Democratizing the Administrative State: Connecting Neighborhood Councils and City Agencies

Citizen participation in government decision making, especially at the local level, has received heightened attention with regard to its promise for improved governance. The overarching administrative ethos of the administrative state creates barriers to citizen participation in governance. Developing and nurturing citizen participation in the presence of the administrative state is a significant challenge. Drawing on the literary tradition of public engagement and learning, this article models a developmental strategy of participation that offers one avenue for achieving meaningful partnerships between city agencies and neighborhood councils in a metropolitan environment. We present a model of citizen participation that brings neighborhood councils and city agencies together in a collaborative partnership. This model is based on the literature on citizen participation, which focuses on the significance of interactive processes in building trust among participants and creating mutual understanding and agreement.

The importance of deliberative democracy, democratic renewal, and citizen participation in governance has emerged as an important normative and instrumental concern in public policy formulation. Because democracy is espoused as one of the core values of American society, (Dachler and Wilpert 1978), citizen participation in governance can be advocated either on moral or instrumental grounds, regardless of whether it results in more efficient or effective policies and programs. One basis for this moral normative argument, typically associated with Thomas Jefferson, is that citizens in a democratic society have a fundamental right to participate. Instrumental normative arguments support citizen participation on either of two grounds. The first is that participation promotes efficiency and effectiveness (deLeon and deLeon 2002). Citizen participation not only enhances the end result but also acts as a tool for empowerment and social change (Irvin and Stansbury 2004). The other instrumental line of argument is associated historically with the federalists and views participation at some minimal level as necessary to maintain stability in a political community (Cooper 1983, 16).

In this article, we offer a way for citizens and public administrators to overcome obstacles that prevent forming democratic governance relationships. To illustrate the significance of this approach, we first discuss the challenge of citizen participation in governance and the difficulty of democratizing the administrative state. We then describe the prevailing overarching administrative ethos of the administrative state, which creates barriers to citizen participation in governance. This is followed by a discussion of neighborhood councils, one example of a citizen participation strategy that has emerged in the field of democratic governance and public administration. In the closing section of
the article, we present a model of citizen participation that brings neighborhood councils and city agencies together in a collaborative partnership. We argue that this model of citizen participation with city agencies provides a valuable process that initiates meaningful interaction and dialogue among citizens and public administrators that leads to an improved mutual understanding of service delivery. The model we explore, which we refer to as the Learning and Design Forum, is based on the growing literature on citizen participation, which focuses on the significance of interactive processes that can build trust among participants and lead to mutual understandings and agreements.

The Challenge of Citizen Participation in a Representative Democracy

Though democracy requires some degree of citizen participation in governance, in a representative democracy, participation often is an elusive ideal. In representative democracy, citizen participation acts as a complement or a supplement (Pratchett 1999), and the exact nature of the participation mechanism remains unclear. In representative democracy, citizens are dependent on their elected representatives to act on their behalf. Both the scale and diversity of American society present serious challenges to the possibility that elected representatives can, in any real sense, represent their constituents in larger cities, states, and the federal government. Even during the early 1900s, Mary Parker Follett (1918) leveled a frontal attack on the whole premise of the adequacy of representative government.

On a daily basis, citizens depend on city agencies to deliver services that affect their lives. Often, there is a failure or an inability on the part of city administrators to respond to the needs of citizens. If citizens experience this lack of response from city agencies regularly, the result may be that they will feel disaffected, disempowered, and alienated from city hall. This experiential disconnect between their wishes and those who are employed to serve them can lead to a lack of trust and confidence in city government.

At the federal level, several studies have reported that citizen trust in government seems to be declining. In 1964, the University of Michigan’s National Election Studies indicated that about 60 percent of respondents stated they have “a lot” of trust in government. By 1994, 30 years later, this figure had declined to about 25 percent. Lan (1997) writes that since the 1980s, there has been an increased tension between citizens and public agencies, and negative feelings about the government have been high. It was reported that only 6 percent of Americans said that they have a lot of trust in the federal government (Stonecipher 1998), and the public believes the government creates more problems than it solves (Wasserman 1998).

This loss of trust in and alienation from government is not restricted to the federal or state governments. A 1995 survey by Evan Berman indicated that “cynicism is present in about one third of all cities with populations over 50,000 and one third of these have widespread ‘ardently’ cynical attitudes” toward government. The works of King and Stivers (1998) and Whelan (1999) attribute this lack of trust to the administrative and citizen participation ethos of the administrative state. King and Stivers (1998) suggest that citizen participation in government decision making is one way of preventing further deterioration of public trust.

The Ethos of the Administrative State

The dominant ethos of American administration for much of the twentieth century can be defined as what Dwight Waldo (1947) called the administrative state. The ethos of the administrative state placed the public administrator operating out of a government bureaucracy at the center of decision making and policy implementation, giving administrators control over a presumed democratic polity (Kirlin 1996). Although, legally, administration at the federal level is accountable both to the president and the Congress, in practice, federal administrators enjoyed considerable leeway and independence. Presidents and the Congress found it difficult to completely control the bureaucracy, even though the president is the top executive and the Congress creates policy (Flanagan 2001). In addition, although the American ethical democratic traditions have a history of encouraging citizen participation in governance, the legal framework was designed to protect political and administrative processes from an active citizenry. Responsiveness to citizens was deemed a necessary evil that could inhibit effective performance by professional administrators. It was also argued that the public will is vague and transitory or can be captured by some interest groups (Moe and Gilmour 1995; Vigoda 2002). The professionalism of the technical administrator would be a safeguard against these problems of citizen participation. Though accountable to politicians, scientific public administration was expected to safeguard government against the caprices of society (deLeon and deLeon 2002). What emerged was a large unresponsive and insulated bureaucracy, “nestled between policy processes above and citizens below and accountable to none” (King 1999). Administration under this ethos was characterized by hierarchy, control, excessive rule, rigid budgeting, and personnel systems, with bureaucracies ignoring citizens and shunning innovation (Denhardt and Denhardt 2000).

Even the scholars of the mid-1900s did not debate whether administrators should be accountable to the citi-
zents. The famous Friedrich–Finer debates centered on whether administrators should be accountable to elected officials, as argued by Herman Finer, or whether the “technical” administrators should be accountable to their own internal professional standards and sensitive to public opinion, as argued by Carl Friedrich (Cooper 1998; Kelly 2005). It was presumed that the public interest and citizen participation would be reflected mainly through elected representatives. On the other hand, scholars such as Rohr (1986) argued that administrators are deemed legitimate and accountable as long as they uphold the “regime values” of the U.S. Constitution, which he identified as freedom, equality, and property. Cooper (2001) has argued that administrators can gain legitimacy by viewing themselves as “citizen administrators” bearing responsibility to act as fiduciary citizens.

The problem of citizen involvement in the administrative state was further compounded by some of the radical changes in the fields of management and organization theory. Frederick Taylor (1911) and his concept of scientific management dominated the rapidly growing manufacturing sector in early twentieth-century America. The focus of scientific management was efficiency and productivity based on technical and economic rationality. In the 1920s, Max Weber’s recommendation of the bureaucratic organization as a means for stability and order in an uncertain modern society gained credibility. The argument was that modern society should be governed by rational and legal authority to ensure order and stability. Extending this logic to public administration, writers such as Henri Fayol, with his “administrative theory” in 1916 (Wren, Bedeian, and Breeze 2002), and Gulick and Urwick, writing on the science of administration (1937), strongly supported bureaucratic forms of governance structures based on scientific principles. Late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century concepts such as the Progressive Reform Movement and the politics–administration dichotomy also laid the foundation for the science of administration. The premise was that a science of administration is necessary to achieve efficiency in government and that separation of politics from administration is required for the development of a science of administration (Cooper 1991). The political, management, and organizational philosophies of the time were mutually supportive and consistent (Schacter 2002).

The first effort to reform the understanding of public administration from a technical bureaucracy perspective to public administration began in the late 1930s. Cooper (2001) traces a considerable body of literature between the late 1930s through the 1960s that focused on administrative ethics and the obligations of administrators to citizens and democratic polity. The next serious effort came in 1968, at the conference of a small group of public administration theorists at Minnowbrook Conference Center in New York convened by Dwight Waldo. At this conference, the seeds of the New Public Administration were sown. The Minnowbrook scholars called for more citizen participation in government and proposed, for the first time, that administrators have a right as well as responsibility to be proactive (deLeon and deLeon 2002). The 1968 call for the New Public Administration, however, did not focus attention on new participatory perspectives in practical terms and did not materially change the predominant administrative state ethos in governance.

The second challenge to the administrative state was the New Public Management and reinventing government movements that emerged during the early 1980s. Some of the important concepts of New Public Management, such as privatization, outsourcing, and downsizing, are still actively used in federal, state, and city governments. However, the New Public Management ethos is based on the scientific management principles of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness, and the role of citizen participation continues to be minimal (Kirlin 1996; Lynn 2001).

In current American administration, elements of each of these philosophies are still manifest in various forms, and each of these philosophies competes against others in the administrative realm, but many argue that the nature of the administrative state in traditional public administration, which was shaped by the American Progressive Reform Movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is still the dominant administrative ethos in government (Denhardt and Denhardt 2000; King 1999; Vigoda 2002).

### Citizen Participation in the Administrative State

Under the ethos of the administrative state, the citizen was treated as a client or constituent. There was a minimalist approach to citizen participation, with a one-way flow of technical information from administrative agencies to the public (Durant 1998; Weber 1998). This approach echoed the federalists’ belief that reasoned, trustworthy administrators derive administrative legitimacy from their technical knowledge and expertise (King 1999). Though the American political system is designed to encourage citizen participation, it also protects the political and administrative processes from too much citizen involvement (King, Feltey, and Susel 1998). For example, the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) provides for substantial citizen input in rulemaking. However, despite more than 50 years of the APA’s provisions on the citizens’ right to participation, the practical situation is far from satisfactory (Noveck 2004). Peter deLeon (1992) gives the example of the public hearings on solar energy during the Carter administration. He writes that President Carter’s staff on
domestic policy review put a lot of effort into involving the larger public in the statutory hearings; the same staff later discounted the large amount of public testimony on the grounds that solar energy was a highly technical subject on which the lay public could not possibly have anything useful to contribute. There seems to be a belief among administrators that participation is actually bad for the healthy functioning of administration, and citizen participation may endanger the neutral bureaucracy. It is argued that complicated and specialized modernism requires detached, objective, and expert administration (Noveck 2004). Distrust of participation by administrators is a significant problem, and citizen participation under the administrative state has been minimal. The key assumptions of this approach to citizen participation continue to be a major barrier to the democratization of the administrative state (see table 1).

Table 1 Citizen Participation in the Administrative State

- Citizen as a voter, constituent or client
- Citizen is self-interested
- Citizen cannot discern public interest
- Citizen participation is disruptive to smooth administration
- Citizen interest reflected through elections, political representation, and law
- Administrators accountable to politicians
- Administrative legitimacy through the Constitution

Neighborhood Councils

Deliberative democracy stresses the creation of institutional contexts and practices that encourage and promote collaborative planning between citizens and government (Campbell and Marshall 2000). Some scholars argue that the question is no longer whether citizen participation is desirable but what forms and processes of citizen participation are best suited for specific situations (Irvin and Stansbury 2004). In a democracy, the citizen should have the primary say in placing value on what government agencies produce or deliver (Alford 2002). During the 1960s and 1970s, numerous mandated citizen participation programs were initiated by government. By the end of the Carter administration, there were 155 mandates in federal legislation requiring public administrators at the federal, state, and local levels to provide for citizen participation. However, these mandates were generally inadequate and ineffective because they were top-down approaches. The requirements also were implemented mainly out of political expediency (Pratchett 1999; Wilson 1999), and administrators adopted a minimalist approach to implementing the mandates (Weber 1998). On the other hand, local citizen organizations such as neighborhood councils are an attempt to allow citizens to create bottom-up structures within a governmental framework. If public policies are set to satisfy societal values, then it is desirable that local city agencies involve citizen organizations such as neighborhood councils in the planning and delivery of services (Wagner 2001).

The early history of interaction between neighborhood organizations and municipal agencies generally has been characterized as adversarial and conflictual. Saul Alinsky’s (1971) central thrust in his community organizing efforts of 1940–60 was to develop this approach by attempting to focus on intensifying assumed latent conflict. Many others during the years of the federal War on Poverty of the 1960s and 1970s followed suit. The assumption behind this orientation was that the interests of cities and communities were inevitably and inescapably at odds. Therefore, amassing power at the grassroots level to do battle with municipal departments was considered the solution to better and more equitable service delivery. This approach achieved limited success in democratizing local city government and was difficult to sustain.

Since the early 1990s, a different approach involving institutional reform has been employed in cities around the nation (Berry, Portney, and Thompson 1993). This orientation has attempted to establish official roles for neighborhood units in local governance as part of the democratization process. The assumption behind these strategies is that the creation of collaborative institutions will allow agencies and community organizations to discover shared interests. Citizen organizations and neighborhood institutions such as neighborhood councils as tools of collaborative governance have emerged in many U.S. cities, including Portland (Oregon), New York City, Minneapolis–Saint Paul, Columbus, Dayton, Birmingham, and Seattle.

Advocates of this system believe neighborhood councils are a mechanism for effective participation that could provide real power to the citizens. They argue that a system of neighborhood councils would enable citizens to participate and represent their interests in services delivered by city agencies such as urban planning, sanitation, street maintenance, water and power supply, parks and recreation, and public works.

Improvement of service delivery, one of the many advantages of citizen participation in governance, can then be based on cooperation rather than conflict. A mutual process of cooperation and collaboration will allow neighborhoods to define their priorities and needs more specifically, thus producing more useful, and perhaps more efficient, services.

There is considerable support for this collaborative approach to citizen participation among significant scholars and practitioners. In the early twentieth century, John Dewey argued that deliberation among members of the public, both on the community and the national scale, was essential for government to be responsive to the needs of its citizens (Dewey 1927). In his writings in the twentieth century, John Dewey stressed that specific multiple "pub-
lics” have an important role in establishing and sustaining democracy through active “public engagement” (Asen 2003). He strongly believed that a robust and healthy democracy was possible only if citizens participated actively in public life. For Dewey, no public sphere, however small and restricted to few, was to be totally private (Goodson 2004), and every public sphere had the potential for public deliberation (Asen and Brouwer 2003). As an ardent advocate of democracy, Dewey never doubted the ability of citizens to participate in democratic deliberation because doubting this capacity “was to doubt the very possibility of democracy itself” (Asen 2003). Mary Parker Follett (1914), during the same years, argued that representative government does not work and that governance needed to be restructured to begin with small groups at the grassroots deliberating among themselves.

Daniel Yankelovich (1991) has argued, based on his studies of polling data and small-scale experiments, that deliberation is crucial in moving people from emotive, unstable, and ill-informed public opinion to public judgment based on reason and information. As he analyzed the results of these opinion polls, he came to the conclusion that there is a difference between what the public says at the spur of the moment and what the public truly believes. Yankelovich suggests a three-stage process that converts public opinion to public judgment. After successfully working through the three-stage process, the public finally arrives at a stage of resolution in which one alternative is chosen, and the public takes responsibility for the consequences of this alternative (Yankelovich 1991). Yankelovich identifies the culture of technical control in our governance system and the role of the media in information dissemination as the main obstacles in moving from public opinion to public judgment. He suggests that the elites and experts who control government do not believe the public has the knowledge and expertise required to resolve complex issues and do not trust the public to come to a quality public judgment.

In Los Angeles, the history of dissatisfaction with the city government among residents of the San Fernando Valley, Hollywood, and the Harbor areas of San Pedro and Wilmington culminated in a secession movement during the late 1990s. Though the secession proposals were defeated by the citizens of Los Angeles on November 5, 2002, political leaders in the city realized that citizens were not satisfied with the responsiveness of city hall and that citizens would launch further assaults against the ineffective urban government structures if some reforms were not implemented. So although the secession movements were going on, a city charter amendment was introduced that proposed a system of neighborhood councils to decentralize the city’s planning, service delivery, and budget processes. Although advocates of secession failed to achieve administrative separation from the city, they succeeded in generating additional impetus to change the city’s 1925 charter as officials and lawmakers turned to the neighborhood council system as a form of “exit” from the crisis (Box and Musso 2004). The charter amendment to create neighborhood councils in Los Angeles was approved by the citizens in June 1999. The new provisions of the charter created a citywide system of neighborhood councils and a Department of Neighborhood Empowerment with the purpose of promoting “citizen participation in government and making government more responsive to local needs” (Article IX).

Learning and Design Forums

Building on these writings, we developed the Learning and Design Forum model to explore the possibility of a deliberative process that would include both neighborhood councils and city departments in an attempt to democratize the administrative state of the City of Los Angeles. This model attempts to develop deliberation in a collaborative mode to find out whether municipal agencies could discover shared interests with neighborhood councils. Sharing of ideas and concepts is most effective in democratic and participatory processes such as workshop presentations, small-group and plenary discussions, informal networking, and participant reflection. The concrete expression of this collaborative deliberation is a signed agreement between a city department and neighborhood councils in specific areas of the city. These agreements include the processes and guidelines for more collaborative delivery of services. They are worked out in a series of three half-day Learning and Design Forums led by a professional facilitator with homework between sessions. The assumption is that these agreements are not the end of work together but the real beginning of an ongoing, collaborative service-delivery planning process.

The concept of the Learning and Design Forums is based on an action research approach that establishes a process whereby city administrators and neighborhood leaders review current city agency practices to identify and establish shared components of service delivery. These shared components become the foundation for the development of coproduction of city services. The central feature of the Learning and Design Forums is deliberation. In this case, deliberation is crafted between two parties—neighborhood leaders and city administrators—working together, face to face, in the same location, in a facilitated seminar setting. The goal of the deliberation is have city administrators and neighborhood leaders foster a new partnership in the planning and delivery of city services by

- identifying obstacles that prevent excellence in service delivery during each step of the process, from problem
definition and development of solutions to implementation
• designing new processes to improve service delivery at each step
• creating a work plan that will address an actual service-delivery problem using the new processes identified throughout the learning forums.

The research team developed the Learning and Design Forums within a larger action research implementation framework that included three stages: (1) pre-assessment and planning, (2) implementing Learning and Design Forums, and (3) agreement coordination. Each stage is discussed below. Between each of the three stages, the research team engaged in significant iterative assessment of the emerging process. The assessment included dialogue with and among all parties that contributed to the ongoing relationship.

During the pre-assessment and planning stage, the research team held a meeting with neighborhood leaders of the selected neighborhood council to discuss and select which city service department would interest the leaders in fostering a new partnership in city service delivery. Researchers and neighborhood council participants discussed the substantial commitment that was needed. Once both the commitment and the process were understood, the next step was to select a city service department with which to build a partnership. The choice of city agency was based on a number of criteria discussed among neighborhood leaders, including neighborhood priorities and overall department service characteristics and administration. Once neighborhood leaders had selected a department service, the research team contacted and held a preliminary meeting with the city department leadership to discuss their commitment, willingness, and feasibility to work on building a means for service coproduction with citizens. When the city agency agreed, independent meetings were held with each group—the neighborhood and city department leaders—to establish current experiences and practices in working with the other group. The intent of these sessions was to establish a baseline understanding of current practices, including issues and obstacles to building a stronger relationship with regard to service delivery from both perspectives. These understandings took the form of a position paper that was used as the basis for presentation and discussion at the initial Learning and Design Forum session.

The three Learning and Design Forum sessions were held three weeks apart, with homework assigned between each of the sessions. A professional facilitator ran the sessions. The research team supported the process by coordinating and announcing program dates, collecting and disseminating forum summary information, and providing refreshments and facility space. The three sessions were held with distinct purposes. The first forum established current practices and a rationale for service delivery, as well as the initial frames of reference each group held with regard to working with the other. Homework assigned to the groups prior to the second session included independent discussions with regard to identifying shared interests. The focus of the homework was how department staff and neighborhood councils could work together to create effective and sustainable service-delivery systems.

During the second session, breakout groups focused on common ideas and components that could be the basis for the coproduction of services: problem identification, solution strategies, and service planning. The third Learning and Design Forum was dedicated to plans presented by each group that would be the basis of a final agreement on the process and content of coproduction of services.

The agreement-coordination stage of the project included working with both groups to finalize the wording of the agreement that established how coproduction of services would actually be achieved. During this stage, the research team assisted selected leaders from both groups in completing an agreement as well as getting approval for it. The agreement took the form of a memorandum of understanding between the neighborhood council and the city department. A final session was held to celebrate the signing of the agreement.

In the process of managing the stages of building the partnership, the research team engaged in iterative communication and interpretative activities designed to foster the building of relationships. The activities included providing an open flow of communication with each group in terms of assignments, meeting times, and information summaries. Each of the members of the research team reported their individual interpretations of the Learning and Design Forums based on participant observation. These reports were reviewed by the research team in team meetings and assisted the team in designing the next phase of the forums.

The Learning and Design Forums were not designed to negotiate a mere compromise between conflicting entities nor to use inherent antagonisms within groups to force an unsustainable settlement. The Learning and Design Forums sought to help participants from both neighborhood councils and Los Angeles service departments to recognize their common goals and interests to plan the delivery of targeted city services. Once these common goals were identified, they were able to forge effective working relationships toward those ends and, ultimately, to formalize these relationships in writing. As a methodology, the Learning and Design Forums employed experiential exercises that gave both neighborhood council publics and city service department publics opportunities to understand and articulate each other’s public interests. Participants from the
neighborhood councils and the city departments each made brief presentations to their counterparts regarding the roles and interests of their entities and the sustainable (or strategic) deliverables they hoped to achieve as a result of these planning sessions. All participants were then divided into small groups that mixed the two original entities, and each group was asked to articulate and advocate their counterpart’s interests. These discussions created a new public—one that existed solely for the best interests of those specific neighborhood councils and city service departments. As a result of the Learning and Design Forums, members of both neighborhood councils and city departments came away with far more comprehensive understandings of their counterparts’ fundamental perspectives, capabilities, and constraints. These understandings became the basis for mutual trust, collaboration, and a sustainable, shared agreement.

A second design methodology employed throughout the Learning and Design Forums involved each participant and participant group envisioning what their optimal partnership and collaboration with their counterparts must include (that is, the “bottom lines” or “deal breakers”). Both the neighborhood councils and city service departments then worked to flesh out in writing what their final working partnership agreement should include, with actual deliverables, negotiated timelines, and delegated tasks. This process built on the understandings and mutual relationships forged in previous sessions. The fundamental recurring questions were first “what’s in it for me?” and then, “what’s in it for everyone else involved in this working relationship?”

As John Dewey stated, the process by which newly evolving publics establish working relationships can be termed politics—the art of getting things done. Participants in the Learning and Design Forums were repeatedly encouraged to develop and deploy their political intelligence, that is, their ability to use politics in creative and mutually beneficial ways to get done what they wanted to get done. Timelines, project guidelines, and directed facilitation also served to hone participants’ political intelligence throughout the Learning and Design Forums.

Finally, participants in the Learning and Design Forums developed their own models for sustaining their efforts. The formal agreements between the neighborhood councils and city service departments were not ends in themselves; rather, they were a means by which future relationships could be established, implemented, and sustained, both among these specific participants and among the neighborhood councils and city service departments generally. The Learning and Design Forums demonstrated that creative, collaborative, and mutually beneficial partnerships and agreements can be developed between diverse and contentious groups such as city agencies and neighborhood councils that initially appeared to have little common ground. The key assumptions of the deliberative approach to citizen participation attempt to create the foundation for the democratization of the administrative state (see Table 2).

### Table 2 Citizen Participation in Deliberative Democracy

- Citizen as a voter, constituent, client, and partner
- Citizen capable of expressing community interest
- Public interest through dialogue and shared values
- Citizen participation is normative and instrumental
- Citizen as knowledgeable and willing to participate
- Citizen participation is for collaboration and partnerships
- Administrators accountable to citizens
- Administrative legitimacy from democratic theory and experiential factors

**Conclusion**

Citizen organizations such as neighborhood councils have emerged as an appropriate vehicle for citizen participation in governance at the local government level. In addition to citizen organizations, appropriate processes and mechanisms also have been developed to synergistically democratize the administrative state. Researchers and organizations use many different processes and mechanisms to involve citizens in the decision-making process of governance. The National Issues Forum (NIF), a network committed to enhancing civic life and public involvement in politics, and the Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC) use similar mechanisms in which citizens deliberate public problems with the goal of developing a plan of action to address the issue (Adams 2004). The NIF uses a moderator, whereas the SCRC uses a facilitator in the democratic dialogue process that is adopted (Crawford 2004). America Speaks, a nonprofit organization, uses a mix of personal interaction and high-tech computer-based communication systems in their electronic town hall meetings that allows citizens to deliberate policy issues (Adams 2004). Fung and Wright (2001) propose a framework for citizen participation in policy making at the local level called *empowered participatory governance*. The main principles of this framework are that (1) participation should be of a practical nature, addressing real problems facing the public at local levels; (2) participation should be bottom up; and (3) the decision-making process should be based on reason. A similar framework from an action research project in Chicago is called the Responsive Participatory Redesign.

We see potential in our Learning and Design Forum model, which uses a facilitator to lead the city agency and neighborhood council team members toward collaboration and agreement. The preliminary results have been encouraging: Two sets of neighborhood councils and city agencies have created written agreements on how the city agency
will deliver its service in the neighborhood council area. Whether this is an appropriate participatory mechanism that can be generalized for other settings to democratize the administrative decision-making process is an interesting research question that we intend to pursue.

Notes

1. Max Weber’s original work, “Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft” was published in German in 1922; an English translation of Weber’s theory of bureaucracy was not available until 1946.
2. Though written in French in 1916, an English translation did not reach America until the late 1930s (Wren, Bedeian, and Breeze 2002).
3. The proceedings and papers presented at the Minnowbrook conference can be found in Marini (1971).
4. The full list of citizen participation mandates is available in the federal government publication Citizen Participation in the American Federal System, published by the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (1980).
5. The Learning and Design Forum process was developed as part of an action research project funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The full report is titled Connecting Neighborhood Councils and City Agencies Phase I Report, prepared by the Collaborative Learning Project research team at the Neighborhood Participation Project, School of Policy Planning and Development, University of Southern California, on September 30, 2004.

References


