

How Citizens can take part in developing and implementing public policy - Part 2

Richard Curtain¹
Co convenor
Australian Public Policy Research Network
curtain@apprn.org

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Abstract

Part I of the paper presented at the Facing the Future Conference was entitled 'What Role for Citizens in Developing and Implementing Public Policy?' The paper offered a critical overview of the current state of the Australian Governments' engagement with citizens in Australia? Also discussed was the why, when and how of citizen participation, using the OECD's three stage proposed model of citizen engagement: information provision, two way consultation leading to direct involvement in policy development and implementation.

The third stage of the OECD's model proposes the active participation of citizens in policy-making based on a partnership relationship. This means that governments acknowledge the role of citizens in proposing policy options and shaping the policy dialogue. However, it is also accepted that the final decision on policy or policy formulation rests with government.

The focus of Part II of the paper is on innovative ways of engaging citizens. Particular attention is given to elaborating a typology of appropriate methods for different stages of the policy process, taking into account the degree of complexity of the policy issue.

Why seek citizen engagement?

Citizen engagement with the development and implementation of policy can help to generate a heightened sense of public value about what government does. Listening to citizen preferences, providing an opportunity to analysis available options, assessing what is a preferred options and providing feedback through performance measurement and monitoring and evaluation are likely to all help ensure that the public will value more highly what publicly funded services they are receiving.²

What is needed in seeking citizen input?

Four essential elements of a pro active approach to consulting citizens can be identified.³

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- The first key element is to recognise that citizens may not have definite views on many issues until they have had the time to think about the issue, hear other views and form their own opinion. Therefore, it is important to allow enough time for discussion so that people can come to grips with the issues involved.
 - The second key element is the need to provide comprehensive and balanced information well in advance of a discussion of an issue.
 - Third, the citizen engagement process needs to be iterative, offering an opportunity for genuine exchanges of views to take place. This, in many cases, will mean being part of a deliberative process with the support of facilitators to set up and guide the discussion. It may also require the use of a methodology, perhaps technologically based, to make it possible for the participants to identify priorities, propose solutions and suggest needed actions.
 - Fourth, the value of the citizen exchange needs to be confirmed by feedback about how the input provided has been used.

What is being tried elsewhere? Local authorities in the UK

The UK and Canada offer examples of a variety of tools and processes to enlist greater citizen involvement. A survey of all local authorities in England, conducted between March and July 2002 with a 55 per cent response rate, sought information about how councils seek the views of citizens; increase citizen involvement in decision-making; or enable the electorate to determine or influence policy on a specific issue.⁴ The survey also obtained information on who and how often local authorities consult; the sorts of issues they consult on; and the perceived benefits of, and obstacles to, involving the public.⁵ The survey results for 2001 are presented in Table 1.

Four different forms of citizen participation were identified from the survey:

- The more traditional forms of consultation such as public meetings, consultation documents, co-option to committees and question and answer sessions;
- Customer-oriented feedback in the form of service satisfaction surveys; complaints/suggestions schemes used in relation to service delivery;
- Innovative participative methods such as interactive websites, citizens' panels, focus groups and referenda; and
- Approaches which encourage citizens to deliberate over issues through mechanisms such as citizens' juries, community plans/needs analysis, visioning exercises and issue forums.

Focus groups

The widespread use of different forms of citizen participation by local authorities is worth noting. As many as 81 per cent of local authorities reported using focus groups (see Table 1). These are groups of citizens brought together to discuss a specific issue. Focus groups do not aim to be representative of the general population, and may involve a particular group of citizens only. Discussions may focus on the specific needs of that group, on the quality of a particular service, or on ideas for broader policy or strategy. Focus groups do not generally call expert witnesses and typically last between one and two hours only, usually involving around 12 people.

Citizen Panels

The use of by local authorities has grown in popularity in four years - from 18 per cent in 1997 to 71 per cent of authorities in 2001. Citizens' panels are made up of a statistically representative sample of citizens whose views are sought several times a year. The survey results show that citizens' panels involved, on average, around 8000 people per authority area.⁶

Two types of Citizen Panels have been used: research and standing panels. Research Panels use a representative sample (ranging from 500 to 5,000 people) of the local population of an area as a sounding board to tracks changes in opinion over time. The sample is usually chosen to obtain representative results related to gender, age, ethnic background and occupation. The views of panel members on different issues are sought regularly using a variety of methods, such as surveys, interviews or focus groups.⁷ A proportion of the panel is replaced over time. In the case of the local government, the Citizens Panel is surveyed regularly to assess the quality of local services and identify views about future needs and goals.⁸

On the other hand, Standing Panels, in face-to-face meetings, can be used to test specific policy options or proposals or to scrutinise policy implementation. Citizen Panels, therefore, can function as a 'sounding board' for the local authority, focusing on specific service or policy issues, or they can also focus on wider strategy.⁹ Just over half of the authorities surveyed (52 per cent) said they used an interactive web site as a mechanism to engage citizens.

Citizens' juries

Citizens' juries are a more complex process involving a substantial deliberative element are much less prominent. This form of citizen participation is particularly appropriate for involving citizens in decision making on complex and highly technical issues which require a high level of knowledge.¹⁰ This form of citizen engagement has been used successfully in relation to complex biomedical, genetic engineering and telecommunications public policy issues.¹¹

A citizens' jury is a small group of citizens brought together to consider a particular issue. It is chosen on a representative basis to reflect the local population. Citizens' juries receive evidence from expert witnesses and can cross-question the experts. The

process may last up to four days, at the end of which a report is drawn up setting out the views of the jury, including any differences in opinion.¹² Typically, the sponsoring body (a government department, a local authority or other agency) is required to respond, either by acting on the report or explaining why it disagrees with it.

Table 1: Forms of public participation in UK Local Government, 2001

Form of Public Participation	Used in 2001 per cent	Form of Public Participation	Used in 2001 per cent
Service Satisfaction Surveys	92	Other Opinion Polls	56
Complaints/Suggestion Schemes	86	Question and Answer Sessions	51
Consultation Documents	84	Co-option/Committee Work	48
Focus Groups	81	Issue Forums	44
Public Meetings	78	Shared Interest Forums	38
Service User Forums	73	Visioning Exercises	38
Citizens' Panels	71	User Management of Services	18
Area/Neighbourhood Forums	64	Referendums	10
Community Plans/Needs Analysis	58	Citizens' Juries	6
		No of local authorities	216

Source: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2002, Public Participation in Local Government A survey of local authorities. December.

It is important to note that only 6 per cent of local authorities in the UK used citizens juries in 2001, no doubt due to the greater resources needed to manage the process effectively. Citizens' juries have been run in the UK on ethical and social questions and on a wide range of policy areas including local planning, energy, communication, environment and transport.¹³ They have also been used widely in Germany and the USA.¹⁴ Their use in Australia appears to be more limited.¹⁵

Box 2: UK Food Standards Agency citizens' jury says GM food should be available to buy in the UK

Monday, 07 April 2003

The FSA Citizens' Jury decided this afternoon that GM foods should be available to buy in the UK, although a sizeable minority (6 out of 15) disagreed, believing that the UK is not yet ready for GM foods.

Over three days, the jurors – comprised of 15 people from Slough – had access to the entire spectrum of views on GM food, and were able to develop an in-depth understanding of the issues via sessions with witnesses from organisations such as Friends of the Earth, Bayer Crop Science, Sainsbury's and the Consumers' Association. The jury were also briefed by Professor Kathy Sykes of Bristol University about the nature of risk, food safety and DNA. After two hours of heated deliberation, the jury presented its verdict to FSA Chief Executive Dr Jon Bell. The majority of jurors thought GM food should be available to buy in the UK because they are confident in safety measures. While some anti-GM concerns are valid, there has to be choice if the UK doesn't embrace new developments in science, it will be left behind, because there are demonstrable benefits from GM.

All 15 members of the jury agreed that the following measures are vital if GM food is introduced to the UK: education to keep the public informed of developments and possible problems with GM [and] effective labelling and monitoring of GM foods; for example, a GM food logo to ensure that people can make a genuine choice to eat or avoid eating GM foods

A number of jurors expressed concerns about the long-term safety of genetically modified organisms, ethical concerns, and the environmental impact of growing GM crops in the UK. Although environmental issues are outside the remit of the Food Standards Agency, the concerns of jurors about environmental issues will be included in the final published report of the jury's considerations.

The jury, socially representative of the population of Slough, included an accountant, two students, a housewife, taxi driver, driving instructor, and a minister of religion.

Thousands of people watched the live internet broadcast of the jury on the FSA's website over the three days, with over 1000 viewers watching the jurors deliver their verdict to the FSA. The jury's delivery of the verdict will be available to watch as Video-on-Demand from midday Tuesday 9 April by on the FSA website www.food.gov.uk.

Citizens' Forum

Another UK example of a process to provide citizen participation in relation to influencing national policy is the use of a large-scale Citizens' Forum model where around 100 members of the public come together to focus on a particular issues. The Forum members work in table groups of 10, each with a facilitator, and have an individual voting keypad to register responses on specific questions.¹⁶ A large Citizens' Forum has been employed to discuss concepts of equality and fairness in Britain with the findings being used to inform the possible development of a single equality commission in the UK.¹⁷

What is being tried elsewhere? Dialogues in Canada on key national issues

National health framework

A recent national participative project in Canada demonstrates how citizens can offer their views on complex issues such as a national health policy framework. The Canadian Policy Research Network (CPRN) worked with US-based Viewpoint Learning to design and conduct 12 day-long sessions held across Canada with about 40 citizens at each session.¹⁸ Participants were randomly selected to provide a representative cross-section of the Canadian population.

They were asked to reflect on four scenarios for reforming Canada's health care system: increase public investment; share the costs and responsibilities; increase private choice and reorganize service delivery. From these scenarios, the citizen participants created their own vision of the health care system that they would like to see in 10 years. They then spent several hours working through difficult trade-offs and choices to realize their

vision. They also completed pre- and post-dialogue questionnaires, designed to measure any shift in opinion due to dialogue with and learning from their fellow citizens.

The results of the exercise were as follows. Citizens said that they wanted to keep the core principles of the Medicare model in accord with their strongly held values of universality, equal access, solidarity and fairness. Also acknowledged were the importance of the values of efficiency and accountability to drive the use of health care resources. Citizens want to update and make sustainable the public health care system for the future and if necessary, are prepared to change their own behaviour and they expect providers, managers and governments to do the same.

The results of the citizens' dialogues were delivered in June 2002 to the Royal Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada. In the Royal Commission's final report to government, in November 2002, the results of citizen dialogues were prominent, with clear evidence that they had distinctly influenced the Commission's recommendations.

Defining quality of life

In another national participative project, citizens were given the opportunity to define quality of life in Canada.¹⁹ From this definition, experts proposed a prototype national set of 40 indicators organized around nine themes. This was followed by the preparation of a national report card on quality of life released in September 2002. Three hundred and forty-six citizens in 40 groups of about 10 each gathered in 21 locations across the country in October 2000 to deliberate for about three hours on three questions: What does quality of life in Canada mean to you? How would you know if things are getting better or worse? Whose information would you trust?

The methodology used was deliberative dialogue, with the administration of pre- and post-dialogue questionnaires, and with the presence of specially trained facilitators and note-takers and a dialogue background package for participants sent to them in advance of the dialogues.

Key elements of a 21 century social contract

A third national project was called 'Citizens' Dialogue on Canada's Future: a 21st Century Social Contract.'²⁰ Using a similar methodology to the above two projects, citizens were randomly chosen to participate in 10 day-long sessions across Canada in October and November 2002. In this dialogue, citizens were asked to reflect on four scenarios - market; civil society; traditional values; cultural diversity. Their reflections were applied to four policy issues - economic development, international development, poverty and marginalization and health and environmental risks. This framework was used to guide their discussions on developing a vision of the kind of Canada they wanted in 10 years.

The result was a view of a new social contract where citizens see market values as integrated with those values of civil society and social equity. The dialogue also showed

that the citizens who participated in the dialogue want to be more active participants in governance, looking for greater accountability while willing to assume more responsibility. Cultural diversity was affirmed and repositioned in a set of core values. The overall result was the emergence of a sense of shared values, shared community and identity.²¹

How best to engage citizens in developing policy options

To be fully effective, decision makers must appropriately tie the selected [citizen participation] strategy to both the purpose for participation and the nature of the issue being considered.²²

The process for developing public policy can be outlined in five steps. These are: define the problem; identify the criteria to be used in evaluating alternative solutions; generate alternative solutions to the problem; evaluate the alternative solutions based on the evaluation criteria; and recommend an option.²³ The question is at what stage or stages is there a role for citizen involvement?

When to engage citizens in policy development?

Walters, Aydelotte, & Miller (2000, p 353) propose the following possible links between the reasons for seeking citizen participation and how they might be linked to the different stages of the policy development process. The process for developing public policy can be described in five steps. These are: defining the problem; identifying the criteria or principles to be used in evaluating possible solutions; generating alternative solutions to the problem; evaluating these solutions based on the evaluation criteria or principles; and finally, recommending a policy option.²⁴ The question is at what stage or stages is there a role for citizen involvement in this five-step process?

Five different functions citizen participation can perform in the policy development process have been identified. These are the roles of discovery, education, measurement, persuasion and legitimation. The appropriateness of the different functions of citizen participation will vary according to the stage of the policy process (see Table 1)

Table 1: Reasons for policy makers to seek citizen participation

Policy development stages	Reasons to seek citizen participation
1. Define the problem/issue	Discovery role – citizen input can help to define the issue
2. Identify criteria for decision	Discovery role – citizen input used to identify evaluation criteria or underlying principles of a sound policy

3. Generate alternative options	<p>Discovery role – citizen input to identify alternative options and/or</p> <p>Education role – citizens participate by absorbing relevant information and discussing issue and/or proposing alternatives</p> <p>Legitimate – citizen involvement in consideration of options can be important basis for wider public acceptance of the outcome</p>
4. Evaluate alternatives	<p>Education role discuss/debate proposed alternatives and/or</p> <p>Measure – assess the range of public opinion on a set of options and/or</p> <p>Legitimate — citizen involvement in consideration of options can be important basis for wider public acceptance of the outcome</p>
5. Recommend an option	<p>Education role – discuss/debate proposed alternatives and/or</p> <p>Persuasion role - seek to convince public to accept recommended option or approach</p> <p>Legitimate – citizen involvement in consideration of options can be important basis for wider public acceptance of the outcome</p>

Source: adapted from Walters, L; Aydelotte, J; & Miller, J; 2000, Table 1.

The discovery role for citizens refers to exploring the range of different aspects of a particular problem or issue. The value of this stage is to identify a common definition of the problem or issue based on a broad consensus of a representative group of citizens.²⁵ In similar way, the discovery role is important for finding agreement on the criteria or principles to be used to assess the relative merit of the proposed solutions. This stage is crucial as it enables competing solutions to be judged against agreed criteria and a viable solution identified.²⁶

The education role of citizen input refers to the task of providing an understanding of the issues. This also enables policy makers to work out what information or research is needed to address these gaps. The third role citizen input can play is to show the state of public opinion regarding a set of options. This is more reliable where input has been sought from a statistically representative group of citizens chosen at random from the wider community.

The fourth possible role that citizen participation can play is to persuade the public of a recommended option or approach. The use of this role for citizen engagement may be where local interests dominate over regional or national interests. An example might be where a community upstream on a river may need to be convinced to take a broader perspective to give equal weight to the needs of the other users downstream.

The legitimisation role of citizen participation in the development of policy options applies particularly where there are high-conflict issues. In this situation, citizen participation in the development of options can be a key element in gaining wider public acceptance of the final outcome.²⁷

Table 2 shows that citizen input can be justified at several stages of the policy process. However, this is not to claim that citizen involvement should be sought at all stages of the policy process. The desirability of citizen participation and the form that it may take will vary with the issue being addressed. Understanding the nature of the issue is, therefore, vital in choosing the appropriate participation methods.²⁸

The form that citizen consultation takes depends on the type of policy issue being addressed. According to Walters, Aydelotte & Miller, policy problems fall into three broad groupings: well-structured, moderately-structured, and poorly-structured.²⁹ The appropriate classification depends how a policy issue rates in relation to six attributes. These are: the degree of conflict over the issue; the number of stakeholders involved; the level of confidence in the information on the issue; the number of alternatives; and knowledge about possible outcomes and the probability of achieving predefined outcomes.

Any of these problem types can affect the success of a public participation strategy. The degree of conflict over the issue can determine when policy makers should include the public and whether consensus building is needed first. On a high conflict issue, public involvement is more likely to be needed early to encourage consensus and to legitimise the process.

Where there is widespread disagreement about how to define the problem, participation methods that promote compromise may be needed. This is to find a common basis from which to start. In a high conflict setting, workshops may be more successful in building a consensus about a common starting point rather than public hearings. The workshops can provide a better opportunity for differing interests to debate and reach agreement whereas public hearings are more likely to be adversarial as they are less personal in nature.³⁰

The nature of the stakeholders involved will also shape the type of participation mechanism chosen. Participation techniques such as small group workshops, advisory committees or conflict mediation are more likely to work for single-issue groups. This is to ensure that their concerns are considered as well as those of other interested groups.³¹

The number of stakeholders and their level of organization also needs to be taken into account. If the stakeholders are organized into a few groups, it will be important to involve their leaders in a participatory process. Examples of methods that involve group leaders are interviews, workshops, and advisory committees as well as focus groups.

On the other hand, if the stakeholders are not well organised or widely dispersed, and do not have legitimate representatives, more open-ended participation methods are warranted. These might include use of the media or open invitation meetings to establish direct contact with citizens. Walters, Aydelotte, & Miller 2000, have suggested the following different consultation methods for different stages of the policy process and the nature of the policy issue.

Table 2: Fit for purpose; outline of appropriate participative processes for engaging citizens according to the purpose of the consultation

Purpose of the consultation	Nature of the issue		
	Well-structured	Moderately structured	Ill- structured
1. Discovery		Interest group forum Consensus conference ³² Internet online discussion	Taskforce or Commission of Inquiry Consensus conference Focus groups Local meetings Internet online discussion
2. Education		Educational public forum Public meeting News media	Educational public forum Public meeting News media
3. Measurement		Citizen Panel Survey Focus groups	Citizen Panel Survey Focus groups
4. Persuasion		Citizen jury (small group) Citizen Forum (large group) Advocacy media	Citizen jury (small group) Citizen Forum (large group) Advocacy media
5. Legitimation	Elections Referenda Formal Hearings	Elections Referenda Formal Hearings Media Taskforce	Elections Referenda Formal Hearings Media Taskforce

Source: adapted with modifications from Walters, L; Aydelotte, J; & Miller, J; 2000, Table 3

Conclusion

There are a range of arguments that can be offered in support of greater citizen participation in the policy making process. More opportunity for citizens to exercise their rights and responsibilities beyond the ballot box is an obvious way to overcome widespread cynicism about the decisions taken by politicians and public servants. The need for public policy to address issues in ways that cut across existing program and departmental boundaries is also widely recognised but the mechanisms for doing so are underdeveloped. Citizen engagement in developing and implementing policy is one way to reconcile competing values and perspective to produce a 'joined up' solution.

For these benefits to be delivered to the body politic, citizen consultation about public policy needs to move beyond the piecemeal and hazard process it is now in Australia. This is not to argue that citizen engagement is needed in all situations. It depends on how important the issue is to any group of citizens shown by their willingness to devote time and other resources to participating.

It is also important for public servants not to engage in a process that raises citizen expectations that will be difficult to fill. This suggests that careful thought needs to be given to when and how citizen engagement is sought. The starting point, however, needs to be a framework that applies across all federal government departments and agencies, if only in broad outline.

The framework needs to encompass a clear understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of elected representatives, public servants, organised interests and citizens. While Governments are accountable for their decisions to Parliament and the electors, it is not clear what the roles citizens can play beyond their entitlement to vote. The role of citizens in the policy development process needs to be spelt out not only in formal terms, it also needs to be addressed in practice. This means that governments and citizens need to work out jointly a set of good practice guidelines and initiate some experimentation in the different ways engagement can take place.

¹ I would like to thank Sabrina Dei Giudici for her research work on references to consultation on the web sites of federal and state government departments. I would also like to thank Meredith Edwards for her close reading of the paper and her helpful comments, Julia Perry, Russell Ayres and Tim Reddel for pointing to several issues that needed more clarification. Needless to say, I take full responsibility for the errors that may remain.

² Gavin Kelly and Stephen Muers, 2002, 'Creating Public Value An analytical framework for public service reform', UK Cabinet Office.

³ I am grateful to a personal communication from Laura Edwards, Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Public Policy Research, UK for some of these points. The IPPR's website is www.ippr.org. IPPR first introduced Citizens' Juries to the UK in the 1990s.

⁴ Birch, D; 2002, *Public Participation in Local Government A survey of local authorities*. Local and Regional Government Research Unit, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, London, December

⁵ I have not been able to find the results of a similar survey in Australia for local government.

⁶ Birch, D; 2002, p 21.

⁷ UK Cabinet Office, 2002, *Viewfinder: A Policy Maker's Guide To Public Involvement*. www.policyhub.gov.uk, p 46.

⁸ The Scottish Office, n.d., *Involving Civil Society in the Work of Parliaments. Para 2.5 Citizen Panels*. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/government/devolution/cpsp-09.asp#bm10>

⁹ Birch, D; 2002, p 66.

¹⁰ The Scottish Office, n.d., *Involving Civil Society in the Work of Parliaments – Consensus Conferences*. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/government/devolution/cpsp-06.asp#bm07>

¹¹ Guston, D, 1998, 'Evaluating the Impact of the First U.S. Citizens' Panel on 'Telecommunications and the Future of Democracy' Prepared for delivery at the 1998 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, September 3-6.

¹² Birch, D; 2002, p 67.

¹³ Ibid, Para 2.3 *Citizens Juries* <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/government/devolution/cpsp-07.asp>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ WA Government and the WA Medical Council have employed Citizen juries to address the issues of a Highway Extension and public health issues. The ANU's Citizens Jury Project lists two citizens juries it has been involved with in 1999 and 2000. <http://cjp.anu.edu.au/>

¹⁶ Edwards, L; 2003, Personal communication, Institute for Public Policy Research, 7 April.

¹⁷ The three organisations it is proposed to join to address discrimination and promote equality in Great Britain are the Commission for Racial Equality, the Equal Opportunities Commission, and the Disability Rights Commission. http://www.cre.gov.uk/gdpract/pol_seb.html

¹⁸ Sandra Zagon, 2003, Canadian Policy Research Network (CPRN), personal Communication, 9 April.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Walters, L; Aydelotte, J; & Miller, J; 2000, p 352.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Walters, L; Aydelotte, J; & Miller, J; 2000, 'Putting more public in policy analysis', *Public Administration Review*, Vol 60, Issue 4, pp349-359.

²⁵ Walters, L; Aydelotte, J; & Miller, J; 2000, p 353.

²⁶ Walters, L; Aydelotte, J; & Miller, J; 2000, p 353.

²⁷ Walters, L; Aydelotte, J; & Miller, J; 2000, p 353.

²⁸ Walters, L; Aydelotte, J; & Miller, J; 2000, p 354.

²⁹ Walters, L; Aydelotte, J; & Miller, J; 2000, p 354.

³⁰ Walters, L; Aydelotte, J; & Miller, J; 2000, p 354.

³¹ Walters, L; Aydelotte, J; & Miller, J; 2000, p 355..

³² A consensus conference refers to a process that uses a panel of 15-20 people, recruited through random selection techniques, to develop an understanding of a specific topic through briefing materials and in dialogue with experts. At its first meeting, the panel is briefed on the subject and identifies questions that it wants to address. At the second meeting, the panel begins to investigate the topic and identifies witnesses to cross-examine and questions witnesses at a public hearing lasting a number of days. Following the hearing, the panel prepares a report setting out their views on the subject and presents this in public session. UK Cabinet Office, 2002, *Viewfinder: A Policy Maker's Guide To Public Involvement*. www.policyhub.gov.uk, p 47-48.