

# Policy recommendations for rebuilding cooperation between state and citizens

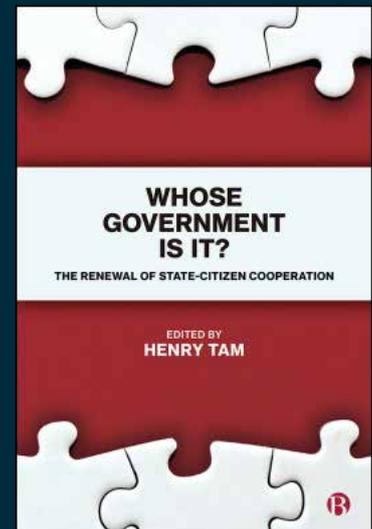
As the gap continues to widen between citizens and the political institutions that are meant to govern on their behalf, many people are losing faith in democracy, while large numbers are turning to authoritarian demagogues to lead the way.

**The only remedy for the growing distrust and discord is to rebuild cooperation between state and citizens.**

Contrary to assumptions about how unlikely people are to get involved in an informed manner with government policies, *Whose Government Is It?* brings together expert analyses and extensive findings to show that state-citizen cooperation is not only feasible, but can lead to much better decision-making and higher public satisfaction.

By examining examples from different national contexts, in diverse contexts, the book's contributors explain what will or will not work in empowering people to assess and shape public policies. Critical attention is given to how to support deliberation over complex issues, build consensus against a backdrop of conflicting opinions, recognise the different needs of diverse groups, and help people identify their real priorities rationally and empathically.

Find key recommendations for policy makers overleaf.



*Whose Government Is It?*  
by Henry Tam is  
published by Bristol  
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## Key Recommendations for Policy Makers

In addition to setting out the key ideas and practices that would advance state-citizen cooperation, *Whose Government Is It?* puts forward 5 key recommendations for ensuring they are widely and effectively adopted:

### 1. Focusing on making engagement a genuine lever for change

**Engagement must be connected to options that would make a real difference to people's lives.**

It should be backed by organisational arrangements so that at the outset there is a transparent and shared understanding of what changes can be secured. To involve people in detailed discussions only to reveal some way into the process that various doors are actually closed will only aggravate disillusionment. Those with the formal decision-making power must be willing to act on the outcomes of informed deliberations. In practice, such a commitment would require a feasibility analysis and a corresponding implementation plan before one launches into an engagement initiative. Otherwise one risks either alienating the participants by admitting that their preferred course of action cannot be taken forward in a safe or beneficial manner, or going ahead with changes which are in fact highly damaging for the public.

### 2. Identifying and publicising the value of democratic cooperation

**Instead of insisting that people should just appreciate the importance of civic engagement, more should be done to make the case for its deployment,** especially in terms that will strike a chord with those holding government positions.

Local government accounting, for example, should not only list 'the cost of democracy' relating to any expenditure associated with elections and subsequent activities of councillors, but cover the gains to accountability and effectiveness generated by informed participation. Techniques for quantifying such gains should be widely adopted.

Assessments from around the world have shown that where people are given genuine opportunities to reflect and contribute their views on the development of public actions, it tends to lead to more satisfactory and cost-efficient outcomes.



### 3. Selecting appropriate and feasible involvement approaches under different circumstances

It is essential for those considering engagement arrangements to **be aware that a wide range of approaches have been developed and refined for different circumstances**, and they only work effectively if they are chosen sensibly and applied with the necessary know-how. To make the right selection, a number of factors should be considered. There is the size and representativeness of potential participants to be taken into account. Issues such as locations, duration, and expenses need to be addressed accordingly. The approach to be adopted should be suitable for setting out and enforcing the ground rules on, for example, mutual respect, civil discourse, and the adjudication and exclusion of lies and misinformation; handling emotional tensions and resolving them with due empathy; fair facilitating of discussions in reviewing pros and cons, questioning experts, formulating suggestions, and weighing options; and overseeing the resolution process.

### 4. Cultivating inclusive community relations as a long-term strategy

Those holding government positions (or seeking public office) should recognise that a genuinely cooperative relationship with their fellow citizens needs a long-term foundation. Between specific engagement exercises there should be communications to cover not just how the outcomes of those exercises are being followed up on, but also what other policy explorations or everyday issues people may want to discuss. In addition to government bodies having regular and constructive communications with the public, the communities being engaged must themselves be not so divided that it would render shared deliberations impossible. This requires the **appropriate use of community development to ensure people from all socio-economic and diverse cultural backgrounds are kept in touch and given realistic opportunities to share their views**.

### 5. Investing in the development of civic leadership at all levels of society

**People aspiring to take on civic leadership positions in society should be assessed on their aptitudes for deliberative engagement with their fellow citizens, and there should be high quality training to enable them to develop the necessary skills and dispositions.**

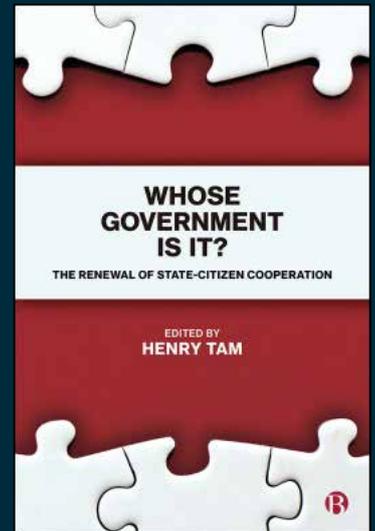
Such training should raise understanding of the value and techniques of citizen engagement. It should also support the cultivation of empathy so that those with power can relate and respond sensitively to the concerns of people they are meant to serve.

Apart from investing in improving formal training provisions and selection arrangements, community-based learning networks should be supported to improve awareness of the opportunities and implications of becoming civic leaders, so that people irrespective of their age, gender, race and class, can be encouraged to participate in informed deliberations and decision-making in relation to public issues.

## About the Book

*Whose Government Is It?* provides in-depth arguments, pertinent examples, and experienced guidance to help civic educators, community activists, policy advisors, political leaders, and public officials to attain a better understanding of why and how state-citizen cooperation should be engendered. Its contributors are theorists and practitioners who have been at the forefront of assessing and applying options for citizen empowerment and deliberative engagement.

Dr Henry Tam is a writer, educator, and former policy head for civil renewal under the last Labour Government. He has been Director of the Forum for Youth Participation & Democracy, University of Cambridge; Lecturer on politics and government for Workers' Educational Association and the Civil Service College; and Visiting Professor, School of Lifelong Learning, Birkbeck, University of London.



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