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Securing an Effective Voice for Citizens in Intergovernmental Administrative Decision Making

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Abstract: Intergovernmental administrative arrangements, often obscured from public view, are responsible for public decisions and their consequences. After European Union citizens expressed dissatisfaction with the disconnected administrative decision-making process by rejecting the European Constitution, the European Commission called for a period of reflection to develop tools and processes in order to involve citizens in the decision-making process.

This article examines collaborative efforts by the European Union to involve citizens in the shaping of national priorities. In-depth interviews were conducted with the heads of nonprofit organizations and staffers at nonprofits involved with organizing the European Citizens' Consultations (ECC). All the organizations are directly involved with implementing the project, have ongoing contact with citizens, and are immersed in the community.

This will highlights lessons learned from the ECCs as a model for involving citizens in the intergovernmental administrative decision-making process on the national level and for transcending obstacles to involving citizens by addressing the following research questions: How to involve citizens? When to involve citizens? And whom to involve?

The findings underscore four lessons that can be applied in the national decision-making process in the U.S. federal system.

1. Citizens do not need to be experts in order to participate.
2. Participation must be facilitated to be successful and representative.
3. Forums should include citizens only—and exclude politicians and other decision makers whom average people might find intimidating.
4. Citizens must be involved on a regular basis.

Keywords: citizen involvement, intergovernmental relations, administrative decision-making, nonprofits

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INTRODUCTION

Multi-level governance (MLG), a theory used to study the European Union, posits that decision-making competences lie not only with national governments but at the supranational and subnational levels of government as well, and that intergovernmental administrative arrangements, often obscured from public view, are responsible for public decisions and their consequences. Such an obscure process is at odds with a growing European Union, given the strong culture of citizen involvement in several of its member countries, such as Denmark and Finland, as well as in newly admitted countries seeking to have their voices heard (e.g., Estonia and Poland). After European Union citizens rejected the European Constitution—an expression of dissatisfaction with a disconnected administrative decision-making process—the European Commission called for a period of reflection so that tools and processes that would involve citizens in that process could be developed. This highlights the importance of citizen collaboration in intergovernmental administrative arrangements.

Although the United States does not have a culture of direct citizen involvement equivalent to the one in some European Union countries, similar issues arise in the U.S. federal system of governance. Even though the 2008 U.S. presidential election mobilized the highest turnout in forty years, and traditionally excluded and apathetic citizens, such as youth,¹ voted in record numbers (Thee-Brenan, 2008), U.S. citizens have been long discontent with their political leaders, estranged from civic institutions, and distrustful of the news media (Weeks, 2000). They are disconnected from their government in Washington, DC, and do not believe that government represents their interests. At the core of this problem is the degraded quality of civic discourse—the way in which public problems are discussed (Weeks, 2000). One solution would be to more fully involve citizens in the deliberative process of policy decision making (Weeks, 2000).

Elected officials and administrators generally deem citizen involvement necessary for successful governance (Thomas, 1995). Specifically, there have been calls for “authentic” and “collaborative” participation (King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998; Innes & Booher, 2004; Callahan, 2007). These ideas become increasingly important as globalization shifts the notions of governance, management, and accountability in the administrative world, because significant issues cross national borders daily and present administrative decision makers with new challenges to which no single actor can respond effectively (O’Toole & Hanf, 2003).

Deliberative models, such as the electronic town hall meeting developed by AmericaSpeaks, have sought to involve citizens in the administrative process by using innovative governance mechanisms at different levels of

¹Twenty-three million Americans under the age of 30 voted—an increase of 3.4 million compared with 2004 (CIRCLE, n.d.).

government. Although they have been successfully utilized on the local and state levels, they have not yet been employed at the national level.

Most recently, during the 2008 presidential election, candidates supported the America Speaks blueprint for engaging citizens in national policy making using the electronic town hall meeting model (AmericaSpeaks 2004; Fung 2007). Furthermore, the Obama Administration supports the use of technologies such as Facebook, e-mail, and cell phone texting as a means of sustaining and transforming citizen electoral involvement and including citizens in the administrative decision-making process (Rutenberg & Nagourney, 2009). But even though public participation is commonly accepted as part of public administration—and deliberative models that encourage collaboration have already been developed—there nonetheless remain some gray areas in the implementation of such models.

This article examines collaborative efforts by the European Union—and specifically, the European Citizens' Consultations (ECCs)—to involve citizens in shaping national priorities. Because of nonprofits' extensive hands-on experience with that project, their ongoing contact with citizens, and their immersion and knowledge of the community, in-depth interviews were conducted with nonprofit heads or nonprofit ECC project organizers. This research addressed ways to involve citizens, when to involve them, and which ones specifically to involve. The results provide a model for transcending obstacles to citizen involvement and to involving citizens in the intergovernmental administrative decision-making process at the national level.

First, I review the relevant literature on citizen involvement, discussing what citizen involvement is, why it is important, what obstacles it faces, and how they might be overcome. Then, using the European Citizens Consultations as an example of nonprofit collaboration, I describe a model for involving citizens and the role of nonprofits. My intention is to bring citizen involvement into the national decision-making process in the U.S. federal system by applying lessons learned from a multilevel governance effort.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Citizen Involvement

Citizen involvement on the national and state levels has existed in the United States since the 19th century and became widespread in the 20th century (Adams 2004; Roberts, 2004). Today, citizen involvement exists at all levels of government, but is more evident regionally and locally (Roberts, 2004). Although the earliest form of participation, mandated by federal government, took place during policy implementation, today citizens are involved in all stages of policy making, including analysis, initiation, formulation, implementation, and evaluation (Roberts, 2004).

There are many reasons for involving citizens in the decision-making process. These include finding out what the public wants in order to reduce conflict and build trust, improving quality and outcomes, and promoting openness and accountability (Callahan, 2007; Roberts, 2004). Involving citizens becomes more important as government grows larger and more distant, programs and services are contracted out, and the constituency grows larger and more diverse (Callahan, 2007; Roberts, 2004).

Citizen involvement has many benefits. Roberts (2004) has enumerated seven reasons for supporting civic involvement:

1. It facilitates realization of human potential (Hart, 1972).
2. It is educative (Pateman, 1970).
3. It gives citizens a sense of belonging (Pateman, 1970) and ameliorates alienation (Hart, 1972).
4. It contributes to legitimizing decisions taken by government (Pateman, 1970; Salisbury, 1975).
5. Through participation in decision making, people gain control over their lives (Pateman, 1970).
6. It enables those without power to challenge those with it and to strengthen their platform and voice (Roberts, 2004).
7. It is impossible to govern realistically without the consent of the governed (Roberts, 2004).

Innes and Booher (2004) have identified five purposes of citizen involvement:

1. So decision makers can find out the public's preferences
2. To improve decisions by including citizens' input
3. To include the least advantaged and those not recognized through normal information sources
4. To obtain legitimacy for public decisions
5. To comply with the law.

On the flip side, citizen involvement can be perceived as a threat to the system, and therefore undesirable (Stivers, 1990). Many view citizen involvement with distrust and doubt the ability of citizens to make a positive contribution to governance (Roberts, 2004). Roberts has listed six negative characteristics of direct citizen involvement:

1. It is based on a false notion.
2. It is inefficient.
3. It is politically naive.
4. It is unrealistic.
5. It is disruptive.
6. It is dangerous.

In addition, according to Callahan (2007), citizens cannot be expected to be responsible for all public-sector decisions: they lack the time and knowledge.

Nonetheless, administrators recognize that public participation is necessary for effective decision making (King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998; Thomas, 1995). The quality and extent of citizen participation in the decision-making process, however, needs to be improved (Dryzek, 1990; Fisher 1993; deLeon 1995; Schneider & Ingram, 1997; King, Feltey, & Susel 1998). In addition, conventional participation models present obstacles to civic involvement. In conventional participation, the administrator plays the role of expert. As a result, citizen participation is most often ineffectual because it occurs only after the issues have already been framed and the decisions made.

Issues of Conventional Participation

Conventional techniques of participation do not adequately address the purpose of public participation because citizens do not come away satisfied that they are being heard or included in the planning and decision making (Innes & Booher, 2004). In addition, conventional participation does not promote deliberation, is typically a one-way communication (with no opportunity for dialogue between citizens and public officials) (Checkoway, 1981; Kemmis, 1990; King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998; Callahan, 2007), and most often does not attract a representative sample of citizens (Gastil & Kelshaw, 2000; McComas 2001; Callahan, 2007). Nor does such a process allow for large groups of citizens to participate in face-to-face deliberation (Adams, 2004).

Types of conventional participation include involvement in citizen advisory committees or task forces, attending meetings of governing bodies, and writing letters to elected officials and editors of newspapers expressing interest in or opposition to a government policy or program. Two of the best-known forms of conventional participation are public hearings and public comments. The central contentions of these techniques is that the main roles are played by the administrator (i.e., the expert) (King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998) and that participation is ineffectual; it therefore occurs late in the process, once decisions have already been made (Checkoway, 1981; Kemp, 1985; King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998; Rowe & Frewer, 2000; Innes & Booher, 2004). Public hearings, for example, are seen as a hollow exercise: they are convened because they are required by law, and not because elected officials and government administrators value input (Callahan, 2007). Public hearings are mostly attended by "extremists"—those who feel passionate about an issue and are personally motivated. Furthermore, they are poorly attended because they are held at inconvenient times or in inconvenient locations, and because the amount of information shared during such hearings is inadequate (Booher & Innes, 2004; Callahan, 2007).

Nonetheless, procedures for review and comments are common in the United States. Federal regulations cannot become law until after a comment period. Comments come from a variety of interested parties, but there is no dialogue and the procedures provide no way to resolve differences other than through the judgment of the sponsoring agency. Even though agency personnel must respond to comments, such responses can be dismissive and may even declare comments irrelevant. Because such responses are unsigned, citizens never know who wrote them, and there is therefore no opportunity for an interchange with that person.

Callahan (2007) has maintained that because of poorly designed participation processes and mechanisms, the benefits of public participation are seldom recognized. The public manager, through administrative structures and procedures, controls the ability of the public to influence the agenda and the process. Public input in program and policy decisions is often solicited only after the administrators and elected officials have defined the problem and developed proposed solutions. Public participation therefore becomes a formality constructed to protect the interests of the agency or organization.

Bridging the Problems of Traditional Models

In an attempt to address the shortcomings of conventional participation structures, researchers and practitioners have called for changes that would result in governance becoming collaborative and deliberative (King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998; Weeks, 2000; Innes & Booher, 2004; Callahan, 2007). Collaborative participation differs from conventional participation in that all stakeholders are included and treated as equals, and the information needed to intelligently discuss the issues is shared with all stakeholders.

The foundations of collaborative participation are communication and a meaningful exchange of ideas. It is not a ritual during which citizens react to administrative decisions and communication flows in one direction (Innes & Booher, 2004; Callahan, 2007); collaborative participation is a “multi-way interaction” wherein all the stakeholders communicate and work in both formal and informal ways to influence action and bring about positive results (Callahan, 2007).

Collaborative participation can both empower and inform while building civic capacity—a combination of social, intellectual, and political capital (Innes & Booher, 2004). As this capital grows and spreads via collaboration into interlocking circles and networks, the civic capacity of a society grows and participants become more knowledgeable and believe more in their ability to make a difference. This capacity has the potential to create a more intelligent society, one better able to adapt quickly to change and more competent to address difficult, controversial issues (Innes & Booher, 1999).

With collaborative participation, the public has the opportunity to influence both the process and outcome (Callahan, 2007). Such processes have emerged on the local and state level, where government is closest to the people. For example, AmericaSpeaks, a nonprofit organization established to promote direct citizen participation and deliberative democracy, has assisted in the organization and implementation of several successful electronic town hall meetings across the nation. Most recently, Californians, faced with a broken health-care system, participated in a large-scale, statewide discussion. California Speaks invited residents to help identify the positives and negatives of proposed health-care reform packages. It has also been used in the redevelopment of the World Trade Center site in lower Manhattan, and in discussions of the future of social security and the post-Hurricane Katrina redevelopment of New Orleans.

However, collaborative participation requires more than the appropriate tools or techniques; it must be deep and continuous (King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998). In other words, it demands ongoing, active involvement—it is not a one-time occurrence. Furthermore, it obligates the administrator to focus on both process and on outcome (Roberts, 1997; Parkinson, 2003; Guttman, 2007) and to dialogue with citizens. This gives the administrator the opportunity to become a cooperative participant and to assist citizens as they examine their interests and arrive at decisions (King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998).

Despite the success of citizen involvement in deliberative meetings, questions about such models remain. How can direct citizen involvement overcome the limitation of scale (Dahl, 1989; Fishkin, 1991; Parkinson 2003)? How can groups systematically excluded from representative democracy be involved (Dahl, 1989)? Can ordinary citizens possess the knowledge and expertise to be involved successfully (Roberts, 2004; Guttman 2007)? When decisions have to be made quickly or during a crisis, can large group deliberations work (Roberts, 2004)—and are they cost-effective (Fishkin, 1991)? Do citizens really have the time to participate (Roberts, 2004)?

Weeks (2000) has questioned whether it is possible to go beyond platitudes to actually convene a large-scale public deliberative process. After reviewing four applications of a deliberative model, he concluded that deliberative dialogue is neither inexpensive, fast, nor easy. Moreover, its successful application is limited to instances where the issues are critical, the political process is deadlocked, and there is sufficient time to complete a year-long process.

More effective strategies for recruiting citizens and ways to shorten the interval between exchanges of dialogue are needed to strengthen such a model. Innes and Booher (2004) have maintained that not all situations are appropriate for collaborative methods; they have suggested weighing the cost of participating against the potential cost of opposition to decisions not made collaboratively. Furthermore, Guttman (2007) has highlighted the perceived challenges of involving in public deliberation “ordinary citizens” who do not have adequate information.

Like Weeks, Parkinson (2003) has focused on the question of legitimacy and representation in large-scale deliberative processes. He has maintained that in complex societies it is quite impossible to include all those affected by collective decision making in deliberative processes, and highlighted the importance of considering how participants are chosen. He has noted (based on Mansbridge, [1999]), that in order to address the question of scale and legitimacy, a single deliberative forum is insufficient: it is the linkages between different and recurring forums that help to address the question of scale.

Understanding the imperative of public involvement is only the first, and perhaps the easiest, part of the challenge; this realization is not sufficient (Thomas, 1995). As highlighted by Roberts (2004, 2007), Callahan (2007), Innes and Booher (2004), Weeks (2000), Guttman (2007), and Parkinson (2003), how to involve citizens, when to involve citizens, and whom to involve remain unresolved issues.

European Citizens' Consultations

European Union and Plan D

The European Coal and Steel Community, established by six countries in the 1950s, has since expanded into a union of 27 countries with a common currency and free movement of people, goods, and services. With expansion came the idea of a constitution to assist in the formulation of a more transparent, democratic, and efficient union. Each member state held a referendum on ratification of the constitution. In order for the constitution to go into force, it had to be ratified by all member countries. Fifteen countries ratified the constitution. However, France and the Netherlands voted it down in 2005—an outcome due in part to the lack of citizen involvement. The Dutch, for example, wanted more of a say in the decisions being made in Brussels, the European Union's headquarters.

It subsequently became evident that citizens' expectations needed to be heard and incorporated into the planning process of an enlarging European Union. According to a Eurobarometer survey, the confidence and trust in European institutions is declining. Fifty-three percent did not believe they have the ability to affect decisions in the European Union. Nonetheless, 49% of citizens wanted the European Union have a greater role; only 14% wanted it less involved. A period of reflection was called so each of the European Union member states could facilitate a discourse "involving citizens, civil society, social partners, national parliaments, and political parties" (Commission of the European Communities, 2005). Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue, and Debate was proposed by the European Commission as a long-term plan for stimulating discourse between the European Union's institutions and its citizens.

The intention was not to limit Plan D to the period of reflection, but to have it run throughout the lifetime of the commission. It is believed that the current crisis can only be overcome by anchoring the European project in citizens' expectations.

The commission's role under Plan D is to assist member national governments. Each country's parliament would ensure that decisions taken by national governments on European Community issues are scrutinized; Plan D simply set out a common organizational framework to stimulate public debates on the future of the European Union. Although each discussion would have its own local, regional, and national character, that framework had to focus citizens' attention on the future of Europe, examining their expectations and discussing the added value and the concrete benefits of community action.

The results of these debates would help the European institutions—and in particular, the commission—better define their priorities. This would be a two-way process: informing citizens about Europe's role, and listening to people's expectations about what should be done. In addition, the structure of the debates had to ensure that any feedback have a direct impact on the policy agenda of the European Union—that clear results be collected at the end of the period of reflection. Each member state would therefore present a synthesis of the initial results of its national debate to the commission and Council Presidency.

Responding to the call of Plan D, the Belgium-based King Baudouin Foundation conducted a feasibility study with IFOK (Institut für Organisationskommunikation), a private management company. The study evaluated three possible methods for a successful project, taking into consideration large-scale true dialogue, meaningful interaction, appropriate content, and the efficient use of resources. As a result, a five-step process was developed. Nonprofit agencies in each country (discussed further below) then organized that country's European Citizens' Consultations; these took place from October 2006 to May 2007. The ECCs consisted of five components: agenda setting, citizens' juries, national consultations, final consultation, and follow-up events.

The **agenda-setting** event was held in Brussels on October 7 and 8, 2006. Two hundred citizens from all member states met to discuss the question, "What Europe do we want?" Citizens were selected randomly by an opinion research agency using the criteria of gender, age, and socioeconomic background. Once in Brussels, the participants were organized into small discussion groups supported by translators, and resource persons. The first stage was to identify shared perspectives on the future of Europe. Groups of participants discussed their views, which were communicated via voting pads to theme teams. The theme teams broadcast the groups' input to all participants via large screens. The groups voted on preliminary lists resulting from the theme team communications, discussing their views on each topic and why it was important, until they agreed upon four topics appropriate for the European Citizens' Agenda. The following topics were chosen: environment and energy, social welfare and the family, Europe's global role, and immigration.

The **citizen juries** brought together 85 randomly selected citizens from registry offices in Berlin and Budapest. The main function of the citizens' juries was to prepare further materials for the upcoming 27 national citizens' consultations.

The citizens consulted over four days. Each day, one of the topics from the agenda-setting event was discussed and further developed. Three of the days were divided into four work units of 90 minutes each; on the fourth day, an overview of the whole process took place, and final changes to the recommendations were made. Each work unit was divided into two parts. During the first part, experts provided fundamental information about the topic at hand to the participants in order to ensure that every participant had a similar base of knowledge. This took about 25 minutes. The participants then had 5 to 10 minutes to ask the consultants questions. After this, the experts left. The citizens' juries were then split into five groups of four or five people; the topic was discussed in terms of a given objective for 30 to 40 minutes. During the consultations, participants were asked to agree upon the three most important proposals—usually political actions—which would then be the basis of the national consultations.

The **national consultations** were held in February and March 2007. Twenty-seven national consultations took place at the member-state level to discuss the questions decided upon at the agenda-setting event. These meetings are considered the heart of the European Citizens' Consultations. In each country, four concurrent consultations were interlinked via video screens using Skype. The consultations were used to identify common ground and to recommend broad policy directions. While all the consultations followed the same basic format, the number of participants varied from 30 to 60. Participants were randomly chosen so different age groups, educational levels, and other characteristics would be represented.

At each event, citizens obtained information on the day's schedule, the process as a whole, their role, and the expected outcome. Citizens were split into three groups or tables, one per topic. For each of the three topics, all citizens completed the phrase, "In 2020, I would like to live in a Europe that. . . ." Each table had a facilitator who kept the discussion going and made sure that every voice was heard. At each table, citizens categorized their ideas into objectives. Experts then joined the groups and discussed tradeoffs and challenges to those ideas. Citizens then rotated from table to table to learn about the objectives formulated by the other groups.

Afterward, there was a vote on preferences. Each citizen was given 15 votes (five for each of the three topics) with which to select the most important objectives. The results of this vote served as a rough guideline to help citizens focus their subsequent discussions. Based on the objectives, the tradeoffs, and the results of the opinion snapshot, each group was asked to come up with one achievable vision of Europe. A citizen representative presented a given group's results, vision, and definition of the European Union's role to all the participants. The ensuing exchange of ideas and feedback was incorporated into final amendments. The results were presented to each national government.

The **final consultation** was held in Brussels on May 9 and 10, 2007. In order to make the results of the 27 national citizens' consultations relevant at a Europe-wide level, they needed to be synthesized in a single report. One citizen volunteer and the national partner from each member country attended the event. Supported by a team of facilitators and experts, citizens debated the 27 national results intensely. They substantiated the results and came up with the *European Citizens' Perspective on the Future of Europe*, which contains a global vision and recommendations. During a press conference, citizens officially presented their results to policymakers in the European Parliament.

METHODS

In order to highlight lessons learned from the European Citizens' Consultations so they can be used as a model for involving citizens in the intergovernmental administrative decision-making process on the national level—and to transcend obstacles to involving citizens—this research examines the following research questions:

1. How should citizens be involved?
2. When should citizens be involved?
3. Whom should be involved?

Sampling

Purposive sampling technique was used for this research. The researcher sought a sample representative of nonprofits that participated in the ECC process. Rubin and Rubin (1996) have suggested that informants selected for purposive sampling be knowledgeable about the cultural arena, situation, or experience being studied; willing to talk; and representative of the range of points of view. Twenty-seven national nonprofits participated in the ECC process. Each was invited, via e-mail, to participate in semi-structured telephone interviews; ten responded and agreed to participate. Although the sample consisted of only ten nonprofits,² it was representative of the available sample population.³

²Language barriers and limited resources most likely influenced some nonprofits' decision not to participate in the interviews.

³The participating European Union member countries had been divided into four groups, each of which combined older European Union member countries with newer additions. The national consultations took place on four dates in February and March 2007. On each of the dates, one of the groups held its meeting. Representatives from nonprofits involved in facilitating each one of those four groups were interviewed, ensuring a diverse sampling of new and old member countries.

(The list of the national partners was obtained from the European Citizens' Consultations Web site.⁴)

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection, in the form of semi-structured interviews, took place over a four-week period in October and November 2007. Interview participants included nonprofit heads and nonprofit ECC project leaders. Each nonprofit was established in a local community; their missions focused on involving citizens in decision making (see Appendix I). Each of the interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes. Interview questions were e-mailed to participants prior to the scheduled interview; follow-up questions were sent via e-mail as well. Ten in-depth, semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted to gain an understanding of the contextual nuances that the nonprofits encountered in trying to involve citizens in the national decision-making process; the nonprofits' role in the ECC process was also discussed. The researcher worked from a prepared list of open- and closed-ended questions designed to stimulate conversation and asked follow-up questions based on conversational leads or cues given by the respondents. Although an interview guide was used, not all questions were asked in the same order. Probing was used to elicit additional information from the interviewees. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The sample size is not large enough for quantitative analysis; nonetheless, through these in-depth interviews, sufficient variation among respondents was detected, as was the thick description that results in "theoretical saturation" (Strauss, 1987). In many instances, if qualitative data are treated properly, a large sample is not necessary: it can be assumed that beyond a certain point during data collection, very few findings will be generated by the addition of individuals to the sample.

It is widely accepted that the sample size for individual interviewing is often under 50 (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003). The findings of this exploratory research have the potential to inform future research that employs a sample of citizens and gathers data with a mailed or electronic questionnaire for quantitative analysis.

FINDINGS

The ECCs provide a model for transcending obstacles to involving citizens in the national decision-making process by addressing how to involve citizens, how their involvement should be invited, and who should be included. The

⁴<http://www.european-citizens-consultations.eu/18.0.html>, October 1, 2007.

interviews revealed interesting and sometimes contradictory opinions regarding the involvement of citizens using the deliberative model.

Based on the published literature and guiding research questions, interviews were analyzed and coded into themes using a closed coding system (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The four emerging themes are:

- 1. Specific expertise unnecessary
- 2. Facilitating involvement
- 3. Citizens-only forum
- 4. Involving citizens on a regular basis.

The essential findings for each theme are enumerated in Table 1 and discussed below.

Specific Expertise Unnecessary

Are citizens knowledgeable enough of the issues to be involved (Roberts, 2004; Callahan, 2007)? Is providing citizens with information prior to meetings sufficient or superficial? The ECC meetings demonstrated not only that citizens can be involved but that they are very knowledgeable about issues they opt to address—possibly more knowledgeable than a given European decision maker.

You have to ensure that the discussion about the EU is not academic—that the competences leading to participation are not so high that you need to have studied EU law at university to participate. . . . When it comes to clean drinking water or . . . to homelessness . . . when you walk around the streets of [your city] or experience these issues in your daily life . . . you should be able to express your opinion and share your knowledge. . . .

Table 1. Emerging Themes Based on Published Literature

Research question	Literature review	Theme
How to involve citizens?	Roberts, 2004, 2007; Callahan, 2007	Facilitating involvement
When to involve citizens?	Roberts, 1997; 2004; Parkinson, 2003; Innes and Booher, 2004; Guttman, 2007	Involve citizens on a regular basis
Whom to involve?	Weeks, 2000; Parkinson, 2003; Roberts, 2004; Callahan, 2007; Guttman, 2007	Citizens-only forum Specific expertise unnecessary

The assumption that [people] cannot understand what the commission is trying to do . . . has been proved very wrong. . . . After the first deliberations and voting, people [focused on] three things: . . . family, renewed energy, and immigration. . . . When we conducted the workshops locally, everyone could cope with the basics—and don't forget, this was a mixed cohort attending the workshop. A lot of politicians don't understand anything about renewable energy, but . . . people did. . . . Even the most difficult issues can be rationalized, can be brought to the attention of the people given the right time and circumstance. . . . We were amazed; . . . people were very up-to-date and very capable of absorbing very technical and important realities of today's world. . . . It sort of proved that you don't need to be an expert; the decisions were for the average common good.

Facilitating Involvement

In our fast-paced society, we commonly lament the scarcity of time to tend to our daily work and family obligations. Would citizens have the time to become involved in the making of decisions (Roberts, 2004, 2007; Callahan, 2007)? It depends. The ECC meetings are an exemplar of how involvement should be invited—of how to interest citizens in participating and make it feasible for them to participate. This includes overcoming obstacles of transportation and other relevant costs, including food, accommodation, and loss of wages.

Going to a different town, meeting different people, discussing issues that might sound interesting, having a nice weekend, [feeling] that you might do something important . . . [this] was mentioned in the cover letter sent along with the invitation to all prospective participants. . . . All of Europe was meeting at the same time . . . I don't think that the financial incentives played any role [in people's] participation.

We actually paid them to participate. . . . At least when it came to the less educated—the less interested part of the group—that was part of their motivation.

We can provide them incentive in [the form] of gasoline coupons. . . . Traveling and lodging were covered apart from the incentives. . . . [It] is quite a big country to travel from south to north; it takes a lot of time.

Citizens-Only Forum

Unlike conventional models, deliberative models of participation should include a diverse set of individuals. Participation should not be limited to extremists (Callahan, 2007); however, such requirements are difficult to

address. As underscored by Roberts (2004), citizens are often intimidated by discussing policy issues, fearing their knowledge is inadequate compared with experts' or other citizens'. Therefore, ensuring a large-scale representative sample may only be part of the solution.

Collaborative participation depends on the involvement of different stakeholders, including elected officials and administrators. However, their presence may intimidate citizens. Limiting participation by elected officials and administrators during deliberation may aid in allaying fears and creating an egalitarian forum:

We [didn't] want this consultation [to be] manipulated [by] an outside process. . . . We wanted [no] pressure or interference from politicians. . . . We had the process and then at the end, when we had the results, we showed [them] to the decision makers.

Nonetheless, it was very important for elected officials to be present; they provided credibility and continuity. In addition, experts were present for guidance and to clarify the issues:

[There were] experts at the table, but [they were] not affiliated with political parties. Most . . . were from the universities. . . . And if we had [someone from] an extremist NGO, we . . . balanced [him] out with a nonextremist.

There were no elected officials or administrators from national government. . . . [Because] we were promised [those] national representatives, . . . our citizens felt that our national government [did] not care very much; . . . that the European representatives were more interested in the outcomes than the national government. . . . That was the impression they got from the weekend based on who came to talk to them. The European members were there for some time; [they] stayed . . . for a while and [talked] with them during the breaks.

Involve Citizens on a Regular Basis

When informants were asked why involving citizens was considered part of the solution, their responses varied from "it's a right" to "it's a method of building a permanent bridge." Echoing Roberts (2004) and Innes and Booher (2004), it was revealed that involving citizens created legitimacy for public decisions and that doing so becomes more important as government grows larger and more distant:

Taking part in European elections [is] not enough; [people] don't feel like they belong to Europe. European citizenship [is even] more difficult to identify with. . . . But as soon as you use participatory methods, people start to get more involved and feel like Europeans. . . .

It also gives them a sense of belonging (Pateman, 1970):

It is very hard for the average citizen to follow what is going on, . . . and in many cases the citizen feels he is not involved properly. . . . [But] everything [at the ECC] revolved around the citizen. . . .

The ECCs employed diverse concepts for including citizens. The literature highlights that involving citizens makes sense (Roberts, 2004), that it is impossible to govern without the consent of the governed (Roberts, 2004), and that it is required by law (Innes & Booher, 2004). But participants emphasized that citizens have a *right* to be involved in decision making at a Europe-wide level and perceived the citizen consultations as a way to foster that involvement:

The discussion about the EU tends to be technical . . . and [mired in] jargon. The process tends to be slow because [it involves] 27 different countries, all [of which] have different cultures. . . . What they see [on TV] is . . . prime ministers stating resolutions or conclusions. . . . It may be good policy, but there is a disconnect between citizens and the government. . . . The discussions served as a bridge.

Without that [citizen involvement], you get a society where people feel they have no connection to the decisions—[that] the only thing they can say is if they like [them] or not. . . .

[There is] a river, and on one side you have all the European citizens, and on the other you have the European Parliament, the commissioners, and the European Council that takes all the decisions. . . . Once every five years engineering troops build a bridge called the election . . . and [during this time] people can cross the river using that bridge. . . . But . . . “every five years” is not the right way. . . . Permanent bridges [are needed] all the way down the river. Each [bridge] would be an NGO, a citizen committee—all these kinds of associations . . . carry[ing] the message on a regular basis from the people to the decision makers on the other side.

Citizen inclusion should be a regular tool, like voting; citizens should be involved on a regular basis, and not just in times of crisis.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The current U.S. administration has sought to involve citizens in the administrative decision-making process on the national level by using

tools such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. Although ubiquitous, such tools do not really foster dialogue or deliberation; instead, they perpetuate the weaknesses of the conventional models of participation. They are typically a form of one-way communication, providing no opportunity for citizens to have an actual exchange with public officials (King, Feltley, & Susel, 1998; Callahan, 2007). Nor do they allow for large groups of citizens to participate in face-to-face deliberation (Adams, 2004). More consideration should be given to tools such as the ECC model, which has demonstrated its ability to transcend barriers to citizen involvement on the national level.

The purpose of this research was to highlight lessons learned from the ECC in the hopes of applying those lessons to the U.S. federal system as a way of bringing citizen involvement into the national decision-making process. The four main lessons to transcending the obstacles of how to involve citizens, whom to involve, and when to involve them are:

1. Citizens do not need to be experts in order to participate.
2. Participation must be facilitated to be successful and representative.
3. Forums should include citizens only—and exclude politicians and other decision makers whom average people might find intimidating.
4. Citizens must be involved on a regular basis.

Whom to involve remains among the key concerns—not whether ordinary citizens have the knowledge to be involved (Roberts, 2004; Callahan, 2007; Guttman, 2007), the concern highlighted in the literature. As has been seen, citizens are quite often more knowledgeable about certain issues—particularly everyday issues—than “experts.” Moreover, when information is presented in a nonacademic manner, citizens can learn, ask questions, and participate constructively.

Whom to involve also involves questions of scale and representation. The literature emphasizes the challenge of holding large-scale deliberative forums that do not simply enforce the majority voice (Weeks, 2000; Parkinson, 2003; Roberts, 2004; Callahan, 2007; Guttman, 2007); holding citizens-only forums is the ECC strategy for dealing with this issue. As revealed by the interviews, an egalitarian forum can be created by limiting the involvement of elected officials and administrators to specific parts of the event. This creates a space for citizens to deliberate without feeling pressured or influenced by “experts” and engenders a feeling that the meeting is theirs—that they are free to deviate from majority consent.

Nonetheless, ensuring that a representative group of citizens attends the meetings remains an obstacle. The literature has questioned whether citizens can be involved successfully because of their everyday work and family obligations (Roberts, 2004; Callahan, 2007). This research shows that such obstacles can be overcome if citizens' participation is properly facilitated. For

example, the nonprofit organizers ensured the involvement of ordinary and traditionally excluded citizens by offering reimbursement for transportation, accommodations, and lost wages. In addition, the organizers tapped into the curiosity of the citizenry, tempting them to learn about what was going on by choosing an appealing location to visit.

Such efforts require that the cultivation of mechanisms necessary for successful collaborative involvement move beyond a one-time occurrence (King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998). Those efforts should not be abandoned at the end of the meeting—neither by the citizens nor the organizers. And such meetings should be ongoing and part of a systematic process of involving citizens in the administrative decision-making process on a regular basis.

The above lessons do not solve the problems of involving citizens in the administrative decision-making process; rather, they seek to get beyond them. Citizens may not be knowledgeable about certain topics. Transportation and per diem costs will always be issues. And there will always be apathetic citizens. It is up to administrators and elected officials to be empathetic, creative, and willing to approach—and transcend—these obstacles. But the lessons provided by the ECC are only a starting point. Future research should address the attitudes, beliefs, and roles of the administrators involved.

Nonprofits held a key role in the process and were committed to their mission of involving citizens on the local level long before they started to involve citizens on the national level. The role of nonprofits as key administrators in the national decision-making process should be examined. Although there may be influential cultural factors in play—citizen involvement is deeply entrenched in the cultures of Denmark and Finland, for example—many more recently formed democracies (such as Estonia and Slovenia) were also participants in the process; they, too, found ways to transcend citizen involvement obstacles.

European Union nonprofits (unlike those in the United States) are sought out specifically to involve citizens in the decision-making process on the local and state levels. Hence, nonprofits are perceived as logical actors in the intergovernmental administrative decision-making process. Furthermore, the inclusion of nonprofits in the administrative process, and the perception of nonprofits as citizen advocates, permits nonprofits to be “the provider[s] of a means by which a local community can pay the ‘ante’ necessary to ‘sit in the game,’” that is, “to secure an effective voice” for citizens “in governmental decisions of local impact” (Elazar, 1961). Administrators are thereby given a potential deliberative governance mechanism inclusive of citizens for common local issues such as the environment, security, and immigration. In the context of globalization (i.e., because local daily issues have a global impact), the significance of this mechanism should not be underestimated.

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APPENDIX I. Nonprofit Missions

Nonprofit	Mission
The Danish Cultural Institute [http://www.dankultur.dk/Default.aspx?ID=68]	The Danish Cultural Institute promotes cultural exchanges, provides information about Denmark, and supports projects that aim at long-term cooperation between foreign and Danish cultural institutions, artists, and other professionals.
Center for Public Policy, PROVIDUS (Latvia) [http://www.providus.lv/public/index_en.html]	PROVIDUS's mission is to facilitate policy change for Latvia's development through advocacy and monitoring, as well as to promote public participation in the policy process.
Partners for Democratic Social Change, PDCS (Slovakia) [http://www.pdcs.sk/en/index.php]	PDCS is a nonprofit organization that helps to develop and promote a culture of democracy and expand democratic approaches and mechanisms for dialogue and conflict prevention.
The Fondazzjoni Temi Zammit, FTZ (Malta) [http://www.ftz.org.mt/]	FTZ aims to improve the quality of life and economic prosperity in the Maltese region, and opportunities for everyone, through several initiatives and by promoting joint working and thinking among local, regional, and international authorities and agencies.
National Forum on Europe (Ireland) [http://www.forumoneurope.ie/]	The National Forum on Europe animates and promotes public debate on the EU, its enlargement, its future, and Ireland's place in it. The Forum's purpose is not to advocate or promote a particular course of action. It is to be a politically neutral public space within which political views and analyses of all shades can be put forward on the EU and on Ireland in the EU.

(Continued)

APPENDIX I. (Continued)

Nonprofit	Mission
Open Estonia Foundation, OEF [http://www.oef.org.ee/en/introduction/]	The Open Estonia Foundation is driven by a vision of democracy, civil society, social responsibility, and equal opportunities in the democratic decision-making process.
Partners Poland [http://www.fpp.org.pl/podstrona.php?id_strony=17]	Partners Poland is an organization committed to building sustainable local capacity to advance civil society and a culture of change and conflict.
Swedish Study Center, SSC (Finland) [http://www.ssc.fi/eng/]	SSC is a study organization that aims to stimulate the Finnish-Swedish civil society through educational seminars and events in order to achieve sustainable local and regional development.
Compagnia di San Paolo (Italy) [http://www.compagnia.torino.it/]	Compagnia di San Paolo pursues goals of social good, to foster civil, cultural and economic development.
The Dutch Center for Political Participation (Netherlands) [http://www.publiek-politiek.nl/English/About-us]	The Dutch Center for Political Participation organizes debates and meetings on topical issues and encourages participation in decision making.