NNIPCamp Pittsburgh, May 6, 2015

Session 2 – Civic Engagement

Led by Preston Rhea

Notes by Maia Woluchem

Present: Preston Rhea, Sharon Kandris, Tracy Soska, Charlotte-Anne Lucas, Liz Monk, Meg Merrick, Mary Buchanan, Elizabeth Guernsey, Seema Iyer, Ryan Kelly, April Urban, Mary Ohmer, Claire LeBlanc, Nathan Dorfman, Seema Iyer, Sharon Kandris, Lativa Tuff, Brandon Nida

Preston Rhea – Ok, let’s go around the room and talk about civic engagement you’ve done recently that made you *feel* good.

Mary Ohmer - Worked with youths on private art, worked on a private garden…

Claire Leblanc - A few mock interviews for HS students

Ryan Kelly - Measuring civic engagement in cross-site projects

Nathan Dorfman - Recent MPA graduate, led a neighborhood tour for Pitt students

Seema Iyer – Almost everything we did last week was civic engagement (Baltimore)

Meg Merrick – A privilege to be a support for a photo voice project for a first-tier suburb.

Liz Monk - Two weekends ago I took my kids to clean up some vacant lots

Charlotte-Anne Lucas - Our nonprofit mission is to promote and facilitate civic engagement.

Elizabeth Guernsey - Here as an NNIP alumni, last night I volunteered at a homeless shelter for formerly incarcerated women

Lavita Tuff - Volunteer for Miriam's kitchen

April Urban – Cleveland, Ohio, Case Western University. Just had Bill Trainers come to our organization to try to inspire suburbs of all people to become more focused on community-building

Brandon Nida - BNIA, Have been trying to patch in with the organizing in Baltimore and longer term community development work.

P. Rhea - The reason I asked why it *felt* good is because if pressed for a definition, we might give lots of different answers. I think that for me, civic engagement means the relationships that you build in your community. Wherever the vector of action comes from, it is due to the relationships with each other. It was Maya Angelou who said that “people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel”. We've come up with a civic engagement standard for what civic engagement means for Code for America. My Twitter handle is @prestonrhea. It has a process for how governments are supposed to, rather the capacities that local governments should have, to practice meaningful civic engagement. You all shared something from your personal lives; most of us have the privilege of being paid for our civic passion. What do people feel like they are trying to do to break down new barriers and build new partnerships in the name of civic engagement?

Ryan Kelly - I have a few. For work we try to measure different metrics, to pick an index of all the ways you can measure it. In Rhode Island we tried different pieces and it's really tough to capture. For example, just picking a few of those different avenues for different candidate or voting data. We’ve been able to get email attachments and it's now on Github and everyone else can see it and use it. Our officers are thinking that it's really tough to put all that data out there but we can make some headway and fix the system. So we’re defining it as voting and engagement in the political system.

Sharon - From a work standpoint, I think what's changing is how we’re engaging people in conversations around the data. Where different social issues are. Recognizing how difficult it is to walk together through that conversation. As you have to walk people through and guide them to have certain actions. So we changed now how we work with organizations. So the hunger summit is one example but it means engaging people in one conversation. How can we engage people with food systems? And bring new service providers together?

Preston – It’ll bring people to understand the data so they can answer the question together.

Tracy - The idea is how to democratize data. We’re using the knowledge and the information to drive the people to drive community change. We’re not setting the agenda but we're using our knowledge to help them build their change. What are we doing to help mobilize our resources? So we set back and work with them to help them understand to help give technical expertise.

Preston - Letting other folks take the lead.

Tracy - Yeah we're absolutely not the experts. We can create a resource for the community to use in the way they define it. How does this involve a process that enables the community to address the needs they have?

Lavita - We were talking to Open Data. On some instances we are continuously reaching out to the same communities. So we need to reach out to communities to say what open data is, so that we can open the parachute, and this is how it powers tools to solve some of the issues that you're facing.

Preston - Easy for us to acquire a constituency and then define that constituency

Charlotte-Anne - As a journalist, we told the story after going to the event. And this year, instead of us telling the story, we would just storify the event and not say a word. So it's covered from more angles, more diversity, has more truth to it.

Preston - Helping other voices be the amplification by this. The moment I was inspired is when I found out what a spectrogram is. It is a civic chemistry. What we'll do is this. Participatory. I'm going to put on a song of the people. And you are going to take a piece of paper and going to write a statement on these pieces of paper that has something to do with civic engagement. Like “mandatory voting is the way to increase civic engagement”. But the point is it needs to be a strong statement. We're going to do a call out. On a spectrum of agreement or disagreement. We’ll break out of the tyranny and get a greater representation.

*“Open air dance parties are healthy civic activities”*

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[Agree]---------------------------------------- [Neutral] -------------------------------- [Disagree]

- A fun thing to do, even in the rain

- It’s good for meeting people

- I have a lot of trouble sleeping, but dancing is a good physical activity. (Taryn) Essentially, it’s good but not in my backyard (Preston)

- It depends.

- An awesome day, during the day, as long as it’s inclusive and not infringing on anyone.

*“Distressed communities are too overwhelmed to be engaged about data”*

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[Agree]---------------------------------------- [Neutral] -------------------------------- [Disagree]

* “We are working on a few projects with people who are working 24/7. So the assumption they’re going to go to an open house is a little unrealistic.”
* “Lots of operational costs—if there are other problems piling up, data are not the first thing you go to. “
* “Lots of people work long hours but a lot of the heavy lifting needs to be done by ‘us’”

“Data could be a first step. You can’t dismiss them—they’re the loudest *because* they’re distressed.”

*“Civic engagement must be driven by people from the community”*

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[Agree]---------------------------------------- [Neutral] -------------------------------- [Disagree]

* “Would be less genuine if not from inside the community”
  + - * “That’s not the only way, but it can also happen from different people”

“Practical reality is that you’re driven from outside the community”

* + - * + “Government officials must *feel compelled*, then all kinds of stuff happens”

“You don’t have to pressure someone not to find a reason to be involved”

*“The relationship between police and the communities they serve needs to be positive for active civic engagement between police and the communities they serve”*

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[Agree]---------------------------------------- [Neutral] -------------------------------- [Disagree]

- It needs to be positive because otherwise there is a sense of military occupations that minimizes the message

- There was a basketball tournament sponsored by the police collective in my city and the outcomes of that are extremely positive.

- Community policing agreements can be good things

- Collective efficacy can happen

- In Indianapolis – there is a new plan for police involved in community policing

- Everyone here is from Baltimore and the police don’t live in the communities they serve.

*“All voices must be considered”*

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[Agree]---------------------------------------- [Neutral] -------------------------------- [Disagree]

* In well-facilitated circles, it’s a good thing

- Elevates practice over bureaucracy

- Freedom of speech

- Think about the racist, sexist, bad people who do not voice things that live up to how we think as a “society”

- Always going to be some pain in the butt at some community meeting somewhere

- Many people should be considered—but what about the people causing harm?

- In San Antonio, there are 14 people running for mayor. In one debate, one candidate got completely out of control so that the other 13 couldn’t even get their voices out, and they should have been able to.

*“A spectrogram was an interesting way to discuss this”*

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[Agree]---------------------------------------- [Neutral] -------------------------------- [Disagree]

- I’m a creature of habit – I really like the focus on discussion.