Why Share Power? Exploring the Motives for Creating Opportunities for Citizen Participation in Local Health and Human Service Contracts

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Paper presented at the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management Annual Meeting, November 12-14, 2015. Please do not cite or circulate without the permission of the authors.
INTRODUCTION

The United States of America has a long tradition of democratic governance – governance “of the people, by the people, for the people.”

Reflecting this, a large body of public administration literature has focused on the importance of involving citizens in governance. There was a surge of interest in the topic of citizen participation during the New Public Administration era in the 1960s and 1970s. More recently, the New Public Service framework has emphasized the moral bond between public servants and citizens and argues that citizens should play a central role in the public policy process (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000). The vast majority of research on citizen participation conducted to date has focused on the efforts of government agencies to engage citizens in the context of traditional public functions and services. Much less is known about citizen participation efforts in situations where government services are contracted to nonprofit and/or for-profit organizations. Across many fields, a range of public, nonprofit, for-profit and quasi-governmental stakeholders are presently involved in policy development, advocacy and service implementation (Smith & Lipsky, 1995; Steven & Pekkanen, 2012). This study seeks to understand the contemporary role of citizen participation within the “hollow state,” where public programs and their monitoring is often delegated to private contractors.

The objective of this study is to explore why public and private managers create opportunities for citizen engagement in the context of government contracting. Drawing on Roberts (2008), we define citizen participation as the processes by which individuals, organizations and informal groups, who are not formally associated with the government, are directly involved in democratic governance and decision-making related to public policies or

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1 The quote is taking from President Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address.
2 Brinton Milward and Keith Provan first used this term in their research (Milward & Provan, 2000).
public programs. To investigate our research question, we conducted 93 semi-structured interviews with public managers as well as with managers of nonprofit and for-profit organizations implementing government contracts. We collected our data in six counties across four states in the Northeastern region of the United States. We focus on health and human services that county governments contract out to for-profit and nonprofit organizations. These services have an immediate impact on the well-being of individuals who may face barriers, such as lack of time, resources and capacity, that make it difficult for them to participate in the public policy process. In some cases, these citizens may be deliberately excluded from participating. Additionally, unlike fields where service delivery outcomes are easy to measure, health and human services are often challenging to monitor and evaluate, which makes it critical to seek client input in the policy-making stage, as well as in the design and the implementation of these services.

The citizen participation movement of the 1960s and 1970s was closely tied to the War on Poverty, which sought to develop working relationships between public agencies and the indigent community residents they served (Gilbert & Eaton, 1970). By revisiting the contemporary state of citizen participation in this context, our study will provide new insights into how public and private organizations can effectively seek community feedback about contracted services and involve the community in the management of these services. Our study will specifically increase understanding of why public and private managers are motivated to seek citizen feedback in the context of health and human service contracts. We compare these motives with the reasons for seeking public input about traditional public functions and services identified in the literature. We hope the study will ultimately enhance practitioners’ willingness to work together with citizens in the design and delivery of contracted services.
LITERATURE REVIEW

In his seminal article entitled “Why Measure Performance?” Robert Behn makes a simple yet powerful argument: managerial strategies and actions aim to achieve numerous purposes, and examination of these purposes is necessary to inform the selection of the most appropriate strategies (Behn 2003). We extrapolate the argument Behn used in the context of performance measurement and apply it to our study of citizen participation. Like performance measurement, citizen engagement is not an end in itself. There are many possible reasons why organizations create opportunities for citizen participation (Bryson, Quick, Schively, Slotterback, & Crosby, 2013; Roberts, 2004; Rosener, 1978). Moreover, managers may have multiple motives for seeking citizen feedback, and these motives may evolve throughout the participation process (Bryson et al. 2013). As shown in Figure 1, we identify two major categories of managerial motives: (1) those related to strengthening democracy and communities and (2) those related to organizational goals and values. Below, we discuss specific motives within these categories.

**Motives Related to Strengthening Democracy and Communities.** The first motive in this category is to *create better citizens*. Promoting an engaged, active citizenry is a core public administration value which can help foster democratic ideals (LeRoux, 2009). Drawing on Alexis de Tocqueville’s observations about democratic life in America, John Stuart Mill was the first political theorist to argue that participation in democratic processes helps individuals become better citizens, thereby strengthening democracy (Mansbridge, 1999). According to Mill (1958), participation in democratic processes enables individuals to develop a capacity to look beyond their own personal interests and take into consideration the interests of society as a whole. While participating, a citizen is asked to “weigh interests not his own; to be guided, in case of conflicting claims, by another rule than his private partialities; to apply, at every turn,
principles and maxims which have for their reason of existence the common good (p. 54).”

Citizen participation can also help individuals become better citizens by making them more tolerant of others with different views (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003; Halvorsen, 2003) and improving their communication skills (Nabatchi, 2010). Moreover, participation is a self-sustaining process: the more individuals participate, the more they are able to develop the skills needed to effectively participate in the future (Pateman, 1970). Consistent with these arguments, Berry, Portney, and Thomson (1993) find residents from cities with more opportunities for structured citizen participation are more politically knowledgeable than those from cities with fewer such opportunities.

Community empowerment is another important motive for creating citizen participation opportunities identified in the literature. This consideration is tied to key themes in the New Public Administration movement which emphasized the importance of ensuring that the delivery of public services enhances social equity by addressing the needs and preferences of historically disenfranchised populations (Frederickson, 1971, 1980). Some contemporary scholars portray citizen participation as a mechanism for empowering the general citizenry (Fung, 2006; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Kathi & Cooper, 2005; Schulz, 2013), while others focus on its potential to empower specific subsets of the community such as clients (LeRoux, 2009) and traditionally marginalized groups (Campbell, 2010; Bryson et al., 2013; Nabatchi, 2010). Citizen participation gives citizens a voice in the policy process (Dickinson, 2007-2008; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004), fosters a sense of ownership (Schulz, 2013) and can increase individuals’ sense of personal and political efficacy (Davis, 1973; LeRoux, 2009; Nabatchi, 2010; Pateman, 1970; Schmandt, 1973). Participation is also a mechanism for those without power to challenge it and can be used to redistribute power from the “have” to the “have-nots” (Roberts, 2004).
Consistent with theoretical arguments in the literature, empirical studies indicate that increased political efficacy is associated with both participation in deliberative processes (Morrell, 2005) and efforts to promote civic culture (Andrews, Cowell, & Downe, 2011). In addition, studies show engagement efforts are more effective at increasing political efficacy in disadvantaged communities than in more affluent ones (Andrews, Cowell, & Downe, 2011; Berry et al., 1993).

According to several scholars, citizen participation can also be used as a way to educate the community about important policy choices or implementation issues (Bryson et al., 2013; Campbell, 2010; Deyle & Slotterback, 2009; Ebdon & Franklin, 2006; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Kathi & Cooper, 2005; Musso, Weare, Bryer, & Cooper, 2011; Walters, Aydelotte, & Miller, 2000). Having an informed citizenry is critical to a well-functioning democracy (Waldo, 1948). Supporting these theoretical arguments, more than a third of local administrators from Florida and Washington interviewed about the development of their comprehensive plans indicated one of the goals for their citizen participation efforts was to inform citizens about policy issues (Burby, 2003).

An additional motive for citizen participation in a democratic context is to be responsive and accountable to the community (Callahan, 2007; Dickinson, 2007-2008; Halachmi & Holzer, 2010; Vigoda & Golembiewski, 2001). Drawing on Romzek and Dubnick’s concept of political accountability (1987) and Rosenbloom’s political approach to public administration (1983), public administrators must be answerable citizens for their actions and decisions in democracies. Citizen participation efforts offer a way for administrators to learn about public priorities and preferences (Brody et al., 2003; Burby, 2003; Callahan, 2007; Godschalk & Stifel, 1981; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Thomas, 1995). Decision-makers can then use this information to shape policies, demonstrating their responsiveness to citizens (Davis, 1973). Past studies show that: (1)
providing citizens with the opportunity to voice their opinions makes them more likely to believe
government is responsive to their concerns (Halvorsen, 2003) and (2) both public officials and
citizens are more likely to believe government is responsive to citizen needs in communities
where there are more citizen participation opportunities (Berry et al., 1993; Wang, 2001).

Finally, several scholars have argued that citizen participation can strengthen democracy
by building trust in government (Callahan, 2007; Ebdon & Franklin, 2006; Halvorsen, 2003;
Kathi & Cooper, 2005; Nabatchi, 2010). Based on national survey data collected from local
government administrators, building trust in government was a key reason motivating
governments to seek citizen involvement (Yang & Callahan, 2005). In addition, there is some
empirical evidence indicating that creating opportunities for citizen participation in fact does
increase trust in government (Berry et al. 1993; Wang, 2001).

**Motives Related to Internal Organizational Goals and Values.** While many scholars
highlight the benefits that citizen participation can provide to communities and society as a
whole, managers may also create citizen participation to advance the goals and values of their
organizations. For instance, citizens can help organizations in identifying new ideas and
solutions for addressing challenging problems (Bryson et al., 2013; Burby, 2003; Fung, 2006;
Nabatchi, 2010; Thomas, 1995). Administrators can learn about the nature of public problems
and possible solutions by drawing on citizens’ first-hand knowledge and experiences with these
problems (Davis, 1973; Fung & Wright, 2003). Incorporating local knowledge into government
decision-making processes is particularly important as government services are increasingly
contracted out, and government becomes more detached from the service delivery process
(Callahan, 2007). In addition, citizen participation efforts can result in more effective problem
solving by encouraging a deliberative and reflective decision-making process involving multiple
parties and by shortening the feedback loop between citizens and decision-makers, making it easier for decision-makers to respond quickly if strategies are ineffective (Fung & Wright, 2003).

Contemporary scholars have also argued that nonprofit and public organizations may seek feedback to better understand and serve client needs (Campbell, 2010; LeRoux, 2009; Vincent-Jones, 2005). Offering empirical evidence to support these theoretical claims, Campbell & Lambright (in press) and Campbell et al. (2012) find that human service organizations, especially nonprofit service providers, are frequently motivated to collect client feedback in order to ensure they are responsive to clients. This motive for citizen participation is consistent with key themes from the New Public Administration movement of the 1960s and 1970s and the New Public Management movement of the 1990s. These movements advocated for a client-centered (or customer-centered) approach to organizational management and emphasized the importance of seeking client feedback (Frederickson, 1971, 1980; Marini, 1971; Osborne and Gabler, 1992).

In addition, citizen participation may be used as a tool for assessing and improving program quality (Campbell 2010; Halachmi & Holzer, 2010; Schmandt, 1973; Moynihan, 2003). Reflecting key themes from the New Public Management movement of the 1990s (Osborne & Gabler, 1992), there has been an increased emphasis on performance measurement and improvement within the human services field (Campbell, 2010; Page, 2005; Smith, 2010). Scholars have argued theoretically as well as shown empirically that citizen participation opportunities provide individuals with mechanisms for sharing their priorities and preferences with decision-makers (Brody, Godschalk, & Burby, 2003; Burby, 2003; Callahan, 2007; Godschalk & Stifel, 1981; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Thomas, 1995). Public administrators can use this valuable feedback to assess and improve services (Halachmi & Holzer, 2010; Schmandt,
Several empirical studies suggest that service assessment and improvement are key reasons why public and nonprofit administrators seek citizen input (Campbell & Lambright, in press; Campbell, Lambright, & Bronstein, 2012; Yang & Callahan, 2005). While often a component of the assessment process, clearly not all performance measurement activities involve citizen input. Some rely solely on program self-reports or direct monitoring by administrators from within or from outside organizations. However, increasingly, constituency input is used as a way to provide more objective information about organizational impact, free of the potential biases of internal assessments.

In organizations that are very client-centered, as many health and human service organizations are, there may be a close relationship between the desire to seek feedback to understand clients’ needs and to improve service. Information about client needs can result in organizations implementing operational or strategic modifications to make services more effective and to increase service utilization. Such changes may, eventually, improve organizational reputation.

Another important reason why organizations may create opportunities for citizen participation is to foster community support for their programs and policies (Davis, 1973; Moynihan, 2003; Ebdon & Franklin, 2006; Thomas, 1994; Walters et al., 2000). Citizen feedback can add legitimacy to organizational decisions and policies (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003; Fung, 2006; Roberts, 2004). It may also give citizens a greater sense of ownership of the plans that are developed, making them more likely to advocate for a policy’s adoption and implementation (Burby, 2003; Denhart & Denhardt, 2003). In addition, there is empirical evidence suggesting that citizen participation efforts have in fact resulted in increased community support for public policies (Godschalk & Stiftel, 1981, Wang, 2001). However,
there is a fine line between fostering community support and cooptation of the public’s interests. Some administrators may use citizen participation efforts as an opportunity for marketing their own agendas, guiding citizens towards supporting the plans that they wanted in the first place (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004).

Finally, organizations may create citizen participation opportunities to meet requirements of outside organizations. According to DiMaggio and Powell’s theory of coercive isomorphism (1983) and Romzek and Dubnick’s theory of legal accountability (1987), legal or contractual mandates imposed by external actors can shape organizational practices. Consistent with these two theoretical frameworks, several scholars have pointed out that a variety of public policies and programs mandate citizen participation (Brody et al., 2003; Burby, 2003; Cooper, 1979; Ebdon & Franklin, 2006; Godschalk & Stifel, 1981; Slotterback, 2008). Therefore, administrators may be motivated to seek citizen feedback in order to satisfy requirements established by external actors (Bryson et al. 2013; Davis, 1973; Yang & Callahan, 2005).

Empirical research suggests that complying with government mandates or funding requirements is a key reason why local administrators create citizen participation efforts (Brody et al., 2003; Yang & Callahan, 2005). However, as Escobar (2013) argues, statutorily requiring participation can have the unintended consequence of shifting administrators’ attention from engaging citizens in meaningful ways to making sure they simply meet all of the participation requirements.

Providing support for this theoretical claim, Yang and Callahan (2005) find that local governments that are only motivated to involve citizens to adhere to funding requirements or regulations are less likely to create meaningful opportunities for citizen participation.

**Research Objectives.** In this study, we are interested in examining the motives for citizen participation specifically in the context of government contracting. Our research is
exploratory and, as detailed in the methods section, our analytical approach is largely inductive. When policies are being “double-delegated”\(^3\) from the legislature first to administrative agencies and then to contractors, we wonder if the motives related to strengthening democracy remain relevant. We also wonder which specific internal organizational motives are most important when contractors are responsible for delivering public services. In addition, our research design offers an opportunity to understand the contextual factors that may influence citizen participation motives. First, by collecting data from both public and private managers involved in government contracts, we are able to compare public and private managers’ motives for citizen participation. Second, by focusing on health and human services, we can identify the motives that are most important in this field. Health and human service providers often target their services to marginalized and vulnerable populations. Therefore, citizen participation motives such as empowerment, accountability or community education may be more important in this context than in other fields. In the next section, we describe our methodology.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Instruments and Locations.** We conducted 93 semi-structured interviews with public managers as well as with managers of nonprofit and for-profit organizations implementing government contracts. We focused our research on county government contracts for health and human services. While the literature review allows us to articulate some preliminary propositions about citizen participation, our research is exploratory. We used a qualitative approach and asked respondents to provide detailed descriptions about their views and experiences in order to reveal the rich context of citizen participation.

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\(^3\) Laura Dickinson first used this term in this context (Dickinson, 2007-2008).
We developed and used separate questionnaires for our interviews with the public and private managers. Complete questionnaires are provided in Appendices A and B. We asked each respondent to discuss citizen participation practices pertaining to one specific contract. Our sample includes county government contracts in a variety of service areas such as housing, mental health, child care, disability care, welfare to work, violence prevention, food security, intellectual disabilities, immigration, and others. We used a semi-structured format for the interviews which allowed us to focus respondents’ attention on a limited number of key questions. The interview questionnaires explore a broad range of issues and cover the same basic topics: the forms of citizen participation used, examples of feedback received, the impact of the feedback on the contracted services, and any challenges with citizen engagement. Central to the topic of this manuscript, we ask the following open-ended question once respondents identified specific citizen engagement strategies: “Why do you seek feedback from the community members/clients?” We also used informal probes (e.g., “Can you tell me more about that?” or “Can you explain what you mean?”) or follow-up questions to clarify respondents’ comments. In addition to the data obtained in response to these questions, we analyzed the comments relevant to the topic of this paper brought up inductively by our subjects throughout the interview.

We conducted our interviews in a purposive sample of six counties across four states in the Northeastern region of the United States: Maryland (one county), New York (two counties), Pennsylvania (one county), and Virginia (two counties). We maximized variation in county poverty rate, size and urban/rural status, while limiting our interviews to the Northeastern part of

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4 Initially, seven counties were contacted, and six out of seven counties formally agreed to allow us to interview public and private respondents in their jurisdictions. In the seventh county, the leadership of the health and human services unit declined participation after consulting with the county’s executive leadership.
the United States, making the findings of this study most generalizable to this geographic region.5

**Data Collection.** The public managers, selected for this study, were responsible for overseeing health and human services contracts, while the managers of nonprofit and for-profit organizations were implementing the contracts for these counties. Our original sample included 129 contracts, but 11 of these contracts were excluded for various reasons. We conducted interviews on 93 of the remaining 118 contracts, resulting in a response rate of 78.8%. We included private organizations serving different sized catchment areas in our sample. While most private organizations we studied operated locally or across several neighboring jurisdictions (e.g., in Virginia and Maryland), we also included several larger national organizations with branches providing services in jurisdictions covered our study in our sample. In the cases when a public managers was responsible for overseeing numerous government contracts, we asked them to pick the most “typical” contract from the list of contracts on which they worked. An average interview was approximately 45 minutes long. As with most qualitative research, we examined and discussed our data throughout the study and decided to stop data collection when no new or relevant information was emerging in the interviews.

**Sample Characteristics.** Out of the 93 interviews we conducted, 55 (59.1%) were with a private manager, and 38 (40.9%) were with a public manager. Table 1 shows the frequency and

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5 According to the Census Bureau, the population size in the counties we studied ranged between approximately 50,000 and 1,000,000 residents (Census.gov, 2010). Four counties had populations below 500,000 and two counties were above 500,000. The average proportion of white county residents was 79%, ranging between 58% and 97% (Census.gov, 2010). The proportion of foreign born residents ranged between 2% and 30%, with an average of 15% (Census.gov, 2005-2009). The lowest per capita county income was $28,000 and the highest was $68,000, with an average per capita county income of $50,000 (Census.gov, 2007). The proportion of persons living below poverty level ranged between 6% and 16%: the average was 10% (Census.gov, 2009). The sample included major metropolitan areas, small cities as well as rural areas. There was an average of 57 people per square mile in the least densely populated county compared to an average of 7,993 people per square mile in the most densely populated county (Census.gov, 2010). Finally, in terms of education, the percentage of persons with a Bachelor’s degree and above ranged between 17% and 70%, with a mean of 42% (Census.gov, 2005-2009).
the proportion of interviews with public and private managers in each county. Table 2 shows the frequency and proportion of interviews by state. Most of the contracts discussed in the interviews represented government-nonprofit contracts (87%), rather than government-for-profit contracts (12%). The higher prevalence of nonprofit contractors is representative of the health and human services field. In most interviews, there was just one respondent. However, in a handful of interviews, multiple individuals participated. Table 3 shows the distribution of services included in the study. The most common service areas were housing and residential services, mental health related services, child and youth services, care for individuals with disabilities, substance abuse services, employment services, violence prevention, food distribution, and services related to intellectual and developmental disabilities.

**Analysis.** We analyzed the interview data using the qualitative software QSR NVivo 10. We coded and analyzed all interview notes and transcripts using a mix of deductive and inductive strategies. We began by reading and discussing the first 30 interviews and identifying broad codes based on the content of our interview questionnaires. Then, preliminary “child nodes” were created to reflect any emergent themes in those broader codes. As the coding progressed, the codes were revised and augmented through an inductive process based on a careful reading of the interview transcripts. To ensure reliability, two individuals coded the data: a primary coder and a research associate. The two coders first analyzed 26 interviews (28% of the interviews) together to ensure that there was a high degree of inter-rater agreement prior to dividing the remaining interviews and having just one person code each of the remaining

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6 Almost 60% of our respondents had at least a Master’s degree, 38% of respondents had a Bachelor’s degree, and only 2% of respondents had less than a Bachelor’s degree. Respondents had an average of 24.7 years of work experience, ranging from 6 to 47 years.
Once the coding was completed, we examined the data in the context of the past research on citizen participation. Thus, the interview data as well as the literature shaped our key findings.

**Limitations.** The service areas as well as the geographic locations we focused on may limit the generalizability of our findings to other types of contracts. On the one hand, the prevalence and the diversity of citizen participation opportunities in the field of health and human services may be greater than in other fields, simply because of the impact that these services have on citizens’ well-being. Citizen participation efforts in this field may also be more likely to be ongoing than in other fields, due to the long-term nature of the problems related to poverty, illness, or homelessness. On the other hand, direct citizen participation in this field may be more limited than in other fields due to: (1) the limited time, resources and capacity of clients to participate in governance which, in turn, necessitates the use of “proxy participants,” (2) the stigma associated with various social issues, such as HIV/AIDS, which in turn may reduce the scope of community-wide discussions, and (3) the complexity and, possibly, the divergent nature of social needs which make public participation more contentious and difficult, compared to other fields, such as the need for “on-time trash collection.” All of these considerations may make our findings less generalizable to other service fields, which necessitates additional research in these areas.\(^8\)

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\(^7\) First, these two individuals jointly coded thirteen interviews, while discussing the emergent themes and the overall coding scheme. Three interviews were then coded independently by the two coders. The Kappa score for these three interviews was .41. Kappa scores measure inter-rater agreement. All three interviews were then reviewed jointly and all disagreements were resolved. Most of the disagreements involved differences in the amount of context that was coded around the text referring to a particular code and hence, the two coders had to agree on how much context should be incorporated around each coded section of the text. As coding progressed, seven more interviews were coded jointly while discussing and revising the coding scheme. Finally, five additional interviews were coded separately by the two coders, the weighted Kappa score for these interviews was .83.

\(^8\) In addition, typical of most qualitative studies, we did not randomly select our sample. Furthermore, it is possible we did not receive a complete list of all current health and human services in cases in which we had to rely on the jurisdictions to provide this information. Finally, while most of our interviews focused on current citizen
FINDINGS

This section details our key findings. In order to provide context for our findings on the managerial motives for citizen participation, we begin by identifying the main strategies public and nonprofit managers use to seek citizen feedback. Next, we summarize the various motives for creating citizen participation opportunities and the prevalence of each motive. Following this, we discuss the most common motives in more detail. Finally, we highlight some interesting trends by comparing the motives for citizen participation most commonly identified by public and private managers.

Citizen Engagement Strategies used by Managers in the Sample. The most common citizen participation strategies used by our sample included client engagement, advisory boards and public hearings. Table 4 provides information on the extent to which counties and contractors use each of these strategies. The second and third columns of Table 4 show the number and the percentage of interviews in which counties used each citizen participation strategy, while the fourth and fifth columns list the number and percentage of interviews reporting contractors’ use of these strategies. Client engagement was the most common citizen participation strategy that contractors used while counties tended to more frequently rely on advisory boards to solicit citizen feedback. In addition to these fairly prevalent citizen participation strategies, other sources of citizen feedback included: nonprofit boards of directors, community education and outreach, involvement of citizens in the pre-contracting process, vendor advocacy, community review of contractor performance, and neighborhood input. The motives discussed in the following sections reflect the reasons why counties and contractors

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9 Organizations received feedback from clients in a variety of ways including formal client surveys and formal and informal meetings with clients or their family members.
adopted these various citizen participation strategies.

**Overview of Motives.** Table 5 details all of the reasons our respondents identified for creating citizen participation opportunities. They are listed in order of frequency. We indicate both the number of interviews and the percentage of the sample that reported a particular motive. As Table 5 illustrates, the most prevalent reasons for creating citizen participation opportunities included: (1) to assess and improve program quality, (2) to understand and serve client needs, (3) to reflect an organization's broader participatory culture, (4) to meet requirements, and (5) to empower clients. The first two motives were mentioned in over 40% of the interviews (49% and 41%, respectively). The other eighteen motives, detailed in Table 5, were much less prevalent. The motives related to organizational culture, external requirements and client empowerment were each mentioned in approximately 15% of the interviews while the remaining 15 motives for citizen participation were each mentioned in less than 10% of the interviews. The reasons for creating citizen participation opportunities were multifaceted, with respondents in many interviews identifying multiple motives for seeking input.

Based on a careful analysis of our qualitative data, we separated these motives using the dichotomy we identified earlier in our literature review: some of these motives are related to strengthening democracy and communities, while others are more relevant to internal organizational goals and values. Figure 2 summarizes the different motives included in each category as well as the prevalence of the two broad categories.

Interviewees were much more likely to identify motives related to internal organizational goals and values than those related to strengthening democracy and communities. Respondents in 25 interviews (27% of the sample) identified at least one motive related to strengthening democracy and communities. Meanwhile, respondents in 80 interviews (86% of the sample)
identified at least one motive related to internal organizational goals and values. Due to the richness of data on organizational motives, we further divided these motives into the following subcategories: (1) programmatic motives, (2) motives related to organizational or professional values, (3) financial motives, (4) process motives, and (5) other motives. The following sections discuss the most commonly mentioned motives in detail.

**Motives Related to Strengthening Democracy and Communities.** As mentioned above, 27% of our sample reported creating citizen engagement opportunities citing motives relevant to strengthening democracy and local communities. The most commonly mentioned reason in this category was to empower clients. In contrast to the literature which primarily emphasizes the ways in which citizen participation opportunities empower the general citizenry, respondents in our sample focused on how citizen engagement can empower a specific subset of the community: their clients. As shown in Table 5, respondents in 13 interviews (14% of the sample) created citizen participation opportunities for this reason. This group of interviewees used citizen participation opportunities as a mechanism for giving clients and their families a voice in the service delivery process and a chance to participate in decision-making. As a contractor operating a residential program for seriously mentally ill adults eloquently described when detailing the rationale for having weekly house meetings facilitated by clients:

> Are you familiar with the concept of recovery in mental health? So recovery is really founded on the belief that people with the mental health diagnosis can live their lives successfully to the degree that they chose you and to the degree that they can. I described the really old school institutionalization: “I am the educated one about your mental health diagnosis, and I am going tell you what to do with the medical knowledge.” There has been over many years a real shift in the philosophy of mental health services: “I am not in charge of your life. I am only giving you the support that you need.” And so that is the whole foundation of our residential programs, our goal is to help you empower you, what I want doesn’t matter. I want to help you get to where you want to go. People create that environment that they want to live in. (Interview #32)

In addition, respondents 9 interviews (10% of the sample) reported creating citizen
participation opportunities to be accountable and responsive to community interests (see Table 5). For example, a contractor providing residential treatment services to adults with substance abuse problems shared the following story when asked about motives for creating citizen participation opportunities:

You know, to think that there is nothing that is ever going to happen that may be adverse to us or to someone, that is just so naïve! So, to establish those relationships and the credibility upfront, that is very important. If something were to happen or there is a minor complaint, for instance, we have a complaint with the women’s program. We had housecleaning on Saturdays, and they would open the windows and turn the music on, Saturday morning, and it annoyed people. Nothing new, right? So, the neighbors brought this up, and we closed the windows and turned the music down. It was like, “Oh, okay.” We didn’t really have to do that but we want them to know that we want them to have more control, and we are trying to be friends. (Interview #37)

A subset of this group of interviewees specifically emphasized that accountability and responsiveness were critical because the programs they managed were supported with taxpayer dollars, with respondents in six interviews expressing this concern. Four of these interviews were with public managers and two were with private managers, indicating that this was a consideration for counties and contractors alike. As explained by a contractor operating a shelter for victims of domestic violence:

I think they [citizen participation opportunities] were created to ensure that the programs that we are offering, that they meet the needs of the people, and that they are spending public dollars well. This is an awesome responsibility. If I am Bill Gates, I can say I only want to do so and so. But with public dollars there are a lot of issues around this. (Interview #2)

A final motive related to strengthening democracy and communities mentioned by respondents in 6 interviews (6% of the sample) was to educate the community about the populations they were serving (see Table 5). As discussed in the methodology section, many organizations in our sample were delivering services to members of marginalized social groups, such as the homeless, victims of domestic violence, individuals with substance abuse problems, individuals with serious mental illnesses, and individuals with intellectual disabilities. The
interviewees identifying community education as a motive viewed citizen participation as a mechanism for raising awareness about the challenges their clients face, reducing the stigma associated with these problems, and making it easier for their clients to be integrated into the community. Representative of this group of interviewees, a contractor operating a residential program for individuals with serious mental illnesses noted:

I want communities in this county to be educated, to decrease stigma, make sure I can have more clients to move out into the community and not have problems. So I am very invested. I see it as a part of my role to educate communities on what mental illness looks like and what we can expect. So that’s the benefit that comes out of this [opportunity for citizen participation]. (Interview #23)

**Programmatic Motives.** Respondents also identified a wide variety of motives related to internal organizational goals and values. Many of these motives were related to programmatic goals with respondents in 69 interviews (74% of the sample) citing at least one programmatic reason for creating citizen participation opportunities. The most commonly mentioned goal within this subcategory of organizational motives was the desire to assess and improve program quality. As mentioned earlier, respondents in 46 interviews (49% of the sample) identified this motive. This finding suggests that citizen participation and performance measurement practices are often closely linked. In the words of a contractor providing before and after school care and summer care to adolescents with developmental disabilities:

We live and breathe these programs daily. Having a set of eyes to see things maybe you can’t see is necessary. You’ve got to be open and be secure in yourself and hear things you don’t like. It’s something you can change. I need to know that. I can change, and I can adapt. I want these opportunities to listen to the people and make an adjustment. That is the reason why. I find those opportunities are like learning experiences for us. Every day you can learn and make the program better. (Interview #41)

Respondents in our sample frequently did not appear to make meaningful distinctions between service assessment and improvement in discussing their motives for collecting feedback and viewed these concepts as interrelated. As illustrated in the following quote from a county
manager overseeing a supported employment and habilitation services program:

Our goal is to provide world class service for all our citizens here in the county, and you know the more input we can get from individuals, the more we can learn about the programs and the better the service can be. (Interview #17)

When explaining their desire to assess and improve program quality, respondents in 25 of the 46 interviews identifying this motive (54%) specifically indicated that receiving feedback from clients and their families was instrumental in achieving this goal. For example, a county manager overseeing a health insurance counseling program for individuals eligible for Medicare noted:

There would be no reason to be offering a service if it wasn’t benefitting our clients. So, to me getting feedback from the people who use our services isn’t a luxury or a maybe. If I insist that we send out evaluations during groups, and even when it’s not easy to have people fill them out and return them to me, it’s one of the most important ways of knowing that our program is valuable in the community. If I was getting feedback saying I didn’t learn anything and I won’t use your services in the future, then we have to go back to the drawing board and drastically change what we’re offering. Client feedback is hugely important. (Interview #36)

The fact many respondents were motivated to seek feedback for performance assessment and improvement reasons provides indirect evidence that performance measurement practices are common in local health and human service contracts. It may also suggest that health and human service organizations rely on client or stakeholder feedback as a way to assess “difficult to measure” aspects of health and human services.

Another programmatic motive mentioned in 38 interviews (41% of the sample) was to better understand and meet client needs (see Table 5). Representative of this group of interviewees, a contractor managing a violence prevention program commented:

I can’t even imagine doing any of these [programs] without going and asking them [our clients]. It is tremendously important – our clients are the experts on what they need. We could have a great idea but we still need to hear it from them on how to deliver it. (Interview #24)
In some cases, organizations assessed whether client needs were being met by collecting data directly from clients. In other cases, programs gathered this information from their clients’ families. A subset of this group of interviewees viewed making sure clients were satisfied as a critical component of ensuring that clients’ needs were met. Respondents in 6 of these 38 interviews explicitly stated that their organizations created citizen participation opportunities to assess client satisfaction. In the words of a contractor providing supported employment services to individuals with disabilities:

> It’s tremendously beneficial for us to know what they [clients] feel about the service we provide, to know whether people are satisfied and happy. It’s our goal to make people productive and happy and there is no other way to do it. Those who take a job, we want to know about how well they are integrated. We have to get that feedback. (Interview #44)

Reflecting the fact that client satisfaction is frequently used as a performance measure, four of the six interviewees in this subgroup considered client satisfaction as part of their service assessment and improvement process.

Although many interviewees highlighted the importance of seeking client feedback in order to ensure their needs were being met, one contractor delivering emergency food assistance pointed out that this can be challenging when clients are receiving subsidized goods and services because of their natural inclination to want to receive as much assistance as possible. This contractor noted:

> We don’t do client surveys on a regular basis because when you think about it, it can be problematic. We are giving out free things. If I was asking for things, I’d want better stuff and more stuff, so we know that would be the case. But we can’t do more with the current resources. (Interview #25)

The third most prevalent programmatic motive was to foster community support. As shown in Table 5, respondents in 7 interviews (8% of the sample) indicated that their organizations used citizen participation opportunities to generate community buy-in for their
programs and that this support was crucial to the programs’ success. Reflecting the sentiments of this group of interviewees, a contractor delivering services to homeless teens commented:

If we don’t have the community support, we won’t be able to run our program. We might have the federal money, but [County X] wouldn’t fund us if the community didn’t support us. And we wouldn’t be able to raise 350K a year from just individual donations. (Interview #55)

Respondents in 5 interviews (5% of the sample) reported that creating opportunities for citizen participation to help their organizations establish goals and plan for the future (see Table 5). Reflecting the sentiments of this group of interviewees, a contractor providing emergency food assistance succinctly stated when asked about motives for creating citizen participation opportunities: “We have a strategic plan, so we need to think about where we are going in the future, we have to know” (Interview #25). As this comment illustrates, consulting with citizens can help organizations determine or refine their strategic objectives and directions for moving forward. Other, less prevalent programmatic motives included generating new programming ideas, developing strong relationships with clients, learning about community perceptions of programs, advocating for clients and sharing program information with the community. Each of these reasons was identified in no more than three interviews.

Motives Related to Organizational or Professional Values. In addition to the programmatic motives for citizen participation, many respondents reported creating citizen participation opportunities because it was consistent with their organizational or professional values, essentially arguing that citizen engagement was part of their organizational or professional culture. Respondents in 21 interviews identified one of the motives grouped in this subcategory. Organizational culture has been defined as “a pattern of basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as
the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein, 2004: 17). Out of 21 interviews alluding to cultural motives for citizen engagement, respondents in 15 interviews (16% of the sample) indicated they sought feedback because their organizations valued citizen participation and expected employees to regularly engage citizens as part of their jobs. A contractor providing employment workshops to individuals with intellectual disabilities explained his rationale: “This [seeking client feedback] is also part of who we are, our beliefs. We are part of the [Organization X], which is a national organization, so involving the clients is important, that’s what we do, something we believe in” (Interview #89). This reasoning was particularly salient for the public managers from one county where five of the eleven public managers interviewed cited their county’s organizational culture as a motivating factor. According to these managers, their county emphasized the importance of citizen engagement in every facet of its government. For instance, a public manager in this county, overseeing a residential program for seriously mentally ill adults, commented:

Essentially, what the culture here in [County X] is – to be very, very involved with the CBS [Community Services Board], and in terms of the Civic Association Board in this county, people have voice, [County X] is 26 square miles, not that big, and it is a community where every citizen pretty much can call the county board, can call the county managers and express concerns. (Interview #23)

As illustrated by both quotes, this group of respondents was motivated to seek feedback as a result of a broader set of shared values and assumptions within their organizations that imposed normative behavioral pressures on employees to engage the community in policymaking. They all viewed efforts to seek citizen feedback as an integral part of their organizations’ identities.

In addition, respondents in 6 interviews (6% of the sample) created citizen participation opportunities citing their professional values and norms as motivating factors (see Table 5). These respondents explicitly indicated that their organizations sought client and/or family input
because it was an important part of the treatment model their organizations were using. In the words of a contractor providing residential treatment services to adults with substance abuse problems:

> Our clients fully participate in the development of their own treatment plans. It does take time to accomplish the goals, and there is individuality in how fast they can do it. Some people come with the skills and understanding of mental health, and others don’t. Some people come and focus on relapse prevention. We have a client-centered model, so the treatment is based on that. (Interview #37)

Creating citizen participation opportunities to adhere to a treatment model was closely linked with other client-related motives. Respondents in five of these six interviews also indicated that they sought feedback to better understand or serve client needs and/or to empower their clients.

**Financial Motives.** Respondents in six interviews (6% of the sample) discussed various financial motives for creating citizen engagement opportunities. These financial goals include obtaining additional funding, identifying ways to be more cost effective and being more competitive for county contracts. None of these goals was mentioned in more than three interviews.

**Process Motives.** Just three respondents identified process-related goals for creating citizen participation opportunities (see Figure 2). Respondents in two interviews reported that their counties had citizens make funding decisions in their RFP process to make the decision process more neutral. Another respondent sought feedback in order to improve the process of matching volunteers and clients.

**Other Motives.** Finally, many respondents reported creating citizen participation opportunities in order to meet mandates imposed by outside organizations. Respondents in 34 interviews (37% of the sample) indicated that the county government required the contractor to create citizen participation opportunities as part of its contract with the county. In addition,
respondents in 15 interviews (16% of our sample) reported that some other outside entity required either the county or contractor to create citizen participation opportunities. Examples of these entities included other county departments, state and federal government agencies, as well as accrediting bodies. For instance, all counties in the state of Virginia are required to create Community Service Boards that oversee a number of human services and include citizens as part of their membership.

Not all of the organizations that were required to create citizen participation opportunities reported that compliance with these requirements motivated them to engage citizens. Some respondents reported that while they were required to create citizen participation opportunities, they were motivated to seek feedback for other reasons and would do so even if there were no requirements. However, many other respondents did mention external mandates as their motive. As shown in Table 5, respondents in 13 interviews (14% of the sample) explicitly stated that their organization created citizen participation opportunities because they were required to do so by an outside organization. For example, a contractor managing a meal program for seniors commented:

This [client survey] is really a requirement by the county, so I just want to make sure this is done. I think the majority of people are happy with the services, and the small percentage that is unhappy, I think this is just noise and I am not worried about it. It is more work for me – doing this, but I guess it is something I have to give back to the county in this contract. (Interview #43).

While several interviewees identified requirements of outside entities as a reason why their organizations created citizen participation opportunities, most of these interviewees mentioned this motive in conjunction with another motive for seeking feedback. Respondents in just two of the fifteen interviews identified requirements of outside entities as their sole motive for creating citizen participation opportunities.
Comparison of the Reasons Identified by Public and Private Managers. An important objective of this paper is to compare the reasons for creating citizen participation opportunities across the public and private sectors to better understand similarities and differences in the approaches. Table 6 details this comparison. The second and third columns indicate the percentage of interviews in which a particular motive was identified by public and private managers, respectively. We report the percentage of interviews identifying a specific reason rather than the number of interviews because our sample was unbalanced with more interviews with private managers.

According to Table 6, our findings on the two top motives for both groups are consistent with the findings for the entire sample. Assessing and improving program quality and understanding and serving client needs were salient for both groups. Nonetheless, a much higher percentage of private manager interviews identified these motives compared to public manager interviews. Respondents representing 64% of the private manager interviews reported creating citizen participation opportunities to assess and improve program quality compared to respondents in only 29% of the public manager interviews. Similarly, respondents in 47% of the private manager interviews were motivated to seek feedback to understand and serve client needs, while respondents in only 32% of the public manager interviews were motivated for this reason.

Organizational culture also appears to be an important factor for both groups. However, as Table 6 suggests, this motive was not equally salient across the sectors: respondents in 24% of the public manager interviews referred to organizational culture as a motive for citizen engagement, compared to respondents in only 11% of private manager interviews. As discussed previously, several of the interviews in which this motive was identified were with public
managers from one specific county. When interviews (both public and private) from this county are excluded from the analysis, the difference between the percentage of public and private managers identifying this motive is much less pronounced: respondents in 15% of the public manager interviews identified organizational culture as a motivating factor while respondents in 11% of the private manager interviews cited this reason.

Other top priorities for public and private managers vary. Requirements by outside entities were a key motivating factor for public managers but not private ones. Respondents in 24% of public manager interviews and just 7% of private manager interviews reported creating citizen participation opportunities to comply with outside mandates. The desire to be responsive and accountable to the community was also more important to public managers than to private ones as a rationale for creating citizen engagement opportunities. Respondents in 16% of the public manager interviews were motivated to seek feedback in order to be responsive and accountable to the community while respondents in only 5% of the private manager interviews identified this motive. On the other hand, using citizen participation opportunities as a mechanism for empowering clients was a more important motivating factor for private managers than public ones: respondents in 18% of the private manager interviews identified this reason as opposed to only 7% of the public manager interviews.

Figure 3 summarizes the top reasons public and private managers created citizen participation opportunities. To be included in this figure, respondents in at least 10% of the interviews from a particular sector had to have identified this motive. The top motives of both public and private managers are primarily related to internal organizational goals and values, although one of the top motives for each group is related to strengthening democracy and communities: many public managers create citizen participation opportunities in order to be
accountable and responsive to the community, and many private managers view citizen participation opportunities as a mechanism for empowerment. However, the motive related to strengthening democracy and communities that public managers emphasized targets a larger “community” more than the comparable motive emphasized by private managers. Respondents in our sample focus on being accountable and responsible to the general citizenry, while the empowerment efforts are focused on a specific subset of the community: clients. On balance, our findings suggest that public and private managers are more likely to create citizen participation opportunities because of internal organizational goals and values, while the more modest share of organizations seeking feedback to achieve goals involving the general citizenry tend to be public sector organizations.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The objective of this study is to explore why public and private managers create opportunities for citizen engagement. We focus on health and human services that counties have contracted to private organizations. To date, very little research has looked at citizen participation in the context of contracted services. As a result, in our literature review, we almost exclusively discuss research on citizen participation in the context of traditional public functions and services. Based on our review of these studies, we identified two major categories of managerial motives. Some scholars emphasized the democratic foundations of citizen participation: they argue public managers should use citizen participation to improve, empower and educate citizens, be responsive to their needs, and build their trust in government. Other scholars pointed out that citizen engagement may be used to advance organizational priorities and goals. In today’s competitive environment, organizations are expected to understand and serve their clients’ needs, identify innovative solutions, constantly assess and improve their
programs, and foster community support as well as meet basic requirements of outside stakeholders. Citizen engagement can be a useful tool in achieving these managerial objectives. Our study explores if these and other motives continue to be relevant in the context of government contracting. We wonder if delegating public programs to nonprofit or for-profit organizations results in new motives for using citizen participation strategies.

This study confirms that there is no simple answer to the “why” question of citizen engagement strategies. As Behn (2003) suggests, managerial actions aim to achieve numerous purposes, and citizen participation efforts are no exception. Our analysis identified 20 distinct motives public or private managers had for creating citizen participation opportunities. While providing some support for the propositions from the existing research, our empirical findings also draw a more nuanced and complex picture of managerial decision-making.

Most importantly, in the context of privatized government services, democratic considerations continue to be relevant in the decision to create citizen participation opportunities. In almost one third of our interviews, managers sought citizen feedback to strengthen democracy and local communities: these managers’ motives included empowering clients, educating the community and being accountable and responsive to community needs. These reasons for creating citizen participation opportunities are consistent with the constitutionalist perspective and its focus on democratic administration (O’Leary & Rosenbloom, 1997; Ostrom, 1974; Rohr, 1986). The constitutionalist perspective differentiates between bureaucratic and democratic administration. The former focuses on perfecting organizations using management principles, while the latter recognizes that the American constitution ultimately gives citizens the power to determine public policy and emphasizes that community preferences should be considered when implementing any public program. The constitutionalist perspective embraces the complexity of
the decision-making process and advocates that there be multiple external checks to protect citizens from being exploited by bureaucrats. Our findings suggest that many managers act in accordance with the constitutionalist perspective by empowering and educating citizens and trying to be responsive and accountable to them.

Many scholars have used agency theory (Eisenhardt, 1989) to conceptualize the delivery of both public and privatized services. Agency theory assumes that citizens (the ultimate principals), legislators, government agencies, and private contractors have divergent goals and will act in their self-interest. Our data pertaining to client empowerment, community education and responsive administration are more consistent with a stewardship mindset. According to Van Slyke, stewardship relationships are “developed based on trust, reputation, collective goals, and involvement where alignment is an outcome that results from relational reciprocity” (Van Slyke 2007, p.164). The managers who created citizen participation opportunities to empower, educate and be accountable valued collective goals and sought reciprocal relationships with their local communities, rather than withholding information or maximizing their individual utilities. However, as highlighted in our findings section, some of these managers, particularly those who emphasized client empowerment, did have a somewhat narrow vision of the “community” by focusing on only a subset of the population: their clients.

While the democratic considerations in creating citizen participation opportunities are fairly prevalent, internal organizational motives were even more common with 86% of our sample identifying at least one organizational goal. These organizational motives reflect key facets of organizational behavior: performance, culture, resources, processes, and external influences. They also help connect our findings to a number of fundamental organizational theories explaining managerial decision-making and behavior.
The group of reasons for creating citizen participation opportunities most commonly mentioned by our respondents were programmatic motives, including assessing and improving program quality, understanding and serving client needs, fostering community support for programs, and helping establish future goals. The prevalence of these motives suggests that citizen participation is closely linked to goal setting and performance management. Public organizations have higher levels of goal ambiguity which often results in them adopting deliberate strategies to address this challenge (Allison, 1997). Furthermore, it is frequently difficult to measure health and human service outcomes. In our study, public and private managers used citizen feedback as a way to track performance, better understand client needs, generate new programming ideas, clarify future goals, and learn about community perceptions of public programs. We also found that more than half of the respondents who identified program assessment and improvement as a motive specifically indicated that receiving feedback from clients and their families was instrumental in achieving this goal. This suggests that constituency input is often a key aspect of performance measurement and program improvement.

Institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Naff and Hyde, 2006) provides a useful lens for understanding other key motives for citizen participation. The institutional approach identifies three key forces shaping managerial decisions: (1) coercive isomorphism which results from formal or informal pressure from external actors; (2) mimetic isomorphism which occurs when best practices are imitated, and (3) normative isomorphism which is a consequence of professional norms and values pressuring organizations to adopt certain practices. Several respondents indicated they created citizen participation opportunities in order to comply with requirements of outside organizations. This motive is consistent with coercive isomorphism. Other respondents created citizen participation opportunities in response to
cultural pressures. Reflecting mimetic isomorphism, many respondents sought feedback because their organizations valued citizen participation. In essence, these respondents were imitating participatory practices widely used within their fairly large organizations. Finally, shaped by normative isomorphism pressures, some respondents sought input from clients or their family members due to their professional values and norms.

While not particularly prevalent in our sample, there is modest evidence that public and private managers engage in citizen participation efforts in order to ensure financial security for their organizations. A handful of respondents in our sample viewed citizen participation as a tool to either help them obtain additional funding, improve cost-effectiveness or increase program competitiveness for continued funding. *Resource dependence theory* which explores how the procurement of external resources influences managers’ strategic decisions provides a useful framework for understanding this group of motives. In addition, the programmatic motive of fostering community support for programs may be linked to this theory as donations from community members are an important revenue source for many programs and community volunteers can reduce programming costs.

Finally, respondents in just 3% of the interviews sought citizen feedback in order to improve organizational processes. Specifically, these respondents adopted citizen participation strategies in order to either have a neutral body making funding decisions or to improve the process of matching volunteers and clients. Both process changes had the potential of saving valuable time and resources, thereby minimizing organizational *transaction costs*.

In summary, while the desire to strengthen democracies and local communities did motivate some respondents to create citizen participation opportunities, it was far more common for our respondents to use citizen participation as a tool in organizational management: to
achieve programmatic objectives, to promote organizational and professional cultures, to sustain financial health, to improve processes and to comply with external expectations. A question we are not able to easily answer in the context of this study is whether our findings are unique to the context of contracted services or whether these motives are likely to be important in the context of publicly-delivered services too. Much of the existing literature we reviewed is primarily theoretical. The empirical studies we discussed were conducted in a broad array of settings and vary in terms of their findings. The four empirical studies most closely related to this manuscript’s research question identify a combination of democratic motives (such as informing citizens about policy concerns, educating citizens, and giving citizens an opportunity influence the decision-making process), organizational motives (such as mobilizing citizen support for a plan and meeting external requirements), as well as motives that can be interpreted as both organizational and democratic (such as determining citizens preferences and community priorities) (Brody, Godschalk, & Burby, 2003; Burby, 2003; Wang, 2001; Yang & Callahan, 2005). The prevalence of these motives varies across studies, and each motive is defined somewhat differently. A comparison of motives identified by public and private managers in our study may provide helpful clues on the cross-sector differences in citizen participation motives.

Our cross-sector findings suggest that the most prevalent motives for both public and private managers are primarily related to internal organizational goals and values. Assessment of client needs, program assessment and improvement, as well as cultural motives were important to both public and private managers. There were also some important differences between the motives of public and private managers. Public managers were much more likely than private managers to refer to requirements of outside organizations when explaining their rationale for engaging the public. This is no surprise as public managers face more external oversight
(Allison, 1997). Even though this was an important motive for some respondents, many of these same respondents cited other reasons for seeking citizen participation as well. Perhaps the most important difference between the sectors is related to the democratic motives that were most salient to each sector. Public managers were more likely than private managers to pursue citizen participation out of a sense of obligation to be responsive and accountable to the community. A greater emphasis on democratic accountability in public organizations may explain this difference. On the other hand, private contractors tended to be more client-centered: they were more likely to be driven by the desire to empower their clients. Overall, the differences in the motives of public and private managers may suggest that more public managers are creating citizen participation opportunities at least in part because they are “expected” to rather than because they are genuinely interested in seeking this feedback.

Denhardt and Denhardt argue that “[i]n public administration, the quest for community has been reflected in the view that the role of government, especially local government, is indeed to help create and support ‘community’” (2000, p. 552). Our study suggests that the local governments and their private partners seek citizen feedback both to strengthen communities and their organizations. The work we have done complements other recent public administration studies, such as Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey (2014), in helping shape the current paradigm of public administration research by placing citizens at the forefront of public administration research. While a substantial body of literature has focused on the topic citizen participation, few studies provide empirical evidence that contributes to theory building in this field. There is also little known about citizen participation in the context of contracted services and how citizen participation efforts may differ in these settings compared to the efforts to seek citizen feedback about publicly-provided services. This study attempts to address these gaps. Furthermore, there
may be numerous contextual factors, unique to different policy domains, that shape citizen participation strategies, motives for their use, and utilization of citizen feedback. By focusing our study on the area of health and human services, we hope this research will provide public administrators with a better understanding of the complex dynamics involved with seeking feedback about programs serving some of society’s most disadvantaged groups who are often underrepresented in public governance processes.
Figure 1. Managerial Motives for Creating Citizen Participation Opportunities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motives Related to Strengthening Democracy and Communities</th>
<th>Motives Related to Internal Organizational Goals and Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• To create better citizens</td>
<td>• To generate new ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To empower the community (including clients)</td>
<td>• To understand and serve client needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To educate the community</td>
<td>• To assess and improve program quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To be responsive and accountable to the community</td>
<td>• To foster community support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To build trust in government</td>
<td>• To meet requirements of outside organizations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2. Respondent Motives Grouped by Category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motives Related to Strengthening Democracy and Communities (n=25)</th>
<th>Motives Related to Internal Organizational Goals and Values (n=80)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• To empower clients</td>
<td>Programmatic motives (n=69):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To be responsive and accountable to the community</td>
<td>• To assess and improve program quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To educate the community</td>
<td>• To understand and serve client needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To foster community support for the program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To help establish goals and plan for the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To generate new programming ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To develop stronger relationships with clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To learn about community perceptions of the program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To advocate for clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To share program information with the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motives related to organizational or professional values</td>
<td>Motives related to organizational or professional values (n=21):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=21):</td>
<td>• To reflect an organization’s broader participatory culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To be consistent with the treatment model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial motives (n=6):</td>
<td>Financial motives (n=6):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To obtain additional funding</td>
<td>• To obtain additional funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To identify ways to be more cost effective</td>
<td>• To be more competitive for county contracts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To be more competitive for county contracts</td>
<td>Process motives (n=3):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To have a neutral body make funding decisions in the RFP process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To improve the process of matching volunteers and clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other motives (n=13):</td>
<td>Other motives (n=13):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To meet requirements of outside organizations</td>
<td>• To meet requirements of outside organizations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3. Comparison of Top Citizen Participation Motives for Public and Private Managers. (Listed in Order of Frequency Starting with the Most Commonly Mentioned).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Public Manager Motives</th>
<th>Top Private Manager Motives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• To better understand and serve client needs</td>
<td>• To assess and improve program quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To assess and improve program quality</td>
<td>• To better understand and serve client needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To reflect an organization’s broader participatory culture</td>
<td>• To empower clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To meet requirements of outside organizations</td>
<td>• To reflect an organization’s broader participatory culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To be responsive and accountable to the community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The motives are listed in order of frequency starting with the most commonly mentioned. Only motives mentioned by respondents in 10% or more of the interviews from a particular sector were included in this figure.
Table 1. Interviews with Public and Private Managers, by County.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Interviews with Public Managers</th>
<th>Interviews with Private Managers</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County A</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County C</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County D</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County E</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County F</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (N=93)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Interviews, by State.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th># Interviews</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maryland (one county)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York (two counties)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania (one county)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia (two counties)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>93</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Service Areas Included in the Sample (Categories are Not Mutually Exclusive).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Areas</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>% total (93)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing, homeless shelters or residential services</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health related services</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care, parent education, youth services and recreational afterschool programs</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADL and IADL care for disabled in home, adult day care or nursing homes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance abuse prevention, policy and advocacy and programming related to other addictions</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare to work and other employment support services</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic and gang violence prevention and intervention</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food distribution, congregate meals, and nutrition</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services related to intellectual and developmental disabilities</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child abuse, neglect and foster care prevention, management and advocacy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health insurance related services</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration related services</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heating eligibility determination and assistance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV AIDS services</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intergenerational programming</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal assistance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical care and medical respite for the uninsured and other groups</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational pediatric and speech therapy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services targeting foreign, non-English speaking clients</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child policy development, technical assistance and evaluation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency assistance for low income citizens (food, utilities, etc.)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health outreach, education, and screening</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's health and family planning services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Key Methods for Seeking Citizen Feedback, by Respondent Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Count of public manager interviews</th>
<th>% (of n=93)</th>
<th>Count of private manager interviews</th>
<th>% (n=38)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Client engagement</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisory boards</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public hearings</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5. Respondent Motives for Creating Opportunities for Citizen Participation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motive</th>
<th>Count of interviews</th>
<th>Percent (of N=93)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To assess and improve program quality</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To understand and serve client needs</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To reflect an organization’s broader participatory culture</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To meet requirements of outside organizations</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To empower clients</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be responsive and accountable to the community</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To foster community support of the program</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be consistent with the treatment model</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To educate the community</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To help establish goals and plan for the future</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To obtain additional funding</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To generate new programmatic ideas</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have a neutral body make funding decisions in the RFP process</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To identify ways to be more cost effective</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be more competitive for county contracts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve the process of matching volunteers and clients</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To develop stronger relationships with clients</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn about community perceptions of the program</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To advocate for clients</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To share program information with the community</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6. Motives for Creating Citizen Participation Opportunities, by Respondent Type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motive</th>
<th>Percentage of public manager interviews (n=38)</th>
<th>Percentage of private manager interviews (n=55)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To assess and improve program quality</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To understand and serve client needs</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To reflect an organization’s broader participatory culture</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To meet requirements of outside organizations</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To empower clients</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be responsive and accountable to the community</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To foster community support of the program</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be consistent with the treatment model</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To educate the community</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To help establish goals and plan for the future</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To obtain additional funding</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To generate new programming ideas</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have a neutral body make funding decisions in the RFP process</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To identify ways to be more cost effective</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be more competitive for county contracts</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve the process of matching volunteers and clients</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To develop stronger relationships with clients</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn about community perceptions of the program</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To advocate for clients</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To share information about the program with the community</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


Appendix A. Government Manager Questionnaire

Background Information on Contract

1. What services are provided through this contract?
2. When contracting out public programs, government agencies usually expect their contractors to achieve certain goals. What are the goals of this contract?

Governments: Public Participation (PP) Forums

3. We are interested in community participation in government contracts. We define community participation as different ways in which community residents can provide feedback and try to influence government services. In this contract, have you created any opportunities for community residents to provide feedback or in any other way impact the services that are provided? For example...
   a. Probe: Has your agency collected information about client satisfaction, suggestions or complaints? I am not asking whether the private contractor has collected this information. Please, explain.
   b. Probe: Has your agency ever had an advisory board making recommendations on services delivered as part of this contract? Please, explain.
      i. What does the board do?
      ii. Who serves on the board? Who else participates in their activities?
      iii. What is the role of the county on the board? (i.e., in setting the agenda, facilitating meetings, or selecting board members?)
      iv. How often does it meet?
   c. Probe: Have you held public hearings or any other discussion forums about this contract? Please, explain.
      i. Who attends those hearings? How many people?
      ii. How often are they held?
      iii. What is the role of the county in these hearings? (i.e., in setting the agenda or facilitating it?)
      iv. How are these hearings publicized?
   d. Were there any opportunities for the community members to provide feedback before the contract was awarded, for instance during the RFP process? Please, explain.

If no citizen participation mechanisms were identified, go to Question 9.

4. Can you give me an example of specific feedback that you received from community members/clients?
   a. Can you also give me an example of feedback you received through [another citizen participation opportunity]?

5. Why do you seek feedback from the community members/clients?

6. What challenges, if any, have you experienced with these efforts?

Governments: Implications of PP

7. Thinking of the different things you have done to seek feedback from community members/clients, how have you used the information you received?
   a. Probe: Have you shared this information with the private contractor or other parties?
   b. Probe: Have you changed the way contracted services are delivered?
   c. Probe: Have you changed the contractual agreement?
8. Can you give me an example of community/client feedback that you received but did not use? Please, explain.

Contractors: PP Forums

9. Does your contractual agreement formally encourage or require the contractor to seek feedback from community members/clients?
   a. If yes, ask: Why is this provision included in the contract?

10. To the best of your knowledge, has the contractor created any opportunities for community residents to provide feedback or in any other way impact the services that are contracted? Please, explain.
   a. Probe: Has the contractor collected information about client satisfaction, suggestions or complaints? Please, explain.
   b. Probe: Has the contractor ever had an advisory board making recommendations on services delivered as part of this contract? Please, explain.
      i. Can you share what you know about this board’s activities?
   c. Probe: Does the contractor have a board of directors? Do clients participate on the board of directors? Please, explain.
   d. Probe: Has the contractor held public meetings or any other discussion forums about this contract? Please, explain.
      i. Can you share what you know about these hearings?

If no citizen participation mechanisms were identified, go to Question 13.

Contractors: Implications of PP

11. Can you give me an example of specific feedback that the contractor has shared with you about what they have learned?

12. To the best of your knowledge, has the information that the contractor has learned influenced the services that are delivered as a part of this contract? Please, explain.

Other Determinants of PP

13. How many years of work experience do you have?

14. What is the highest educational degree you have completed?

15. Is the contractor nonprofit or for-profit?

16. How much public attention has been paid to this service area, on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being a great deal of attention?
Appendix B. Contractor Questionnaire

Background Information on Contract

1. What services are provided through this contract?
2. When contracting out public programs, government agencies usually expect their contractors to achieve certain goals. Based on your formal contract and your informal communication with the government agency, what are the goals of this contract?

Contractors: Public Participation (PP) Forums

3. We are interested in community participation in government contracts. We define community participation as different ways in which community residents can provide feedback and try to influence government services. In this contract, has your organization created any opportunities for community residents to provide feedback or in any other way impact the services that are provided? For example...
   a. **Probe**: Have you collected information about client satisfaction, suggestions or complaints? *Please, explain.*
   b. **Probe**: Do you have a board of directors? Do clients participate on your board of directors? *Please, explain.*
      i. Has your board of directors made decisions that directly impacted the services delivered as part of this contract? *Please, explain.*
   c. **Probe**: Have you ever had an advisory board making recommendations on services delivered as part of this contract? *Please, explain.*
      i. What does the board do?
      ii. Who serves on the board? Who else participates in their activities?
      iii. Is the county involved in this advisory board in any way?
      iv. How often does it meet?
   d. **Probe**: Have you held public meetings or any other discussion forums about this contract? *Please, explain.*
      i. Who attends those hearings? How many people?
      ii. How often are they held?
      iii. Is the county involved in these meetings in any way?
      iv. How are these hearings publicized?

*If no citizen participation mechanisms were identified, go to Question 9.*

4. Can you give me an example of specific feedback that you received from community members/clients?
   a. Can you also give me an example of feedback you received through [another citizen participation opportunity]?
5. Why do you seek feedback from community members/clients?
   a. **Probe**: Does your contract with the government agency formally encourage or require you to seek feedback from community members/clients?
6. What challenges, if any, have you experienced with these efforts?

Contractors: Implications of PP

7. Thinking of the different things you have done to seek feedback from community members/clients, how have you used the information you received?
a. *Probe:* Have you changed the way you deliver services?
b. *Probe:* Have you shared this information with the government agency or other parties?
c. *Probe:* Have you asked the government agency for any changes in the contractual agreement?

8. Can you give me an example of community/client feedback that you received but did not use? *Please, explain.*

**Government: PP Forums**

9. To the best of your knowledge, has the government agency created any opportunities for community residents to provide feedback or in any other way impact the services that you provide? *Please, explain.*
   a. *Probe:* Has the government agency collected information about client satisfaction, suggestions or complaints? *Please, explain.*
   b. *Probe:* Has the government agency ever had an advisory board making recommendations on services delivered as part of this contract? Can community residents participate on this advisory board? *Please, explain.*
      i. Can you share what you know about this board’s activities?
   c. *Probe:* Has the government agency held any public meetings or other discussion forums encouraging public feedback on this contract? *Please, explain.*
      i. Can you share what you know about these meetings?
   d. Were there any opportunities for community residents to provide feedback before the contract was awarded, for instance during the RFP process? *Please, explain.*

*If no citizen participation mechanisms were identified, go to Question 12.*

**Government: Implications of PP**

10. Can you give me an example of specific feedback that the government agency shared with you about what they have learned?

11. To the best of your knowledge, has the information that the government agency collected influenced the services that are delivered as a part of this contract? *Please, explain.*

**Other Determinants of PP**

12. How many years of work experience do you have?

13. What is the highest educational degree you have completed?

14. Is your organization nonprofit or for-profit?

15. How much public attention has been paid to this service area, on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being a great deal of attention?