



## Strategy to facilitate “Community Democracy”

**The situation** ... We face impossible-seeming problems at all levels of society because our collective thinking process is contentious and short sighted. To solve these problems we need to shift our way of thinking ... so that all citizens come together, face the problems creatively, create win/win solutions, and work together in a spirit of “community democracy.”

**Good news...** There are three social innovations, which can help us facilitate this shift ... easier, faster, cheaper and better than most people can imagine.

### Three key social innovations are:

- 1) “**Choice-creating**” (CC) ... CC is the quality of thinking required for true democracy, but largely missing. This quality of thinking is where the people face important problems creatively and collaboratively and co-create win/win strategies on what to do.
- 2) “**Dynamic Facilitation**” (DF) ... DF is a leadership competency, where one person helps the group face and solve the most important issues. One can use DF to evoke choice-creating ... where people overcome the difficult problems, reach unity and build the spirit of community.
- 3) The “**Wisdom Council**” (WC) ... The Wisdom Council extends the range of DF so a whole community of people can engage one another in the spirit of choice-creating. Citizen groups, community foundations or governments can use it to facilitate a new kind of public conversation, where solutions to tough problems emerge naturally. The WC gathers a small group of 10-16 randomly selected citizens. DF is used to help them address the most important issues, think creatively, achieve unity. Then they offer this unity back to the community. They disband. But the audience finds value in the WC perspective and keeps talking in this more collaborative “We the People” way.

**“The Wisdom Council is the future of democracy.”**

Sen. Les Ihara, Senate Majority Leader, State of Hawaii

### History of the Wisdom Council

**“The Wisdom Council is the most empowering democratic innovation I know.”**

Tom Atlee, author  
*Tao of Democracy* and  
*Empowering Public Wisdom*

In the early 1980’s Jim Rough was a consultant to a timber company, helping hourly sawmill workers face impossible-seeming issues and achieve breakthroughs. In 1990 he started teaching public seminars on the approach he developed, Dynamic Facilitation. During the seminars participants would practice the new skills on impossible-seeming issues from society ... and achieve breakthroughs. In 1993 Jim combined many of these breakthroughs into the “[Wisdom Council](#),” a new strategy for whole-system change. In 2002 Jim and his wife Jean founded the

[Center for Wise Democracy](#) to help government leaders and citizen groups use the Wisdom Council. In 2006 government-sponsored Wisdom Councils started in regions of Austria. Now the process is spreading rapidly in Central Europe.

## Two examples

- **Government-led:** In the Spring of 2013 the Governor and Parliament of Vorarlberg, Austria used a Wisdom Council to spark a state-wide conversation on education. Twelve randomly selected citizens met for a day and a half to co-create a unanimous perspective. The Parliament gathered at tables in the foyer of their building. When the Wisdom Council presented their unified view of “the public interest,” they engaged one another in a collaborative conversation toward the shared vision, instead of the usual back and forth arguing and compromise.
- **Citizen-led:** In November 2003 three citizens of the Rogue Valley of Oregon organized a Wisdom Council for their region. This one Wisdom Council reminded citizens that “we” are in charge. It led to a new level of responsible citizen leadership in the city of Ashland and a reinvigorated town charter.

## Strategy for establishing Community Democracy

First a few people learn enough to become excited by the potential for change in this strategy. They begin bringing this new approach to their local area. A phased approach is recommended.

- 1) **The New Paradigm and skills.** Invite the 3-day “Dynamic Facilitation and Wisdom Council” seminar to be held in the community and encourage key community members to attend. This seminar has been taught to rave reviews all over the world. It provides the new-paradigm understandings, an opportunity to practice the skills, and the chance for local people to progress on significant issues. The leadership skills – helping people face and solve seemingly impossible issues -- can be applied to one’s professional and personal life.
- 2) **Community of Practice.** Often local participants of the seminar will choose to keep meeting, develop their DF skills, and offer to facilitate meetings in and among different organizations. Here’s a way to begin building community awareness about the potential of choice-creating ... vs. the usual decision-making.
- 3) **Community Wisdom Council.** In addressing local issues people in the Community of Practice may begin helping people see the potential of the Wisdom Council to spark “Community Democracy.” In a WC twelve or so citizens are *randomly* selected. They meet for maybe one and a half days addressing a difficult issue. Because they engage one another in the spirit of choice-creating, they reach unity on a strategy. In their presentation to the community they share this unity and the story of how it was achieved. Then they disband. But the process creates a legitimate, thoughtful voice of the “public interest,” which transforms the quality of the public conversation.
- 4) **Community Democracy.** Wisdom Councils are inexpensive and relatively easy to convene. A community foundation, for example, might host one every four months on different issues like the school bond, the hospital expansion, the homeless, etc., or the WC itself might identify the issue. Regular WC’s establish a new public conversation, where “the people” work together toward shared vision, providing responsible leadership to government.

**“If you organize a Wisdom Council you will deliver results that are very close to the common good. I have found no alternative to that yet.”**

Dr. Manfred Hellrigl, Director  
*Office of Future Related Issues,  
Vorarlberg Austria*

## This strategy is common sense

Currently our collective thinking process is an agree/disagree battle often yielding collective stupidity instead of collective intelligence. The WC provides a simple, low-risk, inexpensive, inclusive, and fun way to reshape the public conversation and spark collective intelligence. We invite you to explore this strategy and help bring forward this new-paradigm approach.

**For more information please see the Center for Wise Democracy ([www.WiseDemocracy.org](http://www.WiseDemocracy.org)), email to [info@WiseDemocracy.org](mailto:info@WiseDemocracy.org) or call 360 385 7118.**