

HEALTHIER DEMOCRACIES

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Lessons from Public Engagement Efforts Around the World





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INTRODUCTION

by *Melisa Ross and Azucena Morán*

Local and state governments face challenges of unresponsiveness, mistrust, polarization, inequality and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, all of which are placing increased [pressure on democratic systems](#) around the world. The United States is no exception. Even before the pandemic, Americans were looking for change: The first Public Agenda [Yankelovich Democracy Monitor](#) report found that Americans respond enthusiastically to new democratic practices and reforms, especially ones that give citizens a greater voice in the decisions that affect their lives and that promise to establish more equitable, deliberative and collaborative relationships between citizens and governments.

Participatory and deliberative processes offer governments opportunities to increase the legitimacy of public governance by including communities in policy- and decision-making. Innovative forms of citizen engagement have pioneered the way we think about transforming our democracies. Civic engagement has been proven to increase trust in and satisfaction with government, as well as to improve the quality of policy through citizen input, including input that comes via nontraditional political channels.

Deliberative spaces such as citizen assemblies or deliberative polls (in which citizens chosen by lottery respond to pressing societal and environmental issues) are among the most popular engagement tools nowadays. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, over [500 deliberative processes](#) have taken place over the past 20 years, mainly in the Western world. Some processes are even starting to

become permanent parts of their democratic systems, as with citizens assemblies in Ostbelgien (East Belgium) and Paris or the National Public Policy Conferences and Citizen Councils in Brazil. But other forms of engagement are growing as well: According to [LATINNO](#), over 2,500 government-led institutions and mechanisms for citizen participation have been created in Latin America alone since the 1990s.

The **Healthier Democracies Project** was born out of an interest to understand what (and how) forms of government-led participation, deliberation and engagement have a positive impact on the health of communities and democracies worldwide. This project, supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, explores what the U.S. can learn from progress being made around the globe to map new pathways to equitable, deliberative, and collaborative relationships between governments and the communities they serve to ensure everyone has a seat at the table.

Healthier Democracies seeks to find **actionable ideas to inspire public officials** at the local and regional levels in the United States. We researched 15 international examples of systemic and sustained engagement efforts that give people meaningful say in their local and state government decision-making processes. Using a multiple-case study format, we focus on **government systems for engagement** rather than single processes or institutions. Cases were selected to represent a variety of approaches and institutional designs and to reflect government-led efforts to improve equality.

We approached public officials, researchers and practitioners to ask: How does each government create opportunities for shared decision-making? Which structures are put in place and what methods are deployed to achieve success? How are each government's commitment to participation and accessibility translated into action? How does the government share information and support community-building? What impact do these initiatives have on communities?

Building on those initial questions, we drew lessons, inspiration and insights from the innovative and complex experiences of our case study territories and communities in order to envision new pathways for public and elected officials to create healthier democratic environments. The cases go well beyond outdated engagement efforts in which governments merely inform or consult the public about governmental decisions. Curiously, they do not share many similarities when it comes to process

design, but they do offer myriad creative responses to similar challenges, such as the capacity of governments to connect systems of engagement to the larger ecosystems of participation and citizen mobilization. We believe that the experimentation and critical takes developed in response to these unique challenges have the potential to change the future of collaborative governance.

Support for this research was provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has been a collaborative effort from beginning to end. It was conceived and implemented entirely during the COVID-19 global pandemic and a time of transition for Public Agenda. We owe a debt of gratitude to the many individuals and organizations who took part in shaping the research agenda, offering time and wisdom via interviews, managing the project, conducting the research and supporting the work administratively and financially.

The stories of each of these initiatives and government systems would not have been complete without participant perspectives. Individuals interviewed for specific case studies are cited in the case study bibliographies and the full list of interviewees appears below.

With case studies spanning the globe, translation assistance was needed for our Gdańsk and Seoul research and interviews. The services of **Eugenia Scanferla** and **Juneseo Hwang** were of immense support in ensuring accurate representation.

The Advisory Board for this project (listed below) was invaluable in providing guidance and feedback as the project progressed. Drawn from a wide range of engagement in U.S. public life, their wisdom was instrumental in guiding and shaping the work of the research team.

The research team for this project was led by **Sara Clarke-De Reza** and included **Azucena Morán**, **Melisa Ross**, **Erin McNally** and **Mikayla Townsend**. The project was initiated by **Matt Leighninger** and led by **Quixada Moore-Vissing** during their tenures at Public Agenda. **David Schleifer** was the Principal Investigator for the final stages. Final project management was completed by **Parisa Parsa**. During the summer of 2021, **Mason Arbogast** and **Lance Rossi** supported the project with research and interviews.

Final production could not have been completed without the fantastic support of fact checker **Thayer McClanahan**, copy editor **Teri Duerr** and designer **Chris Walton**.

Experts Interviewed

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

Kimbra White, Director, MosaicLab
Cathy Oke, former Deputy Chair of Future Melbourne Environment Committee, City of Melbourne
Lyndal Mackintosh, former Community Engagement Advisor, City of Melbourne
Glyn Davis, Distinguished Professor of Political Science; and Chief Executive Officer of The Paul Ramsay Foundation
Amanda Stone, Nicholls Ward Councilor, Yarra City Council
Georgie Meyer, Leader Community Engagement and Partnerships, City of Melbourne

RIO GRANDE DO SUL, BRAZIL

Tarson Nuñez, Associate Researcher of Political Science, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul
Rafael Sampaio, Professor of Political Science, Federal University of Paraná
Lucas Carvalho, public servant, Secretary of Finance, Rio Grande do Sul
Marie Anne Macadar, Associate Professor of International Affairs, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro
Bruna Blos, Director of the Department of Regional Articulation and Participation, Rio Grande do Sul

CALI, COLOMBIA

Mauricio Garcia, former Deputy Director, Cities of Service
Juan Carlos Tenorio, former Coordinator of the Mobilization and Community Initiatives Team, Santiago de Cali

TAMPERE, FINLAND

Sanna Tuurnas, Associate Professor of Public Management, University of Vaasa

BERLIN, GERMANY

Carolin Klingsporn, Board Member, Liquid Democracy e.V.
Daniel Kämpfe-Fehrle, Advisor for E-Participation, Online Citizen Engagement, Berlin Senate Chancellery
Daniel Oppold, Research Associate, Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies Potsdam
Dirk von Schneidemesser, Research Associate, Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies Potsdam
Karolin Kabelitz and Jasmina McKenna, support team for the Participation Advisory Board, Senate Department for Urban Development, Building and Housing
Helene Anders and Ina Juckel, spokespersons for the Participation Advisory Board, Berlin Senate Department for Urban Development, Building and Housing
Lukas Born and Nils Jonas, Central Contact Point for participation, Berlin Senate Department for Urban Development, Building and Housing
Hanna Buntz, contact person, Citizen Participation Office Berlin-Mitte, LIST GmbH
Patrick Rein, Office for Dialogue and Participation, Citizens Council of Tempelhof-Schöneberg

KERALA, INDIA

Jos Chathukulam, Director, Centre for Rural Management
Joy Elamon, Director General (DG), Kerala Institute of Local Administration
S. M. Vijayanand, Director, Institute of Management in Government
Sarada Muraleedharan, Additional Chief Secretary, Government of Kerala
Jagajeevan Neelakandapillai, Resource Person for the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI)
Matthew Block, academic researcher

BOLOGNA, ITALY

Chiara Sponza, Process Designer and Facilitator, Urban Innovation Foundation
Mauricio Garcia, former Deputy Director, Cities of Service
Michele d'Alena, Director of the Civic Imagination Office, Urban Innovation Foundation
Stefania Paolazzi, Project Manager, Urban Innovation Foundation

MEXICO CITY, MEXICO

Bernardo Rivera Muñozcano, former Coordinator for Open City, Laboratory for the City
Diego Emilio Cuesy Edgar, former Coordinator for Open City, Laboratory for the City
Gabriella Gómez-Mont, former Director, Laboratory for the City
Leticia Lozano, former Coordinator for Playful City, Laboratory for the City

AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND

Lena Henry, Director, Awhi Developments Ltd; Lecturer, School of Architecture and Planning, University of Auckland; and member of Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Hine–Te Maara a Hineamaru
Theresa Roigard, General Manager-Advisory and Performance, Independent Māori Statutory Board
Lou-Ann Ballantyne, Te Tiriti and Māori Responsiveness Hub Lead, Auckland Council

GDAŃSK, POLAND

Marcin Gerwin, specialist in deliberative democracy and sustainability
Sylwia Betlej, Acting Director, Office for District Councils and Cooperation with Residents, Gdańsk City Hall
Piotr Grzelak, Deputy Mayor, Gdańsk City Hall

WESTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA

Crystal West, Programme Manager, Development Action Group
Brian Adams, consultant, Development Action Group
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Pamela Tsolekile-De Wet, Researcher, University of Western Cape
Tyanai Masiya, Senior Lecturer, University of Pretoria

SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

Sunkyung Han, Co-founder and CEO, C. (Cdot)
Joohe Lee, Associate Professor, School of Public Administration, University of Nebraska, Omaha

MADRID, SPAIN

Juan López-Aranguren, Network and Delivery Manager, Democratic Society; and former Program Coordinator, Imagina Madrid
Marcos García, former Director, Medialab-Prado
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Sonia Royo, Professor of Public Sector Accounting, University of Zaragoza
Victoria Anderica Caffarena, Open Government Advisor, municipal group Más Madrid

KIRKLEES, ENGLAND, UNITED KINGDOM

Carl Whistlecraft, Head of Democracy and Place Based Working, Kirklees Council
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Andy Petrie, Group Chief Executive, Local Services 2 You
Alison Smith, Kirklees community member; and Berry Brow Carnival Treasurer
Patrycja Bartosińska, participant of the New Citizenship Project
Allison Lloyd, Research Ethics and Governance Manager, Manchester Metropolitan University; and participant of the New Citizenship Project

GLASGOW, SCOTLAND, UNITED KINGDOM

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Advisory Board Members

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Participatory and Deliberative Democracy Scholars and Experts Consulted

Fiona Anciano, Senior Lecturer, Department of Political Studies, University of the Western Cape
Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay, Director of Society for Participatory Research in Asia and PRIA International Academy
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