Session Two Notes

Dispute Resolution Institute

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AN INTENTIONAL CONVERSATION ABOUT
Public Engagement and Decision-Making:
Moving from Dysfunction and Polarization to Dialogue and Understanding

SESSION TWO – COMPILATION OF SMALL GROUP NOTES

1. Identify public engagement process techniques which you have found to be productive

- Small facilitated groups
- Cross-cultural
- Art of hosting
- Design teams
- Saul Alinsky – Building power/direct action/create tension/engage lay members
- Manage expectations and then exceed them
- Clarity of scope
- Match process with purpose
- Mandate community voice/participation
- Direct Action Organizing
- Organizing Apprenticeship
- Find community partners and champions
- Find trusted/skilled facilitator
- Prepare people for conversation
- Procedural fairness
- Identify/map stakeholders
- Make room for introverts
- Allow for flexible agenda
- Adapt message – grassroots guidance
- Begin with shared values
- Model humility – “I made a mistake.”

Culture

- “with” not to or for
- Human to human interaction on the deepest level
- “Allophilia” love of group other than your own – beyond tolerance
- Food = Community
- Adapt communication and invitation
- Regular, open, accessible meeting time
- Use of time piece
- Honor disruptive actions
2. Identify skills needed to effectively manage public engagement processes

- Communication
  - Brevity
  - Listening
  - Ask clarifying questions
  - Open body language
  - Ability to translate for diverse audiences
  - Identify essence of what is being said
  - Command audience

- Awareness
  - Self
  - Cultural
  - Ability to “code switch”
  - Biases

- Qualities
  - Empathy
  - Flexibility
  - Curiosity
  - Authenticity
  - Resourceful
  - Imagination
  - Humility
  - Patience
  - Critical thinker
  - Respect of others and the process
  - Hopefulness in human condition
  - Trust in good intentions of others
  - Not take things personally/self-control

- Technical/Process
  - Good handwriting
  - Time management
  - Command audience
  - Stamina
  - Preparation and organization
  - Coach presenters
  - Understand role
3. Identify constraints which impede the ability to run effective public engagement processes

- Conflict avoidance
- Money - both when not enough and when there is too much
- Cost to run for office (greed, power)
- Lack of transparency – practice and process don’t match
- Disincentive for changing
- Inability to evolve
- Assumptions – coming in with preconceived notion of solution, process, etc. Assuming more agreement that there is
- Safety – safe space both physically and psychologically
- False empowerment
- Power/agency
- Is there a truly inclusive public engagement process?
- Failure to understand and appreciate cultural and historical aspects
- Logistics – time, transportation, day care
- Lack of time – both time as a privilege and deadline pressure
- Cynicism – “with all due respect” too much process
- Lack of trust
- Attribution of motive by facilitator, participants people not process
- Speech and use of language – concern about using wring words, etc.
- Poor outreach – stake holders not at the table
- Misuse of culture – use as a crutch and over generalize
- False polarities – issues as either/or eg. Pipeline – build or not
- Legal constraints – laws, rules, statutes – too much/not enough structure
- People who come with intent to disrupt/dominante/sabotage
- Not keeping order
- Unskilled facilitator
- Unprepared staff
- Concern they will be seen as a traitor/aligned with the “other”/legimimize the “other”
- Bad habits and templates following process without creativity and flexibility
- Election day is not a national holiday
- Unrelated concerns being brought to the process because there is no other outlet
Question 4: What would public engagement look like if there were no constraints?

- Role for everyone in public decision-making
- Celebrate the smallest step
- Success is not necessarily outcome but rather improved relationships
- Real emotion would be embraced
- Media would not be enamored with reactions
- Public problem-solving more complicated, take longer ... and we would be fine with that
- A way of being – no need to talk about as a thing
- Every stakeholder notified of what they want to be aware of
- No public engagement would be needed
- Move toward unity rather than uniformity
- Shared decision making power
- Space for holding differences of opinion and periodic conduct [passion and respect for conflict]
- Allow for failure and growth
- Dialogue shifts relationships
- Diverse participation on multiple levels
- Trust in process and each other
- Participation barriers eliminated
- People could use the language they are most comfortable with using
- We know it when we see it AND measured outside ourselves as good