California Education Dialogue

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Online Dialogue in a Political Context:
The California Master Plan for Education

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Executive summary

From June 3-14, 2002, Information Renaissance produced an online public dialogue on the California Master Plan for Education (CAMP). Nearly 1,000 people took part in this event, which allowed them to learn about the draft Plan and talk directly with the education planners and legislators involved in its construction and implementation. The dialogue was part of a process initiated by the State Legislature through its Joint Committee to Develop a Master Plan.

Over this two-week period, the CAMP dialogue facilitated discussion of a complex policy document in a political environment. Evaluation findings of special interest include the high satisfaction rate of participants (76% positive; 91% would like additional online dialogues) and the low percentage (49% of non-education personnel) who knew about the Master Plan before hearing of the dialogue. Even more surprisingly, only 55% of non-administrative education personnel had known of the plan. Further, after the dialogue more than one-third of respondents reported an increased interest in government and politics. Among those who said they had previously been less active in politics, 50% said their interest had increased.

The first five chapters of the evaluation focus on the CAMP dialogue. Chapters I-II describe the background and context, plus a set of broad social goals that typically impel the desire for public involvement in policy decisions. Five questions were used to focus the evaluation on the value of online dialogue as a mechanism for civic engagement. These are introduced along with the evaluation methodology. Chapter III outlines the Information Renaissance model for online dialogue; in Chapters IV and V, the data gathered from registration and evaluation forms is presented and used to explore the five evaluation questions.

Chapter VI moves from the specific examination of the CAMP dialogue data to a broader discussion of public participation in a political context. Online activities can address many of the dilemmas associated with participation, but successful online events require careful organization and some basic infrastructure.

Chapter VII develops a set of conclusions, which lead to the following recommendations: first, online dialogue should be broadly used as a mechanism for civic engagement, since in many cases it offers significant advantages over conventional public meetings; second, online dialogue should be institutionalized, so that it becomes a routine part of legislative and regulatory processes; third, standards should be adopted for the exchange of information associated with dialogue; and, finally, both best practices and ethical standards are needed for participatory interchanges.

The CAMP dialogue

Our evaluation of the use of dialogue as a means for civic engagement is based upon data gathered during registration for the CAMP dialogue and from a post-dialogue evaluation questionnaire.

Goals

The intent of the evaluation is to explore the use of online dialogue on the California Master Plan as a mechanism for civic engagement, based on the five evaluation questions outlined below. To put the dialogue in context, we look first at broad participation as an ideal, expected to promote social goals such as incorporating public values, improving decision quality, educating the public, mitigating conflict and building trust in institutions. Detailed examination of

the extent to which the CAMP dialogue made contributions in these areas is beyond the scope of the evaluation, but it does appear to have had an effect. For example, it increased the flow of information between the public and policy makers, giving a chance to learn from each other; encouraged sharing of opinions and values among them; promoted new understanding of others' viewpoints; operated in a non-adversarial, respectful atmosphere; and increased interest in government and politics.

Participants

Those who registered for the online dialogue on the Master Plan for Education came from 47 of California's 58 counties. Cities and suburbs were home to about 77%, while 20% described their location as a small town or rural area. A strong majority (65%) work in the education sector.

Evaluation questions

How satisfied were participants with the process? Participants were quite enthusiastic. In responses to the questionnaire that followed the dialogue, 76% rated their experience as very or somewhat positive, and 91% said there should definitely or probably be online dialogues on other state policy topics. Open-ended responses confirm that the dialogue was a great success in this respect. Although some participants took a "wait and see" attitude, saying that their long-term attitude toward the process will depend on how the Master Plan is implemented, they would like more opportunities to interact with policy makers and find online dialogue a significant addition to the mechanisms that allow this.

Were new voices brought into policy discussions? The "new voices" most often sought in political processes are those who are underrepresented – less well-educated, younger, and ethnic groups. The dialogue did not involve many of these most-hoped-for new participants: 55% of registrants were over 50, and 74% had been or were currently in graduate school. As individuals, however, over one-third of the registrants said they had not known about the Master Plan before they learned of the dialogue, and 45% of those who did know about the Plan had not known they could submit comments. The classroom teachers who were brought into the dialogue on the Master Plan were an important addition of "new voices" to this particular policy discussion.

While technology can be a barrier to online dialogue, other constraints such as a lack of basic literacy (estimated at 23% of the population), a lack of information on issues, scarcity of time, and insufficient outreach and publicity are constraints that are at least as important. The technology also has major positive aspects: for the public, online dialogue can appreciably expand policymaking access and information availability. To increase civic engagement significantly among underrepresented groups, it will probably be necessary to invest more in recruitment efforts, use different approaches for outreach, institutionalize public involvement in legislative and regulatory processes, find ways to demonstrate the relevance of seemingly abstract discussions, and provide easy-to-absorb summaries of background materials.

For many potential participants – those who live outside a city, the disabled, students, parents with young children or other caregivers – online dialogue offers particularly significant advantages over more traditional mechanisms for public involvement in policy decisions, such as public hearings. The question of who wants to be or can be involved remains, but the answer is somewhat different online: those for whom Internet access is difficult or impossible, or technophobes, will be more disadvantaged; those who benefit from flexibility in time or place of participation will be relatively advantaged.

How did participants see the "public space" created by the dialogue for interaction? Much of the potential of an online dialogue is defined by how well it functions as a "public space" – a place

for communication and interaction among members of the public and between the public and policy makers. The evaluation asked about several factors that were expected to affect the perception of the dialogue. Here again, participants were largely quite satisfied: they said they had enough information to take part, and that others knew what they were talking about. They felt welcome in the dialogue and said people's attitudes and responses encouraged participation. They saw the dialogue as balanced among different points of view, respectful, constructive and useful for examining questions and ideas. Although the themes and questions of the dialogue were set before the discussion, there was a great deal of flexibility as to specific topics, and a majority of participants said that the dialogue had covered the education issues that concern them most. As demonstrated by the message archive, participants also supplied a large amount of information on conditions in local schools, policy effects they have observed, and what approaches do or do not work. On the other hand, the use of threads (grouping a message and its replies) and daily summaries only partly helped to meet the challenge presented by the volume of messages.

What did participants get from the process, including potential impact on policy? Opportunities for interaction with public officials and staff are typically limited. This may add value to the interaction in online dialogue, which feels rather direct and personal. This activity is new enough that many people simply find it interesting to take part, and constructive discussion on a topic of interest may in itself be perceived as rewarding. The discussion, as described above, was seen as a useful way to examine questions and ideas; a majority reported learning more about opinions they had not thought about before, and most said they had thought more about their own opinions. Most respondents did not expect a great deal of impact, but more than half expected at least "some." Open-ended responses show participants' hopes and frustrations with respect to their ability to affect policy, and the value they place on the opportunity to interact with decision makers.

What did policy makers get from the process, including the possibility of changes in public attitudes? Involving the public has several potential practical benefits for policy makers, including goodwill, increased trust, educating the public on issues and increasing interest. Many CAMP dialogue participants had previously not been too involved in government and politics. More than one-third of all evaluation respondents – and 50% of those who had been less active – reported that the dialogue had increased their interest. Again, however, what happens after the dialogue will be a major factor in the sustainability of these attitudes.

In interviews, Joint Committee staff were generally positive regarding online dialogue as a mechanism. Online dialogue was seen as far more interactive than other venues for public input on the Master Plan. The discussion is less formal and broader, more weighted toward getting the opinions of the lay public, and a place where people's comments are more direct than in hearings. Staff felt that for many participants this event was a first in terms of being able to address a legislator directly. However, some heard the messages in the dialogue as being "in a similar vein" to comments they had heard elsewhere, and felt that the loss of the face-to-face contact and "immediacy" of a Town Hall meeting as a trade-off. Each of the different venues is seen as giving a different perspective on public attitudes. There was disappointment that the dialogue did not involve a broader demographic spectrum, but the dialogue was seen as helping to change and add clarity to the Plan.

Issues for online dialogue

Beyond the specific issues of the California Master Plan, the CAMP dialogue reflected some practical issues associated with public participation and online events.

Dilemmas of public involvement

Do people want to be engaged? No matter how valuable public involvement in policy decisions may be, many of "the public" may not be interested. Online dialogue can bring together those who *are* interested, even though their numbers may be small in one geographic location, and can help to demonstrate relevance to others. It also allows "observers" to get a taste of an issue without making a major commitment, and to explore in more detail as interest deepens.

Who is or is not involved? Involving those who will be affected by a decision can improve the information available to decision makers in areas including problem definition, public values regarding alternatives, and the likely consequences of proposed policies. For those who are interested and have access, an online activity can encourage involvement in ways that will never be possible in one-time face-to-face events. However, online participation faces the same barriers as other forms of political involvement. To broaden representation, new approaches to outreach and to presentation of online background materials will be needed to inform the public and demonstrate the relevance of policy to people's lives. When important stakeholders are missing, extra outreach should be attempted; innovative techniques may help to fill the gap.

Nature and complexity of issues. The complexity and interrelatedness of many policy issues increases the need for discussion and public understanding; it also increases the difficulty of involving the lay public in decision-making and makes it harder to build public confidence in government. Interactive online presentation techniques can allow users to explore an issue step by step, in as much or as little detail as they want, and show interconnections among issues. Skills of both organizers and sponsors should be developed to facilitate non-partisan communication, including development of themes and discussion questions, background materials, pros and cons and "why this is important" for diverse target groups and varied levels of reading ability.

Impact on policy and engagement. Impact can be seen in terms of the effect of public input on policy decisions, but effects on public engagement are also critical. These two types of impact intertwine: public interest in policymaking is increased by an expectation that input will make a difference; however, if this expectation is disappointed, attitudes may become more negative. Public involvement in policymaking has potential benefits for public officials; new skills will be required to work in a participatory way, build trust and learn to work together; online dialogue, in which people have time to think before they speak, offers a promising venue.

Trust. A lack of trust increases the difficulty of interactions between the public and government. Participation may be an avenue to improvement, but if expectations are disappointed, it may have the opposite effect. Online dialogue can help "public" and "government" to develop shared understandings, to begin to see each other as individuals, and work together toward solutions. Dialogue sponsors and organizers will, however, need to recognize the concerns of potential participants when designing an event, including explicit consideration of fairness and non-partisanship.

Organizational questions

Roles of sponsors, organizers and others. An online policy dialogue requires the collaboration of many groups inside and outside government. Sponsors and organizers need to discuss and agree on their roles and responsibilities; and who is sponsoring an event, who is organizing it and who is funding it should be clear to participants. The sponsor's commitment to action, including participation in the discussion and plans to make use of public input, should also be explicit. The organizer's responsibility to inform the sponsor about participatory processes and roles required for a dialogue can be an issue; and, as online events become more numerous and more commercial, there will be a need to adhere to standards of best practice.

Civility. An online dialogue can provide a space for public discourse that is both open and non-adversarial. Dialogue organizers can achieve the desired atmosphere by setting the tone in a number of informal ways and paying careful attention to structuring the design, presentation, moderation and facilitation of the event.

Mechanics. The mechanics of a dialogue require consideration of both the underlying technology and a number of less technical user issues. The technology should meet the varied needs of participants, sponsors, public officials, and academic researchers. Information Renaissance prefers an open standards, open source approach to building software. This both allows broad replication at the lowest possible cost and provides scalability and interoperability with similar systems of other organizations or units of government. For users, to assure that the public forum provided by the dialogue is accessible to all, the online facility should be designed with simplicity in mind – and with the necessary online aids for those who might be unfamiliar with the mechanics of the Web site or its content.

Cost versus engagement. Online public participation is an interesting new mechanism for civic engagement, but can only reach its potential if sufficient time and money can be invested. There are potential conflicts at every stage of design and production, as when the desire for an audience that is broad but also informed on the issues requires the development of explanations and tools suitable to a wide range of participants. The trade-offs between cost and engagement bear not only on the effectiveness of dialogues but also on the public presence of the sponsoring organization.

Institutionalization

Many of the issues outlined above could be addressed by building dialogue into legislative and regulatory processes. Making dialogue the norm and maintaining the infrastructure needed to organize online dialogues at national level could increase participation, improve the effectiveness of civic discussion, facilitate production of background materials, and build the skills of sponsors, organizers and participants. It could also spur the development of ethical standards and best practices, and could reduce or eliminate many of the recurring costs of production.

Recommendations

The experience of the CAMP dialogue leads us to four specific recommendations:

Use online dialogue as a means for civic engagement. Online dialogue should be used as broadly as public hearings to solicit public comments, educate the public about matters up for decision and encourage discussion of issues under consideration: these events offer flexibility for both the public and policy makers, allow large numbers of people to take part no matter where they live, and allow a broader geographic spread among the public who are involved. When properly structured, a welcoming public space can be created for interaction, communication and engagement, which can encourage constructive, non-adversarial discussion.

Institutionalize the role of online dialogue in legislative and regulatory processes. To increase civic engagement, broad adoption of this new mechanism should be encouraged by incorporating online dialogue in legislative and regulatory processes. By increasing and codifying knowledge and skills, providing ongoing public information, sharing background materials, exploring new means of presentation, establishing technical standards and shared software, and developing ethical standards and best practices, institutionalization of the role of online dialogue would increase the effectiveness of dialogue and decrease its per-production cost.

Adopt standards for the exchange of data associated with dialogues. This technical step will facilitate interoperability among the online dialogues sponsored by different units and levels of government. This will speed the adoption of online dialogues as a tool for public involvement and (1) facilitate parallel discussions that involve state and local governments or state and federal governments, (2) make it possible for researchers to study and compare different dialogues, (3) allow for sharing of resources including presentation tools and background materials, and (4) provide economies in the production of dialogues by facilitating the development of common software platforms for federal, state and local governments.

Develop ethical standards and best practices for participatory interchanges. As online civic dialogues become more numerous, ethical standards and best practices will be needed to assure that the process is transparent, non-partisan, fair, and worthy of the participants' trust. The development of ethical standards and best practices will encourage sponsors and organizers to recognize, think through and agree on their roles and responsibilities for each dialogue element, including the identification of stakeholders, balanced presentation of information and the use that will be made of public contributions to the discussion.

Introduction

Online dialogue offers a new type of public space and a tool for civic engagement that is inherently more dynamic and interactive than most traditional exchanges between the public and policy makers. This evaluation covers an online event involving a Joint Committee of the California state legislature, formed to develop a long-range plan for education. As in earlier Information Renaissance (Info Ren) online dialogues, participants were highly satisfied with the process. This is an important confirmation, since satisfaction is an essential prerequisite for recommending online dialogue as a mechanism for civic engagement.

The online dialogue on the California Master Plan for Education (CAMP) was held June 3-14, 2002, to increase public contributions to the process initiated by the State Legislature, via the Joint Committee to Develop a Master Plan.[1] 937 people registered to take part. To our knowledge, this was the first time state legislators had been involved in an online event of this size. The Information Renaissance[2]-designed dialogue was a part of a public input process of which Sen. Dede Alpert, chair of the Joint Committee, said "I have never seen such an overwhelming interest in shaping public policy." She felt the Joint Committee "listened and we made significant changes."[3]

The dialogue was made possible by funding from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, with additional grants from IBM Corporation and Intel California.

The dialogue dealt with a complex policy document in a politically-charged environment. Preparation for the dialogue included seeking funding, constructing a user-friendly Web site with searchable background material, outreach to let potential participants know about the dialogue, recruiting and working with panelists, and establishing an agenda. During the dialogue, participants read and posted messages to the Web site. For convenience in reading, messages could be arranged by subject, author, date or theme, or as "threads," which group each new message with its replies – making it possible to follow the discussion as a set of conversations. These messages, together with the background material and other materials, remain online as an archive of the dialogue.

Chapters I-III describe the context of the online dialogue, its goals and the evaluation methodology, and the Information Renaissance model. In Chapters IV and V, the data gathered from registration and evaluation forms is presented and used to explore five evaluation questions. Proceeding from this data, in Chapter VI we discuss dilemmas of public involvement as they apply to online activities, and several associated organizational issues. Chapter VII develops a set of conclusions and recommendations.

In the eyes of many participants, the long-term success of the dialogue on the Master Plan will be defined by the degree to which the many provisions of the Plan are implemented. This depends on development and passage of implementing legislation, but also on the availability of financing, which at present is quite problematic. Nevertheless, implementation has begun;

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[1] The archive of the dialogue is available online (http://www.network-democracy.org/camp/).
[2] Information Renaissance is a non-profit corporation based in Pittsburgh, PA and Washington, DC that uses Internet technology to promote broad, informed civic engagement.
[3] Brice, J. "Educational Roadmap Near Completion." Associated Press (31 July 2002, byline Sacramento).

information about current legislation is available online (http://www.sen.gov.ca//ftp/sen/committee/joint/master_plan/_home/021203_IMPLEMENTATION_EFFORTS.HTM). For the CAMP dialogue, success is perhaps best reflected in the statement of a participant:

> "Most contributors began by addressing their personal needs from their own backgrounds and/or schools. As time went on, they began to develop the 'big picture' idea and saw everything as a whole. That was great!"

Chapter I. Background

Education is a significant issue in California. The state's education system includes about twelve percent of the nation's public school students and is the largest single annual budget item: 71 billion dollars in 2002-2003, including $56 billion for K-12 and $15 billion for higher education.[4] The state is very diverse, and demands on resources are increasing. There are four sizeable ethnic subgroups – more than other states with significant minority populations – and Latinos alone outnumber non-Latino whites. From 1990-1991 to 2000-2001, students who are "English learners" increased from 20 to 25% (and more, in primary grades). Over 20% of children under 18 live in families with incomes below poverty level, and in 2000-2001 about 47% of students participated in school meal programs.[5] Postsecondary students are also increasingly diverse, including English language learners, adult re-entry students and part-time students. The draft Master Plan[6] concluded "few schools can now provide the conditions in which the State can fairly ask students to learn to the highest standards," citing National Assessment of Educational Progress scores in 2000: barely one-half or fewer fourth graders demonstrated basic competence in reading, math or science – in which California placed last among the 40 participating states.

While a Master Plan for higher education was developed in 1960, California has had no Master Plan for earlier grades. Major changes[7] related to curriculum, assessment, accountability and teachers, as well as in class size and funding, have been implemented, but these have often been ad hoc, addressing parts of the education system rather than the whole. EdSource Online describes the goal of this plan as to "create coherent, coordinated policy and bring clarity around who is responsible for each component of the public education system. In addition the plan would more tightly couple K-12 and higher education policies and reforms, forging a sorely needed connection…."[8] Processes for allocating resources and for governance also need to be updated, and conflicts among governing entities need to be addressed.[9]

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[4] Enrollment data: National Center for Education Statistics (http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/snf_report/table_01_1.asp); budget data: California State Budget Highlights (October 2002, at http://www.dof.ca.gov/HTML/BUD_DOCS/State_Budget_Highlights.pdf). In "How California Ranks" EdSource Online (September 2002, at http://www.edsource.org/pub_abs_ranks02.cfm) notes that California is moving closer to the national average in spending per student but remains next to highest in number of students per teacher. Teacher salaries are in third place, but are eroded by the high cost of living.

[5] Student statistics and definitions: "Who Are California's Students." EdSource Online "Ed Fact" (June 2002; data from 2000-2001 school year and 2000 U.S. Census, at http://www.edsource.org/pub_edfct_whoarestdts.cfm). Nationally, in 2000 poverty was defined as an annual income of $17,463 or less for a family of four. In 2001-2002, children in a family of four that earned no more than $32,653 per year were eligible for free and reduced-price school meal programs.

[6] The draft of the California Master Plan for Education (May 2001; unofficial HTML version) is available in the dialogue archives (http://www.network-democracy.org/camp/bb/plan/contents.shtml). The final Plan is also online (http://www.sen.ca.gov/ftp/SEN/COMMITTEE/JOINT/MASTER_PLAN/_home/020909THEMASTERPLANLINKS.HTML).

[7] EdSource Online chart showing changes, http://www.edsource.org/align_mat.html (from "Aligning California's Education Reforms," January 2001).

[8] "Up for Public Review: A Master Plan for California's K-16 Schools." EdSource Online "EdFact" (April 2002, at http://www.edsource.org/pdf/EDFctMasterPlan_Final.pdf).

[9] Joint Committee press packet (http://www.network-democracy.org/camp/bb/bg/mp-why.shtml). Also see "Aligning California's Education Reforms: Progress Made and the Work That Remains." EdSource Online

In 1999 the California Legislature established a bipartisan ad hoc Joint Committee to Develop a Master Plan for Education,[10] made up of 18 state senators and assembly members. Their task was to develop a Plan covering Kindergarten through University (during the process, discussion was extended to include pre-kindergarten). The result was a far-reaching draft Plan that attempted to deal with a broad sweep of critical educational issues (Box 2, p. 21), developed following the timeline in Table 1. However, the resulting document is only a first step: much implementing legislation will be required to put the provisions of the Plan into effect.

Fall 1999	Members of the Joint Legislative Committee held interviews with educators and legislators, town hall meetings and committee hearings.
August 2000	Release of a "Framework" document[11] to guide the preparation of the Plan; Seven Working Groups[12] covering the aspects of the Framework began to be established.
January 2001	Working Group meetings began.
September-October 2001	Interim report from Working Groups; discussion of progress and findings.
February 2002	Working Group meetings concluded.
February-March 2002	Working Group reports were released and committee hearings held.
March 2002	e-testimony Web site opened on the Joint Committee Web site (http://www.hpcnet.org/cgi-bin/global/a_bus_card.cgi?SiteID=94#alltest).
May 10, 2002	Release of a draft Master Plan.
May-July 2002	Hearings throughout California; online dialogue 3-14 June; feedback from the public encouraged.
July 2002	Preparation and release of second draft of the Master Plan, using testimony and public feedback.
August 2002	Completion and release of final report from the Joint Committee on the Master Plan for Education, with recommendations to the Legislature.
August 2002	Submission of final Master Plan report to both houses of the legislature.
September-December 2002	Master Plan implementation legislation drafted.
December 2002 -March 2003 and beyond	Legislation to begin implementation of the Master Plan will be deliberated, amended, and voted upon by both houses of legislature. (http://www.sen.ca.gov/ftp/sen/committee/joint/master_plan/_home/021203_IMPLEMENTATION_EFFORTS.HTM)

Table 1. Development of the California Master Plan for Education.

(January 2001, at http://www.edsource.org/pub_abs_align.cfm).

[10] Joint Committee Web site (http://www.sen.ca.gov/ftp/sen/committee/joint/master_plan/_home/).

[11] http://www.sen.ca.gov/masterplan/FRAMEWORK.HTM

[12] See Chapter II.

Chapter II. Goals and methodology

Goals of the dialogue and the evaluation

Over the next twenty years, the Master Plan will have an impact on all Californians. The dialogue was seen as a way to let significantly more people know about and comment on the Plan before it was finalized, share perspectives, discuss ideas and better understand the range of viewpoints involved. The aim was to recruit actively, seeking a demographically broad audience that would include the direct education stakeholder groups as well as many other Californians.

This aim of broad public participation has become a fairly well-accepted ideal. However, "participation" often means simply an opportunity for the public to hear the plans of decision makers and give input, which may or may not be incorporated in decisions. Many reasons have been given for encouraging this or deeper public involvement in decision-making. Beierle and Cayford summarize five "social goals"[13] that are frequently cited in explaining what participation is expected to add to a policy process. The dialogue on the Master Plan, because it involved legislators and invited the participation of a very broad group of stakeholders, differs somewhat from the environmental agency cases discussed by Beierle and Cayford, but their categorization is generally applicable. The five goals, seen through the lens of the CAMP dialogue, are:

- *Incorporating public values.* A goal that is fundamental to democracy:[14] although members of the public may or may not agree among themselves, they often approach issues from the perspective of different and sometimes more complex views of risks and values than experts. The question is the extent to which public values influence decisions; the challenge is to ascertain what these public values are, given diverse views and less than representative participation.
- *Improving decision quality.* The public often knows more – for example, about local circumstances and policy effects – than do officials, and may suggest alternative solutions. Increasing information flow from the public to officials is expected to lead to better decisions.
- *Educating and informing the public.* Making information available can help to "level the playing field between people and government"[15] and to make informed discussion possible. Integrating this information with participants' own experience and knowledge can lead to a shared understanding of the situation.
- *Mitigating conflict.* When stakeholders can hear each other's views in a non-adversarial atmosphere, rather than simply directing their statements to the officials involved, they can more easily understand the necessity for compromise. However, unresolved conflicts can hamper implementation.

[13] Beierle, T.C. and Cayford, J. (2002). *Democracy in practice: Public participation in environmental decisions.* Resources for the Future Press, Washington, DC. The social goals (Chapter 3) are a useful summary of widely cited, field-independent reasons for participation.
[14] Ibid., p. 14.
[15] Ibid., p. 15.

- *Building trust in institutions.* Trust in government has declined greatly.[16] One of the few ways trust can be rebuilt may be by "allowing greater public involvement and influence in decision-making."[17] Understandable explanations may also counter distrust, lack of interest and animosity.

The implementation of policy recommendations that come out of a participatory process is not included in this list by Beierle and Cayford, since this typically depends on far more than participation; the decrease in potential for funding California education since the online dialogue is a good example. Further, as in California, implementation often takes place over a number of years. We would, however, like to highlight stakeholder support for implementation, which overlaps several of the goals.

When stakeholders value a participatory process – typically meaning they feel that they have been listened to and that the process has been fair, and that they understand others' viewpoints as well as their own – they are more apt to buy into and support the resulting decisions. Further, decisions that take account of the diversity of needs and perspectives of stakeholders are more likely to be accepted as legitimate. Decisions that earn the support of participants should be easier to put into practice. For CAMP, it is also to be hoped that individuals who have contributed their views will be more likely to pay attention to discussions on the legislation that puts the Plan into effect, and to support state and local initiatives that are consistent with the goals of the Plan.

The aspirations reflected by the five social goals are incorporated in the discussion of issues and conclusions in Chapter VI, and the evaluation questions below cover several factors that are essential to their achievement. In particular, given the statistics on declining interest in government and politics,[18] achieving the broad social goals will require new ways to increase public participation in policy decisions. Finding mechanisms for involvement that are valued by participants is an essential prerequisite. By the same token, whether participants value online dialogue as an interesting new mechanism is a good test of its potential for civic engagement. In other respects, this evaluation will offer only tantalizing glimpses of the extent to which the social goals were realized. For example, Joint Committee staff report that public input led to changes in the Master Plan, but there were many types of public input. An attempt to separate out the impact of the dialogue would have required a far more detailed study than could be supported by this project, and might not have given a firm answer even with a more complex research design.

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[16] Jedediah Purdy, writing in the Atlantic Monthly ("Suspicious Minds," January/February 2003) says "Trust in the government has fallen by about half since its peak, in 1966." A discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this paper, but an online resource with much related polling data is available from PollingReport.com (http://www.pollingreport.com/institut.htm). Also see "Whose government is this?" Washington Post (13 July 1999) on the results of a Hart-Teeter poll. To the question "One goal that Americans have traditionally considered important is to have a government that is 'of, by, and for the people,' meaning that it involves the people and represents them. In your opinion, do we have a government today that is 'of, by, and for the people?'" 54% said "no."

[17] Beierle, T.C. and Cayford, J. (2002), op. cit., p. 15.

[18] Voting is one indicator: Census Bureau estimates at http://www.census.gov/population/pop-profile/2000/chap11.pdf show voting in Congressional elections at 55.4% in 1966, with a low of 41.9% in 1998. Except for two years (1974, at 44.7%, and 1982, at 48.5), there has been a slow but steady downward trend. Also see "In 20 years, seniors may outvote young 4 to 1." Washington Post. (20 October 2002; based on a survey conducted by the Post, the Kaiser Family Foundation and Harvard University.) Graphics show that in 1974, 18% of voters were younger than 30 and 17% were 65 or older, while in 2002 10% were younger than 30 and 23% were 65 or older. A projection suggests that in 2022 only 8% of voters will be younger than 30 and 33% will be 65 or older.

The focus of this evaluation will be a much more specific study of the online dialogue and its use as a mechanism for civic engagement. We will consider:

- How satisfied were participants with the process?
- Were new voices brought into policy discussions?
- How did participants see the "public space" created by the dialogue for interaction?
- What did participants get from the process, including potential impact on policy?
- What did policy makers get from the process, including the possibility of changes in public attitudes?

The CAMP dialogue raises a number of issues that must be addressed if the social goals are to be realized in today's environment. There are questions related to attempting to identify and bring highly diverse and largely uninformed stakeholders into the process of policy formation, particularly given the complexity of the issues under discussion. For example, the Master Plan discussion centered on a large policy document covering many aspects of early childhood through university education, including elements of governance, accountability, finance, personnel and student learning. General issues of public involvement and how they play out in online events, as well as issues related to dialogue organization, were also evident in the CAMP dialogue. All of these issues will be discussed in Chapter VI.

Origin of the online dialogue

In her endorsement of the online dialogue, Joint Committee Chair Dede Alpert said "We are intent on finding ways to move beyond the usual education stakeholders to engage a much broader segment of the California population in becoming familiar with the importance of an effective education system that is cohesive and focused foremost on learners." As shown in Table 1, several mechanisms were established for public input. In addition to public hearings and committee hearings with opportunities for formal testimony, the Joint Committee Web site made it possible to send in statements as "e-testimony."[19] The most extensive mechanism was the seven Working Groups, covering finance and facilities; governance; professional personnel development; school readiness; student learning; workforce preparation and business linkages; and emerging modes of delivery, certification, and planning.

Information Renaissance – a non-profit corporation based in Pittsburgh, PA and Washington, DC that uses Internet technology to promote broad, informed civic engagement – proposed to support the Joint Committee's work to promote public awareness of and participation in the development of the draft Master Plan by developing and designing an online Internet dialogue for California. The Joint Committee enthusiastically supported this idea.

Sponsorship and funding

The online dialogue on the California Master Plan for Education was endorsed but not financed by the Joint Legislative Committee. Preliminary discussions had suggested that support might be incorporated in Joint Committee fundraising, but this did not happen, nor was there a formal agreement defining the mutual responsibilities of Info Ren and the Joint Committee. However, Joint Committee staff were interested in the dialogue and extremely helpful, spending time to help ensure its success. Further, the online dialogue was incorporated to some extent in press

[19] The e-testimony site was developed earlier, by a contractor to the Joint Committee. Info Ren sought to construct a dialogue site that would more interactive, more "democratic" (in terms of potential for interchanges between policy makers and the public), and oriented toward discussion among the participants rather than testimony to the Committee. Simplicity of use was also a goal.

releases, and the dialogue was announced and hyperlinked from the Joint Committee Web site. Info Ren had begun from an assumption that there would be no dialogue without Joint Committee sponsorship, including help in obtaining financing. Since this initially appeared possible, Info Ren began to approach foundations and businesses to secure support. A fixed timeline for the Master Plan was already in place, with release of the draft Plan scheduled for May, and input to be requested during the summer. It was felt that a dialogue would have to take place at least three to four weeks after this release, but before the end of the school year.

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation was prepared to fund the basic costs of the dialogue, and small additional grants were made available by IBM Corporation and Intel California. However, despite approaches to several other businesses and foundations, no additional funding was secured. (It should perhaps be noted that there had been a great deal of private support to the Working Groups, and that by this time the economic downturn was seriously affecting California businesses and foundations.) As time passed, Info Ren had to make a decision. Info Ren staff were personally committed to increasing public involvement in the draft Plan, and the endorsements from not only Senator Alpert but also a number of California organizations, including the California PTA, the California League of Women Voters, the California Community Colleges, the California State University, and County Offices of Education, were enthusiastic.

A further important and willing resource was EdSource,[20] an impartial, independent not-for-profit California organization whose mission is "to clarify complex education issues and to promote thoughtful decisions about public school improvement." EdSource Online makes publications, analysis and links to other education materials available on the Internet. Decisions about inclusion in the dialogue Briefing Book were made by Information Renaissance, but the willingness of EdSource to discuss the topics and allow use of their materials was extremely helpful.

Given this community support, a decision was made to proceed with a limited dialogue. In the absence of a financial agreement, it would have been preferable to reach at least a semi-formal agreement on several other aspects, as discussed under *Roles…* (p. 75). The absence of such an agreement can be seen as somewhat risky on both sides. For Info Ren, it increased organizational responsibility. It also could have given the participants less assurance that their input would be taken into consideration by decision makers, though the endorsement by Senator Alpert, the participation of many legislators, the press releases and link on the Joint Committee Web site lessened this concern. This support may also have led many participants to assume that the dialogue was sponsored by the Joint Committee. This, together with the influence a dialogue can have on attitudes, suggests some risk on the side of the Committee as well. There were, however, relatively few problems in this area, and in some ways Info Ren came to feel that in such a highly political situation, this arm's-length relationship might have been an asset. (See *Roles …*, p. 75.) In practice, the relationship with the Joint Committee and Info Ren staff worked well because of the commitment, time and energy put in by both sides, and good working relationships were established.

Among the elements left unfunded, broader outreach – including more use of media (particularly public television)[21] and additional approaches to groups not typically involved in the political process – is probably the most important. There had also been discussion of combining face-to-face and online discussions; this and the availability of Spanish translations might also have

[20] http://www.edsource.org/index.cfm

[21] A studio-based discussion program with Joint Committee members, subject experts and others, rebroadcast by cable and satellite systems, had been envisioned.

increased public participation. Online surveys during the dialogue and easy-to-read summaries of background information also could not be included, and evaluation and follow-up information to participants had to be limited. Another interesting possibility that was discussed was to involve school classes, but this was impossible in any case, since the dialogue did not take place until the end of the school year.

The scheduling of the event was an important constraint not only for students, but also for parents and educators. While it seemed evident that such an event had to take place before the school year ended, no discussion could be held before the draft Master Plan had been available long enough for people to become familiar with it. The need to search for funding and the need for lead time to prepare for the dialogue were also important factors. To accommodate the schedule of the Joint Committee, Info Ren set the dates for the dialogue at the very end of the school year (June 3-14), knowing this might limit participation. The section on *New Voices* (p. 46) includes participant comments on this timing.

Context

State organizational structure for education. Public education in California has a complex organizational structure. For K-12 instruction, major political players include the Governor, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Legislature and the teachers' unions. Postsecondary

- Present Situation. The draft Master Plan stated that California's state-level K-12 governance "has no clear lines of accountability due to multiple entities having overlapping responsibilities. Key players include: (1) the Governor, who appoints all members of the State Board of Education, promulgates an annual budget that sets forth priorities and nearly always is the final arbiter of differences of opinion about education policy due to his line-item veto authority; (2) the State Board of Education, which is by law the policy setting body for public schools but which has very little staff of its own; (3) the Superintendent of Public Instruction, who is an elected constitutional officer and manages the Department of Education (CDE) staff, but has little policy-setting authority; and (4) the Secretary for Education, with a small complement of staff whose duties are largely duplicative of those in the Department of Education." Recommendations 31* and 32 addressed this situation.
- The Governor. In brief, recommendation 31 made the Governor accountable for P-12 education, stating that "Authority over the operations of California's K-12 public education system at large, and ultimate responsibility for the delivery of education to California's K-12 public education students in particular, should both reside within the Office of the Governor" and detailing the functions involved. A cabinet-level Chief Education Officer appointed by the Governor would be the Director of the Department of Education. The Governor would continue to appoint the State Board of Education, whose members would represent geographical regions; their functions would be limited to state governance and policy matters. The separate executive director and staff of the State Board within the Department of Education would be eliminated.
- The Superintendent of Public Instruction. Recommendation 32 covered the position of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. It suggested maintaining the elected position, but assigning new functions to the position. The Superintendent would act as an Inspector General for public education, to hold the Governor and the system accountable for student achievement, including monitoring governance/policy instruments intended to ensure adequate and equitable provision of education, and implementation of state and federal programs.

* Numbered recommendations refer to the draft Master Plan discussed in the online dialogue.

Box 1. K-12 Governance.

education governance includes the state university system, the state college system and the community college system; the draft Master Plan comment that state-level K-12 governance "has no clear lines of accountability due to multiple entities having overlapping responsibilities" can also be applied here. Since the Master Plan was written by a Joint Committee of the Legislature, it was this group that Information Renaissance approached in proposing the online dialogue on the Plan.

Box 1 outlines K-12 governance structures and related Master Plan recommendations, and serves as an example of the sort of background material presented in the dialogue.[22] In the dialogue, each reference to a recommendation was hot linked to the draft Master Plan. (http://www.network-democracy.org/camp/pa/gov/gov.shtml shows panelists and questions for the discussion on governance; the material in Box 1 appears under *Background for the Discussion: Question 1*.)

The Master Plan. The Master Plan was intended as a guide to a major change effort, not as a set of specific instructions. The Framework document (footnote 11) produced by the Joint Committee to guide preparation suggested tackling extremely difficult issues. The Working Groups' detailed considerations and attempts to incorporate "best practices" and research results led to far-reaching recommendations, many of which were bound to be contentious, as summed up by Peter Schrag in a Sacramento Bee editorial on May 29, 2002 (Box 2).[23]

Working Groups and staff. Each of the seven Working Groups convened by the Joint Committee was made up of 25 to 65 members. They included research professionals, invited experts, graduate student interns, education professionals, and representatives of business, local government, and civic organizations. They held monthly meetings, examined research and best practices, compiled detailed reports and formulated more than 100 policy recommendations for the Joint Committee's consideration. A staff member was attached to each group, and the work of some groups and staff members were funded by foundation grants. The draft Master Plan integrated the results of the Working Groups with feedback from Joint Committee members and public hearings.[24]

The Working Group model brought about 300 citizens into the policymaking process. Committee members and staff worked hard for over a year, producing volumes of information that were summarized for each group in detailed reports containing specific recommendations.[25] Many group members who were not already experts acquired a great deal of expertise, and many were or became advocates for particular points of view. Also, there was some overlap: some topics were dealt with by more than one group, and different groups did not always come to the same conclusion. Thus, although this was not a traditional process, the Joint Committee and its staff remained in the traditional position of receiving input from a variety of interest groups, which they used to prepare the draft Plan.

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[22] Material in Box 1 was drawn from the draft Master Plan section on *Accountability for Learner Outcomes and Institutional Performance* (http://www.network-democracy.org/camp/bb/plan/accountability.shtml); the description of Master Plan materials regarding the Governor and Superintendent of Public Instruction summarizes recommendations 31 and 32.

[23] Excerpted from the editorial "Thinking big thoughts about California education" (full text at http://www.sacbee.com/content/opinion/story/2971254p-3838392c.html).

[24] Information in this paragraph is based on "California leads the trend in crafting a master plan for education" (Joint Committee Press Packet) and "Up for Public Review: A Master Plan for California's K–16 Schools." EdSource Online "EdFact." (April 2002, op. cit.)

[25] Reports and staff analyses for each group are available as Briefing Book links in the dialogue archive (http://www.network-democracy.org/camp/bb/bb.shtml).

The Working Groups were relevant to the online dialogue in several ways. The topics assigned to the groups were used as a framework for the agenda, group members served as panelists, group reports were featured on the Web site, and staff to the Working Groups served as resources both in the development of questions for the dialogue and in the dialogue itself. On the other hand, because of the timing of publication, the relationship between Working Group reports and the draft Plan may have been confusing to participants. This is discussed further in the section on the *Nature and complexity of issues* (p. 69).

Nobody expected much when the Legislature (in 1999) created a joint committee to develop a master plan for education. The phrase itself is a snoozer, and chances are still high that not much will come of it.

But in the committee's draft report, which will be subject to widespread public comment beginning Monday, there's a set of ideas that may be as far-reaching and significant as anything that's been proposed in California in a long time.

Inevitably, there'll be controversy. The breadth of the list alone assures it. Among the major proposals:

- Changes in the K-12 governance system putting the Department of Education in the governor's Cabinet, thereby streamlining the system, and making the elected superintendent an inspector general to measure educational performance.
- Latitude for local districts to raise property taxes for schools with a 55 percent vote -- in effect a major change in Proposition 13.
- Accountability measures not only for schools and students, but also annual reports measuring how well the Legislature and governor provide the resources to enable schools and kids to meet the standards the state sets.
- A shift to an adequacy model of school funding based on the calculations of a commission. It would estimate how much it would cost to provide the teachers, books and facilities necessary to bring the majority of students up to state learning standards. The state would guarantee "suitable learning environments" in every school.
- Mandatory full-day kindergarten in all districts with low academic performance scores, and wide access to preschool programs aligned with kindergarten. Also, increased academic support and intervention for students in grades three, eight, 11, 12 and the first year of college, transition periods when there's the greatest risk of failure.
- More staff help and higher pay for principals in schools serving high numbers of low-income and other at-risk students.
- State level negotiation and funding of school employee benefits.
- A universal internship program to replace the hiring of all teachers on waivers or emergency credentials with pre-interns who'd get strong state support in obtaining their credentials.
- Development of "classroom-based instruments" to diagnose individual students' learning problems and to quickly provide appropriate intervention. "Measurement matters," the report declares.
- Imposition of accountability standards in higher education, with required annual reports on how well colleges and universities are meeting them.
- Greater emphasis on joint planning and use of higher education facilities; use of subjective as well as objective criteria in admissions to the University of California and the California State University; and stabilizing student fees to eliminate the boom-and-bust cycles in which fees drop in good times and then rise sharply in bad.

It's a long list -- more a wish list of the committee's task forces, staff and legislative leaders than a consensus of the full committee, which has yet to act on it. Committee staff director Stephan Blake says "it reflects pretty well" the feedback from members, but he acknowledges that in its scope, it's an attempt to shoot the moon.

There's a good chance, therefore, that a lot of these proposals won't make it into the final report, let alone into law, even in the multiyear time span that this plan is supposed to cover. A state guarantee of things such as adequate facilities and teachers almost necessarily implies greater state control -- and a lot more money.

Nor is the Legislature likely to ask voters to tinker with Proposition 13, even for schools. It's also likely to be reluctant to give the governor greater authority over schools, no matter how much sense it makes, or to mess overtly with university admission criteria. (Political pressure under the table, which happens frequently, is something else.) Conservatives will bristle at the report's call for "authentic assessment" -- supplementing if not replacing standardized tests with student portfolios, projects and other "fuzzy" measures.

And yet most of the report's ideas are hardly radical. Most states have far more rational and manageable state-level governance systems. In most, local districts can ask voters for tax overrides.

A number, moreover, are moving toward adequacy-based funding systems in which, to quote the draft, "essential components (personnel, materials, equipment and facilities) necessary for an exemplary education are identified and provided." It's precisely what the American Civil Liberties Union, suing the state on behalf of a group of poor California students stuck in rotten schools, is now demanding….

Box 2. A summary of draft Master Plan proposals, from the Sacramento Bee.

Lobbying efforts. In addition to the contentious issues listed in Box 2, one item elicited particular interest: draft Master Plan recommendation 38 advocated consolidating administrative oversight for adult education within the community college system. Master Plan staff saw the goal of this recommendation as a reduction in redundant administrative structures, freeing up resources for other uses. Many staff in adult education programs had another view. They felt that the draft Master Plan showed a lack of understanding of adult education programs and their students, and thought that the community college system could not adequately provide oversight. This group, which had had experience in political activity due to earlier campaigns, organized themselves and their students to object strongly to recommendation 38. They sent in a great many e-testimony forms, and enthusiastically incorporated the online dialogue into their campaign.

Methodology

The dialogue produced a variety of information. Data gathered prior to the dialogue, during registration, covers participants' attitudes and experiences, as well as basic demographic information; ZIP codes allowed the construction of a map showing their geographical distribution (Figure 1, p. 30). Web site statistics (logs of activity on the site, both before and during the dialogue) show number, destination and length of visits to the site, and so forth. Archives contain messages posted to the dialogue but also are a source of information on the number of messages posted, the number of posters and message threads. Responses to open-ended questions on the registration and evaluation forms, as well as interviews and printed materials, contain some information that can be aggregated and quotations that will be used as illustrations.

The post-dialogue evaluation questionnaire is particularly interesting, since participants were requested to report on their experiences in the dialogue, how they felt about it, and how it had changed their attitudes. The evaluation, which consisted of 32 questions (Appendix A, p. 93) – seven of which included an invitation to type in open-ended comments – was voluntary. When they registered, participants were asked if they would be willing to complete the evaluation. On the last day of the dialogue, the evaluation form was available on the Web site, and reminders were sent out in the following weeks. During registration, 770 people said they would be willing to take part in the evaluation; a total of 206 forms (27%) were submitted. The timing of the dialogue may have been a factor in the evaluation response rate.

While the registration form (Appendix A, p. 88) asked participants to give their names and e-mail addresses, the evaluation was anonymous. Therefore the data on the two forms cannot be combined. However, some of the same demographic questions were included on both forms; as shown in Chapter IV, although evaluation responders were on average somewhat older, the two groups were roughly similar in proportion of women and men, education, ethnicity, city-suburb vs. rural-small town location, and responses to "In what capacity are you participating in the dialogue?"

Chapter IV describes the participants; in Chapter V, this information is combined with participants' comments and other sources and used to examine the online dialogue as a mechanism for civic engagement, addressing the five evaluation questions listed beginning on page 17:

- *Satisfaction:* people were asked to rate their experience with the dialogue, and state whether they thought there should be more dialogues of this sort in the future; they could explain either or both responses in text boxes. They were also asked to rate specific elements of the dialogue and the extent to which stated factors had been a motivation to post messages.

- *Introduction of new voices into the policy process:* to what extent did the dialogue attract participants who had not previously been involved? Demographic characteristics and responses to a number of questions (e.g. prior knowledge of the Master Plan, prior political activity and Internet use) will be used in this discussion.
- *Views of the "public space" for interaction:* questions used in this discussion relate to participants' perception of the dialogue, including the quality of communication, the atmosphere of the dialogue, its civility, how informed participants were and so forth.
- *What participants got out of the dialogue:* this will be considered on the basis of open ended responses about engagement and expectations of impact, plus structured questions about areas in which knowledge was gained.
- *What the Joint Committee got out of the dialogue:* participants' responses provide some indication with respect to good will and changes in public attitudes, including interest in government and politics and opinions on education policy. Interviews with the Joint Committee staff before and after the dialogue and a page on the dialogue and its impact are the main information sources regarding the perception of the dialogue on the part of state personnel.

Consideration of these topics raises several issues that will be discussed in Chapter VI, and conclusions and recommendations will be drawn for dialogues of this type in Chapter VII.

Chapter III. Information Renaissance model for online dialogue

Information Renaissance online dialogues are open to the public. Participants are requested to register, but anyone can read the discussions and the daily summaries, and review background resources. Participants join in at their convenience (unlike a chat room, for which all must be online at the same time); they can take time to reflect on background materials and others' postings, and reply at any time of the day or night. The dialogue Web site is maintained as an archive long after the online discussion has concluded, providing an authoritative information and reference source. The CAMP dialogue archive is available at http://www.network-democracy.org/camp/.

These dialogues can be seen as what the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has called "consultation,"[26] with the definition "a two-way relation in which citizens provide feedback to government. It is based on the prior definition by government of the issue on which citizens' views are being sought and requires the provision of information." However, our policy-related dialogues go further, in that the public and its government do not just give each other information, but engage in discussion on the issues. This is, we believe, a step toward OECD's category of "active participation" – a "relation based on partnership with government."

Careful preparation is the key to a successful online dialogue. This chapter outlines components (numbered below and in Chart 1) that have typically been used in Info Ren events, with special reference to the CAMP dialogue. CAMP participants' rankings of several of these components are shown in Figure 17 (p. 44). The scenario in Box 3, written by Tom Beierle as part of the evaluation of a previous dialogue,[27] gives a lively picture of one of these online dialogues by considering what it would be like to do something comparable face-to-face.

Resources and tools (1). For each dialogue, a searchable Web site is developed, with a recognizable character and user-friendly, 508-accessible[28] features. The site includes a "Briefing Book"[29] with extensive, searchable, thought-provoking online background material and a "How To" section covering both online dialogue and use of the site.[30] Participants are urged to become familiar with this material before the dialogue begins. The CAMP dialogue Briefing Book includes background information on California education; links to education glossaries; the full, searchable text of the draft Master Plan; Working Group reports with recommendations; public testimony; staff analyses; links to online references related to "cross cutting issues" like equity, accountability, assessment, school readiness, professional personnel, and technology; and links to state and organization Web sites related to education. (The draft Master Plan and Working Group reports were also available on the Joint Committee's Web site, but in PDF files;

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[26] "Engaging Citizens in Policy-making: Information, Consultation and Public Participation," OECD Public Policy Management Brief PUMA Policy Brief No. 10 (July, 2001, at http://www.oecd.org/pdf/M00007000/M00007815.pdf).
[27] Beierle, T.C. (2002). "Democracy On-Line: An Evaluation of the National Dialogue on Public Involvement in EPA Decisions." Resources for the Future, Washington DC, pp. 49-50 (http://www.rff.org/reports/PDF_files/democracyonline.pdf).
[28] Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act (http://www.section508.gov).
[29] http://www.network-democracy.org/camp/bb/bb.shtml
[30] http://www.network-democracy.org/camp/ab/about.shtml

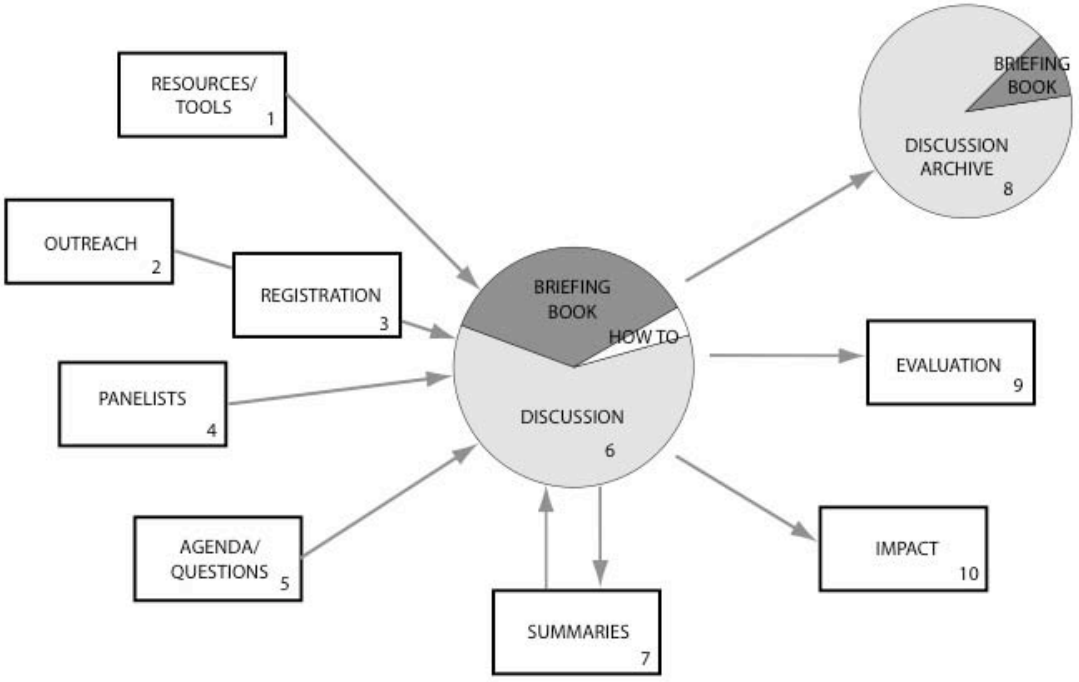


Chart 1: Information Renaissance Model for Online Dialogue

Info Ren converted these to more easily searchable HTML files. This also made it possible, for example, to link each discussion question to the relevant part of the Plan.)

Outreach (2). Information Renaissance believes that a successful dialogue requires the identification and involvement of key stakeholder groups. The dialogue is announced through electronic mailing lists, Web sites of organizations, press releases and newsletters, and media coverage is sought. Key stakeholder groups help in this effort. Public libraries and other community organizations, particularly those that provide public access to the Internet, are encouraged to post information. Demographic information gathered at registration helps to indicate where extra recruiting efforts are needed, but doing more than notification to encourage participation from traditionally underserved communities requires a budget that allows extensive and focused outreach.

For the CAMP dialogue, recruitment encouraged citizens to participate in the online discussions. It also raised public awareness of the draft Master Plan, and is likely to have increased other forms of input as well. (Outreach and related issues will be discussed further in Chapters V and VI.)

Registration (3). Registration typically opens approximately one month before a dialogue begins. For the CAMP dialogue it began on May 1. Participants register and are asked if they would like to take an active part in the discussions (post messages) or be an observer, reading messages and background information. Basic identifying information, including name and e-mail address, is requested, as is an optional 50-word biography. Where possible, more extensive demographic information is collected to aid in evaluation. Although this is not advertised, non-registered participants may also post messages at the discretion of the moderator.

Panelists (4). Panels of policy makers and subject experts are recruited to be a part of the online dialogue. They are not asked to give "speeches" but to interact with other participants, answering questions and exchanging ideas. In some dialogues a Roundtable discussion among experts may be used to explore complex issues and help indicate areas of possible consensus. Each panelist is asked to provide a brief biography and a photograph for the Web site. Staff work with panelists (and in this case Joint Committee staff) beforehand to prepare for the process; during the dialogue, one or more panelists or staff may be asked to respond to a particular question or discussion.

During the CAMP dialogue, a panel drawn primarily from the Joint Legislative Committee and the Working Groups was part of each day's discussion. For seven of these 10 days, there were two to four panelists, with five or more on the remaining days. Except for one day, at least one state legislator was a part of each panel; one day there were three. Joint Committee staff to the Working Groups were also asked to read and join in the discussion, and in particular to answer participants' questions as needed. (Preferably other panelists, including representatives of the other political players listed for education in the section on *State organizational structure* (p. 19), would have been included.)

Agenda and questions (5). An agenda is established, structured around a series of issues, with specific questions used to focus the discussion. The agenda – and preferably the questions as well – are publicized as part of outreach to potential participants. For the CAMP dialogue, since the draft Master Plan was not yet available, the topic areas previously assigned to the Working Groups were used as a framework; specific questions were made available at the time of the discussion. Info Ren took responsibility for the final choice and wording of questions, but worked closely with Joint Committee staff. These and other issues related to structuring a discussion on a complex topic for lay participants are discussed in the section on the *Nature and complexity of issues* (p. 69).

Discussion (6). An online dialogue takes place over two or more weeks. The dialogue is asynchronous, so participants can take part at their convenience, with ample time to reflect on background materials and the postings of other participants. Online surveys can be used to help Committee staff and dialogue participants keep track of viewpoints as they evolve during the discussion.

Non-adversarial discussion is an Info Ren goal. In our experience a properly structured event is typically very civil (see *Civility,* p. 78); moderators and other staff are available to deal with the rare cases in which the discussion becomes too heated. The CAMP dialogue was quite lightly moderated. Moderators or other staff gave an introductory statement each day, presented discussion questions, gave tips (for example, on the use of message threads, or occasional reminders that brief statements are more apt to be read), and took questions. In a more heavily moderated discussion, facilitators and moderators can also help to keep the conversation focused while encouraging broad participation.

To take part in the dialogue, participants go to the discussion Web pages,[31] which list and link to the messages posted to the discussion and show names of posters. Names of panelists and staff and, for the CAMP dialogue, staff to Working Groups, are shown in red. If the author has submitted a biography at registration (an optional, 50 word maximum statement), it is available as a link from each of their messages. Participants may reply to a message or send a new one, and may rearrange and read messages by date, topic area, author, subject line or "thread." A

[31] Messages are arranged by date in the Discussion Archive (http://www.network-democracy.org/camp/archive/date-X1.html); click to view by subject, author or theme.

Start by imagining that more than a thousand people find a time to get together, on only about a month's notice. They all pay their own airfare, lodging, and meals…. Those planning to participate come from all over the country (and indeed the world).... Some people can't come because they don't know about it, can't afford it, or are uncomfortable participating in the proposed forum.… Before people arrive, they are sent a suitcase of materials to read.

Participants converge for what we might imagine as a one-day meeting (to approximate the total time most people spent on the Dialogue). The meeting room is large, with a conference table in the middle, ringed in concentric circles by folding chairs, then a bank of bleachers, and beyond that an expanse of space for milling around. The doors are open and people can come and go. First thing in the morning, participants sit wherever they please as they go through a round of introductions. Some remain silent and listen to the others. While the introductions are still going on, project organizers and the initial set of panelists and hosts take a seat at the central table and kick off the agenda.

As the discussion begins, people start to rearrange themselves. Those who talk the most join the hosts and panelists at the central table. Those with less to say gravitate toward the first ring of chairs. Those interested only in listening take seats in the bleachers. A large number of others – too numerous and mobile to be counted – wander in and out, catching bits and pieces of the conversations. As the day proceeds, some people continue to change places, and panelists and hosts take or relinquish seats at the central table as the agenda moves from one topic to another. Those sitting at the inner table talk the most, although not necessarily to each other. After the hosts and panelists initiate a discussion, others around the table chime in, but they also join in conversation with those behind them. Sometimes the hosts and panelists are simply ignored.

As the group moves through the agenda, discussion shifts to new topics, but many of the previous conversations continue apace. Multiple conversations on multiple topics start to emerge, with groups of speakers converging, splitting up, and converging elsewhere. Many of those listening focus their attention selectively. Some people just sit and talk to themselves, hoping someone will listen and respond. Many people find the rising din confusing and a bit overwhelming. To make matters more chaotic, most of the participants are also trying to satisfy their other daily responsibilities – taking work-related phone calls, leaving to attend outside meetings, and fulfilling other tasks. Some people get fed up and leave. Others take long breaks. Periodically, a recorder hands out a summary of the discussion thus far.

Despite the chaos, people remain respectful and polite. They answer questions when asked. They provide information when they think it will be helpful. For the most part, different viewpoints get a fair hearing (although there are rumblings of discontent). … staff are everywhere, soaking it all in. A few of them run from conversation to conversation, answering questions, taking copious notes, and trying to make sense of it all. Microphones record all conversations.

And then it's over; tapes are transcribed, and a printed version is made widely available. As everyone goes home, the real work for [agency] personnel begins. Their principal challenge is to make sense of the transcripts and staff notes. Participants want to know that their time was not wasted and their participation will matter.

Box 3. Tom Beierle's dialogue scenario.

thread is a message plus any replies – thus a sort of conversation. During the CAMP dialogue, Info Ren staff frequently encouraged use of this feature.

Summaries (7). A summary of the discussion is produced each day, and sent to participants by e-mail. This helps newcomers join in and provides an overview for participants who don't have time to read all of the messages every day. As illustrated by their comments (see e.g. p. 44) and the rating in Figure 17 (p. 44), many participants highly appreciated the summaries.

Archive (8). The Web site is maintained as a searchable online archive after the conclusion of the interactive activity. This includes the entire site – the Briefing Book, messages contributed to the dialogue, discussion summaries and so forth, including this evaluation.

Evaluation (9). Until this procedure becomes routine, our preference is to evaluate each dialogue in terms of how well it meets the needs and expectations of public participants and the sponsoring organization.

Impact (10). Although difficult to quantify, the outcome of a dialogue can be seen in terms of various types of impact. One type asks if public involvement has made a difference, in terms of public input, legislation or other decision-making. Another relates to participants in the dialogue: whether the activity has changed their outlook, for example their interest in government or their understanding of other stakeholders.

Chapter IV. Participants in the dialogue

This chapter offers a statistical picture of participants who completed a registration or evaluation form: areas where they live, demographic characteristics, what they say about how active they are in government and politics, whether they knew about the Master Plan before they received information about the dialogue, how frequently they use the Internet and for what, how they heard about the dialogue, and to what extent they read or posted messages during the dialogue. (Questions in the registration form and evaluation questionnaire are shown in Appendix A, p. 88.) Non-responses are not included in the frequencies and percentages. Responses to open-ended questions, comparisons and issues will be discussed in the following chapters.

Registration and evaluation data

Registration for the CAMP dialogue opened on May 1, 2002. By the time the dialogue began, 631 people had registered. By the end of the dialogue, this number had increased to 935. Those who registered were required to give some personal information: name, e-mail address, city, county, zip code and telephone number (in case of e-mail problems). A short biography was optional. They were also asked if they wanted to take an active part in the discussion or if they would prefer to be an observer, reading but not posting messages (this choice did not prevent later posting). 67% said they wanted to be active participants in the dialogue; 33% said they preferred to be observers. During the dialogue 251 people posted messages. Postings were also accepted from 44 people who had not filled out the registration form. Thus only a third of those who had expected to be active participants actually became ones.

As described under *Methodology* (p. 22), those who registered were asked if they were willing to complete an evaluation form following the dialogue. Where equivalent questions were asked during registration and evaluation, both sets of responses are shown.

Participants' characteristics

Home location

The distribution of registered participants by zip code is shown in Figure 1. They were located in 47 of California's 58 counties. The counties that were not represented (Colusa, Glenn, Imperial, Inyo, Lake, Lassen, Modoc, Mono, Plumas, Sierra and Trinity) were all rural.

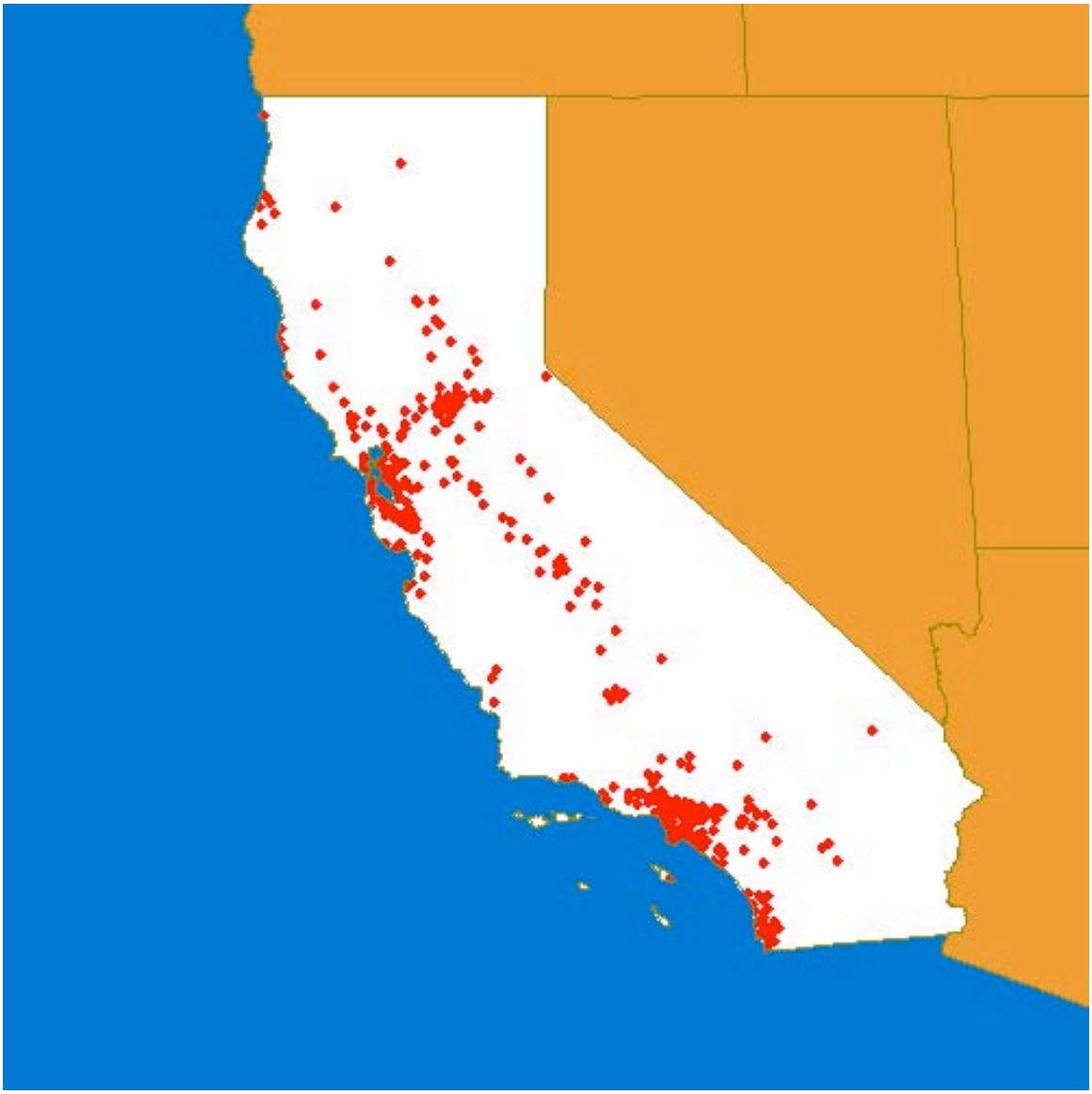
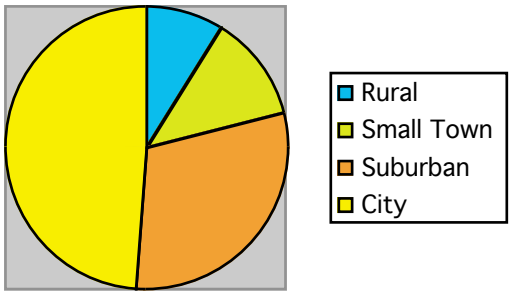
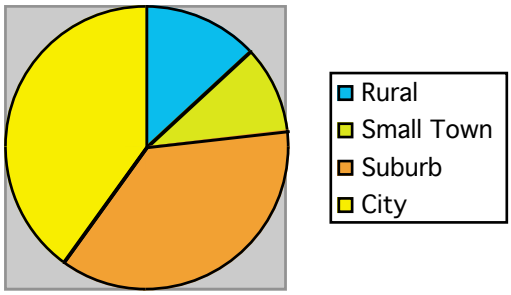


Figure 1. Map of participants by ZIP code: 935 people in 506 ZIP codes.





Registration	Frequency	Percent
Rural area	77	9 %
Small town	111	12 %
Suburb	269	30 %
City	446	49 %
Total	903	100 %

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Rural area	26	13 %
Small town	20	10 %
Suburb	73	37 %
City	79	40 %
Total	198	100 %

How would you describe your home location?

Figure 2. Home location of participants.

Respondents were asked to describe the area in which they live as a rural area, city, suburb or small town. Results from both sets of data are shown in Figure 2. When these four categories are aggregated as "rural and town" and "city and suburb," the response rates from the registration and evaluation forms are roughly similar (21% vs. 79% and 23% vs. 77%, respectively).

Capacity in which individuals participated

In both questionnaires, respondents were asked in what capacity they were participating in the dialogue. Figure 3 shows the distribution of those who registered and of those who completed the evaluation. In both cases a strong majority (66% and 72%) were employed in the education sector, though of course many would be parents as well. Nevertheless, 37% of those who registered said they had not heard of the California Master Plan for Education before they heard about the online dialogue. This will be discussed below in *New Voices* (p. 46).

Demographics

Of those who registered, 45% were under 50 years of age, and 55% were over 50 (Figure 4). On average, those who completed the evaluation were older: 70% were over 50. For the state as a whole at the time of the 2000 Census, 75% of the population was under 50.[32] The timing of the dialogue, outlined in Table 1 (p. 14), may have influenced the age distribution of participants, since it was at a particularly busy time of year for students and parents as well as educators.

[32] Figures calculated from 5-year age Census ranges for California: see "Census Bureau Quick Table QT-P1. Age Groups and Sex: 2000" (Data Set: Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF 1) 100-Percent Data; Geographic Area: California, http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTable?_ts=70468952031).

Registration	Frequency	Percent
Parent, guardian or other family	126	14 %
Student	23	3 %
Educator	326	36 %
Education administrator	176	19 %
Rep. of education organization	100	11 %
Elected or appointed official	32	3 %
Business person	17	2 %
Interested Californian	63	7 %
Other	53	6 %
Total	916	100 %

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Parent, guardian or other family	15	8 %
Student	3	2 %
Educator	76	39 %
Education administrator	52	26 %
Rep. of education organization	13	7 %
Elected or appointed official	7	4 %
Business person	2	1 %
Interested Californian	19	10 %
Other	10	5 %
Total	197	100 %

In what capacity are you participating/have you participated in the dialogue?

Figure 3. Capacity in which individuals participated.

Registration	Frequency	Percent
17 or younger	3	<1 %
18 – 29	41	5 %
30 – 49	357	40 %
50 – 64	440	50 %
65 or older	45	5 %
Total	886	100 %

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
17 or younger	0	0 %
18 – 29	1	<1 %
30 – 39	12	6 %
40 – 49	48	24 %
50 – 64	126	63 %
65 or older	13	7 %
Total	200	100 %

Figure 4. Age.

Registration	Frequency	Percent
Female	539	62 %
Male	324	38 %
Total	863	100 %

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Female	120	64 %
Male	67	36 %
Total	187	100 %

Figure 5. Sex.

In both cases (Figure 5), women are in the majority (62% at registration, 64% at evaluation); at the time of the Census, California was 50% female and 50% male.[33]

The percentage who have attended or are attending graduate school is high (Figure 6), and similar in the two sets of data – 69% of registrants and 74% of evaluation participants said they

[33] California percentages here and in the remainder of this section are from the US Census, 2000 (http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2001/tables/dp_ca_2000.PDF – Table DP-1. Profile of Demographic Characteristics for California: 2000; sex & ethnicity; and http://factfinder.census.gov/bf/_lang=en_vt_name=DEC_2000_SF3_U_DP2_geo_id=04000US06.html – DP-2. Profile of Selected Social Characteristics: 2000; educational attainment).

Registration	Frequency	Percent
Some high school/in high school	3	< 1 %
High school graduate	8	< 1 %
Some college/in college now	61	7 %
College graduate	214	23 %
Graduate school/in grad school	626	69 %
Total	912	100 %

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Some high school/in high school	0	0 %
High school graduate	1	< 1 %
Some college/in college now	13	6 %
College degree	39	19 %
Graduate school/in grad school	148	74 %
Total	201	100 %

Figure 6. Education.

have completed or are now in graduate school. In California as a whole, 27% of the population has obtained a bachelor's degree, while 9.5% have a graduate or professional degree.

Responses on ethnicity (Figure 7) were also roughly similar in the registration and evaluation forms. Percentages at registration, followed by evaluation figures in parentheses: Caucasian non-Latino 77% (77%), Latino or Hispanic 8% (9%), Asian or Pacific Islander 5% (1%), African American 4% (4%), Native American 2% (2%). For California, total population percentages in the 2000 Census were: Caucasian non-Latino, 47%; Latino or Hispanic, 32%; Asian or Pacific Islander, 11%; African American, 6%; Native American 1% (two or more races 5%).

Political activity and attitudes

Perceived political activity

Those who registered were asked how active they saw themselves as being in government and politics. In the evaluation questionnaire, this question was worded in the past tense, and a follow-up question asked whether the dialogue had had an effect on the degree of interest. The percentage who said at registration that they were very or fairly active (42%) was somewhat lower than at evaluation (54%), but in both cases many said they had not been too involved in the past (58% at registration and 46% at evaluation). At evaluation, 38% reported that the dialogue had increased their interest either in government and politics in general, or specifically in relation to education. These results (Figure 8) and a cross tabulation (Figure 21) between degree of activity and change in interest are discussed in *New Voices* (p. 46).

Registration	Frequency	Percent
African American	31	4 %
Asian or Pacific Islander	40	5 %
Caucasian (non-Latino)	667	77 %
Latino or Hispanic	68	8 %
Native American	16	2 %
Other	50	6 %
Total	872	100 %

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
African American	7	4 %
Asian or Pacific Islander	2	1 %
Caucasian (non-Latino)	142	77 %
Latino or Hispanic	16	9 %
Native American	4	2 %
Other	13	7 %
Total	184	100 %

Figure 7. Ethnicity.

Registration	Frequency	Percent
Not too active	230	28 %
Somewhat active	248	30 %
Fairly active	196	24 %
Very active	149	18 %
Total	823	100 %

How active would you say you are in government and politics?

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Not too active	37	19 %
Somewhat active	53	27 %
Fairly active	58	29 %
Very active	49	25 %
Total	197	100 %

How active would you say you have been in government and politics in the past?

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Decreased	1	< 1 %
Decreased, but only for education	0	0 %
Remains about the same	120	61 %
Increased, but only for education	32	16 %
Increased	44	22 %
Total	197	100 %

Has the Dialogue changed your interest in government and politics?

Figure 8. Change in political activity and interest.

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Very positive	8	4 %
Moderately positive	55	29 %
Neither positive nor negative	29	15 %
No opinion	2	1 %
Moderately negative	72	38 %
Very negative	24	13 %
Total	190	100 %

Prior to the dialogue, what was your opinion about education policy at state level?

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
More positive	69	35 %
No change	110	56 %
More negative	18	9 %
Total	197	100 %

How would you describe your current opinion about education policy at state level?

Figure 9. Perceived opinion on education policy.

Perceived opinion of education policy

The evaluation asked respondents to state what their opinion of state-level education policy had been prior to the dialogue, and then to give their opinion at the time of the evaluation. As shown in Figure 9, 33% reported a moderately or very positive attitude before the dialogue, and 51% a moderately or very negative attitude. Just over one-third (35%) said their attitude was more positive after the dialogue, while 9% said they had become more negative.

Master Plan activity

During registration, participants were asked whether they knew of the Master Plan prior to hearing about the dialogue (Figure 10). More than one-third (37%) appear to have learned

Registration	Frequency	Percent
No	340	37 %
Yes	573	63 %
Total	913	100 %

Before you heard about the online dialogue, did you know about the work on a new Master Plan for Education?

Registration	Frequency[34]	Percent
No	313	55 %
Yes	260	45 %
Total	573	100%

If yes, did you know you could submit comments?

Registration	Frequency	Percent
No	648	72 %
Not yet, but I plan to	122	14 %
Yes	134	15 %
Total	904	100 %

Have you already submitted comments on the Plan to either the Working Groups or the Joint Legislative Committee that is developing the Plan?

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
No	59	31 %
Not yet, but I plan to	44	23 %
Yes, e-testimony	30	16 %
Yes, in a public hearing	40	21 %
Yes, message to legislator	75	39 %
Total	192	100 %

Have you commented on the draft Master Plan for Education in other ways? (Please select one or more.)

Figure 10. Master Plan activity.

[34] Some who said they did not know about work on the Master Plan answered "yes" to this question; these answers are not included in the cited frequencies.

about the Plan through the dialogue outreach. (In Figure 20, these numbers are disaggregated to allow comparison of responses of education personnel and others.) While about 15% had submitted comments (and 14% said they planned to do so), 55% of those who did know about the Plan had not known they could submit comments. At the time of the evaluation, 31% said they had not yet commented in ways other than the dialogue; 49% had commented in one or more ways (of these 20% were messages to legislators, without other activity), and 23% said they planned to do so. In addition to messages to legislators, other types of input included e-testimony (see footnote 19), public hearings, and combinations of these mechanisms. The percentage of people who had heard about the Plan – and particularly the percentage who had commented on it – may have been increased by the adult education lobbying campaign described on page 22: as noted, a large number of e-testimony responses were about this issue, and those involved were also quite active in public meetings.

Internet use

Participants were fairly evenly divided (Figure 11) between those using the Internet relatively little (one to seven hours a week: 37% for registrants and 32% at evaluation), those using it eight to fourteen hours per week (28% for registrants; 37% at evaluation), and those online for 15 or more hours per week (32% for registrants; 28% at evaluation).[35] A majority of those who registered had used this means previously to access government services or to contact an elected official or government office, and a remarkable 97% had used it to find government information. Aggregating all evaluation respondents who report using the Internet 8 or more hours a day, rates at registration and evaluation are roughly similar (60% versus 65%). The location of the computer most frequently used to take part in the dialogue (requested only at evaluation) was about evenly divided between work (48%) and home (46%).

The data suggest that with respect to Internet use, participants on average were rather unlike those described in a recent Pew study,[36] in which 70% of users of government sites were under 50 (26% were 50 or older), and 52% had less than a college education. On the other hand, in the Pew survey too, information-seeking was the most popular use of government sites.

How people heard about the dialogue

How to let potential participants know that an online policy discussion will take place is an important issue. Information Renaissance makes it a point to carry out an outreach program that encourages a broad variety of people to join in. Participants often say they have received information from more than one source, so the registration form allows more than one response to the question of how they heard about the dialogue. Demographic information from the registration form can be used to target announcements to groups that appear to be unrepresented.

In preparing for the CAMP dialogue, personal contacts were combined with thousands of e-mail messages announcing the event: over 4600 messages were sent to individuals or groups. Major

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[35] Harris Interactive data (http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=295) released in April, 2002 gives average Internet use as 7-8 hours per week.

[36] Larsen, E. and Rainie, L. (April, 2002). "The Rise of the E-Citizen: How People Use Government Agencies' Web Sites." Pew Internet and American Life Project, p. 5 (http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/toc.asp?Report=57; age distributions are online at http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/chart.asp?img=57_users.jpg).

Registration	Frequency	Percent
No	124	14 %
Yes	787	86 %
Total	911	100 %

access government services?

Registration	Frequency	Percent
No	31	3 %
Yes	877	97 %
Total	908	100 %

find government information?

Registration	Frequency	Percent
No	279	31 %
Yes	626	69 %
Total	905	100 %

offer your opinion to an elected official or government office?

Registration	Frequency	Percent
No	616	68 %
Yes	290	32 %
Total	906	100 %

participate in an online dialogue?

Have you used the Internet previously to …

Registration	Frequency	Percent
None	5	< 1 %
Less than one hour	18	2 %
One to seven hours	331	37 %
Eight to fourteen hours	250	28 %
Fifteen or more hours	287	32 %
Total	891	100 %

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
None	0	0 %
Less than one hour	4	2 %
One to seven hours	64	32 %
Eight to fourteen hours	74	37 %
Fifteen or more hours	56	28 %
Total	198	100 %

On average, how many hours per week do you use the Internet (including work)?

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Home	93	46 %
Work	96	48 %
Library	1	< 1 %
School/university	8	4 %
Family or friends	0	0 %
Other	3	1 %
Total	201	100 %

Where was the computer you most frequently used to participate in this Dialogue?

Figure 11. Internet use.

groups that are involved directly in education and others that involve potential participants were contacted; where names were available, for example, both board members and regional contacts were included. In addition, many groups provided enthusiastic support, putting announcements on Web site home pages, printing them in newsletters and mailings, sending e-mails to members and handing out flyers at conferences and board meetings, and many of those who received e-mails probably forwarded them to friends and colleagues.

Approximately 45 large state-level education organizations were contacted, including those for school board members, school administrators, teachers' unions, organizations of teachers and librarians, technology-interest organizations, charter schools, and so forth; school districts in each county were also contacted. In addition, there were contacts with seven higher education associations, five student organizations, five business organizations, and five organizations that target rural areas. Personal contacts and announcements also went to six major parent or

community groups and to hundreds of smaller groups that work on themes related to children and education; to others who might also be interested, including faith-based organizations; to groups that advocate dialogue; and to policy institutes. To reach minority populations, 21 organizations were contacted, as were the minority caucuses of the Legislature and a large number of media that serve wide-ranging minority communities. Government offices contacted included the California Department of Education, the office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the Leagues of California Cities and Mayors.

In addition to the Info Ren outreach, Joint Committee members sent information about the dialogue to their constituents and staff made media contacts. The draft Plan was also distributed; hard copies were mailed to school superintendents, county offices of education, state libraries and other state agencies, as well as individuals who had monitored the development of the draft. When the draft was posted on the Committee Web page, e-mail announcements were sent to hundreds of organizations and individuals notifying them that the Plan could be viewed electronically and printed locally, if desired.

Given the alternatives shown in Figure 12, the majority of participants said at registration that they had heard of the dialogue via e-mail (320 participants through this mechanism alone, 127 in combination with other mechanisms). The next most frequent response was “through my work or business” (170 and 117); third was “friend or colleague” (129 and 88). Other categories (Web site, other, conference announcement, newsletter, newspaper or magazine, flyer) were much less frequently identified as the sole source of information.

Registration	Frequency	Percent
E-mail from an organization	447	49 %
Through my work or business	287	31 %
Friend or colleague	217	24 %
Newsletter	37	4 %
Flyer	18	2 %
Conference announcement	41	4 %
Web site	78	8 %
Newspaper or magazine	37	4 %
Other	61	7 %
Total	918	100 %

How did you hear about this dialogue?
(Check one or more.)

Figure 12. How people heard about the dialogue.

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Very frequently	67	33 %
Frequently	86	43 %
Sometimes	40	20 %
Never	8	4 %
Total	201	100 %

I read messages …

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Very frequently	8	4 %
Frequently	28	14 %
Sometimes	101	52 %
Never	57	29 %
Total responses	194	100 %

I posted messages …

How active were you in the Dialogue?

Figure 13. Activity in the dialogue.

Activity in the dialogue

Participants were asked in the evaluation how active they had been in the Dialogue – how often they had read or posted messages (Figure 13): 76% said they had read very frequently or frequently, while only 18% said they had posted very frequently or frequently; 49% said they posted "sometimes" and 28% "never." Two series of follow-up questions were asked about decisions to post or not. These will be discussed in the following chapter.

A total of 251 people posted messages. Of these, 44 had not registered, so the fraction of registrants who posted was 207/935, or 22%; if non-registrants are included in the total population this percentage becomes 26%, but this is misleading since non-posting observers may also not have registered. There were 1057 postings in all, distributed on a-day to-day basis as shown in the graph in Figure 14.

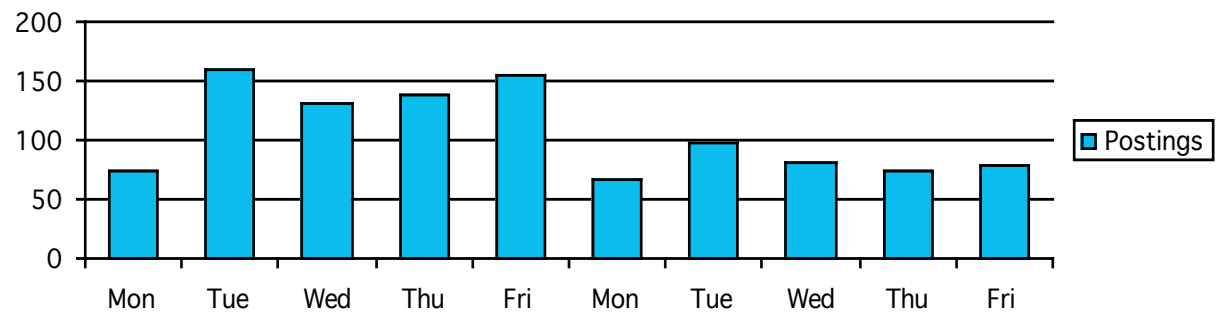


Figure 14. Daily Postings.

Chapter V. An evaluation of the dialogue

This chapter examines the evaluation and registration data in the light of the five evaluation questions.

Satisfaction and motivation to participate

> *How satisfied were participants with the process?*

Satisfaction

Most participants – 76% – described their experience as either "very positive" or "somewhat positive;" 12% found it negative or very negative (Figure 15). Enthusiasm was even greater regarding future online dialogues on California policy topics, to which 91% said definitely (75%) or probably (16%) yes, and less than 2% said definitely or probably no (Figure 16). Several other evaluation questions, discussed below and in the following sections on *New voices* (p. 46), *The dialogue as a public space* (p. 51) and *What participants got …* (p. 59) are also important to satisfaction – for example ratings of elements of the dialogue, questions related to the technology, the atmosphere and quality of the discussion, and what was learned. Although a few participants had trouble with the technology, responses in these areas were also quite positive. This is an important finding, since as mentioned in Chapter II (p. 16) satisfaction with the process is an important prerequisite for recommending online dialogue as a new mechanism for civic engagement.

People participating in the evaluation were invited to give open-ended responses to explain their ratings of their experience. Interestingly, most (19 of 23) of those who said their experience was somewhat or very negative gave explanations. These focused primarily on the technology and the timing of the dialogue; several mentioned their difficulties in finding time to participate, while a few mentioned the topics; two felt the discussion was too philosophical or theoretical, with one addressing the need to include a broader audience. Among the comments were:

- It was hard for me to navigate the Dialogue. If the set-up had shown the discussion as it progressed (or maybe it did and I never found it) it would have made more sense to me, and would have been less frustrating.
- My first notification that the dialogue would begin came on that same day. As a busy mother of two, who is involved in a wide variety of school activities I had no time to block out my calendar…. holding this dialogue during the final weeks of school made it impossible for most parents to participate.…
- Very frustrated. I found that many ideas and thoughts I had on the matter were already expressed and since it was impossible to continue and add immediately to the idea expressed or the delay was so long, it was best to give up.

A considerably lower proportion (17 of 32) of those who rated their experience as "neither positive nor negative," said they had no opinion, or left the question blank gave comments.

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Very positive	66	33 %
Somewhat positive	85	43 %
Neither positive nor negative	22	11 %
No opinion	4	2 %
Somewhat negative	18	9 %
Very negative	5	3 %
Total responses	200	100 %

Overall, how would you rate your experience in this online dialogue?

Figure 15. Satisfaction with the dialogue.

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Definitely yes	150	75 %
Probably yes	31	16 %
Maybe	14	7 %
No opinion	2	1 %
Probably no	2	1 %
Definitely no	1	>1 %
Total responses	200	100 %

Do you think there should be online dialogues on other California policy topics in the future?

Figure 16. Future online dialogues.

These responses were stated more positively, but voiced similar concerns; three mentioned the informative nature of the daily discussion summaries.

- It was somewhat more difficult to access and follow than I expected. It was also very time consuming to read and follow all of the threads.
- At times I found it tedious and had to make myself focus. However, the information and understanding I gained was invaluable.
- I think it could have been more positive if I had been able to spend more time with it. I like the idea; however, it occurred at a very busy time for me and I could not spend the time with it like I wanted to.

Of the majority, the 151 respondents who said their experience was somewhat or very positive, less than one-half (65) gave comments. Participants said:

- …. I had become disheartened, and now feel more hopeful, both as a mother and an educator.
- This process opens the door for access to legislators and policy makers who are otherwise difficult to reach.
- It felt good to be able to share my views among this diverse group.
- I felt the participants were listened to and given credence.
- The depth of insight from the participants was helpful in clarifying the issues.
- I was very impressed with the responsiveness of the master plan team.

- I commented on a thread I thought was very important, but that had not been discussed very much, and I got more responses. Everyone had something worthwhile to contribute.
- I feel that some of the educators who are in the front line of deliverers of education have had an opportunity to respond to some of the current issues. As a parent, I have felt the need to voice my opinions as well.
- An innovative approach to creating a statewide dialogue. Eliminated travel costs and provided for more opportunity for input.
- This is the first time I participated in such a dialogue regarding educational policy in California and I felt richer by it.
- Although I could not spend hours per day following the dialogue along, the summaries each day and being able to click selectively into the topics and discussions in which I was interested, was great. The system reached a tremendous audience who might not have otherwise participated.

Quite a few of these respondents too, commented on the technology, the timing of the discussion, and the difficulty in finding time to participate as much as they would have liked. Some expressed frustration, but again the tone was more positive than for those who felt their experience had been negative:

- It was difficult to access where I wanted to be…. When I did get there, though, it was great!

Others were entirely positive:

- It was easy to access and the threading technology worked well.
- I would like to use this type of format when we revise the Adult Education State Plan -- it's a great way to get broader input.

Several mentioned their concern regarding the impact of the dialogue (see the section below on *What participants got out of the dialogue,* p. 59). There were a number of comments on the volume of the discussion:

- …the volume of participants made it challenging. It was difficult to read every participant's response, which you needed to do if you were not to repeat what others were already conveying.

Six used the word "overwhelming" or "overwhelmed" to describe the discussion:

- I found myself overwhelmed by the number of messages that people were posting…
- The amount of participation was somewhat overwhelming and I did a lot of skimming. But I like the idea of people throughout the state talking about this, and that means listening to what a lot of people have to say.

A few would have liked to have a more in-depth discussion, but more commonly there was a feeling that there was a bit too much information to digest:

- I would open the response, skim it and then move on unless it really caught my attention.
- I did not participate in it on a daily basis, but printed out every day's summary and read them that night.

Other elements also elicited dissatisfaction:

- I think dialogue is a misnomer…. It was an opportunity to communicate to political office-holders, educational policy makers and staff. But it tried to cover too much too quickly.

- Sometimes it seemed one voice would dominate a day's postings.
- I felt that participation was 'limited' and that many appropriate groups were not represented. This wasn't due to exclusion; it just reflects how few educators are really 'connected' in a meaningful way.
- Other open-ended questions also elicited comments related to satisfaction.
- I hope it will continue – finally there is a way to at least attempt to give input on my time, not the legislature's.
- I am not actually sure that I participated in the 'dialog.' I read anonymous comments on different topics and sent in testimony but was not actively interacting with the dialog.
- ….it seemed that when I received notice about a topic the discussion was finished. I felt helpless, as if the so-called 'experts' had taken over. I ended up an observer not a participant.
- The procedures for accessing layers of topic information was too often labyrinthine and excessively complex. Needs to be simplified.
- It is a very efficient way for people to dialogue about educational issues. We discuss issues at various meetings but here we had access to people all over the state. It was very revealing and enlightening.

When asked if there should be online dialogues on other California policy topics in the future, three-fourths of respondents said "definitely yes." With those who said "probably yes", the percent in favor comes up to 91%. Less than two percent said there should definitely or probably not be dialogues on other topics. Here again, participants could give open-ended comments to explain their answers.[37] Many emphasized the general level of interest, convenience and democratic aspects of online dialogue:

- It's an easier way for working parents to participate in the process.
- More accessible than hearings, which is good, but many are still not comfortable with the format.
- Again, this can be a very positive and effective way to gather opinion and information. I just hope that the opinions of those in the "trenches" carries some weight in the decision-making process or it will all be a waste.
- This provides an opportunity to participate without having to travel, and at times more convenient to the many different types of work we do.
- It is good to hear what others are thinking.
- A larger participating group gives a better cross section of ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and misconceptions. These types of dialogues bring the "working grunt" closer to the decision/policy makers.
- An excellent tool to disperse a tremendous amount of information on a specific policy area. Certainly, policy topics like energy, water and health care are worthy of this treatment.
- On-line discussion is a great way to engage people whose schedules might preclude their participating in other venues and times.

[37] For most open-ended questions no counts have been made related to number of responses. Many of the open ended questions drew a mixture of comments – for example, the quality of the dialogue, problems with the technology, or expectations regarding the impact of the process came up in several places. Groups of examples in the following text are sometimes drawn from more than one question.

- You do have to be committed to a course of action and be unafraid of having a position. After all, what one writes is a permanent record. What one says can always be denied or misunderstood.
- For those of us who can't participate in meetings in Sacramento, or even regionally, this is a great way for people to contribute to the policymaking process.

But here too there were cautionary notes:

- The only major problem I see is how to get the opinions from people not online.
- As long as we do not forget about the many that do not have access to online information. This medium could easily become another way of separating ourselves from reality. This form of dialogue still is a virtual forum and nothing more.

Elements of the dialogue

Participants were also asked to assess elements of the dialogue. These responses were often enthusiastic, but variations can be seen (Figure 17). The daily summaries received the highest rating, with 86% of participants saying they contributed "much" or "very much" to the dialogue, and 3% rating them as contributing "a little" or "not at all." Open-ended comments of the following sort explained this rating:

- The summaries were extraordinary. The ability to ooze in and out kept me engaged.

For other elements, combining "much" and "very much," ratings ranged from 72% for the Briefing Book to 58% for moderators. (The response rate on this group of questions was comparatively low; from 19% to 26% of evaluation participants did not answer.)

Motivation to post messages

Reasons for writing messages are indicated by responses to the evaluation questions "If you posted messages during the Dialogue, how often were you motivated to do so by the following?" and "If you were registered as an active participant, how often did the following explain why you did NOT post a message?" with choices including very frequently, frequently, sometimes and never (Figures 18 and 19). Again, response rates were not high (with 31%-39% not responding on questions in Figure 18 and 25%-32% not responding on questions in Figure 19), but in this

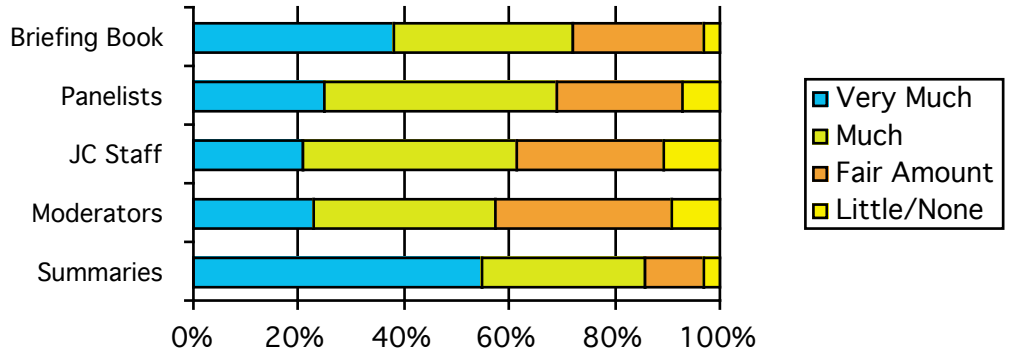
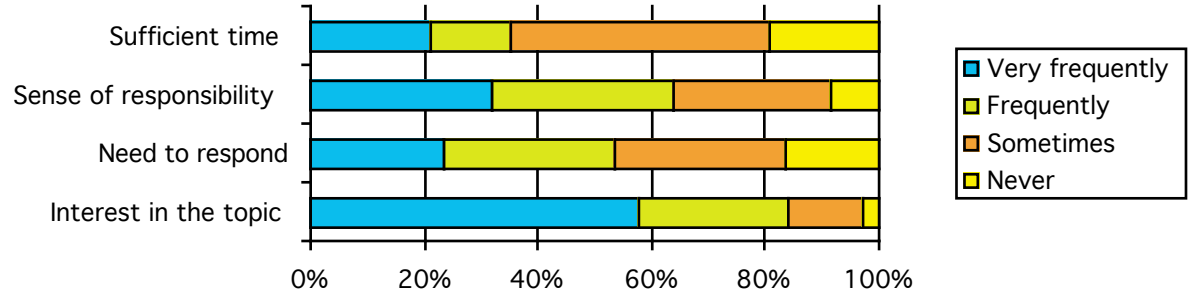


Figure 17. Contribution to the quality of the dialogue.

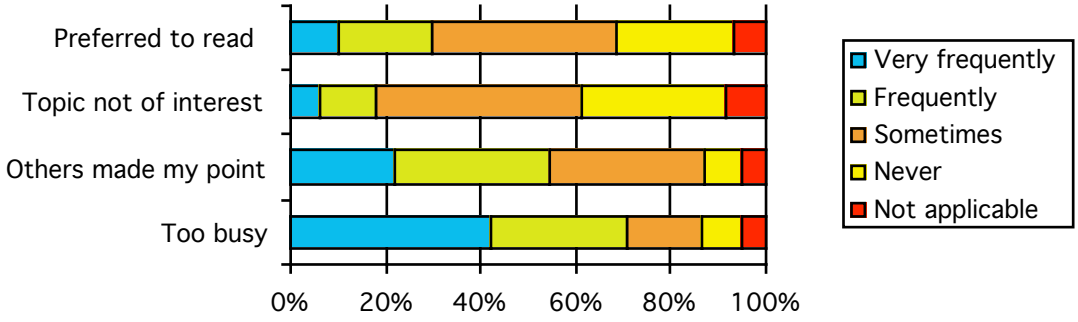


If you posted messages during the Dialogue, how often were you motivated to do so by the following:

- ***Sufficient time to participate***
- ***A sense of responsibility to actively participate***
- ***A need to respond to a previous post with which I agreed or disagreed***
- ***Interest in the topic***

Figure 18. Motivation to post messages.

case can be explained in part by the 57 evaluation respondents who had not posted messages (see *Activity in the dialogue*, p. 39). The reason for posting messages that received the highest percentage of "frequently" or "very frequently" responses (83%) was *interest in the topic*, followed by *a sense of responsibility to actively participate* (64%) and *a need to respond to a previous post with which I agreed or disagreed* (54%). Although the problem of finding time for the dialogue was mentioned in a good many open-ended responses, here "sometimes" was the most frequent response (45%) to "sufficient time" as the reason for not posting.



If you were registered as an active participant, how often did the following explain why you did NOT post a message:

- ***I preferred to read and not send in messages***
- ***The topic did not interest me***
- ***Others had already made my point***
- ***Too busy to formulate a message***

Figure 19. Reasons for *not* posting messages.

New voices

Were new voices brought into policy discussions?

The "new voices" most often sought in political processes are those who are underrepresented as voters – less well educated, younger, and ethnic groups. By this measure, the dialogue did not involve many of the most-hoped-for new participants: a high percentage of those who registered had the opposite characteristics.

As individuals, however, just over one-third (37%) of registrants said they had not known about the Master Plan before learning of the dialogue. Of those who had known about the Plan, only about 45% knew they could submit comments (Figure 10). These percentages seem fairly remarkable, given the percentage (more than two-thirds) who identified themselves as working in some aspect of education – whether as an "education administrator," "representative of education organization" or simply "educator," presumably mostly classroom teachers.

Disaggregating the registration data (Figure 20) suggests that while education administrators and representatives of education organizations did know about the Plan more frequently than the rest of the group, "educators" had this knowledge only slightly more frequently than participants who were not part of the profession (55% versus 49%).

A lack of knowledge on the part of classroom teachers seems consistent with the results of a Public Agenda study of education stakeholders regarding attitudes toward public engagement in education.[38] They summarize: "Teachers, of all the groups surveyed, feel the most ignored, with 70 percent saying they are left out of the decision-making process … parents and the public would like to see more community involvement, but two-thirds say they're comfortable leaving decisions to the professionals." (Parents and others who are dissatisfied with schools were more likely to be engaged.) The study covered individual school districts, but the findings are worth considering at state level as well; they may help to explain the large number of educators who registered for the dialogue, as well as the small proportion of parents. Bringing more classroom teachers – many of whom may go on to give information to their colleagues – into the discussion of the Master Plan is in fact an important addition of "new voices" to this particular policy discussion.

Registration	Yes, knew about Plan		
	Frequency	Total	Percent
Educators	178	325	55 %
Education administrators & representatives	236	274	86 %
Other participants	151	306	49 %
Total group	565	905	62 %

Figure 20. Prior Master Plan knowledge among education personnel.

[38] Farkas, Steve, Patrick Foley and Ann Duffett, with Tony Foleno and Jean Johnson (2001). "Just Waiting to Be Asked? A Fresh Look at Attitudes on Public Engagement." (http://www.publicagenda.org/specials/pubengage/pubengage.htm).

Evaluation	Change in interest		
Prior involvement in politics	Increased	About the same	Decreased
Active	29 %	71 %	0 %
Not active	50 %	49 %	1 %

Figure 21. Change in political interest for different involvement levels.

Another measure of the extent to which the dialogue encouraged new voices has been shown in Figure 8. At evaluation, 46% characterized themselves as having been "somewhat" or "not too active" in government and politics (58% gave these responses at registration). When asked the evaluation follow-up question "Has the Dialogue changed your interest in government and politics?" 38% said that the dialogue had increased their interest either in government and politics in general, or specifically in government and politics related to education. That is, not only were new individuals brought into education policy discussions, but also many saw these discussions as increasing their interest. This was true for almost all participants, but particularly for those who said they had been "somewhat" or "not too" active in government and politics in the past, as shown in Figure 21:[39] 50% said their interest had been increased by the dialogue. The interest of those who had been relatively active was also increased, but somewhat less (29%).

Barriers

Technology is often seen as a barrier to the participation of "new voices" in online discussion, due both to the need to use unfamiliar mechanisms and to concerns about the "digital divide." However, we believe that other factors may be at least equally important. Some participants did have problems using the Web site, though as pointed out by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) in "A nation online"[40] Internet skills are increasing steadily over time, so to some extent this may not be a long-term problem. But the "digital divide" is an ongoing concern. Internet use in the total population is reported at 54% of the population by NTIA;[41] others give higher figures, e.g. 64%.[42] (Both figures include use from any location, including home and work.) Those who are less well educated or have less income are also less apt to have access to and be able to use a computer. For those with family incomes under

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[39] This figure combines data from two evaluation questions: "How active would you say you have been in government and politics in the past?" ("active" includes categories "very" and "fairly" active; "not active" includes "somewhat" and "not too" active) and "Has the Dialogue changed your interest in government and politics?" ("Increased" includes "increased" and "increased, but only for education").

[40] National Telecommunications and Information Administration (February 2002). "A nation online: How Americans are expanding their use of the Internet," Chapter 2 (http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/dn/html/Chapter2.htm; links to all chapters: http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/dn/html/toc.htm).

[41] NTIA (February 2002), op. cit., Chapter 2, data tables. Computer use at this time, as opposed to Internet use, was found to be 66%.

[42] Taylor reports 64% in September/October 2001 and 66% in February/March 2002: Taylor, H. (April 2002). "Internet penetration at 66% of adults nationwide," The Harris Poll #18 (http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=295). The Pew Internet and American Life Project Report (April 16, 2003) "The Ever-Shifting Internet Population: A new look at Internet access and the digital divide" (http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/toc.asp?Report=88) gives an update: "Pew Internet Project tracking data show a flattening of the overall growth of the Internet population since late 2001. Internet penetration rates have hovered between 57% and 61% since October 2001, rather than pursuing the steady climb that they had showed in prior years."

$15,000 and 25,000, usage figures of 25% and 33%, respectively, are cited in "A nation online." Usage in these income categories was reported to be increasing slightly faster than for other income groups;[43] however, many people are still not online.

Most of the 450 public libraries throughout California provide access to the Internet, but public access computers are not always readily available; they require extra dedication to find, reserve and use. "Internet access at public libraries is more often used by those with lower incomes than those with higher incomes. Just over 20 percent of Internet users with household family incomes of less than $15,000 a year use public libraries…. As household income rises, not only does the proportion of public library Internet users decline, but also the percentage of Internet users without alternative access points also declines."[44] Figure 4-7 in *A Nation Online* suggests further that 70% of Internet users in the lowest income category also use the Internet elsewhere; since about one-half of library users are under 25,[45] the second source of many of these users may be computers at school. Figure 12 suggests that very few dialogue participants used library access points. A recent report from the Pew Internet and American Life Project, however, states that "60% of non-users know of a place in their community where Internet access is publicly available…. Most of those who know of local access points say those access points are easy to reach. The most frequently identified location of public access is a library."[46]

Open-ended comments on the technology show a range of abilities and confidence:

- It was easy to access and the threading technology worked well.
- Once I figured out how the system worked, it went smoothly.
- Didn't fully understand the mechanics this time out, but hope to be engaged more actively the next round.
- I am only semi-literate on the computer & found it difficult to open & close comments & responses. I felt as if I wasn't having a conversation. I have never participated in a chat room or this type of dialogue before.
- I found it difficult to navigate and there was too much to read. I wanted to participate, but it was too overwhelming.
- I felt it had too many links which took me to places I didn't want to be. I finally gave up trying to participate and just read the others' comments.
- This is my third attempt to complete this survey involving over three hours, as something always seems to happen before I finish.
- The site was confusing. Finding where to enter in the conversation was not easy.

Participants were concerned about the digital divide:

- On-line dialogue is a great idea. I would love to see it as a common vehicle for citizen interaction with government, when the kind of background materials you provided are available to enrich the discussion. We need to have a set of simpler materials available to include the voices of those the government serves -- students, the elderly, and other vulnerable people whose opportunities to participate has been severely limited until now.
- … remember there are many that do not have access to on-line dialogue.

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[43] NTIA, op. cit., Chapter 2, Figure 2-3.
[44] NTIA, op. cit., Chapter 4, Figures 4-6 and 4-7 (http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/dn/html/Chapter4.htm).
[45] NTIA, op. cit., Chapter 4 (http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/dn/html/Chapter4.htm).
[46] Pew Internet and American Life Project (2003), op. cit.

There were also some misunderstandings. For example, one participant thought the registration process was not working because

- I never received my password and yet whenever I tried to repeat the registration, it said I was already registered.

Actually, to keep things simple, there were no passwords; there were directions, but apparently they were not always found.

Many potential participants, including those with low incomes and those with young families, may also experience more general barriers to political participation, whether online or off. Lack of basic literacy, for example, may stand in the way of participation, as well as any other Internet use: the Pew report[47] cites an estimate that due to problems in this area up to 23% of the population "struggles enough with literacy that they have difficulty completing everyday tasks." Time is also a scarce resource for many people. Participation in the online dialogue required time to become familiar with the Web site, and suggested spending time learning about background material, then reading and perhaps writing messages. The daily summaries (see *Summaries,* p. 27) help, but are not the same as reading individual messages. Using message threads can also save time, but only if the participant has taken time to learn to use them. These constraints were reflected in responses to the open-ended questions:

- The first two weeks in June are probably the BUSIEST for teacher on a traditional school calendar year. I could not get to the dialogue as I had hoped because of report cards and dozens of end-of-year activities. I hope you will choose another time of the year for the next dialogue!!
- This was a very worthwhile opportunity but time consuming. Many teachers and working parents could not participate because it occurred during the day, through dinner, homework, getting kids to bed….
- It was difficult to get on-line on a regular basis due to my own volume of work.... This made it challenging to read everyone's posts before you responded to ensure you were not duplicating other people's thoughts. By the time I was able to go through all the posts I had no time to compose mine. That may need to be looked at in the future, how to manage the large number of posts.
- I wish I had more time to give to the project….
- Too much, too fast. I did not have the energy and the time after 3 days of keeping up (reading everything).
- I am pleased that I took the time to participate…. I would have been more involved had it occurred at a different time of the year.

Such comments reinforced the feeling of the organizers that the scheduling of the CAMP dialogue (see *Sponsorship and funding,* p. 17), while unavoidable, meant that it took place when many parents and teachers felt time was especially short. As noted, this may help to explain both the age distribution of participants (skewed toward older ranges) and the drop off between registration and evaluation in participants aged 30 to 49. In any case, the comments suggest strongly that taking school schedules into account in planning an education dialogue would help to draw more people, and that those who take part might participate more heavily. To have engaged large numbers of students would probably have required both a longer time and sufficient resources to promote involvement classroom by classroom. A participant said:

[47] ibid., citing a statistic from a National Adult Literacy Survey by the U.S. Department of Education.

- It would have been extremely interesting to have involved classrooms in the discussion, and to be able to have assessed the results in terms of interest in politics.

Another barrier to participation may be a lack of information and understanding of the educational policy process. Parents may be concerned about their children's schools, but fail to understand the relevance of state policy to what happens locally. Those who might be interested may feel that they do not know enough to take part. An online discussion can provide enormous amounts of explanatory information, and with sufficient resources could provide it in a manner that is easier to absorb and accessible to users with varied levels of reading skill. However, only those who feel that it makes a difference to their lives are likely to take the time to study and understand such material. This need for skillful summarization and presentation of material increases the cost of an event. Related questions are discussed further under *Nature and complexity of issues* (p. 69) and *Cost versus engagement* (p. 82).

A basic pre-condition for participation is of course that people must know that the discussion is taking place. For the CAMP dialogue, there was an organized campaign of publicity directed to organizations *(How people heard…*, p. 36). Staff of both Information Renaissance and the Joint Committee, as well as participants in the dialogue, felt there was a need for broader outreach and media attention. Participants said:

- I do not think the public was aware of this dialogue nor of its importance to them, to their families and future. However, this is a good start….
- How do we get the info on this dialogue out to others? My employer, Intel, encouraged us to join the discussion, which is how I heard of it in the first place. Otherwise I would not have known. …
- A good beginning, but many people were unaware of it even with the publicity….
- It was not well enough publicized before hand, maybe. I happened to read Peter Schrag's column in the Sacramento Bee in which he mentioned it. Something of this import should be sent to all superintendents to disseminate to school staffs and communities to involve the most broad-based response possible….

The demographic composition of participants suggests, however, that while more outreach would have been desirable, reaching additional types of participants would probably have required different approaches. It would have been interesting (though not possible within the dialogue budget) to place paid advertisements or radio interviews in carefully selected media, and to have guided those without computers to local libraries or other access points. But again, before people can be expected to take advantage of this sort of opportunity, they need to know why participation is relevant to *them*. There is not only a need for outreach but also for skills related to reaching and informing those who do not typically take part in any political discussions – not just online dialogue.

Potential advantages of online participation

Though barriers to involving "new voices" that stem from lack of income and education stand in the way of all types of political participation, online participation can in principle overcome many other constraints. For example, online events can allow people to take part at any time of day. Unlike a public hearing, there is no need to choose a few specific locations. No out of town travel is required, so there are no charges for accommodations, meals, or taking time off from work to attend. Those who live in rural areas – whose increase in Internet use has been

"particularly strong"[48] – have a far more equal chance of taking part, as do disabled people who use a computer for communication or find it difficult to travel, those with young families or other caregivers. And, as a student leader said to a Joint Committee staff member, these features make online discussion "student friendly." In comparison to public hearings, online participation may also have advantages for people who are simply shy about speaking in public, or who prefer a less heated process with more opportunity for reflection and interaction.

The dialogue as a public space for interaction

> *How did participants see the "public space" created by the dialogue for interaction?*

Much of the potential of an online dialogue for reaching the social goals listed in Chapter II is defined by how well it functions as a "public space" – a place for communication and interaction among the public and between public and policy makers. Does this space increase the flow of useful information? Is there a chance to learn from each other? Can policy makers learn more about local circumstances and policy effects? Does it help to inform the public? Do the public listen to and learn from each other? Is the atmosphere adversarial or respectful? Does it encourage sharing opinions and values, and new understandings of others' viewpoints (an aid to decreasing conflict)? Does it offer potential for moving from input to collaboration? Does it encourage trustworthy institutions, and help to build trust?

In addition to determining whether online dialogue supports social goals, the answers are also important to individual participant satisfaction and willingness to take part in this form of civic involvement. This evaluation gives only a glimpse of answers, but it is an encouraging glimpse, demonstrating that in the respects evaluated the dialogue did create a space in which such interaction, communication and engagement can take place. This section begins with a number of messages from the dialogue archive, as an indicator of information transmission. We then turn to evaluation questions that requested participants to assess these less tangible aspects of the dialogue. Open-ended questions provide more information and also speak to ease of use of the technology. Here too, an important related issue is how the public space created by an online dialogue compares to more traditional mechanisms for public involvement in policy decisions. This is addressed under *What policy makers got…* (p. 63).

Information flow

The CAMP dialogue message archive shows participants offering a great deal of information on conditions in local schools, effects of policy on their home locations or their fields, and what does or does not work. Though many comments can be construed as complaints, there were also many suggestions for positive change; clearly participants care deeply about education. The excerpts below are intended to suggest the range of comments; in many cases these were part of a chain of messages, in which these remarks were discussed and may have been rebutted.

An exchange with a state senator, who requested further information:

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[48] NTIA, op. cit., Chapter 2, Table 2-3: "Over the 1998 to 2001 period, growth in Internet use among people living in rural households has been particularly strong (24 percent at an average annual rate). Use of the Internet by people in rural households now approaches the national average."

- I wanted to elaborate on [this] point…. Over 50,000 adult learners receive at least 12 hours of instruction every year in volunteer-based programs.… [which] provide "anytime, anywhere" instruction, usually for the "hardest to reach, hardest to teach" learners.
- Thank you for the information about volunteer adult education programs. I am not familiar with them or with how they fit in the structure of other adult ed programs. Would it be possible to provide the committee with additional information? …

Participants described problems, innovations, and programs useful for particular students:

- I haven't seen any method of parental input mentioned….
- At our school… we have added 1 hour to each day... so we can "get it all done"! We favor this over all day kindergarten where 5 year olds just get too tired for quality learning, and the teachers have less prep time.…
- New teachers could benefit from annual direct contact with the 100-500 "Teachers of the Year" across the nation, in seminars and training programs.…
- …. important for policy makers to understand… in many rural counties County Offices of Education.… are ideal centralized sites for organizing and implementing training programs for both public and privately operated ECE [Early Childhood Education]….
- …While I support the intent of… learning support…at key transition points, …. a traditional view… may not be applicable to many …. [who] do not enroll… as full time freshman…. Years may have passed since high school graduation or they may come in after having dropped out, gone to adult ed. and passing their GED. Many take only one course, stop, continue, stop, continue, all the while working and/or raising children.…
- As a person with a speech disability, … one of my biggest barriers… was my inability to use the telephone. That barrier has now been lifted through a new technology, free to the consumer…. It is very important that every pupil with a speech disability in California be trained to use STS.

Many spelled out unintended consequences of policy, particularly in relation to assessment:

- If you have ever watched a class… with English language learners… [being tested], you have to wonder what is being measured. Students make simple mistakes, mark the wrong bubble, skip a line of bubbles, give up and start crying. At worst, they are forced to take a test in a language they cannot read and are just beginning to understand….
- When the state … insists that all high school students pass geometry (which is not possible), the local districts meet this demand by inventing two geometry classes… If you take geometry A, you cannot sign up for any higher level math classes. … you know what this means (geometry A heavily involves yarn and crayons).
- … schools I work with that are [classified, based on testing, as] underperforming have narrowed their curriculum drastically.… When a district or principal directs teachers to spend 3.5 hours a day on literacy and an hour for math, little time is left for science, social studies, [or the] arts….
- …. the problem isn't with what we learn from the STAR 9 test, the problem is how we interpret what we learn. Johnny reads at 5th level at the end of the 5th grade so his teacher is good. (Even though Johnny read at the 5th grade level when he entered 5th grade.) Bobby only reads at 3rd grade level at the end of 5th grade so his teacher was poor. (Even though Bobby couldn't read at all when he entered 5th grade.)

A question on attracting and retaining teachers for schools with underserved students produced a number of responses drawn from the participants' experience:

- … excellent comments about the methods for attracting teachers… We also need… to retain teachers in the classroom in underachieving schools.… many teachers who leave these schools really want to stay, but… cannot be effective…. Imagine: you have no supplies other than what you have purchased. You have 40+ students. Some… are disruptive, but no one answers the office telephone…. to call parents you have to walk to the office to use a phone on a counter in a public area. The number the District has is wrong…. one student strikes another and is removed, but… [is sent] back to class within 15 minutes. It is hard to feel good when these kinds of incidents are basically daily occurrences and there is no support for or effort toward change….
- … administrative support is key, and that includes counseling services, for students and for teachers.… I worked in a "low-performing" elementary school in Los Angeles where, in a school of 1200 kids from a local housing project, there was little turnover and great pride among the staff and parents…. mostly engendered by the principal and the leadership among teachers, who loved the school, and saw their responsibility to help new teachers help the kids.…
- One teacher… only had 7 of the 30 children that started the year. 23… were replaced with new students (some several times during the year). With every child that changed, she had to start back at the beginning….

This participant may have spoken for others who were not present in the dialogue:

- I am a single mother of three in the public school system in a rural area. I am a full-time working mom… I work with local families in a Native American family services agencies and confront these issues weekly…. It is not a single school, it seems to be more systemic…. I have been amazed when I approach a school as an "official" service provider… I am treated with some grain of respect, but when calling the same school as a mom, I am addressed in a condescending tone and virtually always brushed off….
- …. [in many schools, to receive this information] the parent must WEEKLY request a progress report. This is not realistic for many working parents.… Suggestions made by teachers for student improvement include options not viable for many families of the children they teach, such as after school programs for which no transportation is available.… The K-12 system needs to move out of the 1950's in the way families are perceived, and the roles they may play.…

Advocates forcefully presented the need for adult education:

- …. over five million adults in our state do not have a high school diploma, and this number is on the rise, yet a diploma is now a prerequisite for getting an entry-level job. Millions of Californians lack the English skills they need to be successful….
- … The comprehensive plan for CA education must take this reality into account….
- ... Hayward Adult School has helped me from being just disabled, to a studious uprising employment bound member of the community. Honestly this program has changed my life in such a positive way; it's hard to put to words….
- … in my Basic Reading… just today. "Jacqueline" told me that she and her two children have begun to go to the library to get books once every week…. She now reads to both preschoolers 30 minutes per day…. "Art", a 19 year-old high school dropout, passed a promotional test at reading level 11.0, having originally tested in at 6.8.… Two students in residential drug and alcohol recovery programs have been drug-free for 2 and 3 months and are working toward their adult high school diplomas and/or GEDs…. None of these people would be comfortable in a community college setting… they need the individual and small group instruction and support we can offer in community adult

schools. After they earn their diplomas or GEDs, they will have the necessary skills and confidence to be successful in college or training programs.

Comments on technology reflected both the frustrations of incorporating new technologies and ideas for ways to make this feasible:

- "social promotion" in these schools is very high… students by the 8th grade are already 4-5 years behind…. trying to add new technology to a situation that is so unstable increases the chaos.… until these problems are addressed effectively, new technology may be wasted time, effort and resources….
- … [regarding] teaching technology skills in non-tech classes…. one California school has…. an "English/History" course… two teachers team teaching and a block schedule format…. neither course is "tech" per se, [but] there is an increased opportunity to smoothly "teach" a tech-enhanced methodology …. [this] "works" because a tech-qualified teacher is always present…. a tech-teacher at large who floats and provides just-in-time support and/or training is the key…. one step further and we can have a remote-access connected tech expert instantly available via desktop-sharing to provide support by adding "intelligence" to the coursework interface. Now start "pooling" that support throughout the district and you have a cost-effective and workable solution to the problem of under-utilized technology in the classroom.

Informed participation

Some equality in access to and understanding of relevant information is an important prerequisite to a worthwhile discussion. Better-informed participants can be more equal discussion partners with policy makers, and among themselves. The CAMP dialogue Briefing Book (*Resources,* p. 24) provided detailed background information on many of the topics

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	59	34 %
Agree	72	42 %
Neither agree nor disagree	27	16 %
Disagree	11	7 %
Strongly disagree	4	2 %
Total	173	100 %

Regarding your perception of this dialogue, how would you rate the following statement: I felt I had enough information to take part.

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	38	22 %
Agree	94	54 %
Neither agree nor disagree	37	21 %
Disagree	3	2 %
Strongly disagree	3	2 %
Total	175	100 %

Regarding the communication you observed among participants in this dialogue, how would you rate the following statement: People knew what they were talking about.

Figure 22. Informed participation.

covered in the discussion. The messages above demonstrate that dialogue participants were also rich sources of information, as were panelists and Joint Committee staff.

Most evaluation participants felt that they "had enough information to take part:" 76% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement (Figure 22). When these responses are disaggregated, the percentage for educational personnel is slightly higher (79% vs. 67%) than for others in the group, as might be expected. However, this makes the percentage agreement on another question, "People knew what they were talking about," all the more interesting: again, 76% of the total group agreed or strongly agreed; education personnel were slightly more likely to agree or strongly agree than the rest of the group (77% vs. 71%), but they were twice as likely to "strongly agree" (25% vs. 12%). Of course it is possible that this is a result of a shared vocabulary among the large number of educators taking part.

Atmosphere to facilitate participation

To evaluate the atmosphere of the discussion in areas apt to facilitate participation, a three-part question asked how participants perceived the dialogue (Figure 23). Combined "agree" and "strongly agree" responses indicate that 79% of respondents felt welcome (4% disagreed or strongly disagreed), and 77% felt that people's attitudes and responses encouraged participation (under 3% disagreed or strongly disagreed). Only 22% agreed or strongly agreed

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	93	51 %
Agree	51	28 %
Neither agree nor disagree	32	17 %
Disagree	4	2 %
Strongly disagree	4	2 %
Total	184	100 %

I felt welcome in the dialogue.

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	55	31 %
Agree	81	46 %
Neither agree nor disagree	36	20 %
Disagree	4	2 %
Strongly disagree	1	>1 %
Total	177	100 %

Peoples' attitudes and responses encouraged participation.

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	14	9 %
Agree	19	13 %
Neither agree nor disagree	91	61 %
Disagree	11	7 %
Strongly disagree	13	9 %
Total	148	100 %

When I asked questions, they were answered.

Regarding your perception of this dialogue, how would you rate these statements:

Figure 23. Atmosphere for participation.

that their questions were answered, but the majority (61%) chose “neither agree nor disagree,” suggesting either that they did not feel strongly about this or that the answers they received did not seem relevant. Other factors discussed below, including the quality of communication in the dialogue, are also quite important to its atmosphere.

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	29	16 %
Agree	85	48 %
Neither agree nor disagree	46	26 %
Disagree	14	8 %
Strongly disagree	3	2 %
Total	177	100 %

It was balanced among different points of view.

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	65	36 %
Agree	90	50 %
Neither agree nor disagree	20	11 %
Disagree	5	3 %
Strongly disagree	1	>1 %
Total	181	100 %

It was constructive and useful for examining questions and ideas.

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	16	9 %
Agree	77	45 %
Neither agree nor disagree	53	31 %
Disagree	22	13 %
Strongly disagree	5	3 %
Total	173	100 %

It was not dominated by a few participants.

Regarding the communication you observed among participants in this dialogue, how would you rate these statements:

Figure 24. Quality of communication.

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	80	45 %
Agree	86	48 %
Neither agree nor disagree	11	6 %
Disagree	1	<1 %
Strongly disagree	1	<1 %
Total	179	100 %

Regarding the communication you observed among participants in this Dialogue, how would you rate the following statement:
It was respectful

Figure 25. Respect.

Quality of communication

Perception of factors related to discussion quality. A series of evaluation questions requested information about aspects of the quality of communication in the discussion (Figure 24). Asked about the balance among different points of view, 64% of respondents chose "agree" or "strongly agree"; asked whether the discussion was constructive and useful for examining questions and ideas, 86% agreed or strongly agreed. The question of whether a few participants had dominated the discussion showed less agreement (54%). This may be related to the relatively large number of messages about adult education. On the other hand, 31% selected "neither agree nor disagree," while 16% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Participants were also asked to evaluate the respect shown among those taking part (Figure 25). A very high percentage of respondents (93%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the dialogue was respectful. This is a particularly interesting finding, since the civility of online discussion has often been called into question. The section on *Civility* (p. 78) goes into this issue, and lists some aspects of Info Ren dialogues that may help to promote civility and respect.

Reciprocity. A possible measure of "reciprocity" – or the extent to which people were talking to each other in the dialogue – is a count of the fraction of messages that are found in a thread with other messages. When participants read messages they were given the option of posting a reply to the message they were reading or posting a message that would start a new thread. Of the 1057 messages posted, 924 were part of a larger thread – 87% of the total. This indicates that participants were almost always reading before posting messages – that is, listening to others before speaking themselves.

Allowing dissent. Although most participants saw the discussion as respectful, willingness to challenge the view of others (and a good bit of disagreement) was evident in the messages. Many messages from the adult education group fit in this category, but they were not alone in this. On the other hand, the responses to such messages may have elicited the effect pointed out by Beierle,[49] in which messages from those who are "insufficiently civil" are likely to be ignored, may have been at work. Moderators who are well versed in the subject matter, or significant staff time from the sponsoring organization, can help in identifying and specifically requesting comments on concepts included in messages that are relevant to the discussion, even if infelicitously worded. Diverse and attentive panelists can also help in bringing out opposing viewpoints.

Control of the agenda. Those who examine public discussion processes generally ask about control of the agenda: who determines what is discussed? In one sense, a great deal was pre-determined in the California dialogue. The Joint Committee had adopted a Framework (footnote 11), Working Groups had met through months of detailed consideration, and (although revisions were expected) a draft Plan was in place. Themes and questions were announced for each day of the discussion, and there was some social pressure to stick to them. This pre-determination of topics is probably unavoidable when public discussion takes place at such a late stage of policy development.

The role of participants in determining the details of the discussion was much greater than this might suggest. Topics were broad, and moderators and panelists were not very active; the evolution of the dialogue depended largely on who chose to post a message and who chose to respond (and to some extent on how well participants chose the subject lines for their messages). The adult education campaign, and perhaps the percentage of those who felt that

[49] Beierle (2002), op. cit, p. 39.

the discussion was dominated by a few, illustrate both desirable and less desirable aspects of this situation. Some dialogue participants recognized the role they had, or could have, played:

- I'm interested in Adult Ed. The dialog covered it because so many of us wrote in insisting it be covered….
- There was little dialogue about the youth who are disenfranchised from education – I did, however, have an obligation to add that to the discussion, and my time frame prevented me from that.

Responses to the question "Did the Dialogue cover the education issues that concern you most?" suggest that participants found the issues covered relevant: 87% answered positively ("yes", "yes to some extent" or "half and half"). Fifty-two people responded to the open-ended part of this question, taking this opportunity to cite issues that were not covered in the dialogue. In general, there was little consensus on topics; these included libraries, gifted students, special education, consistency, funding of various sorts, equity (including funding) and quality, social promotion, and environmental education. Several responses referred to topics that were included in the dialogue, but were felt to deserve more emphasis, including unification of small school districts, career or vocational education, school readiness, and governance/accountability. Adult education came up in 10 responses: two felt there should have been more discussion, one that there was too much, and six were glad it had been discussed.

The "no" answers in Figure 26 are also interesting. The questions on local or district issues and on abstraction were an attempt to learn whether people were frustrated by the focus on strategic state-level concerns, which may seem "far from home" if the relevance of state level policy to local schools is not understood. Some examples came up in the open-ended responses:

- Being a senior, my interest in this forum was primarily about the future of Adult education. I really couldn't get an answer on this issue. I still don't know how this plan will affect current facilities….
- The Master Plan (and the dialog) is too focused on bureaucratic procedures and not enough on the process of learning.

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Yes	45	24 %
Yes, to some extent	96	50 %
Half and half	25	13 %
No, I am more interested in local/district issues	3	2 %
No, it was too abstract	8	4 %
No, others did not share my concerns	5	3 %
Other (described in text box below)	9	5 %
Total	191	100 %

Did the Dialogue cover the education issues that concern you most?

Figure 26. Issues covered.

Ease of participation

Ease of participation also affects the quality (and quantity) of discussion. One aspect of technology in the CAMP dialogue was the storage of messages on the Web site. One could print the messages, but this would be tedious, and replies had to be composed in or copied to an online form and sent via the Web site. The large number of participants and volume of messages increased this challenge. The project design chose one large discussion over a number of smaller ones. In part the goal was to expose participants to a broad range of views and avoid the possibility suggested by some authors[50] that people will favor interactions with participants who have similar views and interests. This means, however, that each participant must find a way to cope with the overall message volume. Participants could read the subject lines of new messages and decide which ones sounded interesting, or skim most messages without lingering. Using message "threads" is a next step, since this organizes messages with their replies. This tool was emphasized in messages from staff, and participants did an excellent job of organizing their replies in threads. Daily summaries also helped by giving an overview; this was particularly helpful for those who came in after the dialogue had started or who might have missed a day or two.

What participants got out of the dialogue

> *What did participants get from the process, including the potential for impact on policy?*

Engagement and potential impact

Opportunities for the public to interact with public officials and staff are typically limited. By contrast, online dialogue provides interactions that may feel fairly direct and personal. This type of activity is also new enough that many people find it interesting simply to take part. Also, constructive discussion on a topic of interest may in itself be perceived as rewarding. The dialogue does appear to have been valued in this way: responses to questions about discussion quality quoted in the preceding section (*The dialogue as a public space,* p. 51*)* describe the discussion as a constructive and useful way to examine questions and ideas; the comments below about what was learned also suggest that the dialogue stimulated reflection about one's own opinions. Having this sort of discussion with policy makers is an even greater rarity. Participants commented:

- I've been a teacher for 33 years and shake my head in despair about the seeming lack of respect teachers have in affecting policy. It's done to us. We are held accountable for everything from kids brushing and flossing to passing exit exams, yet our voices are basically unheard when it comes to policymaking and probably most importantly, evaluating how policy is affecting the students we serve….
- It is refreshing to be able to dialog with professionals who agree and disagree on subjects. Allowing for consensus building and bringing clarity on subjects that are a little gray.

[50] Cass Sunstein is one well-known proponent; see footnote 59.

On the other hand, responses to the evaluation question "How much influence do you think this Dialogue will have on the content of the California Master Plan for Education?" suggest that expected impact on policy outcomes may not have been a major reason for taking part, since only 4% expected a "great deal" of influence (Figure 27). Many more (49%) expected "some" influence, and education personnel were somewhat more likely to expect influence than others (55% chose "a great deal" or "some," in contrast to 32% of other participants).

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
A great deal of influence	7	4 %
Some influence	95	49 %
Very little influence	47	24 %
I don't know	44	23 %
Total	193	100 %

How much influence do you think this dialogue will have on the content of the California Master Plan for Education?

Figure 27. Anticipated influence of the dialogue.

The open-ended comments give details about participants' feelings. Some were hopeful:

- I had an opportunity to be heard in a forum where those listening had the power to effect change.
- I got a sense that they care and that they want to make a reasonable change. There was evidence that the people involved care a great deal and are sometimes at a loss where to start.
- Opportunity to access the "ear" of people empowered to make decisions about requirements I am responsible for enacting as a teacher.
- I now believe I/we have made an impact on what expectations are and a reasonable approach to a more positive and across the board plan for a better outcome.

Quite a few, though, felt that the outcome was pre-determined, or that the institutions involved are captives of special interest groups:

- It was good to have the panelists responding to the comments. However, many times it sounded as if they had made up their minds and were not interested in using the input or making any changes in the master plan.
- I feel that possibly the K16 Master Plan was a done deal and we were allowed to vent our frustrations. I hope this was not an exercise in futility and a waste of our time.
- 95% pre-determined.
- … My opinion can, and will swing back to the "negative" side if I feel that the opinions/ ideas/thoughts/ and hopes gathered were used to simply "fulfill the public opinion requirement"… I understand the need to "gather public input", but I also recognize that it can simply become one of many things to "check off" as you formulate policy.
- I had the sense that most of the dialog consisted of members of interest groups expressing their well-defined positions….
- In reality the diversity of opinion found in such dialogue, though engaging and intellectually stimulating, is rarely apparent in the final policies.

- I sort of lost interest in it mid-way because it seemed like special interest groups … were over-represented…. I felt their voices were skewing the reality of what goes on in public education….

Others were somewhat hopeful, but wondered if the dialogue would make a difference:

- I do not know whether this dialogue will actually result in a plan that reflects the fact that participants in the dialogue were heard and their opinions played a role in the outcome of the Master Plan. If it does, GREAT. If the dialogue had no influence on decision-making, then it's "politics, as usual."
- At least I feel that the state cares enough to read our opinions and thoughts (whether or not this really happens later on down the road remains to be seen).
- I am waiting to see what action takes place in the policy related to the comments – that will be the single most important measure of real success.
- I hope that the opinions and the responses obtained through the dialogue are really taken into consideration when setting policy.

Learning

Information Renaissance believes that a dialogue opens up possibilities for several types of learning; participants' comments included:

- This is my first time being part of a public debate. What I can tell you is that I've learned a lot.
- I really appreciated being able to add my opinions to those of my colleagues. I also learned what others consider important in the Master Plan.

Further, a series of agree/disagree evaluation questions (Figure 28) asked participants to report on what they saw themselves as having learned in specific areas. These include content, as well as others' views:

1. I learned a great deal about education in California.
2. I learned a great deal about opinions I had not thought about before.
3. I learned a lot about where to find information related to California education

Participants were also asked to reflect on the effect on their own thinking:

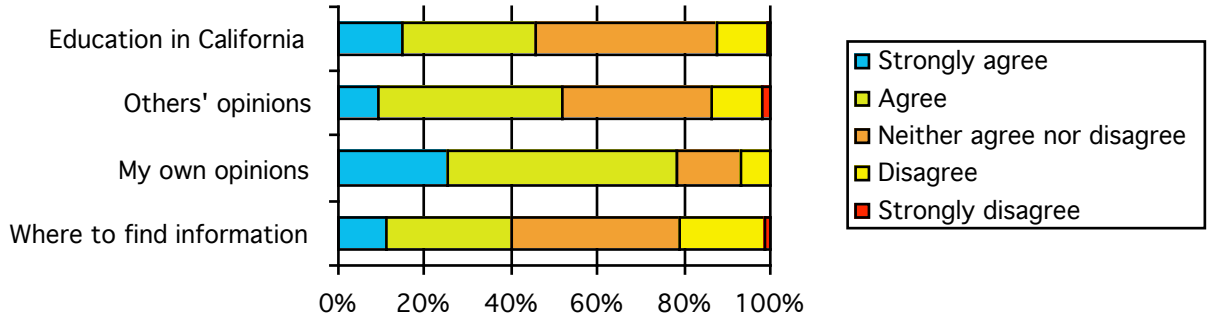
4. I thought more about my own opinions on education.

Such learning can be a major asset for individuals, as well as a social benefit. One participant reflected the importance of such change:

- Most contributors began by addressing their personal needs from their own backgrounds and/or schools. As time went on, they began to develop the 'big picture' idea and saw everything as a whole. That was great!

Interestingly, the learning-related question that received the most agreement ("strongly agree" plus "agree" responses totaling 79%) was on thinking through one's own opinions on education. This was followed by reported learning about "opinions I had not thought about before" (52%), suggesting that many participants did take advantage of the opportunity to hear others' opinions.

It might be expected that education personnel would be less likely than other participants to see themselves as having learned about education and education resources in California. However, this is contradicted by the data. Education personnel as a group were more likely to agree with these statements in the evaluation than other participants (48% vs. 38%, for learning about



Regarding what you may have learned over the course of the dialogue, how would you rate the following statements:

- ***I learned a great deal about education in California.***
- ***I learned a great deal about opinions I had not thought about before.***
- ***I thought more about my own opinions on education.***
- ***I learned a lot about where to find information related to California education.***

Figure 28. What participants learned.

Evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Yes, many people	7	4 %
Yes, a few people	52	27 %
No	134	69 %
Total	193	100 %

Over the course of the Dialogue, did you make personal contacts that you have followed up on, or plan to follow up on?

Figure 29. Networking during the dialogue.

education; 42% vs. 35%, for learning where to find education-related education). Although the numbers involved are not large, it is interesting to further disaggregate this group. Responses regarding learning about education in California were somewhat similar; however, with respect to learning where to find information, “educators” were much more likely to agree (47%) than other participants, while education administrators were less likely to agree.

Other benefits

Increased interest in government and politics (see Figures 8 and 21, plus the following section) can also be seen as an asset for participants. In addition, for some (31%), personal contacts made during the dialogue – and thus potential for future networking – were also a possible benefit (Figure 29). The sort of community building that may occur within a dialogue is an interesting aspect of this activity. If there are repeated events on related topics, the potential for community building will be even greater.

What Joint Committee and staff got out of the dialogue

> *What did policy makers get from the process, including the possibility of changes in public attitudes?*

There are several potential benefits to policy makers from involving the public in dialogue. Goodwill and increased trust may be paramount, but educating the public on issues and gaining information that contributes to better policy decisions are also important, as are opportunities to build support networks and communities.

Participants

The responses to the evaluation shown in Figures 8, 9 and 21 suggest that the dialogue did help to build both goodwill and interest. Many CAMP dialogue participants had previously not been too involved in government and politics. More than one-third of all evaluation respondents (Figure 8) – and 50% of those who had been less active (Figure 21) – reported that the dialogue increased their interest. Asked their opinion on education policy, just over one-third (35%) said their attitude was more positive after the dialogue, although 9% said they had become more negative (Figure 9). Comments, however, indicate that developments after the dialogue – both the final version of the Master Plan and the implementing legislation that must be enacted for the Plan to take force – will be a major factor in the sustainability of these attitudes (see *Impact on policy and engagement*, p. 72).

The dialogue was also an opportunity for the Joint Committee to let the public know more about the draft Plan, and to let the public interact with legislators; half of the 18 Committee members agreed to take part in the dialogue, and several appeared on more than one day. The Web site and, in particular, the Briefing Book served as detailed information resources that are still available for public use. In addition, as demonstrated earlier, *(Information flow,* p. 51) the participants supplied a great deal of material on conditions in local schools, policy effects they have observed, and what approaches do or do not work.

Joint Committee and staff

The Joint Committee, as evidenced by the statement of Senator Alpert *(Origin of the dialogue*, p. 17) had made a commitment to broad public input before the online event was proposed. The legislation that will be necessary to effectively implement the Master Plan may have made the idea of increasing public goodwill, interest and commitment especially interesting. To involve the public the Joint Committee organized hearings, individual members held “Town Hall” meetings in their districts, and there were many informative meetings, including those of the Working Groups, on specific topics, themes, or overviews. There was also the possibility to give online “e-testimony” (see footnote 19).[51] Although e-testimony allowed the public to comment at will,

[51] In 1999–2001, a number of informational meetings on specific aspects of the Plan were held in Sacramento; also, each of the seven Working Groups presented a final report early in 2002. By the time of the dialogue, 19 public hearings had been completed; three additional hearings were held in July and August. During the summer of 2002, 11 “Town Hall” meetings were organized, each hosted by one or more legislators. (Lists of these events are online at http://www.sen.ca.gov/ftp/sen/committee/joint/master_plan/_home/hearing.htp and

rather than attending a meeting, this too is a traditional input mechanism. That is, the public could read a limited amount of information on the Master Plan, and present input to decision makers following a prescribed format; they did not interact with decision makers or receive responses to their input.

To evaluate the CAMP dialogue, pre- and post-dialogue interviews were held with staff members, but not with legislators; Info Ren also received a short write-up on the dialogue and its impact. Ideally legislators would have been interviewed as well, but while legislators had been briefed and had served as panelists, staff members were more deeply involved with the development of the dialogue and the related decisions. They had also served as staff to the Working Groups and had been involved in the details of the draft Plan. During interviews, staff were asked what they hoped to gain from the dialogue. Afterwards they were asked what they had gotten, if their hopes had been borne out, whether the public response they had heard in this and other venues had differed, and so forth. The questions were open ended and there were only seven consultants, so no statistics are presented.

The group was generally positive regarding online dialogue. The hope to hear from those who were not political insiders was fulfilled, but not that of hearing from a broader demographic spectrum of the public. Several would have liked a more specific discussion. This is not surprising; the staff had been working closely with the Working Groups and the draft Plan for many months, and wanted to know what people thought about specific recommendations. There was some feeling that the discussion centered on the Working Group topics, rather than the Plan (see *Nature and complexity of issues,* p. 69). Those who saw dialogue more as a barometer, a view of people's perspectives, than a source of specifics were more content with the course of the event.

There were also comments on the mechanics of the dialogue, that message posting might have been faster, and that it would have been preferable for state staff to have done more toward marketing and recruiting the right people to participate. For Info Ren, it was important to learn that a few Joint Committee staff had not been sure that it was appropriate for them post messages to the discussion.

Online dialogue was seen as far more interactive than other venues for public comment. It involves more people and makes room for some who don't often come to public events. For many, staff felt this would have been a first in terms of being able to address a legislator directly. Some felt they also learned more about legislators' views – they also spoke their minds.

Public hearings were described as relatively structured and formal; most who testify do so as part of their job, appearing on behalf of an organization (lobbyists, unions or professional associations) or due to their special expertise. Many speakers are interested in very specific policy recommendations. Public meetings may be "long and boring" (with one formal statement following another) and are a "one-shot" format – once you have spoken, there is no opportunity to rebut another person's comments. Since people have just one chance, they sometimes feel that they must summarize a large number of opinions as quickly as possible. As one participant put it, describing similar hearings:

- After taking time off work, traveling, staying overnight, you may get 2 minutes at a State Board of Education meeting... and then you often cannot comment in the moment when

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http://www.sen.ca.gov/ftp/SEN/COMMITTEE/JOINT/MASTER_PLAN/_home/COMPLETED_HEARINGS_AND_REPORTS.HTM). The e-testimony page (http://www.hpcnet.org/cgi-bin/global/a_bus_card.cgi?SiteID=94#alltest) opened in March of 2002.

> your voice needs to be heard. The feeling is the decisions were already made before they started the meeting and you are being tolerated.

The Town Hall meetings were less formal and more public; most included a panel to inform the public. They also took questions and statements of opinion. The tenor of the public sessions varied based on the skill of the moderators and the temper of those in attendance; responses of the public varied from “thanks for the opportunity” and appreciation for holding events outside Sacramento, to boos, hisses and personal insults. Some meetings were dominated by one interest group.

In contrast, staff saw online dialogue as both involving more people and making room for some who don’t often come to meetings. Discussion was less structured and broader, more weighted toward getting the opinions of the lay public, and comments were more direct than in a hearing. And, though people could have said anything they wanted, it was more civil than some Town Hall meetings. However, some heard dialogue messages as being “in a similar vein” to comments heard elsewhere (though in the dialogue there were more who spoke for themselves as individuals and fewer organization representatives), and viewed the loss of face-to-face contact and “immediacy” of Town Hall meetings as a trade-off. Different venues were seen as providing different perspectives on public attitudes.

One remarked that there are many points where online dialogue could be used, if this tool were always available. Another said it would have been interesting to have a dialogue earlier, to talk about the goal, intent and vision, and to have been able to build in the program at libraries and community colleges; then people would have been familiar with the idea and prepared for a second dialogue to talk about the draft Plan.

Chapter VI. Issues for online dialogue

This chapter extends our discussion on the value of participation, addressing some practical issues reflected in the CAMP dialogue. Two related topics are considered: first, dilemmas associated with all public involvement, their relationship to online dialogue, and the degree to which online dialogue offers solutions; and second, organizational questions for online dialogue.

Dilemmas of public involvement

Public involvement is arguably quite desirable; however, it is not as simple as it may appear. The associated dilemmas go to the heart of participation and representation in a diverse society.

Do people want to be engaged?

Engaging the public in political activity appears to be increasingly difficult: though involvement may be valuable, "the public" may not be interested. This is apparent even with respect to the low level of participation involved in voting.[52] Beyond this, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, for example, suggest that people would prefer a sort of "stealth democracy" in which procedures are not "particularly visible"; many of their respondents "do not find politics intrinsically interesting. They express no desire to re-engage with the political process. They do not follow most political issues because they do not care about most issues."[53] This suggests that a desire for public involvement may be incompatible with the present public mood.[54]

Data from CAMP dialogue participants and the similarly enthusiastic groups in earlier online dialogues[55] emphatically present another point of view. CAMP dialogue participants were largely self selected – that is, they read or heard an invitation to participate and decided to accept.[56] Their willingness to invest time in a discussion is probably related to the importance they attach to education, the potential for a connection with policy makers being an added plus. Yet their responses demonstrate that previously many had not been very active politically.

We would argue that the perhaps less mediagenic finding of Hibbing and Theiss-Morse that people want input mechanisms to be available when they see an issue as important is what is applicable here. When no direct relevance is apparent, opportunities for political participation are easily set aside. There are many competing demands, and no matter what venue is used many people, especially those for whom daily living is a struggle, will have great difficulty finding time or energy to take part. Online dialogue can bring together those who *are* interested, even though their numbers may be small in one geographic location, and can provide information to demonstrate relevance to others.

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[52] See footnote 18.
[53] Hibbing, J.R. and Theiss-Morse, E.A. (2001). "Americans' desire for stealth democracy: How declining trust boosts political participation." Paper presented at the Midwest Political Science Association (http://csab.wustl.edu/workingpapers/Theiss-Morse.PDF).
[54] Mueller argues that this is nothing new: see Mueller, J. (1999). "Democracy: Optimal Illusions and Grim Realities" (http://www.democ.uci.edu/democ/papers/mueller.htm).
[55] See for example Beierle and Cayford (2002), op. cit.; the dialogue archive is online at http://www.network-democracy.org/camp/
[56] In contrast, the Hibbing and Theiss-Morse data is based on 1266 respondents to a Gallup survey (a random-digit-dialing sample) and paid participants in eight focus groups, each made up of six to twelve people.

Another aspect of online participation is the possibility it provides for "observers." At first glance it might seem that ideally everyone should take part in exchanging messages – but why? Observers (the "non-posters" in the CAMP dialogue) can, without travel time or paying for hotels or restaurants, make use of the same resources – from background material to linked messages – as other participants. For some, being an observer may also be a first step toward taking part in other ways. In any case this demonstration of interest should be seen as a form of participation, especially when it takes place over a period of time and involves repeated visits to a project Web site. Observers can get a "taste" of an issue without making a major commitment, and use the Briefing Book to explore it in more detail as their interest deepens.

Who is or is not involved?

Decision quality is closely related to the adequacy of the information available to decision makers, and the extent to which it is used. When those who will be affected by a decision are included in the discussion, new perspectives and information are likely to become available – for example, on the problem definition, public values regarding alternatives, or the likely consequences of proposed policies. Instead, however, the public's role in the evolution of policy is typically limited, particularly for underserved groups. The lay public who choose to take part are often few in number, and their role is generally limited to appearances at public hearings and/or meetings with legislative staff. Hearings are announced with a public notice, but typically there is no systematic attempt to seek out and engage either the most relevant stakeholders or a representative cross-section of the public. As illustrated by lobbying campaigns everywhere, exactly who attends a hearing, testifies or writes to legislators also depends on which interest groups – whether trade associations, advocates for educational reform or others – have targeted the issue. Thus the number of participants may increase without increasing the breadth of representation. On the other hand, it is far better to have interest groups represented up front than to attempt to shut them out.

When a variety of stakeholders are involved, both the public and the decision makers can hear and compare multiple viewpoints on decision alternatives and consequences. The CAMP dialogue data suggests that when diverse participants can interact in a non-adversarial setting, they can learn from each other, and that a carefully implemented process can increase interest in politics and government. Also, some of the pressure may be taken off government officials; instead of the traditional relationship in which they receive input and take the responsibility for aggregating (or selecting) opinions, participants with differing opinions can interact and may discover mutual values or other points of agreement.[57] For decision makers, even without a representative sample, the increased involvement of "real people" may have an additional effect. In California and nationally, we have heard interest in encouraging the development of what some have called a "public voice" as a means of increasing the political will to construct policies that would otherwise be politically infeasible.

In defining participants for policy discussions, it is essential to include the question of which legislators, governmental officials and staff should be encouraged to take part, since this often determines whether the process will have the potential to lead to change. Especially when the implementation of a decision will require cross-departmental or cross-agency commitment, not only the decision makers but also those who will be responsible for implementation should be included, perhaps as participants. Consideration should be given to building commitment both within and between agencies or departments. For example, supplying information about a coming discussion and encouraging questions should begin prior to the event and continue

[57] Fishkin, J. "Democracy in Texas: The frontier spirit." *The Economist,* 347, p. 31. May 16th 1998.

through the period of analyzing public comments. Another sort of governmental involvement is needed when discussion centers on policies that affect state or local governments; in this case many governmental players will be among the stakeholders who should be involved.

As noted in Chapter III, Information Renaissance makes the assumption that a successful dialogue requires the identification and involvement of key stakeholder groups, as well as other interested members of the public. Dialogue sponsors need to think whether their usual discussion partners are the right ones for each specific topic. Again, though, "involvement" is often difficult to obtain. Potential participants need to hear about the discussion, understand its relevance to their lives, and be able to make use of the venue provided. As discussed in *New voices* (p. 46), for a successful dialogue stakeholders need to be taken into account in planning the outreach, timing and presentation of materials.

Additional steps to encourage involvement could be taken, such as "active notification" – requesting the public to sign up to receive e-mail notices when their topics of interest are under discussion, and background materials could be built into a resource for the wider community outside the dialogue. However, the issue of who takes part in a dialogue will remain a concern. This is pointed up by the demographic composition of the CAMP dialogue (in which both Info Ren and the Joint Committee had hoped to have many more students and parents, as well as more ethnic and economic diversity): just as for in-person political participation, self-selection in online dialogue means there is no assurance that relevant stakeholders will be represented. The generality of this problem is pointed up by Beierle and Cayford's finding that in nearly 60% of 63 case studies of face-to-face participation, "participants were not at all representative of the wider public."[58]

For those who are interested and have access, an online activity can encourage involvement in ways that will never be possible in one-time face-to-face events. An online event, open day and night over several days or weeks, has a clear edge in terms of accessibility in time and location. For those who live outside a city, the disabled, students, parents with young children or other caregivers, the flexibility of an online event can make the difference between participation and non-participation. Selection effects – the question of who wants to be or can be involved in this way – are somewhat different online: those for whom Internet access is difficult or impossible, or technophobes, will be more disadvantaged; those who benefit from flexibility in time or place of participation will be relatively advantaged. We believe that online discussion has the potential to bring in diverse participants, and that increases in Internet access over time will broaden this group still further. Online dialogue can also encourage participation by allowing interactions that feel quite direct, by helping participants to become better informed, by facilitating a new kind of interchange on complex issues, by encouraging collaboration, and perhaps by increasing trust and commitment. Other advantages of online dialogue using the Info Ren model, particularly when there are diverse groups of participants, are suggested by Sunstein's tests[59] for a "well-functioning system of self expression": providing encounters with views and topics one has not specifically selected, and at the same time giving a group of people a common experience that

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[58] Beierle and Cayford (2002), op. cit., p. 24.

[59] Sunstein, C. (2001). "The daily me," Chapter 1 in *Republic.com*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey (http://pup.princeton.edu/chapters/s7014.html). These tests have been better accepted than Sunstein's widely disputed concerns about the Internet; see e.g. James Fallows, "He's Got Mail." (March 14, 2002) New York Review of Books, v. 49, no. 4 (http://www.nybooks.com/articles/15180); and the Boston Review forum "Is the Internet Good for Democracy?" (http://bostonreview.mit.edu/ndf.html#Internet). Uslaner, E. (No date; post-2000) in "Trust, Civic Engagement, and the Internet" agrees with concerns re filtering but gives interesting comments on "Good Net" versus "Bad Net" theories (www.pewtrusts.com/pdf/vf_pew_internet_trustpaper.pdf).

they value. We see dialogues like the CAMP event, with participants in one large group and using mechanisms such as those described under *Civility* (p. 78), as working against any tendency to filter online contacts so as to avoid association with people who have beliefs that differ from one's own.

What can be done when important groups of stakeholders don't sign up to take part? Info Ren has attempted to work toward a solution by using the information collected at registration to get an idea of who is missing, so that outreach to underrepresented stakeholders can be intensified. In the case of geographical representation, this is relatively straightforward. When seeking target groups who do not often participate in any political process, this outreach will be much more difficult, though adequate financial resources could allow innovative attempts. This might include the development of targeted explanations of why the discussion will be relevant to them, with a careful balance between attempting to convince and overselling what a discussion can achieve. Otherwise, one can work to involve intermediaries who are in touch with the target groups and who can either urge participation or take part themselves: at the least, they can ask questions that might be raised by those who are missing. A skilled and knowledgeable moderator could also do this. More active measures are also possible, depending on the objectives of the discussion: having some participants role-play the missing groups or, given good demographic statistics and a very large group, asking survey questions and using weighted statistics when interpreting the results.

Nature and complexity of issues

The complexity and interrelatedness of many policy issues increase the need for public understanding and discussion, but also increase the difficulty of involving and informing the general public. Better-informed participants are more likely to enjoy interactions, to get something out of a discussion, and to have an impact on policy. Learning about the topic is also likely to increase a person's interest – what it means on a personal level, what it connects to – and to enhance their ability to take action or make a long-term commitment. However, participants who are new to a policy discussion may not be willing or able, or may not have time, to absorb a great deal of information before entering a discussion. Given this disjuncture, establishing a real dialogue among a diverse group of participants on a complex policy question will be a challenge. Ways must be found to formulate the discussion and provide background information such that complexity does not create an impenetrable barrier to participation.

The CAMP dialogue presented additional difficulties:

- *Strategy vs. local issues.* Many people are concerned about local schools and immediate educational outcomes, but the Plan is a rather intangible, long-term, state-level strategy and planning document. Since implementing legislation will be necessary to carry out some of its elements, no one could answer questions like "exactly what will it do?" or "how much will it cost?"
- *"Messy" issues.* Many educational issues are not just complex but "messy"[60] in one or more ways: variables are interconnected, causal relationships between interventions and

[60] "Managers are not confronted with problems that are independent of each other, but with dynamic situations that consist of complex systems of changing problems that interact with each other. I call such situations messes." Ackoff, R.L. (1979). "The future of operations research is past." *Journal of the Operations Research Society,* 30(2), p. 93. One approach to such a situation is outlined by R. E. Horn in "Knowledge Mapping for Complex Social Messes" (2001; http://www.stanford.edu/~rhorn/SpchPackard.html).

outcomes are ambiguous, and many past efforts have not produced the desired effects. Further, there may be tension between individual and societal goals, personal priorities may conflict, and funding programs are generally not coordinated.

- *Different levels of public knowledge and involvement.* The seven Working Groups spent many months digesting information in specific subject areas. They worked hard to reach agreement within groups, and to incorporate best practices and research in their recommendations. Many of these were included in a forward-thinking draft Plan – 73 pages long in the official PDF version – that suggested many changes (Box 2, p. 21). Other members of the public who had gone through a similar process might have come to the same conclusions; for those who had not, the need for change was not always apparent.

Choosing themes and topics. Any many-faceted policy document presents hard choices in selecting discussion material. For the CAMP dialogue, the 53 recommendations (and many sub-recommendations) of the draft Master Plan suggested an enormous number of potential themes and topics. Even in two weeks of discussion, only a small fraction of this material could be covered. The draft Plan was the intended focus of the dialogue, but the Working Group reports were available considerably earlier. They were summed up and publicized by interested organizations, and, because publicity for the dialogue had to be sent out before the draft Plan was available, the dialogue was organized (with the agreement of Joint Committee staff) around the Working Group themes. After the dialogue, some staff felt this had pushed the focus toward the Working Group recommendations. It might have been possible to compensate during the discussion by asking questions about specifics, but this would have required more resources, including staff time from both Info Ren and the Joint Committee.

To arrive at questions for the dialogue, Info Ren requested suggestions from Joint Committee staff and panelists, worked with staff to make a selection and arrive at final wording, but took the responsibility for the selection. The choice between raising barriers to public involvement and having a more detailed discussion seemed very clear. Compromises were reached in which questions were often stated in a general way, followed by the more specific recommendation and links to background material. However, after the dialogue some Committee staff were still disappointed about the lack of specific discussions. Here too more resources and support might have been used to achieve this aim, but this brings up a professional issue for moderators. Many feel that it should not be necessary for moderators or facilitators to have a deep understanding of the subject area under discussion. Dialogue on complex issues challenges this view: to follow a discussion and encourage thinking through multiple aspects of issues or to rapidly pick out points where a question would be effective may require considerable knowledge.

One alternative is for the sponsor to assign staff to work full-time on the dialogue while it is open for comments. This points up the need for sponsors to understand in advance the trade-offs between broad involvement and more detailed discussions, and for organizers to be able to explain what would be required to inform the public sufficiently to have a meaningful dialogue on issues that require some depth of understanding.

Background materials. Background materials are an essential part of public involvement with policy: the more complex the topic (or the more unskilled the participants), the greater the need for careful attention to this area. An online event has potential advantages over other venues with respect to educating and informing the public. Ideally, a variety of information can be made available, tailored to varied participants, and new techniques – for example, development of interactive presentations – can be explored. This is especially important for complex, intertwined issues. Rather than giving each participant an enormous stack of printed documents, an overview can be presented, with links to progressive levels of detail that can be called up as

desired. Discussion questions can be linked to specific background material, and a working glossary can be made available. Nevertheless, it is not easy to assure that participants will make use of these materials. Moderators can encourage this, and links and pop-ups can be used to remind people of what is available.

In preparing for the CAMP dialogue a good deal of time was devoted to the Briefing Book. Developing this material was both easier and more difficult because of the amount of information on education that is available on the Internet. There were no resources to allow experimentation with presentation, simplified language summaries or Spanish translations. However, Briefing Book material was organized into pages on "crosscutting issues:" 13 topics such as accountability, "alignment," assessment and equity[61] that occurred throughout the draft Plan or were related to topics on the discussion agenda. Each of these pages began with a short, non-technical summary – for example, explaining the use of the word "alignment" in the Plan, or assessment as an issue – and included many links to online resources. Searchable versions of the draft Master Plan and Working Group reports were created and put into the Briefing Book, as were many links to the draft Plan and other background materials.

Explaining content and relevance. During the CAMP dialogue the draft Plan's treatment of some areas, particularly adult education and vocational education, raised great concern among participants. To some extent this was based on misunderstanding of the draft Plan, probably exacerbated by uncertainty about the effects of its recommendations and a degree of distrust in government intervention. The message archive shows that the Joint Committee, staff and panelists worked diligently to supply information, but this was only partially successful. In retrospect, a plan for dealing with such situations, perhaps stepping back to a discussion of common goals or calling for a discussion of pros and cons, might have been helpful.

One approach to managing controversial issues would be to identify such topics before a dialogue is undertaken and pay attention, as one Joint Committee staffer put it, to "explaining why things are important." Vocational education is one example. The draft Plan put the emphasis on career education, with the intent that students should be encouraged to keep their options for further education open. However, some interpreted the lack of attention to vocational education as elitist, and offering little to those who do not go on to college. Other topics, including mandatory kindergarten as one response to the need to help large numbers of children learn English before first grade, assessment as a means of measuring outcomes and promoting accountability, or consolidation of small school districts, encountered similar difficulties.

The need for more explanation of the Plan's treatment of such topics was realized only as the dialogue progressed. Staff familiarity with the Working Groups that preceded the CAMP dialogue may have made it more difficult to see this need. As outlined above, these groups involved a large number of citizens in a very intensive process, in which many participants were – or became – quite well informed. As often occurs in participatory processes,[62] less attention was given to informing the larger community. Unfortunately, sponsors may feel they have worked intensively with the community, without realizing that this same process can increase the need to explain decisions and recommendations to the general public. The deliberations of the Working Groups supported far-reaching change, which was incorporated in the draft Plan. For some of those who had not experienced the year of reading and discussion on the issues, it

[61] Other issues were data, ESEA, finance, governance, professional personnel, quality education, school readiness, standards and technology. Links to each issue page are given in the dialogue archive at http://www.network-democracy.org/camp/bb/bb.shtml (see "Crosscutting Issues").
[62] Beierle and Cayford (2002), op. cit., e.g. p. 32 and p. 48.

was difficult to comprehend the rationale for certain recommendations in the draft Plan. (The Joint Committee responded to this in the final Plan, where some of the changes identified by Committee staff as due to the dialogue were "additional supportive text and research background to support more controversial or challenging recommendations.")

When the need is recognized and the resources are available, online dialogue presents opportunities to use a variety of techniques to explain and clarify complex or controversial topics. However, making use of these opportunities takes time and skill. One of the issues involved is "telling vs. selling."

Telling vs. selling. "Explaining" has its pitfalls. As illustrated by comments quoted under *Engagement and potential impact* (p. 59), participants may be quick to feel that an outcome has been pre-determined, and that a concept is being "sold" instead of offered for discussion. This may or may not be true: one result of distant, complex and ambiguous issues is to lower public confidence in government, including its ability to determine and implement a reasonable course of action. Messy issues make it harder to dispute this lack of confidence: for example, a failure to improve education due to the lack of alignment in the system, weak connections between programs and outcomes, and other such problems is difficult to distinguish from failure due to a lack of political will.

Sponsors should therefore think carefully about what they want from the process, what is or is not open to discussion, and state this honestly to participants. If the sponsor is open to a full-blown exchange of ideas – which may be more likely if public involvement takes place early in a policy process, before a proposal is on the table – a more free-wheeling discussion may be possible. When a proposal that the sponsor supports has already been made, it is far better to state this up front. Openness makes it easier to treat a participant comment that "they've already made up their minds" as an opportunity to deepen the discussion. For example, a panelist or staff member can be invited to present the reasons for their position, and participants can be requested to discuss these reasons and present counterarguments or alternatives.

Impact on policy and engagement

The outcome of a dialogue can be seen in terms of at least two types of impact, both important in terms of social goals for public involvement. One perspective asks if public involvement has made a difference in the resulting legislation or other decision-making. Another relates to participants: has the activity changed their outlook, for example their interest in government, their views on specific topics or their understanding of the views of other stakeholders? Success here suggests the creation of an active, engaged citizenry that pays attention to its government, and is willing to be involved in a positive way. These two types of impact, however, intertwine in a dilemma. The public's interest in policymaking is increased by expectations that their input will be used, but if expectations are disappointed attitudes may become more negative. However, honestly and directness in stating how much room there is for change and who will make the decisions provides a basis for dealing with these questions as they arise in a discussion.

As for many decisions, direct impact on policymaking is difficult to evaluate (and stakeholders may differ on whether a given impact is positive or negative.[63]) For the Master Plan, it is clear that public comments had an effect; staff can point to changes in the draft Plan that emerged as a result. However, the dialogue was only part of an extensive process, and long-term results will become clear only as the Plan is enacted, through legislation and local efforts. For citizen

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[63] Ashford, N.A. (1999). *Public Participation in Contaminated Communities.* MIT Technology and Law Program (http://web.mit.edu/ctpid/www/tl/TL-pub-PPCC.html). Chapter III, "Prior Scholarly Work on Public Participation," p. 6.

engagement, data on impact has been discussed under *New Voices* (p. 46) and *Engagement and potential impact* (p. 59): for example, participants saw the dialogue as having changed their outlook and interest in government. A message archive statement from a Joint Committee staffer directly involved with the Plan suggests that change was mutual: "Your comments have challenged some of my own thinking…."

Public involvement in policymaking can only have an impact on a decision if a de facto decision has not yet been made, if decision makers listen, and if they take public comments into account. This seems self evident, but ambiguities in these areas are a source of unhappiness in many participatory processes, as seen in participant comments under *Engagement and potential impact*. What may be less evident is the potential benefit to policy makers of public participation in policymaking. Here too utility flows, in principle, from the social goals of Chapter II. In practice, "messy" processes – together with public distrust – increase the need of decision makers for the understanding and support of the public. In an era when attention often seems most focused on government when things go wrong, enlisting the public in working through issues become more attractive. For education, Public Agenda has said "Advocates believe that if the public has its say over what schools should look like, people will once again recognize them as the public's schools, as something worth supporting."[64]

On the other hand, to public officials participatory processes often seem chaotic and unpredictable; they may be seen as taking too much time, or as adding little; or decision makers may feel that it is not "safe" to open up policymaking, apart from giving information and asking for public input. Even with a degree of openness, there may be accusations that policy makers have already made up their minds and are not really listening; or that the right stakeholders have not been involved. In particular, when the public is already somewhat distrustful, asking for "input," particularly when there is no real intent to take that input into account (for example, when what is really wanted is a ratification of a decision), may be less "safe" than attempting to create a feeling of working together to find mutually acceptable solutions, either through a deliberative process or through collaboration.

Engaging in open discussion, deliberation or collaboration with the public will call for new skills on the part of officials, and for many members of the public as well. Online dialogue has the advantage that interchanges take place a bit more slowly than in face-to-face encounters; people have time to think before they speak, and various mechanisms can be used to encourage civility (see *Civility*, p. 78). Background materials also facilitate informed discussion, as outlined earlier. Presentation of these materials and planning to make good use of online comments may need to be learned, but online dialogue can serve as an intermediate step that increases skills and trust and opens paths toward real collaboration. Even without collaboration, the impact of public involvement will be significantly increased if it occurs earlier in the policy development process; this is an interesting goal for online dialogue.

Trust

Trust in government has been decreasing,[65] and we have suggested that lack of trust is one reason for difficulties in public-government interactions. Short of major reforms and better understandings of causal relationships between policy and outcomes, public participation in the policy process may be one of the few avenues to a "virtuous cycle" in which improving interaction and trust between government and public could lead to more participation and perhaps yet greater trust. Here too, the dilemma is that participation may also have the opposite

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[64] Farkas et al. (2001), op. cit.
[65] See footnote 16.

effect – when increased interest in government raises expectations that are subsequently disappointed, trust may decrease. As for all participatory processes, it is essential to spell out carefully the degree of influence that participants can expect, but the problem can easily persist.

Again, participant comments under *Engagement and potential impact* (p. 59) underline the need to deal with this issue: quite a few felt that the outcome of the dialogue was pre-determined, or that the institutions involved are captives of special interest groups, or simply wondered if the dialogue would make a difference. Others were quite specific that if the public comments had no effect, they would be disillusioned. In addition, distrust was evident in remarks about the timing of the dialogue and the possibility that this might have been an attempt to limit participation:

- I am a teacher. The last 2 weeks of classes are the worst possible time for a dialogue on education if you really want teachers to participate. The scheduling was either quite insensitive or deliberate. After many years, I am almost cynical enough to believe it was the latter. I really pushed to find the time to participate. The issues are vital.

When a "messy" situation decreases trust, it becomes very difficult to discuss education and many other current issues. There is rarely time to develop a common background of information, and it is easy to assume that missteps are a result of "politics," whether or not this is true. In such a situation, it is especially important for the "public" and the "government" to begin to see each other as individuals, and to perceive that it might be possible to work together toward solutions. In this respect online dialogue offers a great deal of promise. The discussion (and, ideally, the process as a whole) is transparent: participants see not only their own messages, but also those of others, and information can easily be made available. The interchanges often feel direct and personal, and the resulting feelings of community may act on officials as well as the public, providing an impetus for listening and change on both sides. Some of the open-ended questions give examples of "thinking of each other as people:"

- I got a sense that they care and that they want to make a reasonable change. There was evidence that the people involved care a great deal and are sometimes at a loss where to start.
- …how do we help policy makers hear our concerns?

If a participatory process is perceived as transparent and fair – and for a political process, this includes the idea that it is non-partisan, that viewpoints are represented in a balanced way – participants will be more likely to accept the results,[66] and trust may increase. As online policy discussion becomes more common, potential participants will become more selective in deciding whether to take part, based on non-partisanship as well as other concerns:

- Will the sponsoring agency listen?
- Will it be worth my time? Will my comments make a difference?
- Is the process an opportunity for discussion or an attempt to convince – to sell me a particular viewpoint or political stance?
- Does the background information give a balanced, non-partisan overview of the issues involved? Is it authoritative and complete? Who has provided it?

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[66] The general important of perceiving a process as fair and building trust is covered in Kim, W.C. and Mauborgne, R.A. (1997). "Fair Process: Managing in the Knowledge Economy." *Harvard Business Review* (July/August). A discussion of this article by Victor Rozek, including the question of how long trust will last if it is not accompanied by fair outcomes, is also available online (http://www.midrangeserver.com/mid/mid021903-story05.html).

- Who decided which people would be on the panels – and why? Do the agency representatives and "experts" in the discussion represent a spectrum of viewpoints?
- Will the atmosphere be one I will enjoy? (See *The dialogue as a public space…,* p. 51.)
- Will the topics and questions lead to good discussion? Do they cover my concerns? Can participants influence the course of the discussion?
- Who will make the decisions, and how?

Questions like these need to be considered by sponsors and organizers of dialogues when designing an online event. Each of the elements of a dialogue has a contribution to make. As outlined in the following section, central organizational principles should include clear objectives; broad, inclusive outreach; appropriate background materials; relevant, articulate panelists; and, importantly, a commitment by the sponsoring agency to interact with and respond to participants.

Following these principles and other suggestions in this report can increase the potential for enhancing trust, but one event cannot be expected to effect lasting change. Problems with trust emerge from the society as a whole, and will be very difficult to solve; in Beierle and Cayford's cases, the social goal of building trust had the least success.[67] This emphasizes the great importance of attention to this area; real improvements in trust will require sustained efforts at communication and discussion. As discussed in Chapter VII (*Institutionalization,* p. 85), developing best practices and ethical standards for public participation need to be developed to support these efforts.[68] Again, skilled online moderators and staff can make a major contribution. Coleman and Gøtze give an online slant on principles for facilitators that encourage trust, a variety of facilitator roles and basic listening skills for public officials.[69]

Organizational questions

Roles of sponsors, organizers and others

Info Ren-produced online dialogues have benefited from relationships with a number of non-profit organizations, foundations and government agencies. Our experience with the CAMP dialogue has helped us to sharpen our definitions of these relationships and has made us realize that organizing successful public involvement activities requires a clear delineation of the roles of the various participants.

Sponsoring agency. For a dialogue in a political context, the sponsor is the unit of government seeking information through an online dialogue. For the CAMP dialogue in effect, if not formally, the sponsoring agency was the Joint Committee to Develop a Master Plan for Education. The sponsoring agency must make a commitment of staff time for participation in the dialogue.

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[67] Beierle and Cayford (2002), op. cit., p. 33.
[68] Some steps have been taken; see OECD (2003). "Engaging Citizens Online for Better Policy-making" (http://www.oecd.org/pdf/M00039000/M00039857.pdf), particularly Boxes 1 and 3; and Steven Clift (2002). "Online Consultations and Events: Top Ten Tips" (http://www.mail-archive.com/dowire@tc.umn.edu/msg00479.html). Government guides for pubic involvement more generally are also available, e.g. for the UK (http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/Consultation/Code.htm, including an interesting checklist), Canada (http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpfb-dgpsa/ocapi-bpcp/framework_guides_cover_e.html) and Australia (http://www.ccu.dpc.wa.gov.au/index.cfm?fuseaction=publications#consultres1); in the U.S., see the Environmental Protection Agency Public Involvement Policy (2003), especially "Seven basic steps for effective public involvement" (http://www.epa.gov/publicinvolvement/public/index.htm).
[69] Coleman, S. & Gøtze. J. (2001). *Bowling Together: Online Public Engagement in Policy Deliberation.* Hansard Society, London, Chapter 2 (http://bowlingtogether.net/chapter2.html).

Further, if it expects serious public comments in the course of the dialogue, it should state clearly how it intends to process that input and how recommendations from the public will be considered for incorporation into its final policy. A flaw in the production of the CAMP dialogue, as discussed below, was that some of these points were ambiguous.

Organizer. This is the group that is putting together the dialogue – perhaps serving as a broker, creating the Web site, moderating the online discussion, developing summaries and maintaining the archive. The organizer may also create the Briefing Book and line up panelists or oversee the work of other groups that carry out these tasks. Info Ren handled these tasks in the CAMP dialogue, but with significant help from staff of the Joint Committee and with resource material from several non-profit organizations that work to further educational reform, particularly EdSource. In other events this work might be divided among several organizations, although there will be a need for some coordinating authority to provide coherence in presentation.

Funder. Funding, too, can involve multiple sources. Info Ren originally expected that the Joint Committee would be a major funder of the CAMP dialogue or would provide active help in fund-raising. Info Ren planned to supplement these funds with money raised from private foundations. While Info Ren was successful in covering the basic costs for the event with grants from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, IBM Corporation and Intel California, no fund-raising was forthcoming from the Joint Committee. A significant portion of the dialogue therefore had to be subsidized by the organizer. As described previously, this also entailed a cutback in the projected scope of the event and necessitated last-minute decisions, both of which reduced participation. While there is no logical need for the sponsoring agency to be one of the funders, this is a good way for the agency to demonstrate that it gives the dialogue a high priority in its efforts to solicit public involvement. It also makes it much easier to obtain supplemental funding, since the dialogue then clearly bears the imprimatur of the sponsoring agency.

Partner. This term could be applied to all of the groups that contribute to a dialogue – whether by supplying material for the Briefing Book, helping to identify and recruit panelists, or helping to advertise the dialogue and recruit participants. Ideally, the set of partners should include advocacy groups on both sides of any controversial issue. For example, in the CAMP dialogue, Info Ren approached representatives of the various state agencies that deal with education, the teachers unions, and non-profit groups interested in educational reform. The dialogue would have profited from more explicit inclusion of these groups – as panelists, for example – but many did help in outreach by letting their members or supporters know about the activity.

Defining roles and responsibilities. The development and production of an online dialogue involves an interplay among sponsors, organizers, funders and other partners. It is useful to define the roles and responsibilities of the sponsor and the organizer with respect to each of the elements of the dialogue. In addition to providing an event that encourages constructive engagement, assurances are needed for all – particularly for the public – about the commitment of the sponsor and the organizer to a fair and non-partisan process. Also, who is sponsoring the event, who is organizing it and who is funding it should be clear to participants.

The first point and last points below require the involvement of the sponsor; for other items, either the sponsor or the organizer may assume responsibility. However, due to the potential impact on public profile, the sponsor should be involved in this decision-making and understand all of the arrangements:

- *Clear objectives.* This requires the sponsoring agency to lay out a set of issues, identify stakeholders and indicate why public comments are being sought and what use will be made of the input.
- *Broad, inclusive outreach.* Both the stakeholders who have been identified and the general public need to be notified and encouraged to take part.

- *Appropriate background material.* The Briefing Book should cover the subjects under discussion in a non-partisan manner, using language that will be understandable to all participants. There should be introductory summaries for more complex materials.
- *Relevant, articulate panelists.* The panelists can set the tone of the event, so their responsiveness and clarity are important. Further, their views should cover a range of political options on the issues under discussion, lest the dialogue be viewed as slanted toward one pole.
- *Commitment to action by the sponsoring agency.* The more explicit this commitment can be, the more seriously participants will approach the event. Steps include:
    - Taking part in the discussion.
    - Responding to participants' input and questions.
    - Using public input in the decision-making process.

Agreements regarding the response to comments from the public may assume various levels of formality, ranging from a simple statement from the sponsoring government agency to a legal requirement that binds the agency to respond to public comment. For the CAMP dialogue there was a welcome message from Senator Dede Alpert, Chair of the Joint Committee, which expressed the Committee's interest and intent with respect to the dialogue. In other forums, such as the Notice and Comment process followed in federal rulemaking, this commitment may be contained in governing statutes.

The sponsor's use of comments from a dialogue is a critical issue, but a prior question is how to get a grip on the useful information contained in a large number of messages. If sponsoring agency staff are heavily involved in the online process, they will have a basic awareness of the comments received. However, during a large dialogue it is difficult to maintain an overview; a thousand or so messages can be a challenge. Many alternatives and techniques are possible to help in summing up messages: pop-up questionnaires during an event could act as indicators, specific staff could be designated to deal with each theme, and so forth. One way to facilitate exploration of a message archive can be seen in the archive of a previous dialogue (http://www.network-democracy.org/cgi-bin/epa-pip/show_tables.pl). Here agency staff went through messages to identify key topics and problems, and Info Ren set up a search engine that allows agency staff – or anyone else – to search the archive by topic and/or key words.

Project management, overseeing the process as a whole, is typically the responsibility of the organizer. Mechanisms should be in place for the organizer to respond to questions about the Web site, and to make modifications, as necessary. In the CAMP dialogue, as noted, Info Ren also took the responsibility for several other elements, including the identification and notification of stakeholders and construction of the Briefing Book. Identification of panelists, again, was a shared effort between the two organizations. The Joint Committee did a good job with respect to its own strong representation among panelists, an important feature for a discussion in a political context. Responding to questions was not done very systematically, but some Committee staffers worked very conscientiously toward this end, and this appeared to pay off in terms of public opinion. Use of the comments was less clear. Although a great deal of effort was put into collecting input in the dialogue and elsewhere, no formal process was established to make use of it.

When the organizer is under contract to the sponsoring agency, then lines of authority will be clear and roles may be better defined. Absent a contract, it is still advisable to develop a specific written agreement. Functional organizational structures gelled without such an agreement in the case of the CAMP dialogue, but only due to the dedication of individual staff members; more discussion between the sponsor and the organizer would have been helpful. It is easy to imagine a far less successful outcome, so a more robust structure would be preferable.

Suggesting discussion of these issues between the organizer and the sponsoring agency raises some interesting questions on the dynamics of this relationship. What is the responsibility of the organizer to inform a potential sponsor about participatory processes in general and their role in the dialogue in particular, including the need for commitment and for a plan to deal with the resulting input? Is this a question of educating the sponsor on new mechanisms for public involvement – or, as it is more likely to be perceived, a matter of selling one of the organizer's products? And once the agency has taken on the role of sponsor, how much of the activity should they continue to delegate to the organizer?

Although this was not an issue in the CAMP dialogue, it is easy to think of situations in which an online dialogue could become very contentious. Whose job is it to defuse an inflammatory situation? Who will decide if some messages are defamatory or otherwise unacceptable for a public discussion? If a governmental agency is in charge of the event, will their legal counsel feel that they are legally constrained from imposing any restrictions on the speech of the participants? This is only one of a flock of issues we have encountered in discussions with several federal agencies. We believe that these questions may sometimes lead governmental sponsors to prefer an arms-length relationship with the organizer, who could conduct a forum outside of standard government channels but provide input into those channels.

As online events become less unusual and more interesting for their commercial potential, the need to consider issues such as non-partisanship, how best to inform sponsors and participants, and agreements on roles and responsibilities will grow. This suggests that it is time to begin to define best practices and ethical standards for online discussions.

In Chapter VII we consider a longer-term perspective. We believe that these issues can best be met by making dialogue a standard part of legislative and regulatory processes, and that mechanisms should be put in place to allow for public dialogue on many issues before state or federal legislative bodies. This might involve a new or existing non-partisan agency of government – perhaps something like the current California office of the legislative analyst – or contractual relationships with groups outside government. This approach would solve several problems of sponsorship and production.

Civility

Participants found the CAMP dialogue an enjoyable means of civic engagement; those with diverse viewpoints interacted in a non-adversarial manner, and people felt they learned from each other. Yet online discussion is often said to involve insults and flaming.[70] We suspect that there is no discrepancy here, and that out-of-control exchanges occur most often in un-moderated online forums. The CAMP dialogue (like other Info Ren events) was moderated and extremely civil, as reflected in the participants' assessments in the section on *The dialogue as a public space…,* (p. 51).

The more contentious the topic, the more important it is to achieve a civil discussion, to increase the likelihood that participants will be able to hear each other's views. It is also important to demonstrate the value of dialogue both to the public and to legislators or government agency staff; a non-adversarial exchange is likely to be more attractive to all parties.

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[70] The Hackers Dictionary (http://www.mcs.kent.edu/docs/general/hackersdict/02Entries) defines the verb "to flame" as "to post an e-mail message intended to insult and provoke" and gives a colorful etymology. A popular review of research on flaming and related phenomena is given by Bruce Bower: (May 4, 2002). "The Social Net: Scientists hope to download some insight into online interactions" *Science News Online,* Vol. 161, No. 18 (http://www.sciencenews.org/20020504/bob9.asp).

A non-adversarial tone is not achieved simply by having a moderator who cracks down on the first note of hostility. It isn't the act of moderating a dialogue that keeps it civil; rather it's the fact that uncivil behavior could be restrained if necessary, which means it rarely or never occurs. The initial tone can be set by example, using friendly and informal words in announcements and the opening remarks from invited panelists, and maintained with occasional messages from moderators and other staff. Participants quickly pick up on this tone and help to establish the tenor of the event.

We have seen this phenomenon repeatedly in the online events we have hosted. Many participants quickly develop a strong sense of identification with the group – and this is true even when the group's "tone" is somewhat contentious. If someone attacks the process – or threatens to divert it with inappropriate behavior – members of the group will quickly put things back on track. Thus Info Ren is able to conduct moderated discussion groups in which the moderator seldom, if ever, has to intervene in the discussion. Instead, our staff and moderators mainly help participants focus on the tasks at hand. This, however, again raises the more subtle point that people may simply ignore messages that are "insufficiently civil" (footnote 49). In a threaded discussion these messages tend to get isolated in threads that other people may not read extensively. A skilled moderator may work behind the scenes to work out frustrations, or may encourage the group to consider ideas that are significant, even if stated unpleasantly.

Some of the tricks of the trade can be summarized as follows:

- Ask participants to register as real people – with their actual names and e-mail addresses (although in the interest of diverting spammers, it may be best to suppress publication of these addresses).
- Use the registration form to solicit a telephone number that project staff can use to contact a participant if a technical or process problem should arise.
- State the guidelines for the discussion clearly – no abusive language, no sales pitches, no personal attacks, etc.
- Explain that all messages will be reviewed before being posted on the site.
- Assure that staff are present during advertised hours so as to minimize the delay between the posting of a message and its appearance on the Web site.
- Provide welcoming messages – in response to registration and for visitors to the Web site – that make it clear that people with all viewpoints are invited to participate.
- Have panelists, staff and participants introduce themselves as the dialogue begins.
- Identify staff members and representatives of the sponsoring agency as individuals, preferably with pictures and biographical information.
- Ask project staff to attempt to deal with (or explain) technical glitches – even if they are clearly problems of users or someone else's software. The point is to show that staff are available to deal with whatever problems may come up and to give participants and panelists the confidence that the show will go on as scheduled, even if there are unexpected complications now and then.
- Thank panelists and participants for specific contributions and insights. This helps glue the conversation together by underscoring particular points that have been made, and makes people feel good about the process.
- Practice facilitation "out of band" – that is, behind-the-scenes. Info Ren sometimes sends out e-mail messages during a dialogue, perhaps targeting people who have made no postings. These personalized messages are likely to produce responses, which may highlight technical problems or process issues – or may confirm that many people are following the discussion as readers but don't presently want to post messages.

- Encourage follow-ups, explanations and clarifications. Unlike a town meeting, where contributors are on the spot to use their perhaps three minutes and sit down, an online dialogue has a less hurried dynamic. When staff receive an interesting personal communication from a participant, they can urge the participant to let other people hear what they have to say.
- Provide heads-ups to panelists and staff at the sponsoring agency so that participants' questions and needs will be addressed promptly.
- Assure that moderators, panelists and sponsors' staff are familiar with the Web site and the process of posting messages before the dialogue begins.
- Encourage participants to understand and make use of technical features on the Web site. Tell them where to find how-to information. Remind them how to follow a threaded discussion to help with information overload, and remind them how to find the background information for topics addressed on different days of the discussion.

Mechanics

The mechanics of a dialogue include considerations of both the underlying technology and a number of less technical user issues.

Technology. The technology that underlies an online dialogue must be designed with several audiences in mind. These include the participants, for whom ease of use is paramount; the public officials and others who want to refer to materials in the dialogue archives; the group sponsoring the dialogue; and, finally, academic researchers who might want to examine the dynamic of the dialogue, message contents or other factors.

Some of the demands of these different audiences run at cross-currents, so there is a need to set priorities and perhaps make compromises. Participants need a simple and efficient interface. Public officials need a stable platform, good internal organization and reasonably extensive search capabilities. Standards for data exchange are needed if different units of government are to be able to work together effectively. Academic researchers will be looking for interoperability with other systems that they might use for data analysis. And the group organizing the dialogue will value stability, while seeking a low-cost solution. Depending on the financial and philosophical interests of the organizer, there will be an interest in either protecting a system's proprietary design or facilitating the reproduction of the basic system architecture.

Info Ren prefers an open standards, open source approach to building software for online dialogues, for two reasons. First, there is the desire to allow broad replication of this facility at the lowest possible cost. Open source software – including a Web server (Apache), a relational database (mysql), a mailing list manager (majordomo) and a Web archiver (MhonArc) – forms the core of the Info Ren system used for the CAMP dialogue. All of this software is available at no cost via the Internet, and the core elements are fast, reliable and tested over years of use by an enormous online audience.

The second reason to prefer open standards in the specification of software for public dialogues has to do with scalability and the desire for interoperability with similar systems in use by other organizations and other units of government. The fundamental unit of all messages in our system is a standard e-mail message, supplemented with custom mail headers to identify special features such as messages from panelists or staff, the discussion topic to which a message refers, and a message identifier within the dialogue. Visitors to the Web site don't see unformatted e-mail messages; rather they view versions of the messages that have been converted to html for online display by their own browsers. Researchers, however, can retrieve the original mailbox files for each day of the dialogue and process this material as they like.

By using a standard mailbox format, Info Ren retains the facility to add an e-mail interface to its system, although this was not done in the CAMP dialogue. More importantly, since the system retains all relevant message headers, it would be possible to export messages with XML markup or, more generally, to construct a Web service interface to the system. We believe that approach will be key to the development of scalable systems for online dialogue, so that it will be possible to have online dialogues with tens or hundreds of thousands of individuals, sharing information and exchanging viewpoints in hundreds or thousands of parallel conversations. The mailbox format is not the only possible way to organize messages for this purpose: for example, a different format has long been used for the exchange of Usenet news. But systems that use proprietary message formats or that lose message headers in the process of converting materials for display on the Web are much poorer candidates for a system of scalable parallel online dialogues. And, if the pros and cons (including cost) are carefully weighed, it is such a system that governments are likely to want to develop.

User issues. User issues for an online dialogue system are less technical in nature. For the most part they relate to ease of use and the ability of computer novices to come up to speed rapidly. Responses in the evaluation forms show that the audience for the CAMP dialogue was very broad in this regard: some participants praised Info Ren's system for its simplicity and ease of use, while others found the system too complex to navigate. We interpret this range of responses as indicative of the range of Internet experience in the audience, but it is a reminder that it is important to design with the low end of the experience curve in mind. There are many possibilities for guidance for less-skilled users, including tutorials, pop-ups offering help, and a "tips" file, but how to offer enough help for the least skilled without boring others, and how to assure that these functions will be found and *used* by those who need them remain difficult issues.

As discussed in the preceding section, we find it important to have moderators but, as outlined in the section on *Civility* (p. 78), even more important to set the tone of the discussion in informal ways. Going hand in hand with a moderator is the idea of having participants register for the event and give their real identity at registration. Some organizers of public dialogues favor anonymity, but Info Ren prefers real people with real names. There are privacy issues here, most notably the practice of commercial spammers who harvest e-mail addresses from public discussion forums. This problem has gotten significantly worse in the months following the CAMP dialogue, and Info Ren will take more stringent steps to suppress the publication of e-mail addresses in its future events. Recent tests by some reporters have shown that if addresses are not masked, spammers will capture the address of someone who posts messages in a public forum within just a few hours.

While participants in the CAMP dialogue were asked to register, there was no requirement for a password to enter the site or post messages. Passwords often discourage use and create additional support problems. The registration status of someone submitting a posting could be checked by examining their e-mail, but this was not routinely done. This meant that some people did post messages without having registered – a potential problem had there been a need for the moderator to restrict postings. But there were basically no very ill-tempered messages, and only one case in which the moderator requested that a submitter reconsider the language in a message.

The CAMP dialogue was structured somewhat as a town hall meeting might be – with a panel of experts and elected representatives and a large audience able to interact with members of the panel. Obviously this is not the only possible architecture for such a forum. Other organizers prefer small group discussions, but Info Ren has found that groups of 500-1000 can function quite effectively online. Not everyone is online at the same time, yet a group of this size produces a fairly high volume of messages, which creates a significant "buzz" to be heard by

those reading the messages on a regular basis. Using one large group, everyone is able to interact with the same experts, and everyone is brought into contact with the full range of participants. Smaller groups do allow for more personal interaction, but many of the people drawn to an online forum have come to listen as much as to speak, and large groups put fewer demands on such participants. Significantly, while a high percentage of people who signed up for the dialogue said that they expected to post messages, no more than 30% of the registrants actually did post. This is not a low percentage for online gatherings, and there was no sense in the evaluation forms that people felt they hadn't been able to speak or were intimidated from doing so.

Cost versus engagement

We have argued that online participation is an interesting new mechanism for civic engagement, and suggested that it can pay off in terms of broad social goals: incorporating public values, improving decision quality, educating and informing the public, mitigating conflict, and building trust in institutions; and that this can be achieved in a non-adversarial way. But these goals can be achieved only if sufficient time and money are put into these events – or, equivalently, if structures are built to assure that this takes place. The trade-offs between cost and engagement bear not only on the effectiveness of dialogues but also on the public presence of the sponsoring organization. Online events can be put on at very little cost – by, for example, populating a Web site with the text of proposed legislation and setting up an e-mail address for public comments. But this approach may not meet anyone's definition of involvement and, if there is no explanation, response or follow-up, may actually increase public dissatisfaction with the remoteness of government.

Sponsors and stakeholder groups can assist in the processes of collecting materials for a Briefing Book, finding panelists and recruiting participants; but when the issues are contentious or where there are many interested stakeholders, there must be provisions for coordinating this activity and assuring non-partisanship, which can represent an added cost.

At every stage there are potential conflicts between cost and engagement. For example, the desire for an audience that is broader but also better informed results in a need to pay for production of simplified explanations and tools to help naïve participants deal with the topic at hand. When cost considerations become dominant, compromises are necessary and a barrier to repeated events is created, making it difficult, if not impossible, to build on previous successes.

Behind these conflicts there is a fundamental issue of scale. Computers and computer networks are well-suited to events that could scale up to involve many millions of people. Human institutions are much less facile in dealing with this type of transition. To relieve this conflict – and to minimize the problems of cost for repeated large-scale public dialogues – we believe that the appropriate solution is one of *institutionalization,* as discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter VII. Conclusions and Recommendations

The chief conclusion of the evaluation of the CAMP event is that online dialogue can be recommended as a mechanism for civic engagement. The results of the five evaluation questions, summarized below, all support the view that online events can generally offer significant advantages over public meetings with regard to the number and geographic distribution of those who can participate, and in flexibility for both the public and policy makers. When properly structured, the public space created for interaction, communication and engagement can be welcoming for participants and can encourage constructive, non-adversarial discussion.

The discussion of issues related to public participation in a political context, and to the organization and infrastructure required to put on a successful online event, suggest additional conclusions: online dialogue should be institutionalized, so that it becomes a routine part of legislative and regulatory processes; and standards should be adopted both for the exchange of data associated with dialogue; and both best practices and ethical standards are needed for participatory interchanges.

In this chapter, conclusions that flow from the preceding sections are briefly summarized, and the concept of institutionalization is presented in more detail.

Conclusions

The CAMP dialogue

Goals. Online dialogue can be carried out in ways that support broad social goals such as incorporating public values, improving decision quality, mitigating conflict and building trust in institutions.

Participant satisfaction. CAMP participants were quite enthusiastic, and would like more opportunities to interact with policy makers in this way. They find online dialogue a significant addition to existing mechanisms.

New voices. While the dialogue did not involve many of the most-hoped-for new participants, over one-third of registrants had not known about the Master Plan before learning of the dialogue; of the remainder, 45% had not known they could comment.

Online dialogue offers important advantages for those who live outside a city, the disabled, students, parents with young children or other caregivers. Technology can be a barrier, but other constraints – lack of information on issues, scarcity of time, lack of literacy, outreach and publicity – are at least as important. To appreciably increase civic engagement among underrepresented groups, it will be necessary to invest more in recruitment, use different approaches for outreach, institutionalize public involvement, find ways to demonstrate the relevance of seemingly abstract discussions, and provide easy-to-absorb summaries of background materials.

The dialogue as a "public space." Online dialogue can function quite well as a public space, particularly in comparison to venues such as public hearings. Participants felt they had enough information, and that others knew what they were talking about. They felt welcome and said people's attitudes and responses encouraged participation. The quality of communication in the

discussion was seen as high: respectful, balanced, constructive, a useful way to examine questions and ideas, and addressing participants' concerns.

What participants gained. Participants, as noted, valued the opportunity for interaction with public officials and staff and enjoyed the dialogue. Most did not expect a great deal of impact on policy, but more than half expected at least "some." Many described themselves as having learned during the dialogue, and the discussion was seen as a useful way to examine questions and ideas. A majority reported learning more about others' opinions, and most said they had thought more about their own opinions.

What policy makers gained. Online dialogue was seen as far more interactive than other venues for public input. It involves more people and makes room for some who don't often come to open meetings. The discussion is less formal and broader, more weighted toward getting the opinions of the lay public, and people's comments are more direct than in hearings. For many this was probably a first in terms of being able to interact directly with a legislator. Public involvement, done well, can benefit policy makers in terms of goodwill, increased trust, educating the public on issues and gaining information. Further, more than a third of all evaluation respondents – and 50% of those who had been less active politically – reported that the dialogue had increased their interest in government and politics.

Issues for online dialogue

Dilemmas of public involvement

Do people want to be engaged? No matter how valuable public involvement in policy discussions may be, many of "the public" may not be interested. Online dialogue can bring together those who *are* interested, even though their numbers may be small in one geographic location, and can help to demonstrate relevance to others. It also allows "observers" to get a taste of an issue without making a major commitment, and to explore it in more detail as interest deepens.

Who is or is not involved. To improve the information available to decision makers, those who will be affected by a decision should be involved in policy discussions. For those who are interested and have access, an online activity can encourage involvement in ways that will never be possible in one-time face-to-face events. However, online participation faces the same barriers as other forms of political involvement. To broaden representation, new approaches to outreach and to presentation of online background materials will be needed to inform the public and demonstrate the relevance of policy to people's lives. When important stakeholders are missing, extra outreach should be attempted; innovative techniques may help to fill the gap.

Nature and complexity of issues. The complexity and interrelatedness of many policy issues increases the need for public understanding and discussion, but also increases the difficulty of involving the lay public in decision-making. Interactive online presentation techniques are needed that allow the user to explore an issue step by step, in as much or as little detail as they want, and show interconnections among issues. Skills of both organizers and sponsors need to be developed to facilitate non-partisan communication, including development of themes and discussion questions, background materials, pros and cons and "why this is important" for different target groups and varied levels of reading ability.

Impact on policy and engagement. Impact on policy and impact on public engagement are both critical. These two types of impact intertwine: public interest in policymaking is increased by an expectation that input will make a difference; however, if this expectation is disappointed, attitudes may become more negative. Public officials need to understand the potential benefits of public involvement in policymaking; new skills in working in a participatory way will be needed

to build trust and learn to work together. Online dialogue, in which people have time to think before they speak, offers a promising venue.

Trust. Decreasing trust makes interactions between the public and government more difficult. Participation may be an avenue to improvement, but again, if expectations are disappointed may have the opposite effect. Online dialogue can help "public" and "government" to begin to see each other as individuals and work together toward solutions. Sponsors and organizers, however, will need to recognize participants' concerns, including explicit considerations of fairness and non-partisanship.

Organizational questions

Roles of sponsors, organizers and others. Sponsors and organizers need to discuss and agree on their roles and responsibilities; participants should know who is sponsoring the event, who is organizing it, who is funding it, and what the sponsor's commitment to action is. As online events become more numerous and more commercial, best practices and ethical standards will need to be developed.

Civility. By following best practices in the design, presentation, moderation and facilitation of an online event, organizers can maintain an open yet non-adversarial environment for public discourse.

Mechanics. The technology behind a dialogue must meet the needs of participants, public officials, and academic researchers. An open standards, open source approach to building software both allows broad replication at the lowest possible cost and provides scalability and interoperability with similar systems of other organizations or units of government. There are also less technical user issues: to assure that the public forum provided by the dialogue is accessible to all, the online facility should be designed with simplicity in mind. User support, participant passwords – which Info Ren prefers not to use – registration and group size must all be addressed.

Cost versus engagement. Online participation is an interesting new mechanism for civic engagement, but can only reach its potential when sufficient time and money can be invested. There are potential conflicts at every stage of design and production, as when the desire for a broader, better informed audience results in a need to develop simplified explanations and tools. The trade-offs between cost and engagement bear not only on the effectiveness of dialogues but also on the public presence of the sponsoring organization.

Institutionalization

Many of the issues outlined above could be addressed by building dialogue into legislative and regulatory processes, much as public hearings are currently a part of the process. Indeed, online dialogues might replace some fraction of public hearings, although a situation in which public officials became visible only in the online realm would not be desirable.

By making dialogue the norm and establishing and maintaining the infrastructure needed to organize an online dialogue at national level, institutionalization could increase public participation, improve the effectiveness of civic discussion, facilitate production of background materials, and build the skills of sponsors, organizers and participants. It could spur the development of ethical standards and best practices, and could reduce or eliminate many of the recurring costs of production. A few examples:

- *Decisions to produce a dialogue, informing sponsors, making agreements and seeking funding.* Making dialogue the norm would lead to significant cost savings per event. The question would be which topics, rather than whether an event could be produced. Word

of mouth would encourage potential sponsors to take part, and the need for commitment by a sponsor would become known. The knowledge and skills acquired by sponsors – as well as other players – could build from one event to the next, and could be codified to aid those playing these roles for the first time. Better understanding of what types of events work best in which situations would make online dialogue an increasingly productive technique.

- *Outreach.* One-time events require a learning process in many areas, including defining stakeholders and informing them through repeated advertisements. If, however, every piece of legislation created the potential for dialogue – perhaps triggered by a critical mass of people expressing an interest in the topic – then there could be more effective, less expensive ongoing public information, with advertising costs spread over a large number of events. People could sign up for e-mail notification on favorite themes, which would increase interest. As online participation becomes a primary mechanism for interacting with government and students become familiar with the process through civics courses, there will be less need to advertise individual dialogues. More attention can then be paid to stakeholder identification and hard-to-reach target groups, and best practices can be developed.
- *Background materials.* Info Ren has created a Briefing Book for each of its online dialogues. In an environment in which dialogue was institutionalized, many materials would already be available online, techniques for selection and production could be standardized, much of the process of assembling a Briefing Book could be automated, and dialogues on related topics could share materials. This would decrease another significant cost, and could encourage the development of innovative tools for presentation. Large-scale production would also encourage the development of standards for representing the viewpoints involved in a non-partisan manner.
- *Software and technical standards.* Adopting standards for software and data exchange, building software out of components, and making use of open source software will help to make dialogue software largely reusable, so that it can be shared across government agencies and levels of government.
- *Ethical standards and best practices.* Producing a dialogue touches on many ethical issues – for example, who will be notified and how, non-partisanship in presentation of materials, rules and procedures, fairness to participants, and the sponsors' use of public comments. These can affect participants' attitudes and willingness to engage in such discussions. When the event takes place in a political context, trust in government as a whole may be at stake. Institutionalization would offer opportunities to identify and encourage adoption of practices that merit trust and work toward ethical standards for dialogue production.

In light of these issues we believe that future foundation funding should go, in part, toward establishing examples that could be used as a basis for institutionalization. The CAMP dialogue and other such events have established the validity of online dialogue and its viability as a means for public involvement. What is needed next is a recognition of the potential for institutionalization and the education of law-makers and agency personnel as to the general utility of this approach. At the same time government agencies wishing to use dialogue should be encouraged to develop their own mechanisms to fund such events. With this experience in hand, they can begin to develop mechanisms for sustainable, ongoing funding.

Recommendations

Use online dialogue as a means for civic engagement. Online dialogue should be used as broadly as public hearings to solicit public comments, educate the public about matters up for

decision and encourage discussion of issues under consideration: these events offer flexibility for both the public and policy makers, allow large numbers of people to take part no matter where they live, and allow a broader geographic spread among the public who are involved. When properly structured, a welcoming public space can be created for interaction, communication and engagement, which can encourage constructive, non-adversarial discussion.

Institutionalize the role of online dialogue in legislative and regulatory processes. To increase civic engagement, broad adoption of this new mechanism should be encouraged by incorporating online dialogue in legislative and regulatory processes. By increasing and codifying knowledge and skills, providing ongoing public information, sharing background materials, exploring new means of presentation, establishing technical standards and shared software, and developing ethical standards and best practices, institutionalization of the role of online dialogue would increase the effectiveness of dialogue and decrease its per-production cost.

Adopt standards for the exchange of data associated with dialogues. This technical step will facilitate interoperability among the online dialogues sponsored by different units and levels of government. This will speed the adoption of online dialogues as a tool for public involvement and (1) facilitate parallel discussions that involve state and local governments or state and federal governments, (2) make it possible for researchers to study and compare different dialogues, (3) allow for sharing of resources including presentation tools and background materials, and (4) provide economies in the production of dialogues by facilitating the development of common software platforms for federal, state and local governments.

Develop ethical standards and best practices for participatory interchanges. As online civic dialogues become more numerous, ethical standards and best practices will be needed to assure that the process is transparent, non-partisan, fair, and worthy of the participants' trust. The development of ethical standards and best practices will encourage sponsors and organizers to recognize, think through and agree on their roles and responsibilities for each dialogue element, including the identification of stakeholders, balanced presentation of information and the use that will be made of public contributions to the discussion.

Appendix A. Registration form and evaluation questionnaire

Registration form

Please complete the registration form to:

- Receive an e-mail summary of each day's discussion and information on the next day's agenda.
- Receive feedback forms to indicate your opinions.
- Be able to contribute your ideas to the interactive part of the dialogue.

The information you provide will be used to develop a statistical picture of all dialogue participants. An asterisk indicates a field that must be filled in. However, only your name, e-mail address and optional introductory statement will appear on the project Web site. The survey and evaluation have been funded by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Information Renaissance is responsible for its design and content.

Thank you for your participation!

First Name:* _____

Last Name:* _____

E-mail:* _____

City:* _____

County:* _____

ZIP Code:* _____

State (other than CA): _____

Country (other than US): _____

Telephone:* _____

In what capacity are you participating in the dialogue?

Educator
Education administrator
Representative of education organization
Elected or appointed official
Business person
Parent, guardian or other family
Student
Interested Californian
Other

How would you describe your home location?

Rural area
City
Suburb
Small town

Age:

17 or younger
18-29
30-49
50-64
65 or older

Gender:

Female
Male

Education:

Less than 8th grade
Some high school/in high school now
High school graduate
Some college/in college now
College graduate
Some graduate school/in graduate school now

How did you hear about this dialogue? (Check one or more.)

E-mail from an organization
Through my work or business
Friend or colleague
Newsletter
Flyer
Conference announcement
Web site
Newspaper or magazine
Other

Before you heard about the online dialogue

Did you know about the work on a new Master Plan for Education?

No
Yes

If yes, did you know you could submit comments?

No
Yes
Not applicable

Have you already submitted comments on the Plan to either the Working Groups or the Joint Legislative Committee that is developing the Plan?

No
Yes
Not yet, but I plan to

If you are a member or staff to one of the seven Working Groups, please indicate which one:

- Student Learning
- Emerging Modes
- Professional Personnel Development
- Workforce Preparation and Business Linkages
- School Readiness
- Facilities and Finance
- Governance
- Not a member

On average, how many hours per week do you use the Internet (including work)?

- None
- Less than one hour
- One to seven hours
- Eight to fourteen hours
- Fifteen or more hours

Have you used the Internet previously to:

Access government services?

- Yes
- No

Find government information?

- Yes
- No

Offer your opinion to an elected official or government office?

- Yes
- No

Participate in an online dialogue?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please state topic: _____

Ethnicity:

- African-American
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Latino or Hispanic
- Native American
- Caucasian (non-Latino)
- Other

How active would you say you are in government and politics?

- Very active
- Fairly active
- Somewhat active
- Not too active

Evaluation. After the dialogue Info Ren will conduct an online evaluation. We would like to know about your experience in the dialogue, and your answers will improve future online events. All responses will be confidential. Would you be willing to take part in this evaluation?

- Yes, please notify me
- No, I don't wish to take part in the evaluation

Active Participation. Active participants are those who wish to contribute messages to the interactive dialogue and exchange ideas directly with panelists and other participants. Active participants should be prepared to spend up to two hours a day reading background resources and discussion and follow the "rules of the road" for polite and thoughtful participation.

I would like to be an active participant in the dialogue:
- Yes
- No

If you have elected to be an active participant, please indicate the agenda topics of greatest interest to you in the boxes below. We will need this information if the number of registered participants is so high that we have to assign people to specific days to avoid an unmanageably high message volume. If you will not be an active participant, you may skip these boxes.

The agenda topic that interests me most is:
- Tues. June 4: Student Learning
- Wed. June 5: Emerging Modes
- Thurs. June 6: Professional Personnel Development
- Fri. June 7: Workforce Prep/Business Links
- Mon. June 10: School Readiness
- Tues. June 11: Facilities and Finance
- Wed. June 12: Governance
- No preference

My second highest interest is:
- Tues. June 4: Student Learning
- Wed. June 5: Emerging Modes
- Thurs. June 6: Professional Personnel Development
- Fri. June 7: Workforce Prep/Business Links
- Mon. June 10: School Readiness
- Tues. June 11: Facilities and Finance
- Wed. June 12: Governance
- No preference

My third highest interest is:
- Tues. June 4: Student Learning
- Wed. June 5: Emerging Modes
- Thurs. June 6: Professional Personnel Development
- Fri. June 7: Workforce Prep/Business Links
- Mon. June 10: School Readiness
- Tues. June 11: Facilities and Finance
- Wed. June 12: Governance
- No preference

Active participants, please provide a brief (50 word max.) introductory statement about yourself and your personal and/or professional interests in the Master Plan. Your name and statement will be listed on the Web site so that others can learn something about you.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for registering to join the dialogue on the California Master Plan for Education!

After submitting this form, you will receive e-mail confirmation of your registration. During the last week of May all registrants will be sent a reminder, with updates to the project Web site.

Evaluation questionnaire

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey on the online Dialogue on the California Master Plan for Education. No matter how much or how little time you spent reading or posting messages over the last two weeks, we would like to hear your thoughts. The survey has 32 questions and should take no more than ten minutes. All responses will be kept strictly confidential.

This survey is being conducted by Information Renaissance. The results will be used as part of an evaluation report, which will be available on the Web site for the California Education Dialogue (http://www.network-democracy.org/camp). The survey and evaluation are being funded by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The Joint Committee to Develop the Master Plan has not reviewed the survey or evaluation, and has no control over content.

Responses to the survey questions are in the form of text boxes in which you can type and drop-down alternatives. To select an answer, click on the triangle to the right of the box and roll down to your response. If you are part way through the survey and want to start over, press the RESET FORM button at the end of the survey. When you are finished, click on the SUBMIT SURVEY button.

--Rosemary Gunn, Information Renaissance

1. Overall, how would you rate your experience in this on-line Dialogue? (Please feel free to explain your answer in the text box below.)

Very positive
Some positive
Neither positive nor negative
Somewhat negative
Very negative
No opinion

2. Do you think there should be online Dialogues on other California policy topics in the future? (Feel free to explain your answer in the text box below.)

Definitely yes
Probably yes
Maybe
Probably no
Definitely no
No opinion

3. How active were you in the Dialogue?

I read messages:
- Very frequently
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Never

I posted messages:
- Very frequently
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Never

4. If you posted messages during the Dialogue, how often were you motivated to do so by the following: (1=very frequently, 2=frequently, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 5=not applicable/did not post any messages.)
- (a) interest in the topic
- (b) a need to respond to a previous post with which I agreed or disagreed
- (c) a sense of responsibility to actively participate
- (d) sufficient time to participate

5. If you were registered as an active participant, how often did the following explain why you did NOT post a message: (1=very frequently, 2=frequently, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 5=not applicable/not registered as an active participant)
- (a) too busy to formulate a message
- (b) others had already made my point
- (c) the topic did not interest me
- (d) I preferred to read and not send in messages
- (e) not registered as an active participant

6. Regarding the communication you observed among participants in this Dialogue, how would you rate the following statements: (1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree)
- (a) It was balanced among different points of view
- (b) It was not dominated by a few participants
- (c) It was respectful
- (d) It was constructive and useful for examining questions and ideas
- (e) People knew what they were talking about

7. Regarding what you may have learned over the course of the Dialogue, how would you rate the following statements: (1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree)
- (a) I learned a great deal about education in California.
- (b) I learned a great deal about opinions I had not thought about before.
- (c) I thought more about my own opinions on education.
- (d) I learned a lot about where to find information related to California education (e.g. people, organizations, or information resources).

8. Regarding your perception of this Dialogue, how would you rate the following statements: (1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree)

(a) I felt welcome in the Dialogue.
(b) Peoples' attitudes and responses encouraged participation.
(c) When I asked questions, they were answered.
(d) I felt I had enough information to take part.

9. Prior to the Dialogue, what was your opinion about education policy at state level?

Very positive
Moderately positive
Neither positive nor negative
Moderately negative
Very negative
No opinion

10. How would you describe your current opinion about education policy at state level? (Please feel free to explain your answer in the text box.)

More positive
No change
More negative
No opinion

11. How much influence do you think this Dialogue will have on the content of the California Master Plan for Education?

A great deal of influence
Some influence
Very little influence
I don't know

12. Did the Dialogue cover the education issues that concern you most?

Yes
Yes, to some extent
Half and half
No, it was too abstract
No, I am more interested in local/district issues
No, others did not share my concerns
Other, described in text box below

13. Have you commented on the draft Master Plan for Education in other ways? (Please select one or more.)

Yes, message to legislator
Yes, in a public hearing
Yes, e-testimony
No
Not yet, but I plan to

14. Regarding their contribution to the quality of the Dialogue, how would you rate the following: (1=very much, 2=much, 3=a fair amount, 4=a little, 5=not at all)?

(a) briefing book
(b) contributions from daily panelists
(c) contributions from staff to the Joint Committee
(d) moderators
(e) daily summaries

15. How active would you say you have been in government and politics in the past?

Very active
Fairly active
Somewhat active
Not too active

16. Has the Dialogue changed your interest in government and politics?

Increased
Increased, but only for education
Remains about the same
Decreased
Decreased, but only for education

17. If you were to send the Legislature a message on education in 25 words or less, what would it be?

18. Over the course of the Dialogue, did you make personal contacts that you have followed up on, or plan to follow up on?

Yes, many personal contacts
Yes, a few personal contacts
No

19. On average, how many hours per week do you use the Internet (including work)?

None
Less than one hour
One to seven hours
Eight to fourteen hours
Fifteen or more hours

20. Where was the computer you most frequently used to participate in this Dialogue?
    - Work
    - Home
    - School/university
    - Library
    - Friends (other than those in your home)
    - Other

21. ZIP Code: _____

22. State (Please select if other than California.) _____

23. Country (Please enter name if other than United States.) _____

24. How would you describe your home location?
    - Rural area
    - City
    - Suburb
    - Small town

25. In what capacity have you participated in the Dialogue?
    - Educator
    - Education administrator
    - Representative of education organization
    - Elected or appointed official
    - Business person
    - Parent, guardian or other family
    - Student
    - Interested Californian
    - Other

26. Were you a member of or staff to the Joint Committee or one of its seven Working Groups?
    - Yes
    - No

27. Age
    - 17 or younger
    - 18-29
    - 30-39
    - 40-49
    - 50-64
    - 65 or older

28. Gender
    - Female
    - Male

29. Education
    - Less than 8th grade
    - Some high school/in high school now
    - High school graduate
    - Some college/in college now
    - College graduate
    - Some graduate school/in graduate school now

30. Ethnicity

African-American
Asian or Pacific Islander
Latino or Hispanic
Native American
Caucasian (non-Latino)
Other

31. If you would like to suggest topics for future online Dialogues, please type them in the text box.

32. Please offer any other comments or observations you have about the on-line Dialogue.

Thank you for taking the time to give us your feedback!

Information Renaissance