

Engaging the Community in Decision Making

Case Studies Tracking Participation, Voice and Influence

Roz Diane Lasker
and John A. Guidry

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[240] pages \$39.95 softcover (7 x 10) 2009
Notes, bibliography, index ISBN 978-0-7864-4312-3

In recent years, the rapidly growing field of community participation has promised to give people formerly excluded from decision making an influential voice about issues that affect their lives. Inclusive processes implemented in the United States and internationally have certainly given community members new opportunities to participate and be involved, but how effective are these processes in promoting the voice and influence of the people who have historically been excluded the most—the poorest, least educated, and most marginalized residents in communities? Of the various participants who have “a seat at the table,” whose voices are influential, whose aren’t, and why?

This book summarizes how five community partnerships, working with a team of researchers, attempted to answer these critical questions by looking at influence directly. Investigating 10 cases—two from each community partnership—the study tracks the ideas of everyone involved and reveals how and why the ideas of marginalized and ordinary residents were far less likely to be influential than those of people with more clout, resources, or acknowledged expertise. Finally, the authors explain how and why these influence inequities can be overcome, providing readers with practical, evidence-based tools to help them do so. The book should be helpful to readers involved in any form of active community participation, from participatory research to civic engagement, deliberative democracy, and community initiatives.

Roz Diane Lasker is a physician known internationally for her work on public participation in community planning, policy development and problem solving. She holds an appointment as clinical professor of public health at Columbia University’s School of Public Health and, for over a decade, she directed the Division of Public Health and the Center for the Advancement of Collaborative Strategies in Health at The New York Academy of Medicine. **John A. Guidry**, a political scientist, worked with Dr. Roz Lasker from 2004 through 2008, during which time the research for this book was completed.

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