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Puerto Rico's Citizen Feedback System

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March 1971

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Abstract

Citizen feedback may be defined as information from citizens directed to societal institutions, particularly government, in order to improve their functioning. Feedback can be divided into two broad categories: service feedback, which includes inquiries, requests, and complaints; and involvement feedback, which includes opinions, suggestions, and volunteering.

A service feedback system has been established in Puerto Rico. A Feedback Division is part of the Governor's Office and is staffed by Citizen Aides whose function is to respond to letters, phone calls, and visits from citizens. The Citizen Aide is a "non-buck-passer," that is, if a citizen is referred elsewhere in government, the aide retains responsibility for following through on the case. An island-wide 24 hour phone service makes the system available to citizens at all times. Feedback reports provide information on the numbers and types of citizen concerns, including requests for service, complaints about government programs, and the delays in providing service. This information can then be used by the executive department and other branches of government to improve government functioning.

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I. PUERTO RICO'S EXPERIMENT IN CONTEXT

Democratic government requires more than elections as methods for citizens to inform and to affect government. Special efforts must be made to design two-way communications systems between government and the citizen, particularly in times like the present when substantial groups of people are estranged from the rest of society. Today's electronic media provide a powerful, virtually unobstructed channel from government to the citizen. Attention must be devoted to developing effective channels in the reverse direction -- from the citizens to government.

Since Governor Luis A. Ferre took office in 1969, he has concentrated on developing a more responsive government. He has been working to create a government by anticipation instead of by crisis, by developing new ways to bring science, government, and the citizen closer together. Among the new institutions he has introduced are a Governor's Advisory Council for the Development of Government Programs, an Institute of Social Technology, a Scientific Systems Center, a Governor's Information Room, and a Citizen Feedback System, the subject of this article.

The authors of this article were involved in various aspects of these innovations; but, in particular, were among those who designed for Puerto Rico an experimental citizen feedback system to handle citizen complaints, requests, and opinions in a way which would give the individual citizen a more rapid and complete response, and, at the same time, give government a more accurate and comprehensive view of citizen needs and performance. The fundamental elements of the Puerto Rican citizen feedback system are

applicable elsewhere, particularly at state and local levels of government.

For example, the authors have recently started a related effort for Governor Francis Sargent to develop a citizen feedback system for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Government Reform and Citizen Participation

In order to put this citizen feedback system model in context, four major trends to improve the responsiveness of government to the citizen should be considered:

(1) Electoral reform, a primary focus of the National Municipal League, is, of course, basic to any efforts to improve the responsiveness of government.

(2) The administrative decentralization of facilities and services as, for example, the establishment of branch offices for tax collection, license issuance, of for various public works activities. The decentralization of big city school systems and the creation of multiservice (social service) centers are increasingly occurring.

(3) What can be considered top-down reform of government decision-making encompasses the popular cabinet-style executive branch reorganization and consolidation, improving the planning and budget processes, upgrading of chief executive staff, the increasing use of edp equipment and management information systems, and other administrative improvements.¹ The centralized ombudsman is, in a sense, a top-down innovation of interest to reformers, particularly in the late 1960's.

(4) Bottom-up, ad hoc approaches to citizen participation have been a fourth major trend during the past decade. Within government, citizen participation has been primarily stimulated by Federal antipoverty, urban renewal, and model cities programs. State and local governments are experimenting with new programs for handling citizen communications such as little state houses and neighborhood city halls.

President Nixon has experimented with "listening post" programs in both the U.S. General Services Administration and in the Republican Party. The

Republican Party has opened Republican Action Centers, primarily in Negro ghettos in large cities, while two Democratic candidates devised innovative campaign participative techniques: Eugene McCarthy's large-scale, house-to-house canvassing and Robert Kennedy's community organizing program.

Increasing numbers of other feedback innovations are being undertaken by social institutions outside of government, by churches, civic groups, and by the mass media, particularly in the form of telephone "hotlines."

Media innovations include newspaper "Action-Line Columns" which handle complaints mailed in or phoned in by readers; regular reporting of topical opinion polls; radio talk shows, where the listening audience is encouraged to phone in and state their views on the air; and several television programs have experimented with arrangements for viewers to dial one of two telephone numbers to indicate their "vote" for or against a specific proposal under discussion.

Citizen Alienation Still Persists

In the face of the rapidly growing problem of citizen alienation, these several trends to improve government responsiveness seem to be too little, too late, and, in particular, too fragmented. Administrative decentralization has usually been done for administrative convenience. "Although administrative decentralization and community participation are often talked about together, they are not the same thing. It is possible to decentralize without providing for any citizen participation at the service area level, . . ."2

The efforts of reformers concerned with top down government administrative improvements have become divorced from the efforts of many bottom-up participatory reformers. The two groups may share ultimate objectives, but they do not agree upon the means or even upon fundamental attitudes toward "the system."

Most of the top-down reorganizations do little, if anything, to affect the way the citizen views the bureaucratic maze. Citizens generally "see" only two types of government officials: first, the people at the top (primarily the governor or mayor, some cabinet members, leaders of the legislative body or of the opposition parties, and relatively few others) who are visible to the public on a regular and timely basis through the electronic media; and, second, government personnel with whom the citizen has personal contact.

Much of the invisible bureaucracy in-between seems irrelevant to the citizen and may, for communications purposes, be obsolete, since hierarchical channels are no longer the relatively fast means of communication that they once were. Hierarchies have been short-circuited, at least in one direction: the electronic media are a more efficient communicator from government and the center of society out to the citizen than are long, bureaucratic channels. However, without a corresponding increase in the speed of communications in the opposite direction, from the citizen to government, the increasingly aware citizen becomes frustrated when he attempts to communicate with his government.

The bottom-up citizen participation programs have generated tension and controversy. Nearly 1,000 Community Action Programs and 150 Model Cities

programs are underway, but these have often turned out to be either cases of non-participation (manipulation and therapy), or cases of token participation in the form of consultation and placation, with few cases of real citizen power in the form of partnership, delegated power, or citizen control.³ The basic difficulty has been that the program was nominally designed to bring about institutional cooperation, while community leaders saw institutional change as the key objective. The CAP's most closely controlled by City Hall were disappointing. The ones most antagonistic were destroyed.⁴

The operations of little city hall programs are frequently the target of politically voracious city councils. Also, citizens seem to have been expecting more follow-through than they have been able to get. Although neighborhood city halls process complaints and requests for services more rapidly than before, citizen participation in policy planning has not significantly increased.⁵

Citizen participation has thus been increasingly emphasized in federal, state, and local government programs in recent years, but usually in ad hoc ways. Both legislative and executive branches of government receive large quantities of communications from citizens. There is, however, a lack of systematic approaches and the various efforts to handle these communications have suffered from: (1) a lack of coordination among the various feedback mechanisms; (2) the absence of an overall reporting system; and (3) limited accessibility and comprehensiveness. In today's large and complex government, there is a need for a comprehensive system for receiving, examining, and channeling citizens' complaints, requests for information and services, and opinions.

While existing feedback mechanisms even now contribute information, this information is generally not analyzed to help determine government policy. The contribution of the individual citizen to government policy-making need not always be a well-articulated opinion or suggestion. A personal complaint, or even a well-directed inquiry by a citizen, can help trigger a change in government policy.

II. A SYSTEMS APPROACH TO SERVICE FEEDBACK

Objectives, Terminology, and Components

Citizen feedback may be defined as information from citizens directed to societal institutions, particularly government, in order to improve their functioning. A citizen feedback system allows information to be collected from citizens and introduced into government to modify policies, programs, and services. Feedback can be divided into two broad categories: service feedback, which includes inquiries, requests, and complaints; and involvement feedback, which includes opinions, suggestions, and volunteering.

Citizen feedforward is information from the center out -- policy and program information projected forward to citizens who then provide feedback based on their observations, values, and judgment about the results that follow. It is presentation to the citizen of a set of understandable alternatives about which value judgments can be made.

There are, then, two sides of the communications loop. A citizen feedback system concentrates on the citizen-to-government communication, the weaker of the two sides of the loop. However, once this side is strengthened, the

weaknesses on the other side will become more obvious. Only with quality feedforward, will there be assurance of quality feedback.

The core of successful citizen feedback is an information system designed to receive citizen communications, to make direct referrals to appropriate government problem-solvers, and to trigger automatic follow-up for complete and prompt response by the government. A citizen feedback system should also classify citizen problems and preferences in order to help monitor (1) the level of activity of various government programs; (2) the delays involved in delivering public services; (3) the level of satisfaction of the citizens relative to such programs and services; and (4) preferences of citizens regarding competing alternatives faced by government decision-makers.

A citizen feedback system should take into account not only unsolicited and unstructured communications in the form of letters, phone calls, and personal contact of government by citizens, but also solicited and structured communications through public hearings, special group meetings, perhaps even issue ballots, etc. The latter require a certain amount of feedforward from government, to which citizens may then respond with feedback.

The pilot version of the Puerto Rican citizen feedback system received primarily unsolicited and unstructured citizen communications. Sixty-two per cent of the feedback received during the first nine-month period of testing was in the form of requests for service. Twenty-four per cent of the cases were complaints. During this period, only a small proportion of citizens using the system wanted to obtain information (4 per cent), or to offer an opinion (6 per cent) or a suggestion (4 per cent). Only a fraction wanted to volunteer (0.2 per cent).

Service feedback (89.8 per cent) outnumbered involvement feedback (10.2 per cent) by almost a 9:1 ratio, as might be expected from unsolicited communications. Therefore, so as not to overstate the degree of citizen participation reflected in the system at its present stage of development, it might best be called a service feedback system.

The principal criteria which were applied to the design of this system were that is should be:

- (1) Strong enough to curb buck passing, cut unnecessary red tape, and redress grievances;
- (2) Independent enough to give the citizen and elected officials a real check on the bureaucracy;
- (3) Informative for the citizen as to what programs are available to serve him or to be influenced by him;
- (4) Accessible enough to give all citizens an opportunity to communicate with their government;
- (5) Informative for government as to what citizens need, what they are getting, and how they feel about various programs;
- (6) Comprehensive enough to improve service and policy-making throughout government as a whole.

An important characteristic of any "system" is that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." In other words, a system is not readily divisible into specialized components which separately satisfy particular design criteria. Nevertheless, the components of the present Puerto Rican service feedback system are considered in a sequence which relates quite closely to the above list of six criteria and also to an approximate chronological order in which these components have been introduced into the system. These system components are:

- (1) A Feedback Division of the Governor's Office to coordinate the operation of the system.
- (2) Interagency Citizen Aides who receive special training in non-buck-passing and case investigation.
- (3) A Public Service Manual which describes for each government service when, from whom, and how to obtain it.
- (4) An Outreach Network of feedback stations, mobile units, and a special 24-hour phone service.
- (5) Feedback Reports which provide indications of volumes, delays, types, and examples of feedback on various services.
- (6) Agency Personnel Training to develop both feedback analysis and citizen aide capabilities within government agencies, in general, and particularly, in ones which have a great deal of contact with citizens.

A Feedback Division

The most apparent figure in government to oversee the operation of a citizen feedback system is the chief executive, as his office is the center of citizen awareness, of government. Some other elected official might be designated for the role if he is close to the chief executive, particularly if he runs for election with him as a team.

If the feedback system is operated out of the executive branch of government, legislators must be given ready access to the system. Many legislators are jealous of the service function they provide for their constituents. Although any single legislator has become less visible with the growth of mass media, his geographical accessibility to his own particular constituents is still very important and can be complemented by giving him particularly easy access to a citizen feedback system.

In the case of Puerto Rico, coordination of the feedback system has been carried out on an ad hoc basis within the Governor's Office. The Governor is the only executive official elected by all the people of the Island. Prior to initiation of the Feedback System, the Governor's Office received each day 200 to 300 letters, 50 to 100 visitors (other than tourists), and numerous phone calls from citizens.

The development of the citizen feedback system in Puerto Rico has gone through two phases: a design phase beginning in June 1969, and a testing phase beginning in January 1970. Initially there was very limited publicity given to the system, so that input increased only as the system developed the capability to handle a larger case flow. In the initial months, the system handled around 250 communications (visits, letters, phone calls) per month. When the special phone system was inaugurated in the ninth month of the testing phase, the volume quadrupled. The system is now capable of handling at least 1000 communications per month.

In February 1971, Puerto Rico's feedback system moved into a new phase. A Feedback Division of the Office of the Governor was created and it was decided not only to continue implementing the service feedback and outreach aspects of the system, but to give increased attention to the analysis and reporting of citizen feedback within individual agencies, as well as in the Governor's Office. The Feedback Division will

(1) aid all citizens who write, phone, or visit the Governor's Office or other offices established throughout the island, for the purpose of handling citizen inquiries, requests, complaints, opinions, and suggestions;

(2) provide techniques by which these communications, along with social indicators and program costs, can be analyzed in order to evaluate government programs and to recommend improvements in government services and policies;

(3) train agency personnel in the use of the feedback system so as to provide both for better service to the citizen, and for better planning and management within government; and

(4) inform the public about various government programs so that they might have more direct access to the agencies which provide particular services and which establish particular policies of concern to any particular citizen.

Interagency Citizen Aides

Government civil servants are usually highly specialized. This inevitably leads to buck-passing and the run-around for citizens unfamiliar with the bureaucratic maze. A citizen feedback system, therefore, needs a group of Interagency Citizen Aides who function as an information resource, switching center, and helping hand for any citizen. The Interagency Citizen Aide must follow up any referral he makes and, in certain cases, conduct an independent investigation.

Since the Citizen Aide is the key to the success of the citizen feedback system, he must be well-prepared. A two to three week training program, consisting primarily of sensitivity training and sample case analysis, is needed.

During the 13 month pilot test of the Puerto Rican feedback system, two groups of Interagency Citizen Aides have been trained. There are now twenty working at the Governor's Office and in five remote feedback stations, handling

citizen cases and working on various system components. The full network of 12 feedback stations and 5 mobile units originally conceived for a fully implemented islandwide system will require up to forty Interagency Citizen Aides.

A Public Service Manual with Automatic Updating

Initially, citizen aides need only be equipped with telephone access to all government agencies, a photocopier to make copies of certain letters containing problems relating to more than one agency, and an up-to-date Public Service Manual.

The Manual should contain a brief description of each government service, and of the requirements for obtaining it. How, where, and when it may be obtained should be presented and any documents needed to receive the service identified. The name of an agency "problem solver" should be given for each particular service so that a citizen aide can call him to straighten out any problems the citizen is having or to check on the status of a request for service. This agency contact is crucial for short-circuiting hierarchical flows of communication. The citizen aide can help the citizen avoid "getting the run around" by going directly to the appropriate person in the agency.

Puerto Rico's Manual lists approximately 800 government programs offered by the Commonwealth. Certain local, federal, and non-governmental civic programs should be added. Also, certain frequently needed application forms should also be included in the Manual or in an appendix.

Compilation of this data was a massive undertaking and updating is a continuous process involving a citizen aide in contact with the agencies. Ultimately, what will be needed in Puerto Rico and elsewhere is a computerized service information retrieval system.

In the more immediate future, microfilm retrieval and form copier devices should be considered, along with various indexing schemes, in order to make comprehensive but bulky Public Service Manuals more usable. In Puerto Rico, a somewhat abbreviated version of the Manual is being made available to all government personnel and will perhaps be available at cost to private citizens. This version of the Manual will not contain the specific names of agency problem-solvers and will, of course, not be updated as often as the citizen aides' loose-leaf version of the Manual. This will have additions, deletions, and changes made as often as once a month.

An Outreach Network

The handling of unsolicited citizen communications must be adequate before an outreach program is established to solicit more communications from citizens. Since the goal of an outreach system is to encourage the citizens to use the system by making it easily accessible, a poorly planned, unresponsive feedback system could conceivably increase, rather than decrease citizen alienation.

However, once a Feedback Division with strong executive support has been established, once Citizen Aides have been trained to care and know how to handle citizen communications, and once they have been equipped with adequate service information resources, then a well-publicized outreach program should be undertaken.

The outreach subsystems of a feedback system should be a flexible, multi-media network, consisting of such components as feedback stations, mobile units, and a 24-hour phone service. Costs will inevitably be a concern. Components should be added and deleted as needed to meet a goal of accessibility at low cost. Because citizens in different areas often have different preferences with regard to communicating by letter, phone or in person, these preferences and the cost to government of the various outreach mechanisms should be continuously evaluated.

Local feedback stations can be effectively used in densely populated areas. Certain public buildings should be selected to house the stations. Public familiarity and cost favor the use of an existing facility. The citizen should visualize the feedback station as politically and socially neutral. In Puerto Rico, fire stations met these criteria. Furthermore, the firemen and their chief visualize the fire department as a service organization in the community in which it is located.

A school building may be a better natural choice, because of its visibility and its accessibility. Schools as feedback stations fit well into the concept of "lighted school house" programs that put that community's public school buildings at the disposal of both its adult and young citizens for a variety of public purposes during and after school sessions.

An outreach network should include not only a limited number of feedback stations in large urban areas, but also mobile units to serve smaller, isolated urban areas, sprawling suburban areas, and sparsely settled rural areas. The mobile units, not only offer the citizen a regular opportunity to communicate

in person with his government in his own community, but they are also a source of publicity for the fixed stations and the total feedback system.

A mobile unit can be a converted bus or truck. Facilities and information should be provided to aid citizens in expressing their opinions on important public issues. Each mobile unit should have a staff of two Citizen Aides who operate similarly to those in the feedback station, except that they would not usually be dealing with the telephone calls from citizens. Each mobile unit should, however, be equipped with a radio-telephone to be used in follow-up work with government agencies. One Citizen Aide should always be on duty in the mobile unit, while another circulates through the community to locate problems and to develop a feeling for community problems.

An important component of the Puerto Rican's system is a centralized, 24-hour phone service. This gives the citizen access to government at any time of the day, from any location. This solves a problem inherent in such mechanisms as little city halls in that often they are open only during regular working hours, thus inaccessible (or inconvenient) for working people or mothers with small children.

In Puerto Rico, there are two ways a citizen may phone the Feedback Division at any time. First, the citizen may use his own private phone at home or at work to call the Feedback Division at his own cost. A special feedback phone number is known to the phone operators and is publicly advertised.

The second way for the citizen to phone the Feedback Division is toll free. Public pay phones located at all fire stations (not just the ones equipped with Citizen Aides to serve as feedback stations) allow one number to be dialed at

no cost to the citizen, using a reverse charge method. These calls are billed to the Feedback Division.

During regular working hours operator-secretaries attend all incoming calls, answer simple inquiries, and transfer more complicated calls to Citizen Aides. On holidays and during off-duty hours, a person calling at any time can leave a message on a tape recorder connected to one of the phones reserved for this purpose. On the following working day, one of the operator-secretaries will transcribe the recorded messages and forward them to a Citizen Aide to process them.

In Puerto Rico, the average initial cost to the Feedback Division of a long distance call using this reverse charge method has been one dollar. It is estimated that the phone system will cost the Government around \$130,000 per year.


It is difficult at this stage to make cost comparisons between various outreach components. But a network of twelve feedback stations and five mobile units staffed by 40 Citizen Aides would be expected to cost approximately \$400,000 per year to operate in Puerto Rico.

Feedback Reports As a Prelude to Service Auditing

A citizen feedback system is designed to provide better information not only for citizens, but also for government policy-makers. From a public management and policy standpoint, an information system to make citizen communications useful for decision-making is the crux of the feedback system. Many outreach programs, such as found in various neighborhood city hall

programs, never make the transition from the outreach phase to the analysis phase. Case accounting and analysis should help government identify problem areas where administrative action could alleviate a problem or where new legislation is required.

While feedback case information can be tabulated manually, computerization of the reporting system can better handle the volume, increase its accuracy, and is a major step in enabling timely presentation and wide distribution of summary data.

A program has been developed for an IBM 360/50 for computerizing the cases received in the Puerto Rican system. Each individual case is entered into the computer with the following information: a case number; the citizen's name (not to be retained once the case is fully resolved); the originating feedback office; the medium used for contact (telephone, visit, or letter); the date the case was opened; the municipality where the citizen lives; service information (the agency, program, and  municipality where the agency has an office to solve the problem); the type of feedback (requests, complaints, opinions, etc.); the Citizen Aide handling the case; the estimated number of days the case will take to resolve; the closing date; and the nature of the disposition of the case. By keeping an up-to-date record of all the feedback received by the system, the chief executive will be assisted in identifying important problem areas quickly. Information received from citizens, plotted on time series graphs and studied by feedback analysts, will help the chief executive and his cabinet to know what services and programs are functioning

properly, what the problem-areas are at a particular time, what policies might need to be revised, and what are the changing public moods. The executive can then propose corrective measures.

Ultimately, there should be a wide variety of users of summarized feedback information. How the information is to be analyzed should be determined by each particular user's requirements. At a minimum, the Feedback Division itself should prepare reports for the Governor, his aides, and his cabinet. Others to receive various types of reports are: at the operational agency level, the problem-solver or analyst assigned to a particular public program; at the supervisory or intermediate level, the agency head responsible for designated programs; the citizen aides themselves. The public should also receive some record of feedback results as should the legislature. In effect, a government-wide Service Audit should evolve along lines which in some sense parallels the financial auditing process.

Feedback reports should be part of a system of social indicators to be used in government planning systems such as PPBS. Feedback is an indicator of the benefit side in cost/benefit analysis. This is the weaker side and better inputs are badly needed on the weaker of the two sides, the benefit side. The role of feedback analyst will require a great deal of skill, sensitivity, and knowledge of the government.

Agency Personnel Training to Allow the System to Spread

Puerto Rico's Feedback Division within the Office of the Governor will initiate a government-wide training program in citizen aide techniques and feedback analysis techniques. Agency personnel must learn both types of

techniques if the bureaucracy as a whole is to become more sensitive to the citizen. The government-wide training program will begin on a phased basis in at least a few agencies in fiscal 1971. By then, copies of the Public Service Manual will have been distributed throughout all Puerto Rican government agencies. Every agency will receive at least a minimal amount of instruction as to how to make full use of these copies of the Manual, with more thorough training to follow when an agency begins to evaluate its own programs through citizen feedback.

The Feedback Division should also offer such training for employees of the legislative body. The legislature and executive should, however, maintain their traditional independence to whatever extent they mutually agree is necessary. In other words, even though they may use the same system of case accounting, they need only share feedback reports to whatever extent is agreed. Legislative oversight of the executive must be done with a certain degree of independence.

However, within the executive branch of government, feedback analysis must be done in a well-coordinated fashion. In Puerto Rico, the Feedback Division is under the direction of the same person who is responsible for developing and operating what is known as the Governor's Information Room, which is used for the presentation of economic and social indicators to the Governor, his aides, and his cabinet.

During the implementation and analysis phase of Puerto Rico's feedback system development, each cabinet member will designate one of his closest aides to receive feedback analysis training. Then these agency feedback

analysts will work closely with the Feedback Division, and particularly with the staff of the Information Room, in the development of feedback reports which will be of particular relevance to each of their particular agencies.

III. INVOLVEMENT FEEDBACK, FEEDFORWARD, AND THE MEDIA

The Puerto Rican system has been described as handling primarily service feedback. Yet 10 per cent of the citizen communications received have fallen into the category of involvement feedback--opinions, suggestions, and volunteering. Special attention should be given to these communications, since they usually represent extra effort taken by the citizen to abstract from his own experience and observations in order to generalize about a problem or issue which concerns others.

Involvement feedback should not only be brought to the attention of the chief executive and other policy-makers but, like service feedback, it should receive a direct response from the relevant government official.

Feedforward, or publicity designed to encourage citizens to offer more involvement feedback, would no doubt increase the volume of such communications. The first feedforward applied to the Puerto Rican system was public advertisement of the existence of the system's 24-hour phone service. Volume picked up considerable (about 4 or 5 times the previous volume), but the publicity emphasized service feedback. When involvement feedback is solicited through government feedforward, a mere increase in the volume of involvement

feedback may not be a satisfactory objective. Policy-makers would be able to use such feedback more readily, if it were more structured in order that comparisons and correlations among opinions could be made more apparent.

The objective of such structured involvement feedback should not be equated with the objective of standard opinion polling. Respondents here would still be self-selected and would, therefore, usually be expressing more intensive feelings, based perhaps upon their personal experiences on the issues.

Thus, in addition to mechanisms for service feedback, involvement methods of communication are also needed to produce a more complete feedback analysis. Once problem areas are discerned through summary reporting of service feedback (which might be termed "program monitoring" or "service auditing"), or through other feedback channels (e.g., protest demonstrations), then a more structured approach for producing involvement feedback is useful to resolve a broad issue.

To date, the Puerto Rican system has not been used to project issue feedforward and then receive resultant involvement feedback. Opinion feedback experiments using the mobile units, suggestion feedback "listening post" group discussions, and a volunteer talent bank have been planned, however.

A number of additional techniques for structuring issue feedforward and feedback have been considered by the authors and others at M.I.T. Among these techniques are:

- (1) Issue balloting: A questionnaire containing a logical sequence of questions on one issue, interspersed with brief presentations of facts and pro and con arguments on the issue; the ballot being suitable for automatic tallying, for forwarding to any government official of the respondent's choosing, and for other types of follow-up action.

- (2) Technology-aided dialogue: A more dynamic version of issue balloting involving real time access of respondents, both to a tallying system which immediately displays results, and to the question formulator or discussion leader who restates the issue and questions, in interactive fashion, in order to move more rapidly to a resolution of the issue or at least to a better group understanding of differences in basic individual values and beliefs which relate to the issue.

- (3) Multi-participant modeling: An extension of the above to include not simply a tallying of opinions, but rather their implications in terms of predicted policies and their consequences as programmed into a model of the issue.

A service feedback system which helps identify public issues is something that government can readily sponsor. However, once an issue becomes clearly identified and articulated, it is difficult for any government either to state that issue unbiasedly in the feedforward process or to invite a great deal of opinion feedback on that issue.

There are times when government is guided by referendum votes which are binding. It is, however, more difficult for any government to ask for opinion feedback when it does not necessarily want to be bound by the results, as is likely if it undertook such efforts. The search here is not for an electronic version of a New England town meeting, but rather for a means of supplementing the process of electing representatives with a process for more readily expressing informed citizen opinion to those same elected officials who would still have to make final judgments on each particular issue.

Governments should not be the only sponsors of issue feedforward and opinion feedback. The mass media are sponsors because their audience

appeal increases as they introduce innovations which convert them from one-way into two-way communication processes.

Another possible sponsor of opinion feedback would be various political and civic organizations which may want to encourage citizen reaction on certain issues. Such organizations might be more biased than the media, but at least they need not feel as bound by opinion feedback as a government sponsor might.⁶

IV. SYSTEM EVALUATION AND EVOLUTION:

FEEDBACK ON FEEDBACK

A random sample of twenty-four users of the 24-hour telephone service of the feedback system during the pilot testing phase were interviewed as part of an evaluation of the system. Seventy-five per cent of those interviewed had tried to solve their problems by other means before resorting to the telephone service; fifty per cent had contacted a government agency which they claimed had taken no action.

The respondents were asked: "Would you have received a better response to your problem if you had gone directly to the agency involved, instead of using the 24-hour telephone system?" Half of the respondents felt they received a better response via the telephone service, 37 per cent felt there would be no difference, and 13 per cent felt they would have done better going straight to the agency. When asked "Would you use the telephone service again or would you go elsewhere with your problem," 88 per cent said they would use the telephone system again.

These citizens who have used the feedback system apparently feel that they get a better response than they would have otherwise gotten from government. It was also apparent that the system can be further improved by reducing the delays involved. The citizens liked the easy accessibility of the phone system.

Feedback about a feedback system might be obtained periodically through the type of interviews cited above. However, if the philosophy of the system really deserves support in the first place, then some such feedback on the feedback system should be encouraged to come through the feedback system itself. When a citizen receives a final response from the system on a particular case, he might be given an opportunity by means of a self-addressed postcard to express his degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the way the system has served him. In order that these responses not be biased by expectations about future service, these respondents should be anonymous, unless the citizen wants the case reopened.

V. CITIZEN FEEDBACK IN THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

The citizen feedback system developed for Puerto Rico can be applied elsewhere, with sufficient modification for varying political and social conditions. Already this system's approach is being used in Massachusetts. With the help of a grant from the National Science Foundation, a joint team from M.I.T., Governor Sargent's staff, and from the Office of Planning and Program Coordination, is undertaking an intensive six month effort to develop a feedback system for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

This project will focus first on the current communications and decision-making procedures in the Governor's Office. At least initially, the main emphasis of this project will be to improve methods for handling and learning from existing service and involvement feedback, rather than developing an ambitious outreach program.

The first phase of a cabinet-style reorganization plan takes effect in the spring of 1971. There Governor Sargent has expressed an interest in having his new cabinet secretaries play key roles in the operation of a contemplated government-wide citizen feedback system, so that each secretary make his designated area of government more responsive to the citizenry.

These two experiments in Puerto Rico and Massachusetts come at an opportune time, given the latest moves at the federal level toward federal revenue sharing with states and toward reorganizing the federal bureaucracy in order to make it easier for revenue sharing to be administered. The federal government is expected to further stimulate the development of goal setting and of program evaluation capacity at state and local levels, and to place less emphasis on ad hoc citizen participation programs and more emphasis on systematic ways for involving citizens.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 For a recent review of these efforts, see Stanley Botner, "Managing a State," National Civic Review, June, 1970, pp. 308 ff.
2. Howard Hallman, "Guidelines for Neighborhood Management," Public Management, ICMA, January, 1971, p.4.
3. Sherry Arnstein, "Ladder of Citizen Participation," AIP Journal, July 1969, p. 217 ff.
4. Daniel P. Moynihan, Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding, (New York: Free Press, 1969), pp. 131-134.
5. Nigel Gusdorf, an S. B. thesis, "Puerto Rico's Citizen Feedback System," M.I.T., Cambridge, Mass., January 1971, pp. 22-23.
6. For further discussion of these topics see: Dr. Chandler Stevens, "Citizen Feedback: The Need and the Response," Technology Review, M.I.T., January 1971, pp. 39 ff.

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