

Is Collaboration REALLY Possible in Public Participation Processes?

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Lewis Michaelson has been a member of IAP2 since 1992. Since then, he served as President of the International Board, shepherded the development of the IAP2 Core Values, authored the IAP2 Code of Ethics, co-authored the IAP2 Spectrum and co-developed the original IAP2 Foundations Training in Public Participation. He is President of Katz & Associates and an active IAP2 trainer.

Session Description:

Collaboration occupies a prominent position on the IAP2 Spectrum, but what does it really mean in a public participation context? We hear about musical and artistic collaborations in popular culture all the time, but what does it look like among multiple stakeholders with competing agendas and conflicting interests? Is collaboration possible to achieve in that context, or only in very limited situations? Please join Lewis Michaelson, a practicing neutral of 30 years, in an exploration of how, when and why collaboration is actually possible in public participation, based on scores of processes he has personally facilitated and interviews with dozens of participants in those processes.

Outline of your session:

I am presently working on a book about Collaboration based on 30 years of experience and feedback from participants. I have empirical observations and working hypotheses to share with conference participants about the conditions and elements needed to both recommend and achieve successful collaboration. I want to both “compare notes” with other practitioners who have attempted to work at the collaboration level of the Spectrum (whether they succeeded or not), as well as, encourage other practitioners to think more confidently and aggressively about the opportunities to attempt and achieve collaboration.

The first 10 minutes would be used by me to set the stage for the conversation by defining collaboration in a public participation context, discussing the challenges to achieving it and suggesting the conditions and elements that should be present to attempt it. The rest of the session would be interactive with the participants drawing on their experience, challenges, fears, misgivings and successes.

Brief description of how your session addresses the theme of the 2017 Conference:

As an IAP2 trainer since 1999, I have noticed that while many trainees would love to attempt a more collaborative approach, most are flummoxed, if not intimidated, about when or how they would actually try to pull that off. One obstacle is that few have ever witnessed or experienced it firsthand in a public participation context. Another is that their decision makers rarely seem ready to commit to the Collaboration level of influence sharing. And yet, when we conduct the Foundations training, many if not most of the scenarios they work on point to an almost obvious need, or at least strong benefit, to attempting collaboration. In the end, many of the trainees opt for “Involve” for their mock training exercise, because they can’t imagine Collaboration in the real world.

This session is intended to provide real world examples of where collaboration has occurred, why it succeeded and the elements you would want to look for (or develop) to attempt it in the first place. Given the values that IAP2 stands for and the theme of this conference to provide more meaningful engagement among diverse stakeholders, we need to give practitioners more tools and more confidence that deeper levels of dialogue and public participation can be achieved in order to promote trust building, mutual understanding and sustainable decisions that mutually satisfy all stakeholders’ needs

and interests - in ways that only a collaborative process can.

Session learning objectives:

- What collaboration looks like in a public participation context
- The necessary conditions for attempting collaboration
- The necessary elements for achieving collaboration