

Three Basic Public Engagement Strategies

	Community Meetings	Deliberative Councils	Wisdom Councils
What?	People in the community are invited to gather... e.g. to learn from and influence decision-makers; to process difficult issues like racism or community projects; to vent feelings of anger or pain over recent events; to conduct business through voting, etc. Usually, there is time for people to break into small groups for dialogue.	A randomly selected citizen group (24-800) is gathered from the community. They are given a carefully framed issue; balanced information and a clear set of options. They discuss the data, weigh the options, and vote. Hopefully, the vote of this informed, rational “mini-public” will influence decision-makers and the larger public.	A randomly selected group of 8-24 citizens from the organization, city, state, or nation. They are given a difficult, ill-defined issue. Through “Dynamic Facilitation” they co-create a shared perspective and present this unity to the whole population. The point is to stimulate a new, all-inclusive public conversation that achieves clarity on impossible-seeming issues.
The issue	... is often local, to be decided in the community or where individual attitudes are key, like talking about immigration or racism.	... is carefully framed with concrete options determined ahead of time. People hear from neutral experts and then vote.	... can be ill-formed, conflicted, urgent, and/or seemingly impossible. The WC co-creates unity and shares this perspective.
Primary Aim	To involve the public in high quality conversation about the issue. It’s an opportunity to bridge polarities; influence decision-makers; and include marginalized views.	To influence decision-makers toward better policy by informing them what the public would choose if they understood the issue and context more deeply, and approached the issue rationally.	To involve “all” the people in a creative, collaborative public conversation, which reaches unity and ultimately provides responsible leadership to elected leaders, organizations and citizens.
Primary thinking process	Dialogue (plus deliberation) ... where people enquire deeply into questions, listening, sharing and expressing themselves.	Deliberation ... where people are less emotional, more detached and rational in assessing the situation and weighing options.	Choice-creating ... where WC members (and the larger population) face hot issues, evolve a shared perspective and work together.
Facilitator	... is competent at blending large-group methods like Future Search, World Cafe, and Open Space with small-group methods like Dialog	... is a neutral moderator who guides people on a step by step journey of learning, analyzing, discussing, deliberating and voting	... is skilled in Dynamic Facilitation, which reliably evokes the spirit of “choice-creating” (www.DynamicFacilitation.com)
The result	... can be a transformational experience for individuals. Sometimes there may be a clear direction on local issues.	... is a recommendation to decision-makers. Usually, the result is a split vote.	... is an evolving whole-system perspective on a difficult public issue. Plus, a new kind of trust-building public conversation.
Examples	After the Ferguson MO police shooting of black residents, there was a community meeting of blacks and whites to heal. After the Newtown CT school shooting there was a community meeting to determine what to do with the school. Dialogue was a healing part of both.	In British Columbia 153 random citizens of met over a year to investigate different election methods. 146 to 7 they recommended “single transferable vote” over “majority rule vote.” Later there was a referendum on the recommendation, which was ultimately not approved.	In a one-time experiment three citizens organized a WC for Bonham County of North Carolina. The WC reached unity, expressing the problem to be: “Our social contract is broken!” And suggesting a way to organize neighborhoods and generate a new local contract. There were no follow-up WCs.
Likely impact	The process can be healing—talking through feelings. But it may also set up expectations that cannot be met at a collective level.	Decision-makers are not usually swayed by the split vote of such a panel. Sometimes the results are published to influence voters.	The process identifies the common good and a new political will for action. It breaks up the partisan gridlock.

See www.WiseDemocracy.org for information about the Wisdom Council process