

The IAP2 Spectrum: Larry Susskind¹, in Conversation with IAP2 Members

Compiled by Lyn Carson

Abstract

Lyn Carson initiates a conversation by email with Larry Susskind to explore concerns about and critical reflections on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation. The terms comprising the Spectrum are *inform*, *consult*, *involve*, *collaborate*, and *empower*, representing increasing levels of public impact. Appreciating the Spectrum's usefulness as a tool in teaching and explaining public participation to various audiences, the conversation aims to dig deeper into meanings and implications. In the early course of the conversation, Lyn and Larry weigh merits of amending the Spectrum, such as removing *inform*, combining *consult* and *involve*, and they examine what it means to *empower* citizens, including in relation to statutory responsibilities of officials, responsibilities that cannot be delegated away. Then, they open up the conversation by inviting John Dengate, Lewis Michaelson, John Godec, and Anne Carroll to join in. Concepts in the Spectrum are discussed in relation to the IAP2's Core Values and Code of Ethics, and the Ad Hoc Working Group's alternative to the IAP2 Spectrum, called the New Spectrum (Appendix A), inducing more critical reflection about how to distinguish the bases for some conversational disagreements and various premises and circumstances. In closing words, Larry posits the demands in the field to: base recommendations of particular forms of engagement on evidence, justify recommendations and reasonableness of purported outcomes from following them, and overall, deepen the commitment to deliberative democracy wherever we work.

Keywords: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation, New Spectrum

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Lyn Carson:

Larry, I use the IAP2 Spectrum routinely for teaching purposes (with university students and, in the wider community, with policy makers). I know, too, that members of IAP2 find it an extremely useful explanatory tool, for example with their consulting activities. Despite its usefulness for me as a teaching tool, I have reservations about it and believe that you do too. To begin, can we explore your concerns?

Larry Susskind:

I don't find the spectrum particularly helpful – either from a theoretical or a practical standpoint. To put it as bluntly as possible – the first step on the spectrum – inform – is not really a form of participation. It involves a totally passive role for the public. Having information sent to you does not mean, in my mind, that you are participating in a meaningful way. At the far end – empower – is misleading because there is no way in any democracy I know about that elected and appointed officials can actually “turn over” to a random assortment of citizens the statutory authority to make decisions. The officials involved would be delegating away their statutory authority. That's illegal in most places. So, the last step is an illusion and should be dropped because it is misleading. The third and fourth steps – involve and collaborate – are the same thing. If a government agency seeks to involve a set of stakeholders in the process of decision-making, it better mean to collaborate with them, or the offer to participate is a hoax. And, finally, with regard to the second step, I'm not sure that I favour any form of consultation that does not guarantee true collaboration. That is, asking people to respond to a pre-made list of policy or design options without inviting those participants to help structure the options and the questions being asked about them, is so limiting as to be unacceptable to me as a form of participation.

So, in the end, there is really just collaboration – that is, an invitation to selected stakeholders to participate in joint decision-making, including the design of the process itself. There are many different ways of doing this, although from my standpoint, unless three pre-conditions are met, I would urge citizens or stakeholders to refuse to get involved. First, all groups that think they are stakeholders ought to be consulted on the design of the civic engagement process and the selection of the actual participants. (Stakeholder reps should always be selected by the constituencies they are presumed to represent and not by the sponsoring or convening agency.)

Second, collaborative processes should always be managed by professional neutrals who know how to help groups work toward consensus and not by the agency or unit of government convening the process. And, third, the product of collaboration should always be a written agreement summarizing the agreement reached and should be signed by the participants (even if the result is no agreement).

Lyn Carson:

That invitation to explore your concerns yielded such a colourful handful of threads that I'm perplexed about which strand to pick up because I want to play with each one. There were places where I wanted to say "yes, I like that and I agree completely" and a few where I thought "hmm, I'd want to examine that much more closely". Let me start with a place where I agreed.

When I use the Spectrum, I find myself describing it as a continuum, then saying I won't spend any time talking about the left-hand columns. Of course, it's important to *inform* constituents, and open governments should do this routinely, but I dismiss that column in particular as unworthy of my attention in any discussion about public participation (P2). So, for sure, I'd like to see the *Inform* column either dropped or mentioned by way of a footnote as an essential prelude to P2 but not classified as P2. However, to be fair this is not simply entitled a *Public Participation* Spectrum, the sub-heading notes that it's about *Increasing Levels of Public Impact*. But, like you, I'm still bothered by the presence of *Inform* despite that caveat. Having said that, I know of community relations/communications people doing ethical work in this area and I guess they would feel rather excluded by the omission.

I took exception to a statement about the extreme right-hand side, *Empower*, so perhaps I'll jump over to that column. This statement captured my attention: that "there is no way in any democracy I know about that elected and appointed officials can actually 'turn over' to a random assortment of citizens the statutory authority to make decisions". There is not a claim in relation to statutory authority. There's a promise to *implement what you decide*. I know of instances where this has happened and it *has* been empowering and statutory authority was quite irrelevant. For example, there are local governments that have allocated budgets to a community to take care of community resources such as sporting fields. There is a state government minister who has allowed the affected community to make controversial land-use planning decisions and promised to implement their decision. These are in the Australian context. The decision maker

has informally ceded power and (morally) contracted to do what the community wishes and then delivered that promise.

Mind you, the decision making which follows with the sporting committee example might not be particularly participatory and might replicate the poor practices of its own local government. However, with the state government example a citizens' jury was used and I feel confident that it was a credible and empowering example of P2.

By the way, maybe these examples also indicate that we need to take care not to be too ethnocentric with our judgments. Local government in Australia is quite different to the US which is quite different to Venezuela or Brazil (where some empowerment is surely occurring amongst marginalised folks through participatory budgets and communal councils?). Also, IAP2 is not only talking about government and there are certainly organisational instances of implementing workers' decisions that would belong in that column. I suppose it boils down to how we interpret *public*.

I have lots more to say about the middle columns as well but maybe I'll shelve those comments in order to keep the conversation alive. But before I hand it back to you, I wanted to offer a cautionary note about boycotting P2 unless "all groups" (boy oh boy there's another thread, because I want to strongly argue for P2 beyond *groups*) "that think they are stakeholders ought to be consulted on the design of the civic engagement process and the selection of the actual participants". I'm recalling a project in a regional town in Australia when a new local government enthusiastically decided to consult its communities about how they would wish to be consulted about local government issues. The co-facilitator and I warned that residents would want to complain about things like footpaths and waste collection and the former council and would find it difficult to discuss matters relating to *process*. The new council representatives were adamant that we proceed according to their wishes so we did. People complained about things like footpaths and waste collection and the former council. They refused to be drawn into process design. This is a much longer story but I'm wary of involving citizens as process designers, including as selectors of participants. I'd rather design a robust process and have residents affirm (or not) its robustness before proceeding. I'd also wish to ensure a fair selection process (using, say, random selection) rather than asking people to self-nominate or nominate from amongst their ghettos of like-minded people. This could take us off on a big discussion about delegates/trustees or descriptive representation, I know.

P.S. I probably should have restricted this to a page. I did not want to have you bogged down with too many threads.

Larry Susskind:

Where to start? I guess there are two themes that we should consider further. The first is individual vs. group. The second is consultation vs. collaboration. I think these are at the heart of our different views of the field (and perhaps the most important source of the tension in our professional circles).

You mention citizen juries and surveys. These are the tools of the deliberative democrats who think in terms of individuals when they talk about public participation. I talk in terms of stakeholder groups and the dynamic representation of interests. These are the tools of the consensus building (and dispute resolution) crowd. It is not possible to manufacture consensus in a community (at whatever scale) unless you bring representatives of all the relevant stakeholding groups together to make decisions jointly. They need to be able to negotiate and they need to be held accountable. Citizens on juries don't represent anyone but themselves in the sense that they can't speak for or like segments of the larger community. And, surveys take a picture at one point in time; they don't afford opportunities for interaction and the learning that comes with it.

It is possible to consult with (typical) individuals in a community by talking with or surveying a random sample of residents at various points in time, but these randomly drawn individuals cannot commit anyone else besides themselves to take action or lend public support to an agreement. All they can do is speak for themselves and put on display a sample of the public's reaction to an issue at a point in time. Traditional democrats (with a small "d") think that this will influence elected and appointed officials, but why should it? Public officials were elected by a much larger fraction of the community which expects them to remain loyal to the agenda or platform on which they ran. Why should it matter what a randomly drawn small sample of people says about an issue at a later moment?

To build an informed consensus—the goal of true collaboration—we need to ask all the relevant stakeholding groups (whether they are already organized or not) to select representatives they trust to participate in a decision-making process. This group, facilitated by a professional neutral—who is not required to adhere to the views of the convening authority—needs to engage

in joint fact finding and a problem-solving dialogue. The participants should not be there just to sound off. The product of their conversation should be presented by the representatives to their constituencies (by whatever technological means makes sense for each group) before the ad hoc group reaches any final decisions. Then, the representatives must come back together to work out a final agreement. The product of such a conversation will be difficult (but not impossible) for the convening authority to set aside. This is a way of supplementing our democratic commitments on an issue by issue or project by project basis. Talking with a random sample of average citizens, on the other hand, provides no credible basis for taking (political) action and no guarantee that anyone will commit to implement whatever outcomes emerge. Short of a negotiated consensus, what should elected and appointed officials do with the rainbow of recommendations they would otherwise? What legitimacy does such an inventory of concerns have?

If public officials commit to interactive representation, rather than a static accounting of what the majority of the public wants only when there is an election, they need a mechanism for engaging all citizens in the consideration of problems or issues as they arise. Only through group fair representation and professionally-facilitated consensus building will a credible and implementable agreement emerge. In the absence of such an agreement, why should what a random sample of folks has to say influence the decisions made by elected and appointed officials?

Lyn Carson:

I was struck by a statement and a question from you, Larry. The question: “Why should it matter what a randomly drawn small sample of people says about an issue at a later moment?” We could turn to the Ancient Greeks for an answer to that. They used it routinely, often for matters already on the agenda, matters such as “will we go to war?” knowing that the randomly-selected decision makers *themselves* would go to war. I like Bernard Manin’s² provocative inquiry... why do we *not* practice random selection and yet still call ourselves democrats?

The statement of yours which captured my attention was: Only through group fair representation and professionally-facilitated consensus building will a credible and implementable agreement emerge. I disagree. Look at citizens’ assemblies in Canada or

² P. 9; Manin, B. (1997). *The principles of representative government*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

consensus conferences in Denmark. Neither draws on delegated representation, each uses descriptive representation, achieved through random selection. Both employ “professionally-facilitated consensus building” and both lead to “credible and implementable agreement”. As a footnote to that, we will use stratified random selection to create the descriptively representative sample for our forthcoming Citizens’ Parliament in Australia.

When you and I speak of random selection can we put surveys or opinion polls to one side since they are barely worthy of a place in any discussion about P2? I’m fighting my own private battle against them; I now assume a new personality each night and answer phone pollsters from the perspective of a new persona each time they call—a 16-year-old hippie one night, a 60-year-old divorcee the next. I have a great time and discredit the market research industry in the process.

It’s interesting to me and probably unsurprising that your perspective is so resonant of the language and experience of dispute resolution (mine has no doubt arisen from my frustrating experiences as an elected representative, wanting to hear voices beyond the ‘squeaky wheels’ or ‘usual suspects’—so my perspective is deeply political).

Shall we return to the Spectrum? We’ve eliminated *Inform* (and maybe replaced it with a footnote)? I want to leave *Empower* there because I’ve seen circumstances where final decision making *was* placed in public hands. You would like to see that column removed. I’m warming to the idea of combining *Consult* and *Involve* because the differences are too subtle to be useful.

Given that we are not left with much of a Spectrum I wonder if it’s a good idea at this stage to invite others into the conversation. Would you be happy with that? Is there more you would wish to say before we do so?

Larry Susskind:

Yes, there are a few more things I want to put down on paper before we open this up to others for comment and suggestions. I want to go back to your assertion that you have seen public involvement processes in which elected councils “promise (before-the-fact) to implement” what an ad hoc group of participants proposes or that an elected council might “morally contract to do what the community wants.” Second, I want to clarify that my commitment when I facilitate collaborative processes involves a promise to do everything I can to help “balance science and politics.” I want to talk about the work “away from the table” that those of us in the

negotiation field believe may be the most important part of what a professional neutral does. Finally, I want to reflect very briefly on your initial point about “ethnocentrism” or cross-cultural perspectives on public participation.

What do we want from our elected (and appointed) officials. Indeed, what does democracy demand of them? From the standpoint of the political science field, we want public officials to be representative and accountable. Usually, we presume that free and fair elections (and a few other constitutional requirements) will ensure this. The public participation field, however, stands for a view of democracy that goes beyond this. We want direct involvement in framing, making and implementing decisions, not mere accountability. And, elections are not enough to ensure this. So, what can we do to be sure that elected and appointed officials take affirmative steps to ensure that “the public” is given a chance to engage directly in making important decisions that affect them? We know that petitions, hearings and town hall meetings are not enough. It is too easy to ignore what gets said at these events (especially when conflicting views are presented). At the same time, we are not asking for a plebiscite on every issue. Somewhere between these extremes we envision a process that provokes engagement, deliberation and thoughtful problem-solving. The goal, though, is not just to portray what the average or median citizen (voter) wants, it is to produce a negotiated agreement that has political credibility. It is the political credibility (hopefully derived from the quality of the discussion and the representativeness of the discussants) that will ensure the responsiveness or accountability of the public officials (beyond just throwing them out of office at the next election). On the other hand, I wouldn't want my elected officials to sign away their right to respond to whatever emerges from a collaborative process before they have a chance to review what's proposed on its merits (i.e. the reasons that are given matter a lot). Also, if it turns out that the dialogue was flawed (because a key group was left out, new information emerged after the fact, or some other statute was disregarded), I would expect the officials to put the recommendation of the collaborative process aside. In my model, a carefully structured process (that the participants themselves have a hand in shaping) – that takes the form of a neutrally-managed conflict assessment can yield a politically credible array of relevant stakeholder group representatives, an agreed upon process design and ground rules, a manageable agenda, and a written agreement with the elected officials involved that they will take seriously what the group produces and in all likelihood implement it – especially if the group can reach consensus.

We haven't talked at all about the "quality" of the agreements we hope will emerge from collaborative processes in the public arena. In the environmental field, in particular, a good process that produces an agreement that ends up killing people because important scientific information was ignored is not an acceptable outcome. It is the responsibility of the professional neutral managing a collaborative process to press the group to engage in joint fact finding (and to consult with various kinds of experts) to ensure that they can justify their recommendations in technical terms. In the public engagement field, attention is currently focused on criteria for evaluating the outcomes (and not just the process) of consultative efforts and I think this is right. We also can't depend on the average citizen or voter to bring sufficient expertise to the table to ensure an appropriate balance between science and politics. Among the "groups" that are relevant stakeholders are those with specialized knowledge and experience who can help ground the discussion.

There is no way for the average citizen to be in touch with the "constituency" they ostensibly represent. In most of the collaborative processes I have helped to run we put an emphasis on stakeholder groups so that there are obvious constituencies for participants at the table to be in touch before, during and after the problem-solving dialogue. The role of neutral includes working at every stage with the participants to ensure that this "second table" or "back table" conversation takes place and that it is handled effectively. Too many public engagement processes involve facilitators who only work at the table when the participants are assembled as a group. This is not an adequate method of generating a politically accountable and powerful consensus that public officials will have reasons to take seriously.

I've worked in more than twenty countries on public engagement and consensus building processes (and written about these extensively). It is my assertion that the commonalities in democratic settings outweigh the cultural or constitutional differences. While public involvement (particularly consensus building at the local level) needs to be tailored to the expectations of the participants, take account of statutory constraints, and reflect the institutional capacities that are in place, the basic notion of involving relevant stakeholders in professional-facilitated deliberations leading to consensus proposals on controversial public policy choices resonates across the globe.

I understand the value of getting information into the hands of citizens before legislative and regulatory decisions are made (at every level of government), even if there is no direct

engagement of citizens in preparing, evaluating and making decisions based on this information. And, I appreciate the contributions that deliberative polling, citizen juries, and blue-ribbon advisory commissions (or formal inquiries) of various kinds can make to helping public officials get a better sense of what the citizenry is thinking. But as a profession, I do not think we should stand for anything less than broad-gauged, professionally-facilitated, problem-solving by carefully selected representatives of all relevant stakeholder groups -- leading to well-reasoned and technically credible (written) proposals, signed by the participants, indicating that they have taken the steps necessary to ensure that the constituencies they represent support the consensus agreements reached. We should stand for this not because it is currently in fashion or because it creates work for us, but because it offers the only way to achieve the ideals of democracy.

John Dengate:

I was interested in the suggestion to remove *Inform* as it involves a passive role from the public. Yes, but it is not passive from the decision maker or project perspective. I often am challenged as I teach the Spectrum in the Certificate Course around how *Inform* can be P2 when it does not satisfy Core Value 2—i.e., that to be authentic P2, the activity must “influence” the decision.

Increasingly I am seeing examples of projects running at *Inform*, where the project team are challenged to think about how they are running the project, and do make changes to the project design and activities as they work to help the public understand what is being done and why. It reflects I think the deliberative element mentioned, and perhaps makes more sense if we add to the promise under *Inform* about understanding, i.e., “we will keep you informed, and help you to understand”. With this intent, I think it raises the stake for the decision maker, and moves closer to that intent of “influence”. I agree that the influence is not seen as huge—i.e., the project decisions are not likely to change, but it can drive shifts in the way the project is conducted.

Thinking more broadly, while I accept that collaboration is desired on wicked problems to give decision makers confidence that there is a consensus, I think the Spectrum is hugely helpful in building understanding and helping manage expectations around P2- however we define it. The Spectrum provides clarity around how input will be used, and the degree of influence that can be expected. It is just as useful for decision makers as it is for the public in managing expectations and getting a dialogue going around what engagement means. So while we may

disagree on whether it is right or not, I find it a hugely valuable tool to get the conversation going given the poor levels of understanding about what is meant by “consultation”.

My brief thoughts; over to Lewis...

Lewis Michaelson:

Oh my – where to start?

First of all, I think there has to be some credence given to those of us who have used and taught the Spectrum for close to a decade versus those who are reacting to it from a theoretical or philosophical basis. For example, the plain and obvious answer to the usefulness of the Spectrum is the thousands of people who have put it into practice and used it with good results. By good results, I mean wise decisions that reflect the needs and preferences of affected communities and interested stakeholders. To assume that the only way to reach good decisions is, as Larry states: “to produce a negotiated agreement that has political credibility,” is to ignore the richness of techniques and opportunities there are to gather public input to inform decision makers and their decisions. It also ignores the fact that there is a continuum of decisions - some that affect stakeholders deeply and some that affect them marginally – and that the stakeholders themselves often have varying levels of commitment to participation that they see as warranted or beneficial to them. I have observed or been involved in dozens of public participation processes where consulting or involving the public, and not collaborating with them, was not just the choice of the decision maker, but the preferred method of interaction of the stakeholders themselves.

Secondly, it is important to understand the primary purpose for which the Spectrum was invented: it was developed not to tell people the “right” way to conduct public participation, but to reflect the range of processes that exist and to help decision makers clarify how much public input and influence they can and want to commit to. There is no point in telling decision makers through the Spectrum that the only legitimate form of public participation is collaboration for two reasons: 1) not all decisions deserve/demand collaboration; and 2) the purpose of the Spectrum is to describe the range of what is out there, not insist how it should be done. IAP2 has developed two other tools that go hand in hand with the Spectrum: the Core Values for Public Participation and the IAP2 Public Participation Code of Ethics. These are the appropriate

mechanisms for describing our normative expectations for public participation. The Spectrum, in contrast, is a descriptive and explanatory device.

Thirdly, IAP2 has found that the single largest obstacle to engaging communities and stakeholders in public participation processes is the deep skepticism they feel towards these processes, because they have been involved in decision making before where the decision maker appeared to be offering meaningful influence in the decision, but in the end, their involvement seemed to have little if any impact on the outcome. Particularly as public participation has become increasingly required and routinized through regulatory processes such as environmental impact assessment studies, the exercise of perfunctory and sham public participation processes has become rampant. The public seems to have adopted the attitude of the old Who song, “We Won’t Get Fooled Again.” While it might be tempting, it would certainly be futile to tell governments around the world that they need to chuck all the required processes, start fresh, and only conduct public participation when they have a sincere commitment to collaboration with stakeholders leading to consensus or agreement. What the Spectrum provides is a mirror that allows decision makers to understand the limitations and obligations of different forms of public participation. Perhaps more importantly, the conceptual framework of the Spectrum is specifically how we teach practitioners and decision makers how to accurately and explicitly describe to the public and other stakeholders what their role in the decision making process will be and how much influence their input will have on the decision makers. Time and again, we have found that by using the Spectrum, decision makers have been able to create realistic expectations with the public about their level of impact on the decisions and make promises regarding the public’s influence that they actually can keep. By so doing, we have seen many, many governmental entities begin to restore trust with their publics by delivering the public participation impact they have described and committed to, not by promising to collaborate on every decision they face.

Fourthly, as a teaching, training and planning tool, decision makers and the people they employ to implement public participation processes consistently tell us that the Spectrum is the most useful concept they have ever found for helping them design public participation processes. Oftentimes they found themselves in situations where there was a big disconnect between their expectations and the participation expectations of the public, but they could never put their finger on the source or solution of the problem. Now they use the Spectrum to have the kind of internal

discussions they need to have before engaging the public, so that they can align their resources, their time constraints and their discretionary authority with the significance of the decision. While this alignment process has to take into a variety of factors, including the expectations of the public, we always tell them: it is far better to commit to consultation and deliver on the promise of consultation, than to implicitly or explicitly offer collaboration and then fail to deliver (for whatever reasons might impede a decision maker's ability to do so). When you look at the Spectrum, you have to look at all of the rows in the chart; to ignore the "Promise" aspect is to miss out on one of the fundamental values of the Spectrum: getting government to evaluate its commitments and ensuring that they keep their public participation promises.

Lastly, no one has ever claimed that "Inform" is a robust form of public participation. It is, as Lyn has pointed out, at the far left of the Spectrum, and it is clear from the "Promise" row that all it promises is to keep people informed. As it is taught in IAP2 training courses, we point out that while "Inform" is not by itself participation, it is such a fundamental foundation of most public participation processes that we wanted to acknowledge its role (providing the information that people need to participate in a public participation process is, for example, one of the seven IAP2 Core Values). We also use it to point out that when there is no ability for the public to impact a decision (which can occur for a variety of reasons, including the decision has already been made, the decision maker believes it has all of the input and information it needs, the law requires a certain decision, or the decision is urgently needed and there is not enough time to consult the public meaningfully), that they ought to call what they are doing "public information" and avoid using the terms public participation or public involvement. On this point, I essentially agree with Larry; I just think he has not had the opportunity to see how having "Inform" on the Spectrum is so useful for making these points when teaching. If it causes misunderstanding or apprehension in non-teaching situations, we have discussed the possibility of adding a thicker "line" between "Inform" and "Consult," but perhaps there also needs to be some text or footnote to make this clearer.

In closing, there is a prodigious amount of empirical evidence from actual practice and use, that the Spectrum is a useful tool for helping describe existing processes and teaching decision makers how to avoid creating the kind of unmet expectations that inevitably lead to public cynicism about participation processes. If one wants to argue that only one form of public participation is legitimate, i.e., stakeholder collaboration conducted by a neutral third party

leading to consensus, then one is certainly free to make that case. However, as someone who has spent most of the last two decades facilitating such processes, I am not prepared to pass that judgement. Further, I believe that taking that approach impoverishes the range of tools that government needs to engage their publics, and ignores that decisions come in all shapes and sizes. Some decisions demand collaboration, and it would be almost inconceivable how you would arrive at a wise, just decision without it. Other decisions of government do not rise to that level of public participation. Thus the need for the Spectrum.

John Godec:

Relative to Larry Susskind's comments I'll let my colleagues weigh in, but I do take exception to Larry Susskind's take on the Spectrum. Perhaps it's never been explained to him adequately but I can tell you that after years of use and in training the material, it is the most useful tool that IAP2 has produced to date.

We have grappled for years with including the Inform level but it remains for its importance to the process and the other levels and puts 'participation' in context. It is always explained as not involvement in and of itself, but critical to authentic participation. And his take on the Empower level is simply wrong; voting and the referendum process - now well overused in the US - are two obvious examples. Understood in context the Spectrum is very valuable and now well established. In the only call in which I participated with the Ad Hoc working group so far (that did not include Larry Susskind) there was significant discussion of the Spectrum and how this group wants to adapt it to their own use. Interestingly, the other AD HOC WG members on the call were very complimentary about the Spectrum concept. I recall several of us having this same Spectrum discussion with Larry Susskind in his two-day 'class' in Scottsdale last fall. He seems to be stuck on his position but I think he's ignoring the facts and the context.

Anne Carroll:

As background, much of my work as a consultant, trainer, and faculty member revolves around authentic and ethical P2 process design; I'm also in my third, 4-yr term as a local elected official serving 287,000 constituents. Similarly to Lewis and others, I don't use the Spectrum to lecture about what should be but whether to talk about what is. The work illustrated (however imperfectly) in the Inform column of the Spectrum plays two critical roles: it helps participants

get up to speed prior to being able to authentically participate, and reflects the reality of important *parts* of every legitimate process – the most obvious example being at various summary or closure stages when a stakeholder team “reports back” to the larger stakeholder group the work to date.

I also put on both my consultant and elected official hat and beg to differ with the notion that we don’t turn over certain decisions to stakeholders as characterized in the Empower column. As Carson notes at one point, we’re certainly not talking about turning over statutory decisions to anyone nor claiming that entire processes could be characterized this way. But in fact we can and do regularly share and in many cases turn over major decisions to lots of groups, in most cases because they are in better positions to make decisions than we are. Of course these include staff (who I’m not claiming are stakeholders in the same sense we’re discussing here), but also (in my case) to groups such as school site-based decision-making councils composed of parents/guardians, school staff, community representatives, older students, community-based groups and committees, student or family-based committees, and others, depending on the situation.

I will also dispute the cynical view of politics as simply partisan politicking limited by blind adherence to narrow party platforms, thus supposedly rendering moot both the representative nature of our electoral process and the value/use of information gained through polls or input from a random selection of stakeholders. Those of us in local elected offices are often officially non-partisan (meaning there is no party designation on the ballot) and we don’t run based on a particular agenda or platform. Yes, of course there are major issues that define the relevance and legitimacy of local offices, but the majority of people who vote in local elections at least in the Midwestern US focus on the candidates’ basic approaches to the responsibilities and priorities of the office, commitment to represent constituent values and priorities, positions on key issues of importance to the community, trust, ethics, past performance, etc. That means I hear from all kinds of people a lot (trust me!) but of course also make a point both individually and as part of the organization to create many, many ways for stakeholders to have legitimate roles in decision making. Of course it’s not perfect, but it’s far from a sham.

There’s also been considerable discussion around right and wrong ways of doing things. I couldn’t agree more that not only do we make mistakes ourselves but we often have to help participants recover from or mop up after really bad P2 work that preceded us. On the other

hand, there are many, many “right” ways of doing P2 – taking me back to my commitment to really robust design. I believe that each overall process as well as the implementation work within that process should be customized to the unique situation and needs. One of my concerns in reading through some of these commentaries was the regular focus on X approach, method, or technique. I find that very problematic. Unlike what Susskind posited early on, I would argue that it’s not a matter of whether you or I favour a particular form of consultation that doesn’t guarantee “true collaboration.” No design or technique is right in every situation, every time (ditto for all of us as both my children and my clients routinely remind me!). So while Susskind’s highly collaborative model may be just perfect in some situations, just as a random sampling approach may be, the choice depends on the situation, and the process design and technique selection thus must be context sensitive. The Susskind model is unworkable, for example, when most of the stakeholders are illiterate or non/preliterate, are spread out over enormous geographic distances, speak many languages, where people don’t have abundant resources of time or money, where the challenge isn’t about topics that information and study are best suited to help – or most importantly where such a process is not suited to the cultural or community norms or mores. Any of the other approaches as well as particular techniques suffer similarly when one attempts to apply them to all situations – at least if you define success relative to the satisfaction of key stakeholders.

So I will end with what others may perceive as a naïve: I believe that good P2 is fundamentally about ethics. The ethics of authentic design and implementation – working sincerely with stakeholders to design a process that honors and demonstrates our commitment to the Core Values, P2 Code of Ethics, and the promises that we are collectively making to stakeholders. And implementing, evaluating in real time, and continually evolving the work...jointly making choices and changes to ensure that the process, techniques, and outcomes are successful from the stakeholders’ perspective *and* meet the highest ethical standards.

Lyn Carson:

This has been an interesting exchange, or multilogue. Thanks to all for the reminder about the uniqueness of each P2 situation and the intention that the Spectrum be an explanatory and descriptive device, to be read in combination with the Core Values and Code of Ethics. I hear lots of defence of the Spectrum for training purposes as well as a tool to provide a shared

language. I was interested in the suggestion about adding a thicker line between Inform and Consult and some text or a footnote to make the distinction between passive and active P2 clearer.

Let me give the final word to Larry.

Larry Susskind:

Lyn: Many thanks for initiating this conversation. And, I appreciate the comments of your IAP2 colleagues who are firmly committed to the IAP2 Spectrum as it stands. The Ad Hoc Working Group (mentioned by John Godec) has, over the past two years, brought together the broadest array of public engagement and public dispute resolution groups, organizations and associations ever assembled in the United States. The Group has produced an alternative to the IAP2 Spectrum, called the New Spectrum (see Appendix). It highlights the processes, methods and outcomes public engagement specialists can recommend, ranging from Explore/Inform, to Consult, Advise, Decide, and Implement. We call this a *Spectrum of Processes for Collaboration and Consensus Building*. We don't feel that the phrase public participation adequately portrays what most of us are seeking when we help to engage the public in efforts to promote deliberative democracy. The new Spectrum emphasizes when and why each approach makes the most sense (and what it can be counted on to achieve).

My own interest is in situations in which public officials seek to engage all relevant stakeholding groups in making decisions that affect their lives (i.e. Advise, Decide, Implement). I understand that there are many circumstances when Explore/Inform and Consult are most appropriate to what public officials are seeking, and that these processes work best when the focus is on individuals (sometimes randomly drawn) rather than representatives of stakeholder groups. But, as professionals who help to design and manage public engagement processes, I think we should distinguish between (and sometimes advocate) methods of collaboration and consensus building that will produce the fairest, most efficient, most stable and wisest outcomes in a given situation. Such advocacy (and our professional identity!) ought to rest on more than a descriptive frame (i.e., the IAP2 Spectrum) that merely describes what's been done in the past. Rather, we need to be able to explain *why* we suggest a particular form of engagement in each situation. And, our recommendations ought to be based on evidence and scholarship that demonstrate the connections between the processes we recommend and the outcomes we believe

are most desirable and appropriate. Finally, we should give reasons to justify the outcomes we think are most appropriate when we advocate a particular collaborative or consensus building process. From my standpoint, we are in the business of “deepening” the commitment to deliberative democracy in whatever countries we are working.