to have an opportunity to influence and to know that your influence has the potential to make a difference." Administrators also stressed the centrality of input: "we need input," "we don't make good decisions without it," "it is essential." Our research participants agreed that the main problem with participation as it is currently practiced and framed is that it doesn't work. They believed that finding better ways to engender participation will make it more meaningful for all involved. Administrators recognize the need for participation, but they cannot find ways to fit the public into decision-making processes. Citizens believe that greater participation is needed, but they are rendered cynical or apathetic by vacuous or false efforts to stimulate participation that ask for, yet discount, public input. As a result, citizens find themselves moving from potentially cooperative to confrontational situations that pit administrators against citizens in an adversarial way. Why are we in this paradoxical conundrum? One reason may be the way participation is currently framed, the point to which we now turn.

How is Participation Currently Framed?

Public participation processes have four major components: (1) the issue or situation; (2) the administrative structures, systems, and processes within which participation takes place; (3) the administrators; and, (4) the citizens. Participation efforts are currently framed such that these components are arrayed around the issue. The citizen is placed at the greatest distance from the issue, the administrative structures and processes are the closest, and the administrator is the agent between the structures and citizens, as depicted in Figure 1.

[Figure 1 ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

In the context of conventional participation, the administrator controls the ability of the citizen to influence the situation or the process. The administrative structures and processes are the politically and socially constructed frameworks within which the administrator must operate. These frameworks give the administrator the authority to formulate decisions only after the issue has been defined. Thus, the administrator has no real power to redefine the issue or to alter administrative processes to allow for greater citizen involvement (Forester, 1989).

In the context of conventional participation the administrator plays the role of the expert. White and McSwain (1993) suggest that participation within this context is structured to maintain the centrality of the administrator while publicly presenting the administrator as representative, consultative, or participatory. The citizen becomes the "client" of the professional administrator, ill-equipped to question the professional's authority and technical knowledge. This process establishes what Fischer calls a "practitioner-client hierarchy" (1993, 165). In this falsely dualistic relationship, the administrator is separated from the "demands, needs, and values" of the people whom he or she is presumed to be serving (&Leon, 1992, 126).

Participation in this context is ineffective and conflictual, and it happens too late in the process, that is, after the issues have been framed and most decisions have been made. Therefore, rather than cooperating to decide how best to address issues, citizens are reactive and judgmental, often sabotaging administrators' best efforts. Administrators are territorial and parochial; they resist sharing information and rely on their technical and professional expertise to justify their role in administrative processes. Citizen participation is more symbolic than real (Arnstein, 1969). The power that citizens yield is aimed at blocking or redirecting administrative efforts rather than working as partners to define the issues, establish the parameters, develop methods of investigation, and select techniques for addressing problems.

Reframing Participation

As defined by the participants of our research, effective participation is participation that is real or authentic. Authentic participation is deep and continuous involvement in administrative processes with the potential for all involved to have an effect on the situation. An activist defined authentic participation as "the ability and the opportunity to have an impact on the decision-making process." According to an administrator, authentic participation is "on-going, active involvement, not a one-shot deal, not just pulling the lever...it needs to go out and reach out to every part of your community, however

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defined." An activist said that good participation has occurred when "people affected by the change are comfortable with the decision made." A citizen explained, "For me, when I change perceptions I know it's a success."

Both citizens and administrators in our study defined the key elements of authentic participation as focus, commitment, trust, and open and honest discussion. As an activist stated, "People need to know that their input is important and will be considered in making that decision." An administrator concurred, "I think one of the keys for effective participation at the citizen and neighborhood level is for decision makers to be interested; to really listen to what the needs are of the people." Another administrator talked about listening and trust: "The first step is to make it clear that you're going to be receptive to their comments. But also I think a critical second step to maintaining their trust is to demonstrate to them that they're being heard...and that their ideas are shaping whatever you're developing." To achieve all of this, according to a third administrator, citizens and administrators "need to have a partnership. We do that by being sensitive that other people do have an agenda...but everyone should gradually come together."

Authentic participation requires that administrators focus on both process and outcome. In this context, participation is an integral part of administration, rather than an add-on to existing practices. Authentic participation means that the public is part of the deliberation process from issue framing to decision making (Roberts, 1997). As a citizen indicated, "From the very beginning people need to be involved." An administrator told us, "If you go to the community with a totally preset agenda that doesn't work. Bringing people into the process too late does not work." An activist concurred, "I think that it is very important that individuals be given the opportunity, prior to the decision being made, to provide input. [Citizens must have] enough time to process that information. There is a lot of phony participation going on out there."

Addressing the limitations of current participatory efforts requires that public administrators become "interpretive mediators." They must move beyond the technical issue at hand by involving citizens in "dialectical exchange" (Fischer, 1993, 183) and by engaging with citizens in discourse (Fox and Miller, 1995), rather than simply getting citizens input. Then, the administrator becomes a cooperative participant, assisting citizens in examining their interests, working together with them to arrive at decisions, and engaging them in open and authentic deliberation.

A citizen offers a compelling summary of the tensions involved in public participation: "You have to get in there and ask their opinion. And they will tell you their opinion in the midst of telling you what a lousy job you are doing. And you have to be willing to deal with that, to put up with it. I think a lot of administrators, like us, don't like criticism. They'll, naturally, avoid it...and forget to go out in the field and get democracy." Getting democracy seems to lie at the core of why authentic participation is important. Engendering a discourse where all participants have an equal footing and where one group is not privileged over the other is at the heart of authentic participation (Habermas, 1975).

The context of authentic participation is very different from the context of conventional participation. Authentic participation places the citizen next to the issue and the administrative structures and processes furthest away. However, the administrator is still the bridge between the two, as depicted in Figure 2. Citizens are central and directly related to the issue; they have an immediate and equal opportunity to influence the processes and outcomes. The administrators' influence comes from their relationship with the citizenry as well as from their expertise and position. The administrative structures and processes are defined by the relationships and interactions of citizens and administrators.

[Figure 2 ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

Authentic participation moves the administrator away from a reliance on technical and expertise models of administration and toward meaningful participatory processes. Table 1 summarizes the key differences between unauthentic and authentic participation models. As an activist told us:

Over the last year, the federal urban development people have put out some strict guidelines to encourage and mandate participation. And they don't know how to deal with the participation...they're intimidated...and

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they [are beginning to realize] that maybe we all can learn better ways of doing this. Their attitudes have always been: we know what's better for the neighborhoods. Maybe they're just beginning to realize that maybe citizens do know something. Maybe they do know what's best for the neighborhood and they're in the process of trying to figure out how to balance what they've been doing all these years with the need for citizen participation.

Table 1 Comparison of Authentic and Unauthentic Participation

	Unauthentic Participation
Interaction style	Conflictual
Participation is sought	After the agenda is set and decisions are made
Role of administrator	Expert technician/manager
Administrative skills needed	Technical; managerial
Role of citizen	Unequal participant
Citizenship skills needed	None
Approach toward "other"	Mistrust
Administrative process	Static, invisible, closed
Citizen options	Reactive
Citizen output	Buy-in
Administrator output	Decision
Time to decision	Appears shorter and easier but often involves going back and "redoing" based upon citizen reaction
Decision is made	By administrator/political and/or administrative processes perhaps in consultation with citizens
	Authentic Participation
Interaction style	Collaborative
Participation is sought	Early; before anything is set
Role of administrator	Collaborative technician/governor
Administrative skills needed	Technical, interpersonal skills, discourse skills, facilitation skills
Role of citizen	Equal partner
Citizenship skills needed	Civics, participation skills, discourse skills
Approach toward "other"	Trust
Administrative process	Dynamic, visible, open
Citizen options	Proactive or reactive
Citizen output	Design
Administrator output	Process
Time to decision	Appears longer and more onerous but usually doesn't require redoing because citizens have

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Decision is made

been involved throughout; may take less time to reach decisions than through traditional processes
Emerges as a result of discourse; equal opportunity for all to enter the discourse and to influence the outcomes

Processes of authentic participation do not necessarily create more work for administrators. Authenticity does, however, require different kinds of work. In conventional processes, administrators often have to go back and redo projects that citizens block once decisions have been made. One administrator indicated:

Why not get the citizens in and work these things out before we go with it? Actually, it may seem like it takes a little longer because, in the old way, we make a decision and run with it as far as we can; but then we have to run back and fix it There's always this arrogance that we know what the people need without their input--our system is set up to keep people away from the decision making.

Authentic participation involves citizens in the making of decisions instead of just judging. As one administrator told us, "There are two ways of participating: making, which includes doing something, and judgment. A lot of us go to meetings where we do nothing but judge It's the making and the doing that I think we're all wishing more citizens participated in."

Our research shows that the desire for participation is strong, and our participants recognize its importance. The next section examines the barriers to authentic participation.

Barriers to Authentic Participation

The focus group participants and subject matter experts agreed that participation methods and processes pose barriers to participation, but other factors do as well. Three categories of barriers were identified in our analyses: the nature of life in contemporary society, administrative processes, and current practices and techniques of participation.

The Nature of Life in Contemporary Society

The barriers stemming from the practical realities of daily life are tied to the social class position of citizens and include factors like transportation, time constraints, family structure, number of family members in the labor force, child care, and economic disadvantages. Some people express a desire to participate more fully in their communities, but the demands of day-to-day life get in the way. As one citizen said, "A lot of people are holding down two jobs and both people work in the family and are too tired... [from] trying to survive a day at a time."

The focus group members compared an idealized past where civic participation was common and visible, to the present, where it is nearly impossible to fit participation into an over-crowded schedule. The past was seen as a time of economic security with stable employment where participation in community life was a given. As one administrator explained, "At least in my grandparent's generation they weren't worried if Goodyear was going to be there. They knew they were. They were playing ball, going to Boy Scouts. Now... it's unusual if you have a bit of [worry-free] luxury in your life to participate."

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According to the older members in the focus group, younger community members are not pursuing an activist tradition. It is a constant challenge to community activists to get younger citizens to participate. One activist said, "We're trying to replace people who were active in the block clubs with people who are from the young families to take over the reins of what the older citizens have been doing for years. That's a hard thing to do."

Citizens, administrators, and activists all agreed that participation is hindered by a lack of education, both informally within families and communities and formally in the schools. One administrator described how early childhood socialization prepared him for a life of participation:

When I was a kid we would meet at the dinner table...and that was the place that almost without fail we'd get around to political and neighborhood and church going on...that would be the basis for learning about and socializing into broader issues in the community The same thing was true for the neighborhoods.

The adults used to gather on the front porches while their kids would play.

The demise of the neighborhood as an organizing and socializing system was described in the following way by one administrator: "People don't talk to each other anymore...the neighborhoods aren't neighborhoods...they used to be real tight-knit communities." Isolation from others is detrimental to participation.

One subject matter expert suggested that citizen participation is "abysmally low [because] we've taught people not to participate." However, he noted that even if people were invited to participate, "there is still the nature of citizen life itself, we are all very busy, perhaps too busy to participate." He warned against relying on standard indicators to draw conclusions about rates or levels of participation. Traditional participation indicators such as voting, attending civic meetings, or running for city council don't capture the cultural forms of participation that are more likely to involve younger members of the community. However, he also agreed that participatory values have not been reinforced in this "era of privatization and free market economy [where] individuals have a lot of economic pressures without much spare capital."

While day-to-day life keeps people from being more participatory and perhaps inculcates nonparticipatory attitudes and apathy, many of our research participants felt that current administrative processes are as much to blame for the lack of citizen participation.

Administrative Processes

The second set of barriers identified by our participants consists of those inherent in administrative processes themselves. These barriers are paradoxical. While most people define citizen participation as desirable, any participation seen as challenging the administrative status quo is blocked by the very administrators who desire more participatory processes. As one citizen lamented:

Isn't it a shame [that] one of the obstacles in citizen participation seems to be government We're talking about grass-roots programs that work despite the government,

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[because they are able to] work around the officials.

It seems to me that [elected officials and administrators]

should all be wanting to get people to

participate...not putting up barriers. They only want

favorable participation...to keep the status quo.

An activist described the barriers in the process as follows:

It seems to me that the political process gets in the way.

You can do all the things that should be done, get the

citizens together, get them involved, get input. But if

the decision has already been made on a different level,

it's all [window] dressing. And we have to get past that

first. How do you do that when the political process has

already made the decision which way it's going to go?

Citizens in our focus groups, like those included in other research, viewed communication in participatory processes as flowing one way--from the administrative professional to the citizen. Citizens in our project felt that information is usually managed, controlled, and manipulated, limiting their capacity to participate. As one citizen explained, "By the time we hear about issues it's too late to affect a decision." Another citizen concurred, "By the time we hear about the issues it is too late in the process. We might hear about it if we read the paper or if someone on your committee is on top of things enough to know what's going on." As a result, citizens talk about administrators as adversaries, as one citizen explained: "I think if we participate...we can sometimes beat the administrators to the gun."

Techniques of Participation

One of the most problematic administrative barriers is the techniques used in most participatory processes. As found in other research (Crosby, Kelly, and Schaefer, 1986; Kathlene and Martin, 1991; Kweit and Kweit, 1981; 1987; Parsons, 1990), our focus

group participants told us that most techniques used in current participation efforts are inadequate. The most ineffective technique is the public hearing. Public hearings do not work. Low attendance at public hearings is often construed as public apathy or silent approval of the status quo (Kathlene and Martin, 1991). In actuality, low attendance is more likely to be related to the structure of public hearings.

Administrators recognize that the structure of public hearings and public meetings prohibits meaningful exchange. As one administrator said, "The public hearing is not about communicating, it is about convincing." Another explained the limitations of public school board meetings, "When you go to a school board meeting, they get this egg timer, time to grab the microphone and speak. There's no follow-up. You don't even get to ask them questions There's no give and take." An activist suggested that the public hearing was window dressing, "We have these hearings so they can check off on their list that they've had their citizen participation It's participation out of the fear that they are going to look bad."

A major problem is the timing of public hearings. They are often held late in the process, when decisions have already been made. As one administrator explained, "I think public hearings are definitely too late. It's a formal process. Citizens

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know that. They know that and come to public hearings, but they know that it is already too late."

Other common methods of participation are citizen advisory councils, citizen panels, and public surveys (Crosby, et al., 1986; Kathlene and Martin, 1991; Parsons 1990). Limitations of councils and panels include biases in composition, particularly with regard to social class (Verba, et. al., 1993). Surveys, on the other hand, document public opinions at one point in time (Kathlene and Martin, 1991) and do not allow for an interactive process or relationship between citizens and administrators.

Administrators in our project were clear that participation techniques need to be improved. One administrator pointed out: "We can't ignore the process of conducting a good meeting. There are many people who get turned off when [meetings aren't run well] It could be a royal waste of my time and I resent that." Another administrator challenged all administrators:

Look at alternative ways to get people involved. It isn't just if you can't come to the meeting, you can't be involved. That may be a very interesting challenge for us to think about. What other ways can people feel that they have some say in the process without having to leave their kids and get a baby-sitter and go to a meeting and so forth? Solving these problems may be a tremendous, innovative way to break down some of these barriers.

To move toward authentic participation administrators need to change many of their current practices. One change may be to go where the citizens are rather than asking citizens to come to them. As one administrator proposed, "So imagine if the councilman from your ward called you up and said, you know, I'm interested in meeting with a small group of your neighbors. Can I come to you rather than you coming here?" Another administrator concurred, "We've got to stop doing things the way we've always done them. We can't be having meetings during the daytime and expect people to come. We can't be doing things in a remote place and expect people to come at 8:00 at night We've got to go to them."

Accessibility is another important issue. As one administrator outlined, "Another effort in the community is grass-roots leadership Folks who have been historically excluded from processes of decision making about these scarce resources need to be increasingly included in the processes." Another administrator agreed, "In order to have true participation, those of us who have some authority have to be more active in bringing people who perceive themselves as excluded into the process."

Our research participants told us that they want authentic participation, but many barriers restrict participation. In the final section of this article we suggest how to overcome these barriers in order to move toward more authentic participatory processes.

Overcoming Barriers to Authentic Participation

As our findings indicate, people may be more willing to participate if they have a real opportunity to influence both administrative processes and outcomes. Shifting participatory techniques to more effective or authentic practices requires what deLeon (1992) identifies as a two-sided learning process. Both administrators and citizens need to learn.

In order to move toward authentic models, all three components of public participation--the administrative structures and processes, the administrators, and the citizens--must be addressed by those working in, and seeking to understand,

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public administration. Authenticity cannot be achieved by addressing problems in only one area. For example, citizen empowerment in the absence of administrative transformation is problematic. To develop processes that increase participation without changing the power relations between citizens and administrators is also problematic. Models of authentic participation must take a three-pronged approach, addressing all three components, seeking to (1) empower and educate community members, (2) re-educate administrators, and (3) enable administrative structures and processes. We discuss each of these objectives in the following sections. Table 2 provides a summary of practical actions that administrators and citizens can take to overcome barriers to authentic participation in each of these areas.

Table 2
Overcoming Barriers to Authentic Participation: Recommendations for Practice

	Objectives
Barriers	Empowering and Educating Citizens
Realities of Daily Life	Talk with administrators; establish one-on-one relationships, Pay attention. Talk to neighbors; form relationships with others in your area (interest or geographical), Strengthen local economies, emphasizing benefits to people versus the economy, Create opportunities for people to interact with each other,
Administrative Systems and Processes	Teach citizens how to work within the system and to work with the system, Head off antigovernment sentiment by educating citizens about the necessity of government practices (red tape, etc), assuming this is done in a good-faith effort to find ways to work more effectively with citizens, Place more emphasis on civics and public participation in K-12 (add to 3Rs) as well as in higher education. Educate to participate,
Participation Techniques	Hold workshops with administrators that focus upon discourse skills, meeting skills, and research and statistics skills, Hold workshop and training opportunities with administrators prior to beginning project team work. Objectives
Barriers	Re-educating Administrators
Realities of Daily Life	Take initiative to talk with citizens; establish one-on-one relationships. Go out and get democracy. Don't separate yourself from your job; you are a citizen also. Think about your life and plan participation efforts accordingly.

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Be sure that projects are advertised so that people are informed (flyers in well-attended places, phone calls, mailings, etc.).

Administrative Systems and Processes Begin to see citizenry as the fourth branch of government; one can't talk about governance and government without talking about citizens.

Shift from majority focus of education on managerial skills to governance skills.

Require continuing education credits for administrators that focus on innovations in practice.

Participation Techniques Infuse Master of Public Administration and undergrad curricula with training in the skills below; develop on-site training funded by agencies and local governments:
 facilitation skills; team-building skills;
 organizational development skills;
 discourse skills; interpersonal skills,

Require these curriculum changes as part of NASPAA accreditation requirements,

Objectives

Barriers Enabling Administrative Systems and Processes

Realities of Daily Life Set up flexible meeting schedules; multiple opportunities.

Go to where people are (lunch hour, child care centers, schools, churches, laundry facilities, electronic, etc.).

Use electronic resources (but don't rely only upon them).

Provide on-site, free child-care; catered meals at a nominal charge for participants, free meals for disadvantaged participants.

Seek diversity in representation.

Administrative Systems and Processes Allocate resources for participation efforts.
 Reward administrators for participation efforts; change job descriptions; participation must be integral to job, not an add-on.

Bring people in before agenda is set; create on-going project teams that follow project through to completion.

Shift from emphasis on managerial roles of administration to governance roles.

Participation Techniques Change the way we meet and interact with each other and with citizens:
 many small meetings; roundtable
 discussions; outside facilitators; equal

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participants; no one privileged in group because of position, status, demographic characteristics, etc..

Avoid one-shot techniques like surveys or biased techniques like boards or panels.

Empowering and Educating Citizens

Empowering citizens means designing processes where citizens know that their participation has the potential to have an impact, where a representative range of citizens are included, and where there are visible outcomes. The central issue is one of access. According to one subject matter expert, "Creating opportunities for people to participate is the key.... It is all about access to skill building and to information."

The education of citizens should focus on teaching specific organizing and research skills. In addition, community members need leadership training. According to a subject matter expert, "democracy schools," much like the Citizenship Schools that fueled the civil rights movement in the South, should be established in local communities "to encourage people to see they can actually make a difference if they get involved." Another subject matter expert recommended learning centers "to provide continued education for elected officials and citizens alike."

Citizens and administrators must work as partners in the establishment of democracy schools or learning centers, and, according to one subject matter expert, "they should be learning the same skills." Educating people, according to one activist, "is having people feel confident and informed...directing their energies towards a specific goal instead of sitting there being angry with their situation Empowerment [comes from] education."

With a shared base of knowledge, citizens and administrators can work together from the very beginning when issues are being defined and framed. Citizens need to be involved from the beginning rather than brought in at the end when questions are already framed in ways that are not amenable to open decision making (e.g., the specific placement of a nuclear waste site versus the question of nuclear waste production and disposal as a community-based issue). In addition, citizens and administrators can work together to develop methods of investigation and select techniques for addressing problems.

Many of the realities of daily life that limit citizens' ability to be involved in public decisions seem almost too big for an administrator to change, especially at the local level. How can we change economies and habits of living that limit people's time, energy, and capacities to participate? Although it is difficult to address the major political, economic, and social issues that limit participation, participants in our research project told us that it is possible to chip away at these big issues. For example, some programs stimulate participation and reduce citizen alienation through the development of alternative economies. Summit County in northeastern Ohio is home of one of the first goods-exchange alternative economies that are now beginning to crop up across the country. People connect with one another through a program called "Summit Dollars," where both the currency and the products are services, hand-produced goods, or hours spent on a project. People barter and exchange their services and goods outside of the regular money economy. Not only are those involved benefitting from this program economically, but participants are also making connections and developing relationships that they may not have made without the program. As a result, alienation is decreasing and connections in the community are increasing.

Summit County also houses a successful program called SHARE, which brings together community members and corporate sponsors to provide \$30.00 of groceries a month to each participant willing to pay a reduced amount for the food and donate two hours a month to a community effort. This program is interesting because it brings together participants across class, race, and other boundaries and gives people something tangible in return for their participation efforts. Although the decision to be connected rests with the individual, much can be done to address the barriers that discourage people from being more involved in public decision making.

Re-educating Administrators

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Re-educating administrators means changing their roles from that of expert managers toward that of cooperative participants or partners. This task involves shifts at the personal level with regard to inter/intrapersonal skills (Denhardt and Aristigueta, 1996; Stivers, 1994), redefining the role of expertise in public administration, and changing the ways we educate and train public administrators.

Along with the traditional research, budgeting, and management skills that one normally learns in a graduate program in public administration, public administrators also need to be trained in process and interpersonal skills including communication, listening, team building, meeting facilitation, and self-knowledge. In their accreditation reviews public administration programs should be evaluated on the basis of their process-oriented curricula, much in the same way that the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) currently evaluates content-oriented curricula.

Administrators need to examine their basic assumptions and practices regarding power. They need to become cooperative participants in the discourse, moving from a self-regarding intentionality where the goal is to protect self, promote self-interests, and hoard power, to a situation-regarding intentionality where power and community are grounded in the needs of the issue or situation (Fox and Miller, 1995). The motivation to do so is lacking, of course, when administrators are under pressure from their agencies and institutions to perform in certain ways that serve the institutions, rather than the citizenry. Therefore, examining the basic assumptions about power requires a significant shift in the mainstream values about what it is that administrators do. Administrators typically are expected to manage, not govern (Harmon, 1995; Wamsley, et al., 1990).

Enabling Administrative Structures and Processes

The most difficult things to change are the structures and processes of administration. To shift administrative structures is no small feat. This requires changing institutionalized habits and practices. Without real changes in how bureaucracies function, there will be little movement toward authentic participation and greater cynicism on the part of administrators and citizens. Public organizations must "not only democratize formal institutions and procedures, but also make room for nonbureaucratic discourse and organizational forms" (Tauxe, 1995,489).

Most of the changes needed in administrative structures will originate with the people involved in administration. Systems and structures are nothing more than the habitual practices of the people involved in the system, or what Giddens (1984) calls recursive practices. If administrators change their practices and start working with citizens as partners, they will begin to shift the way administration is practiced at the microlevel. If changes are made at the microlevel, macrolevel administrative structures and processes will necessarily follow.

Administrators in our study made specific recommendations for changing microlevel practices (see Table 2 for examples). Experimenting with a variety of innovative microlevel techniques is a starting point for administrators as they grapple with the problem of how to increase the level of participation in their communities. Some changes must be made or else we risk continuing to hamper our work by practicing participation efforts that, according to a subject matter expert, "are inherently conflictual, discourage public participation, and yield silly outcomes." He added, "In a perfect world, if participation is sought at the first level of the decision rather than at the end, then citizens may be more likely to trust the experts and let them do their jobs. As it stands now, trust will never happen."

It is ironic that the obligation for facilitating change in citizens, administrators, and administrative practices falls on the shoulders of administrators. After all, the administrators have been doing it "wrong" all along. If we assume that a more authentic context of participation allows the administrator to act as facilitator, then it is the responsibility of the administrator to shape the participation process, starting as the initial change agent. It is essential that schools of public administration, as well as those in leadership positions in agencies, create environments within which these change agents can be successful. Such an environment requires appropriate levels of resources and changes in job descriptions for administrators.

We are asking a great deal of administrators and their agencies, but it is clear to us, based on our findings and participation efforts like those in cities such as Cleveland, Seattle, Dayton, and Phoenix (Crislip and Larson, 1994), that the potential is there. In addition, significant reorganization efforts in policy-making bodies, such as the U.S. Environment

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Protection Agency (King, Stivers, et al., 1998), indicate that it is possible to shift institutional systems so that the policy processes are amenable to collaborative work.

Authentic participation is possible. This study validates previous research, brings together the voices of the people involved in participation at the local level, and suggests a three-pronged approach toward authentic participation. Translating these recommendations into action requires that public administration practitioners and scholars address all three components at the same time, an essential strategy for shifting toward more authentic participation processes in public administration.

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RELATED ARTICLE: METHODOLOGY

The research reported here follows a grounded theory model of research (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) and is based on interviews with subject matter experts and focus group discussions among citizens and public administrators in northeast Ohio. We used qualitative techniques because of our desire for depth in addressing the question of how to make participation efforts more effective for both citizens and administrators. We also wanted to allow issues we may not have considered to emerge from the research.

Subject matter experts are individuals we identified as knowledgeable about participation, either through their research or practice. We conducted hour-long telephone interviews with five subject matter experts; one interview was conducted in person. Subject matter experts include two organizers who are currently engaged in extensive participation projects, one for the Environmental Protection Agency and one for the city of Dayton, Ohio; two former executives from national foundations that focus on increasing the links between citizens and government; a public participation practitioner currently working in nuclear waste cleanup in Idaho; and one established scholar in the field.

In the interviews the subject matter experts talked about the meaning of participation, identified the key components of successful participation efforts, addressed the issue of decline in participation, suggested ways to bolster citizen involvement in civic processes, and discussed key theories guiding research and practice in participation. We used the results of the interviews to shape the discussion guidelines for the focused group discussions.

The focus groups included three types of participants in public administration: non-elected administrators in local government, activists, and citizens who had participated in at least one public process or event during the previous year. A type of snowball sampling helped us identify group participants. The first few participants were identified through our personal and professional networks; we asked them to recommend other potential participants. Surprisingly, given this technique, our participants were fairly diverse with regard to their experiences and perspectives.

The activists and citizens were similar in terms of their interest in, and commitment to, participation. They differed in that the activists were formally tied to organizations that represent citizen interests and had higher levels of participation than ordinary citizens because of their organization's mission and goals. Citizens who did not participate in public processes were not represented in the focus group discussions.

We convened seven groups in three communities in northeast Ohio, chosen to represent the diversity of communities in the area (large city, medium city, rural/edge city). The focus groups ranged in size from six to eleven members, with three citizen-only groups, one administrator-only group, one activist-only group, and two groups of both activists and administrators. Participants were diverse with regard to demographic characteristics, the focus of their participation efforts, and the organizations they represented, although the administrators were all local (city or county). Participants in the groups responded to four general questions: What does public participation mean to you? What are the barriers to effective public participation? How can effective public participation be achieved, if at all? What advice do you have to give to people studying and attempting to practice effective public participation? Other topics and questions emerged in each group. The facilitators guided the discussions but did not control the direction of the conversations. The discussions lasted for two hours and were recorded verbatim by a courtroom transcriber.

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In the first stage of the analysis, we coded the transcribed interviews and discussions individually, using a qualitative form of content analysis (see Strauss and Corbin, 1990). In the second stage of analysis, we synthesized the separate analyses, using a nominal group technique to create the categorical themes discussed in this paper.

It is important to note that, except for administrators, all participants in the focus groups were active in public participation processes. We wanted people involved to give us guidance on how these processes might be more effective. Every group discussion turned, at some point, to the question of nonparticipation. Our participants had a great deal to say about nonparticipation. We have incorporated their views of nonparticipation into the discussion.

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