

PD-ABM-937
90613

USAID Final Report
ESTONIA: LOCAL GOVERNMENT
ASSISTANCE

USAID Cooperative Agreement
No. EUR-0021-A-00-4028-00
May 1994 - June 1995

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SUMMARY

Between May 1994 and June 1995, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) conducted a local government assistance program in Estonia. NDI's activities were primarily designed to assist local officials in three cities to implement procedures that encourage public participation in the local decision-making process. Following the end of USAID funding, NDI continued the program, extending its activities to two additional cities, with funds from the National Endowment for Democracy.

BACKGROUND

Since their independence in 1991, the Baltic States have struggled with the task of decentralizing their administrative structures and building local communities capable of governing themselves. Estonia was the first of the three countries to take concrete steps in this direction. In 1993, Estonia's parliament passed legislation that established all localities, regardless of size, as autonomous entities with equal status vis-à-vis the center. The new legislation took effect following the country's first post-independence local government elections in October 1993.

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) has been providing democratic assistance in the Baltic States since 1991, conducting programs on democratic institution-building and civic and voter education. In November 1993, the Institute sent a small team to Estonia to explore the possibilities for programming to assist the newly elected local governments. The NDI team visited six of Estonia's largest cities and met with national and local elected officials, political and civic leaders, journalists, and academicians. The team found that local officials outside the capital lacked the necessary expertise and resources to respond effectively to the needs of their communities. Moreover, the team observed that local governments were not making sufficient use of existing resources by reaching out to and involving constituents in solving community problems.

Following the visit, NDI decided to establish a field office in Estonia and initiate a program primarily designed to assist several targeted local governments. USAID agreed to fund the program for one year (after which USAID funding would be used to support a similar program

in Lithuania). NDI chose Tartu as its base of operations because the city's government was especially receptive to NDI's mission and because the city, home to Tartu University, offered valuable access to local expertise and infrastructural support. NDI decided to concentrate its efforts in three of the cities it had visited in November: Tartu; Narva, an industrial city in the northeastern corner of the country with a predominantly Russian population; and Voru, a small town in the Southeast of Estonia.

In April 1994, NDI hired Wallace Rogers to be its field representative and local government trainer in Estonia. Before joining NDI, Rogers had served for eight years on the Eau Claire, Wisconsin city council, acting as chair of the council for four years. Rogers arrived in Estonia in May 1994. He revisited most of the contacts NDI had made during its previous visit and began to establish working relationships with key people in each of the three target cities. In early July 1994, NDI's office on Tartu's town hall square was opened. By late July, NDI's local government assistance program was fully developed and a work plan submitted to USAID.

OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of NDI's program was to encourage the governments of the three target cities to introduce procedures and mechanisms, such as public hearings, citizen task forces, and public commissions, that guarantee residents a voice in local decision-making beyond elections. In particular, NDI sought to persuade city officials to institutionalize these procedures so that public participation would become a regular feature of how the communities conducted business, well beyond the current incumbents' tenure in office.

The program's secondary focus was on creating opportunities for local government officials in the three target cities and throughout Estonia to meet and discuss common problems and to learn about how their international counterparts in other democracies handle similar responsibilities. Because the program year coincided with national parliamentary elections, held in March 1995, NDI also anticipated the opportunity to assist political parties in stimulating political participation, particularly, at the local level. Finally, since NDI's field representative had considerable teaching experience (he came to NDI from the faculty of the political science department at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire), NDI also made plans to establish a cooperative relationship with the political science faculty at Tartu University.

ACTIVITIES

A. Municipal Activities

Throughout the program year, NDI's field representative facilitated the development and implementation of public participation programs by working closely with local administration members, elected officials, and community leaders in each of the three target cities.

Tartu and Narva

In Tartu, NDI worked in cooperation with both the city council and the city administration to organize a first public hearing on the city's community development plan. NDI developed a close working relationship with the chairman of the city council, who became an ardent supporter of public participation. In Narva, NDI found an ally in the city's deputy mayor, who expressed interest in holding a series of public meetings prior to the development of a community development plan for Narva. Although NDI never worked directly with the Narva city council members, the administration had the full support of the city council. Both NDI and its contact in the administration viewed the hearings as a way of reaching out to Narva's majority population of ethnic Russians, who were not represented on the city council.

In both cities, NDI initiated the training with a series of consultations to present the rationale for public participation. During these meetings, the NDI field representative explained why public participation should be an essential part of policy-making in a democratically oriented government. Subsequent discussions focused on how to channel citizen participation to fit the needs of the city. After determining in each case that a community development plan was the best opportunity around which to organize a public participation program, NDI worked closely with local officials on developing an action plan and selecting and training a team responsible for organizing the hearings. In both cases, the decision to organize the hearings was formally endorsed by the city council.

With NDI's help, public hearings on the cities' community development plans were held in Tartu and Narva. Tartu's first town meeting, in May 1995, was attended by more than forty people and was well managed and received. The experience persuaded city officials to organize a follow-up hearing after the plan was revised and to include a public participation component in the development of the city's 1996 budget. A revised version of the community development plan and the first draft of the city's 1996 budget were the subjects of a second large-scale hearing in December 1995.

Narva's approach was to convene four small meetings with professionals interested in specific aspects of their development plan. These meetings took place throughout the winter and spring of 1995. A general public hearing was held at a neighborhood community center in November 1995. It was attended by more than 80 people.

As part of the program in each city, NDI worked closely with local officials to help them develop public information brochures that included information about the structure of municipal government and the roles of local officials, as well as summaries of each city's development plan and 1995 budget. The brochures were distributed to the public at hearings and city council meetings. They represent an important aspect of the public participation initiative in each city and were eagerly received by people who attended the events at which

they were made available. [An English translation of the Tartu brochure is included as an appendix to this report.]

Voru

In Voru, NDI first encountered resistance from the administration to the notion of reaching out to residents and involving them in community affairs. (Cooperation with the Voru government was also hampered by the sinking of the *Estonia* passenger ferry in September 1994, which claimed the lives of the mayor of Voru and several members of his administration.) NDI circumvented the administration's reluctance to involve the public by working with a community task force to draft a "Greater Voru" strategic development plan for the city. The initiative to draft the plan was an outcome of a one-day seminar which NDI conducted for members of the Voru government in January 1995. (See also below.) The task force, established with the assistance of a local Peace Corps representative, included seven members representing town and county government and civic and business organizations.

During a series of meetings facilitated between May and September 1995 by the NDI field representative, the Voru task force produced a draft plan that describes, prioritizes and suggests responsibility assignments and deadlines for several projects to be undertaken and completed within the next five years. The projects all relate to a "community vision" formulated by the task force. The strategic development plan was presented to town and county officials in January 1996. [An English draft version of the plan is included as an appendix to this report.]

B. Training Seminars

September 30 - October 1, 1994 Seminar

Topic: Intergovernmental Relations

During a first round of meetings conducted by the NDI field representative in June 1994, officials in NDI's three target cities expressed frustration that the national government was generally insensitive and unsympathetic to the needs and responsibilities of local government. In response, NDI organized a seminar to present and discuss practical ways in which the Narva, Voru, and Tartu governments could be more effective in gaining national support for their projects and how the cities could better influence national legislation and policy making in areas that affected them.

Each city was invited to send a delegation to the seminar; NDI assembled a six-member team of trainers who had considerable experience as effective advocates for local government interests. The team included: Joanne Adams, a local government consultant for USIA and former field representative for NDI in Moscow; Eric Anderson, City Manager of Evanston, Illinois; Roger Appleton, Head of the Policy Unit of the Wandsworth Borough Council in London; Grzegorz Grzelak, a local councillor from Gdansk, Poland, and Deputy Chair of the

Polish Assembly of Local Authorities; John Krauss, former Deputy Mayor of Indianapolis, Indiana; and Thomas Volgy, former Mayor of Tucson, Arizona. The two-day meeting was held in Tartu.

Forty-three people attended the seminar, almost all of them elected and appointed officials from Narva and Tartu. (The Voru delegation did not participate due to the sinking of the passenger ferry *Estonia* one day before the seminar. As previously noted, the mayor of Voru and several members of his administration were among the 900 victims of this disaster.) The sinking of the *Estonia* dampened the participants' enthusiasm, but 24 of 32 attendees who returned evaluation sheets had very favorable impressions about the seminar and thought that the topics of discussion had immediate practical application.

NDI arranged for Eric Anderson and Roger Appleton to return to Estonia in January 1995. On January 24, the team held a day-long version of the seminar in Voru. Twenty-three local government officials attended the training. During the seminar, a number of the participants decided that Voru's case would probably be made most effectively to the central government if it could be shown to be part of a well conceived and comprehensive approach to dealing with the challenges the community faced. An idea to develop a strategic management plan grew from the discussion and was accomplished six months later by the "Greater Voru" strategic planning task force (see also above).

January 12-13, 1995 Seminar

Topic: Political Party Training -- Campaign Management

Estonia's second national parliamentary election since independence was held on March 5, 1995. Prior to the election, several of NDI's city council contacts in Narva, Tartu, and Voru asked if NDI could offer training for their national parties' campaign organizations. Using funds from the National Endowment for Democracy, NDI sent political trainer Peter O'Brien to Estonia in early January to advise parties and coalitions on campaign strategies. Besides conducting one-on-one consultations with most of the parties and coalitions, NDI organized a training workshop in Tartu to coincide with the beginning of the electoral campaign. The Institute assembled a panel of four trainers that included NDI's Estonia field representative; O'Brien; Kate Head, an American political organizer from NDI's Moscow office; and Hege Hero, a Norwegian Conservative Party activist.

The seminar was attended by 41 people who represented twelve different parties and coalitions. Following the March election, three parties requested and received follow-up help from NDI as they began to organize for local elections in 1996.

May 18 - 19, 1995 Seminar

Topic: Public Participation in Local Government

Anticipating a continuation of its Estonia program beyond the end of USAID-funding, NDI

organized a seminar with a dual purpose: to provide an overview of public participation to local officials from across Estonia and to persuade two or three other cities to adopt some of the public participation mechanisms that were now in evidence in Voru, Narva, and Tartu.

Three trainers joined the NDI field representative for the two-day program in Tartu. They were: NDI local government trainer Cara Hesse, who had had considerable experience in neighborhood-based community organizing in the United States; Jim Nathanson, former City Council member for the District of Columbia; and George Farcas, a consultant to the Trumbull County (Ohio) Planning Commission. The program placed emphasis on presenting a rationale for opening the policy-making process up to ordinary citizens and how this effort might be organized and accomplished. The experiences of Tartu, Narva and Voru were highlighted by local officials from those communities who attended the seminar.

Thirty-nine people from 14 separate local jurisdictions participated in the seminar, as did two members of parliament. All the program's evaluations rated the seminar's content and presentation as extremely useful and well-conceived. Several cities requested follow-up consultations, which were conducted during the fall of 1995.

POST USAID PROGRAMMING

Following the end of its USAID funding, NDI was able to continue its activities in Estonia on a grant from the National Endowment for Democracy. Wallace Rogers stayed on in Tartu to conduct NDI's programming through March 1996. Besides continuing to assist ongoing projects in Tartu, Narva, and Voru, NDI expanded its public participation program into two additional cities, Viljandi and Pärnu. In Tartu, Narva, Viljandi, and Pärnu, much of NDI's activity was organized in cooperation with Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI), a USAID contractor. Working closely with the DAI staff, NDI also helped to enhance the capacity of one of its local partners, the Tartu Development Center, to provide consultative services and technical assistance to local governments in Estonia. NDI and DAI have assisted the Tartu Development Center in hiring and training an Estonian local government expert to carry on public administration and public participation programming after USAID's close-out in September 1996.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

The most important goal of NDI's local government assistance program has been to establish a democratic initiative that long survives its on-the-ground presence in Tartu. The citizen participation projects in Narva, Tartu and Voru appear to have accomplished that. Permanent procedures for public hearings have been institutionalized for community development planning projects in Narva and Tartu. Public hearings will also be part of the budget process in Tartu. Voru's experience with citizen study committees has been a positive one and affords city and county officials a public management tool they will use often when developing public policy and making important long-range decisions. Furthermore, the experience of these cities

provides a positive example for other communities in Estonia. The Tartu Development Center will employ a local government consultant trained by NDI, who will be able help local governments to continue and expand the practices and procedures NDI helped establish.

NDI was not able to establish working relationships with the political science faculty at Tartu University and the staff of the Association of Estonian Cities (the country's largest organization representing local government interests). Work with individual local governments, particularly in Tartu, proved more intensive than anticipated, making the cooperation with university and the Association a lower priority, given time constraints.

Except for the shortfalls mentioned in the previous paragraph, the task NDI set for itself in its workplan for Estonia has been accomplished. Its successes can be objectively measured in reports about the three seminars NDI sponsored during its program year, official accounts and media reports about the public hearings it helped organize, the public participation pamphlets NDI and local government officials in Narva and Tartu developed, printed and widely distributed, and the "Greater Voru" strategic development plan. (See the Attachments for some of these documents. Others have already been submitted as attachments to NDI's quarterly reports.)

What NDI has learned about the potential for instituting workable public participation programs in Estonia is transferable to other political structures in place in the former Soviet Union, particularly at the local government level. The Estonia experience will be shared and applied both throughout this region and elsewhere as part of other NDI local government assistance programs.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Tartu Public Participation Brochure

Appendix 2 - Voru Strategic Development Plan

**Appendix 3 - NDI Brochure on How to Conduct
Public Participation Programs**

Appendix 1 - Tartu Public Participation Brochure

THE CITY OF TARTU

Information About City Government, the City's Budget, and the 1995 - 1997 Tartu Development Plan

In democracies like Estonia, the authority to govern comes from the people who are governed. To be sure, this is the organizational basis for city government in Tartu. No government is closer and more accessible to citizens than local government and no government affects the every day lives of average people like local government does. To do our jobs the best way possible, your City Council and your City Government believe it's important to find ways for you to tell us how we're doing and what we should be considering to do. This pamphlet hopefully gives you background information that will help you make those types of judgments best, so together we citizens and municipal leaders can all do what we do better.

This pamphlet contains some basic information about two important documents that city council members and city government officials will consult frequently. You should know something about both of them and your city's leaders should know what you think about them.

THE TARTU CITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The City's Development Plan has three purposes:

1. to identify and describe issues and problems that the city should address during the planning period (1995 - 1997),
2. to identify and describe ways those issues can be addressed and those problems can be solved, and
3. to estimate how much these projects and programs will cost and suggest when they should be scheduled to be done.

Because there will probably always be more that has to be done than there are resources (time, people and money) available to do everything, the Development Plan, with its comprehensive analysis of all the community's needs, is a good thing for city leaders to consult when they have to decide what to do with the city's money.

The Development Plan is a long and detailed document. It includes many facts and statistics about Tartu. It analyzes the current condition of the city and suggests a direction toward which it should be moving during these next three years. It sets some goals and objectives that can be kilometer posts which measure how much progress the city's made in getting to where it wants to be.

The Plan in its present form makes six major points:

1. Tartu is not an industrial city. Large industries that were established in the city during Soviet times are grossly oversized, their capacities far exceeding the demand the Estonian economy has for what they produce. The city should develop programs that encourage the growth of small business that flourish because Tartu is and will always be the regional trade center for all of southeastern Estonia.
2. The local economy must be diversified. Development of tourism-related business should be promoted, as should scientific, medical and general research centers. The city should better exploit its reputation as Estonia's center of culture and learning as it grows. Tartu University needs to be more active in promoting and enhancing these types of advantages for the university and the city's economic benefit.
3. If Tartu is to become a major national trade center, it won't happen by challenging Tallinn's position. Tartu's success depends on the expansion of east-west trade opportunities, perhaps involving Germany and Russia. The redevelopment of Raadi Air Base may be the way to enhance Tartu's importance as hub for east-west trade.
4. Privatization must be accomplished as quickly as possible. Returning expropriated property to pre-1940 owners and privatizing municipally-owned housing and state-owned businesses should be one of the city's highest priorities.
5. Provision of health care and social welfare services should be decentralized. To the maximum extent feasible, facilities should be situated near where the people who will use them live. This applies to police protection services, too.
6. In order for Tartu to realistically expect any of its grand economic and community development plans to evolve as real projects and programs, the city must make a very significant investment in repairing, improving, and rebuilding its public works infrastructure. This includes major arterial and residential streets, water, and sewer lines, and the heating plant and its distribution system. As privatization of property is accomplished, these kinds of projects should be the places where the city's money is spent.

THE 1995 CITY BUDGET

The city's budget is a very important document. It's a public policy statement that specifically says how much of the city's time, manpower, and scarce financial resources will be allocated for programs and projects and the offices and agencies assigned to administer them.

The budget is developed by the City Government. It's presented to the City Council which must adopt it in order for it to become effective. The Council not only very carefully examines the proposed budget, it usually makes adjustments or amendments to it before it's

passed. The Council is sometimes even involved in drafting the original proposal offered by the mayor and his staff. After the budget is passed, the Council routinely monitors how it is followed and how the money they approved is spent.

In 1995 the city will collect and spend about 145 million kroons. Most of the City of Tartu's money comes from the national government in Tallinn. It is allocated to the city either on the basis of a formula that depends on population statistics, or data about how much of the tax was raised in Tartu that was sent by the taxation authorities to the state treasury in Tallinn. Less than ten percent of the city's funds come from local sources. However, that should change during the next few years as property is privatized and cities begin to decide locally how much of its value should be taxed.

Elsewhere in this pamphlet is information about who and how to contact people in City Government who can answer questions you might have about the city's business. We invite and appreciate your interest in what we do.

Appendix 2 - Voru Strategic Development Plan

Estonia

VISION STATEMENT for the Year 2000:

Voru will be a vibrant, attractive community -- a regional trade center for southeast Estonia -- with low unemployment and steady growth.

ELEMENTS OF THE VORU COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN

1. Economic Development

Most of the new jobs that will be created in Voru these next five years will be home-grown -- by the expansion of businesses already operating in the community or new enterprises, created on a small scale, by entrepreneurs who already live here. In order for Voru to successfully attract outside business investment, its economic development effort must be highly organized, well-coordinated, and feature innovative programs.

PROJECT 1-1: Formation of a Public-Private Partnership Whose Ultimate Purpose is to Form and Operate the Greater Voru Economic Development Corporation (GVEDC)

1. City and county governments will authorize the creation of GVEDC, whose membership will be appointed by concurrent resolution of each government and consist of an equal number of government officials and representatives of business and community organizations and private enterprises.

Members of the Strategic Planning Task Force will draft enabling legislation and present it to the governing bodies. Presentation will be in September. GVEDC will be operational in late October.

2. Responsibilities and tasks for GVEDC:

- Develop a funding proposal for 50,000 USD for administration and programming (possibly including the purchase of real estate that can be used to create opportunities for business development). Submit proposals to the Soros Foundation and the World Bank. (December 1995)
- Set up a one-stop shopping procedure for representatives of the State Privatization Council and the potential investors they bring to Voru. (February 1996)

PROJECT 1-2: Small Business Incubator

1. Arrange for the purchase and rehabilitation of unused factory or manufacturing space for the operation of a business incubator -- a place where people from Voru with good ideas for small businesses can begin to operate those businesses. (Through the GVEDC board of directors, by April 1996)
2. Set up a procedure by which business plans from prospective tenants can be reviewed, evaluated, and the best, accepted. (GVEDC by the end of January 1996)

2. Housing

Voru has made good progress privatizing its government-owned housing stock. But much of that housing needs immediate rehabilitation to structural elements like foundations, plumbing and electrical systems. Energy conservation plans that hope to convert the city's central heating system to one that is more consumer-controlled will necessitate major adjustments and installation of better insulation in walls and ceilings. The community also needs to encourage the construction of new low-density housing, has hardly

4. Infrastructure Improvements

Substantial work has to be done to maintain and improve the Town of Voru's public infrastructure system, especially in three areas: changing the heating and water distribution systems from being centrally controlled to being consumer controlled; building a new landfill; improving roads and streets. Good infrastructure systems attract new business and industry and helps persuade what's in place to stay and expand. This means more jobs and a growing community.

PROJECT 4-1: A New Landfill

1. Working closely with city government officials, the county governor will convene a task force of local experts in solid waste management that will have three responsibilities:
 - to assess the immediate need, size and cost of a new landfill
 - to study and evaluate alternative methods for disposing of solid waste
 - to develop a comprehensive solid waste management plan

The task force's report should be ready by the end of May 1996. The task force should be formed and begin its work in October 1995.

2. Armed with the task force's plan and report, the governor and the task force chairman will make presentations to the World Bank and other international financial institutions for funding to help pay for construction of a new landfill and projects suggested in the task force's plan. The team will also seek a private business partner who might be willing to help develop such facilities as a demonstration project. (May-September 1996)

PROJECT 4-2: A Comprehensive Street Improvement Plan

1. The deputy mayor in charge of public works and highways will develop a five-year street improvement program that recognizes available funding for this work and immediate need and maximum benefit for making improvements to existing streets. His report should be ready in the time the mayor to include 1996 recommendations as part of his 1996 budget.

PROJECT 4-3: Heating System Conversion

1. The director of the heating plant will collect and analyze all available information about converting centralized municipal heating systems to consumer-controlled systems.
2. The city will hire a consultant (January 1996) who'll help the director formulate a long-range plan to make the conversion. The plan should include a cost estimate and the time frame it will take to make a complete or partial conversion. The report should be finished by July 1996.

PLEASE NOTE:

SEVERAL OF THE PROJECTS DESCRIBED IN THIS PLAN OF ARE STUDIES OF SPECIFIC ISSUES THE STRATEGIC PLANNING TASK FORCE THINKS THAT CITY AND COUNTY GOVERNMENT SHOULD ADDRESS. SPECIFIC PROJECTS IMPLEMENTING STUDY GROUP AND COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS SHOULD BE INCLUDED AS AMENDMENTS TO THIS PLAN.

any has been built for more than ten years. Improvements and additions to the housing stock have to be accomplished in an economic environment where most people can't afford to pay to do needed improvements or purchase their housing without government incentives and direct funding assistance.

PROJECT 2-1: New Housing Construction Demonstration Project

1. The town government will provide suitable land to a private company that will build energy efficient duplex (two-family) housing on it. Perspective owners must be able to demonstrate that they can provide 25% of the cost of such housing and are willing to enter into a cooperative agreement with the housing developer in order to pool their funds so that the developer can get funding for the project.
2. The project will be set up as a "demonstration" so as to attract foreign money at favorable rates to do it. Voru's housing director will be in charge of developing a project proposal (November 1995), seeking interested builders (January 1996), and getting financing (May 1996) and a good site (January 1996) for the project.

PROJECT 2-2: Housing Rehabilitation Fund

1. Create a program where homeowners can get no-interest loans to make structural (heating, electrical, foundation, roof, plumbing, insulation) improvements to their houses. Loans will be forgiven if the owner continues to live in his house for seven years after the improvements were made. Money for the improvements will be provided in equal parts by the homeowner, the city or county government, and the state government. Local government inspectors will help supervise the work.
2. The mayor's office will develop a project proposal, establish the size of the fund, get the city council to provisionally approve its inclusion in the 1996 budget (December 1995), and will seek at least a one-third match from the state government (March 1996).

3. The Environment

Voru city and county governments need to enhance existing public parks, better protect and maintain natural and historic areas. Doing these kinds of things make the community more attractive, the people who live here proud, and visitors and potential residents more attracted to the area.

PROJECT 3-1: The Historic and Natural Resource Protection Commission

1. City and county government will jointly form a ten-member citizen commission that will have three responsibilities:
 - do an inventory report that lists and describes the condition of historic places, public parks, natural and wildlife areas
 - list structures and areas that should be designated public places and public domain
 - estimates the annual cost of maintaining an existing and expanded parks system
 - offers a development plan intended to specifically address environmental issues the commission thinks should be raised
2. The Commission's inventory and report should be completed and presented to the mayor and county governor by April 1996

**Appendix 3 - NDI Brochure on How to Conduct
Public Participation Programs**



NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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INVOLVING CITIZENS IN THE BUSINESS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR IMPLEMENTING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROGRAMS

1. INTRODUCTION

This pamphlet is a handbook that describes ways and means to involve the public in helping make municipal government policies and decisions. It is written in a way so as to make it useful to local government advisors, elected officials, city administrators, and members of civic organizations interested in making the business of government more open and accessible to the people government is supposed to serve. It is aimed at people who are in positions to institutionalize public participation procedures: people who can write regulations and pass laws and ordinances that can make what is described here become a required part of the ways things are done in government.

Your interest in this topic probably indicates that you have been, are, or soon will be somehow associated with a government that has been structurally arranged and conducts its business in a democratic way. Whatever vagaries your political situation exhibits, your circumstance is a variation of a common theme: the people who are making political decisions and public policy were either bestowed their authority through the rite of an election or owe their position and the responsibilities that accompany it to winners of the jurisdiction's most recent election. This is the same seed from which all public participation initiatives grow. Sometimes it's fertilized by civic mindedness; sometimes, by political expediency; usually, by a combination of both. This pamphlet employs both motivations to make a case for inviting citizen participation in local government.

Finally, when promoting increased public participation in government, be cognizant that democracy exists in many varieties -- not just the American Jeffersonian brand. Every nation which considers itself "democratic" seems to have a few ideals that profoundly affect its political life. In America, ideals (like liberty, self-government, equality, individualism, diversity) are the basis for its national identity and are tightly wrapped in Americans' notion of what democracy ought to be. For people in most other countries, their national identity grows from the common ancestry that gradually drew them under one flag. (Before there was a Russia, there were Russian people.) Democracy encountered in its applied form around the world is often highly influenced by cultural proclivities not indigenous in America. That's not for better or worse: it's just different.

The word "football" conjures images of a sport played much differently in America than almost everywhere else in world. But both games, when played best, put premium value on the same athletic characteristics: speed, quickness, and agility. So it is with "democracy" and public participation.

2. WHY SHOULD PUBLIC PARTICIPATION BE AN ESSENTIAL PART OF MAKING POLICY IN A DEMOCRATICALLY ORGANIZED GOVERNMENT?

The Civic Perspective

Democracy is a form of government in which a substantial portion of the citizenry have opportunities to participate in ruling themselves. The best examples of democratic government offer their citizens the broadest range of opportunity to participate and have the greatest the portion of their population using those opportunities. In a democratic society, people have a civic responsibility to actively participate in governing themselves -- so said the ancient Athenians, who conceived the idea.

Democracy is usually exercised in an indirect manner. As prescribed in a constitution or charter previously approved by referendum, citizens choose a few from among them to represent all of them in their government. The event that accomplishes this is an election. Voting – the process that determines who represents the people – is the most obvious example of citizen participation in government. Some advocates of representative democracy go so far as to maintain that the occasional act of voting is the defining moment when civic responsibility is exercised in democratic governance.

But democracy means more than the selection of accountable representatives to undertake all the real tasks of government. In its developed form, democracy involves burdensome practices of collective self-government. Learning how to become competent citizens capable of community self-government requires individuals to deliberate as members of a community – to learn a language of civic discourse that does more than express their private interests. From a civic perspective in a democratic society, it's as much part of the job for public officials in leadership roles to provide these opportunities for civic discourse as it is for their citizens to avail themselves of them. In a democracy, the rulers and the ruled have a shared responsibility for making government. Responsibility is taught by giving people responsibility. Elected and appointed leaders providing ways for the rest of the population to become involved what government regularly does encourages citizens to share aspects of the decision making and policy making responsibility. Responsibility of this kind cannot be ceded to great leaders. Regardless of the cultural differences among the many places democratic governments are trying to establish institutional footholds, democracy always suffers when political leaders are only held publicly accountable for the decisions they make at election time.

In order for democracy to work, it is imperative that citizens have chances to participate in aspects of government's usual operation. In this form of government, they are the source from which all political power and political authority is supposed to flow. The importance of their role should be regularly re-affirmed for them. It's every elected leader's responsibility to make sure that those opportunities are provided, and it's every citizen's responsibility to learn how to participate constructively occasionally between elections.

The Political Perspective

No matter what cultural accessories democracy sprouts in its many applied forms around the world, the variations grow from one standard assumption: leaders became leaders because they got the greatest amount of citizen support in the last election. Even if they were appointed to their positions or chosen from among a body of directly elected representatives, the basis for being able to hold their jobs is the continued support of more potential voters than anyone else who wants their job. It's clear who the boss is in this system – it's the voting public.

The public's opinion (about who should lead them, in what general direction and at what general pace they want to be led) has an important place in all democratic societies because of the concept that government springs from the will of the people it governs. The idea that government should attend to the opinions of ordinary citizens is deeply embedded in democratic thought and has to be an important consideration for anyone who wants to have his or her job for more than one interim between successive elections. Practically speaking, public opinion is an important influence on government but doesn't necessarily directly determine what public officials always do. Public opinion works mostly to impose limits and directions on the choices available to leaders in democracies -- a fact that doesn't diminish its importance as part of the democratic framework, but rather describes how important it is that a public official be aware of it.

Elections are certainly good indicators of public opinion; so are public opinion polls. The first provides the information the hard way (one's job is at immediate risk in order to get it), and it often comes too late to do any good and enhance the public official's political career. The second way is expensive

and the information received is often subject to broad interpretation and is never absolutely accurate. But there's also a third way to gauge public opinion firsthand:

Public officials can invite citizens to get a glimpse of what goes on inside their government, learn about how decisions are made and what is considered when those decisions are made. Officials can create forums where interested citizens (likely voters) can offer their opinions about public policies that affect where they live, how they work, and how the taxes they pay are spent.

A good politician will come away from such an experience with an enhanced appreciation for the voters' overall mood and their attitudes about projects and problems the politician is dealing with and will have to make decisions about (all of which becomes part of his performance evaluation, to be reviewed by voters when he seeks re-election).

There are at least four reasons why encouraging public participation in government is good politics:

1. Elected officials get chances to meet voters face-to-face and broaden their base of support (and the people who will take the politician up on the opportunity to participate in the governing process are indeed people who vote). The politician instantly becomes more than a name in the newspaper or among the many names on a ballot on election day.
2. People like to be asked their opinion about important issues — especially issues that directly affect them. Even if they choose not to offer an opinion, they like to be asked. It makes them feel important, and people like to think they matter. That's human nature.
3. The circumstance provides the public official with an opportunity to show his boss (voters) that he knows his job and is doing it responsibly — something invaluable at election time. Potential challengers have no such opportunities.
4. The politician has created a forum where he can control the agenda, the flow of information, and get the feedback he needs to make the best political decision he can when the time comes that decisions have to be made.

From the politician's point of view, creating opportunities for ordinary citizens to become involved in government in circumstances besides elections is an example of a situation that one faces too rarely in politics — when doing the right thing is the right thing to do. It's good democratic government, and it's good democratic politics.

3. AVENUES FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT

Citizen participation is most effectively accomplished at the local government level. Not coincidentally, a nation's democratic tendencies grow from democratic traditions first established in its towns, cities and villages. Ordinary citizens identify closest with local government. Its leaders are their neighbors and the mayor's office and the city council's chambers are conveniently nearby; the business it conducts often directly affects their daily lives; it's where their involvement is most likely to influence an outcome. Local government officials are in frequent contact with the people they serve because a large part of the local politician's job is constituent service-based. Citizens are motivated to participate; local officials have a proclivity for conducting many aspects of their work face-to-face with citizens.

There are three things that a local government jurisdiction routinely does that captures its residents' interest and attention:

1. levies taxes and spends the money the municipality has directly collected from its citizens and has received as shared revenue from taxes its citizens have paid to the state government,
2. plans and regulates community development,
3. provides essential services (like water and sewer services, public transportation, police and fire protection, housing for low-income people, heating and electrical utilities, garbage pick-up).

There are usually two important policy documents local governments develop and regularly refer to as they do these things: a budget and a land use or development plan. A useful and comprehensive public participation program can be organized around activities that involve citizens in the budget proposal's review and/or a comprehensive plan's development and implementation.

Doing a budget is an annual affair – the responsibility of the government's administrative branch. The budget document includes revenue projections and an accounting of how those revenues will be spent (commonly organized by listing each administrative agency or department, each office's allocation being broken into categories like personnel and funds set aside for special projects). The city council is usually responsible for passing the laws that authorize collecting the required revenues that have to be raised locally and approving the budget in its final form. The budget is very much a public policy instrument. It establishes priorities for what the municipality will be about in the coming year by determining what gets funded and what doesn't, and how much of the city's scarce resources (money, time and manpower) will be set aside for funded projects and activities.

A good place to involve citizens in the public budgetary process is when the city administration first presents its proposed budget to the city council. The council, being the people's representatives in the government, would probably find it helpful to hear from the people what they think about how much the mayor thinks they ought to be taxed and what he suggests their money be spent for. Council members can take the public's reaction into account as they review, revise and approve the next year's budget.

Probably the best way to handle the public's review of the budget proposal is to convene at least two public hearings: one, held on the occasion of the administration's presentation of its proposal to the council; a second, just prior to the council's consideration of its adoption – perhaps in an amended form, reflecting adjustments made because of the public's reaction to some of its parts. How to organize a public hearing and a description of what usually happens at one is described in detail in the handbook's next section.

The other place public participation works well involves city development plans. Most cities have them. If they don't, there is probably someone in the city administration who wants to do one. A good community development effort is based on sound long-range planning. That way, street and utility improvements, business development, population growth and environmental projects can be managed so that they complement and benefit each other. Creating and maintaining a favorable physical and cultural environment where a community can grow and prosper is every elected local government official's goal. How successful he is at doing it is the standard by which his job performance is publicly evaluated.

People who draft development plans usually begin by creating a "vision" of what they want their community to be at the end of planning period (most often, three to five years) – like a regional trade center, a tourist destination, or a center for education and medicine. Next comes an objective analysis of the current condition of the community, highlighting its strengths and its weaknesses. The plan then proceeds to develop programs and projects that build on those strengths and recognize those weaknesses, to get the community to where it wants to be by the end of the planning period. If community leaders are committed to making the plan happen, its contents are an important consideration when considering and approving capital improvement projects when annual budgets are developed.

Doing a community development plan or periodically reviewing and revising one already done presents an excellent opportunity to get citizens involved and interested in local government. They should be consulted to find out what direction the community should move anyway. It's good politics to ask. Their involvement can be channeled through public hearings and special citizen task forces charged with actually producing parts of plan (like the vision statement or the section that describes how aspects of the plan will be funded). Inviting the public to be part of the process of developing a comprehensive community-wide development plan lends greater legitimacy to the plan and creates citizen-supporters for

policies and projects it advocates – something useful to have around when a public official is seeking the popular and political support he needs implement them.

4. ORGANIZING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Previous sections have presented a rationale for public participation and suggested two things government does where citizen participation can be usefully applied: developing budgets and community development plans. This part describes how to apply public participation. There are many ways to channel citizen participation. Here, variations of two are explored in some detail: public hearings, and citizen committees, advisory groups and task forces.

Public Hearings

These are usually single topic meetings about a matter of public interest to which the public is expressly invited to attend to hear an official presentation about the meeting's topic and to comment on the matter at hand. It's a practice unusual in Europe, but dates from colonial times in America, where tradition generally requires the general public to be consulted, or at least informed, about almost every public policy decision.

Public hearings should be held at times convenient to the public – not during the day when most people are working, but preferably on a weekday evening. If possible, they ought to be held at places convenient for the public to get to, like a neighborhood center, instead of downtown at the city administration building. (This reinforces the notion that the government is coming to them, to ask their opinion about something important that has to be decided.) The hearing ought to be advertised at least two weeks in advance: by word-of-mouth to community leaders, on radio and in the newspapers, by written announcements posted in places the public will likely see them. Press releases that summarize the draft of the development plan and the budget and describe the process by which the plan and the budget will be presented to the public should be written and distributed. (If the press releases sound interesting, the government can get its public hearings announced in news stories, saving the expense of paid advertisements.)

There ought to be something simple, prepared beforehand, that gives general background information about the budget or the land use plan. It should be available for distribution when the public hearing is first announced so people can pick it up prior to the meeting, and it should be printed in enough quantity to have plenty available for distribution at the hearings. These hand-outs accomplish two purposes: they tend to help focus an informed discussion on the subject at the meeting, and they afford an opportunity to get public officials' names before the public one more time. (The pamphlets usually include names, titles and telephone numbers of the policy makers who are dealing with the issue.) If people want the full copies of the draft of a development plan or a budget, they should be able to get them, but it is not unreasonable for them to have to pay time and material costs to copy it.

It is often hard to predict how many people will come to a public hearing. Seemingly important things like the annual budget may attract almost no one while a discussion about part of the development plan like the location and design of a bridge might attract a hundred people. The most important thing about doing public hearings is not how many come to them, but that people know that the hearings are being held and that they have been invited to attend them – that their opinions are important and are sought by their government.

Public hearings should be managed so as to last no more than two hours if possible. Most analyses of meetings indicate that a meeting's productivity really begins to drop off after it extends past ninety minutes. The most difficult aspect of doing a public hearing is to move the meeting along without giving the people who have come to it a sense that the meeting's sponsors don't have the time or interest to hear their comments and opinions and would rather be somewhere else.

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The chairman of the meeting should open the meeting -- on time -- by introducing himself, the people sitting with him in the front of the audience, and any other elected officials or administrators present. He should thank the people present for taking time to come to the hearing. Next there should be a brief presentation by the city staff (no more than thirty minutes, preferably using visual aids of some kind) about the topic of the public hearing. Public comments will usually focus on some aspect of the staff presentation.

Now it is time for listening to the public and answering the questions they raise.

The pace of the meeting can be controlled by gently reminding speakers to keep their comments to the subject of the public hearing. If several speakers are repeating the same point, the chairperson might ask all the people at the meeting to show, by raising their hands, how many support the speaker's opinion. This allows people to indicate their point of view without necessarily giving the same testimony over and over again.

Most hearings have the practice of inviting people to address themselves and their comments to the meeting's chairperson and the officials sitting up front. People usually begin their comments by introducing themselves. They should have a chance to speak into a microphone or in some way that assures that their comments are heard not only by the chairperson, but by the audience, too. The chairperson and the panel members up front sometimes ask the speaker questions about his comments after the speaker is finished, but care should be taken that these be questions of clarification only. The people asking them should be sensitive to making the people who speak not feel badgered or intimidated, rather they agree with what they've said or not. This is the public's meeting -- it's a public hearing.

Every public hearing should be chaired by either the mayor, the chairman of the city council, or the government official assigned by the mayor to manage the process of developing the city plan or the city budget. In any case, it is important that all three of them come to every public meeting, if possible. This subtly demonstrates to everyone there how important the public hearing process and the development plan or the budget are, and it gives each of those three important people a firsthand indication of the public reaction to the development plan or the budget.

A few words are appropriate here about the kind of public reaction one should expect at public hearings. First, they are usually attended by a disproportionate share of pensioners, mostly because their circumstance allows them time to go to meetings and develop an interest in public affairs. Secondly, testimony will sometimes seem to indicate the public is negatively disposed to aspects of the budget or development plan. It is human nature that decision makers routinely hear from the people who are not happy with the decisions they make; the people who favor them are less apt to tell them so. The people conducting the hearing should not base their opinions about the development plan or the proposed budget solely on the basis of the hearing. Among other things, the hearing is a safety valve for allowing disapproving persons to gain the opinion that they have had their say on the matter directly to the people in charge; sometimes they even succeed in having a proposal modified somewhat. The hearing also allows officials to judge the political climate prior to making decisions, possibly learning how to minimize unfavorable responses to what they finally decide to do.

After everybody who wants to has had a chance to talk, public hearings conclude with the chairperson thanking the people who came to the meeting for their interest and their participation, assuring the people who spoke that what they said will be considered as the development plan or the budget is drafted in its final form and implemented, and explaining what happens next to the document and when it is likely to be officially before the city council for its consideration and adoption.

Someone from the city government should be assigned responsibility to attend the hearing, make official minutes of the meeting, and, within one week of the meeting, write and mail letters to everyone who gave their names before they testified, thanking them for their interest in meeting's topic and sharing their comments about it.

The Advisory Group and the Citizen Task Force

Citizen committees provide some of the same things for the political system as do public hearings. They first became featured in democratic government as informal calls for public discussion of public issues but have gradually become more institutionalized, as aspects of decision making in public administration have evolved more and more to being one person's responsibility. In developed democratic structures, advisory committees with specific mandates and individual terms of office are increasingly replacing former elected or politically-appointed governing boards and commissions.

These citizens committees, advisory groups and task forces are usually made up of representatives of special interest groups and civic organizations who have an interest in the issue around which the committee is formed. They can often be appointed as administrative matter, without the requirement of special legislation have to be passed and the mayor's appointments having to be approved by the council. In cases where the citizens committee becomes an official, permanent and institutional part of the structure, like planning commissions and police citizen review boards in most American local governments, the important decisions these citizen-based committees are charged with making are subject to approval by either an elected mayor or the city council. The people who have business dealing with the committees have had a hearing before non-politicians, people even more like them than the people they elected. The officials who appointed them can override the decisions they make.

Besides making the groups represented feel their point of view is being seriously considered by the person who has to make the decision or produce the planning document, the budget or an important public policy, using citizen advisory groups has five other positive spin-offs:

1. They will probably provide the public official with points of view he or she may not have otherwise considered. Their analysis will likely be more thorough than his would probably have been, and the result will be of better quality.
2. Besides getting a different perspective on the problem, the city official, if he follows any of the committee's recommendations, often creates an expanded team of supporters when the attempt to do something begins.
3. If the group recommends the policy favored by the person who has appointed them to the task force, the policy has been legitimized and justified by independent experts.
4. When the decision or policy that has to be made is especially controversial, the advisory group gives the public official "political cover". The official can claim that he is basing his decision on the recommendation of the group -- his responsibility for making it is somewhat diffused.
5. The official has given the very public appearance of placing an important value on what the people who elected him or elected the people who appointed him think.

3. OUTCOMES

Inviting people in to watch you do your job and asking for and listening to their varied opinions about what you ought to be doing and how you ought to do it makes your job more difficult. It surely sometimes makes the decision making process take longer. But in a democratic political environment, the outcome (the policy, the document and all the decisions that are made along the way to implement it) has greater potential for broader public support, which is what is supposed to be the nature of outcomes in a democratic system.

No matter what stage the level of democracy in the country in which you work has been allowed by cultural or political considerations to reach, the people who make decisions and public policy almost all owe their positions to the fact that the people they rule have put them where they are. If they want to stay there, they have to establish some kind of positive, on-going relationship with eligible voters. They must either learn how to mold public opinion or how to determine its direction in order to run out ahead of it in

election years. A public participation program like the modest one suggested here allows public officials to do either or both because it keeps them in touch with public opinion throughout their term in office.

Some politicians who argue: "People elected me to make decisions for them. If I make the wrong ones, that's what elections are for." Most of the people who believe that serve just one or two terms and are not around long enough to affect much that lasts longer than them. At any rate, citizen participation in government, even in its most vigorous form, should not be viewed as an imposition or something that renders a politician impotent. It does not abrogate any of an elected official's responsibilities or authority. Public opinion that citizen participation initiatives produce and register are views held by ordinary citizens that government ought to take into account in making its decisions. It is the blood that runs through the body politic in a democratic system. Elected representatives are the body's brain. Public opinion is an important influence on government but, as has been previously mentioned, does not directly determine what public officials have to do. Rather, public opinion imposes limits and directions on the choices made by public officials.

A healthy democratic body politic can no more afford to limit citizen participation to occasional elections than the heart can act without the instruction the brain provides it; or the brain, without the blood the heart supplies it.