

Lakewood, Colorado

- Just west of Denver
- Highest approval ratings for a local government in the Denver metro area
- Lowest tax support, per capita, for a local government in the Denver metro area

Citizens in the 21st Century:

- More educated
- More skeptical
- Have less time to spare
- Use the Internet to learn and connect

Officials in the 21st Century:

- Fewer resources
- Tired of conflict with citizens
- Lower levels of public trust
- Harder to hide behind data, jargon

“Citizens don’t always realize that elected officials are human beings too. When the public is screaming at you, it does make you question why you chose a career in public service.”

– Henrietta Davis, city councilwoman, Cambridge, Massachusetts

“We sometimes forget that people are desperate for social connections. They make time for things like Neighbors Building Neighborhoods because these experiences fill a void in their lives.”

- Lois Giess, city councilmember,
Rochester, NY

“When you get down to it, what we’re really talking about is whether the current form of representative government is obsolete.”

- Steve Burkholder, mayor of Lakewood, CO, and first chair of NLC’s Democratic Governance Panel.

“Democratic governance is the art of governing communities in more participatory, deliberative, collaborative ways.”

**– Democratic Governance Panel,
National League of Cities**

Temporary projects and permanent structures

- Some efforts involve a critical mass of citizens to address a specific issue or create a plan – the project concludes after 6-12 months;
- Other communities have created “neighborhood councils” or other kinds of permanent structures – these involve citizens continually in land use, policing, and other issues.

Four Successful Democratic Principles

1. Proactive, network-based recruitment to reach a critical mass of people
2. Use both small-group and large-group meetings
3. Give people the chance to share experiences and consider a range of views or options
4. Different levels of change: volunteerism, organizational change, policy change

“Neighbors Building Neighborhoods”

Rochester, NY

- Continual neighborhood-based planning
- First planning cycle in 1993 (three so far)
- Issues: land use, redevelopment, public finance
- 6,000 participants per planning cycle
- NBN Institute trains neighborhood leaders and city staff

“Neighbors Building Neighborhoods”

Rochester, NY

Outcomes:

- Over 80% of action ideas in neighborhood plans have been implemented, with significant volunteer support
- NeighborLink computer system that allows residents to track plan benchmarks
- Award-winning urban farming project
- New comprehensive plan and zoning code

“KCK Study Circles”

Kansas City, KS

- Began in 2000
- Initial Organizer: United Way
- Issue: schools
- 1,300 participants

“KCK Study Circles”

Kansas City, KS

Outcomes:

- Parent support group for Spanish-speaking mothers
- “Black Roses” after-school program
- “Missing Link” project for tutoring, mentoring, mediation
- Higher test scores – in concert with “First Things First” initiative

“Lee County Pulling Together”

Fort Myers, FL

- Began in 1996
- Initial Organizer: single church
- Issue: race
- 600 participants

“Lee County Pulling Together”

Fort Myers, FL

Outcomes:

- “Lee County Cooking Together” cookbook
- Clean-up of Rev. Dr. M. L. King Blvd.
- New shopping center in Dunbar neighborhood

“What To Do About the Flu?”

*Georgia, Nebraska,
Massachusetts, Oregon*

- Took place in 2005
- Centers for Disease Control, Study Circles Resource Center, Keystone Center
- Issue: pandemic influenza
- 500 participants

“What To Do About the Flu?”

*Georgia, Nebraska,
Massachusetts, Oregon*

Outcomes:

- Input used in Administration’s pandemic preparedness plan
- Local planning to prepare for pandemic

“Community Chat” *Southwest Delray Beach, FL*

- Began in 2000
- Initial Organizer: Local chapter of MAD DADS
- Issues: crime, education, housing, youth
- 100 participants

“Community Chat”

Southwest Delray Beach, FL

Outcomes:

- Parent support group
- Youth basketball team
- Expansion of “Delray Divas” youth group
- Westside Neighborhood Presidents’ Council
- Prayer vigils to eradicate drug activity
- Citizen input to street redevelopment plan
- “Maintaining the Village” effort to rehabilitate housing
- New deregulated public school - the “Village Academy”

“Kuna Alliance for a Cohesive Community Team” *Kuna, ID*

- Recurring input-gathering process, used on all major decisions
- Organized by Kuna Alliance for a Cohesive Team (Kuna ACT), in collaboration with local government
- Issues include: school funding, downtown development, planning and growth
- 500 participants annually (city of 6,000)

“Kuna Alliance for a Cohesive Community Team” *Kuna, ID*

Outcomes:

- New comprehensive plan
- Passage of school bond issue
- Improvements made to downtown
- New strategy to market community as hub for “Birds of Prey” area

How universities have been involved

- Dialogue and action on campus issues
- Deliberation within the classroom
- As partners with communities – initiating projects, helping to recruit, conducting research, evaluating
- Through cooperative extension

Jane Addams School for Democracy

West Side of St. Paul, Minnesota

- **Community center that regularly hosts “neighborhood learning circles”**
- **Involves recent Hmong, Latino, Somali immigrants**
- **Young people involved in circles and other activities**
- **Cultural exchanges - food, crafts, storytelling**
- **Has resulted in new projects, initiatives, festivals, and a change in INS policy**

Horizons II

WA, ID, MT, ND, SD, MN, IA

- **Initiated by the Northwest Area Foundation and the state cooperative extension services**
- **Issue: poverty**
- **175 communities (all pop. 10,000 or less), including 20 on reservations**
- **Over 10,000 participants across 7 states**
- **To be followed by a leadership development phase and a community visioning phase**

THE NEXT FORM OF DEMOCRACY

*How expert rule is giving way
to shared governance . . .
and why politics will never be the same*

MATT LEIGHNINGER

Foreword by **U.S. Senator Bill Bradley**

