Beyond Citizen Engagement: Involving the Public in Co-Delivering Government Services

By P.K. Kannan and Ai-Mei Chang

The Obama administration's 2009 Open Government Initiative sparked innovative ways of engaging the public in government. But engagement for engagement's sake has not been an end goal. Trends in both the public and private sector, in the U.S. and around the world, have leveraged new technologies available to create meaningful dialogue and relationships between citizens and their government.

Today there is an opportunity to go beyond traditional forms of citizen participation such as voting and testifying at public hearings. The rise and increasing pervasiveness of digital social media—Facebook, Twitter—have dissolved the many technical barriers to widespread and sustained citizen involvement in actually co-producing and co-delivering public services. Pioneering initiatives, in turn, are also thawing the cultural barriers among professional public administrators to engaging and co-designing public services with non-expert citizens.

This report highlights three different types of co-delivery initiatives that can increase citizen engagement, each offering different roles and opportunities for citizens to engage in public services: co-design, co-production, and co-delivery of public services.

Co-design initiatives. A co-design initiative allows citizens to participate in the development of a new policy or service. These kinds of initiatives typically are time-bound and involve citizens either individually or as a group. For example, the development of the Obama administration's Open Government policy in 2009 engaged citizens via an open electronic platform where citizens could be actively involved in the drafting of policy guidance.

Co-production initiatives. A co-production initiative involves citizens—as individuals or in groups—in creating a service to be used by others. These can involve either short-term or long-term participation. For example, the Youth Court of Washington, D.C. engages first-time, non-violent offenders to serve as a jury and try other offenders as a teaching tool to

reduce the chances of recidivism. Similarly, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office engages individual outside experts in the patent application examination process to speed patent issuance. In contrast, the Library of Congress engages large groups of citizens via crowdsourcing to classify and categorize content and facilitate appropriate information retrieval for all users.

Co-delivery initiatives. The co-delivery approach involves citizens—as individuals or in groups—in delivering a service to others. It can be premised on either short-term, transaction-based or longer-term relationships. The United Kingdom has been a pioneer in co-delivery of health and mental health programs, including family intervention programs and community support programs.

Understanding Key Design Elements of Co-Delivery

Within any co-delivery initiative, there are a series of decision points concerning the design and characteristics of the initiative that designers should take into account for the initiative to be successful. These include:

- At what point does engagement occur? Citizens can become engaged at different points in the policy cycle in any initiative. These points can include:
  - Program or policy design stage
  - Policy or service production stage
  - Final service or information delivery stage
  - Evaluation stage

- What is the nature of the engagement? Two types of interactions can occur in a co-delivery initiative. One type is transaction-based: a citizen will interact to complete a specific task or contribute a specific idea. These tend to be short-term in nature. For example, providing advice on the design of a new policy via an e-rulemaking website is a one-time transaction.

Examples of Co-Production Initiatives

Following are several examples of co-production initiatives. Some are short-term and transaction-based in their design, while others are longer-term and relationship-based in their design:

- **The British Columbia Ministry of Transportation**. In Canada, this program combines MapQuest data with real-time traffic data to create a mash-up of current driving conditions and advice to drivers and commuters. Such information allows citizens to avoid congested routes while regulating the traffic load on main arteries. Drivers can call in or enter information they come across as they drive, which gets updated in the map. This is an example of drivers helping each other through network technology with the technology component managed by an intermediary.

- **SeeClickFix.** This interactive website allows citizens to report non-emergency issues that they come across in their communities—potholes, graffiti, broken street lights, etc. Users can track local government responses to their reports. This service is free for citizens to use, and 50 U.S. cities are using back-end tools and apps to enable fixing the reported issues. (www.seeclickfix.com).

- **The Library of Congress.** The Library is using co-delivery to classify and categorize content, aiding appropriate retrieval of information for all users. The Library is now implementing several pilot projects that allow users of its information to tag the content and provide metadata information using "social bookmarking." The pilots have three specific goals:
    - Provide the Library's public domain content in user community environments
    - Encourage users to co-produce by generating tags for the content they read, which helps other users as well as the Library
    - Create folksonomy to supplement expert-generated taxonomy

The agency plans to place citizen-generated content on its website for other users to take advantage of after verification procedures to ensure the integrity of the content.

- **The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO).** USPTO has embarked on a co-production initiative by enlisting outside experts in reviewing patent applications and allowing the public to examine the patent applications and provide input of prior examples. This initiative—Peer-to-Patent: Community Patent Review Pilot—launched in 2007 allows the USPTO to reduce its backlog of reviews through community involvement in the patent examination process, and is an excellent example of how co-production through community networks can help government agencies be more efficient and effective.

- **The Youth Court of Washington.** In the District of Columbia, the Youth Court has put co-production into action by designating first-time, non-violent offenders between the ages of 12 and 17 to serve as juries in the Youth Court; they then try other, subsequent offenders.

The program keeps the first-time offenders out of the formal juvenile justice system and puts them to work, making the co-delivery (of justice) experience into something positive and helping them to get back on the right track. The co-production experience lowers the probability of recidivism, helps the offenders to negotiate and communicate better, and makes them more responsible for their actions. The Youth Court system has been fairly successful. A recent survey showed that 77 percent of the youth graduated from high school and 43 percent of those went on to study in colleges, and the recidivism of 11 percent is much lower than the rate in the formal juvenile system.

P. K. Kannan is the Ralph J. Tyser Professor of Marketing Science at the Robert H. Smith School of Business at the University of Maryland, and is also the Chair of the Department of Marketing. He was the Director for the Center of Excellence in Service until December 2009.

- Another type of interaction is relationship-based: where there is an ongoing interaction between individual citizens or groups of citizens and a government program. For example, participation in a chronic disease mitigation program or becoming a registered expert for patent application reviews are types of co-delivery engagement.

- How will participants interact with government? Another key design issue is whether the initiative is intended to be an interaction between a government program and an individual, or an interaction between multiple individuals and the government program. For example, the United Kingdom's Keyring program helps communities of the mentally disabled maintain independence, and in the TimeBank system, residents at a housing project in Cardiff can earn credits that can be converted to services by participating in community projects.

Determining such design issues in advance will help frame the boundaries of the initiative and hopefully contribute to a better designed and more successful initiative.

When Is Co-Delivery an Appropriate Approach?

Co-delivery is not right for every program or service. Given that government services vary across different agencies with different stakeholders and different objectives, a careful assessment needs to be done to understand the risks and value propositions of different levels of service engagement. For some agencies, self-service could be the only and the highest level of citizen engagement possible. In some service situations, it is not appropriate to give citizens the control that co-production and co-delivery processes may demand. A careful cost/benefit/risk analysis would reveal what level of engagement is appropriate for a given service environment.

- **Define the acceptable level of risk for a co-delivery initiative.** This is a key decision that needs to be made at the design stage. Programs such as Youth Court may be deemed too risky; yet without taking such risks, successful outcomes are not achievable. It is necessary to tackle the fear of reasonable risk at the design stage of the co-delivery process. Undertaking pilots on smaller scale may be a viable way to reduce such risks.

- **Effective co-delivery initiatives focus on outcomes.** These concepts view citizens as partners, assets and resources who can provide significant input to service provision. The value that is created in service initiatives is accomplished through leveraging citizen networks, through citizen reciprocal relationships, and is based on the outcome for citizens.

- **Start any initiative with the right motivation.** Co-delivery initiatives are all about successful service outcome that benefits the citizens, leading to significant improvement in outcomes through innovative, creative sparks. The primary motivation for a government agency should be improvement in service outcome, and not cost-cutting. If the service outcome is successful, it also will ensure that the process has been an efficient one, with reduced costs and government input and increased return on investment (ROI) manifesting themselves as by-products. A singular emphasis on cost-cutting is likely to lead to failure.

- **Co-delivery has service innovation at its heart.** While this is possible in the service design stage, ceding control to the users of service to innovate the process is essential. When citizens are involved in designing and delivering services for themselves and for others in their community, local innovations can flourish. Thus, the service design and the service professionals have to be flexible enough to let such innovations emerge.

- **Understand in advance citizens' ability and willingness to contribute their efforts in a particular initiative.** The literature suggests that citizens' willingness to contribute varies, depending on the policy or geographic areas involved. We have observed that it is especially high in areas involving local governments and the local

Ai-Mei Chang is a Professor of Systems Management at the University of Maryland, University College, where she teaches graduate level courses in Information Technology Foundations, Infrastructures; and Security, eBusiness, and Project Management.

ecological environment. The motivating factors are mainly volunteering, a sense of making a difference in the community, and being treated as partners by the professionals and staff. Environmental and economic sustainability initiatives score high on the participation index. In general, citizens want more control on services that affect them and their family directly and are willing to contribute in those domains.

- **Targeting the appropriate citizens for these service initiatives is important.** Engagement in the co-delivery of government services will require effort and time from citizens. In the context of transaction-based co-delivery processes, some citizens may not have the time to use the co-created service channel, but rather may want to use full service. (This is similar to self-service versus full service in a grocery checkout). The issue is how to deal with the heterogeneity in needs over time. This calls for design of multiple channels of service provision that might increase overall costs and reduce the benefits of co-delivery initiatives.

Citizens who have the right skill set and motivation to participate in the initiative over a longer term are critical to the success of the initiative. It is important to keep citizens engaged, providing feedback to them to encourage their continued participation and commitment. Targeting and interacting with the right segment for such a service initiative are essential for its continued success.

What Are Some of the Key Design Questions That Need to be Addressed?

Following are some issues government leaders should address in advance of committing to a co-delivery initiative:

- **Distinguish between models for transaction-based versus relationship-based processes.** The orientation of co-delivery service processes ranges from transaction-based to relationship-based. The time frame for service outcome varies accordingly: immediate for transaction-based service processes, long-term for relationship-based

processes. The nature of risks with the outcome also varies from being low for transaction-based services to high for relationship-based processes. The decision to embark on a relationship-based co-delivery process involves balancing the trade-off between value and risks. In some instances, co-production may be the only strategy that could lead to positive outcomes.

- **Set clear boundaries between the roles of citizens and government.** There is a need for setting clear boundaries between the tasks that citizens do and staff do so that work proceeds in a coordinated way. However, allow for flexibility in design and implementation—especially in relationship-based co-delivery processes—and focus more on the right outcome than the right process.

- **Government has a duty to delineate the separation between the tasks performed by employees and professionals and tasks performed by citizens.** An ill-structured design of tasks could risk participants stepping on each other's toes, leading to conflicts and dissatisfaction with the process. A too-rigid separation, on the other hand, could stifle the innovations that could potentially arise in co-delivery processes. Agencies need to monitor the process carefully and continuously to learn what works and what does not, and refine the design over time.

- **Technology can be a critical ingredient.** Technological innovations have a powerful impact on citizen co-delivery. Even if citizens are motivated only for themselves in providing input, creative design of co-produced and co-delivered service processes based on technology can leverage that input to benefit the whole community. Technology plays a critical leveraging role in the service process.

- **Co-delivery initiatives are based on the equality of participants in creating value.** Thus the co-delivery of the service has to "foster equal partnership between providers and users of service, afford equal value of different kinds of knowledge and skills, and acknowledge that everyone has something to contribute." As we pointed out earlier,

this means a paradigm shift as far as design is concerned, completely changing the expectations and approach of both service professionals and users.

What Are Some of the Key Implementation Steps?

If the design issues above are addressed satisfactorily, then government leaders should incorporate the following ingredients into their implementation:

- **Engage participants in the development process.** It is important to understand the motivation of the participants and leverage it in designing the initiative. Targeting participants who have the appropriate skills, motivation levels, and time is very critical at the design stage. Design should leverage technology significantly for transaction-based co-delivery process. Allocating the right amount of resources for testing and support is important for a successful launch.

- **Foster citizens' civic engagement and trust.** The process of involving citizens in policy enactment and design of public services can provide impetus for raising the level of civic engagement of the whole community, especially in local government applications. Co-delivery can increase government transparency, help citizens understand the inner workings of government service provision, and help them appreciate the design and constraints of delivering the service. Giving control to citizens in co-delivery processes can also increase the trust in government.

- **Share your results transparently.** It is important to understand that government agencies need to "co-create" successful citizen engagement processes. So, contribute to case repositories and disseminate information about your initiative by sharing it with other agencies, regardless of the outcome! It is only through a meta-analysis of these initiatives that success can be achieved on a consistent basis.

- **Getting the incentives right for citizens to participate in a co-delivery initiative is important.** It is essential to understand the citizen groups targeted from their motivational viewpoint. Is it their own benefits they value most, or is it their reputation in the community or their altruistic goals? Since motivations can be different, the designs can be made flexible enough to let citizens with different motivation co-create and thrive. This certainly calls for creativity and experimentation in the design process.

- **Invest in education and training of both government and citizen participants.** Co-delivery and co-production initiatives require education and training of both sets of participants—citizens as well as employees and professionals—to set expectations, guidelines, and rules of engagement. While emphasis is generally always put on citizens, preparing the staff for service is absolutely essential for its success. The design of the initiative should include this component. In addition, in order to ensure that the momentum of these initiatives is sustained beyond their initial novelty period, periodic feedback to participants and staff is necessary to keep participants motivated. Creative ideas from participants and staff are to be appropriately channeled for consideration and implementation.

- **Transparency of service operations is touted as an advantage of citizen engagement.** However, from the agency viewpoint, being completely transparent may not be the best strategy. Depending on the application areas, appropriate levels of transparency should be designed in. This calls for a careful review of tasks involved in the process especially in the context of transaction-based services.

- **Co-delivery and co-production initiatives need to be marketed to the citizens in the right way to set the intended expectations and rules of engagement.** Nothing succeeds like success for marketing such initiatives and thus a small successful pilot should always be the first step. ◻

TO LEARN MORE

Beyond Citizen Engagement: Involving the Public in Co-Delivering Government Services
by P.K. Kannan and Ai-Mei Chang
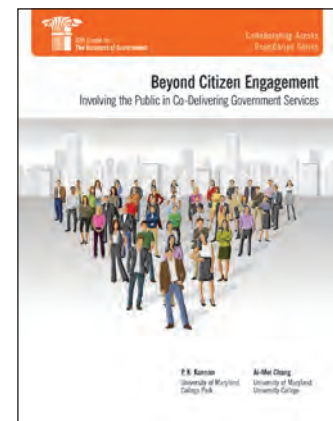
The report can be obtained:
- **In .pdf (Acrobat) format at the Center website, www.businessofgovernment.org**
- **By e-mailing the Center at businessofgovernment@us.ibm.com**
- **By calling the Center at (202) 551-9342**