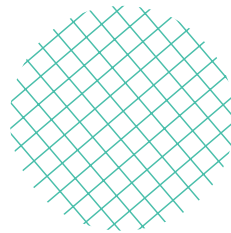


# Characteristics of Participatory Systems Change



Addressing many of today's most pressing societal, economic and environmental problems requires both engaging broad public audiences and working within complex systems of institutions, actors and drivers to mobilize solutions.

Governments are democratically-elected to address these problems — but they can't do so alone. Success requires a systems-based approach that takes into account the values of citizens, identifies leverage points for intervention and builds collaboration among multiple actors.

Participatory Systems Change is a new approach to address these challenges. This approach redefines key aspects of engagement, including:

- Sponsorship
- Issue Framing
- Sequencing
- The nature of democratic exchange
- The method of analysis
- Strategies for mass communication

Sponsorship establishes political accountability

## SEQUENCING

### TRADITIONAL APPROACHES

**Linear:** series of steps to get from A to B

"What is the most direct route to the solution?"

#### WHAT IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE:

- Decision-makers only involved at beginning and end
- Public feeds experts, experts feed decision-makers

### PARTICIPATORY SYSTEMS CHANGE

**Iterative and integrative:** developing a phased process that creates solutions through learning and experimentation

"Issues are complex and are rarely solved through a linear process. There needs to be space for feedback loops."

#### WHAT IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE:

- Integration between the activities of experts, citizens and decision-makers to build upon each other's work and provide multiple opportunities to inform each other's contributions
- Uncertainty is embraced through prototyping and experimentation
- Sufficient time is allocated to allow for iteration and co-creation

## NATURE OF DEMOCRATIC EXCHANGE

### TRADITIONAL APPROACHES

Process is a linear flow of information where feedback is received, internally analyzed and responded to by designated decision-makers

"How can we solicit input from individuals?"

#### WHAT IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE:

- Traditional town-halls, open houses, public hearings
- Surveys
- Online portals to collect expert submissions

### PARTICIPATORY SYSTEMS CHANGE

Process creates spaces for learning, deep reflection and informed judgment

"How can we engage affected parties to co-create viable solutions?"

#### WHAT IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE:

- Deliberative processes for citizens to explore options and trade-offs, and to make recommendations that are guided by evidence and citizen values
- Participants work in groups across a range of interests and perspectives
- Organizers recruit participation by equity-seeking communities and take steps to equalize power
- "Large group" methods such as Real Time Strategic Change and Open Space Technology maximize participant contributions.

