ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY IN PRODUCTIVE PUBLIC CONVERSATIONS ABOUT IMMIGRATION

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Abstract

Immigration is a difficult subject to talk about in public settings because it arouses strong feelings. This article reports on four case studies from the United States and Canada which involve democratic organizing efforts to bring citizens together for deliberative dialogue on this difficult subject in a way that builds mutual understanding and trust and involves participants in weighing options and making choices. The authors identify common themes from the cases and draw conclusions.

INTRODUCTION

Americans have been debating costs and benefits of immigration since the Nation's birth. In 1753, 23 years before he signed the Declaration of Independence, Benjamin Franklin wrote at length about costs and benefits of German immigration. On one hand, he wrote "few of their children in the country know English." But Franklin also recognized the benefits of immigration, writing that "German immigrants are excellent husbandmen and contribute greatly to the improvement of a country." He concluded that benefits could outweigh costs, under appropriate conditions (Weaver, 1957).

American history is replete with cost-benefit calculations about immigration. In some epochs, calculation has led the country to adopt an open door immigration policy, as was the case until 1924. In others, calculations encouraged the country to close its doors and admit few immigrants, as occurred

from 1924 through 1965. The 20th Century began with the country in the midst of the greatest wave of immigration in its history. The Century ended in the midst of another period of high immigration. The issues raised at the beginning of the 21st Century parallel the earlier wave: Can the country accommodate numbers of immigrants? Who benefits from the arrival of immigrants? Who is harmed? Can immigrants be absorbed and integrated or are they simply too "different" from the rest of the country?

One reason that any discussion of the costs and benefits associated with immigration policy is difficult is that it taps into fundamental American values and often brings those values into conflict with one another. Perhaps the most obvious value at stake is standard of living. Any changes in the volume of immigration are likely to create gains in standard of living for some sectors of the indigenous population and losses for others. A discussion of immigration may also tap into values regarding equity which make us sympathetic toward the plight of people who are politically persecuted. History of conflicts over immigration policy also shows the importance to many people of the perceived effect of immigration on the preservation or modification of American culture.

When deeply held values are in conflict and citizens are not in agreement on what goals or outcomes they want to achieve on an important issue, such as immigration policy, policy makers often find themselves gridlocked and unable to define the public interest. On such issues, public officials need a way to hear more than the polarized debate of interest groups. They need a public dialogue in which people look for common ground on which to base action.

Another way of thinking about the costs and benefits related to immigration is to consider the ways in which American citizens, organizations, and communities have helped immigrants over the years to become productive citizens. Jane Addams' Hull House in 19th Century Chicago is just one example of such initiatives. Involving community members directly in addressing immigrant needs represents another way of thinking about the cost benefit analysis of immigration. By contributing their toil to the cause and providing immigrants with support and assistance, some communities believe that they can contribute to increasing the benefits that immigrants bring.

DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUE

When community values are in conflict and when many individuals and groups must work together to solve a public problem, our standard strategies for informing and involving the public—workshops, public hearings, or distributing brochures—don't work very well. A major weakness of traditional public

participation is that it does not provide an opportunity for people to directly engage with an important issue - such as immigration - and with one another to work through options and tradeoffs together. Nor does traditional public participation mobilize or inspire citizens to take individual as well as collective action to solve community problems. That's why some communities are engaging community members in *deliberative dialogue* about their experiences, attitudes, and opinions about immigration.

The term deliberative dialogue refers to a particular kind of public participation which both builds mutual understanding and trust and involves participants in weighing options and making choices. In *Public Management in a Democratic Society*, Robert Reich (1988) considers public deliberation to be a process of "social learning about public problems and possibilities." He sees it as "the creation of a setting in which people can learn from one another." As deliberative dialogue projects have proliferated in the last decade, organizers have shown that – when given the right opportunities – participants in these projects can take a more active role in public life, moving from learning and dialogue to collaborative action, often in partnership with government.

CASE STUDIES IN DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUE

In this article we present four case studies in which the public is involved in deliberative dialogue on immigration issues. Although they differ tremendously in their scale and in the assumptions they make about immigration, these four programs have some critical elements in common. All of them used structured small-group dialogues to engage residents in discussion and action on public issues relating to immigration. These groups typically included 8-12 participants and met for several sessions. Each group had an impartial facilitator, who moderated the sessions without expressing his or her personal opinions. Each program prepared a discussion guide to help structure the sessions. The small-group dialogues had three main goals: to help participants share their personal experiences with the issue, to help them consider the main policy options, and to help them effect change. Each group had an impartial facilitator, who moderated the sessions without expressing his or her personal opinions. Each program issued a discussion guide to help structure the sessions.

The four examples also exemplify the new wave of deliberative dialogue projects in that they guide participants through four levels of analysis: observation (learning about the issue); emotional reaction (sharing experiences pertinent to the issue); judgment (weighing policy options); and decision (developing plans to address the issue, which may include policy recommendations, individual or small-group actions, and other ways of effecting change). Structuring the sessions to

allow for these four elements seemed to be critical to the success of the discussions; in the limited context of the projects, it not only helped the participants fulfill the role of productive citizens, it seemed to make the policymaking process more reasonable, rational, and beneficial for all.

Some of the similarities in philosophy and strategy among the four examples – and within the field of deliberative dialogue – are due to the national leadership of organizations like the Democracy Education Network in Canada and the Study Circles Resource Center in the United States. These organizations strive to champion the idea of democratic organizing, to connect the organizers of deliberative dialogue projects with one another, and to collect the lessons learned by these organizers for the benefit of future projects.

The role of government was different in each of the four examples. The first case study, the "Canadian Immigration Review," represents a situation where the federal government actively sought citizen input in policy making related to immigration. The "Changing Faces, Changing Communities" program in Minnesota involved many state legislators and local officials, but was initiated by the League of Women Voters chapter in that state. The "Many Voices, One Community" project in Miami, Florida, was initiated by a coalition of nonprofit organizations, but included a formal opportunity for participants to exchange views with their U.S. Congressman. Finally, the "Neighborhood Learning Circles" in St. Paul, Minnesota, do not involve government directly, but have helped participants become successful political actors in their neighborhood and community.

Canadian Immigration Review, 1994

Many Americans don't realize that over the last 30 years, Canada has had a more liberal immigration policy than the United States. Because most of those immigrants have come from non-European countries, Canada's racial and ethnic mix has changed dramatically: major cities like Vancouver and Montreal are just as diverse as their American counterparts and it is actually Toronto, rather than New York or Los Angeles, which is now the most multiethnic city in the world.

In the early 1990s, the Canadian government faced a public crisis over its federal immigration policy and program. The Canada was mired in one of the most extended economic downturns in its history while levels of immigration were at an all-time high. Meanwhile, funding for social programs which supported recent immigrants had been cut. Immigration had become a taboo in Canada, with anti-immigration views being brushed aside as racist or reactionary. But, the economic situation brought all arguments out into the open. In reaction to the public uproar,

the federal government announced plans to limit immigration to 1% of the population. But that did little to diminish concern over competition for jobs, charges that immigration led to higher crime levels, scandals relating to supposed mismanagement by the Immigration and Refugee Board, confusion over laws and terms such as "refugee," and anger over the budget cuts for social programs, along with direct accusations of racism.

In early 1994, Canada's Minister of Immigration and Citizenship convened a group of 30 individuals, representing the federal government, business, unions, education, and social, health, and public safety agencies, to help launch a national "consultation" on immigration. This group helped recruit citizens to take part in the consultation, and helped decide what kinds of materials the participants would need to make informed judgments about immigration issues. The organizers hoped that the consultation would lead to the development of a ten-year strategic framework for immigration policy.

The Immigration Review used a wide variety of processes to stimulate discussion, including: expert "Working Groups" on each of the ten sub-issues; meetings between federal immigration officials, their provincial counterparts, and national "stakeholder" organizations, "town hall" meetings in seven cities; and a total of 58 "study circles" in six metropolitan areas. Over 1,600 Canadians participated in the public meetings, with 1,100 taking part in study circles. To help ground the sessions, study circle participants were given a document outlining the Department of Immigration's policy goals, a history of Canadian immigration, a sheet of statistics on immigration, facts about who provides services to immigrants, and a paper presenting the arguments on the different sides of the immigration debate.

In late 1994, a national conference was held to conclude the consultation. The conference brought together a diverse set of 200 delegates. One surprise in the study circle recommendations was there were very few regional differences in the conclusions of the groups. "I was amazed that even in the heart of Alberta, when people discovered that Quebec had different immigration powers than other provinces, it made sense to them," said David Shulman of the Democracy Education Network, one of the groups that spearheaded the project. And in general, participants were not so much against immigration as critical of the way immigration was being handled by the federal government.

> "What participants realized once they had the information was that immigration had been going up between 1984 and 1994 but that services and language training were being cut in the same period. The government had come up with a target of one percent immigration to try to calm the

> fears they found reflected in the polls. [The] study circles said they should open to as much immigration as they could afford to integrate. [Participants] favored immigration, but they wanted to make sure that the services could be available to settle immigrants in the country successfully."

Evaluations of the Immigration Review were particularly positive about the small-group component of this project. "Analysis of the study circle process demonstrated that opportunities for deliberation allow informed public judgment rather than 'top of mind' opinions. The public demonstrated their ability to understand options and tradeoffs in study circles. Study circles revealed that participants were more concerned about the Department's administrative capabilities and accountability than they were about immigration and the economy."

Federal immigration policies in Canada did change after 1994, and officials sometimes cited conclusions of the public consultation to validate their actions. In at least one situation, the Minister of Immigration and Citizenship felt compelled to make a change he personally did not support: implementing a landing fee for all new immigrants. But there are no known examples of ordinary Canadians taking action, or of local policy changes, as a result of the Immigration Review. This is presumably because the consultation was presented almost exclusively as a discussion of federal immigration policy.

"Changing Faces, Changing Communities" in Minnesota, 2000

In the last decade, Minnesota has been affected dramatically by immigration as any other state in the United States. The state's foreign-born population is estimated to have grown by 50% in the 1990s. Minnesota now has the largest population of Somali immigrants and nearly 17,000 Hmong refugees have arrived from refugee camps in Laos. Each summer between 15,000 and 20,000 Mexican migrant farm workers find work in the state. "Lake Woebegone is getting a tan," said John Powell (2000), a professor at the University of Minnesota Law School. These demographic shifts are even more apparent in smaller cities and towns. In Worthington, for instance, a town of 10,260 people, more than 50 languages are spoken in the public schools. In Pelican Rapids, formerly a tourist town of 1,900 residents, 24 languages are spoken in the schools, according to a representative of the local League of Women Voters. Among the people watching these shifts were Nancy Kari and Harry Boyte, two well-known authors on civic issues who live in Minnesota. Kari was a co-founder of the Jane Addams School for Democracy, a community-based education and social action initiative in St. Paul. Boyte is a co-director of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the

University of Minnesota. The pair had been involved in 'community circles' at the Jane Addams School, involving Hmong and Hispanic residents, college students, and longtime residents. They persuaded the League of Women Voters of Minnesota to launch a statewide program to involve citizens in small-group discussions on immigration.

The project was named "Changing Faces, Changing Communities: Immigration in Minnesota." The League adopted the label 'community circle' for the small groups. To structure discussions, they adapted *Changing Faces, Changing Communities*, a study circle guide published by the Study Circles Resource Center in Pomfret, Connecticut, and added information specific to Minnesota. The new guide included a session, which helped participants to consider what it means to be an American in the current age of immigration.

The project coordinator barnstormed through the state helping local League chapters and other local organizers prepare for the circles. In most of the communities involved, coordinators were able to hold kickoffs, involve public officials, and recruit a range of people and views. They ended up with 17 sites, from the Twin Cities and their suburbs to little Pelican Rapids. In February 2000, 70 community circles got under way, involving 961 people.

Many of the immediate local outcomes of "Changing Faces" were ethnic festivals and diversity celebrations. In Marshall, where 120 citizens participated in circles, over 70 of those people visited the high school on Martin Luther King Day to take part in small-group dialogues on race, diversity, and immigration. The "Changing Faces" program also led to a Malaysian Harvest Festival in Northfield, a Somali Festival in Marshall, and an international potluck at Armstrong High School in Robbinsdale. In at least one instance, circles helped an immigrant group recapture a part of their culture they had lost. In one of the circles in Marshall, a Somali man connected with a local farmer who was willing to sell goats to the Somali community. Goats are slaughtered as part of a religious ceremony and the meat is distributed to Somali families.

Some of the other action ideas emerging from circles were aimed at helping recent immigrants find their voices politically and equipping them to succeed economically. Participants in Eden Prairie made plans to hold a job fair and provide job placement support for recent immigrants. In Edina, the school district hired an additional social worker to assess the needs of immigrant families and connect them with human services programs. A hospital in Marshall has started a program in which Somali women are taught to sew, and are given job opportunities in which to exercise this skill. In Winona, a local technical college agreed to help more immigrants learn keyboarding skills. A number of

communities have expanded access to ESL classes. Participants in several communities proposed "welcome centers" or "multicultural resource centers." These were envisioned as central locations where immigrants could organize, socialize, and get access to public services, as well as being places where immigrants and longtime residents could meet and interact. At least one – in Pelican Rapids – has since been built.

Participants in Pelican Rapids worried that many recent immigrants in their community would be undercounted in the 2000 Census, resulting in insufficient state and federal funding for social services. They took the lead in training census takers in reaching out to immigrant communities, and they conducted a media campaign to encourage immigrants to step forward. When the count was taken, "the Census report showed a dramatic increase in population," said Connie Payson, a social worker in Pelican Rapids. "I believe that if we hadn't pushed for a strong census initiative after the circles, we might have missed most of our minority population." she said.

The action forum for the state - held in St. Paul - attracted a large and enthusiastic crowd. Each community was given a chance to report on the findings of its circles. Many recent immigrants in attendance reiterated how valuable the small-group dialogues had been. "For me, it was the greatest thing that happened," said a Peruvian-born woman who had taken part in the St. Cloud circles. "This is the first time I could express or tell my experiences since coming to this country." Others exposed their commitment to implementing some of the ideas generated in the discussions. "Two things struck me about the forum," Kari said. "First, citizens took those community reports very seriously, and were adamant about the need to move forward on the issue. Second, on several occasions I heard people look around at their fellow attendees and say, '*This* is what it means to be a citizen.'"

<u>"Many Voices, One Community" in Miami, Florida, 1998</u>

Immigration has been a key feature of life in Miami throughout most of the 20th century. The city is one of those rare places that may actually play a larger role internationally than it does nationally. Miami is now known to many as the "Capital of Latin America." Miami also has great political diversity among its immigrant population, with conservative Cuban émigrés as well as more left-leaning immigrants from other Caribbean nations, from South America, and from Asia.

In the mid-1990s, a coalition of groups led by the American Friends Service Committee decided to organize broad-based public deliberation on immigration issues. They were motivated by bias and strife between the city's

many ethnic and immigrant groups, but also by federal policy changes that would deny welfare benefits to many recent immigrants. They worked with the Study Circles Resource Center to develop a discussion guide called *Changing Faces, Changing Communities: Immigration and race relations, education, language differences, and job opportunities.* The extensive subtitle resulted from a desire to ground the term "immigration" in the realities of everyday life, and to name sub-issues that resonated with people of different political backgrounds.

The organizers were explicit about the need to recruit a politically diverse set of participants. Their kickoff event featured authorities on immigration from across the ideological spectrum. They put a special emphasis on recruiting on college and high school campuses, and eventually held study circles at Hialeah High School, Florida International University, Barrie University, and the University of Miami Law School. During late 1997 and early 1998, they involved roughly 700 people in their circles.

At the conclusion of the circles, organizers invited U.S. Congressman Lincoln Diaz-Balart, representing part of Dade County, to a 'fishbowl' forum where he could interact with study circle participants. Ten participants took part in a discussion circle with Congressmen, while the other attendees watched and listened. Later the discussion was opened up to questions and comments from the audience. Toward the end of the session, Diaz-Balart compared it to other public forums on immigration. "This approach is much more productive and I hope more of it goes on," he said.

"Many Voices, One Community" seemed to have fewer identifiable outcomes than the other projects reviewed in this article perhaps because the organizers were unable to provide support to motivated participants after the action forum in March 1998. However, one circle formed a new entity called the Citizens Accountability Network - an informal group that holds public meetings and serves as a networking opportunity for citizens interested in immigration issues.

"Neighborhood Learning Circles" in St. Paul, Minnesota, 1996-present

The West Side of St. Paul, Minnesota, has been called the "Ellis Island of the Midwest" for its role in the history of immigration in the region. The current wave of immigrants in the neighborhood include large numbers of Hmong, Latinos, and Somalis. The neighborhood is also near the University of Minnesota and the College of St. Catherine. In 1996, professors at those two institutions joined with neighborhood residents and the staff of a century-old settlement house to found the Jane Addams School for Democracy, one of the most innovative entities of its kind.

The Jane Addams School is a community-based education and action initiative, informed by concepts and practices of both the Citizenship Schools of the Civil Rights movement and the settlement house movement, of which Jane Addams' Hull House was an important part. Its primary ongoing activity is the organizing of neighborhood learning circles which bring together residents, students, and others. Two goals of the learning circles are to help recent immigrants pass the federal citizenship exam and to help participants learn about each other's languages and cultures. However, circles have led to a number of other projects and outcomes over the last six years as participants compared experiences and generated ideas for improving the neighborhood.

The learning circles are ongoing, with several under way at all times, rather than in large sets of circles. The Jane Addams School employs translators to help participants who are just beginning to learn languages other than their own. There is also often a children's circle made up of multilingual children. A part of each session is devoted to a more formal cultural exchange where participants teach each other traditional crafts, share foods native to their cultures, and engage in storytelling. Emphasis is on the value of Hmong and Latino immigrants' native cultures, and on the immigrants' capacity to teach college and high school participants lessons that are not offered in the academic setting.

Many participants in the neighborhood learning circles have since passed the federal citizenship exam. The circles have also helped neighborhood children raise their scores on a state-administered basic skills test. Other outcomes are less measurable, but no less significant. Participants in the learning circles created a community farming project, a mural, an education initiative at the local high school, a health project, and a community-wide celebration known as the West Side Freedom Festival. And even though most of the emphasis of the circles is on improving the local situation, participants have had at least one impact on federal policy. The School began a relationship with the regional director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service in order to address citizenship-applicants' concerns about the citizenship exam. As a result of this relationship, English-speaking partners may now accompany Hmong applicants during the citizenship examination and interview.

SOME COMMON THEMES

In reviewing these four case studies, several common themes emerge. We have chosen to highlight three. *First*, community members are directly involved in defining the problem, or naming the issue, in language that is meaningful to them. *Second*, public conversations take place in settings in which people feel safe to

share their stories, offer up their personal experiences and participate in finding solutions to community problems. *Third*, in each of the cases public deliberation is built around four basic questions flowing from the natural internal processes of observation, emotional reaction, judgment, and decision (Scheim, 1987).

Involve the Community in Naming Issues

Any community problem can be framed in various ways by diverse stakeholders, each reflecting a unique perspective and internalized model. Issues surrounding immigration, like all public problems, are socially constructed, meaning that individuals view and interpret the same situation in different ways and pay attention to different aspects of the same problem. Some people view immigration as a cause of declining wages when newcomers are willing to work for less money. Others point out that immigrants have always brought new skills and ideas to America and that in a global economy communities with strong ties to other parts of the world have a competitive advantage in generating trade and business with other countries. Still others worry that new immigrants create a burden on social services.

The hardest part of involving citizens in community problem solving is often deciding what the problem is. There are usually powerful tensions among multiple, often conflicting definitions of problems and their solutions. As a result, there is seldom a consensus about whether a problem exists and, if so, what it is and how to respond to it effectively. Among the four projects, we found great disparities in how the organizers viewed and described the issue. The Canadian national consultation on immigration policy focused on the federal policy debate, including how many immigrants should be admitted and how the budget for enforcement and settlement should be prioritized. The "Changing Faces, Changing Communities" project in Minnesota devoted one session to national immigration policy, but placed more emphasis on the economic and social effects of immigration in the community, and how those should be dealt with. Finally, the Jane Addams School for Democracy in St. Paul (MN) works primarily with recent immigrants, helping them gain access to education, social services, and economic opportunities, while equipping them to participate in the public life of their community. Clearly, these projects reflect very different assumptions about immigration and how citizens and communities should address it.

The name that people give to a problem influences how they approach it. It also influences who will feel that they have a role in addressing the issue and the responses that may emerge. For example, when immigration is framed as a matter of enforcing laws or preventing illegal aliens, then citizens view the issue as a matter of national policy over which they have little control. The Canadian

Immigration Review process was framed as public input on federal immigration policies, and it was deemed successful in achieving its goals. Consequently participants did not focus on generating local projects or ways they could participate in addressing immigration issues. On the other hand, when an issue is defined in a way that reveals actions citizens can take in their own families and in their neighborhoods, citizens are able to see how they can be part of solving the problem, as both of the Minnesota case studies illustrate.

Create Safe Space

It is not easy to create an environment, or space, in which people will feel safe addressing critical issues relating to race, class, ethnicity or power—such as immigration. Small groups make most people feel more comfortable about speaking than large groups. Clear expectations, ground rules, group behavioral norms and competent facilitation assure people that their efforts are worthwhile and that individuals will be respected and protected in the group.

Most public spaces, like legislative hearing rooms and council, board or commission chambers are settings for debate and not well suited for deliberative conversations. Meetings held in neighborhoods at locations where people will be comfortable, such as schools, worksites, parks, churches, mosques and synagogues, fire stations and people's own living rooms are more conducive to good conversation. Each of these case studies involved citizens meeting in small groups of 8-12 participants in which each person has a reasonable chance to speak, be listened to and receive responses. The group process used in each of these cases involved trained, neutral facilitators and ground rules regarding how group members would work together.

When a deliberative process is owned by the community and has the support and involvement of community groups with which people identify, they feel more comfortable about participating. A distinctive feature of the study circle model for community dialogue is the effort devoted at the beginning of the process to building a strong and broad coalition of organizational support. This contributes to creating the safety that fosters productive public conversation.

Public Deliberation Uses Questions on Four Levels

In each of these cases, small discussion groups worked with a facilitator who asked a series of questions to elicit responses that took a group of citizens from the surface of an immigration issue more deeply into its implications for their life and community. The questions flow from the natural internal processes of observation, emotional reaction, judgment, and decision. The observation level

deals with data and things people can observe (data about immigration patterns, economic impact, employment figures). Printed discussion materials are helpful in grounding the conversation at the observation level.

At the emotion reaction level the participant is invited to share his or her personal experience with the issue. Questions at this level are concerned with feelings, moods, and memories. If something is worrying people about the issue it is important to get that out in the open (fears about community change, racism, loss of a common culture, competition for jobs). It is at third level of questioning, the judgment level, that participants begin to grapple with the real meaning of the issue. It is at this level that participants consider and weigh options and alternatives. (Should we: Protect all people who want to live here? Admit highly skilled immigrants rather than those who will compete for entry-level jobs with people who are already here? Allow fewer people to move here to alleviate demand for housing, health care, schools, and environmental resources? Focus on helping poor countries to address their own problems and reduce people's desire to come to the United States? Make changes in our own community to support immigrants in their transition process?)

The fourth level of the conversation is the decision level where implications and directions are discussed. Here, some kind of commitment brings the conversation to a close with questions that allow people to take the data from the previous level and use it to make conscious choices. The decisions may involve actions that the group has committed to take or they may involve words that the group endorses. (Thinking together about how we can make a difference and setting priorities for action.) (Bramson, 2000).

CONCLUSIONS

It is our belief that all four of these examples were successful, each in its own way. Viewed collectively, we believe they represent some important lessons about how communities can address issues relating to immigration. *First*, it is clear that constructive citizen involvement on these issues is achievable and manageable. Though they range in scale from a temporary national effort to an ongoing neighborhood activity, all four examples engaged large numbers of people meeting in facilitated small groups. All of the projects resulted in some form of public action.

Second, citizen involvement on this issue is more likely to be successful if organizers recruit from all the different segments of the community. Most communities contain residents who are enthusiastic about immigration and its benefits, citizens who are ambivalent or negative about immigration, and recent

immigrants themselves. Involving people from all three groups will not only lead to a more realistic policy discussion, it has greater potential for creating change. Citizens are more likely to change their minds about policy when they compare personal experiences with others who have different opinions, and they are more likely to find projects to work on together when they forge relationships across the barriers of cultural difference

Third, we should realize that immigration is more than simply a question of federal policy. It is important to gather citizen input on how to make national admissions decisions, but the immigrants already present in our communities are having a tangible impact (whether viewed positively or negatively) on the social and economic aspects of our day-to-day lives. It is our hypothesis that projects allowing citizens to address immigration at different levels – from national policy to neighborhood impacts – are more likely to reap the full benefits of public involvement. This is a subject requiring additional study.

Finally, we need a better vocabulary for this issue, a broader (and perhaps more value-neutral) definition of immigration as a topic for deliberation. Not all of the four examples revealed the key assumptions about immigration made by the organizers. These assumptions, as well as the possibilities for action and change at the neighborhood and community level, should be a much more upfront part of the local discussion of immigration.

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