

# New Models for Civic Engagement

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# Why pressures to heed the public voice are building

- Changing public expectations
  - More educated and informed population
  - Greater demand for openness, accountability and responsiveness
  - Increasing insistence on having a voice
- Increased availability of information
  - Media, internet
- New era of mistrust

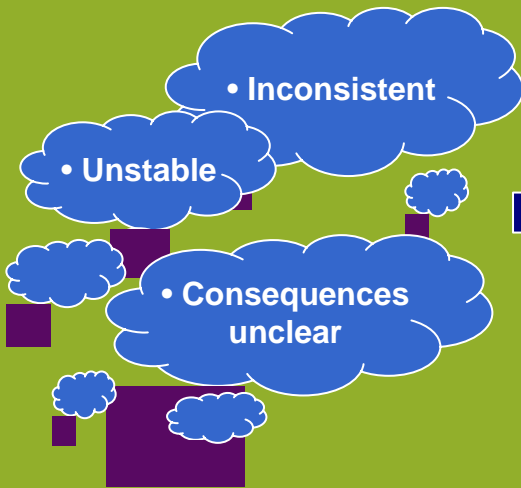
# People haven't made up their minds = "Raw Opinion"

- Inattentive
- Dominated by wishful thinking
- Mistrustful and suspicious
- Focused more on self than on community
- Haven't done hard thinking
- Views inconsistent and contradictory

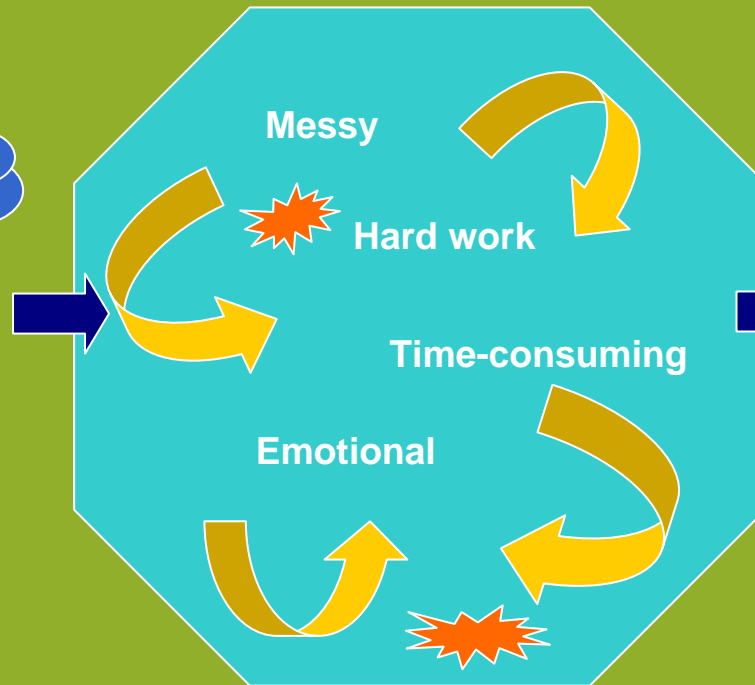
**Inevitable when public doesn't have a voice**

## A model of public judgment

Unorganized  
Public Opinion



**CHOICEWORK**



Thoughtful  
Public Judgment



# A quick tour of ways for heeding the public voice

- I. Polls
- II. Focus groups
- III. Town meetings
- IV. Hearings
- V. Special interest advocacy
- VI. Deliberative Democracy methods

# I. Polls

## Strengths

- Cross-sections of public
- Minimizes bias
- Can track changes

## Limitations

- Mirrors raw opinion
- Often superficial and misleading
- Unrevealing of context
- Little indication of intensity or firmness of views

## II. Focus groups

### Strengths

- Vivid portrayal of people's thought processes and feelings
- Relates issue to people's broader value orientation
- Reveals what people do and do not know about an issue

### Limitations

- Samples too small to project
- Vulnerable to interpretive bias
- Like polls, reflect raw opinion

# III. Town meetings

## Strengths

- Give public a chance to vent
- Give leaders the opportunity to hear people's venting
- Gives leaders opportunity to appear responsive

## Limitations

- Unrepresentative
- "False advertising" -- almost never a genuine opportunity for give and take
- Loudest voices -- most likely to be heard

## IV. Hearings

### Strengths

- Mandated by law
- Provide venue for experts and those with special perspectives to be heard

### Limitations

- Unrepresentative
- Often dominated by special interests and/or cranks
- “False advertising” -- rarely represents public voice

# V. Special interest advocacy

## Strengths

- A legitimate way of organizing in a democracy
- Responds to political theory that the general interest = the sum of all special interests
- Sometimes the only way to practice successful advocacy

## Limitations

- An imbalanced representation of the public voice
- Excludes the unorganized public
- Subject to financial/political pressures

# VI. Deliberative Democracy methods

## Strengths

- Corrects main weakness of polls -- reporting raw opinion
- Has potential to make democracy work better
- Is inherently trust-building
- Permits genuine dialogue
- Essential for gridlock issues

## Limitations

- Still in infancy
- Time-consuming and expensive
- Not cost-effective for easy-to-resolve issues
- Hard to scale up

For cities, deliberative methods hold promise

- Raw and distorted opinion should not shape action
- Lasting support for tough decisions depend on citizens working through tradeoffs
- Trust-building is essential

# Three recent experiments with deliberative methods

- Finding solutions to the housing crisis in San Mateo County
- Addressing the future of air travel in San Diego County
- Balancing revenues and services in the city of Morgan Hill

## These efforts place strong emphasis on dialogue

### Features

- Conducive to listening rather than arguing
- Opportunity to consider multiple points of view
- Organized around tradeoffs
- Ample time devoted to “working through”

### Advantages

- Converts raw opinion into thoughtful judgment
- Trust-building
- Accentuates **common ground** rather than differences

# Dialogue: The Opposite of Debate

<b>Debate/Advocacy</b>	<b>Dialogue</b>
Assuming there is one right answer	Assuming others have pieces of the answer
Combative	Collaborative
About winning	About finding common ground
Listening for flaws	Listening to understand
Defending assumptions	Exploring assumptions
Seeking your outcome	Discovering new possibilities

# San Mateo County

**Issue:** How to address San Mateo County's housing crisis. What solutions will the public support and under what conditions?

**Tasks:** Gain insight into how citizens' views of the future of housing will evolve  
Lay groundwork for sustainable policy solutions that the public will support

**Tools:** **ChoiceDialogues** with public (Spring 2003)  
**Stakeholder Dialogues** to connect county decision-makers to public (Jan. 2004)  
**Scale-up and engagement efforts** may include on-line dialogue and Meeting-in-a-Box

# San Diego's Airport Crisis

**Issue:** How to address the growing demand for air travel and the severe limitations of San Diego's current airport. What solutions will the public support and under what conditions?

**Tasks:** Gain insight into how citizens' views of the future of air travel in the region will evolve, and their support for a new airport or other solutions  
Lay groundwork for sustainable policy solutions that the public will support  
Scale up the dialogue to include hundreds, if not thousands, of residents in serious consideration of the issue  
Engage leaders in furthering citizen vision and defining action steps

**Tools:** **ChoiceDialogues** with public (Spring 2004)  
**On-line Dialogue (1) Summer 2005**  
**Interactive Briefing Winter 2006**  
**On-line Dialogue (2) and Community Conversations-Spring, 2006**

## Morgan Hill

Issue: What kind of city do citizens want and are willing to pay for? How to balance taxes and services?

Tasks: Invite public to work through current state of mind:  
*“Yes to better services, no to paying for them”*

Develop dialogue-based communication between citizens and decision-makers

Tools: **“Meeting in a box”** Design and tools for **“do it yourself”** citizen dialogues

Training: Winter, 2005

“Community Conversations” winter-spring 2006

**“Capstone” Dialogue:** Citizens and leaders convened in half-day dialogue to further define vision and identify possible ways forward  
Spring, 2006

## Summary:

### 10 rules for leaders re: the public voice

1. When leaders and public are out of phase, leaders must seize the initiative
2. Frame issues from public rather than expert point of view
3. Address public's concerns, not experts'
4. Let public know leadership is listening and responsive
5. Consider only one or two issues at a time

## Summary:

### 10 rules for leaders re: the public voice

6. Don't rely on open-ended discussion: formulate a limited number of choices
7. Highlight the values implicit in choices
8. Help people move beyond wishful thinking
9. When values conflict, encourage pragmatic compromises over ideological purity
10. Use dialogues to build trust

Adapted from Dan Yankelovich's *Coming to Public Judgment: Making Democracy Work in a Complex World*

# Ground Rules for Dialogue

- The purpose of dialogue is to understand and learn from one another (you cannot “win” a dialogue).
- All dialogue participants speak for themselves, not as representatives of groups or special interests
- Treat everyone in a dialogue as an equal: leave role, status and stereotypes at the door.
- Be open and listen to others even when you disagree, and suspend judgment (try not to rush to judgment).
- Search for assumptions (especially your own).
- Look for common ground.
- Express disagreement in terms of ideas, not personality or motives.
- Keep dialogue and decision-making as separate activities (dialogue should always come before decision-making).

# Questions for discussion

- What is the most important or surprising thing you've heard?
- What are 1 or 2 issues on which you think a deliberative process might be helpful or essential?
- What questions do you want to make sure we address before the end of this session?