Citizen Engagement Through the Budget

Budgeting in Local Government

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First Things First

Q. Do we want citizens engaged?
   - What does that even mean?

Q. What possible advantages might there be?

Q. What difficulties may be associated with citizens having a more active role?

Questions & Previous Research

Q. What does citizen engagement mean?

Q. What effect does it have?

Q. What are some of the ways we can engage our citizens?
CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT
- Educate and inform
  - Policies
  - Spending
  - Costs
  - Services provided
  - Laws and limits

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT
- Incorporate their input
  - Integrate them into the process
  - Receive feedback early and shape policies and priorities
  - Allow them to more directly change what the proposed budget will look like

PHASES OF ENGAGEMENT
- Phase 1: Information
  - One way relationship in which government delivers information to citizens
    - Government → Citizen

Taken from QUBA-ICT Policy and Coordination Office (2010)
PHASES OF ENGAGEMENT

- Phase 2: Consultation
  - A two way relationship in which citizens provide feedback on issues defined by government
  - Government               Citizen

Taken from QGEA – ICT Policy and Coordination Office (2010)

LOOKING TO ENGAGE BEYOND INFORMING?

- Fairfax County, VA
- Can you create a better budget?

John C. Cook
Fairfax County Supervisor

Thank you for voting for budget cuts. It was up to you as to whether a member of the
Board of Supervisors and how you voted your proposed budget.

Before you the FY 2014 budget presented by the Fairfax County Supervisor, your job was to reduce the
budget to $5.97 billion. You voted $5.37 billion and the proposed

The process by which citizens engage in the budget process is called "engaging." This is the process of asking citizens how they would like to see the budget changed. In Fairfax County, the process of engaging citizens is called "Focus Group." The Focus Group is a group of citizens who are asked to participate in a meeting where they can share their ideas about how the budget should be changed.

Please be aware that it is not always easy to understand how the budget process works. However, the changes are made on the basis of citizen feedback. Thank you for participating and good luck!
Better Budget?
- Not just getting information out
  - Though it is
- They are soliciting feedback about how “you” would spend the money
PHASES OF ENGAGEMENT

- Phase 3: Active participation
  - A collaboration in which citizens actively shape policy options, but where government retains the responsibility for final decisions
  - Government  Citizen

Taken from Q4EA ICT Policy and Coordination Office (2010)

EAST LANSING, MICHIGAN

- “Had” to close a community center
  - What to do with the building?

- Chose to solicit feedback and ideas from the community
  - Received numerous proposals
  - Got feedback from citizens that were engaging for the first time (50%)!
  - Ranked ideas and had round-tables
  - Received high levels of support for the project


FORMAL MODEL

- Another way to think about the “levels” of citizen participation
NEW MODEL?

- Phase 3 is the one receiving the most attention lately...

- New proposed model:
  - Move away from “Gripe, Grumble, Groan and Fix”
  - Government is seen as solely responsible for solutions and results
  - Move towards partnerships with citizens
  - Residents as citizens NOT customers
  - Respect them
  - Accept that government may not have all the answers

Traditional Ways to Relay Budget Info

- Traditional budget
  - Hard to navigate
  - Build a roadmap

- Fact sheets
  - Hard to decide what to present
  - Keep it in lay language with graphics

- Videos
  - Public access

Two NEW(ish) Techniques

- Taxpayer receipts
  - Examples
  - Suggestions

- Participatory Budgeting
  - What it is
  - Why some do it
TAXPAYER RECEIPTS

- 2011 interview:
  - Who knows how much of our tax dollar went to develop clean energy or reduce our dependence on foreign oil? You know, that’s just one of the reasons we feel disconnected from our government, and we think a tax receipt would help give people an idea where their tax dollars go — David Kendall from Third Way

- White House Responds
  - April 2011: Taxpayer Receipt is launched

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https://www.whitehouse.gov/2014-taxreceipt
DIFFERENCES
- What are the primary differences between the Federal example and the Connecticut example?
  - Advantages?
  - Disadvantages?
- Which is more feasible for your local government?

http://sogubs.unc.edu/electronicversions/pdfs/pmb08.pdf

MANY WAYS TO RELAY THIS INFORMATION
- Myrtle Beach has done something similar to the receipt presented here
  - Within their budget document, 13 pages of explanation
  - Services, powers, structure, revenue sources, etc
OTHER END OF THE SPECTRUM

- Participatory Budgeting
  - Who has heard of this?
  - What have you heard?

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

- Participatory budgeting (PB) is seen as direct democracy
  - Citizens create proposals and vote on them

- Taxpayer receipts are phase 1 (information/education)

- PB is a phase 3 (partnership/consultation)
PB IN OTHER CITIES

- More popular abroad
- US cities such as NYC and Chicago
  - Not citywide
  - “Pork” budgets of commissioners
- Greensboro & Durham

WHY IS IT BEING ADOPTED?

- What advantages would bringing citizens at this level have?
- What possible problems?
- Take 5 minutes and discuss with people around you.

ADVOCATES OF PB...

- Educate citizens about government
- Increase trust
- Reach marginalized populations
- Direct democracy
CONCERNS ABOUT PB...

- Won’t reach people
  - Low participation
- Projects citizens propose are not feasible/legal
- Already tight budgets
  - Community gardens?

GREENSBORO

- Advocates fought for years
- $500,000 earmarked for PB
- Very inclusive
  - As young as 11 can vote and make proposals
- Have completed first year
  - Projects include:
    - Murals
    - Bus shelters
    - Crosswalks
    - Emergency call box
    - Game tables in parks

ENGAGEMENT IN THE CLASSROOM

- Go into the schools
- I did a trial run of this myself
  - Lots of lessons learned
- Activities are you friend
- Keep it very applied and think about examples they understand
Activity: What does government do?

Let’s brainstorm!

1. Circle all of what government does.

Ideas For Government

Let’s take a few minutes to think of things that you would like government to do (provide):

1. Step 1: Break into pairs.
2. Step 2: Think about some things that you think are harder (or impossible) than they should be.
3. Step 3: Discuss whether government should help with those activities (or not).
4. How could government help?

Metro Transit Authority

- Last year Metro Transit Authority (MTA) received an increase of $2,000,000 ($2 million).
- MTA had a total budget of $75,666,100 last year.
- $42,013,600 came from the city, the rest was revenue they generated.
- This year Nashville is proposing to increase MTA’s budget by $7,000,000.
- So $49,013,600 coming from the city and an overall budget of $81,888,600.
- If passed this would be $120 per person for everyone living in Nashville.
- This is only for the operating budget, does not include the $36,500,000 million the city is planning on spending on capital!!
You vote!

- What do you think?
- Should Nashville adopt this budget and increase spending on the bus system?
- Stand under “yes” or “no”!

MTA EXAMPLE
- We came back to that example everyday
- It was making headlines
- About half the class used public transportation
- We could talk about who pays, equity, trade-offs, how spending in one area affects other areas, mission of the community, etc
- You want to make it relevant for your community!

Lots of Ways to “Engage”
- What seems feasible?
CONCLUSION

- Engagement can mean lots of different things
- Need to consider your ultimate goal
  - How you want to use feedback, if you solicit it
  - Be careful what you ask for.
- Series of blog posts on this topic on Death & Taxes

RESOURCES