



“Inspiring Community Involvement: Is 42<sup>nd</sup> in the nation good enough?”

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THEMES: importance of dialog, face-to-face communication, relationships matter, perhaps the problem is a lack of diversity; “speaking to the choir” doesn’t help, so let’s expand our audience. Think of a model for better political discourse, polarization and incivility makes it difficult to even talk about politics. Battle (or trade-offs) between privatized public sphere (network organization, online communication tools) and traditional public institutions. Barriers to voting (ID laws) can only make things worse. Better civics education, particularly in terms of civility, might be an answer to low participation. We need to get people more invested in their communities, more appreciative of investment in each other. Voting seems irrelevant when citizens are powerless to hold institutions accountable.

QUESTIONS: In what forms are deliberative conversations taking place? In what forms *ought* they to take place? When might community talks expose us

to diverse ideas? How much do people actually interact in online forums? Or do they just talk at each other? Why is engagement so low? How do we become more inclusive, how do we make our outreach organizations more diverse in terms of who joins, more diverse in terms of our audience?

Notes:

ZHERKA: Digital format not structured for long-term relationships- we need a format for change. Can use discursive events (like DC Speaks) to identify issues, and use as a tool for better representation- perhaps messages can be taken up by organizations after the event.

PARTICIPANTS: Perhaps lack of diversity b/c forums, like this one, are barriers in themselves (it should be free and not on the weekend)

PARTICIPANTS: On diversity: Just b/c we look alike, it doesn't mean that we don't have diverse backgrounds. Still, often these conversations often take place among those already engaged.

ZHERKA: If a coalition does a good job of expanding participants, we might include those that are not 'the usual suspects'- so outreach is important.

On the topic, is 42<sup>nd</sup> good enough? Why is engagement so low?

PARTICIPANTS: Not reaching out, in more conservative communities, especially in school environments, people are afraid to have conversations-

sort of a chilling effect on political conversation- should teach skills on how to have conversations.

Political differences turn into arguments, so why participate when they won't listen to the other side?

ZHERKA: Maybe polarization makes it more difficult-even in the home?

PARTICIPANTS: (Elazar! Individualized political culture) people want to keep their distance when it comes to politics, b/c we are individuals, reluctance toward government, instead of communal conversations. The idea of TX though, we might be more willing help each other.

PARTICIPANTS: Teach the kids how to have a dialog. Know how to talk and how to receive a different opinion.

PARTICIPANTS: As social worker, they need us- we have deplorable social conditions (health care) high incarceration, low public service, hard to teach without being an advocate

HANKS: Reciprocity over discourse, front stage v. back stage behavior, even a spiral of silence. A book: Avoiding Politics: <http://www.amazon.com/Avoiding-Politics-Americans-Everyday-Cambridge/dp/052158759X>

Some speak of using a model to teach discourse- what other conversations might open up if we have a better model

PARTICIPANTS: The media show us a model where people yell, causing aversion.

PARTICIPANTS: Why is TX diff? Maybe people don't see a tangible way to engage- get no feedback on what they do- perhaps if they had tangible results/ outcomes- it might inspire more participation.

ZHERKA: Explore the one party nomination- TX is much like other large states- are there diff. when there is more competition in elections? What about the laws that makes it harder to register? To vote? Plus, people feel that their vote doesn't matter-

PARTICIPANTS: What happens when my address doesn't match on my license and voter registration card? Causes anxiety at the booth, slows the process- what if there is more turnout? We would have never gotten through? We hear, in league of women's voters, that people say it doesn't matter.

PARTICIPANTS: Obstacles are an opportunity to tune-out. Raising the costs makes people less likely to participate? Need more education about the process- to avoid surprises at the booth.

PARTICIPANTS: To play devil's advocate, these restrictive policies reinforce existing power structures and actors in power.

PARTICIPANTS: Well, I think there's prejudice, period. The idea that non-whites somehow don't have the right to participate, like a few cases of fraud stereotypes voters as taking advantage of the system

PARTICIPANTS: Atrocious we are creating barriers to voting

PARTICIPANTS: Look, in many ways your vote doesn't matter- look at the electoral college- certain states, safe states, take away the voice of the dissenting party- should have direct democratic elections

PARTICIPANTS: Good point, in TX races some speak of repealing 16<sup>th</sup> amendments.

ZHERKA: Take Virginia for example (higher turnout), smaller populations end up making decisions b/c there is a lack of importance of what's at stake (?)

PARTICIPANTS: Even if I am approached to petition, I have no idea what will come of it. If its online, in contrast, I can keep track of my issues- I have a company that uses crowd-funding, raising problems and finding solutions-with an open transparent process-a new echo system because we can do things on our own.

PARTICIPANTS: Right, they can see the tangible goal, so they will continue to invest their time- gives them incentive.

PARTICIPANTS: Crowd sourcing can be used to put together tools for raising money

PARTICIPANTS: Well, I'm all for tools, but then you privatizing the public sphere- so the traditional institutions are left without oversight- and the state becomes a vehicle of big business at the expense of the people.

ZHERKA: Part of what we struggle with: society is changing- how do you deal with institutions? If we privatize citizenship, people withdraw from society- but now how do we (organizers) harness the tools technology offers while trying to solve the problems associated with privatizing the public sphere.

HANKS: Let's not overlook local issues- challenge to think less in terms of tangibles- but making the intangible tangible. What can help? CHI has some recommendations what do you recommend?

PARTICIPANTS: Embrace diversity.

PARTICIPANTS: Improve the education system.

ZHERKA: expand our role of higher education-what about community colleges

PARTICIPANTS: Yeah, but higher Ed is nice, well what about the disadvantaged and disenfranchised that are not even finishing basic public education programs?

PARTICIPANTS: That's what I'm saying- we need to improve public education.

PARTICIPANTS: How about term limits? Name recognition is the key factor in re-electing candidates. So people sit in the House, and they stagnate- let's get new ideas into the system.

PARTICIPANTS: How about more/better civic education in the public school system.

PARTICIPANTS: It's been there!

PARTICIPANTS: No, it's not fully integrated; it's more about standardized testing. What about how we design neighborhoods and public spaces- we don't think of these long-term projects.

PARTICIPANTS: To add- how do we get younger people invested in their communities? When you have a reason to be involved, you will be involved- that's not coming from the politicians.

PARTICIPANTS: At the local level, it is important to support the youth programs. Influence young student to get more involved by supporting those non-profit organizations that work with youth.

PARTICIPANTS: How do you invest in a community when you're mobile all the time? At CAN, we see that people often don't think that they are important in their community, they might see how their invested- lets celebrate it when people help others-creating a norm of value in investing in others.