

February 19, 2009

Here is the introduction from a paper presented in November 2008 at the American Evaluation Association conference and in process of revision for publication.

LEARNING FROM YOUR NEIGHBOR: THE VALUE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION EVALUATION FOR PUBLIC POLICY DISPUTE RESOLUTION

John Stephens, Associate Professor of Public Administration and Government
Maureen Berner, Associate Professor of Public Administration and Government
School of Government, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Draft
January 9, 2009

Introduction

Public policy dispute resolution [PPDR] policies and programs seek better decision-making processes and better outcomes. The criteria for what constitutes “better” varies somewhat, but usually draw from the values of participation, diversity of viewpoints, exchange of information, consideration of new options, agreement by stakeholders on a course of action, and the improved quality, durability and support for such action. While there has been some focus on benefits that follow a consensus decision;ⁱ most PPDR concerns have been on the process of making a decision on a public issue.

As discussed below, public participation [PP] as a professional field of practiceⁱⁱ has much in common with PPDR. We will argue that not only are they similar, but public participation is an inherent part of almost all forms of PPDR. As such, any evaluation of PPDR cases should incorporate an evaluation of its public participation aspect.

However, most evaluations of PPDRs simply assess the existence of public participation. They do not extend to evaluation of its quality, value or impact. PPDR evaluation has been largely separate from public participation evaluation. This separation is a detriment to achieving a stronger perspective on PPDR as a whole, and for the goals and methods of its evaluation.

Can methods of evaluating public participation be effectively incorporated into evaluating PPDR? We explore this question by first comparing the goals, values, concepts, objectives, and practices of each. We highlight selected similarities and differences. We then examine PPDR evaluation literature, focusing on the gap surrounding public participation. By then examining public participation evaluation literature, we find that the evaluation gap in PPDR can be addressed by more explicitly incorporating the theory and methods from public participation evaluation. In particular, we find that the methods may be more successfully incorporated if one goal of the PPDR process is a public view of legitimacy and public support of the decision.

ⁱ Judith E. Innes, “Evaluating Consensus Building,” in *The Consensus Building Handbook*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1999), 631-675. See also, O’Leary, Rosemary and Bingham, Lisa B. (eds.) 2003. [The Promise and Performance of Environmental Conflict Resolution](#). Washington, D.C.: Resources for the Future.

ⁱⁱ For example, the International Association for Public Participation. See: <http://www.iap2.org>