**A Ladder of citizen participation – Sherry R. Arnstein**

What is citizen participation?

Arstein’s answer to this question is simply that citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power. It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens *(‘an individual or group that is without wealth, social position, or other material benefits’)*, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits like contracts and patronage are parcelled out. In short, it is how they can induce significant social reform which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society.

The type of participation can be defined by 8 rungs of a ladder.

1. **Manipulation** – Non-participative, cure or educate the participants. Achieve public support by PR.
2. **Therapy** – Non-participative, cure or educate the participants. Achieve public support by PR.
3. **Informing** – One way flow of information.
4. **Consultation** – attitude surveys, neighbourhood meetings and public enquiries. Window dressing ritual.
5. **Placation** – Allows citizens to advise but retains for power holders the right to judge the legitimacy or feasibility of the advice.
6. **Partnership** – Power is redistributed through negotiation between citizens and power holders. Shared decision-making responsibilities.
7. **Delegated** **power**- To make decisions. Public now has the power to assure accountability.
8. **Citizen** **control** – Participants handle the entire job of planning, policy making and managing a programme.

**1) Manipulation**

People are placed on rubberstamp advisory committees or advisory boards for the express purpose of “educating” them or engineering their support.

Distortion of participation into a public relations vehicle by powerholders

“At meetings of the Citizen Advisory Committees, it was the officials who educated, persuaded, and advised the citizens, not the reverse”.

**2) Therapy**

Group therapy, masked as citizen participation, should be on the lowest rung of the ladder because it is both dishonest and arrogant.

Public housing programs where tenant groups are used as vehicles for promoting control-your child or clean-up campaigns.

The tenants are brought together to help them “adjust their values and attitudes to those of the larger society.”

Binge drinking, ASBO’s on council estates.

**3) Informing**

Informing citizens of their rights, responsibilities, and options can be the most important first step toward legitimate citizen participation.

The most frequent tools used for such on-way communication are the news media, pamphlets, posters, and responses to inquiries.

“Intimidated by futility, legalistic jargon, and prestige of the official, the citizens accepted the “information” and endorsed the agency’s proposal”

**4) Consultation**

If consulting them is not combined with other modes of participation, this rung of the ladder is still a sham since it offers no assurance that citizen concerns and ideas will be considered.

People are primarily perceived as statistical abstractions, and participation is measured by how many come to meetings, take brochures home, or answer a questionnaire.

What citizens achieve in all this activity is that they have “participated in participating.”

Attitude surveys: as one woman put it: “nothing ever happens with those damned questions, except the surveyor gets $3 an hour, and my washing doesn’t get done that day.”

**5) Placation**

They allow citizens to advise or plan ad infinitum but retain for powerholders the right to judge their legitimacy or feasibility of the advice.

An example of placation strategy is to place a few hand-picked “worthy” poor on boards of community Action Agencies or on public bodies like the board of education, police commission, or housing authority.

**6) Partnership**

Power is in fact redistributed through negotiation between citizens and powerholders.

They agree to share planning and decision-making responsibilities through such structure as joint policy boards, planning committees and mechanisms for resolving impasses.

After the ground rules have been established through some form of give-and-take, they are not subject to unilateral change.

Works most effectively when:

* There is an **organized power-base** in the community to which the citizen leaders are accountable;
* When the citizens group has the **financial resources** to pay its leaders reasonable honoraria for their time-consuming efforts;
* and when the group has the **resources to hire (and fire)** its own technicians, lawyers, and community organizers.

**7) Delegated power**

Negotiations between citizens and public officials can also result in citizens achieving dominant decision-making authority over a particular plan or program.

Citizens hold the significant cards to assure accountability of the program to them.

**8) Citizen control**

That degree of power (or control) which guarantees that participants or residents can;

* Govern a program or an institution,
* Be in full charge of policy and managerial aspects, and
* Be able to negotiate the conditions under which “outsiders” may change them.

A group with no intermediaries between it and the source of funds is the model most frequently advocated.