



THE URBAN INSTITUTE



CITIZEN PARTICIPATION MODEL

FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS



I. INTRODUCTION

The brochure is meant for the people who work in local government: mayors, city secretaries, department heads and public relations officers, as well as elected officials, who create local policies. Because a variety of tools, with the simplest to the most sophisticated of mechanisms of tools, is presented, the brochure can be useful to small **rural municipalities** as well as **larger cities**.

The brochure will help you to deal with many of **your problems**, like insufficient communication with citizens, the limited involvement of citizens in local government activities, or the demanding approach some citizens take with local government authorities.

It explains the merit of **citizen participation** and its role in modern management in local government.

You will find in this brochure **practical solutions** on how to improve citizen participation and management in your local government. It will be possible by implementing various tools to improve citizen participation in your local government and how you may implement the various citizen participation tools described in this brochure. The brochure will briefly explain a **step-by-step** approach of activities to implement citizen participation.

If you find the content of the brochure interesting and you would like more detailed information, you can find information on the last page on how to request more information on this Local Government Reform Project model and **benefit** from LGRP project's experience.

II. GENERAL INFORMATION

What is Citizen Participation and why it is important for modern local government?

Citizen participation is critical to developing and strengthening democracy, but increasing citizen participation in the government's decision-making process should not be a goal just for this reason. Nor should citizens' participation in local governance be an objective of local government because it is fashionable. Citizen participation has a much wider meaning. For one, it is a very important management tool that improves the effectiveness of management in local government and, if understood widely, can lead to a real and valuable public–private partnership.

Of the many objectives of citizen participation, some of the most important are:

- To be informed of citizens' needs, and to meet citizens' needs
- To ensure citizens' influence on the city's future
- To develop mutual trust between citizens and the local government
- To attract support for local activities and investments; and
- To increase citizens' involvement in the implementation of joint projects.

In general, *citizen participation* enables the creation of civic society.

What is civic society and why it is important?

Neither central nor local government can fulfill all the expectations of the people living in their jurisdictions. There are always unsolved problems, issues to tackle, and a scarcity of resources. Totalitarian systems (and other kinds of systems) have proved that the government's attempt to fulfill all citizens' needs - especially in systems without clear and open communication about what is really needed or demanded by the public - leads to inefficient solutions.

Modern democratic societies are based on three pillars: the market economy, democratic public institutions, and non–governmental organizations. Those pillars are also referred to in terms of three sectors: public, economic, and non–governmental.

The framework for these three pillars is provided by the State, which sets all necessary legislation for economic, political and social activities of its residents. The success of the central or local government is based on quality of its services and cooperation of all three sectors.

“Activity” is crucial in civic society. An individual member of civic society should be active by seeking sources of income, solving daily problems, and participating in social activities including education, sport, culture, etc. An individual should seek local government assistance only in cases when he or she cannot solve problems independently. On the other hand, a local government understands that its role is to create a favorable environment for residents to be active in different areas. For a local government, the driving rule for its functions should be the subsidiarity principle: that the level of government closest to the people should be in charge of as many functions as is effective and efficient.

In the last several years, many modern democracies experienced a decrease in the level of resident activities or initiatives. Some civil society experts called this phenomenon a "devaluation of democracy." The response to this "devaluation" calls for modern, innovative methods that promote greater involvement in different areas of local community.

What are civic initiatives?

One of the three pillars of modern democracy is the non-governmental organization (NGO) sector. It is important to understand that in this pillar we need not refer only to the activities of formal organizations. A civic initiative is an informal group of citizens, often focused on a particular problem or issue, or a resident group like an informal neighborhood organization. The residents of one street, for example, may come together to take action in cooperation with the local government. A formal organization is not always needed, and in fact, quite often an informal association of individuals rallying around a local issue becomes formal after some period of time.

It is also important that no level of local government (even including neighborhood councils) should monopolize activities and always acts in a supporting role (subsidiarity principle, again) to resident associations whenever possible, as opposed to doing things for residents directly.

Is it sufficient to simply inform the public about local government activities?

In building democratic civil society, the first challenge is usually to create access to information. However, residents should not only have knowledge about an issue at the local level but they should also have the possibility to communicate back to the local government. That is why establishing good communication channels that goes both ways is important.

While it is critical that the local government request residents for their opinions on public services and that communication is open. A partnership between the citizens and the local government has to be established in order to create a strong civil society. Local government has to create an environment for solving resident's problems. Such a partnership leads to the addition of resources from the citizens and it provides justification for action.

Why is citizen participation so important to the management of local government?

It was mentioned that governments never have sufficient resources to fulfill all citizen expectations. Local government management should not be in a "socialist" mode of doing all things for all residents. Instead, it should create a supportive environment for the expression of needs and ultimately address these needs. In a partnership between citizens and local government, a local community can mobilize additional resources for its development and provide stronger justifications for the decisions it takes.

III. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION MODEL

The Goal of the Citizen Participation Model.

The goal of the model is to increase participation of citizens in the local government's decision-making process and to provide an environment for the creation of civic society. Such participation will contribute to strengthening democracy and improving public service delivery.

What can local governments get from the Citizen Participation Model?

First, the local government can achieve a more meaningful democracy in its community leading to a more active and engaged citizens in local governance. Secondly, it can benefit from more effective management once it works to reach consensus on its activities. Thirdly, improvements in citizen participation will create resources for development through private-public partnership.

How can local government approach the model?

The citizen participation model can be implemented using different approaches.

- The simplest is a “short path” approach, when local government can chose and apply, based on its own evaluation of the level of citizen participation in its jurisdiction, the particular tools that address citizen participation. Examples of tools include a city newsletter, if citizens are not well informed, contests among citizens groups, if that is needed to motivate citizens, or general public surveys, if there is a need to identify citizens’ perceptions of the city’s activities/services.
- A more long-term approach is to develop a comprehensive public participation plan, in which the selection of tools to be utilized is based on more careful analyses and determination of citizen participation goals.

Local governments who want to follow the “short path” should choose tools directly from a citizen participation ‘tool box’ and implement these tools. This approach allows for rapid results but also brings the risk of missing important issues that need to be addressed. This approach might be appropriate for smaller local governments or as a starting point for developing citizen participation in a local government.

In order to implement the comprehensive (long-term) approach, a local government should implement following steps:

- Organize general orientation seminar on citizen participation.

Audience of the seminar should be local government key personnel and staff. During such a seminar, participants should be educated on the merits of citizen participation, its importance, and the opportunity to apply various citizen participation tools.

Create citizen participation task force.

Members of the task force should be recruited from the local government offices, NGOs and neighborhood councils. They should be willing to commit their time and knowledge to the task.

Series of task force workshops.

The task force starts its work with analyzing all aspects of citizen participation in the local government. The task force can use criteria to assess information policy such as: credibility of the local government; citizens' trust; perceptions of the local government's openness or effectiveness, outreach, access to the public, willingness to share authority, and respect towards citizens. This analysis should be then be summarized in a table or document outlining the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats relevant to citizen participation in local decision-making.

The second task, based on this analysis, is to define citizen participation goals. A good approach is to first define critical areas (e.g. communication between citizens and authorities) and then define goals that can be achieved and measured.

The next task is to identify interventions that could support the achievement of these goals. The best approach is to brainstorm for ideas to address the goals. During brainstorming a selection of tools from citizen participation toolbox can be utilized, but ideally approaches to citizen participation should go beyond the proposed tools to make them more specific to the particular local government.

The fourth task is to evaluate all ideas, after a discussion on selection criteria, and to choose the best ones. The last task is to prepare draft action plans for selected ideas to promote. With the outcome of the task force, this should be summarized in a *Citizen Participation Comprehensive Plan*. The Plan should be in a form that all political bodies can take a decision on its implementation.

- Presentation to the Board and Council for adoption.

Once the plan is developed, it should be presented to the Board and Council for discussion and adoption.

Implementation.

After the plan is adopted, action plans for implementation of particular tools can be further developed in greater detail than the draft comprehensive plan for taking policy decisions. It should be noted that detailed plans allow for the implementation of different tools.

Monitoring and updating the plan.

During implementation of the plan, it is important to monitor the results of implementation and, if necessary, to revise the plan due to new circumstances/environment in the local government.

Citizen Participation Toolbox.

Bellow is selection of different potential interventions, which can be utilized in order to improve citizen participation. Some of them are very simple, some more sophisticated. Due to limited space, only a few are described, but the LGRP can provide more information on each approach upon request. These tools deal with different aspects of local government activities, such as communication, budget preparation process or institutionalization of the citizen participation approach.

- Local government newsletter, issued on a regular basis (weekly, biweekly, monthly), which contains most important information on activities within the local government. It can be distributed through children in schools or by placing free copies in public buildings. Usually, this newsletter is free of charge. The cost of printing depends on volume, frequency and print sophistication. For smaller local government it could be just 1-2 pages copied on a photocopying machine.
- Citizen meetings with council members – organized frequently.
- Utilizing media through press conferences, press releases, inviting them to important events, etc.
- Feedback channels: such as letters and phone calls from citizens (e.g. establishing toll-free phone lines); complaint/comments boxes in public places; establishing and responding to a special e-mail address for comments. The most important issue here is to manage properly the comments received by citizens: a return message or a card should acknowledge those who sent the comment. The local government should report in the media or other public source on the type of comments received and actions undertaken to address the comments.
- Informational brochures, such as:
 - A general brochure such as a “City in Brief” document that contains general information on city authorities, telephone numbers, working hours, organizational chart, board, council, committees, advisory groups, etc. Such a brochure can be distributed among citizens along with local newsletter or placed in public buildings. Brochures on city services, explaining procedures and providing examples of application forms also have proven useful as effective communication tools.
- Talk shows / interviews – in local TV or radio on the most important local topics like investment plans and the budget. If possible, there should be an opportunity for citizens to call local government officials who appear on TV or radio directly and ask questions.
- Public hearings – on different topics, for example, on budget planning. It is important to thoroughly prepare for the hearing by arranging for an appropriate facility, thoughtful presentations, rules for the meeting, and a good facilitator.
- Methodology of conducting meeting with citizens – In order to hold and conduct meetings efficiently, an appropriate room and agenda should be prepared, and facilitation with tools like a flip chart or other visual aids should be used.
- Youth city council – to involve young people in local government activities and teach them about democracy and its values. This may be most effective if the youth council has some of its own responsibilities and its own budget.

- City festivals, city days – these are good tools to integrate citizens to the entire community, especially if they are involved in preparation of the event.
- Task forces – utilized in different areas, e.g. area of economic development (Economic Development Task Force) to prepare an economic development strategic plan.
- Staff person in charge of citizen participation within the local government offices, or an interdepartmental team managing citizen participation activities.
- “My vision of the Local Government” contest – usually to support the community-based strategic plan preparation process; that might be organized for young people to draw their attention to city activities and to collect their opinions for the future of the local government.
- Frequently asked questions (FAQ) – published in media, Internet or brochure, with answers to the questions most commonly asked by citizens.
- General public surveys, which can identify priorities of the public or gather more precise information on a particular subject. Usually, a survey is conducted by professionals interviewing a representative sample of the community. Sometimes it is possible to use students to conduct surveys after conducting training, which limits the costs of the survey process. The most important part of surveying is analysis, which should not only count answers but also analyze the relationships between different types of answers. Only such an analysis provides real knowledge on the situation. Such analyses should be conducted by an experienced specialist.
- Local partnership programs – This often takes the shape of a contest designed for citizens groups or NGOs, focusing on a ways to address a particular problem. It requires a clear statement of rules including the criteria for the competition and the evaluation of project proposals submitted by applicants. This is a good way to directly involve citizens in solving local problems by putting their own resources to use.
- NGO charter – The NGO charter usually takes the form of a local government council resolution that establishes local policy on civic initiatives such as the one in Zagreb.
- System for financing civic initiatives – As follow up to an NGO charter, this tool provides more detailed rules for local government co-financing of civic initiatives.
- Publications on subjects such as the role of civic society or the role of neighborhood councils.
- Mayor's message on the budget – Materials prepared to facilitate discussion on the budget before it is adopted by the council that explain local government priorities and constraints of the budget, etc.
- Budget-in-brief – Short version of the local budget written in clear language, understandable to local citizens. Usually, this type of document consists of an introduction by Mayor in which he/she explains the city's priorities and the most important issues in the budget. This is followed by an explanation of the sources of revenues and expenditures, perhaps divided by program or department. Special attention in the Budget-in-brief is devoted to capital expenditures. A budget-in-brief brochure also contains general information on the local government, such as the members of the board and the council, the administrative structure, or other explanations of the budget document.

IV. REPLICATION OF THE MODEL

Where has this model of citizen participation worked already?

Pilot activities in developing the entire citizen participation model and its application are taking place in the City of Rijeka. The City decided to implement some "short path" tools described in this brochure as pilot programs. Additionally, the City took a comprehensive approach and developed a comprehensive citizen participation plan.

Under its "short path" approach, the City of Rijeka implemented pilot tools like:

- Community-based strategic planning process.
- "My Vision of Rijeka" contest among young people to support the process of developing a local economic development strategic plan.
- Model methodology of a citizens' meeting, practiced during a meeting with a neighborhood council in the area of a bankrupt paper mill. The meeting was designed to collect citizen opinions on possible future use of the bankrupt facilities.
- A general citizens' survey which provided useful information on citizens' priorities, their knowledge of City activities, and information sources they rely on. The report on the survey results was made available to the media so that the results would be publicized.

In a comprehensive approach, the City of Rijeka organized a citizen participation task force of about 15 participants that conducted four workshops to develop a citizen participation comprehensive plan. As a result of their work, several elements of the plan were developed:

- Summary of analyses of citizen participation situation in the City,
- Definition of goals:
 - Citizens better informed and more frequently communicating back to the city.
 - Higher level of citizens participating in budget preparation process.
 - Increased role and activity of the "mjesni odbor".
 - Increased quantity of civic initiatives that solve problems and needs of community.

- Interventions addressing goals:

Communication:

- City newsletter.
- Brochure on city's activities.
- Talk show in local TV.
- Feedback channels.

Budget preparation process:

- Procedures defining open budget preparation process.
- Mayor's budget message.
- Public hearings on draft budget.
- Budget talk show in Canal RI.
- Budget in brief.

Neighborhood councils:

- Leaflets on Mjesni Odbor's activities.
- Competition on Mjesni Odbor Day.
- Competition on Mjesni Odbor programs.

Civic initiatives:

- NGO-City charter.
- Transparent rules for competitions.
- Leaflet on civic initiatives.

The City of Rijeka began implementing some citizen participation tools, such as the preparation of talk shows on subjects including economic development and the bankrupt factories' property and the development of an NGO charter in cooperation with local NGOs. In some activities City went beyond the model's plans. For example, it implementing the project "e-munis", which will provide an sophisticated Internet platform for communication with citizens and neighborhood councils.

What local government should do to implement the Model

If your local government wants additional information about the LGRP and the models it has developed to help local governments in Croatia successfully adapt to their increased responsibilities, we suggest that you:

- visit our web page (www.urban-institute.hr) where downloadable files on the process will be available,
- sign up for our LGRP newsletter; and
- read printed materials

The LGRP is conducting regional conferences to present more details on the models. A survey distributed during the conferences will ask attendees to express their willingness and commitment to devote local resources in implementing a particular tool. Analysis of survey results will help us identify the level of interest in each model and select the most appropriate method to help local governments replicate each model. Possibilities include:

- LGRP technicians will train Croatian consultants, who then will be offering assistance to local governments in implementing the model
- LGRP will conduct a series of seminars with homework assignments leading to a step-by-step implementation,
- LGRP will hold other conferences, workshops, or seminars.

Representatives of local governments that have indicated an interest in implementing the model will be invited to those activities should it provide to be the most suitable method to implement the model.

THE URBAN INSTITUTE

The Urban Institute is a nonprofit policy and research organization established in Washington, DC in 1968 to investigate social and economic problems confronting the U.S. and government policies and programs designed to alleviate them. UI is internationally known and respected as an objective, nonpartisan source of expertise and analysis for informed policy deliberation and debate. UI has expanded its role to include analysis of analogous problems and policies in developing countries and transition economies. Recent and ongoing projects have been engaged in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Latvia, Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Hungary, Poland, Macedonia, Croatia, Albania, Bulgaria, and Slovakia.

THE URBAN INSTITUTE IN CROATIA

Since the early 1990s, the Urban Institute has been active in Croatia, assisting the public and nonprofit sector in urban service provision, financial management, and capacity building in war-affected areas along with collaboration with many cities and towns to implement technical assistance.

In Croatia, UI maintains an office in Zagreb with an 8-person team of highly skilled local staff and expatriate country director.

The Local Government Reform Project offers technical assistance to local governments. There are four components in the Scope of Work for this project to address local government reform in Croatia:

1. Improve Fiscal and Management Efficiencies of local governments
2. Improve Investment Opportunities for Economic Development
3. Improve Citizen Participation in Local Governance
4. National Policy Initiative (Policy Advice to Government of Croatia)