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Handbook Two

THE REPRESENTATION ROLE AND COMPETENCY

Part One: Concepts, Principles, and Strategies

The Local Elected Leadership Series

Second Edition

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~~HANDBOOK II~~

~~PART ONE: CONCEPTS, PRINCIPLES, AND STRATEGIES~~

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Introduction

If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice, or representation.

Abigail Adams, in a letter to her husband John Adams (March 31, 1776)

We want to say a few words about the relevance of the above quotation. Abigail Adams was a feisty co-conspirator with her husband and others in the American colonies' fight for independence from the British in the latter half of the 18th century. Her husband, with a handful of other remarkable men of their time, was in Philadelphia drafting a declaration of independence. In spite of her fervent plea on behalf of women at this critical time, women in the United States did not get the right to vote until the early part of the twentieth century.

In that same letter she said, "Do not put unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember all men would be tyrants if they could." A rather tough but prophetic statement, when we think about it. She could have been speaking for most women around the world when it comes to issues of representation. As you read this handbook, consider how women are represented, both **within** your local government's political process, and **by** your governing process. By the way, John Adams's career didn't suffer because his wife was a gender activist. He became the second president of the newly constituted United States.

REFLECTION A Reflective Opportunity

Better yet, stop for a moment and jot down some reflections about the state of representation in your local government. How representative is your elected body of the overall population of your local government; in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, economic status, geography, and other key considerations? Think about the various boards, commissions and other citizen bodies your elected council has created over the years to help you govern more effectively. How representative are they of various segments of your community? In the space below, record your thoughts about the under-representation that may exist on your elected body, and the official boards and commissions of citizens that serve your local government.

Representation is not just the presence of individuals who **represent** various sub-populations within your local government jurisdiction. Representation is also a measure of how well those various sub-populations are **represented** in: your elected body's decisions; the allocation of public resources; programmes and services delivered by your government; the ranks of your government's employees; and other ways you can measure **representation** performance. For each of these representation measures and others you think are important, grade your local government's performance.

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- A= Excellent;
- B= Good,
- C= Average;
- D= We need to call a special meeting of our elected body to discuss this and take actions to improve our representation performance.

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Representation: It's your most important, and most difficult, role.

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Representation is at the very core of local self-governance, democracy, and elected leadership. It is also the most problematic, difficult, and challenging aspect of your role as an elected official. Unfortunately, representation, as the underlying operating principle and expectation associated with local self-governance, is too often ~~sullied~~damaged by special interests, personal orientations to the world around us, and, on occasion, personal and collective greed.

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How do you balance the interests of all your local government's citizens with those who:

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- live in your part of the community;
- were responsible for getting you elected;
- belong to the same political party;
- share many of your social and economic ties; and,
- in many cases, helped pay for your election.

These are the difficult, critical, and key choices that confront you constantly as an elected official. Your elected representation role and responsibilities are central to how effective, inclusive, open, accountable, and trust-worthy your local government is in its relationship with all of your citizens.

~~In most democratically elected governments, there are legal mechanisms, such as periodic elections, legal recourse when there is blatant misrepresentation, and various kinds of political pressures to foster and assure representation of all the people. There are legal mechanisms in most democratically elected governments to foster and assure representation of all the people, such as periodic elections, legal recourse when there is blatant misrepresentation, and various kinds of political pressures.~~ But, we won't be talking very much about these in this handbook. Rather, we will take the high ground in this discussion about *representation* and treat it as a principle, value, and competency that will define your career and service as an elected leader.

The art of leadership is to act as a representative of a much larger constituency than those who voted for you.

Sir Peter Parker

What do we mean by Representation?

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You and your elected colleagues are responsible for carrying out the representational function of your local government. As elected officials, you speak for your citizens; and make decisions on their behalf. James Svara, a political scientist who has spent much of his career trying to understand the processes of local governance and helping others perform it more admirably, provides some valuable insights into the representation role. According to Svara, it helps to make a distinction between the legislative roles of *delegate* and *trustee*.

As delegates, elected representatives try to express as clearly as possible the opinions of their constituents and seek to be guided by them in making decisions. As trustees, elected representatives act in the interests of the community as a whole and use their judgment to do what they think is best for their constituents, whether the constituents are in agreement or not.¹

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As Svara points out, the *delegate* role depends on close interaction with your constituents and on the level, clarity and consistency of those interactions. It also depends on how you as the delegate, or elected official, define your constituency. If you, ~~as an elected official~~, have a strong orientation and commitment toward a special interest group, i.e. big business, the elderly, a particular neighbourhood, or some other identifiable group, this probably increases the likelihood that you will assume the *delegate* approach to your representation responsibility.

When you take into consideration the needs of the entire community or local government and decide what you believe is the best course of action, based on your judgment, experience and convictions, even when you believe your constituents may disagree, you are performing your representation role as a *trustee*. Svara also makes the point that many elected leaders combine the two representational approaches. He refers to these individuals as *politicos*. We suspect that most elected officials are *politicos*.

Representative and participatory democracy

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There is another distinction that needs to be made before we launch into a full blown discussion of what your representation role and competency entails. You will, on occasion, hear the term “participatory democracy” as well as other terms used to define the governing process. Representative democracy is a form of democracy wherein voters choose representatives to act in their interests. It also assumes that these representatives are given enough authority to exercise initiative in the face of changing circumstances. We assume that you as an elected representative will be performing in both the delegate and trustee roles as just defined by James Svara.

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The process of representative democracy has a couple of built in challenges for citizens who are supposedly represented under this form of government. If elections are based on partisan political interests, in other words representatives are elected to represent different political parties or organisations, those citizens who support candidates who are not elected may find themselves and their interests not being represented. For those citizens whose candidates lost the current election it may seem like a long time until the next. The other challenge of representative democracy is when those who are elected decide that they have the mandate to act without consulting their constituencies.

Representative democracy came about for practical reasons. As populations grew and governance became more complicated, it became unrealistic for everyone to gather under some tree to make all those decisions that have to be made to sustain a viable government. Hence, *direct democracy*

¹ Svara, James H., *Official Leadership in the City*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.), p. 126.

like the ancient Athenians liked to have others believe they practiced became a theory with little merit. The citizens of Athens over two centuries ago did participate directly in their government. However, only a few male elite were involved. So much for equity and inclusion under the terms of Athenian democracy.

As we said, the representation component of most democratic institutions can be hampered by partisan politics and representatives who think they only need to consult with citizens at election time. While we know the elected officials who are using this series could never be accused of such unrepresentative behaviour, we did want to alert you that there are others out there who just might be so inclined.

These shortcomings to representative democracy have spawned a worldwide advocacy movement to assure that representative democracy is also participatory democracy. Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, defines **participatory democracy** as a broadly inclusive term for many kinds of consultative decision making in a democracy. Variations on this theme include anticipatory, consensus, deliberative, non-partisan, grassroots, and liquid democracy. Unfortunately, representative democracy is not always considered participatory, particularly by those who believe in greater consultation between the governing and the governed. This series of learning opportunities is devoted to the notion that *representative democracy should be synonymous with participatory democracy*. Keep this in mind as we delve more deeply into what your representation role and competency is all about.

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A Reflective Opportunity

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Before moving on to the specific activities that define a functioning representative democracy, take a moment to reflect on the participatory aspects of your representative form of governance. How widespread is the involvement of citizens in your governing process between elections? What might you and your elected colleagues do to make your representative democracy more participatory?

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Representation in action

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Representation involves a number of specific kinds of activities, and they in turn help determine the approaches elected officials take toward this role responsibility.

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- **The first activity is the development and enforcement of local government policies.** For example, as an elected official you may take a strong *delegate* stand on economic development, favouring certain large business constituents while ignoring the concerns of environmentalists. Or, acting as *trustee*, you may promote anti-discrimination legislation that assures fair and equal treatment of all citizens within your community regardless of gender, race, religion, or economic status. The *Policy Making* competency, covered in Handbook VII, is designed to help you better understand how to manage this aspect of your representation role.
- **The second representation activity involves the allocation of public goods and services.** For example, public contracts might be awarded to certain firms or groups within your community based on their support of certain elected officials. In these cases, the elected officials are most likely acting in the role of *delegate*. Or, you decide to locate

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public facilities such as schools or health facilities based on demonstrated and documented need; whether or not certain constituents agree. Based on Svava's model of representation, you would be acting in the role of *trustee*. If a contract is let to the largest contributor of the political party in control of your elected body at that time and is; based on solid evidence of need for the facility; and the demonstrated capacity and reputation of the contributor, then Svava would say your elected body is operating in the *politico* mode of representation. Among those elected leadership competencies that can help in your allocation-of-scarce-resources representational responses are: *Decision Making* (Handbook # VI); *Financing* (Handbook # IX), *Using Power* (Handbook # IV); and *Negotiating* (Handbook # VIII).

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- **Representation often involves intervening in the local governing system to assist individuals or groups in their interactions with local government staff and service deliverers.** It may be that you and your elected colleagues, as *delegates*, are particularly adept in assuring that your constituents are getting more than their fair share of the services offered. The *trustee* on the other hand fights to assure that all citizens are represented equally in gaining access to local government staff and resources. Elected leadership competencies that will help you be more successful in these kinds of representational situations include: *Communicating* (Handbook # 23); *Overseeing* (Handbook # X); and *Institution Building* (Handbook # XI).

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- Finally, **representation involves continuous dialogue with all constituents of your community.** These may include special interest groups ~~(this is rarely difficult since they are probably in constant contact with you)~~; non-governmental organisations (NGOs); community based organisations; those parts of your community that lack the resources to mobilise their collective voices so they can be heard; religious and ethnic groups; your political party affiliations if they exist; private sector interests and resources; and, of course, the individual citizen. Individual and collective competencies of elected leadership that will help you in these multi-faceted dialogues include: *Communicating* and *Negotiating*, already mentioned, and those all-purpose competencies of *Facilitating* (Handbook # HV) and *Enabling* (Handbook # VII).

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You may be surprised that carrying out your *representation* role and responsibilities involves all the competencies we have included in this series. For example, you may be thinking, "What does *institution building* have to do with representation?" Quite a lot, as we think about it. Your local government employees may not have the level of knowledge, insights, skills and attitudes needed to be every citizen's trustee. The *institution building* competency will help you understand how you can help strengthen your local government management and delivery systems. Representation is not just your sole responsibility as an elected official; even though you are the citizen's elected *representative*.

Having a well informed and trained workforce is also key to your local government's representation responsibilities. A well-thought-out and supported *institution building* plan for your local government can:

- assist employees in understanding the importance of delivering services based on criteria like equity and human need;
- provide them with communication and facilitating skills to help them interact more effectively with citizens and organised groups in the community; and
- develop the resources needed to deliver services in an equitable, effective, and inclusive manner.

All of the competencies in this series are designed to help you carry out your two most important roles as a local elected official: representation and leadership. But your achievement and success in performing both of these roles and responsibilities is also dependent on the quality and performance of your staff and employees. This is why institution building is so important and why these training materials can also be an important resource in helping your appointed officials and employees join you in fulfilling your representation role.

Representation: the basis for your legacy

There is a strange charm in the thoughts of a good legacy.

Miguel De Cervantes

John Gardner, a long time and respected public servant, helps us understand the complexity and importance of the representation role. He also offers some insights into how you can cope with this complexity as an elected official. We've taken the liberty to adjust a few of Gardner's terms in the following quotation to put the spotlight on elected leadership and the challenge of representation.

Effective elected leaders deal not only with the explicit decisions of approving the budget or announcing a policy but also with that partly conscious, partly buried world of needs and hopes, ideals and symbols. They serve as models; they symbolise your local government's unity and identity; they retell the stories that carry shared meanings. Their exemplary impact is great. They provide messages to your citizens about what you are paying attention to, how you deal with critical incidents, in the correspondence between your words and acts, in the ethical tone of your behaviour.²

This up-lifting message speaks not only to the representation decisions that you and your elected colleagues make today, but to the legacy you will leave behind to guide future generations of local elected officials. The decisions you make will also provide important messages for your constituents, the citizens of your community. While all your citizens will not like some of your decisions as their elected representatives, they will find it easier to accept them if they are based on principle and the greater common good of the community.

One of the authors had an opportunity to return to a small city where he served as the city manager several decades earlier. In a conversation with the young mayor who now serves that community, the mayor spoke about the quality of elected leadership that the community experienced more than thirty years before and the critical decisions his elected predecessors had made during their service to the community. He recalled that some of the more important decisions they made ran counter to many of the special interest demands put on the elected officials at the time. In retrospect, those decisions resulted in long-term benefits to the community.

They established a process of dialogue with their counterpart elected officials in the five adjoining local governments, even though relationships among them were problematic at the time. The elected officials of these six local governments continue their shared leadership initiatives; after more than thirty years and currently operate a variety of joint programmes and

² Gardner, John, *On Leadership*, (New York: The Free press, 1990) p. 29.

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facilities that benefit all citizens within the region. As the mayor recalled, their decisions at the time were clearly out of step with what many citizens felt were in the best interests of the city. Nevertheless, those decisions became legend; and serve as models for current elected decision making in that region.

Those elected officials; in the role of *trustees*; used their judgement and courage to do what they thought was best, not only for their own local government and citizens, but for the governments and citizens of the larger community. Their actions symbolised the “partly conscious, partly buried world of needs and hopes, ideals and symbols” that Gardner refers in his statement about leadership. They also call to mind a comment made by Edmund Burke, the 18th century British statesman and orator, during a speech to the electors of the city of Bristol in November 1774.

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“Your representative owes you, not his industry only,” Burke counselled, “but his judgement; and he betrays instead of serving you if he sacrifices it to your opinion.”

In Svava’s terms, Burke was telling the citizens of Bristol that they should expect their elected representatives not only to be their *delegates* but to act boldly as *trustees* for the greater good of their community. Often you; as your constituent’s elected representative; are able to see the bigger picture. Your information base and experience gives you a unique advantage in making trustee-type decisions. When you make *trustee* decisions on behalf of all your citizens, you are demonstrating leadership qualities, and that is what representation is all about.

Why representation can be so difficult

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The problems you face in representation are at least three-fold. **First, there are conflicting demands on your judgement; and your decisions.** Often; it is difficult and nearly impossible to weigh the benefits and liabilities that will accrue to you and the community given one decision over another; or one in relation to many others. Moreover, many of those conflicting demands will have political price tags attached. If the decision doesn’t cost you your reputation and the next election, your political adversaries will see that retribution is levied. Conflicting demands, in many ways, provide the opportunity to rise above the fray and make decisions for the common good, not the vested interests. After all, you risk being pummelled by someone, whatever you do.

Second, there are often pluralistic pressures that pull you not just in two opposing directions, but to numerous points around the political compass. These many-headed pressures make it almost impossible for a collective decision-making body; like an urban council; to reach a decision that will assure smooth implementation by their local government organisation and staff. ~~Even though~~~~if you are able to~~ you reach a decision on an issue where there are conflicting special interests, it may be difficult for your municipal organisation to implement it effectively. A policy that is nearly impossible to implement is a hollow victory for policy makers. In these cases, it’s prudent to go back to the drawing board or wait until the timing is more favourable to all concerned.

Lastly, we live in a world where no one is “in charge.” No one is “in charge,” that is, of those public problems that tend to gallop across geographic and geopolitical boundaries like a herd of wild antelopes. John Bryson and Barbara Crosby, authors of *Leadership for the Common Good* explain why:

No one organisation or institution is in a position to find and implement solutions to the problems that confront us as a society. No one is “in charge” when it comes to helping the crack babies, the homeless, the substance abusers, the sick, and the disenfranchised.

No one alone can decrease crime, restore economically ravaged inner cities and small towns, reduce government deficits, or reverse environmental damage. In order to marshal the legitimacy, power, authority, and knowledge required to tackle any major issue, organisations and institutions must join forces in a “shared-power” world. In this world, organisations and institutions that share objectives must also partly share resources and authority in order to achieve their collective goals.³

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Bryson and Crosby define shared power as *shared capabilities exercised in interaction between or among actors to further achievement of their separate and joint aims*.⁴

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When you consider that you operate in a constituent environment where there are conflicting demands, pluralistic pressures, and virtually no one in charge, it’s difficult to imagine how you can possibly carry out your representation role with any sense of effectiveness. Take heart. There is light at the end of this dark and foreboding tunnel.

The Good News: Representation is not a one-way process

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You can’t clap with one hand only.

Chinese proverb

Representation suggests a one-way flow of information, services, goods, and whatever else the people’s representatives in government can offer their citizens. While this may be the case in some authoritarian forms of government, it’s not the case within a well functioning, local self-governance process. The local government that works best is one that engages in a constant flow of information, ideas, and resources in all directions, not just from the *governing* elite to the *governed* masses.

In order to better understand the importance and vitality of representation built on partnerships between local elected officials, their operating organisations, and their constituents, we want to return to those generally accepted principles of good governance discussed in the Introduction to this series. As we look at these principles from the perspective of *representation*, it is helpful to keep two important factors in mind.

1. Your effectiveness, as elected leaders, in fulfilling your representation role and responsibilities is largely dependent on the will and capacity of your local government organisation and staff to respond to constituent needs and interests.
2. Your constituents are a highly diversified and eclectic mix of individuals and institutions. Among them are: ordinary citizens who are often unorganised and therefore under-represented; special interest groups that cut across the spectrum of private enterprises, religious and ethnic institutions, and non-governmental and community-based organisations; and other public institutions within your political jurisdiction and beyond.

A Reflective Opportunity REFLECTION

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³ Bryson, John and Barbara Crosby, *Leadership for the Common Good*. (San Francisco: Jossey –Bass Publishers, 1992.) p. 4.

⁴ Bryson, John and Barbara Crosby, p.13

This is a good time to stop for a moment and reflect on who it is that you interact with as an elected official. Take a few moments and jot down the individuals and groups with whom you most frequently hold discussions within your official responsibilities as an elected official.

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How representative are they of the entire citizenry of the local government you serve?

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What are some things you can do to increase the depth and breadth of your representation?

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How effective do you believe your appointed officials and local government staff are in fulfilling their representation roles and responsibilities?

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What might be done to increase their representation competencies and performance?

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Good governance and representation

We make the path by walking it.
Motto of the Mondragon
Cooperative in Spain

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Let's review some of the accepted principles of good governance from the perspective of *representation*.

- **Civic engagement, citizenship, and participation:** Don't be confused by the many labels used to describe this phenomenon of local self-governance these days. By whatever label, we are talking about the active involvement of: individuals; clusters of citizens; other public institutions; private, non-governmental and community-based organisations; and, coalitions of willing partners in the governing process. The participation and engagement of these collections of individuals, groups and institutions

is fundamental to effective representation. This is what makes the representation process multi-directional, and not one-way. We will return to this principle later when we discuss representation strategies.

- **Respect for the law, or the rule of law.** Representation that ignores this principle is perhaps the biggest threat to the integrity of your local government and its long-term vitality. We are talking about corruption, from bribing key elected and appointed officials to “greasing the hand” of the building inspector. Corruption undermines the principle and practice of elected representation more than any other factor. When representation goes to the highest briber, democratic self-governance no longer exists. Fortunately, there is increasing awareness about the corrosive nature of corruption, and public officials and citizens are mobilising to fight it at all levels of governance. Representation is dependent on governing by the rule of law.
- **Equity and inclusiveness:** The denial or inattention to these principles of good governance make a mockery of representation. However, there is good news to report. Local elected leaders, and those who manage their public programmes and services, have become increasingly aware and vigilant about the importance of assuring equal access to decision-making processes and the basic necessities of community life to all their citizens. As a local elected official, you need to ask yourself and your colleagues these questions on a regular basis:
 - Are we doing everything we can to assure that all citizens are being treated fairly and equally?
 - Are we, in any way, discriminating against any segment of our community in the policies we proclaim and the programmes and services we deliver?
 - Does every citizen have full and unfettered access to the decision-making processes of our local government?

These questions, of course, only take a top-down, rather paternalistic view of elected officials and your role of representation. Recognising that representation is a reciprocal venture, what are some of the bottom-up benefits of equity and inclusiveness to elected officials and the local government as an institution? These governing qualities, when put into practice, assure a rich flow of information, ideas and insights from all your citizens about their needs and aspirations. More importantly, they reveal your citizens as potential resources and partners in the governing and operation of your local government.

- **Transparency and accountability:** As citizens, it is difficult to know whether we are being represented fairly, or equally, when we don’t have access to public information, when we don’t know how decisions are made, and when we are not able to hold our elected and appointed officials accountable. Representation thrives on transparency and accountability provided these values and strategies flow both ways in citizen-elected leadership relationships.
- **Effectiveness and efficiency:** You’re probably asking, “What do these two principles have to do with representation?” Quite a lot. Let’s see if we can explain why.
 - *Effectiveness* involves “doing the right things” as a local government, and doing the right things is central to representation. For example, if you have street children in your community, and you have developed programmes to assure

their safety, alternative educational opportunities, and reasonable well-being, your local government is being *effective*.

- *Efficiency* involves “doing things right.” If your local government has sub-contracted some of these services out to a local NGO that specialises in working with children, and the costs are less, and the level of services better than your local government could provide through its own staff, then your local government is being *efficient*.

While effectiveness and efficiency are most often associated with management practices, they define the quality of much of what you do in carrying out your representation role as an elected official. And, they convey the important role of your local government organisation and employees when it comes to representation.

One other good governance principle we haven't mentioned is something the UN-HABITAT Global Campaign on Urban Governance calls *Subsidiarity*. In operational terms, it means the “~~subsidiarity~~devolution” of authority and resources to the closest appropriate level consistent with efficiency and cost-effective delivery of services.²² From a management point of view, subsidiarity is *delegation* and a whole lot easier to spell and explain. We will discuss some interesting ways to engage in “subsidiarity” later, but, for now, let's see how it fits with the elected leadership role of representation.

One of the most effective ways to declare your “representation” commitment is to equip your local government so it can function at the closest appropriate level of operation possible to all your citizens. Operationally, this translates into mechanisms like: neighbourhood policing, localised social service programmes, and something called neighbourhood city halls. From a governance perspective, it is setting in motion processes like participatory budgeting and planning. The city of Porto Alegre, Brazil, for example, involves more than 45,000 citizens in the development of its annual budget.

Representation is not confined to direct contacts between you, as an elected official, and your citizen constituents, although this is important. Representation also means:

- mobilising your local government organisation to foster greater citizen involvement,
- establishing policies that assure transparency and accountability between your government and its citizens,
- allocating necessary resources to support delegation of responsibilities to lower levels of implementation,
- establishing networks of communication, and,
- enabling others in your community to assume more responsibilities for their well-being.

In other words, if you, as an elected official, are going to fulfil your *representation* responsibilities, you will need to call upon a wide range of individual and institutional competencies. ~~Competencies~~ like those covered in the next ten handbooks in this series.

Representation, advocacy, and inquiry

We want to shift the discussion to what we think is one of the more revealing and useful strategies associated with representation: balancing advocacy and inquiry. This is a set of

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conversational tools based on a model author Peter Senge discusses in one of his earlier books, *The Fifth Discipline*. It's based on the idea that managers and elected officials are advocates. They are often forceful proponents of positions and have the skills to influence others. After all, you probably wouldn't be an elected official if you weren't advocating various positions and values in relation to the well-being of your community.

But advocacy without input and feedback from others, Senge would argue, can be counter-productive. What you, as an elected official, need to do is balance your advocacy with inquiry, a dialogue that promotes collaborative learning. From the perspective of representation, this process assures that you and your elected colleagues can refocus your policies, programmes, and actions based on an on-going dialogue with your citizen constituents.

Balancing advocacy and inquiry involves, among other things, making your thinking processes and those of your constituents more visible or, in other words, getting them out in the open where both can be examined through enlightened conversation. Here are some of the conversational tools involved in balancing advocacy with inquiry that Rick Ross and Charlotte Roberts describe in their article *Balancing Advocacy and Inquiry*.⁵

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As an elected official, you can improve your advocacy position by:

- Stating the assumptions behind your position and describing how you arrived at your position using data, facts, and other concrete information;
- Explaining the assumptions underlying your position;
- Being more explicit about how you arrived at this point of view;
- Elaborating your point of view by explaining who will be affected, how they will be affected, and why;
- Providing concrete examples, if possible, and hypothetical ones if you are operating in new territory; and
- Trying to imagine your constituent's perspective on what you are saying.

Test your conclusions and assumptions by:

- Encouraging your constituent(s) to explore your ideas, assumptions and data;
- Not being too defensive, particularly if your political opponent is in the audience;
- Indicating where you are least clear in your thinking about the position you are advocating; and asking for their input; and
- Listening actively, remaining open, and encouraging others to put forth their views.

Finally, balance your advocacy with a healthy dose of inquiry by:

- Helping your constituent(s) explore their own reasoning on the topic;
- Explaining why you are interested in their points of view;
- Testing what they are saying by asking open ended questions;
- Checking to see if you really understand what they are saying; and
- Listening for new understanding which hopefully moves both of you to a higher level of insight and appreciation of each other's points of view.

⁵ Senge, Peter, Charlotte Roberts, Richard B. Ross, Bryan J. Smith, and Art Kleiner, *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook :Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization*. (New York: Doubleday Publishing, 1994.) pp.256-7.

Obviously, this is not a “you talk at them—and then they talk at you” set of deadly monologues. What we have outlined are guidelines for directing a conversation with your constituents that not only presents your point of view (advocacy), but also infuses it with deeper understanding and new ideas on the part of both you and your constituents (inquiry). As we said earlier, representation is not a one-way process. (See Handbook # 2: *Communicating* for more practical advocacy and inquiry tools.)

Representation is not limited to elected officials

*He who would do great things should
not attempt them all alone.*

Seneca, Roman statesman

While representation is at the heart of being an elected *representative* and one of your major responsibilities as an elected official, you are supported in these initiatives by a network of representation-fulfilling resources. Some of these you have influence on, even control over, as an elected official. Other representation initiatives may erupt as a counter-movement from the community. These can come in a variety of ways. But usually citizens are unhappy about the quality and extent of representation from their local government and its elected officials. Citizen reactions can range from removal of an elected official at the next election to riots in the streets.

It is important to recognise that representation falls into several categories of initiators. Here are some examples of how the function of representation gets implemented at the local level of governance in a democratic society.

- You, as an individual elected official, have direct control over some of the representation tools, i.e., your right, opportunities, and elected responsibility to communicate directly with citizens as an elected official and to advocate issues of representation as a member of the elected council.
- Your local elected body theoretically has the most power and influence at the local level to assure that the principles and practices of representation are implemented. Foremost are your legislative powers to establish policies and allocates scarce resources. Every formal act of governance your elected body takes should be subject to some kind of explicit representation test to determine who benefits and who doesn't. Representation doesn't stop with the actions of individual elected officials; or the elected body as a whole. There are other mechanisms and resources to assure representation.
- Many elected bodies work through committees to fulfil their elected responsibilities. A designated committee of the full elected body, such as a *Committee on Social Welfare*, might recommend starting a pre-school program in an underserved ethnic community. Such committees, because they have specific, targeted responsibilities, are in a position to safeguard the representation aspects of the functions for which they are responsible.
- Your elected body controls significant community resources that have responsibilities to assure representation. The most obvious and important is the local government

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organisation that is responsible for planning and delivering public programmes and services. For example, your elected body might instruct your chief executive officer, public safety director, and staff to develop and implement a safe streets program involving local police and citizen volunteers. Your decision is based on a request from the citizens of a low income neighbourhood that has a higher than average crime rate.

The physical evidence of your representation mandate and intentions are most often delivered by your local government appointed officials and staff. In most cases, the quality and fairness of your representation will be judged on the streets of your community, not in the elected council chambers where you preside.

- Often, local governments establish semi-public mechanisms to carry out specific tasks and responsibilities. These, most typically, involve the operation of public utilities or large public infrastructure investments, i.e., water systems and housing for lower income families. These quasi-public bodies most likely operate under a broad mandate from your elected leadership. In reality, you have delegated authority for representation to these bodies. Your ability to assure that their actions meet your elected body's definition of responsible representation is greatly diminished. In reality, the policy boards and managers of these semi-public authorities may resent any oversight you and your colleagues try to provide. Here's a hypothetical example to make this point more clear.

The director of one of the most influential NGOs in your country has accused your municipality of not representing the interests of "their constituents" in providing water services to a squatter settlement on the fringes of the municipality. Your mayor, in turn, orders the water authority to do something about the mess but it responds by saying it doesn't have the resources. The citizens are threatening to riot because they have no influence or elected representation. Your representation role and responsibilities, as an elected official, are being diffused, if not negated. To the citizens, it often looks like no one is in charge.

- Your representation role as an elected official gets even more interesting, challenging, and frustrating. For example, an angry mob of citizens has demanded that your local government take action to stop the destruction of trees in your central business district and to halt the development of a major traffic artery. They have interrupted your scheduled council meetings with their protests and threatened to campaign against several of your elected colleagues at the next election.

As you can see, representation is a shared responsibility, even though you and your elected colleagues are the citizens' elected *representatives*. While your representation role begins with a very personal commitment to serve your constituents, it becomes less personal and more bureaucratic as the organisation and programme resources you govern assume more of your representation responsibilities. As the public service delivery systems become more complex and complicated, and less in your direct control, your ability to assure your constituent citizens of their representation rights is further diminished. Frustrating, isn't it?

It becomes even more frustrating when some non-elected official, like the NGO director in our example, begins to talk about "his constituents" when you thought you and your elected colleagues were the only individuals with authorized, by-the-ballot, representation rights and responsibilities.

And then, the citizens start to exercise their representation rights by imposing grassroots democracy principles and practices on their elected officials. One of the authors was directly involved in the angry citizens/-tree episode mentioned above. When a few tree-loving citizens took up residency in five trees scheduled to be cut down to widen an intersection, it all looked rather humorous. Unfortunately, it turned into a major political confrontation for the elected officials who decided it was their duty and responsibility to assure the motorists safer and more efficient traffic flow within the central business district. Most of the elected officials who were in office during this citizen confrontation were voted out of office in the election that followed. Many attributed their demise to the tree-hugging constituents.

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Representation truths and consequences

*If you let me set the constraints,
I'll let you make the decisions.*

Herbert Simon

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Many decades ago there was a popular television show in the United States called *Truth or Consequences*. It came to mind as we were struggling with this difficult subject and how best to explore its many challenges from your perspective. Responsible representation, as an elected official, is not a matter of truth **or** consequences, but **truths and** consequences. Let's see if we can explain this riddle of terms.

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The truths:

- You represent many competing interests: economic, social, religious, ethnic, gender and age related, and geographically located interests, to name some of the more important and interesting variables.
- These competing interests often find it difficult to see the big picture, which must be your perspective as an elected official. After all, you and your elected colleagues represent all the citizens of the community.
- There are not enough public resources to meet all the needs and interests of all your citizens. As their elected representatives, you and your elected colleagues must decide how to allocate these scarce resources among the many competing interests.

The consequences:

- Whatever your decisions are, there will be constituents who will be unhappy.
- Many constituents will believe they are either under-represented by your decisions, or not represented at all.
- Your decisions may need to take into consideration people you don't represent, non-citizens of your community. For example, there may be the need for inter-jurisdictional decisions on such issues as water, traffic flow, or environmental protection.
- Your decisions may require that you balance short-term needs with long-term consequences, and relative costs with benefits to be realised.

As you can see, representation is not only a role and responsibility that you share with many other individuals, groups, and institutions; it is also a role and responsibility that embodies many *truths* and *consequences*. As Peter Block would remind us, *“The choices you offer your constituents are what creates accountability.”*

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Strategies and Tactics to Enhance Representation

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All of the competencies covered in this elected leadership training series encompass representation strategies and tactics. Communicating, facilitating, enabling, financing, negotiating, overseeing, institution building, financing, using your power, and making quality decisions; all have direct links to representation. While we will provide more in-depth ideas and examples about how to strengthen and use each of these competencies in the competency handbooks, we want to end this discussion with some ideas about how you and your elected colleagues can exercise your representation responsibilities.

Probably your best representation strategies involve building partnerships or working at the grassroots level to deliver public programmes and services. Partnerships can be almost as diverse as your imagination allows. They can be with: other local government units; private sector firms; non-governmental and community-based organisations; schools; religious institutions; combinations of these organised entities; or; collections of like-minded citizens. Grassroots government, on the other hand, involves mechanisms like neighbourhood city halls, participatory planning and budgeting sessions at the local level, and neighbourhood policing and other localised service delivery mechanisms.

Partnerships

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Partnerships come in many configurations; as we just mentioned. In an in-depth look at over fifty successful community partnerships, researchers David Chrislip and Carl Larson identified these basic conditions that contributed to their successes.

- 1. Create broad-based involvement:** Reach into every segment of the community you expect to serve as well as those who will be affected by what you want to do. Get them involved in the initial planning and decision making. Don't wait until you are ready for implementation to get them involved. One of the participants in one of the partnerships they researched made an interesting comment. "Our philosophy is, *‘If you have the people around the table who can make things happen—and those who can stop it from happening—then it will happen.’*" What an insightful comment. Too often we try to avoid those who we think might stand in our way. It only strengthens their resistance. Besides, we are talking about *representation*, not a meeting of the convinced.
- 2. Get to know each other and do some social contracting:** Before jumping into the fray of why you want to form a partnership, what these researchers call *collaboration*, put some energy into getting to know each other. Discuss each others interests, what they want to achieve, what personal resources they bring to the new partnership, their values, hopes, and, yes, concerns. It is important to establish a level of trust before delving into the midst of the new challenge.

3. **Create a credible, open process:** If your culture is like ours, there may be a bit of cynicism and mistrust about what local governments are trying to do. Who is really behind the idea that we should form this partnership? And, of course, what's in it for them? Have the important decisions already been made which puts us in the role of "rubberstamping" someone else's idea? This is where the good governance principles of openness and transparency come into play. By getting people from all aspects of the community involved, you send a strong message that your process is open, and that it will be credible. Backroom political deal-making has no place in this kind of process.
4. **Promote visible support from acknowledged leaders in the community:** Hopefully, this means you and your elected colleagues. In most successful partnerships, there are individuals who act as catalysts. They have a vision, inspire imagination, and possess high energy to keep things going. These kinds of community-based ventures rarely start out with their leadership already identified. In fact, that is often a disadvantage in forging partnerships at the grassroots level of governance. Leaders, who will be acknowledged rightfully by those they serve, will evolve from the process. The process establishes a new level of representation.
5. **Gain the support of established authorities:** This means, in most cases, the local government's elected leadership - you and your elected colleagues! Remember, we are talking about grassroots ventures. While you may be instrumental in planting the seeds of contemplation, we hope that these initiatives grow out of the community. This kind of top-down support for bottom-up initiatives may seem like a natural thing for elected officials and their operating friends to latch onto, but it doesn't always happen. There is always the "If it didn't come from us, it must be a rotten idea," or "We can see this as cutting into our official authority, and we can't have that!" Remember, representation goes in all directions, not just from the elected officials down to the masses.⁶

While this kind of collaborative-partnering venture is best initiated from the ground up, this doesn't deny your involvement as an elected official, or as an elected body. This is where the competencies we cover in this series on elected leadership come into play. You might *facilitate* the initial meeting of a few insightful, or angry, citizens who want to make something happen in their neighbourhood. You can *enable* them to get organised by offering a public facility where they can meet. You might be called in to *negotiate* the boundaries between what they want to do, and a possessive bureaucrat from city hall. Once they get near to putting their ideas into operation, they may need some *financing* or *overseeing* help. Of course, by doing these things you are fulfilling your representation role, and exhibiting elected *leadership*. Congratulations.

Before leaving the representation strategy of promoting partnerships, we want to call your attention to a valuable contribution to this discussion by the authors of *A Sourcebook for Municipal Capacity Building in Public-Private Partnerships*. While the authors are talking about large-scale partnerships, many of the principles identified as crucial to success are important to all kinds of partnerships, big and small. They include:

- Transparency: Keeping stakeholders informed and involved, curtailing corruption, and ensuring transparency.
- Accountability: Can you do what you said you would do?

⁶ Chrislip, David D. and Carl E. Larson, *Collaborative leadership: How Citizens and Civic Leaders Can Make a Difference* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994.), pp.75-88.

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- Legitimacy and legality: The rule of law even reaches down to community-based partnerships.
- Stakeholder participation: Know your stakeholders and keep them involved.
- Equity and inclusiveness: Does your partnership treat everyone equally? Is your process inclusive of all who can be involved; who will contribute and benefit from your partnership?
- Empowerment: Will your partnership empower the poor, the disenfranchised, and the marginalised members of your community?⁷

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We will return to this [Sourcebook](#) in the [Enabling competency handbook](#) so we can take advantage of the authors' world-wide experiences in enabling successful partnerships.

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Enhancing local self-governance through grassroots involvement

Representation really works when your citizens can see it, feel its presence, and get directly involved in making it happen. Again, we want to remind you that many of the ideas we will share with you about examples of representation are included in the other manuals. For example, we talk about the participatory budgeting and planning initiatives of the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil, in Handbook # IX: *Financing*. In addition to this world-class example of representation, here are some other ideas to ponder.

- In Mesa de los Hornos, a neighbourhood on the fringes of Mexico City, the municipal government is providing demand-driven technical assistance for planning and development of essential infrastructure improvements.
- In Germany, *Mothers' Centres* and *Mothers' Platforms* evolved from a grassroots effort to provide an alternative vehicle for mothers to get child development services and have an active political voice in their communities. While its energy comes from the resources and talents of women with children, it also opens official channels so they can gain access to a wider range of municipal and district councils and their programmes. Importantly, this model has wheels. It has been adopted by many mothers in western, central and eastern European countries.
- In the southern State of Kerala, India, municipal governments were having a difficult time communicating with the poor residents of their communities. With assistance from UNICEF, they developed something called the *Community Development Society (CDS)*. CDS organises women in poor communities to make plans for local development. Self-elected committees run these groups, and their recommendations are often incorporated into the municipal budgets of their respective jurisdictions. While this process was initiated from the "top-down", it has created a "bottoms-up" network of communicators to help in the governance of their communities.
- In Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, eighty percent of the housing stock was destroyed during the recent war that ravaged that part of the world. The municipality of Sarajevo played a catalytic role in mobilising the citizens to reconstruct their own housing - rather

⁷ Heymans, Chris, "Establishing Sound Partnership Principles" (Focusing Partnerships: A Sourcebook for Municipality Capacity-Building in Public-Private Partnerships. Ed. Janelle Plummer: London: Earthscan Publications, 2002, pp. 213-30.

than going in and doing it for them. The key was to identify the houses and provide titles to homeowners who were without legal ownership papers, even before the war. A major side benefit was also realised in these initiatives. It fostered ethnic and social reconciliation in an urban community where the unifying social and economic fabric was in tatters.

- There is a movement in the United States to create deliberative forums and study circles at the local level of governance. Public deliberation is a means by which citizens make tough choices about basic purposes and directions for their communities. It is a means of reasoning and talking together. These forums are organised by a variety of initiators: libraries, community centres, civic associations, even local governments, if they are so inclined. They are designed to raise awareness and explore options. They often lead to community action, but that's not the sole purpose. New knowledge, a heightened sense of civic responsibility, and engagement with one's neighbours concerning what is important to them are equally important reasons for engaging in public deliberation.
- In one of the poor sub-divisions of Cotonu, Benin, West Africa citizens were experiencing a huge gap in their local government's ability to fulfil its representation role and responsibilities. So, citizens waded into the void and took charge. It was a clear case of bottoms-up representation. They formed a team that went about consulting with a variety of elders, development association officials, and representatives of market women to get a sense of what was needed. The team established a community association with a permanent secretary, developed a plan of action, and made arrangements for basic service management and delivery. While this citizen initiative suggests a serious breakdown in local government leadership, think about the longer-term consequences. These citizens have managed to develop a new cadre of elected leaders who can take charge in the near future.⁸

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Representation, as we said in the beginning, is probably the most difficult, challenging and important role you assume as an elected official. In fact, it is your mandate. While you have only a modest amount of direct control over how your local government's representation functions are ultimately implemented, it is obvious that you have many potential resources to help you in this role.

A Reflective Opportunity

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We have described a number of ways that representative governments have reached out to their constituents to involve them in the governance process. Take a few minutes to record one or two examples of how your governing body is strengthening its representation roles and responsibilities through citizen involvement.

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Given these successes, how might you and your elected colleagues use these experiences to enhance grassroots involvement in some other programme or service arenas?

⁸ With the exception of the public deliberation example, these short case examples were taken from *Implementing the Habitat Agenda: In Search of Urban Sustainability*, published by the Development Planning Unit, University College London, 2001.

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Key Points

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- Representation is the elected leader's most difficult and important role
- Representation is the measure of how well your local government serves all of its citizens in accordance with widely accepted principles of good governance.
- The representation roles of elected officials include those of *delegate*, *trustee* and their combination, *politico*.
- Representation involves: the development and enforcement of policies; allocation of public goods and services; assisting citizens in their interactions with their local government; and keeping in touch with all citizens on a continuing basis.
- Effective representation is challenged by: conflicting demands; pluralistic pressures; and problems with no one in charge of solving them.
- Representation is not a one-way process.
- Representation and good governance share common values: participation; respect for the law; equity and inclusiveness; transparency and accountability; effectiveness and efficiency, and subsidiarity.
- Representation requires a judicious balancing act between advocacy and inquiry on the part of elected officials.
- Representation involves not just elected officials but their appointed officials and staff, subsidiary organisations established by the local government; and those citizens and community institutions that exercise their representation rights through protest and other means of telling their local government that they are not being represented to their satisfaction.
- The truth is: representation has consequences.
- Representation is enhanced through a rich network of partnerships; which is different from a network of rich partnerships.
- It is also enhanced richly through grassroots involvement of all citizens.

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