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What is This?

Direct Public Engagement in Local Government

Tina Nabatchi[1] and Lisa Blomgren Amsler[2]

Abstract

Public engagement is an umbrella term that encompasses numerous methods for bringing people together to address issues of public importance. In this article, we focus on direct public engagement in local government, exploring what we know and proposing areas where more research is needed. We first define direct public engagement and distinguish it from related concepts and terms. We then introduce a simple framework for exploring variations in direct public engagement at the local level. Next, we use this framework to examine the extant literature on why, how, and to what effect direct public engagement in local government is used. Finally, we identify gaps in the literature and propose a research agenda for the future.

Introduction

Public engagement is an umbrella term that encompasses numerous methods for bringing people together to address issues of public importance. Although concern about public engagement has waxed and waned, we are currently experiencing a revival, a resurgence of interest among scholars, public managers, elected officials, civic reformers, and others. The reasons for this renaissance are numerous, ranging from practical concerns about improving the production and delivery of public goods and services, building community, and generating support, agreement, and momentum for public actions to more philosophical concerns about remediating democratic and citizenship deficits, addressing complex governance problems, and taking advantage of transformations in the expectations and capacities of ordinary people. Buttressing these and other raisons d'être is the evolution of information, communication, and other technologies that have made large-scale public engagement more feasible and potentially more productive than ever before.

Despite increasing interest in and use of public engagement, our knowledge about the topic is fragmented and it is difficult to put together the pieces to fill the gaps and improve practice. Several issues make it challenging for conveners and sponsors to determine which direct public engagement processes work when, where, why, and how. First, public engagement is taking place around the world, at all levels of government, and across the public, private, and nonprofit

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or nongovernmental spheres. Second, the processes and designs of public engagement vary widely across many salient dimensions. Third, the breadth of variations means that scholars and practitioners conflate terms and use mismatched definitions, which results in confusion about the meaning of various concepts, generates unproductive debate between advocates and critics, and stymies the development of theory and best practice. Finally, there are relatively few comprehensive assessments of these practices and their consequences.[1] As a result, we do not have sufficient knowledge about how the context, structure, and design of public engagement in local government change or affect the practice of engagement by officials and professionals and the enactment and experience of engagement by members of the public.

To begin to overcome some of the barriers to our understanding about public engagement, it is necessary to narrow our scope and focus. In keeping with this special issue, this article concentrates on an important function for local government in the United States: direct public engagement (for an international survey of public engagement in local government, see Serafim, Piper, & Namisi, 2012). This focus is warranted for several interrelated reasons. The local level is the most permeable region of government; it is more proximate and accessible to individuals than state or federal government. Local policy issues are likely to be more immediate and comprehensible to individuals than state and federal policy. Likewise, local issues and decisions on matters such as land use, zoning, crime prevention, budgets, garbage collection and waste disposal, school governance, welcoming immigrant and minority communities, and upkeep of local parks and recreational areas, among many others, directly affect individual and community quality of life (Adams, 2007; Baker, Addams, & Davis, 2005; Barnes & Mann, 2010; Berry, Portney, & Thomson, 1993; Mansbridge, 1980). In these and other areas, the public is being engaged as citizens, customers, and partners in the work of government (Thomas, 2012, 2013). Finally, most direct public engagement and pioneering innovations in it happens at the local level.

This article focuses on the United States (as opposed to taking a global or comparative approach) because of its unique history with, and legal infrastructure for, direct public engagement. Local public meetings have been considered to be the primary schools of liberty and democracy since the nation's founding (de Tocqueville, 1945), and complex combinations of federal, state, and local laws, policies, regulations, and other legal orders have shaped direct public engagement since the advent of "home rule" (Barron, 2003). Elected officials, public managers, and civic leaders increasingly use direct public engagement to identify, prioritize, and solve pressing issues, and there is a growing push in American local government to move from temporary, one-off approaches to more stable, durable, and embedded forms of direct public engagement (e.g., Fung & Wright, 2003). This shifts the question from *should* the public be involved in governance (e.g., King & Stivers, 1998) to *how* and *how much* the public should be involved governance (e.g., King, 2011).

We seek to identify what we do and do not know about direct public engagement in American local government by reviewing, organizing, and synthesizing literature in a variety of fields, including public administration, public policy, political science, planning, law, and conflict resolution, among others. This review is distinct from others that broadly examine new governance processes (e.g., Bingham, Nabatchi, & O'Leary, 2005) or public participation (e.g., Roberts, 2008a), or that narrowly focus on a specific mode of engagement such as public deliberation or discursive participation (e.g., Delli Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004; Nabatchi, 2010; Nabatchi, Gastil, Weiksner, & Leighninger, 2012), stakeholder involvement (e.g., Bryson, Quick, Slotterback, & Crosby, 2013), or collaboration among organizations (e.g., Ansell & Gash, 2008). We only focus on direct public engagement in U.S. local government, and seek to contribute to theory and practice by examining how this unique context may shape its design and outcomes.

We first define direct public engagement, and distinguish it from related concepts and terms. We then introduce a framework for exploring the salient variations in direct public engagement processes, and examine the literature relevant to its component parts. Finally, we identify gaps

in the literature and propose a research agenda that centers on the contextual features of local government and the connections between design and outcomes to learn how we might improve both the professional practice of and the public's experience with direct engagement in communities.
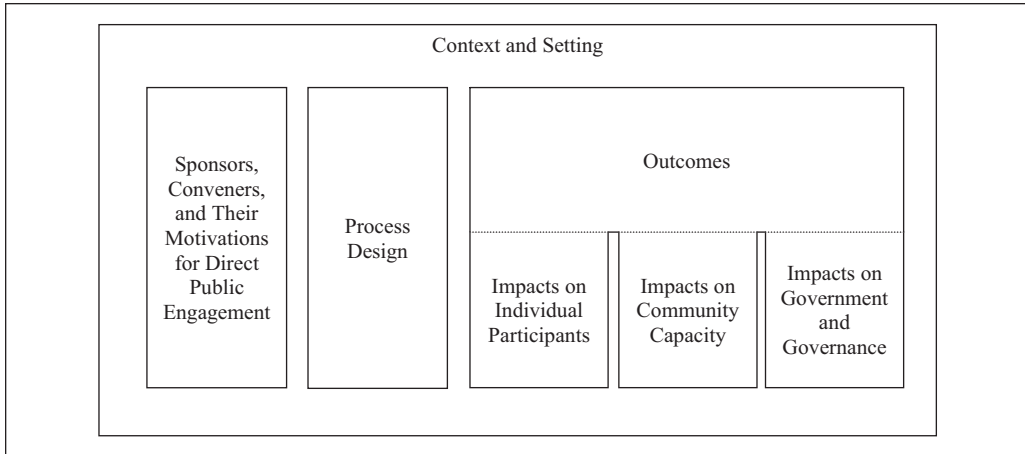
What Is Direct Public Engagement?

Because scholars and practitioners use a wide variety of related terms interchangeably, there is confusion about the definition of direct public engagement. There is a plethora of related terms and concepts, such as public engagement, citizen engagement, civic engagement, community engagement, public participation, citizen participation, resident participation, community participation, community involvement, stakeholder involvement, public deliberation, deliberative democracy, empowered participatory governance, democratic governance, collaborative governance, and collaborative policy making, among many others. There are meaningful differences among these terms, and research and practice would benefit from more terminological clarity and careful use.

For our purposes, most of these terms can be distinguished by the "who" and "how" of the process to which they refer. Some terms reference processes that engage the "public" (i.e., the broad and general populace), "citizens" (i.e., eligible voters), "residents" (i.e., inhabitants of a particular locale such as a housing subdivision or building), "community" (i.e., members of a particular neighborhood or area), or "stakeholders" (i.e., individuals who have a vested interest in an issue by virtue of their professional role or involvement in a formal group or organization). Moreover, some terms focus on "engagement" or "involvement" (which are general terms for assembling individuals to address an issue), "public participation" (which is a legal term of art), "collaboration" (which generally refers to organizations or a network addressing an issue), and "deliberation" or "deliberative" (which refers to a specific mode of communication during engagement).

We focus on *direct public engagement* in local government. The word *direct* refers to situations where individuals are personally and actively engaged in a process, as opposed to situations where individuals are "indirectly" engaged through representatives, agents, or other intermediaries. The phrase *public engagement* refers to a variety of in-person and online methods for bringing people together to address issues of public importance. Public engagement is more specific than "civic engagement," which generally refers to the public's role in civil society (Bingham, 2010), and "stakeholder engagement," which does not necessarily involve members of the lay public. Public engagement is also distinct from, but includes, "public participation," which is a legal term of art that while generally not expressly defined in laws, includes notice and an opportunity to comment in advance of government action (Bingham, 2010). Finally, "local government" refers to our focus arena, and includes legislative, administrative, and other government decision-making organs in a county, city, town, village, or other municipal authority.

Putting these elements together, we define direct public engagement in local government as in-person and online processes that allow members of the public (i.e., those not holding office or administrative positions in government) in a county, city, town, village, or municipal authority to personally and actively exercise voice such that their ideas, concerns, needs, interests, and values are incorporated into governmental decision making (for related definitions, see Nabatchi, 2012b; Roberts, 2008b).[2] More specifically, we focus on quasi-legislative and upstream participatory processes, by which we mean processes used to create, shape, and implement policy (Bingham et al., 2005). We also limit our discussion to processes open to the general public or a random or representative sample of it; thus, we use the word "citizen" in a specific sense (to reference eligible voters) and "public" in a broader sense (to reference the general populace, which includes citizens and other people). We exclude the larger category of new governance processes such as

Figure 1. Framework for understanding differences in local direct public engagement.

negotiation, collaborative public management, and dispute resolution with specific stakeholders or networks (see Ansell & Gash, 2008; Bingham, 2009; Bingham et al., 2005; Bingham & O'Leary, 2008; Bryson et al., 2013; O'Leary & Bingham, 2009), as well as traditional political acts such as voting, working with interest and advocacy groups, and engaging in protest and social movements.

Examples within this narrower definition include,

- Traditional activities like public meetings or hearings, such as those held by a school board, zoning commission, city council, or other legislative or administrative body;
- Newer forms of deliberative activities, where participants simultaneously engage in dialogue about an issue, such as those involving participatory budgeting or community policing;
- Remote data collection activities, such as mail or web-based surveys about community needs or problems or about satisfaction with a public service; and
- Activities conducted online or through mobile phone applications, such as wikiplanning, SeeClickFix, and many others.

To better analyze direct public engagement, we need to identify its key variables.

What Are the Key Variables in Local Direct Public Engagement?

Direct public engagement varies in where, when, why, how, and to what effect local government uses it. To better understand these differences, we developed a simplified framework of categories, displayed in Figure 1, that identifies key variables including context and setting; conveners, sponsors, and their motivations; process design; and outcomes. These categories include important variables in direct public engagement that we believe researchers need to clarify and explore (cf. Bryson et al., 2013; Hoppe, 2011). We developed these categories by reviewing extant frameworks and research (e.g., Arnstein, 1969; Bingham et al., 2005; Bryson et al., 2013; Carcasson, 2009; Creighton, 2005; Delli Carpini et al., 2004; Fung, 2003, 2006; Hoppe, 2011; International Association for Public Participation [IAP2], 2007; Nabatchi, 2010, 2012a, 2012c; National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation [NCDD], 2008; Thomas, 1995, 2012, 2013), and using our own professional experiences. This framework is *not* intended to convey relationships and directions among the categories, but instead to provide a simplified and parsimonious

structure for exploring the extant research about direct public engagement in local government. We break down this framework and examine its component parts in the following sections.

Context and Setting

Context and setting can include the legal framework for public participation in government, scale or size of the municipality, political system, political culture, and civic assets.

The legal framework shapes the nature of voice in governmental affairs; it affects where, when, why, how, and by whom there is direct public engagement (Working Group on Legal Frameworks for Public Participation, 2013). It is often an omitted variable in research on public engagement. The legal framework has evolved at the federal, state, and local levels during the long history (dating back to the Progressive era) of schemes to promote local public engagement, including the Community Centers Movement, the City Beautiful Movement, and the urban renewal and slum eradication movements. This history may form part of the context and setting and serve as a source for current efforts (for brief reviews of this history, see Day, 1997; McComas, 2003b; Roberts, 2008b).

The current legal framework for public engagement in local government must be viewed within the historic context for home rule. As Barron (2003) explains, early 19th century courts viewed municipalities as creatures of the state, and enforced a public/private distinction to limit the scope of municipal action. Local power was privatized; the municipality coordinated wealthy private actors who both sought and then paid for public improvements like streets through special assessments, or property owners who paid for police protection through private deputies or fire protection through volunteers and contributions. This view was reinforced by Dillon's Rule, which conceived of municipalities not as governments, but instead as corporate creatures of the state with limited power to administer local affairs and make economic expenditures. Municipalities had powers explicitly delegated through legislation, and implicitly delegated by the state's act of incorporation. Beyond these delegated powers, municipalities were powerless to act. We may in some respects see the expansion of private gated communities as an echo of this era.

In the late 19th century, urban reformers began to promote what became known as "home rule" efforts, which attempted to strengthen municipalities by creating a zone of action insulated from state legislative interference, and possibly corruption, through special acts directed at a particular city. Barron (2003) identifies three early conceptions of home rule: the Old Conservative, Administrative, and Social. The Old Conservative vision sought home rule charters over traditional matters of local concern to limit taxation and maintain municipal autonomy as an impartial and neutral coordinator of private markets. The Administrative view was an effort to protect a municipality from state legislative interference by entrusting local powers to professional, impartial, and expert administrators (see also Goodnow, 1895). The Social conception sought broad public cooperation on an expanded scope of important municipal action that included providing public services that had heretofore been private, such as transportation and utilities.

While Barron (2003) does not directly address the question of public engagement in local governance, these home rule conceptions implicitly reflect a changing view of who had standing to participate. In the Old Conservative view, business actors and property owners were the express beneficiaries of government, and hence the legitimate participants in decision making. In the Administrative view, objective, professional public administrators were important participants, because they brought scientific and technical expertise to solving practical problems. The reformist Social view, known as "the public point of view," recognized the political nature of municipal decisions and the role of the public in making those decisions (p. 2310). Over time, changing views about the nature of engagement echoed these changing views of standing (Nabatchi, 2010, 2012c; Stewart, 1976).

Public engagement in U.S. local government dates back to New England town hall meetings. However, contemporary public participation mandated by law stems from the birth of large-scale administrative apparatus at the federal and state levels, a comprehensive review of which is outside the scope of this article (for an overview of law, see Working Group on Legal Frameworks for Public Participation, 2013). At the federal level, the work of New Deal administrative agencies prompted the passage of the federal Administrative Procedure Act (APA), which created a form of public participation by requiring opportunities for notice and comment in rulemaking (for analysis of federal law, see Bingham, 2010; for a brief history of laws that affect public engagement, see Beierle & Cayford, 2002; Day, 1997; Roberts, 2008b). Among the Great Society programs, the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act mandated "maximum feasible participation" among the poor in community action programs; this led to substantial controversy and ultimately the repeal of the language (Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, 1979; Moynihan, 1969). Several other federal laws, executive orders, and agency regulations, guidance, and policy memos also require public participation in numerous policy areas such as planning, housing, transportation, education, and the environment, among others, (for a planning example, see the California Department of Transportation, http://www.dot.ca.gov/ser/vol1/sec1/ch3public/chap3.htm). More recently, the Obama Open Government Initiative requires all federal agencies to be more participatory and provides some limited impetus for innovations in deliberative public participation as a contrast to typical public meetings and town halls (Bingham, 2010). It also serves as a model for similar state initiatives.

Public participation at the state and/or local level is addressed in states' general legislation on administrative procedure (see Commissioners on Uniform State Laws, Model State APAs dating from 1961, 1980, and 2010), freedom of information and public records, and public meetings in the sunshine. These laws on public participation vary widely, and preliminary research reveals that, similar to federal law, the phrase "public participation" is rarely defined. Home rule acts, whether they take the form of a constitutional amendment or state statute, are generally silent on the issue. Instead, specific mandates for public participation at the state and/or local level appear in laws on land use and planning, transportation, elections, budgeting, education, environmental policy, and many other policy areas.

These and other laws create a problematic legal infrastructure for public engagement (Bingham, 2010). While the authority to conduct public participation is clear, government officials have reason to shun more innovative forms of participation in favor of compliance with explicit minimal standards. Government lawyers raise concerns about the legal authority of their clients to move beyond the minima (Bingham, 2010). Provisions in sunshine laws that require advance notice and confine public meetings to topics on a specific agenda may limit the capacity of elected officials to respond to public comment outside the scope of the agenda (for a review of state sunshine laws, see Piotrowski & Borry, 2010). Monitoring to keep public officials within the agenda requires staff resources. Thus, municipal authorities are prompted to do the minimum required public comment approach using the standard "three-minutes-at-the-microphone" tactic rather than more inventive deliberative approaches where many people engage in dialogue simultaneously. There are current practitioner efforts to modify state and local legal frameworks through model state statutes, ordinances, and policies (see Working Group on Legal Frameworks for Public Participation, 2013).

In addition to legal frameworks, research suggests that several other elements of the context and setting influence local government public engagement, including the scale or size of the municipality, political system, political culture, and the presence (or absence) of civic assets. First, those interested in democracy have long recognized that the scale, or size, of the political body matters for participation. Conventional wisdom suggests that smaller cities and towns offer the best conditions for public engagement and participation; however, empirical research on this issue is limited (for research on European cities, see Martins, 1995; Mouritzen, Rose, & Denters,

2009). Moreover, advancements in information and communication technologies may render the issue of scale in local (as well as in state, national, and perhaps even international) public engagement less important. Technologies, including digital and mobile, now enable the concurrent or remote engagement of large populations.

Another relevant factor is the political system of the locality, which varies state by state and with local charters. This includes distribution of power or "the gross dispersion of influence or control among members of the community"; political dispositions and style, or "the broad background of attitudes influencing the goals participants decide to pursue, and how they go about realizing them"; and output, or "the consequence of the interplay of these powers, attitudes, and interests" (Rabinovitz, 1970, p. 20). Inherent in the political system are other issues such as government control mechanisms, local policies, distribution of financial resources and responsibilities, funding processes, mechanisms for interorganizational collaboration, and organizational standard operating procedures (Feldman & Quick, 2009), among others.

Political culture also matters. In their study of five American cities where public engagement was successful, Berry, Portney, and Thomson (1993) find a clear pattern of present cultural factors: a strong motivation to make participation work, close attention to the design of the participatory system and its processes, use of a "sophisticated political balance" void of partisan politics, and reaching a high level of participation before there were financial or political reversals. These findings are reinforced by more recent research suggesting that public engagement is used more frequently and successfully when conveners have political authority and are willing to consider results and share authority with the public in decision making; the community has the capacity, resources, and expertise to convene engagement and mobilize people to participate; and the public demands democracy and presses for engagement even when it is uncomfortable or inconvenient for local elites and authorities (Fagotto & Fung, 2009). Several issues affect political culture, including professional expertise, officials' attitudes toward the public, the public's attitudes toward government, and community composition (including group identities and conflicts), among others.

Finally, research suggests that the presence and strength of "civic assets" influence the use of direct public engagement. "A civic asset could be any kind of resource—a building, an organization, a program—that connects citizens to one another, and to their public institutions, in ways that inspire and support collaboration, deliberation, and shared responsibility" (Leighninger & Mann, 2011, p. 3). There are numerous potential civic assets, such as city-wide public engagement commissions, wired, welcoming physical spaces, minigrant programs, and neighborhood councils. Communities may cultivate civic assets, including schools, business communities, faith communities, nonprofit organizations, hospitals, libraries, community foundations, youth groups, community centers, groups promoting racial equity, immigrant service organizations, civic groups, service clubs, neighborhood groups, colleges and universities, newspapers, radio and public access television, online media, community organizing groups, police and fire departments, and other groups, associations, and organizations.

Sponsors, Conveners, and Their Motivations for Direct Public Engagement

Thousands of direct public engagement processes are conducted across the United States each year, the majority of which occur at the local level in counties, cities, towns, villages, and municipal authorities. These processes can have a variety of sponsors (i.e., those who fund all or part of a direct engagement process) and conveners (i.e., those who plan and lead a direct engagement process), all of whom come from a wide range of professional and academic backgrounds (Carcasson, 2008; Lee & Polletta, 2009). Typical sponsors of local direct public engagement include mayors, city council members, city managers, planners, administrative officials, community foundations, nonprofit organizations, interfaith groups, community organizers, school

superintendents and school boards, police chiefs, librarians, neighborhood associations, and colleges and universities, among others (Leighninger, 2012). Sometimes, a sponsor will also serve as a convener. This is particularly true for traditional direct public engagement processes, such as when a government body conducts a public meeting, or the local League of Women Voters sponsors a forum. However, when sponsors want to use a more innovative or complex format, such as a deliberative process, they often contract with an expert convener, such as a solo practitioner, a consultant in a nonprofit or for-profit organization, or even a scholar (see Leighninger, 2012, for a list of organizations that convene deliberative civic engagement processes).

As with the diversity of sponsors and conveners, there is a diversity of motivations for using direct public engagement (Amsler, 2007; Leighninger, 2012). Perhaps the simplest and most laudatory explanation of why sponsors use direct engagement is that they seek to generate change in government, policy, or their community, with some working from the bottom up and others working from the top down (Leighninger, 2006, 2012). It may be more precise, however, to say that while most conveners see normative or intrinsic value in direct public engagement (and do it as part of their professional work), sponsors use such processes instrumentally—to generate support on an issue, make decisions, get closure, and otherwise get work done.

Sponsors' motivations often vary depending on whether they represent a governmental or nongovernmental organization (NGO). Sometimes, government officials sponsor engagement because they believe it can promote citizenship and have "positive benefits to the substance, transparency, legitimacy, and fairness of policy development as well as the general view of government held by citizens" (Lukensmeyer & Torres, 2006, p. 5). More often, however, government officials use engagement as a reaction to an immediate political peril, to seize the opportunity of a policy window, or because of other concerns or frustrations with the policy making process. For example, government officials may use engagement to help break deadlocked decision-making bodies or to generate some political (and public) will for making unpopular policy decisions on difficult issues such as school redistricting and closings, land use, highways, shopping malls, and other projects. Decisions about city budgets, including raising revenues and cutting services have prompted local governments in Philadelphia, Chicago, New York, and several other cities and towns across the nation to use various participatory budgeting exercises (e.g., Marois & Amsler, 2008). Finally, government officials' rationales sometimes include quelling voter backlash. In Los Angeles, when the San Fernando Valley attempted to secede from the rest of the city, citing concerns about representativeness and equity raised by the city council's decision to move from a ward-based system to at-large voting, the city council created a system of neighborhood councils and a Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (Cooper & Kathi, 2005; Musso, Weare, Bryer, & Cooper, 2011).

In many cases, public engagement is not sponsored by government officials, but rather by actors from civil society. For example, a nonprofit, advocacy, or nongovernmental organization may sponsor direct public engagement to help them pursue policy goals, or a philanthropic organization may sponsor direct public engagement as part of its funding strategy. In these cases, the motivations for using public engagement typically involve the desire to pursue policy and structural changes or to influence and transform the larger political process.

> Instead of continuing to push their agenda through lobbying, the media, or other established avenues within the political arena, these advocates are essentially trying to change the arena by bringing a larger number and wider array of people into the debate. (Leighninger, 2012, p. 26)

Engagement projects initiated outside of government can be successful, particularly when they are able to generate a critical mass of voters (Fagotto & Fung, 2009; Leighninger, 2006, 2012). However, if the civil society organization does not work with and get the buy-in of governmental officials, it may have a hard time fostering change after the engagement process.

Finally, government officials and/or civic leaders may sponsor public engagement because a problem requires individual actions, behavioral changes, or small group efforts on a large scale. For example, a city can enact a recycling policy, but if people lack the knowledge or incentive to recycle, it will fail. Examples abound, including race and diversity issues (Walsh, 2007), crime and policing (Fung & Wright, 2003), and involvement of parents in their children's education (Friedman, Kadlec, & Birnback, 2007; Mathews, 1997).

Process Design

The process designs of direct public engagement also vary among salient choices, including general purpose and specific goals, participation mechanism and methodology, size and participant selection, participant recruitment, participant preparation, communication mode and plan, locus of action, connection to policy process and specificity of recommendations, and recurrence and iteration. Many of these design choices have been identified in other scholarship (e.g., Bingham et al., 2005; Bryson et al., 2013; Fung, 2003, 2006; Hoppe, 2011; Nabatchi, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). Design choices are not made in a linear fashion, but rather "through an iterative and integrative process" that considers other factors, such as timing or how quickly a decision needs to be made, mandates, laws, rules, and/or regulations, the surrounding system context, and organizational conditions (e.g., budget, human and other resources, available technologies, and logistical constraints), among other issues (Nabatchi, 2012c, p. 701).

General purpose and specific goals. Direct public engagement processes can be designed with many general purposes and specific goals in mind. The general purposes of direct public engagement have to do with the sponsor's broad intent, which may include exploration (e.g., encouraging people and groups to learn more about themselves, their community, or an issue, and possibly discover innovative solutions), conflict transformation (e.g., resolving conflicts, fostering healing and growth, and improving intergroup relations), decision making (e.g., influencing public decisions and public policy and improving public knowledge), or collaborative action (e.g., empowering people and groups to solve complicated problems and take responsibility for the solution) (NCDD, 2008).

Within these broad purposes, sponsors and conveners might seek a variety of specific goals. The specific goals of direct public engagement concern the expectations sponsors have for the kinds of "public knowledge" that will be generated during the process. The term *public knowledge* describes the understandings, ideas, or recommendations that are produced by the public and intended to inform and influence officials in their decision making (Amsler, 2007, p. 2). Typically, direct public engagement seeks to achieve one or more of the following specific goals: informing the public (e.g., letting the public know about issues, changes, resources, and policies), collecting data (e.g., gathering information from the public about their concerns, needs, values, opinions, and preferences), generating ideas (e.g., getting new suggestions and alternatives about an issue or its solutions), obtaining feedback (e.g., understanding the public's views of and preferences for an issue, policy, or proposed solution), or generating consensus (e.g., developing agreement around proposal or decision) (see Amsler, 2007; Mann & Barnes, 2010; Nabatchi, 2012b; Thomas, 1995, 2012, 2013).

Participation mechanism and methodology. Direct public engagement may involve in-person, remote, and/or online mechanisms. Until relatively recently, direct public engagement typically involved in-person, face-to-face group events (e.g., public meetings and hearings), and in some cases, mail or web-based "customer satisfaction" surveys and similar remote data collection protocols. However, the evolution of information and communication technologies has prompted growth in online public engagement, sometimes called Participation 2.0 (Nabatchi & Mergel,

2010; see, generally, Svara & Denhardt, 2010). Participation mechanisms among in-person and online processes can vary widely. For example, in-person processes may use a large group or small table format, and may or may not use one or more facilitators (Gastil & Levine, 2005). Online processes differ in terms of spatiotemporal distance (where and when participants interact with each other), communication medium (how interaction occurs), and procedure (what occurs among participants) (Davies & Chandler, 2012; see also Coleman & Shane, 2012). Finally, some participation mechanisms have official names and may even be trademarked, whereas others do not use named methodologies (Gastil & Levine, 2005).

Size and participant selection. The size of a process can range from a few participants to hundreds or thousands, and online processes could potentially involve millions. In part, size is a function of participant selection. Who the participants are and whom they represent are central issues in public engagement (cf. Bryson et al., 2013; Fung, 2003, 2006; Thomas, 1995, 2012). Most agree that getting the "right" people to the table is important; however, the level of inclusion and diversity perceived to be necessary depends on normative organizing principles and intended outcomes. In simplest terms, some processes are open to the public, while others involve only experts or professional or lay stakeholders (Fung, 2003, 2006). Processes that are open to the public may involve selected and/or self-selected and diffuse members of the public, depending on the recruitment strategy (see below). In both forms of participant selection, each person brings a set of individual attitudes, values, interests, and knowledge to the table.

Direct public engagement contrasts with expert or stakeholder processes (such as collaborative public or network management and conflict resolution) where the participants may represent themselves, a client, a constituency, a decision maker, a public agency, an NGO, a business or corporation, a community, or the public at large. As representatives of others, these experts and stakeholders bring the cultures, missions, and mandates of the organizations or constituents they represent to the table. In direct public engagement, experts and stakeholders may participate, but they serve simply as members of a much broader public.

Participant recruitment. Once sponsors decide who should participate, conveners need to begin recruitment. There are four primary participant recruitment strategies, which may be used alone or in combination: voluntary self-selection, random selection, targeted demographic recruitment, and incentives (Fung, 2003, 2006; Nabatchi, 2012c; Ryfe & Stalsburg, 2012). The most common strategy is voluntary self-selection, where individuals personally decide whether to attend; this is true of the traditional public hearing. While this approach is the easiest and least resource intensive, it can lead to "participation bias," where those who come care deeply about and have strong positions on the issue and/or are not sociodemographically representative of the community from which they come (Fung, 2003; Nabatchi, 2012c). To minimize participation bias, conveners can use random selection (i.e., picking participants by lot, Fishkin, 2009) or targeted recruitment (i.e., picking participants to mirror the demographic profile of the general population, Lukensmeyer & Brigham, 2002). Both of these strategies are more challenging and resource intensive. Finally, conveners can use "structural" or "material" incentives (e.g., per diems, honorarium, gift cards, transportation, meals, and child or elder care) that attempt to remove the immediate barriers to participation. Although conveners often aim incentives at "low-status and low-income citizens," incentives can also be used for other groups who have less reason, time, or motivation to participate (Fung, 2003, p. 342).

While recruitment is a design choice, how effective it is depends why individuals choose to participate (see Barnes, Newman, & Sullivan, 2003, 2007; Bryer, 2009; Lowndes, Pratchett, & Stoker, 2001; Neblo, Esterling, Kennedy, Lazer, & Sokhey, 2010). Several variables appear to be relevant, including sociodemographic factors such as education, economic status, race, gender, and family status; psychological factors such as a "need for cognition," personal and political self-confidence, openness toward conflict, and ideological intensity; and social factors such as

proximity to social networks, and levels of activism and voluntarism (Ryfe & Stalsburg, 2012). Finally, the stakes for participants, or their perceptions about the importance of the issue (Fung, 2003), are also likely to matter.

Participant preparation. Processes may or may not provide one or more types of training or informational materials to better prepare participants for engagement. Common informational materials include presentations, panel discussions, issue guides, discussion books, and available subject matter experts to answer technical questions or concerns (for examples of processes that use informational materials, see Gastil & Levine, 2005). Research suggests that the quality of their input improves when people have more and better information (Delli Carpini, 2000); however, informational materials must be of high quality and provide "sufficient context and history on the issues, be neutral and fair to all perspectives, leave room for citizens to create new options, and have credibility with all audiences" (Lukensmeyer & Brigham, 2002, p. 355).

Communication mode and plan. By communication mode, we mean the organization and style of the discussions that happen during the public engagement process. In general, public engagement processes may use one-way, two-way, and/or deliberative communication. One-way communication is the unidirectional flow of information from a sender to a receiver. Typically, the direction is from the administrator to citizens (e.g., through websites, social media, pamphlets, and similar mechanisms), though sometimes it may be from a citizen to an administrator (e.g., through "customer" or "client" surveys). Two-way communication is the bidirectional flow of information among individuals who act as both senders and receivers. This communication mode is found in traditional public meetings, hearings, and focus groups, as well in most online activities. Deliberative communication is structured and oriented toward problem solving (Gastil, 2008). Deliberation requires that a group of participants take part in an open and accessible process of discussion in which they

> reflect carefully on a matter, [weigh] the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions to a problem [and] aim to arrive at a decision or judgment based on not only facts and data but also values, emotions, and other less technical considerations. (Gastil, 2005, p. 164)

Deliberation also requires that all participants have an adequate opportunity to speak, listen attentively and consider carefully the contributions of other participants, and treat each other with respect (Gastil, 2008). There are many deliberative processes, such as the 21st Century Town Meeting, National Issues Forum, Deliberative Polling, and the Citizens Jury, among others (Gastil & Levine, 2005).

In addition to communication mode, conveners and sponsors sometimes have a communication plan or strategy to assist with the dissemination of information to the attendees and the broader community about the process, its results, and how and why public input is (or is not) being used in official decision making (Amsler & Speers, 2005; see also Public Agenda, 2008). The communication plan can also include strategies for reaching out to community and institutional "influencers" to help ensure support for the ensuing decisions (Amsler, 2007).

Locus of action. Local public engagement typically focuses on the neighborhood, community, or municipal level, and may occur before a local legislative body (e.g., city or county council), administrative body (e.g., Planning and Zoning Commission), or department (e.g., Parks and Recreation). However, sometimes local public engagement is conducted with intended actions or outcomes at the state, national, and even the international level. It may also be convened by a nongovernmental entity wishing to influence government or other community-related decision making or seeking actions and outcomes at the organizational or network level.

Connection to policy process and specificity of recommendations. Some processes are designed with explicit connections to policy and decision makers (at any of the loci listed above), while others have little or no connection to policy and decision makers, and instead seek to invoke individual or group action or change (Barrett, Wyman, & Coelho, 2012; Fung, 2003, 2006). Regardless of how closely linked to the policy process, public engagement may produce a variety of outcomes, ranging from an expression of preferences or priorities, to fairly generic proposals, to highly specific recommendations.

Recurrence and iteration. This design choice relates to how frequently a participatory process occurs, that is, whether it is a one-time event or a longer term, ongoing endeavor (Fung, 2003). More often than not, public engagement is a one-off experiment, "realized mainly as a temporary practice, a phenomenon experienced by citizens, public officials, and other leaders within the confines of a single issue over a short period of time" (Leighninger, 2012, p. 24). Local governments have rarely institutionalized (meaning made permanent through ordinance, resolution, or formal policy) new systems of more fully democratic participation at the local level. A few exceptions exist. For instance, some large (e.g., Los Angeles, California; Portland, Oregon; Minneapolis, Minnesota) and small (e.g., Dayton, Ohio; Grand Rapids, Michigan) cities have created and funded permanent structures, such as neighborhood councils or community boards, that have an official or semiofficial role in local decision making; however, these tend to be representative bodies, rather than democratic, empowered ones (Leighninger, 2006, 2012).

Many local governments are increasingly exploring ways to move from temporary to more stable, durable, and embedded forms of public engagement (e.g., Feldman & Quick, 2009; Fagotto & Fung, 2009; Fung & Wright, 2003; Quick & Feldman, 2009). In particular, advocates argue for embedding deliberative engagement in a community's political institutions and social practices, such that public decisions and collective actions are made through "processes that involve discussion, reasoning, and citizen participation rather than through the exercise of authority, expertise, status, political weight, or other such forms of power" (Fagotto & Fung, 2009, p. 1). The likelihood of embedding direct public engagement seems to rely on three important factors: political authority, deliberative capacity, and demand for democracy (Fagotto & Fung, 2009).

To assist these efforts, practitioners recommend that city leaders and officials develop and sustain a shared civic infrastructure of local groups, organizations, government institutions prepared to act on public input and to collaborate with residents. Moreover, they recommend, (a) creating democratic spaces for citizens (i.e., in neighborhoods, schools, online, and other settings that can provide physical hubs for engagement), (b) building engagement skills and capacity (e.g., through leadership, public information dissemination, engagement training, and tracking, measuring, and providing technical assistance), and (c) improving public decision making and problem solving (e.g., with official public meetings that are more participatory and effective, recurring deliberative processes on key issues and decisions, systems that encourage innovation by citizens, and cross-sector problem-solving teams) (Leighninger & Mann, 2011; see also Leighninger, 2009, 2012).

Outcomes

Theory suggests many benefits of direct public participation and engagement. At the individual level, advocates claim that participation and engagement inform the public about policy issues; foster and cultivate civic skills and dispositions such as political efficacy, trust in government, and public spiritedness; enable people to become more "other-regarding" by developing empathy and tolerance; and increase the likelihood that people will participate more in politics and in their communities (Mansbridge, 1995; Pateman, 1970; Pincock, 2012; Yankelovich, 1991). At the

community level, advocates claim that participation and engagement can help build capacity to understand and address social issues and problems by cultivating social capital, fostering leadership or individual and organizational commitment and ability to solve problems, and increasing access to resources (Kinney, 2012; Mathews, 1994; Yankelovich, 1991). At the institutional level, advocates claim that public participation and engagement can improve policy making and the quality of governance by lessening bounded rationality, increasing public justification for policy options, and fostering policy consensus, which in turn improves the justice of decisions, eases implementation, and increases the effectiveness of public action (Barrett et al., 2012; Elster, 1998; Fung, 2003, 2005).

In contrast, many scholars point to the potential drawbacks of public participation and engagement, citing possible harm to both the public and to government officials, policies, and governance (see Collingwood & Reedy, 2012; Day, 1997). On a practical note, some point to the transaction costs of such processes (e.g., time, lost wages, or child care and transportation costs) and assert that the public is generally disengaged and disinterested in politics (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002; Rydin & Pennington, 2000). Others suggest that participation and engagement can increase public frustration and perceived powerlessness (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002), lead to exclusion, tokenism, power inequalities, and cooptation by stronger social groups (Arnstein, 1969; Young, 2003), and foster risky decision making, group think, and polarization (Shapiro, 2002; Sunstein, 2002). Critics also point to the challenges for government officials, asserting that such processes further diminish scarce time, money, and other resources (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004), and reduce officials' ability to broker policy compromises and satisfy diverse demands (Sunstein, 2002).

One final, but important criticism comes from government officials themselves, namely, that such processes force them to interact with an uninformed, hostile, and disrespectful public (Nabatchi & Farrar, 2011). A study of California public managers concluded that "everyone involved . . . had personal experience with—or could relate to descriptions of—instances of the public-acting-badly and civic engagement gone-wrong. These experiences were personally painful and often degraded the quality of decision-making and policy implementation" (Pearce & Pearce, 2010, p. 19). These scary and scarring experiences with public participation and engagement bolster the critics' arguments and have contributed to an apparent decline in the general number of public processes held by government officials, and particularly town halls by Congressional Representatives (Chaddock, 2011).

Clearly, advocates and critics of participation do not see eye-to-eye. However, this is because they often use mismatched definitions and ignore salient variations in process design; in other words, critics are not examining the kinds of direct public engagement processes that advocates support (Nabatchi, 2012a). Until researchers conduct more nuanced analyses of how process design affects outcomes, we are left with findings that support both the advocates and critics' views. To begin making sense of the relationship between process designs and outcomes, we examine the impacts of direct public engagement within three large categories: traditional processes, in-person deliberative processes, and online processes. Although great design variation exists within these three categories, it is beyond our scope to do more finely distinguished analyses. For each category, we examine outcomes in terms of impacts on individual participants, community capacity, and government and governance.

Traditional public participation and engagement processes. By traditional public participation and engagement, we mean myriad processes that use one- or two-way communication and otherwise adhere to the narrow definitions and minimal standards provided under law. With the exception of surveys, social media, and similar remote tools, traditional public participation typically occurs in a face-to-face setting. These processes vary by mandate, formality, structure, flexibility, and many of the process design features discussed above, but all are usually open to the public.

Traditional processes are far and away the most common approach to direct public engagement at the local level. In a study of U.S. cities, Wang (2001) found that public hearings, community meetings, citizen advisory boards, and the Internet were the most commonly used engagement mechanisms, and that budgeting, planning and zoning, parks and recreation, and policing or public safety were the primary policy areas for public engagement. Likewise, other studies suggest that public meetings and hearings are the most common traditional approach to direct public engagement (Fiorino, 1990; McComas, 2001a, 2001b). For example, a survey of city managers and chief administrative officers found that more than 97% of cities use public meetings and hearings (Berman, 1997). At these meetings, "citizens are given a specified period of time (frequently two to three minutes) to state their opinions and are usually prohibited from engaging other citizens or officials in dialogue" (Adams, 2004, p. 43). Thus, communication "sometimes falls short of two-way symmetry" and devolves into "the one-way dissemination of information to publics" and "responding to questions rather than initiating dialogue" (McComas, 2003a, pp. 166-67; see also Middendorf & Busch, 1997). Public meetings and hearings are also criticized for having "adversarial formats, overly technical presentations, minor impact on ensuing decisions, and unrepresentative audiences" as well as for being "biased toward agency-driven objectives and against those of potential public participants" (McComas, 2001b, p. 38).

Despite their frequency of use (and the wealth of normative criticism), there is a little systematic research examining public meetings and hearings (McComas, 2001b). "The literature on public hearings is both substantial and thin. It is substantial in the amount of descriptive and prescriptive writing available . . . [It] is thin in systematic research that analyzes the effects of the hearing process on policy outcome" (Fiorino, 1990, p. 230). Most studies focus on short-term indicators of effectiveness, such as the representativeness of attendees as compared with the larger community (e.g., Gundry & Heberlein, 1984; Johnson, Johnson, Edwards, & Wheaton, 1993; McComas, 2001a, 2001b; McComas & Scherer, 1998).

In terms of individual impacts, some have suggested that public meetings and hearings are "rituals" that can have positive benefits for participants, such as solidifying norms and behaviors, supporting civic values, and strengthening group cohesion (e.g., McComas, Besley, & Black, 2010). However, empirical studies show mixed, and often disappointing, results about the impacts on participants. For example, in an analysis of 36 public hearings about proposed highways, Kihl (1985) found that individuals who participated more frequently in meetings tended to exhibit less frustration about the issue than those who participated less frequently. In contrast, in a study of two public meetings about landfills, McComas (2003b) found that only 41% to 44% of respondents were satisfied with the meetings. Most participants believed their attendance made no difference in the outcome; only 5% to 8% thought their opinions would matter in the end. Moreover, most participants left the meetings feeling worse about the situation. In another study of the same two meetings, McComas (2003a) found that participants and nonparticipants were more satisfied with the public meetings when they held higher expectations for the meetings; perceived that the meetings provided useful information and open, meaningful discussion; saw the government agency conducting the meetings as being credible and legitimate; and believed landfills to be of low risk. Perhaps most interesting is that both participants and nonparticipants generally reported low levels of satisfaction with, and low expectations for, public meetings.

Very little research has been done on the impacts of traditional participation on community capacity building. One study of public hearings held for the Federal General Revenue Sharing Program found that participation was associated with greater spending, public interest, and net fiscal effects in some, but not all, cities (Cole & Caputo, 1984). Other research suggests that participants use public meetings to network and build community cohesiveness (Adams, 2004; Checkoway, 1981).

There are also mixed results for the impact of traditional direct public engagement on government and governance. Some research suggests that government officials consider public meetings to be "democracy in action," while others believe meetings do more harm than good (McComas, 2001b). A recent study of local officials in California found that they see shortcomings in traditional public engagement approaches and perceive the public to be disengaged, uninformed, and distrustful (Hagelskamp, Immerwahr, & Hess, 2013). Similarly, Wang (2001) found that city officials did not believe traditional public participation mechanisms improved the public's willingness to pay taxes and fees or increased their trust in government. Another study of city managers found that they perceive public meetings and hearings to be more successful when there is (a) a greater number and mix of prehearing educational methods, (b) more media types and greater media frequency used in the informational presentation, (c) more control over speakers' presentation time, (d) greater use of an open follow-up meeting, and (e) more use of newspaper and direct mail to communicate posthearing decisions to the public (Baker et al., 2005). Moreover, larger populations tend to predict higher participation, and cities that use a variety of participation mechanisms are more likely to report being able to meet citizen needs and build consensus (Wang, 2001).

In terms of policy impacts, some research suggests that citizen input can influence decisions (Cole & Caputo, 1984). For example, participation in meetings of the California Coastal Commission had an impact on the denial rate of permits under consideration by the board (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1980; Rosener, 1982). Other studies show that while public meetings "can enhance the responsiveness and accountability of government . . . [and] assist citizens at the front end of the policy process by providing a venue for citizens to set the agenda and frame policy issues," they "do not directly contribute to the process of formulating effective policy solutions to public problems" (Adams, 2004, p. 52).

Scholars suggest that this lack of policy making impact is because traditional public engagement methods do not represent the full range of the public's concerns (Cole & Caputo, 1984; Glass, 1979). For example, research on public meetings about wildlife management found that compared with nonparticipants, participants were more critical of current wildlife management and more likely to express opinions on various options. Moreover, participants had different preferences about management options, and tended to offer more extreme views, and sometimes more positive and negative opinions (Johnson et al., 1993).

Another study found that perceptions of bureaucratic responsibility were likely to be related to whether public input affected a decision. Specifically, Handley and Howell-Moroney (2010) surveyed community development block grant (CDBG) directors and found that although respondents reported low public attendance at meetings (with nearly 80% indicating an average public attendance of 0-20 people), more than 70% stated that citizens "significantly affect" or "somewhat affect" annual budget allocations. Only 3% stated that citizens "do not affect" the budget process. They also found that in communities where bureaucrats felt most accountable to citizens, there were higher levels of public attendance at CDBG hearings and higher levels of citizen involvement in the budgeting process. However, the high reported impact of public input in this study can be contrasted with another study where fewer than half of the responding public officials agreed that citizens were actually involved in decision making in any area (Wang, 2001).

Procedural justice theory, which asserts that assessments of outcomes are shaped by subjective perceptions of process fairness including the opportunity for voice, sheds some light on the seemingly low impact of traditional approaches on individuals, communities, and government and governance. For example, Tyler and Markell (2010) examined and evaluated various traditional procedures for judging the acceptability of land use decisions in Florida communities, including public hearings by local elected authorities, hearings by administrative law judges, judicial adjudication, private negotiations, and public referenda. They found that participants ranked hearings by administrative law judges as the most fair and traditional public hearings as

the least fair. Accordingly, Tyler and Markell (2010) suggested using procedural justice as a theoretical lens through which to examine public perceptions. Another study using the same community level data found that people "are not always rational economic actors"; they instead "bring sentimental as well as monetary values to their consideration of the adequacy of different procedures, and . . . the amount of weight people attach to monetary and sentimental values affects their views about how well different procedures protect their interests" (Markell, Tyler, & Brosnan, 2012, pp. 211-212). This research raises significant questions for the design of public engagement, including whether deliberative processes are perceived in a better light.

Deliberative in-person engagement. Deliberative in-person processes bring people together in face-to-face formats to engage in accessible, informed, and reasoned discussion about one or more issues. Although public deliberation processes vary widely, they all seek to foster respectful and rigorous dialogue about public problems (for a review of processes, see Gastil & Levine, 2005). The empirical evidence on deliberative in-person public engagement generally supports the claims of participation advocates (see Delli Carpini et al., 2004; Nabatchi et al., 2012; Ryfe, 2005).

In terms of individual participants, some studies find negligible or negative impacts of deliberation on individuals, but most studies find positive results (for a review of this literature, see Pincock, 2012). Research suggests that deliberative participation can help people learn about issues, form more consistent and durable opinions, and improve their civic skills and dispositions, including political interest, public spiritedness, trust in government, political efficacy, and deliberative competence. Other research finds a modest relationship between deliberation and standard measures of political participation (e.g., working on election campaigns, contacting government officials, donating to a political party, talking about politics, and voting) and civic participation (e.g., community service, community organizing, and problem solving) (Fishkin, 2009; Jacobs, Cook, & Delli Carpini, 2009). Some scholars raise concerns about the effects of deliberation on group polarization, which can mean either that the deliberative group splits along preexisting fault lines, taking strong positions at opposing poles (Shapiro, 2002), or that the moderate members of a like-minded group shift toward the positions of the most extreme members (Sunstein, 2002). However, while there is empirical evidence of both types of polarization in general political discussions, research specifically focused on deliberative public engagement typically has not found such effects (Collingwood & Reedy, 2012).

Research also shows that well-structured deliberative events generally produce high-quality discussion, even among diverse participants (Black, 2012), and can help alleviate social problems of exclusion, marginalization, and inequality, particularly when proactive design strategies are used (Sui & Stanisevski, 2012). These findings suggest that deliberative in-person engagement might be perceived as being procedurally just, particularly in comparison with nondeliberative, traditional processes.

Although the relationship between deliberative engagement and community capacity is often neglected in empirical research, there is some evidence suggesting that deliberation can increase participants' feelings of commitment or responsibility toward their community, build partnerships between community members and policy makers, strengthen people's commitments to participate and engage on issues, and produce new and innovative solutions to community problems. Moreover, research suggests that deliberative engagement can strengthen existing organizations, contribute to the creation of new organizations, and facilitate organizational collaboration (for a review of this literature, see Kinney, 2012).

In terms of government and governance, one study of local officials in California found that there is growing awareness about, but mixed views on, the benefits and costs of deliberative public engagement processes (Hagelskamp et al., 2013). There is also limited research on the impacts of deliberative processes on public policy. However, not all deliberative processes are

designed to impact public policy or to link directly to the policy process, and for those that are, measuring the policy effects of deliberative engagement is challenging, in large part because it is difficult to demonstrate causal links. This problem is exacerbated to the extent that one wants to quantitatively measure policy effects; qualitative evidence is often more feasible and appropriate for analysis. That said, there is evidence that deliberative in-person engagement can have impacts on local policy (for a review of this literature, see Barrett et al., 2012). For example, Goodin and Dryzek (2006) identify several ways in which deliberative processes may impact policy (e.g., actually making policy, being taken up in the policy process, informing public debates, market-testing of proposals, legitimation of public policies, building confidence and constituencies for policies, popular oversight, and resisting co-option); they offer success stories for each of these categories. Similarly, case studies show positive policy impacts in a wide variety of areas, including budgeting, planning, habitat conservation, policing, and public education (see Fung & Wright, 2003). Evaluations of California*Speaks*, a multi-city deliberative process designed to evaluate the health care reform proposals in the state legislature, reveal that public officials thought the process was innovative and successful and that elements of the final legislation aligned with the priorities and values the public identified during the process (Fung, Lee, & Harbage, n.d.). Another study of community deliberations with the Keiki Caucus in the Hawaii state legislature shows a strong impact public funding for children's welfare (Fagotto & Fung, 2009).

Online engagement. Online processes bring people together through one or more electronic communication technologies (e.g., web-based and mobile phone applications) to engage in discussion about issues. Although research regarding local government processes is limited due to their emergent nature, there is evidence that online deliberation is an effective complement to or substitute for face-to-face deliberation (for discussions, see Coleman & Shane, 2012; Davies & Chandler, 2012). For example, Davies and Chandler (2012) found that in general, online deliberative forums are easier and cheaper to set up, but suffer from issues of accessibility and other digital divides. They also found that (a) structured and facilitated processes are more likely to foster deliberative behavior than unstructured, nonfacilitated processes; (b) asynchronous, text-based processes (as compared with synchronous, voice-based processes) appear to be more effective at encouraging participation, diverse representation, and longer contributions, but less effective at fostering mutual understanding or changing people's minds; (c) online forums can approach the impact of face-to-face deliberations in terms of individual attitude change; and (d) anonymous participation, even when users can be traced by administrators, appears to make people more willing to contribute to discussion but less accountable for what they say and lowers participant satisfaction.

There is also emerging evidence that online engagement can facilitate the development of distributed public responsibility and digital neighborhoods (Nabatchi & Mergel, 2010). Distributed responsibility refers to situations where people organize and take over noncritical government tasks and responsibilities. An example on the island of Kauai, Hawaii, is illustrative: business owners and residents joined forces to repair a bridge to a state park for which the State Department of Land and Natural Resources did not have the finances. Digital neighborhoods refer to the use of Participation 2.0 to virtually engage the public continually and over the long term in addressing general community issues (such as in Redbridge and Harringay, UK) or specific issues (such as planning in San Jose, CA).

Finally, there is a little research about the policy impacts of online engagement. Aström and Grönlund (2012) conducted a meta-analysis of 58 European and U.S. case studies to determine success in online consultation, which was defined as including the criteria of representativeness, early involvement, transparency, independence, and influence. They coded for failures in participation, deliberation, and policy effects, as well as for several process design

features including participant selection, stage in the policy cycle, deliberative mode, media mix, democratic intentions, evaluation timing, research involvement, and content analysis of the consultation as a research tool. A significant and disheartening finding is that there was an overall high rate of failure across all conditions and criteria, the mode being somewhere in the 40% range. However, the authors also found that online consultations succeeded in attracting more participants when (a) there were strong democratic intentions combined with strategic or random selection of participants rather than open self-selection, (b) consultation occurred at the policy analysis or decision-making stage rather than too early in the policy process, (c) there was a deliberative mode of communication rather than simply expression of preferences, and (d) online and offline processes were used together. Under these circumstances, the failure rate was below 22%; under the opposite circumstances, the failure rate was between 56% and 64%. Moreover, using multivariate logistic regression methods, they found that consultation design elements, strong democratic intentions, and rigorous research as part of the process design all contributed to success. Perhaps these results should not be surprising given that local officials are hesitant to use online media and web-based engagement and have a hard time assessing its effectiveness (Hagelskamp et al., 2013).

In sum, while there is a rich literature about the outcomes of direct public engagement, the research is generally thin and unsystematic (cf. Fiorino, 1990) and is often disconnected from attempts to improve practice. Much of the reported research uses quantitative methods and does not engage in the deeper qualitative study of how context and design affect the practice of engagement, and in turn how practice affects the public's experience of engagement. Because few make clear the various contexts and designs for the processes under examination, we can only draw a few broad conclusions. First, empirical studies show both benefits and drawbacks of direct public engagement for individual participants, communities, and government and governance. Second, in-person deliberative public engagement processes seem to generate better outcomes than both traditional public engagement and online public engagement processes. Third, context and design choices affect who attends, how prepared they are, how much they know and learn, with whom they interact, how they participate, and likely what they experience. Again, however, we have little research exploring how these dynamics affect the practice of direct public engagement and the experiences of officials, professionals, and members of the public.

What Research Do We Need?

Several scholars have articulated research agendas for new governance processes (e.g., Bingham et al., 2005), public participation (e.g., Roberts, 2008b), stakeholder processes (e.g., Bryson et al., 2013), deliberative democracy (e.g., Nabatchi, 2010), and deliberative public engagement (e.g., Weiksner, Gastil, Nabatchi, & Leighninger, 2012). We do not wish to repeat those efforts. Instead, we supplement those agendas by extrapolating from our framework for understanding variations in local direct public engagement. Specifically, we suggest that researchers need to examine direct public engagement in relation to (a) context and setting; (b) sponsors, conveners, and their motivations; (c) design choices and variations; and (d) outcomes; and then to (e) better connect research on direct public engagement to practice, particularly in terms of how officials, professionals, and members of the public interact in and experience various processes. Understanding these issues can help to improve the practice of direct public engagement, particularly if researchers make a concerted effort to share their findings in a way that is accessible to officials and professionals.

First, we need to explore the context and setting of direct public engagement in local government. Research needs to address comparative proximity questions, and growing use of geographic information systems to facilitate public engagement (Salling, 2010) may make this more possible in the future. For example, do individuals make different calculations about the costs

and benefits of participation based on proximity? Do new technologies and tools for engagement "shrink the distance" between the public and other levels of government and make proximity less important? Similarly, what have been the effects of recent federal policy debates on issues such as health care, unemployment, immigration, and gun control on engagement at the local level? Beyond examining the geographic proximity to the locus of decision making, scholars should also investigate other features of the local context and setting. For example, how do state laws and other aspects of the legal framework affect direct public engagement? We know that the political system and culture of the locality matter, but how do various factors (e.g., power and the attitudes of officials, civic leaders, and the public) affect the designs and outcomes of, and experiences in, local direct public engagement? Similarly, research suggests that civic assets are important for cultivating engagement, but how can we measure their presence or absence, and which assets are most important for initiating, sustaining, and embedding direct public engagement?

Second, we need to explore issues related to the sponsors and conveners of direct public engagement, as well as their motivations for using such processes. For example, we know that there are varieties of sponsors and conveners. Moreover, there is wide variation in the skills or designs (sometimes protected as intellectual property) that conveners bring to sponsors. However, we do not know what difference this makes in the eyes of the public. Do public perceptions and experiences of direct engagement vary depending on whether the sponsors and/or conveners are government officials or civic leaders? If so, how? We also need to understand when and why sponsors serve as conveners, as well as when, why, and to whom they contract out the convening function. In addition, we need to understand how the motivations of sponsors affect decisions about using and designing direct public engagement. For example, what prompts sponsors to use public engagement when it is not legally required? How do various sponsors think about the costs and benefits of, and select among, traditional, deliberative, and online designs? Are such decisions an artifact of the current legal framework, or are they driven by something else? How do issues such as timing (i.e., how quickly a decision needs to be made or an outcome reached) and organizational context and conditions (e.g., budget, human, and other resources, available technologies, and logistical constraints) affect decisions to engage? How do conveners "pitch" their services to sponsors, and are they able to influence sponsors to use more innovative designs?

Third, we need to conduct more systematic research about how various process design choices affect outcomes (cf. Hoppe, 2011; Nabatchi, 2012c; Weiksner et al., 2012). Some theoretical work about the connection between design and outcomes has been done (e.g., Fung, 2003, 2006; Nabatchi, 2012c), and there are a number of nonprofit organizations and NGOs working to help improve the practice of public engagement (see the Institute for Local Government, 2012a). However, more methodical research is needed. For example, we need to know how the designs of various engagement processes affect an individual's decision to participate (or not). Are individuals more (or less) likely to want to participate in traditional, deliberative, or online processes, and which individual characteristics are likely to matter most for participation in these various formats? Beyond those identified in this article, what other design elements matter? Do (and if so, how do) the stakes, or the perceived importance of the issue, affect participation? Are people more likely to participate when the perceived importance and stakes are high as opposed to low? Or, do high stakes decrease the likelihood of participation because of fears that the process will be adversarial, controversial, and otherwise unpleasant? Similarly, do (and if so, how do) the instruments and materials given to participants, the selection and role of facilitators and moderators, and implementation issues such as logistics, venues, timing, and reporting affect participation? Finally, we need to understand participants' comparative satisfaction with various process designs. Procedural justice theory offers a potentially powerful frame for this research (cf. Tyler & Markell, 2010), as might the wider theoretical lens of organizational justice, which includes several distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice factors (Nabatchi, Bingham, & Good, 2007).

Fourth, we need to examine all of the issues above in relation to immediate, intermediate, and long-term outcomes for individuals, communities, and government and governance. How do context and setting, sponsors, conveners, and their motivations, and process designs impact individuals in terms of civic dispositions (e.g., personal and political efficacy, trust in government, tolerance, public spiritedness) and political involvement and civic activism (e.g., voting, voluntarism, associational membership)? Similarly, we need research that explores the impacts of direct public engagement on leadership development, the formation and nurturing of bridging and bonding social capital, the allocation of community resources, and other elements of community capacity. In terms of public officials and government institutions, we need research that explores officials' satisfaction with various engagement processes and the comparative impacts these processes have on their ability to make hard decisions and otherwise do their jobs. We also need research that looks at whether engagement increases institutional legitimacy, stability, and capacity. For example, does direct public engagement promote or hinder institutional capacities for collaboration, conflict resolution, decision making, and effective public action? If so, why and how? Finally, we need more research on the policy outcomes of engagement. Specifically, we need to understand the point(s) in the policy cycle at which engagement processes are most likely to influence decisions. Are certain processes more effective at certain points? Does the policy issue and context within which engagement occurs affect the outcomes?

Finally, flipping the perspective, we need to examine how these various practice-based factors influence or shape how members of the public enact, experience, and interact in direct engagement. How do these generally top-down design choices affect practice? When the design itself is participatory or bottom-up by engaging members of the public in making choices across the many different structural or design elements, does it alter how participants enact direct public engagement? Does practice change when local governments move from episodic one-off deliberative events to embedded and iterative engagement of the public as partners in the process of making, implementing, and enforcing important policy decisions? Can it lead to an active public engaged in co-production of public good (Sirianni, 2009)?

These five broad areas are by no means the only areas where research on local direct public engagement is needed. For example, researchers should examine issues pertaining to building civic infrastructures for public engagement and otherwise embedding ongoing public engagement in governance structures. Researchers could also assess how public engagement might be (or has been) used to address highly polarized policy and political issues such as immigration, health care, and gun control, as well as the phenomenon of organized efforts to disrupt public engagement (Institute for Local Government, 2012b). Many additional questions can be identified. Moreover, researchers should broaden and deepen methodological choices from quantitative to mixed methods and qualitative approaches to better understand the relationships among context, design, outcomes, and practice. They must also learn to better share and communicate with officials and practitioners such that research can help inform and improve the practice of direct public engagement.

Regardless of what scholars and practitioners focus on in research, one thing is clear: Direct public engagement is unlikely to disappear from the landscape of local government. If anything, it is likely to continue with increasing frequency in years to come, especially given the rapidly changing and highly complex political, social, economic, and environmental conditions of this era. If for no other reason than this, we need more research and a better understanding of direct public engagement in local government.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Notes

1. It is, of course, difficult to conduct such assessments. Not only is it challenging to sort through the previously mentioned issues, but also it is impossible to access and digest the extant knowledge. There are tens of thousands of scholarly publications spread across numerous scholarly disciplines; reports, papers, briefings, and other materials hidden in the repositories of research institutions and civic organizations; and a vast body of accumulated practical knowledge yet to be published.
2. As noted earlier, scholars, practitioners, politicians, civic reformers, and others use terms interchangeably. Although we are careful about our terminology, when we quote or cite another author, we use their original wording.

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