

## **Essential Stages of a Civic Participation Process**

### **A Model for Experiential and Problem-Solving Civic Learning**

One example of how to practice an experiential learning strategy in the context of a civic participation process is well being demonstrated by the program >Projekt: aktive Bürger< (Center for Civic Education/Koopmann, F. Klaus, Mülheim 2001), the German adaptation of >We the People ... Project Citizen< (Center for Civic Education, Calabasas, CA 2001<sup>11</sup>). The following 6 stages summarize the main participatory actions to be taken.



#### **(1) Identifying and Analysing a Public Problem**

- What is a 'public problem'? Clarifying core characteristics of a 'public problem'
- Identifying authentic public problems – preferably at community level – participants are affected by or concerned about
- Deciding upon a public problem to deal with
- Analysing the problem by gathering and evaluating information on the problem from various resources (Internet, libraries, newspapers, experts, people affected, policy-makers, public administration etc.), focussing on: scope, intensity, duration, cause(s), genesis, resources/costs, (groups of) people affected/involved etc.
- Displaying the findings as part of the portfolio

#### **(2) Finding Possible Problem-Solving Options**

- Examining solutions having e.g. been developed and implemented in the contexts of similar cases in other communities or being suggested by groups of people, by non-governmental organizations, public administration, policy makers etc.
- Comparing those solutions and deciding on an option as an approach to be adopted
- Displaying the problem-solving options as part of the portfolio

#### **(3) Developing a Problem-Solving Strategy**

- Deciding upon a problem-solving-option to deal with and developing a problem-solving strategy by gathering and evaluating information on the problem from various resources (Internet, libraries, newspapers, experts, people affected, policy makers, public administration etc.)
- Drafting main steps of the proposed strategy
- Displaying the proposed problem-solving strategy as part of the portfolio

#### **(4) Developing an Action Plan**

- Surveying the civic and policymaking landscape: interest groups, NGOs, individual citizens interested in solving the problem, political institutions, policy makers, public administration etc.
- Involving and acting with whom? Finding coalition partners
- Collecting and determining means and levels of public involvement: circulating and/or signing a petition, contacting appropriate organizations/institutions/officials/groups/newspaper, requesting public policy makers to place the issue on the agenda of a city council meeting, presenting the proposal to city council, forming or joining a group being involved in the issue etc.

- Preparing a list and order of concrete step-by-step activities
- Displaying the action plan as part of the portfolio

**(5) Taking Action**

- Implementing the action plan into practice
- Presenting the portfolio to the public (local press, civil society organizations, possible ‘coalition’ partners, financial supporters, political institutions, governmental agencies, public administration etc.)
- Sticking closely to the political institutions and the public administration that are supposed to implement the solution
- Being prepared for flexible and appropriate reactions to unexpected developments of the problem-solving process
- Keeping records of activities

**(6) Evaluation**

- Comparing outcomes with intentions
- Reflecting critically upon the whole project
- Reflecting upon learning experiences: impacts of the project on acquiring participatory skills and competences
- Naming unintended consequences/new problems
- Deciding upon continuing the project
- Drawing conclusions for future participatory projects



The participants will develop a **portfolio** displaying the essential steps taken during the active learning process. There will be four well-designed displays exhibiting clearly and convincingly the stages (1) – (4): our public problem / possible problem-solving options / our problem-solving strategy / our action plan. The portfolio will be the core medium of communication with the public.

OUR PUBLIC PROBLEM	POSSIBLE PROBLEM-SOLVING OPTIONS	OUR PROBLEM-SOLVING STRATEGY	OUR ACTION PLAN