

# Building Community Engagement

lessons from the past,  
sign posts to the future

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## A Symbol of Hope

THE SOLUTION TO  
THE PROBLEM



THE MAGIC  
CURE



THE SYMBOL  
OF HOPE



THE PERFECT  
TECHNOLOGY



THE SECRET  
OF HAPPINESS.



THE SCENE OF  
THE MIRACLE.



## The Two Theories of Democracy

✧ DEMOCRATIC ELITISM ✧

OR

✧ STRONG DEMOCRACY ✧

## Democratic Elitism

**E**lections decide who should govern. Individuals acquire the power to decide by election and to expect more is unrealistic and dangerous

*(J. Schumpeter)*

## Strong Democracy

**I**nvolving the people directly in public interest considerations. The focus is on citizenship and participation

*(B. Barber)*

## Key Questions

- ☆ **I**s there a middle way?
- ☆ **I**f we go beyond elections how far and in what way should we go?
- ☆ **W**hat circumstances best suit an engagement strategy?

## Citizenship

**In a liberal democracy citizens should have a right to...**

- vote
- be represented in the process of government
- have access to elected representatives
- hold to account those who represent them
- be given an account by their representatives
- know the decisions of government
- know why those decisions are made
- have access to the information on which those decisions are made

## Citizenship

In a liberal democracy citizens should have a right to...

- be heard in government
- be listened to by government
- be entitled to explanation
- be involved in the process of government
- contribute to discussions in government
- associate with fellow citizens to express points of view or to provide services through co-operation

Source: John Stewart (*Policy and Politics*, vol. 24, no. 1)

## What Can It Mean to involve the public in government?

- 1) Regular, fair and free elections
- 2) Beyond that it could simply mean informing and consulting or it could go further and mean collaboration and empowerment.
- 3) All options should be on the table and involvement of the community considered as potentially good public policy

## How do we decide?

- 1) Breaking an impasse eg. planning issue
- 2) Popular assessment of a new issue eg. genetically modified crops
- 3) Ensuring efficient implementation eg. road construction
- 4) Seeking legitimacy for a bold decision eg. drug law reform

## What does the evidence tell us?

- 1) Not all wisdom lies with government, the public can help
- 2) All forms of risk assessment need popular input
- 3) It can help resolve matters in an efficient way
- 4) It allows government to break the "SYSTEM" of powerful interest groups

## What does the evidence tell us?

**Above all else it tells us that  
DELIBERATION matters**

- ✧ Politics is not just about numbers
- ✧ Representation should be an active process involving dialogue
- ✧ Involving people encourages them to think about the public interest

## Note the potential pitfalls...

- 1)** Engagement is a science and needs to be conducted properly and in good faith
- 2)** There will always be differences of opinion and interest in the community which elected representatives need to consider and balance
- 3)** Sometimes governments need to “push the envelope” in the interests of the long-term

## The Future of Public Policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| <b><u>Health</u></b>    | from treating illness to illness prevention |
| <b><u>Education</u></b> | from curriculum to outcomes                 |
| <b><u>Crime</u></b>     | from crime fighting to crime prevention     |
| <b><u>Welfare</u></b>   | from income support to capacity-building    |

**EACH REQUIRES ENGAGEMENT,  
COLLABORATION AND CO-PRODUCTION**

## Conclusions

- 1)** Engaging the public strengthens our representative democracy
- 2)** There are a range of engagement options available, ranging from information provision to community empowerment
- 3)** Engagement strategies must be delivered properly and in good faith
- 4)** Engagement will have to become a more prominent feature of public policy in the future