

Democratic Strategies Enhance Engagement and Valued Results

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Abstract

This article discusses the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a deliberative public issues forum held at North Carolina State University in early 2008. The forum itself was a part of a larger university strategic planning process. In spite of tight time constraints, the planning team made a decision to tailor the forum according to principles of deliberative democracy. As a result, the focus was as much on the importance of informed public participation in the university decision-making process as it was on generating tangible action plan outcomes.

Background: The University of North Carolina (UNC) Tomorrow Initiative

In 2007, President Erskine Bowles of the University of North Carolina (UNC) System, in partnership with the chairman of the Board of Governors, announced the University of North Carolina Tomorrow Initiative. The purpose was to determine how the UNC university system could “respond more directly and proactively to the 21st century challenges” facing our state “now and in the future through the efficient and effective fulfillment of its three-pronged mission of teaching, research and scholarship, and public service” (UNCGA 2007).

The process was exhaustive and ambitious. Thousands of people across the state participated in listening forums, faculty forums involving all university campuses, a blog, and an online survey (see figure 1). A final report of the results and findings was published in December 2007 (see UNCGA 2007).

In the final report, seven major recommendations were offered. The people of North Carolina wanted to see the UNC System universities address each of the following issues:

- Our global readiness
- Our citizens and their future: Access to higher education
- Our children and their future: Improving public education
- Our communities and their economic transformation

Figure 1. Map of North Carolina with UNC System Campuses

Source: <http://www.northcarolina.edu/content.php/campus/campusmap.htm>

- Our health
- Our environment
- Our university's outreach and engagement

In early January 2008, the UNC Board of Governors and President Bowles asked each of the seventeen UNC campuses to develop a substantive response to the issues and findings of the study initiative. Within a week, a planning team at North Carolina State University (NC State) was selected to involve Extension, Engagement and Economic Development stakeholders, to identify relevant and valued recommendations, and to connect those recommendations to concrete suggested initiatives. This article will describe the planning, implementation, and evaluation of this deliberative public issues forum; it also provides an example for those working in higher education settings.

The NC State Extension, Engagement, and Economic Development (EEED) Administrative Team met and provided ideas for the planning committee. The administrative team decided it was important to solicit participation from faculty, staff, students, and partners who are involved in outreach and engagement, and to reflect that collaboration in the UNC Tomorrow Study response.

On January 25, 2008, Dr. Jim Zuiches, the university vice chancellor of EEED, charged the committee with conducting an inclusive, participatory forum to generate recommendations corresponding to each UNC Tomorrow Report finding. The committee began immediately, and the forum was scheduled for February 13, 2008. In spite of the time frame, the planning committee adhered to the plan to utilize a deliberative democracy framework for accomplishing the charge.

The planning team members, while experienced, had not previously worked together. The team discussed how to ensure that the deliberative democratic philosophy would be translated from a

working philosophy to an action plan. Our process here exemplifies Friedmann's (2008) work, which suggests that good program planning practice includes bridging philosophical vision with adapting to real-world constraints and making the knowledge generated accessible and useful (248).

Deliberative Democratic Framework

An important starting point is to consider the responsibility that the planning team and NC State held as initiators, or conveners, of this type of event (Button and Ryfe 2005). By initiating and inviting participation from the university and surrounding community stakeholders, the team recognized the importance of articulating these responsibilities. Thus their planning included a discussion of what kind of information participants might need or want in order to feel prepared to attend and discuss the relevant issues. They defined participation not merely as an exercise of stating opinions, but an activity in which the deliberative process allowed for forming or changing opinions along the way. Further, they took into account how to evaluate their success not just by the generation of recommendations, which was critical, but also by the participants' perceptions of NC State's responsiveness to the feedback generated at the forum.

The planning process loosely paralleled principles that are articulated in Briand's (1999) work on practical politics. The first principle, inclusion, is basic and foundational; it suggests that any policies or decisions under development should include and be approved by those that are influenced by the decision(s). In this case, the findings under deliberation were critical to future university-community well-being: global readiness, citizens and their future access to higher education, improving public education, economic transformation, health, the environment, and university outreach and engagement. The benefits of inclusion have been discussed by many: it leads to fully dimensional and richer consideration of alternatives, and therefore better decisions. It also promotes self-responsibility and buy-in, creating a shared and vested interest in the success of the joint endeavors. Of particular importance, though, is one of Briand's suggestions of creating inclusion through a "community conference," which moves beyond the idea of participation to put

"[I]nclusion . . . leads to fully dimensional and richer consideration of alternatives, and therefore better decisions."

a human face on dialogue and help people find ways to viscerally identify with one another. It suggests that face-to-face participation, even when combined with other mediums, adds a dimension of humanity and reality that is essential to reaching realistic and valuable community engagement partnerships.

The second principle is comprehension. Comprehension is defined as the ability to understand and appreciate others' perspectives, positions, and motivations. According to Briand, it is more than just intellectual empathy: comprehension involves a vicarious understanding of someone else's holistic position. To facilitate comprehension, it is recommended that participants be able to contribute statements of their opinions, share what they think, identify their motivations, clarify the points of others, restate their opinions in response to those clarifications, and then allow a group to reformulate positions once again.

The third principle, deliberation, is not necessarily discrete from the second principle of comprehension, though it generally tends to appear during later phases of participation. It focuses on helping participants recognize that they can't please everyone or have everything, and decisions have to be reached. It is a funneling process, moving from the general to the more specific.

Next is the principle of cooperation. Cooperation seems simple, but in fact, it is sometimes quite difficult, for just as communities are multifaceted, so are people. Many participants in public forums wear more than one hat, so to speak, and have primary and secondary group memberships that divide their perspectives and allegiances. Irrespective of their representative role in a given public forum, the other perspectives are still there as a part of the person. During the cooperation phase, it is important to emphasize that a healthy civic partnership is the goal. One way that Briand (1999, 163) describes this is to say that "we need to be easy on each other but tough on the problem(s)."

Finally, Briand suggests that a participatory process must result in realistic action with continued shared information, follow-up, and forward movement on the issues at hand. In the end, the planning committee consulted Gastil and Levin's (2005) edited volume *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook*, which draws upon the principles of informed, purposeful participation with planned opportunities for sharing opinions, listening to others, reformulating or clarifying positions, and funneling or moving toward a specific cooperative plan of action. As a final note, the forum we describe here represents, in effect, a double loop of deliberative

democracy. The original report findings were generated via a comprehensive participatory process, which then led to the deliberative issues forum highlighted in this article.

The Deliberative Forum: Planning and Implementation

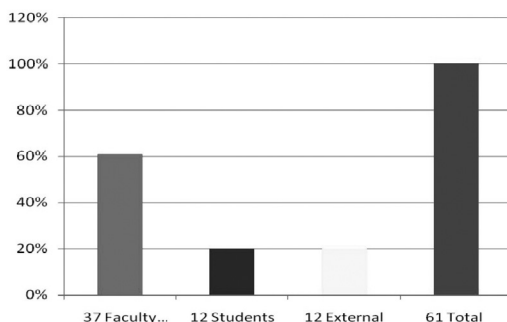
With the UNC Tomorrow Deliberative Forum scheduled for February 13, the team had thirteen working days to plan the meeting, invite participants, and prepare small-group facilitators.

The members of the planning team were asked to invite faculty, staff, and students from each college and unit of the university, as well as several external partners of each college or unit. The team was asked to create conditions that would encourage the participants to be thoughtful and innovative as they recommended actions to build a stronger and more engaged university for the people of the state.

Faculty and staff from academic and extension units were a natural choice. We also decided to include undergraduate and graduate students engaged in extension and outreach. A next step was to include these groups from all colleges and units in the university. In considering the scope of the UNC Tomorrow planning process, we asked ourselves about other stakeholders. The decision was made to invite community partners, including representatives of state and local government, industry, business, and K-12 and community college educators. The invitation process used a distributive model. An invitation went out to faculty and professionals who had a formal connection to Extension, Engagement, and Economic Development. This invitation asked the campus invitees to bring a community partner to the session, and to nominate an undergraduate or graduate student to attend. Once invitations went out and responses were received, we assigned each person to a group that would respond to one of the discussion topics based on their affiliation. Participants were provided with background reading and information on the UNC Tomorrow process, so that they could prepare for their discussion roles in the forum. In sum, the UNC Tomorrow Deliberative Forum attracted sixty-one participants, of which 60 percent were faculty and staff while 40 percent were students and external partners (see figure 2).

Designing and Planning a Deliberative Dialogue

Several critical elements were put in place in order to effectively generate ideas to inform the Extension, Engagement, and

Figure 2. Details of forum participants

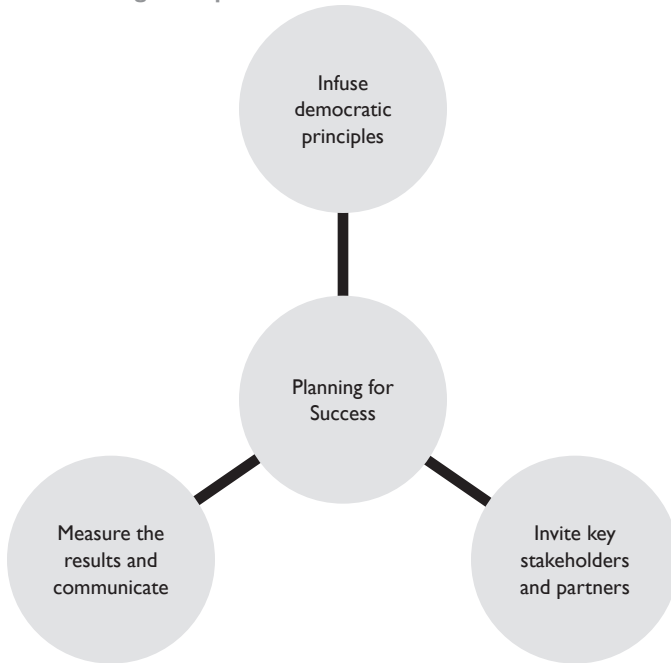
Economic Development response to the UNC Tomorrow Study. The planning team was selected and organized to develop a program design. Each member of the team was an experienced facilitator. The assignment focused on planning and carrying out a process that would be enabling and engaging for the participants.

As mentioned before, discussion within the team gravitated toward a democratic design that included a diversity of participants. Any plans for facilitation needed to allow their full participation. The planning team had to consider the deliberative learning role of the participants: what knowledge did they need in order to effectively engage in the deliberation? And what needed to be put in place in order to study the results of the deliberative dialogue? Finally, the team addressed how to refine the participant feedback/results and put them into use.

The team used several modes in order to achieve multistage planning and incorporate periods of reflection between drafts of the plan. Face-to-face meetings, e-mail, and conference calls were all important tools. We discovered that there was a dynamic to using e-mail for planning that had to be considered. At points, there would be a quick flurry of discussion with e-mails rapidly flying, which sometimes led to misinterpretations or complicated threads of discussion. As a strategy, it was important for someone to take the initiative and stop e-mail flurries by calling for a conference call so that thought processes could be clarified. Some team members found it most productive to carve out a section of the planning and complete tasks solo. Figure 3 and table 1 show the components we developed during the planning process and forum event.

Participation

Preparing for facilitated deliberation participation. Once the event agenda was developed, we saw that we needed small-group

Figure 3. Planning concept**Table I. Planning Process**

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- | | |
|----|---|
| A. | The inclusive planning process for the UNC Tomorrow event <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The assignment: Enabling and engaging 2. The planning meetings 3. Infusing a natural democratic leadership |
| B. | Incorporating the use of a facilitated, democratic model <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Self-discovery of the model 2. Deliberative infusion of the model 3. Discovery of nonparticipating alliances |
| C. | Inclusion of stakeholders, students, and faculty <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Survey 2. Direct feedback 3. One-on-one communication 4. Deliberative champions |
| D. | Training for the event <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recruitment and training for facilitators 2. Training the leaders |
| E. | The event unfolds: On-site democratic leadership with full engagement <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Room setup 3. Roles and responsibilities 4. Group participation and engagement 5. Corrective action and alignment |
| F. | Measuring engagement and full participation <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Summarizing and communicating results 2. Next steps (segue) |
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facilitators to maximize authentic engagement and emphasize the importance of all generated ideas. We recruited facilitators and ended up with a mix of Adult Education graduate students and professionals from Industrial Extension and Small Business and Technology Development. A facilitator's agenda or script was generated and sent to the group. About two weeks before the event, master facilitators Lisa Grable and Margaret O'Brien held facilitator training in conference call meetings. We also met the group prior to the forum on the day of the event to walk through the agenda within the actual physical setting.

The physical setting. The planning team decided that one important component of a successful deliberative dialogue was the physical setting and environment. We wanted everything to be conducive to collaboration, learning, and negotiated recommendations. Alice Warren took the lead for this planning.

The room chosen for the deliberative session was large (89' x 89') and could easily accommodate the activities planned. It was set for seventy-two participants seated at nine round tables with eight chairs each. The round tables were spread out across the room to give ample space between tables for walking and to provide workspace. The workspace for each table included a portable corkboard and an easel with a writing pad and colored markers. The chairs were padded for comfort and lightweight in design for ease of movement so that the participants could stand to place their ideas on the corkboards or easels. The room was lighted quite well with comfortable temperatures for the duration of the session. Laptop computers loaded with a predesigned template were made available for each group to populate with information as they progressed through the guided discussion and responses. Electrical power strips were placed at each table for the laptops; wireless connections and flash drives were also provided.

To prepare the front of the room for the formal kickoff and presentation of agenda for the session, an eight-foot riser was installed with a floor podium and microphone. A large projection screen was placed where it provided good viewing for all participants in the room.

Two "greeting" tables were assembled just inside the entrance doorway with registration materials, stick-on name tags, and markers. Tables were placed along the front wall to hold the boxed lunches and beverages that had been ordered for the session participants. After receiving the name tags with preassigned numbers for the first rotation, the participants were encouraged to select a boxed lunch and beverage before proceeding to their assigned

Figure 4. Forum agenda

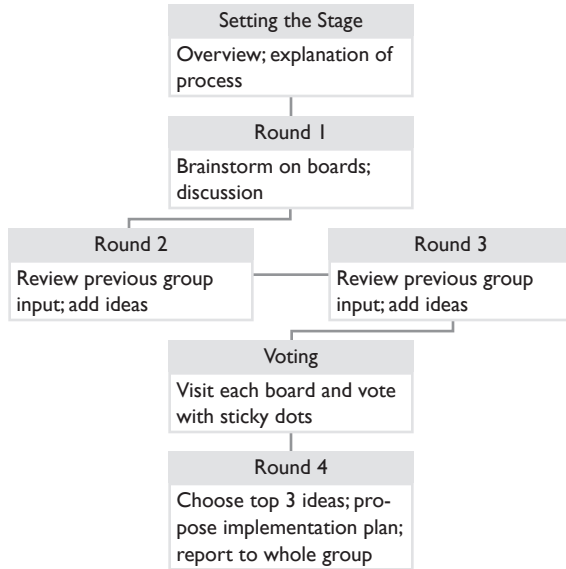


table. The members of the planning team assisted the participants with check-in and table assignments.

The event unfolds. Figure 4 gives an overview of the forum.

The day of the event, the planning team individually welcomed participants and helped them find their assigned groups and box lunches. The welcome presentation included an overview of the connections between UNC Tomorrow, the University of North Carolina System, NC State University, and the office of Extension, Engagement, and Economic Development. External participants were introduced and recognized. The process for the event was explained to the participants.

The overall process included several discussion rounds allowing for the principles of inclusion, comprehension, and deliberation. Initially, four discussion rounds were held, with participants assigned to a topic during the first round. They were given free choice of topic for subsequent rounds. Discussion prompts were in writing at each group's table.

In rounds one through three, participants responded to thematic prompts by writing on large self-stick notepads during a silent response phase. Table facilitators then led discussion about each response; these responses were posted on rolling bulletin boards. For each new round of discussion, participants first reviewed the previous group's postings, focusing on learning from the ideas, and then went on to amend, edit, or add new ideas.

At the end of round three, participants were given colored self-stick dots. Time was allotted for the participants to visit each bulletin board for the major themes of UNC Tomorrow. Participants read the ideas and placed a dot by those they wished to endorse, which was a way to embed the deliberation and cooperation principles within the overall process. It was fascinating to watch the dots grow on the boards and see which ideas clearly had the highest priority for the group. Some priorities were predictable, and there were a few surprises!

The group facilitators monitored what was happening in each round at the tables. Coaching by the cofacilitators helped table facilitators take corrective action and keep participants in alignment with the overall agenda. Some facilitators were most comfortable with controlling the discussion or leading to a predetermined

“At the end of the session, the planning team received direct positive feedback from both table facilitators and participants. Several asked how they could continue to participate.”

outcome. Since this violated our theoretical premise, facilitator coaching was implemented. The master facilitators had to diplomatically say a quiet word to help with recall of the training and foundational purpose of every voice and recommendation being heard and recorded.

The next round of discussion focused on clarifying and prioritizing the ideas established during the previous discussion. Participants were asked to return to their initially assigned table or to choose a table that had a topic they felt strongly about. The table facilitator helped participants count the votes for the ideas on their bulletin board and choose the top three ideas. Participants were asked to discuss these ideas in order to estimate a timeline for initiating the priority, identify the name of the party responsible, and estimate the cost for implementation. Each table facilitator used a laptop to capture this discussion. The results were reported out to the whole forum group.

At the end of the session, the planning team received direct positive feedback from both table facilitators and participants. Several asked how they could continue to participate. We felt it was important to put additional planning into making that possible.

Upon reflection, we engaged in self-discovery about using a democratic process. We discovered that some people on the planning team did not have complete buy-in when the team decided

to use deliberative democracy strategies. There was some discomfort with the democratic process. This meant that some members plunged in fully, even spending time reading more literature on the subject. Other members pulled back and took smaller, more controllable tasks as their contribution. Some found it hard to handle the open-endedness of the process and being trusted to arrive as informed participants, learn together, engage in collaborative dialogue and discussion, and develop informed and collaborative recommendations.

Measuring engagement and full participation. Within two days after the forum, e-mail notes containing a summary of the work done went out to the participants. We thought that some participants might have had additional thoughts about the themes after time to reflect. A short online survey was attached to the e-mail. The next step was to analyze the session results for weighted and visionary ideas. The weighted ideas were those that were clearly voted for by the participants. Visionary ideas were those that might have appeared in the discussion and might not have received a popular response, but were innovative and timely possibilities for the university. The EEED leadership team chose “distillers” to write white papers on key proposals that would go to the university team. The university team had voices from every college, so proposals would be placed in the university report and then might be left out in the next draft. The EEED team served as advocates for the voice of the community in these sessions and persistently presented the proposals generated from the democratic process. Ultimately, most of these ideas were incorporated into the final NC State response.

The day after the forum ended, all of the recommendations generated were e-mailed to participants, including the recommendations that emerged as most valued. Selected participants were invited to further refine recommendations to be submitted for inclusion in the university report. A report was developed to submit to the university committee. One of the functions we observed is that the ideas emanating from our participants had to be submitted, resubmitted, and supported by an advocate throughout the process of developing a university-wide report. The university team was learning about the process and collecting ideas across the university, so it was a dynamic process. We believe it was critically important to have an advocate or two on the university committee who would continually come back to the recommendations voiced by the broad spectrum of participants attending the forum. Without this voice, these ideas might have been lost. We were fortunate

because the recommendations coming from the forum were eventually incorporated in the NC State report (*UNCGA 2007*).

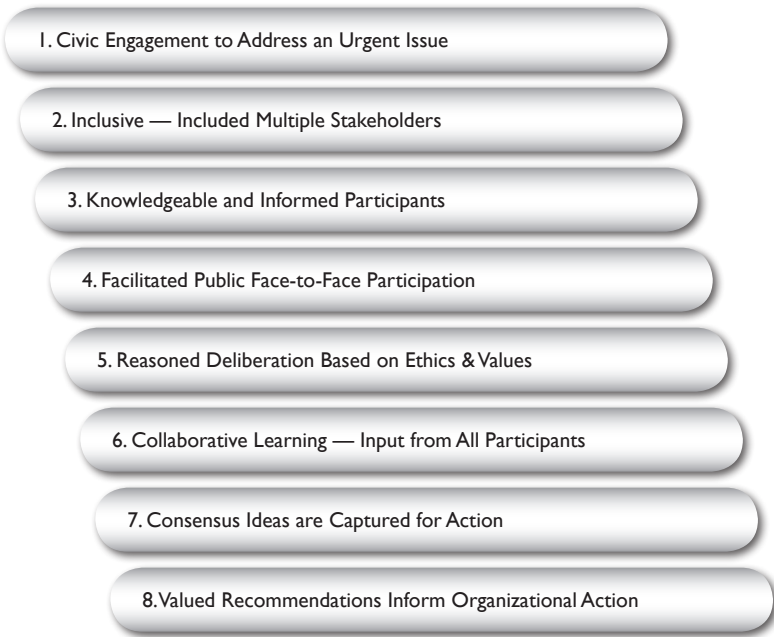
Methodology, Results, and the Study

Subsequently, the planning team decided to find out if the participants who attended the meeting perceived and felt positive about the deliberative democracy strategies we had designed into the structure of the day using deliberative democracy theories. We wanted to learn whether these were valued and whether the participants believed the day went as well as we thought. As a result, we designed a short survey. The planning team members observed specific strategies that they believed created successful democratic deliberation. We hoped that our reflections, combined with participant feedback, would inform future public issues forums.

Questions were developed by Lisa Grable and Pat Sobrero, then edited and reviewed by the planning team. We believed that the forum included strategies that supported deliberative democracy, such as the use of critical theory for authentic democracy, public deliberation, inclusivity, lack of oppression, use of a structure or framework to achieve essential elements of deliberative democracy, and creation of an environment where participants could negotiate democratically and develop public judgments while making defensible decisions. We wanted participants to be assured their ideas and recommendations were valued (*Dryzek 2007; Button and Ryfe 2005; Forester 1999; Gastil 2007; Deal and Bolman 2003*). The key ideas we utilized are shown in Figure 5.

Methods. A survey was constructed to measure participants' attitude toward the democratic process. Inviting participants from the deliberative session to answer the survey served additional purposes: (1) we could alert them to the availability of the final university report and (2) we could thank them again for their participation. The research design was nonexperimental, cross-sectional, posttest-only, and descriptive in nature. We wished to search for patterns in participant attitudes along various democratic principles embedded in the deliberative session ("the treatment").

Population. The target population for this descriptive study is a convenience sample of university members engaged in extension activities and community members affiliated with those activities. The researchers filed an application for review by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB). We had to ensure that the data collected from the subjects

Figure 5. Eight platforms for influence, inclusion, and deliberation

would be anonymous. The IRB approved the study and determined that this study was exempt from the federal regulations.

Data collection and measurement instrument. Data were collected by administering an online survey four months after the deliberative session. An e-mail was sent to all deliberative session participants explaining the purpose of the survey and directions. Additional follow-up e-mail invitations were sent to nonrespondents for a total of three email contacts.

The Deliberative Forum Survey was designed to assess participants' perceptions and attitudes in the areas of freedom of opinion and communication, authentic engagement and group process, idea consideration, and increased interest in community matters. This instrument included eighteen items, most of which employ dual five-point Likert scale response options. In response to a prompt, "Agreement with Experience at the Forum," options ranged from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." "Level of Importance to Me" options included "very important," "important," "somewhat important," "of little importance," and "unimportant." An eight-part question assessing level of outcome for personal perceptions

used another set of response options, ranging from “none” to “very much.” Items were developed around constructs such as authenticity, civic engagement, deliberative model, democratic control of issues, defensible decisions, and strategic interaction (*Habermas 1990; Dryzek 1990, 2007; Button and Ryfe 2005; Forester 1999; Gastil 2007; Gastil and Levine 2005; Schwab 1969*). For example, one question reads, “The meeting provided the opportunity for a wide variety of people to contribute ideas.” This question was included to measure democratization level (*Dryzek 2007*).

Results. The number of participants in the deliberative session was 61. Forty-one of these participants responded to the survey for a 68 percent response rate. Responses were aggregated for each question and comparisons made of the level of agreement with the statement and its importance to the respondents. Below we discuss some of the more interesting results.

To look at the construct of “informed participants,” the survey asked for a response to “I was adequately prepared to competently address the UNC-Tomorrow findings.” As seen in figure 6, 56.8 percent of respondents agreed with the statement, while 48.6 percent rated it as important.

The prompt “Overall, I could freely express my ideas” was designed to measure collaborative learning. The responses here represented the highest level of importance to the respondents (see figure 7).

Figure 8 shows the high rate of agreement with the statement “The meeting provided the opportunity for a wide variety of people to contribute ideas.” Participants also gave this statement a high level of importance.

To find the participants’ perception of the forum’s deliberative democracy, 97.8 percent agreed with the statement “Participants were open to other points of view” (see figure 9).

The prompt “I amended my original thinking about UNC-Tomorrow responses upon discussion and reflection with others” was designed to measure strategic interaction. The responses showed the lowest level of agreement for any of the survey questions, but this was also not seen as important by the participants, as shown in figure 10.

Figure 11 illustrates how participants saw a change in their perspective or behavior. For the prompt “I have changed my perspective and/or behavior as a result of considering the issues raised by the UNC-Tomorrow Report,” 66.6 percent of responses ranged from “Some” to “Very Much.”

Figure 6. Informed participants

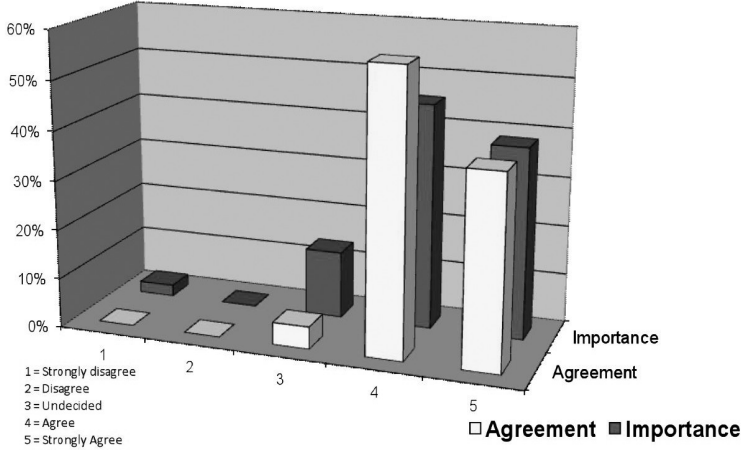


Figure 7. Collaborative learning

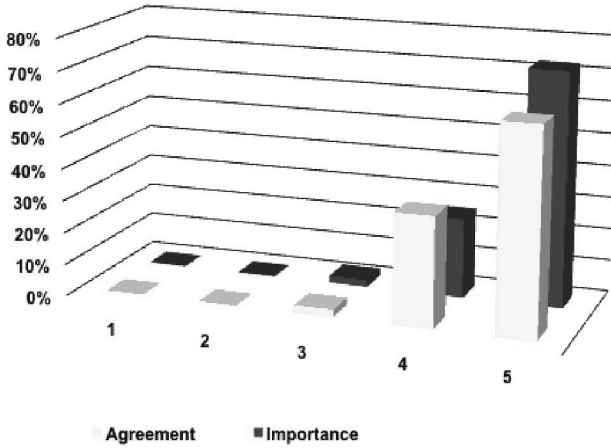


Figure 8. Inclusion and franchise

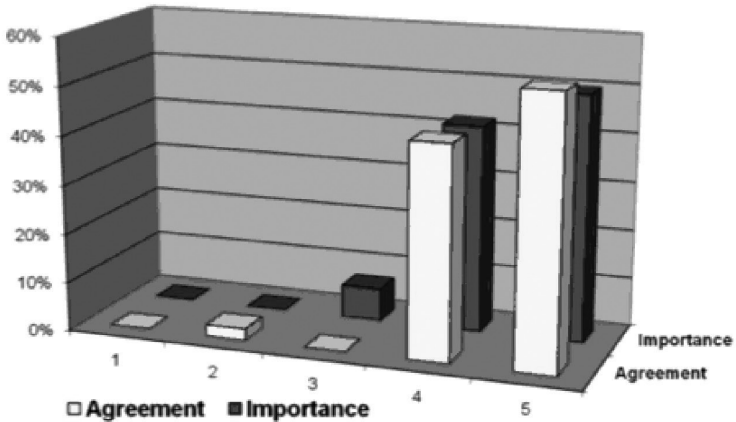


Figure 9. Open to other points of view

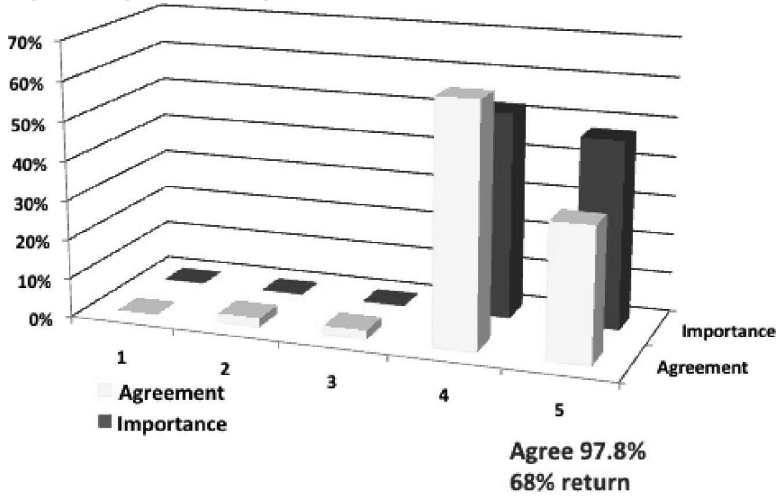


Figure 10. Amended thinking

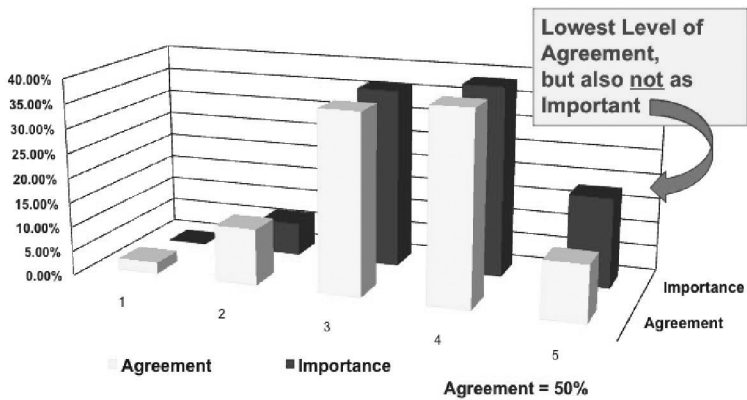


Figure 11. Changed perspective and/or behavior

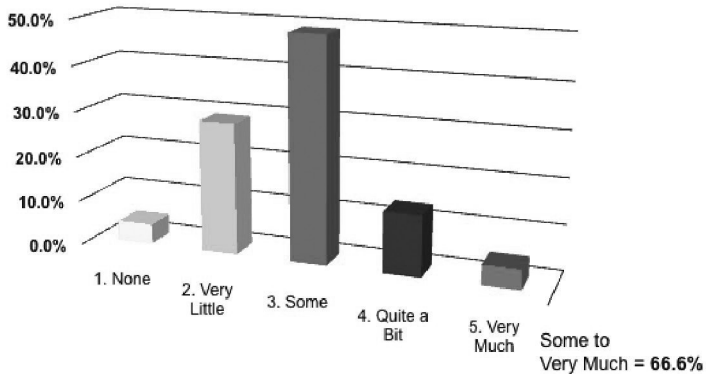


Figure 12. Technical, ethical, and political insights

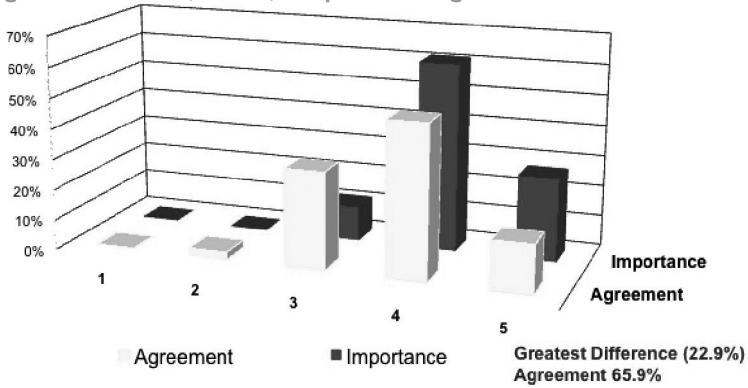


Figure 13. Consensus

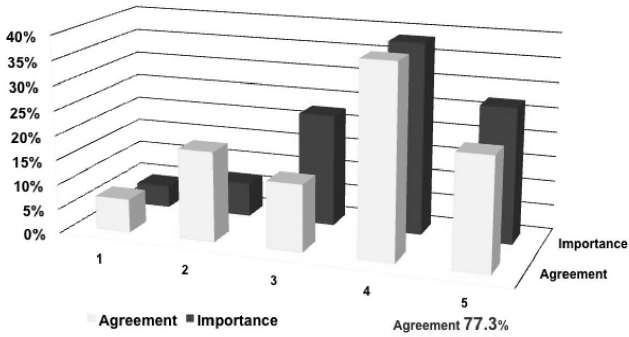


Table 2. Participants’ perspective on practices of democracy and engagement

<i>Deliberative democracy platform</i>	<i>Participants’ agreement with presence in forum</i>
Overall, practices of democracy & engagement	84%
Inclusive—including multiple stakeholders	98%
Knowledgeable and informed participants	96%
Facilitated public face-to-face participation	96% and 98%
Reasoned deliberation	82%
Collaborative learning	84% and 98%
Consensus ideas are captured for action	77%
Valued recommendations inform organizational action	58% and 62%

Another outcome measure was in the integration of technical, ethical, and political insights. The item “I found the final responses resulting from the meeting integrated technical, ethical and political insights” elicited the greatest difference between “Agreement with Experience at the Forum” and “Level of Importance to Me” (see figure 12).

Figure 13 displays 77.3 percent agreement with the statement “At the end of the day my small group used consensus to reach decisions and develop final summary responses.”

In looking at the results of the survey, we aggregated responses to find that 84 percent of the respondents agreed that the forum included practices of democracy and engagement. Table 2 also displays the level of agreement with questions that were matched to our platforms of influence, inclusion, and deliberation.

Lessons Learned

We observed that efficiency is the enemy of democracy.

Democracy takes time. As we immersed ourselves in the time-consuming democratic process, Pat Sobrero made a simple yet remarkable observation. Efficiency is the enemy of democracy. In spite of tight time constraints, the planning team made a decision to tailor the forum according to principles of deliberative democracy. Our team had to make a significant time investment in spite of the short turnaround. If you assign responsibility and accountability to all the planning committee team members while intentionally designing public dialogue for maximum interchange with minimum intervention, genuine community engagement emerges.

Within this article, we’ve described our process for planning, implementation, and evaluation of a deliberative public issues forum held at a large public institution of higher education. The forum itself was a part of a larger statewide university system strategic planning process.

Representative democracy focuses on structures, while participatory democracy focuses on processes (Boyte 2008). This forum enabled a collaborative organized community to make sense of their own and others’ thoughts and opinions. Through data analysis and reflection, nine key lessons learned emerged.

Lesson 1. The process we’ve described serves as an example in a higher education culture. From both the academic and practitioner perspectives, there’s value in sharing our experience with others. While this process is not new to students of democratic process, universities have grown away from using this type of process

for deliberation within the community. Contemporary case studies such as ours could be useful in higher education courses or in facilitator professional development.

Lesson 2. There are ways to adapt a pure democratic model if you have time or other organizational constraints. Don't be afraid to try it. The short turnaround time for getting this information from constituents could have prevented us from embracing a democratic process. Democracy takes time, and aiming solely for efficiency can mean not realizing the potential for richer and broader and unexpected ideas.

Lesson 3. We learned that if materials are provided in advance for a broad group of people, they really do come prepared. Instructions are important. Trust your participants—trust them with information, trust them to come prepared and participate. This was a local university exercise in the context of the state university system mandates. It was somewhat easy for us to put that trust in our internal stakeholders, but we learned that extending that trust to the external stakeholders

“Give people tools and they come prepared and ready to engage.”

worked. Most participants felt prepared through readings and the event overview to competently and authentically address the action plan for UNC Tomorrow Study response (*Habermas 1996*). Survey results revealed that a key factor was recognition and validation of input. Give people tools and they come prepared and ready to engage.

Lesson 4. We learned a lot from working with the design team. Planning team members had a deep understanding of adapting model processes to a situation. Even with that background, and an evolving democratic culture within the design team, it was necessary to anticipate the more intense dialogue and sense making yet to come with the forum group. We learned that not all committee members or community members bought into this democratic process uniformly, yet inclusiveness, participation, and task sharing—all democratic values—had significant implications in our problem-solving task.

The process-driven participatory democracy from the newly formed team represented creativity, passion, competence, and the support to move an idea forward. The planning team chose to become a learning team, address conflicts, label theory-driving opinions and suggestions, provide opportunities for consensus

to emerge, value each other, and enable engagement of members based on their self-selected strengths.

Lesson 5. Because this forum represented the voices of such a broad group of people, the forum results had higher credibility and regard within the university. The focus in planning the forum was as much on the importance of informed public participation in the

“Because this forum represented the voices of such a broad group of people, the forum results had higher credibility and regard within the university.”

university decision-making process as it was on generating tangible action plan outcomes. However, most of the action plan outcomes generated in the forum were incorporated in the final report to the university system.

Strategic interventions during the forum itself were carefully managed with good results that were transparent to the large group; survey results verified that there was an observed lack of oppression, which eased communi-

cation. The participants perceived very few or no constraints in working toward the written action plan outcomes with no coercion for democratic authenticity. The comfort level as revealed by our responding participants was high, and there was also a sense of community pride of completion and a sense of change to come (Button and Ryfe 2005).

Lesson 6. We learned that a deliberative public forum could be replicated because we successfully used a similar process again on smaller scale in a visioning process for another project involving university and community engagement. By plunging in and adopting a framework of democratic process, we were able to build capacity for our institution.

Lesson 7. Developing a survey based on democratic constructs gave us additional opportunities to learn. The follow-up survey affirmed what we observed and took our evidence a step further from “this felt good” and gave us greater clarity on our observations. While any program planning model involves an evaluation component, we designed our survey to attempt a measurement based on our theoretical constructs, a step past “bricks and bouquets.” We used the deliberative democracy literature to frame our survey items. The results thus inform future practice. Aggregating responses, we found that 84 percent of our responding participants agreed that the forum included practices of democracy and engagement. We recommend surveying the literature and writing a survey

of this type at the beginning of the planning process. It would be valuable to statistically validate an instrument of this type with more responses.

Lesson 8. Our survey results led us to recommend having more meetings beyond the initial public forum to involve the participant group in lasting changes. The mechanics of follow-up meetings would most likely be different from the initial meeting.

Lesson 9. Reflection time is valuable for learning. The next session we planned benefited from our reflection and use of data results. This is an iterative process; refinement can carry from one event to the next. Vice Chancellor Zuiches and Pat Sobrero have recycled the democratic process model with master facilitators Grable and O'Brien to apply the lessons learned in a community

gateway project with good initial results during the visioning process. Building capacity while applying the democratic engagement model, the team believed and trusted that we could ask a series of complex questions and receive substantive input from our civic community. Our work toward democratic engagement in the community using our expertise does not claim an exclusionary position, but instead focuses on inclusion and interaction of the communities most impacted by the change.

“Building capacity while applying the democratic engagement model, the team believed and trusted that we could ask a series of complex questions and receive substantive input from our civic community.”

Discussion

Our intentional structure included a minimally facilitated, open event with a carefully planned and timed agenda, a good location, and an inclusive environment where key stakeholders and students engaged in public deliberation through interesting face-to-face discussions. We were fortunate to have key team members strong enough to reframe discussion as events unfolded. In addition, we generated published, valued results and postanalysis to influence future actions for continued advocacy. We discovered our forum deliberation contained many of the components of a deliberative democratic process with intentional influence and civic engagement. However, the process was not an end in itself. The solutions to the six key UNC Tomorrow issues were not predictable.

In fact, the issues as presented by the UNC Tomorrow Commission were intractable problems (*Zimpher, Percy, and Brukaradt 2002*); it was not probable that a clear resolution would occur within a single citizen forum. The forum was civic engagement demonstrating inclusion with an opportunity to share knowledge in an open problem-solving environment. Our challenge was to gain the trust of the community and become stewards of information. This forum was only one of many on the sixteen campuses across the state to collect opinions from our communities. NC State was unique in that we closely followed the democratic model.

One final observation emerges from questions in the outcome section of the survey: “Heightened interests in recommended issues and programs recommended,” “Participation in the meeting broadened my outlook on the issues raised,” and “I believe my participation made a difference.” These items refer to Gastil’s research on those who participate in deliberative democracy forums and discussions. In summary, we believe that civic engagement is critical to address an urgent issue such as our universities of tomorrow. For face-to-face participation in reasoned deliberation of collaborative learning, we strongly support inclusion of master facilitators and multiple stakeholders: knowledgeable and informed participants and public citizens. Individual ideas are captured and shared with valued recommendations quickly published from the organization with noted actions endorsed by the chancellor. Deliberative democracy takes time. Authentic civic engagement will be a bold investment of our time, talent, and treasure.

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