

TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR CIVICALLY ENGAGED COMMUNITIES

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INTRODUCTION

The roles and expectations for contemporary public administrators are changing. We are witnessing a transition from the public administrator as the expert, to the public administrator as the entrepreneur, to the public administrator as the collaborator. Citizens, for a variety of reasons, expect to be included, or at least informed, about public sector decisions and as a result public administrators are expected, among other things, to facilitate participation among various stakeholders. Public administrators find themselves partnering with private sector companies, non profit organizations and other government agencies in the administration of programs they once managed exclusively on their own. Changes in expectations and the growth in collaborative relationships require that public administrators develop new skills in order to be effective as facilitators, partners and collaborators. Public administrators, many who were once comfortable making decisions behind closed doors and away from public pressure and scrutiny, are now expected to facilitate dialogue among stakeholders, negotiate agreement among disparate interests, use participatory decision making strategies, communicate effectively, build teams and foster partnerships.

Likewise, the roles and expectations for citizens are changing. In order to enter into meaningful relationships with government citizens need to rethink their relationships with elected and appointed officials. Encouraged to feel comfortable in the passive role of customer or client, citizens enjoyed a one-way relationship with government where there were no expectations for their involvement in the governance process. Many citizens who once trusted public administrators to act in their best interest now want to take a more active role in the decision making process. In order to contribute in a meaningful way, citizens need to be informed about the issues and understand how government functions. In addition, they need to find the time, and the interest, to get involved in issues that matter to their community.

This paper explores the changing roles for public administrators and citizens and the training opportunities available to them as they assume new roles as collaborative administrators and engaged citizens. The partial findings of a national survey on civic participation are presented here as are the highlights of interviews with city managers and county administrators who, through their survey responses, demonstrated they value public participation and are implementing training and professional development programs for citizens and staff.

MODELS OF MANAGEMENT AND MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Traditional Public Administration

Traditional public administration was founded on the ideal that the bureaucratic model of management was more productive and responsive than the democratic model of governance. In an effort to rid the public sector of undue political influence a professional administrative state was created where the values of neutral competence, rationality, efficiency and professionalism were advocated. The focus of government was the direct delivery of services through bureaucratically structured government agencies. Programs were run and services were delivered through top-down, hierarchical mechanisms that limited administrative discretion. These closed systems did not encourage the involvement of citizens and the prevailing attitude was that government functions should be left to the experts and citizens and politicians should rely on the professional administrator to effectively deliver government services (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000; King and Stivers, 1998; Stivers, 2000; Vigoda 2002). Professional administrators were not involved in policy making and governance; that role was left to the elected officials. Public administrators were responsible for the implementation of public policy and policy objectives within a bureaucratic framework that emphasized specialization, limited span of control and unity of command. The skills necessary to manage effectively within this environment, according to early theorists, included planning, organizing, scheduling, directing, coordinating, reporting and budgeting (Gulick, 1937). From a bureaucratic perspective, employee training should focus on helping the employee master the knowledge and skills necessary for a position, such as developing financial spreadsheets, forecasting, using PERT charts, and learning rules and regulations. Managerial training, within the bureaucratic model, focuses on traditional management skills, especially leadership, discipline, motivation, communication, and performance appraisal. Both types of training tend to have an internal orientation, aiming to improve bureaucratic efficiency and effectiveness.

Traditional public administration, by the very nature of its design and structure, encouraged individual citizens to assume the role of client in their interaction with government. The client assumes a passive relationship with government agencies when government is the only option in terms of service delivery. As a client, an individual is dependent on the bureaucracy, and aware of this dependency, government can choose to treat the individual as a client, with no choice, rather than a citizen with certain rights and protections under the law. The notion of professional expertise also fostered this passive relationship. Citizens assumed that professional administrators knew what was in their best interest and trusted them to do what was right for them and their fellow citizens.

New Public Management

While traditional public administration encouraged the adoption of private sector techniques, in particular scientific and rational approaches to management, it still acknowledged the democratic values that form the foundation of our constitution-based method of governance. However, the New Public Management (NPM) goes beyond the encouragement of private sector techniques to the advocacy of private sector values, while often ignoring the democratic values that shape the public service. Many of the familiar principles of the NPM such as market-orientation, customer focus, competitive bidding and efficiency were advanced by the recommendations found in the National Performance Review and Osborne and Gaebler's (1992) book *Reinventing Government*. An underlying belief of the NPM is that administrative entrepreneurs would introduce creative ideas

that would reform the outdated, rigid and bureaucratic way of doing business, resulting in a government that works better and costs less.

Within the framework of the NPM, public administrators have greater administrative discretion than traditional public administrators. New forms of service delivery are advanced so that government agencies are no longer the sole source of service delivery. Competition within government and across government units is encouraged, as is contracting with non-profit agencies and for profit companies for the delivery of public sector goods and services. Citizens are treated as customers and responsiveness to individual concerns, or complaints, is stressed as public sector employees are encouraged to adopt the private sector approach of customer-centered management.

To function in this environment, public administrators need training to change their mindsets and obtain knowledge and skills in certain areas, such as improving customer satisfaction, outcome-based performance measurement, performance-based budgeting, contract management, re-engineering, and empowerment. Public managers and employees are viewed as valuable resources and assets that should be liberated, with the role of training being increasingly emphasized. However, the NPM approach tends to support training on those entrepreneurial management skills rather than how to engage citizens. The private sector's training methods of improving customer service are borrowed to teach public employees to be more responsive to the customer – responding more effectively to their inquiries face to face, over the phone, or through e-mail.

The NPM encourages citizens to act like customers and to interact with government only when they have a need or concern. The customer mentality fosters a one-way relationship with government where the individual asks what government can do for them, not what they can do for government (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000; Mintzberg, 1996; Vigoda, 2002). There has been a growth in citizen passivism and cynicism (Berman, 1997; Vigoda, 2002) where we find citizens who “favor the easy chair of customer over the sweat and turmoil of participatory involvement” (Vigoda, 2002, 527). An outcome of the customer model is that people begin to think only of themselves, rather than community as a whole.

New Public Service

In response to the criticism of the NPM a new model of management, the New Public Service, is evolving. The New Public Service is based on the assumption that governance is built on democratic citizenship where public administrators serve and empower citizens as they manage public organizations and implement public policy (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000). Within this model, public servants act as facilitators and partners rather than experts and entrepreneurs. In this role they help citizens articulate their needs, build relationships of trust with and among citizens, and are more attentive to community values and citizen interests.

In the New Public Service, the role of government is transformed from one of controlling to one of agenda setting, bringing the proper stakeholders to the table and facilitating or negotiating solutions to public problems (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000). Recent publications reflect the elements of the New Public Service described above and call for public administrators to become facilitators or collaborators with citizens in the formation of policy and programs. Public administrators need to create the conditions under which citizens and public servants can join in deliberation about issues of importance (King and Stivers, 1998). Academics, and many practitioners, are advocating for a more democratic and collaborative form of governance and a

more active administration, where public administrators actively seek input from various stakeholders prior to making policy decisions or implementing new programs and as a result they need to become skilled at facilitating dialogue, building partnerships and developing consensus.

The New Public Service encourages citizens to act as engaged participants and owners of government. They are expected to enter into meaningful, reciprocal relationships with government and in doing so they have a duty to assume an active role in improving government services, making decisions and challenging government actions. In this model, citizens look beyond their own self-interest to the broader issues of community. This broader vision requires that citizens have knowledge of public affairs, have the public interest at heart, and a bond, or sense of belonging, with the community. The public interest is advanced when citizens, and administrators, think about the impact of their actions and how their behavior can contribute to improving societal conditions (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000).

Challenges

This call for an active and involved citizenry presents many challenges for public administrators and citizens. Active administration requires that administrators share power and relinquish some of their authority in favor of participation and democracy. Public administrators need to effectively partner with elected officials, community members, the citizens they serve, the staff they supervise, officials from other levels of government and representatives of the non-profit and private sectors who are increasingly involved in the direct provision of public sector programs. Their responsibilities include empowering the governing body and citizens by helping them develop and use the tools of civic engagement (Box, 1998; Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000; Nalbandian, 1999).

This collaborative relationship calls for citizens to find the time and interest to get involved and stay involved. It requires that citizens learn about the functions of government so they are aware of opportunities, as well as constraints. They need to come to the table motivated by broad public interest, not self-serving personal motivation. Citizens have several roles to play in developing and sustaining collaborative partnerships. They need to become active and involved members of their community; participating in neighborhood associations, serving on school boards and advisory committees, attending public meetings and hearings and encouraging their neighbors and friends to do the same. Through this involvement, networks and relationships of trust develop. Citizens, at the same time, become more knowledgeable of the governing system and can hold elected and appointed officials accountable for their actions.

Education and Training for Civically Engaged Communities

Training and education for citizens and administrators is essential if the public sector is to experience meaningful civic participation (King, Feltey, and Susel, 1998). Both citizens and administrators need to rethink their relationship with one another and the broader community, and modify their behaviors, if we are to be successful in this shift toward collaboration and partnerships. This requires a “two-sided” learning process where both citizens and administrators are exposed to new ideas (DeLeon, 1992). First, government must provide the structure and incentives for meaningful deliberation to take place. Then, they must also provide assurance that the process is not a “sham” where information is withheld, restricted or manipulated. The second side to the process is that citizens must recognize their responsibility to be informed and articulate their opinions.

This training should include topics such as effective communication, effectively managing meetings, conflict resolution skills, and active listening. However, management training and education programs typically focus on the acquisition of technical knowledge and skills. The “people-related” aspects of management such as effective communication and confidence in dealing with the public, while as important and worthy of attention as the technical skills, typically receive less emphasis in training and professional development programs and are often overlooked (Analoui, 1995). Most of the practices that include citizens in the deliberative process, such as gathering community input, holding neighborhood-based meetings to solicit citizen input and making policy decisions based on community values, are underused and often the least favored by city managers (Wheeland, 2000). Public administrators need training on how to work effectively with a variety of citizen groups who have different priorities, determining when to involve citizens, how to appropriately define community problems, how to choose a practical and effective participation channel, how to conduct citizen surveys, and how to build partnerships and networks (Thomas, 1995).

Professional associations, such as the International City/County Managers Association (ICMA), have called for managers to be more responsive and foster participatory government, while at the same time defending the legitimacy of administrative leadership in the public sector. New roles for city managers include that of “educator, listener, facilitator, subordinate and director” and as a result, training and professional development efforts should help managers realize the expectations of these new roles (Wheeland, 2000, 260). ICMA has developed many training materials that help public managers master citizen participation skills. For example, Miller and Kobayashi’s book (2000) provides an excellent step-by-step guide on surveying citizens. Benest’s book (1997) demonstrates how to make budget reports citizen-friendly and how to involve citizens in the budget process. Other materials include topics such as how to get neighborhood residents involved in the planning and implementation of local government service delivery, how to build citizen involvement, and how to integrate citizen participation with strategic planning. ICMA has also developed materials helping citizens improve their participation skills such as how to participate in city council meetings.

However, empirical knowledge about whether and how local governments provide training pertinent to citizen participation has been rarely reported in the literature. A recent study by Schachter and Aliaga (2003) finds somewhat disappointing results in MPA classrooms: Few MPA programs offer citizen participation courses; for those that do, they “tend to focus on imparting cognitive knowledge rather than developing skills or engendering psychological transformation—outcomes that may be key to having administrators who are comfortable working with citizens” (p. 433). Based on 33 large municipalities, Jacobson, Rubin and Selden (2002) report that the most popular training (over 50% cities offer) includes computer service training (60.6%), leadership development (60.6%), supervisory skills (60.6%), computer use (66.7%), and management skills (75.8%). For management skills, the most popular courses are (over 50% cities offer): grievance policy, recruiting, disciplinary policy, and performance appraisal. Interacting with citizens is not identified as important. Considering the study’s limited sample, it remains unclear to what extent municipalities provide citizen participation training.

This paper aims to offer some initial observations on the training and professional development opportunities offered at the local level to citizens and public sector employees to assist them in creating more civically engaged communities.

FINDINGS FROM A NATIONAL SURVEY

This paper, as an exploratory study, originates from a national survey on citizen participation and public sector decision making, which was sent to 933 municipal managers and county administrators across the country. The sample population included 823 counties/municipalities with populations between 25,000 to 49,999, and 110 jurisdictions with populations between 250,000 to 499,999. The sampling frame was obtained from ICMA. The survey includes one item asking about whether the jurisdiction has training program relevant to citizen participation.

Table 1: Demographics of the responding local governments (n=428)

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Population		
25,000-49,999	377	46%
250,000-499,999	51	46%
Region		
Northeast	70	16%
North Central	114	27%
South	137	32%
West	107	25%
Form of Government		
Council-Manager City	237	55%
Mayor-Council City	49	11%
Commission County	56	13%
Council-Administrator County	49	11%
Council-Elected Executive County	36	8%

The survey had responses from 428 jurisdictions (46% response rate). No response bias was found. Seventy-five per cent of the respondents identified themselves as municipal/county managers, 11% as business/county administrator, 1% as elected officials, and others included assistants to city/county manager or council/board, as well as public information officers. A majority of the respondents worked in the public sector for over 20 years; 96% have at least 5 years experiences in the public sector. In terms of position and work experience, the respondents possessed relevant knowledge about the questions raised. 67% (287) of the respondents represented municipalities and independent cities, as well as city-county consolidations that function as city governments; 33% were from counties. The respondents represented the geographic segments of the United States with 70 (16%) from the Northeast region, 114 (27%) from North Central, 137 (32%) from South, and 107 (25%) from West. The majority of the respondents were from council-manager forms of government (55%), 13% were Commission county governments, 12% were Mayor-council city governments, 11% were Council-administrator county governments, and 8% were Council-elected executive county governments. Table 1 provides demographic information.

One of the questions on the survey was “How much training does your government provide for public employees on how to interact with citizens?” Respondents were asked to indicate the level of training along a five-point Likert scale – a lot, some, not sure, little, none. If the respondents indicated a lot or some we asked them to specify how the local government provides or supports the

training. About 10% of the responding jurisdictions indicated they provide a lot of training, and 54% indicate providing some training. About 27% of the responding jurisdictions provide little training, and 7% provide none. The numbers suggest that a majority of local governments offer some training to their employees on how to interact with citizens. Table 2 outlines this information.

Table 2: How much training do local governments provide on citizen engagement?
(n=411)

	None	Little	Not sure	Some	A lot
Percent	6.83	27.80	1.46	54.88	9.02

In addition to asking the respondents to explain how the local government provides and supports training, we asked them to “provide additional comments or stories about public participation and the value of participation in your community.” We find from the comments that some jurisdictions are very attentive to the training issue. For example, one respondent says the government provides “twice monthly internal training on customer/citizen relations; and quarterly customer service training provided by the local junior college.” Another respondent reports using of “training on procedures for public involvement and training on working with citizen groups.” However, many respondents think citizen participation training is customer service training. One indicates that “we have put on a mandatory customer service training program for all employees. Customer service is part of our employee evaluation program.” Another writes “all new employees are counseled on the ‘citizen as customer’ philosophy during orientation.” This narrow focus on customer service, such as “how to deal with difficult people,” may leave out some more important aspects of citizen participation training such as conflict resolution, facilitation, and strategic planning for citizen involvement.

We also discovered from the comments that city managers from smaller jurisdictions referred to community building, collaboration, deliberation and partnerships in their open-ended responses—reflective of the New Public Service—more frequently than the administrators of larger jurisdictions. These words appeared less frequently in the open-ended responses from the larger jurisdictions, for which the references were more reflective of the New Public Management—customer service, customer focus, and Reinventing Government.

FINDINGS FROM FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS

Our survey analysis led to some interesting questions, so we decided to select ten jurisdictions for follow-up interviews based on the level of training they provide and the nature of the comments they made in their open-ended responses. Five large and five small jurisdictions were included in the sample and were randomly selected from a group of 49 jurisdictions that indicated they provide a lot of training and/or made reference, in their open-ended responses, to partnerships or collaborations with citizens. Telephone interviews were conducted with the city managers and coordinators of neighborhood relations programs. Before conducting the interviews, we reviewed their websites in order to familiarize ourselves with the background and operations of the jurisdiction. Particular attention was paid to their training and citizen engagement activities. An e-mail was sent to the county or city administrator describing our interest in speaking with them about their training efforts and a scheduled telephone interview was arranged through e-mail correspondence. An interview guide was developed and each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes.

Professional Development for Public Employees

The findings from the interviews indicate that formal training for developing or enhancing civic engagement skills for government employees is not routinely provided. This confirmed our suspicion that the survey results, showing that a majority of jurisdictions have at least some training, are inflated by treating customer service training as citizen participation training. Even though the jurisdictions we interviewed had identified themselves as providing a lot of training in the survey, we found that only three communities provide training on facilitating meetings, customer service skills, and effective communication. Two of the communities provide training on how to communicate effectively with the local media and one community, in partnership with a local college, provides training in conflict resolution.

The administrators we spoke with recognized that citizen-government relationships were changing and that the expectations for engagement and involvement had increased in the last few years, however, many admitted that formal staff training and development did not accompany the change. Because of the “soft” nature of skills associated with civic engagement – communication, active listening – formal training was not implemented. One administrator said “It’s not rocket science. I’m not sure how formalized it need be” implying the skills needed to effectively interact with the public were interpersonal skills and therefore formal training was not necessary.

According to one city administrator “To be honest it (training) really is hit or miss with our internal staff.” One county administrator said “We’re looking to establish meaningful partnerships with citizens. It’s part of our mission. We want to provide good customer service but we also want citizens to participate with government. We want to eliminate the ‘them and us’ attitude and talk about solutions.” All of the administrators interviewed expressed their value for positive civic engagement and indicated they communicated the importance of civic participation to their employees. As one city manager stated, “City employees hear directly from the manager and mayor that they have an obligation to listen to citizens.”

In communities where training is formalized several different approaches were discussed. Five years ago, senior staff members in one community began asking for training programs to help them develop skills to work more effectively with the public. They asked for training in communication skills, conflict resolution and convening effective public meetings. As relationships changed, division directors and department heads, as well as the line staff, found themselves discussing issues and deliberating alternatives with the public and they knew they needed guidance on how to frame issues and structure meetings to promote dialogue. The town manager recognized the need. “We’re our own worst enemy at times, not prepared for the public, and we can get defensive. Some of the older employees act in deplorable fashion – technically competent but they enjoy confrontation with citizens.” He went on to say, “We’re (citizens and employees) often critical of one another because of ignorance.”

Training for civic engagement skills is voluntary, but staff realizes that promotions are more likely given to the employees who attend training so there is an incentive to participate. “Line managers going to the divisional level understood they would be ‘promotable’ if they participated in the training.” Other staff members participated in the training out of a personal desire to communicate more effectively with the public. Frustrated by failed attempts to involve citizens in positive and productive discussions they understood their approach to engagement could be improved.

Training is conducted internally in the communities where formal training is provided. The human resource departments coordinate the training and rely on managers who are skilled in outreach, communication and customer service to conduct the training. Training on media relations is provided by reporters from the local community. In one community the local reporter conducting the training is a former elected official, giving him a unique perspective on both sides of the issue. The training is offered to supervisors and managers who interact with the media. "They learn the impact of public speech. They learn to choose words carefully and learn that their personal values should not interfere with the message." The training was first provided because "some employees felt they were getting burned by the media so we implemented this mandatory training. We wanted to educate employees and provide them with examples of better ways to frame their speech."

Not all employees were receptive to the training. "One employee was resentful and to be totally honest was the reason we introduced this training. The employee was vocal in saying 'I'm the one who is getting in trouble. I'm being misquoted and misrepresented in the press.' At the end of the training he was more understanding of the media's role, especially in terms of informing the public, and is now more thoughtful in his interactions.

A city manager in Idaho mentioned that ongoing training for line supervisors, those employees who have the most direct contact with the public, is provided on a regular basis. The training is intended to keep the "street level bureaucrat" informed about broader community issues and government's response to those issues. The rationale behind the training is these frontline employees are often the only government employees citizens have contact with. According to the manager, "The individual patching the potholes needs to know the mission and goals of the community; they need to be part of the bigger picture." The manager expressed concern that employees who understood only part of the big picture (broad community issues) often innocently present a misleading picture to the public. The training has been beneficial in many ways including improving the quality of communication among employees, citizens and elected officials. She went on to say "Communication is essential and it has improved tremendously with citizens and elected officials. We are working together effectively."

In addition to the training and professional development opportunities it is important to look at some of the initiatives these communities have implemented to help them communicate more effectively with the public. As one administrator stated "There is no written policy on citizen engagement, and training opportunities are limited, yet everything we do – the citizen satisfaction survey, newsletter, citizen training academy, cable programs, committee meetings, the web site -- are an effort to communicate and be open and transparent with citizens."

Most of the communities had departments or programs designed for the sole purpose of communicating more effectively with the public. One community in Florida had a Neighborhood Liaison program where municipal managers were assigned responsibility for being the ombudsmen, or liaison, for three to four neighborhoods. In that capacity they are responsible for communicating the neighborhood concerns and priorities to the administration and for reporting to the neighborhoods the action of the administration.

Another community in Virginia established an office called Neighborhood Connections whose sole responsibility was effectively communicating with the various neighborhood associations within their jurisdiction and the residents who live in these private communities. The

office of Neighborhood Communications was established as the “one-stop” center where residents and association officers could turn to with questions. In an effort to keep citizens informed, this county offers “push e-mail” through their website where citizens select topics of interest so they can receive relevant newsletters and announcements.

A Florida city, experiencing a significant growth in population and a corresponding growth in new construction, convenes “tailgate parties” where they go into neighborhoods that are going to be impacted by construction to explain the project, answer questions and provide residents with contact information. The contractors attend the party, as do appropriate city employees. According to the manager, this pro-active approach has “drastically reduced the number of complaints” and citizens feel the process is inclusive because the city is telling them what is going to take place before the heavy equipment arrives in their neighborhood. Citizens also feel good because they have a name and a face they can contact when a problem or question arises.

A city manager in Massachusetts expressed concern that participation and collaboration are not valued by many public administrators. “The issue of citizen engagement is just as important as budget and finance. A lot of managers don’t buy into the whole interaction thing – they’d rather sit in their office and work on the budget. Interaction doesn’t seem to be valued. Education programs should be modified to reflect the value of engagement. Courses should be offered that reflect the value of engagement, but they’re not. It’s a fundamental flaw in the curriculum. I know that most MPA programs don’t offer courses like this.” (it should be noted that this city manager teaches in the MPA program of a nearby college). This manager ended our conversation by saying “A lack of civic engagement creates suspicion. Citizens are suspicious of government and of each other. The more information they have the less suspicion they have, which reduces hostility. We need to give people as much information as they want in an effort to chip away at the hostility.”

Educational Opportunities for the Public

The training and education opportunities for citizens in these communities are more formalized and readily available than is training for the staff. Three communities indicated they sponsor City Management Academies or Citizen Leadership Academies. Although implemented for different reasons – one community coordinator indicated they developed the training program to “calm the angry masses and establish lines of communication and trust” while another indicated “as the manager I thought it was a good idea, it wasn’t established in response to angry citizens” – the programs are remarkably similar.

The citizen academies provide comprehensive hands-on learning experiences that give residents an opportunity to interact with city management staff and learn about the challenges facing local government. A variety of interactive activities provide participants with a better understanding of the evolving principles advocated by the local government such as: “cutting red tape; better customer service; creativity; shared decision making with community groups; and increased connectivity with other government agencies.”

The academies are designed to provide residents with an opportunity to learn firsthand how the community is managed and operated and they investigate how creative management and budgetary solutions have been used to address these challenges. According to one administrator “The Leadership Academy was established to help citizens develop a better appreciation of government and government functions.” Another administrator indicated a big part of the training

is “problem solving and role playing, where participants come up with solutions for real problems and the participants learn that problem solving requires collaboration and dialogue.

The academies vary in length from 11-15 weeks and some offer classes in the evening, while others offer classes during working hours. As to be expected, the Academy that offered classes during working hours attracted the business community, retirees and “stay at home moms” while the evening academies attracted a more diverse population. The coordinator of one of the Citizen Management Academies said there is no shortage of interest. They attract a diverse group of citizens, from community activists to homeowners, and they always have a waiting list.

According to another administrator “the management academy builds trust and ownership.” As an example he told the story of a tax group that wanted to reduce the tax levied on phone bills. Citizens, many graduates of the academy, opposed the efforts of the tax group because they understood the impact this reduction in revenue would have on the city’s budget and services. As a result of their coordinated opposition, the tax on phone service remained in place. “Citizens support government because they understand it.”

Citizen response to the training has been positive. Citizens appreciate the effort and take ownership of their city government. “Subtly they feel an obligation to be more than angry at government. They have a right to complain but are more civil and effective as a result of their training.” A city manager said, “There’s been universal applause – it’s more successful than I ever imagined. Graduates of the academy go on to serve on boards and several citizens have run for office. These citizens enrolled in the Academy wanting to become a part of the community. I want to keep them engaged.”

Even though one academy was established to be proactive, the academy coordinator found that people entered the academy out of frustration. “People enter the program wanting to challenge the system, but end up being supportive of local government. Their hostility stems from the old way of doing business. It was a very closed system.” He went on to say residents were angry that past decisions were made without their input and that communication between citizens and the city administration rarely took place.

An outcome of the Ambassador Academy in Florida is that “Citizens take ownership. The condo attitude of I don’t own the property has changed.” For example, residents were concerned with the amount of litter and debris on the main thoroughfare. “The Ambassadors realized the city couldn’t do everything so they took it upon themselves to speak to the business owners and encouraged them to keep the sidewalk and street in front of their place of business clean. There is a perception of authority with the Ambassadors. In another situation two people had engaged in a very public and hostile dispute about littering and an Ambassador pulled out his badge and was able to quell the dispute.”

Another outcome of the citizen academies is the civility of discourse between citizens and city employees has improved. They each have more respect for one another. “Employees recognize the importance of the ambassador program and are a lot more respectful and responsive.”

In addition to formal training, other initiatives to engage the public in the decision making process are taking place. One community sponsors a city summit twice a year where citizens,

elected officials and administrators address big issues such as homelessness. The first city summit attracted 75 participants, the last one over 300 participants. Residents discuss the issue in the morning session, insuring that all viewpoints are presented. A representative from a neighboring community, who has addressed the same, or similar, problem will tell their story of how they handled the problem and the strengths and weaknesses of their approach. The afternoon is spent brainstorming, problem solving and making decisions. The coordinator said “You can feel the hostility in the beginning—then you feel the consensus develop. There is a lot of anger surrounding this issue but once residents understood the issue they came to the realization there are no simple solutions. When you provide people with the information you’re basing your decision on, they tend to become supportive.”

All of the communities utilize technology to enhance communication with citizens. One California community archives the video tapes of council meetings on the web for viewing. Citizens can link to the city clerk’s office to view meeting agendas and summaries to determine if there is a video they want to view. Citizens viewing an archived meeting can take advantage of a “drop down box” that allows them to move ahead in the video to an agenda item they are interested in seeing. Another community provides an on-line guide to the budget that provides simple, straight-forward information about where the money comes from and where it goes. Opportunities for citizens to get involved are very visible on all of the websites and most ask for citizen opinions on a variety of issues.

DISCUSSION

Our findings indicate that training for civic engagement is not that widespread, with only 7% of our respondents indicating they provide a lot of training for their employees. Not surprisingly, many of the participants in our survey tended to confuse citizen participation training with customer service training, thinking they were one in the same. The influence of the NPM model and the impact of the recommendations of the National Performance Review and the principles of Reinventing Government can be seen throughout our sample with the numerous references to customer satisfaction and customer service.

Interestingly, we found that smaller communities offer training more frequently than larger communities. In addition, the smaller communities talked about collaboration, partnership, and democracy to a greater extent than the larger jurisdictions. The larger jurisdictions spoke more about customer service and customer focus, as well as the principles of Reinventing Government. These responses could reflect the fact that smaller jurisdictions may adopt a more grassroots approach to service delivery, whereas the larger jurisdictions operate more like a business due to their size and the possibility that employees in larger jurisdictions have more access to seminars and training on business practices and the New Public Management philosophy. Prior research on citizen participation (Irving and Stansbury, 2004) indicates that certain place-based characteristics, such as community size, wealth and homogeneity may predict the success or failure of participation efforts. They found large, poor and diverse communities were less successful at meaningfully engaging the public because of the social and economic costs associated with engaging the public. This is certainly subject to debate and worthy of future research.

It also appears as though new approaches to management will be sustainable only if the concepts and values are supported by the administrative culture as expressed by the values and

attitudes of senior management. The administrators we spoke with felt that the values they communicated to their staff were as important, if not more important, than any formal training that could be provided on the value of including citizens in the deliberative process. Managers possessed the attitude that “people” skills are not rocket science and people should know how to communicate and interact with the public, yet at the same time two city administrators acknowledged that employees can become defensive and argumentative, some taking delight in angering citizens.

While formalized training efforts for staff are minimal, there are coordinated programs to communicate more effectively with citizens. The managers we spoke with recognized the need to be more open and transparent in their interactions with the public. All are making concerted efforts to communicate more effectively with citizens and are utilizing a variety of approaches to do so. Many of the communities had recently, within the last five years, established offices or departments whose sole responsibility is educating, informing, communicating with and listening to citizens. The change in the way they do business relates to the question of which come first, reform efforts or training related to the reform initiatives. There is some evidence that training follows reform movements. That is, public administrators are likely to be more willing to undertake training measures after the start of crucial reforms, when they feel the pressure to change their operating procedures (Reichard, 1998).

While formal training for public sector employees is rather limited, there appears to be a more structured approach to educate citizens. This training has led to a change in individual attitudes and behaviors. Citizens develop a sense of ownership and are more supportive of government. Employees gain more respect for citizens and as a result are more respectful.

Training for citizens and administrators is essential if we are to successfully move toward more open, authentic and collaborative forms of governance. Effectively facilitating meetings, sustaining meaningful partnerships, practicing active listening and effectively communicating with the public are skills that can be taught just as readily as leadership, budgeting and data analysis. These skills are currently overlooked in the MPA curriculum and in the training that takes place on the job. Our concern is that the informal and haphazard approach to training public managers on civic engagement techniques, both in the field and in the classroom, puts meaningful engagement endeavors at risk. Training that takes place in the field, and in the classroom, should reflect the realities of managing in the public sector. If we expect administrators to be facilitators, partners, and collaborators who facilitate dialogue, build teams, foster partnerships and utilize participatory decision making strategies then we need to provide the appropriate training to equip these public administrators with the skills they need to do their jobs effectively.

In summary, change can and does take place as a result of training, education and reform initiatives. As this, and other, research has demonstrated “two-sided” learning processes, where both citizens and administrators are exposed to new ideas, can result in:

- Change in individual behavior and attitudes
- New relationships
- Increased tolerance and understanding
- New working collaborations

- Increased sense of ownership by citizens
- Greater respect for citizens
- Greater respect for government employees.
- Change in community dynamics – public debate, consensus driven
- Change in public interaction – less hostile

These changes can lead to a more open and democratic process of governance, and ultimately, more civically engaged communities.

Although this is a preliminary study, we do know that training is an essential tool for meaningful civic engagement. Future studies should use a more systematic design to accurately assess the type, level, and impact of citizen participation training, as well as the explanatory factors affecting its adoption and implementation.

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