

## **Topic guide: Citizen-centred policy-making and delivery**

### **Introduction**

This literature brief is organised into six parts reflecting the key concerns of academic and practice-based scholarship in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the US and the UK. In part one a definition of public participation is provided. Part two places citizen-centred policy-making and delivery within an instrumental and normative context addressing the question *what are the merits of public participation?* Part three then identifies the core arguments against public participation. In part four, the ingredients of effective citizen-centric policy-making and delivery are reviewed. Part five highlights the public management capabilities necessary to deliver effective citizen-centred policy outcomes? And, finally, part six identifies what methods of engagement there are and evaluates how effective they can be.

### **1. What do we mean by public participation?**

Public participation is difficult to define because it means different things to different people and organisations. In one sense defining participation in decision-making should be straightforward. It should merely involve posing the question – do the people decide? If not then they don't participate. The rhetoric of policy-makers often emphasizes the importance of citizen participation when in practice they really mean consultation between decision-maker and citizen. Indeed the idea of sharing the process of decision-making itself is unpalatable to most policy-makers. This is why one of the key challenges in Australian governance is the problem of sharing power whether with citizens, stakeholders or other governments.

The merit of a participatory view of decision-making is really a normative question and may be couched in terms of elitist versus participatory views of democracy. The former is a realist theory that emphasizes a belief in the inevitability of elite rule and the limits to public participation in public affairs. In this minimal conception of liberal democracy, apart from the process of voting, political participation is not taken to be an important measure of the quality of democratic life. Political representation or elite responsiveness to the ruled is considered more important. This elitist or 'top-down' conceptualization of democracy would include the following forms of political institutions and processes – a majoritarian or 'first-past-the post' electoral system, executive dominance over the legislature, limited access to governmental information, low levels of participation in the system of government, persistent inequalities in power resources, a centralized state, and a media system that is vulnerable to manipulation by government.

By contrast, a participatory view of democracy would take as its key aim the establishment of pluralism through a society-led conception of the national interest and the creation of open, decentralized and democratic political institutions and processes based upon popular control and political equality. Examples of institutions and processes which would reflect a 'bottom-up' or participatory view of democracy would include – the protection of individual rights, freedom of information and other forms of open government, electoral systems based on proportional representation, the decentralization and territorial devolution of power, and, high levels of participation in the system of government anchored in the twin concepts of popular control and political equality.

The decisive test of a participatory view of democracy is its capacity to encourage its population to play an active role in its government (see Beetham ed., 1988 & Evans, 2003).

## 2. What are the merits of public participation?

Over the past two decades the number of contemporary researchers and institutions arguing that public participation is essential for good policy-making has been on the increase (see: Canadian Policy Research Network, 2003 & 2007; Edwards, 2008; European Institute for Public Participation, 2009; Fischer, 1993; Rowe and Frewer, 2000; Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker, 2001; OECD, 2001; Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003; Parkinson, 2004; Hendriks, 2005; Involve, 2005 & 2009; USAID, 2009). This literature may crudely be organised around instrumental and normative justifications for extending public participation into policy and operational delivery.

### ***Instrumental justifications***

The value of public participation in policy-making can be conceptualised through an instrumental lens – i.e. it is worth having as a means towards getting something that is considered ‘a good’. Hence certain authors argue that it can be used as a tool for enhancing trust and confidence in public institutions. Rowe and Frewer (2000) and Bourgon (2009) note that trust in government has been declining since World War II. Indeed, Rowe and Frewer (2000), Abelson *et al* (2003) and Leighninger (2010) all argue that increased public engagement in policy-making can be seen as a response to a loss of faith in government institutions. This is a trend first observed in Almond and Verba’s *The Civic Culture* in 1963.

Public participation in policy-making may also be seen as a tool to resolve the complex problems faced by public administrators – e.g. climate change, energy conservation, water governance. Fung (2006), Bourgon (2007), and USAID (2009) all argue that public participation can assist in: collating best available evidence and provide opportunities for technocrats to be better informed about the consequences of different options hence reducing uncertainty and risk. Public participation may also assist in leveraging resources by creating opportunities for finding partners that can aid the implementation of policy solutions (Foley and Martin, 2000; Smith, 2003). Moreover, technological advances and mature consumerism should make participatory decision-making more feasible and help:

- with problems of information overload;
- provide basic information about rights and responsibilities of citizenship;
- inform and educate about politics and about issues of public concern;
- help voters to make up their mind about candidates, parties and issues in election process;
- promote/offer opportunities for citizens to deliberate on public issues, on draft (in preparation) laws, social problems (allow experience of analysing complicated issues);
- promote/offer communication between citizens and politicians;
- guide citizens through the growing jungle of publicly available government and other official information; and,
- offer citizen participation in real decision-making.

### ***Normative justifications***

The value of public participation in policy-making can also be conceptualised through a normative lens – i.e. as an essential ingredient of a liberal democratic way of life. From this perspective it is argued that there is more to democracy than exercising a vote every three, four or five years it requires ongoing engagement with the citizenry. This emphasis on the role of the citizenry in policy-making and delivery is viewed as an important method for generating legitimacy and ownership of government interventions. Curtin (2003) and Foley and Martin (2003) observe that involving citizens early on in the policy process creates broader support for policy options and solutions, reduces the risk associated with new initiatives and, therefore, ‘makes government policy more effective and legitimate’.

Perhaps the most influential expression of this argument can be found in the ‘public value’ management (PVM) approach. Mark Moore (1995), who coined the phrase, basically argues that public services can add value to society in the same way that private for-profit organisations create value for their shareholders and other stakeholders. By implication, public intervention should be circumscribed by the need to achieve positive social and economic outcomes for the citizenry. What is and what is not public value should be determined collectively through inclusive deliberation involving elected and appointed

government officials, key stakeholders and the public. Conceptually the notion of public value resonates with other modernisation discourses that seek to address the limits of the liberal democratic model in meeting the requisite needs of the citizenry such as the New Localism (Aldridge & Stoker, 2002), social capital (Putnam, 1995; UK Cabinet Office, 2002) and deliberative democracy (Fischer 1993 & 2003; Parkinson 2004).

In the same way that Christopher Hood (1995) identified the emergence of an international New Public Management movement in the mid-1990s; a similar observation can be made with regard to PVM in the new millennium. A small number of centrist UK think tanks such as the IPPR, the Work Foundation, Demos, Involve and the Young Foundation have adopted public value as their modernisation concept of choice for reinvigorating the public sector and bringing it closer to the people.<sup>1</sup> In addition, several state centred public value projects have emerged in Australia (e.g. the National Office of the Information Economy), Germany (e.g. the Civil Service commission and the 'Red Tape' movement), and, France (e.g. the Ministry of State Transformation and the French decentralisation process). Moreover, civil/public service training organisations such as the Australia-New Zealand School of Government, the Kennedy School at Harvard, the China National School of Administration and the National School of Government in the UK have all begun to integrate the concept of public value into their executive training courses.

There have already been several governmental flirtations with the concept of public value. For example, in the UK during the Blair premiership following the publication of *Creating Public Value* by Gavin Kelly and Stephen Muers in the Strategy Unit in 2002 several high profile government spokespeople included references to achieving public value in policy papers and public lectures (see Balls, 2002; Blunkett, 2003a&b & 2004, Raynsford, 2003 and Turnbull 2002). Indeed, according to the Work Foundation several British public organisations have operated public value assessment frameworks since 2006 including the BBC, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and several local authority recycling schemes such as the London Borough of Lewisham. However, on closer inspection it is evident that public value experiments tend to be characterised by different models of decision-making underpinned by different conceptions of democracy and reflecting different modes of public engagement.

There are three potential new theatres for PVM which further bolster its claims to being both philosophically and practically attune with the needs of the citizenry. Firstly, it would be possible to circumvent criticisms that PVM would undermine the power of elected representatives through the introduction of delegated decision-making on a devolved model operating within framework agreements established by the government of the day. Secondly, a public value approach could be integrated into a Comprehensive Performance Assessment process. Public service agreements could be established in high politics by the government of the day and Specially Responsible Officers accountable for delivering government priorities but supported by Boards comprised of key stakeholders would then be required to call a public into being through the creation of public service juries with the task of monitoring and evaluating government performance alongside public servants and elected representatives. Public service juries would operate on the same basis as the criminal jury system. *We trust citizens to make life and death decisions why not public value ones?* Thirdly, the international case study evidence tells us that PVM is particularly effective in societies characterised by economic crisis or where government is suffering from low esteem due to the fall-out from corruption scandals or other forms of maladministration. In such circumstances PVM is a crucial policy instrument for both social stabilisation and trust-building between government and civil society.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, for the Work Foundation see: <http://theworkfoundation.com/products/publicvalue.aspx> [accessed 3 October 2010] and for the IPPR see: <http://www.ippr.org.uk/research/teams/project.asp?id=876&pid=876> [accessed 3 October 2010].

### 3. What are the arguments against public participation?

On the surface the value of participation seems obvious as it provides a broad source of legitimation for government and for policy change. Walters *et al* (2000), however, offer an opposing view, arguing that a large number of scholars believe public participation in policy-making to be problematic rather than an essential tool for enhancing policy-making and delivery. Two potential difficulties are worth rehearsing here. Firstly, the process of canvassing a wide spectrum of opinion and incorporating the interests that they represent into the decision-making process can lead to information overload and make decision-making slow and cumbersome. Secondly, open conflict between competing groups ultimately leads to clientelism and the privileging of certain elite groups. A sectional interest or alliance of sectional interests will ultimately win the war of ideas and there would then be a mobilisation of bias in favour of that sectional interest or alliance of sectional interests. This could lead to more limited participation.

The obstacles to the effective application of PVM in Westminster models of representative democracy have been well documented elsewhere and include: professional and parliamentary resistance and path dependency; the lack of political will; resource constraints; and, issues of complexity (see: Gains and Stoker 2009 & Rhodes and Wanna, 2007). The notion of public value, so the argument goes, doesn't sit easily with the Westminster model as it introduces a concept of public interest that is not determined by the government of the day, but by public servants in consultation with communities and providers. These factors, amongst others, have led Francesca Gains and Gerry Stoker (2009: 2) to conclude that, 'this new "public service contract" is likely to be easier to adopt in a local setting than in the core executive although in neither case is the adoption of new modes of working between politicians, officials and citizens unproblematic'. It is noteworthy, however, that the majority of the criticisms advanced in critique flow from a minimalist conception of public value which views PVM as a method for privileging the role of bureaucrats in policy processes. This was not Moore's intention.

Nonetheless, evaluations of performance in government continue to bemoan: the absence of citizen involvement in service delivery; low productivity and inefficiency; restricted choice and poor outcomes for the disadvantaged; the minimal spreading of best practice and innovation; and limited government responsiveness to public opinion (see, amongst others, Bichard, 2005).

### 4. What are the ideal conditions for citizen participation?

The key literature in this area is associated with the work of Involve (2005 & 2009) and Lowndes et al (2006). Seven key observations can be derived from this literature:

- *The design of citizen-centred policy-making and delivery depends on its purpose* – it is important to be clear on what this purpose is as the outset (e.g. deep democratisation or feedback on services) as it will lead to very different styles of participation (Involve 2005).
- *The importance of place* – citizen-centred policy-making and delivery means different things in different places – the key is to find out what works in the context you are working in. This philosophy will inevitably lead to co-production with citizens.
- *Using diagnostics tools such as the CLEAR model will help you to identify what works* (Lowndes et al., 2006). The CLEAR tool argues that participation is most effective where citizens:
  - ✓ Can do – have the resources and knowledge to participate
  - ✓ Like to – have a sense of attachment that reinforces participation;
  - ✓ Enabled to – are provided with the opportunity for participation;
  - ✓ Asked to – are mobilised through public agencies and civic channels;
  - ✓ Responded to – see evidence that their views have been considered.
- Self evaluation using the CLEAR model allows each local government to diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of their own public participation initiatives. This tool is currently being used across the European Union. Hence:
- *Social mobilisation on specific issues is required prior to intervention* and the application of engagement methodologies (see Involve, 2005; Putnam, 1995; USAID, 2008).

- *Representativeness and efficacy* are crucial to ensuring continued engagement (Mihaly, 2010).
- *Use existing institutions where possible to heighten potential for success and to save on costs* (e.g. community forums, sports clubs, churches or other social institutions or criminal jury system).
- Effective citizen-centred policy-making and delivery is *a development process* which requires time and resources and cannot be done on the cheap! (Involve, 2005).
- *Participation is not appropriate in all areas of decision-making* – we need to identify where and when it is appropriate! Insufficient research has been conducted on when and what type of engagement is appropriate in relation to different types of decision. When is engagement not necessary? When is consultation appropriate? When is co-production crucial and in what form?

For an alternative (but overlapping) set of conditions, see OECD *Guiding principles for open and inclusive policy-making* (2009, p. 79) presented in Appendix 1.

## **5. What public management capabilities are necessary to deliver effective citizen-centred policy outcomes?**

What are the implications of PVM for public management capabilities? As Gerry Stoker (2006:16) observes, the public value paradigm demands a commitment to broader goals than those envisaged under traditional and NPM management regimes as managers are tasked with steering networks of deliberation and delivery as well as maintaining the overall coherence of the system. It offers a different narrative of reform in the sense that it centres:

...on a fuller and rounder vision of humanity than either traditional or NPM. People are, it suggests, motivated by their involvement in networks and partnerships, by their relationships with others formed in the context of equal status and mutual learning. Some will find its vision attractive but the realists or cynics may prefer to stick with traditional public management or NPM.

Hence PVM will require new values and practices and in certain instances the rediscovery of old ones; for example, the notion of public service. So how could PVM reform be embedded in governance? Governance should become the instrument for the pursuit of public value through the reformation of governing norms, values and operational rules. This would require the adoption of at least four public value principles:

Proposition 1: the role of public organizations at all levels should be circumscribed by the search for public value and a commitment to a public service ethos.

Proposition 2: decision centres in governance structures should include a balance of forces (public service panels, political representatives, technical support).

Proposition 3: public managers should be neutral arbiters of public value.

Proposition 4: governance structures should use a participatory learning-based approach to the challenge of service delivery.

These principles would help to bring the politics back into policy deliberation and operational delivery at a time when the public standing of governmental institutions has reached its nadir. They would help to foster problem-solving, reflexive public organisations committed to delivering public value.

The application of these principles would have dramatic practical implications for the work plans of public organisations. However, they are very much in alignment with the drivers and thematic priorities of reform. Five public value practices would be particularly important for governance:

Proposition 1: public managers need to understand the network environment through scoping the field of action, identifying all potential partners and their resources.

Proposition 2: public managers need to develop 'smart partnerships' through policy community-building.

Proposition 3: to ensure public value, public managers should establish clear deliberative rules and intelligent performance indicators linked directly to negotiated policy objectives.

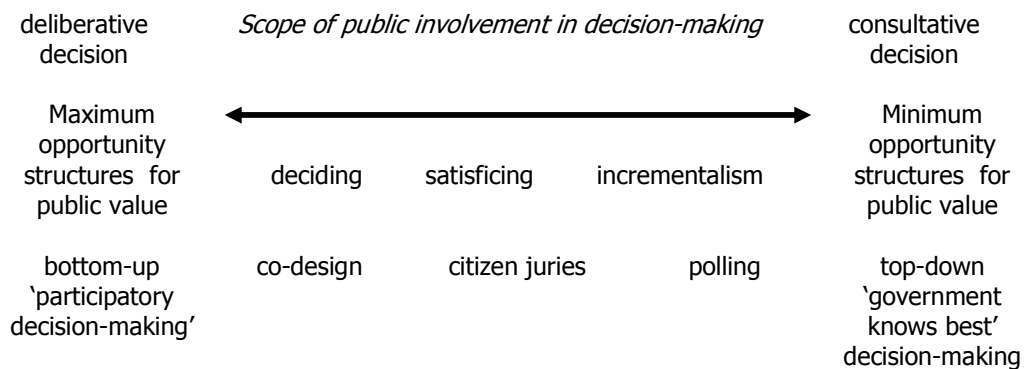
Proposition 4: Monitoring systems should be designed to identify movements towards or away from achieving these objectives.

Proposition 5: Work plans should be subject to annual audits and evaluations with effective reporting systems both to politicians and to the public (Evans et al., 2010).

## 6. What methods of engagement are there and how effective can they be?

Involve (2005 & 2009) provides outstanding practice-based materials on methods of citizens engagement and their application to particular case studies. Figure 1 situates these models of decision-making along a continuum in which 'bottom-up' deliberative decision-making and 'top-down' 'government-knows best' consultative forms of decision-making can be found at each end of the spectrum. The further you move towards the deliberative end of the continuum, the greater the ability of the citizen to affect policy outcomes (Evans, 2009). Appendix 2 presents a review of the utility of public participation methods developed from the work of Abelson et al. (2001). Finally, for the most inspiring work at present on co-design see Charles Leadbeater's (2010) series of case studies for I&DeA in *The Man in the Caravan and Other Stories*.

Figure 1. The scope of public involvement in public value decision-making



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## APPENDIX 1

### OECD Guiding principles for open and inclusive policy making

(Source: OECD, 2009, p.79)

OECD countries recognise that open and inclusive policy making increases government accountability, broadens citizens' influence on decisions and builds civic capacity. At the same time it improves the evidence base for policy making, reduces implementation costs and taps wider networks for innovation in policy making and service delivery.

These Guiding Principles help governments to improve their open and inclusive policy making as a means to improving their policy performance and service delivery.

**1. Commitment:** Leadership and strong commitment to open and inclusive policy making is needed at all levels - politicians, senior managers and public officials.

**2. Rights:** Citizens' rights to information, consultation and public participation in policy making and service delivery must be firmly grounded in law or policy. Government obligations to respond to citizens must be clearly stated. Independent oversight arrangements are essential to enforcing these rights.

**3. Clarity:** Objectives for, and limits to, information, consultation and public participation should be well defined from the outset. The roles and responsibilities of all parties must be clear. Government information should be complete, objective, reliable, relevant, easy to find and understand.

**4. Time:** Public engagement should be undertaken as early in the policy process as possible to allow a greater range of solutions and to raise the chances of successful implementation. Adequate time must be available for consultation and participation to be effective.

**5. Inclusion:** All citizens should have equal opportunities and multiple channels to access information, be consulted and participate. Every reasonable effort should be made to engage with as wide a variety of people as possible.

**6. Resources:** Adequate financial, human and technical resources are needed for effective public information, consultation and participation. Government officials must have access to appropriate skills, guidance and training as well as an organisational culture that supports both traditional and online tools.

**7. Co-ordination:** Initiatives to inform, consult and engage civil society should be coordinated within and across levels of government to ensure policy coherence, avoid duplication and reduce the risk of "consultation fatigue." Co-ordination efforts should not stifle initiative and innovation but should leverage the power of knowledge networks and communities of practice within and beyond government.

**8. Accountability:** Governments have an obligation to inform participants how they use inputs received through public consultation and participation. Measures to ensure that the policy-making process is open, transparent and amenable to external scrutiny can help increase accountability of, and trust in, government.

**9. Evaluation:** Governments need to evaluate their own performance. To do so effectively will require efforts to build the demand, capacity, culture and tools for evaluating public participation.

**10. Active citizenship:** Societies benefit from dynamic civil society, and governments can facilitate access to information, encourage participation, raise awareness, strengthen citizens' civic education and skills, as well as to support capacity-building among civil society organisations. Governments need to explore new roles to effectively support autonomous problem-solving by citizens, CSOs and businesses.

**APPENDIX 2** A review of the utility of public participation methods

Provided in separate attachment.

