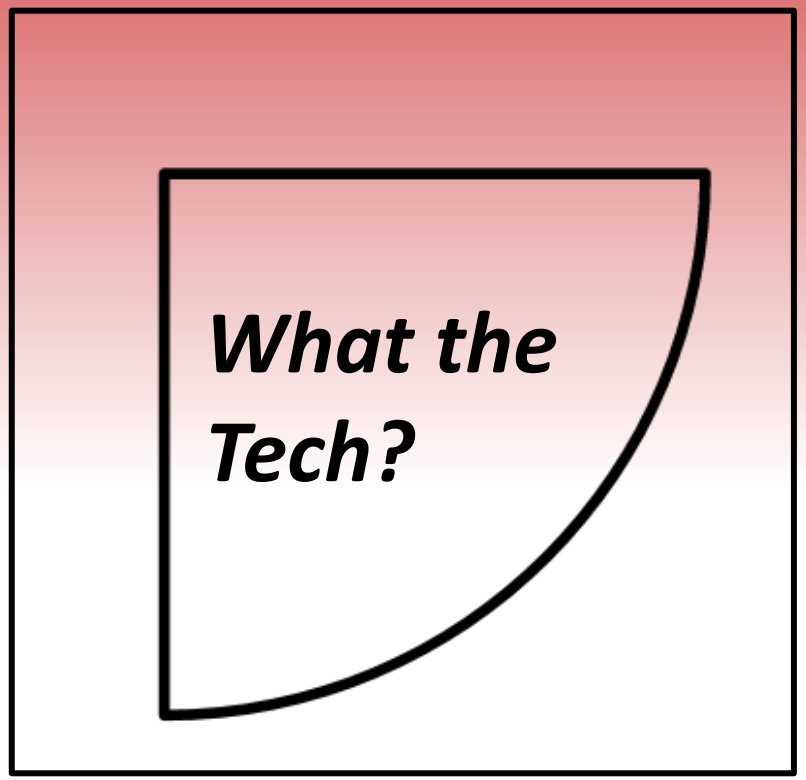
What the Tech?

PART 6: AI AND ADVOCACY IN OUR COMMUNITIES

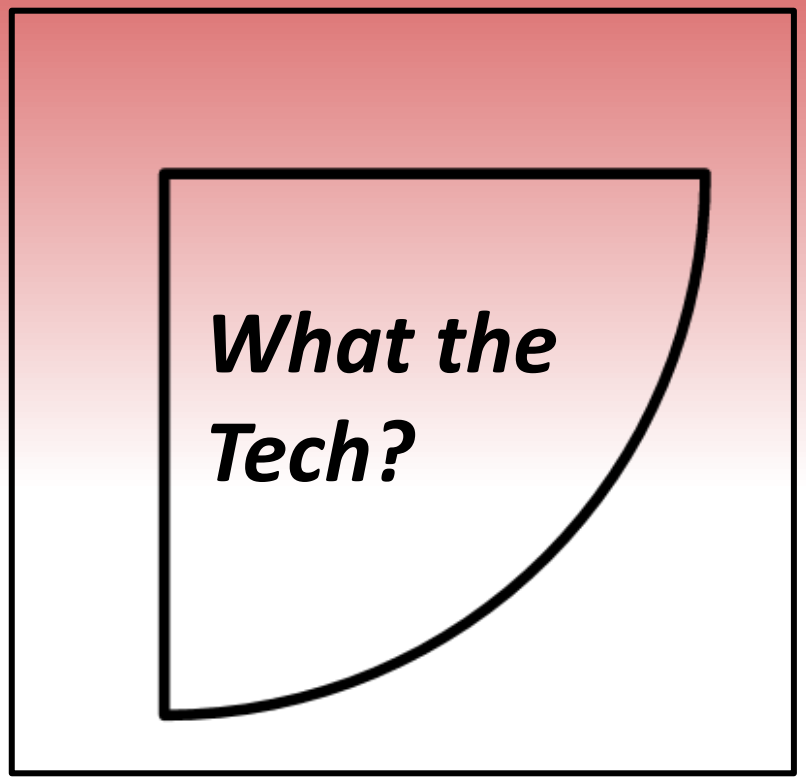
AI in Our Communities



Last Time:

- Generative AI: definitions and applications

AI in Our Communities

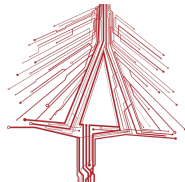


Today will be about:

- Reflections
- AI and Advocacy in Communities
  - Examples and group discussions

Questions so far?

Next: Reflective Assignments



Weekly Reflections

How it works

- Goal: everyone goes once!
- Three volunteers per week

Every Monday

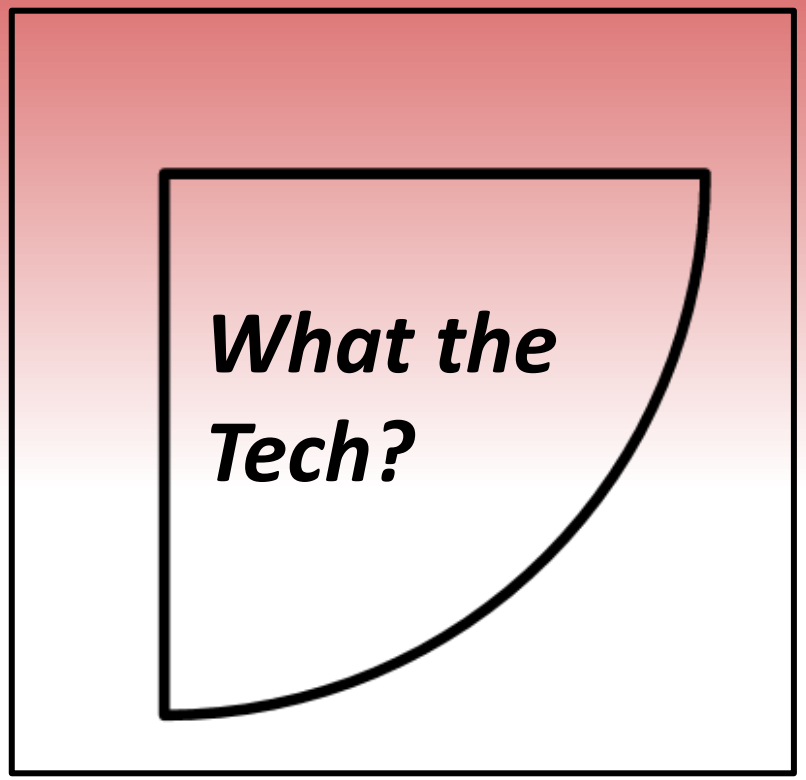
- Week 2:
- Week 3:
- Week 4:
- Week 5:
- Week 6:

Questions so far?

Next:

AI And Advocacy In Our Communities

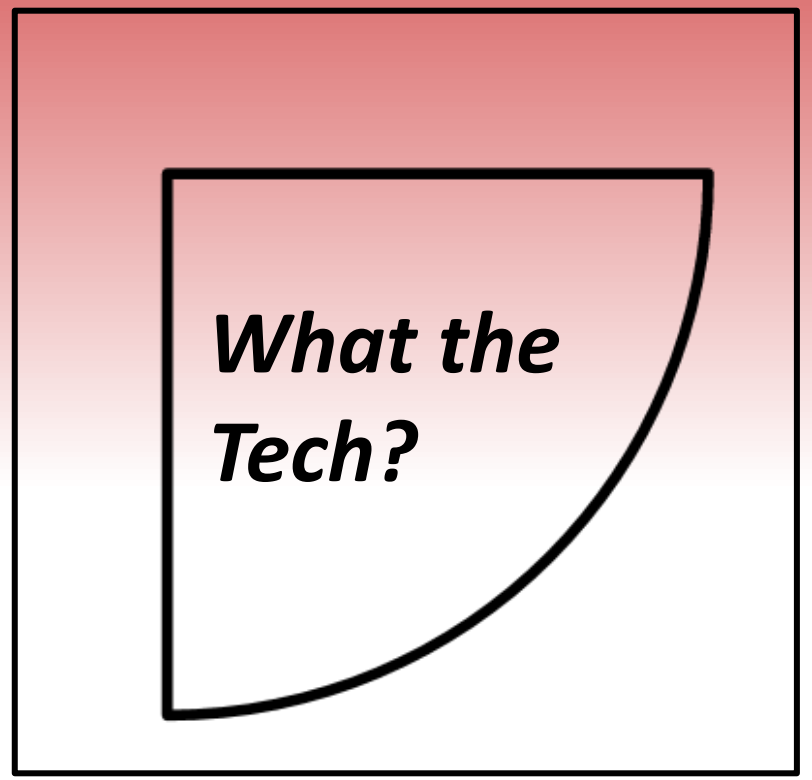
AI AND ADVOCACY IN OUR COMMUNITIES



Our Focus

- Why have a policy?
- What can you do about it?
  - "Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation"
- Three examples of AI and public policy:
  - Boston.gov and Google translate
  - Google and traffic flow
  - AI and forest fires

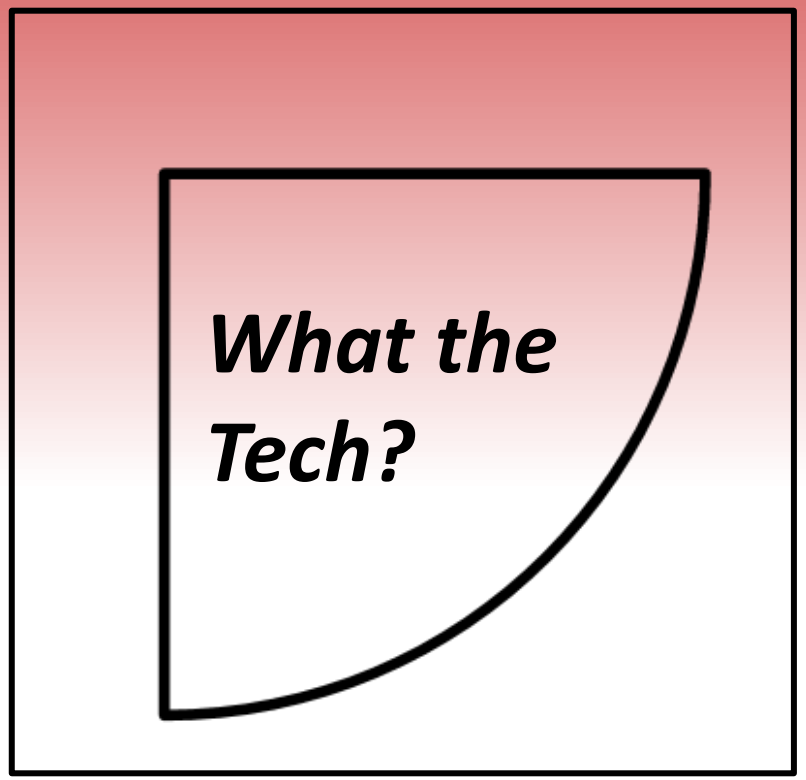
AI AND ADVOCACY IN OUR COMMUNITIES



Why have a policy?

- Not a trick question…
- Every game needs rules
- Where do you see AI policies today?
  - They're more common than you think!

AI AND ADVOCACY IN OUR COMMUNITIES

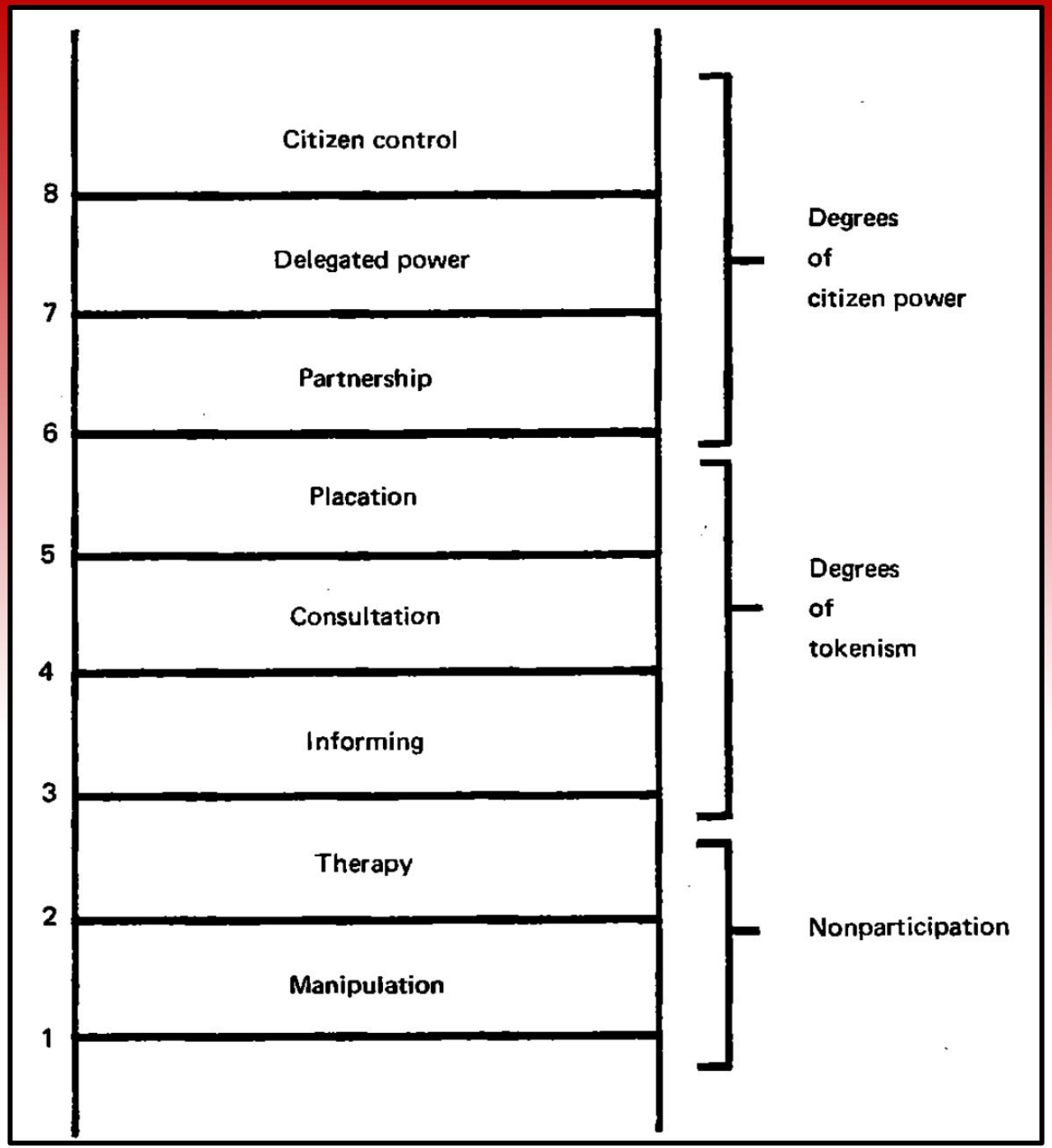


Who gets to be involved?

- How do *you* think policy is made?
- Policy design in general has changed over the past 70 years
- Community engagement is more important than ever
  - Especially with huge issues like AI!

Power to the People… But How Much?

- Community advocacy groups have revolutionized the way policy is designed.
- However, tensions remain over who gets how say.
- Advocating for your community includes making your voice heard

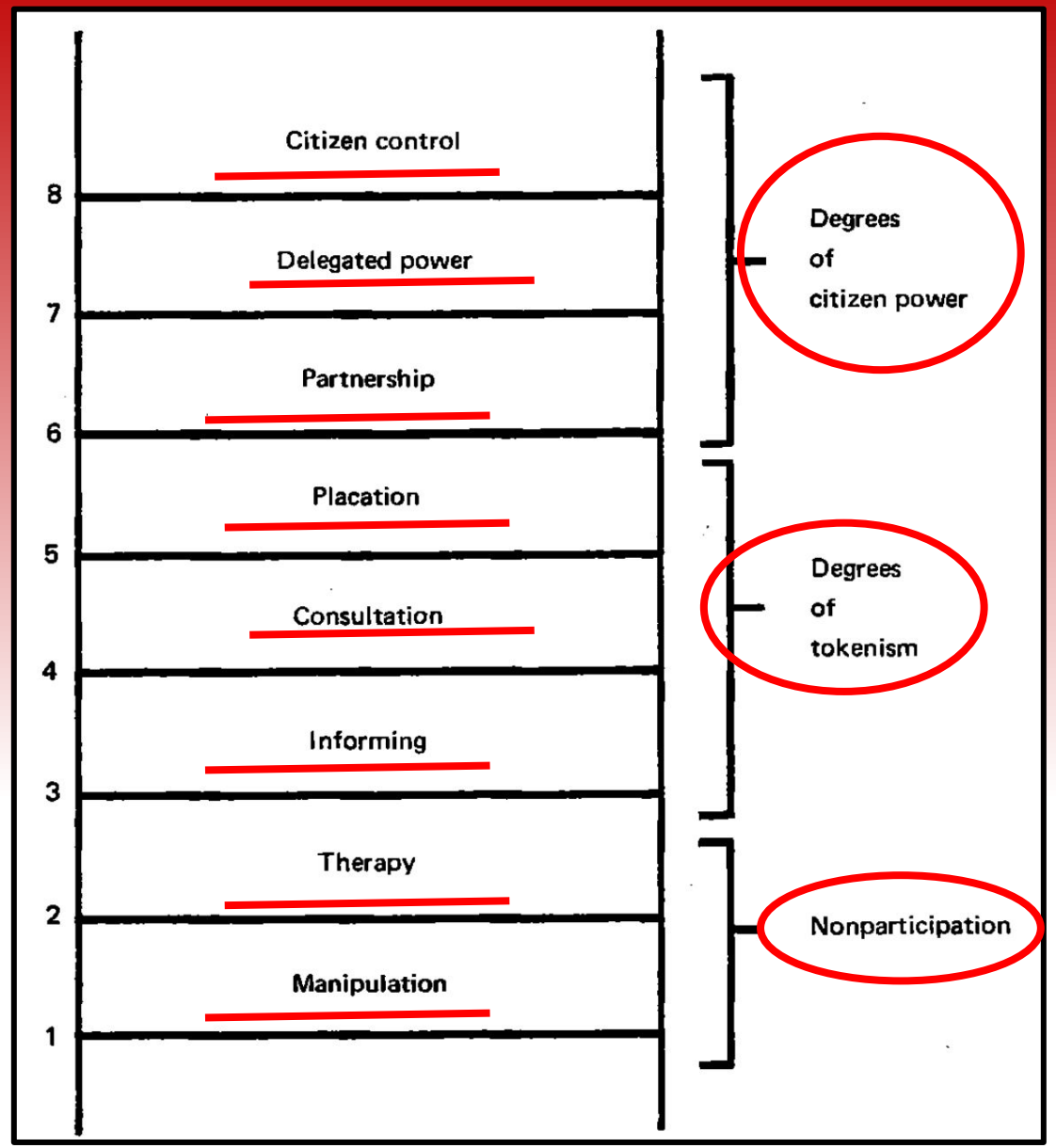

Citizen control
8
Delegated power
7
Partnership
6
Placation
5
Consultation
4
Informing
3
Therapy
2
Manipulation
1
Degrees of citizen power
Degrees of tokenism
Nonparticipation

Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation

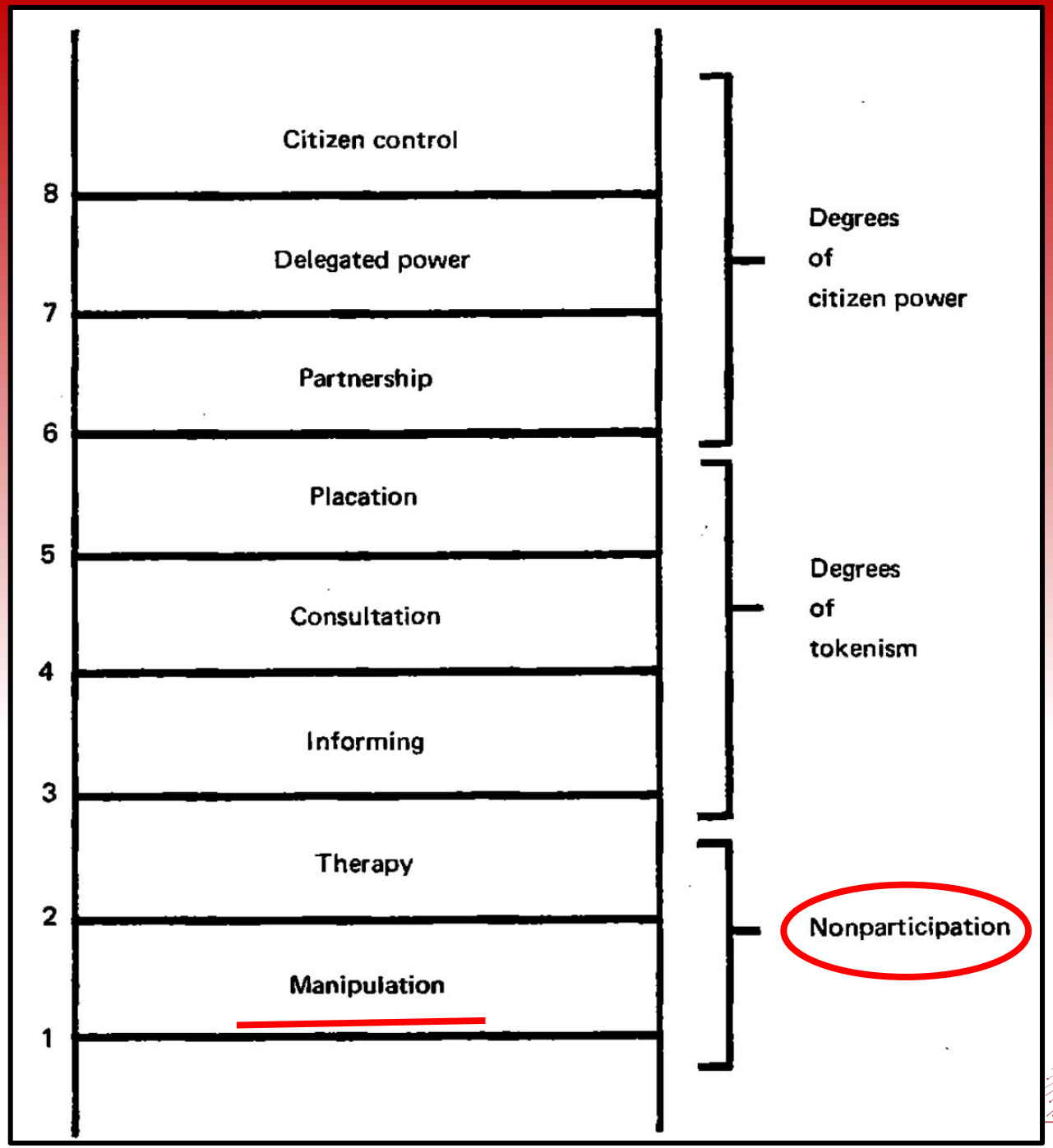
- Designed in 1969 by Sherry Arnstein, a policy specialist at HUD

- Used to measure just how involved citizens are in projects that impact them

- Eight “steps” of the ladder across three empowerment categories.

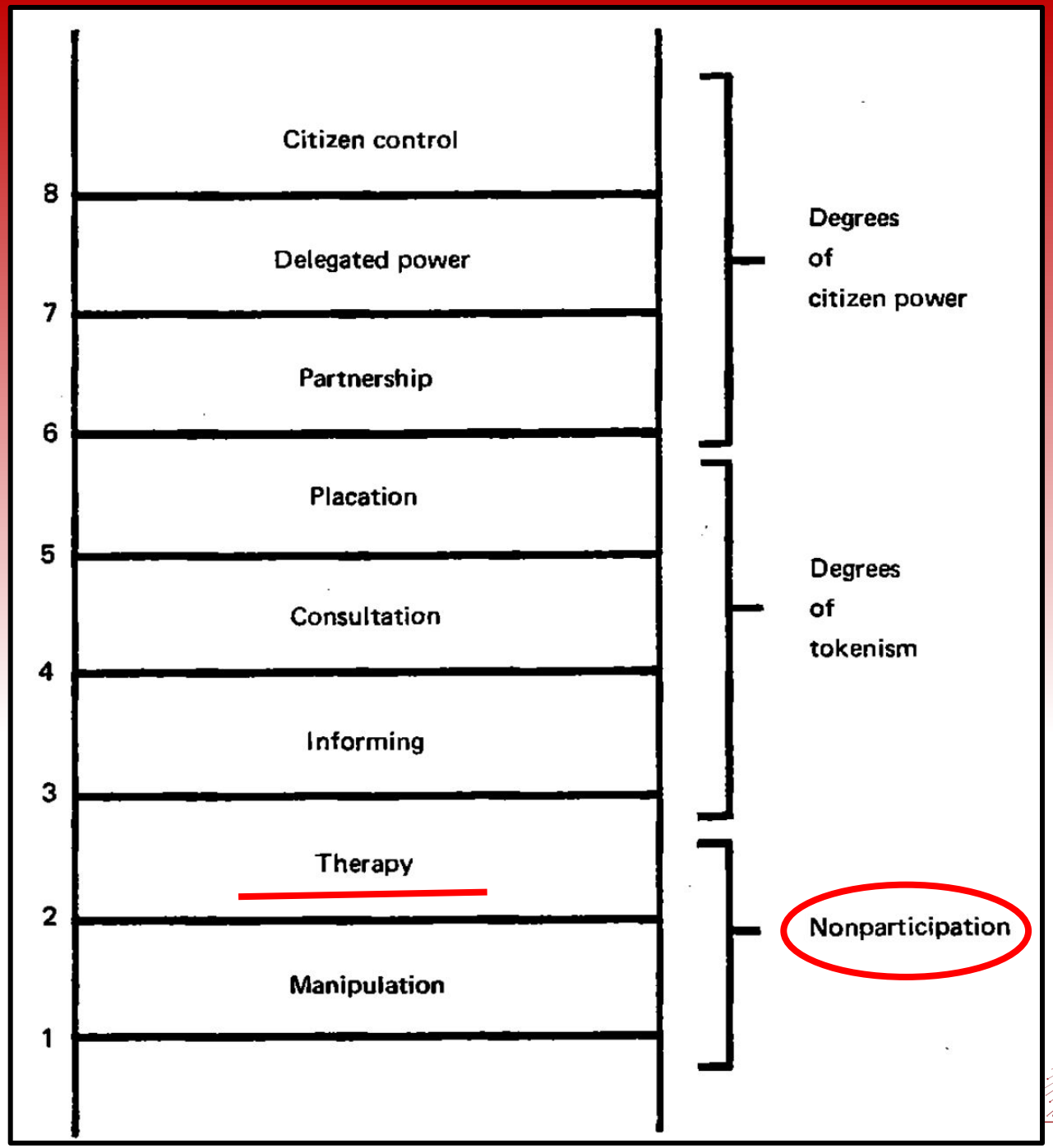


Eight Steps of the Ladder



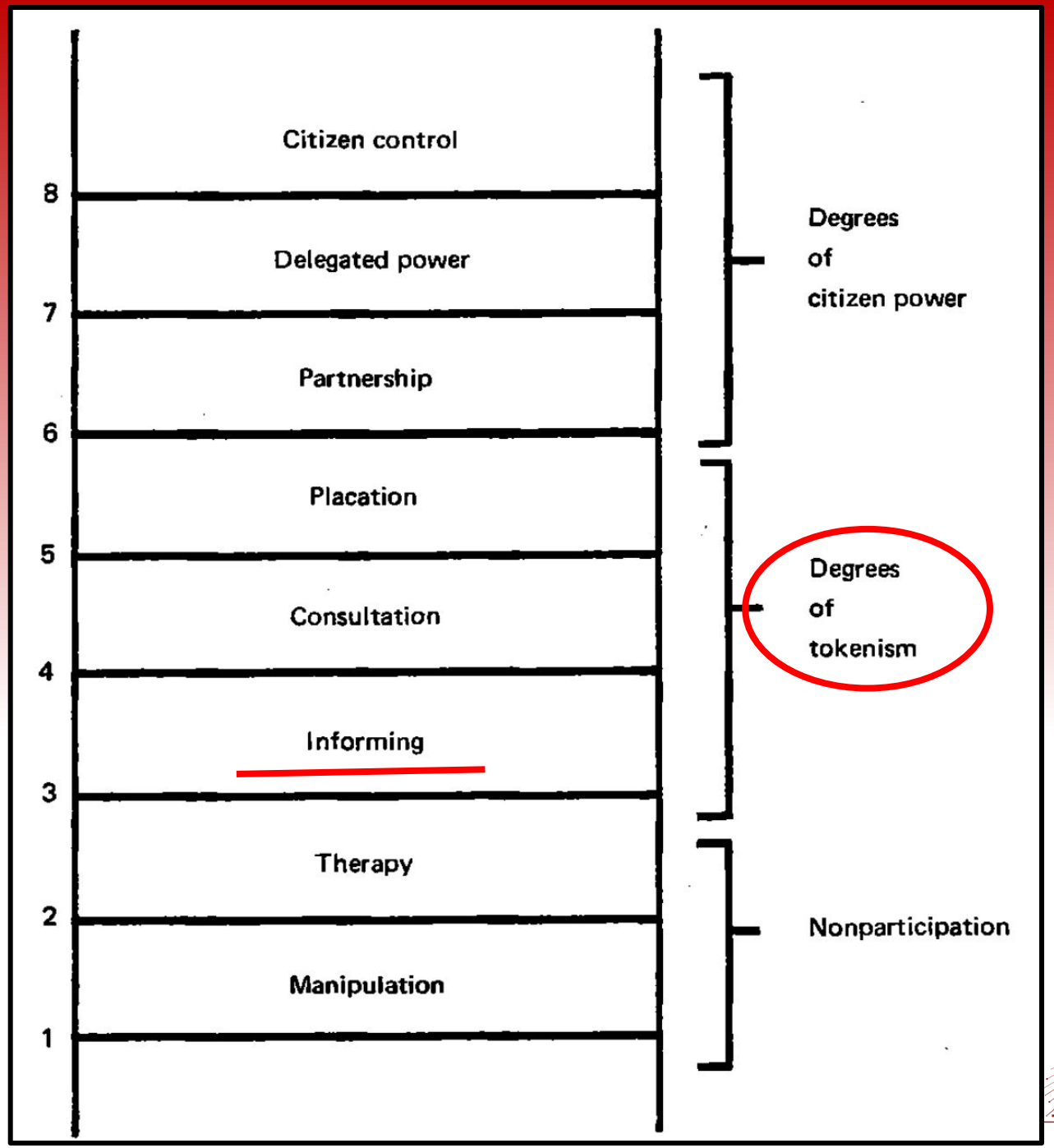
Manipulation (Step 1): phony power.

Eight Steps of the Ladder



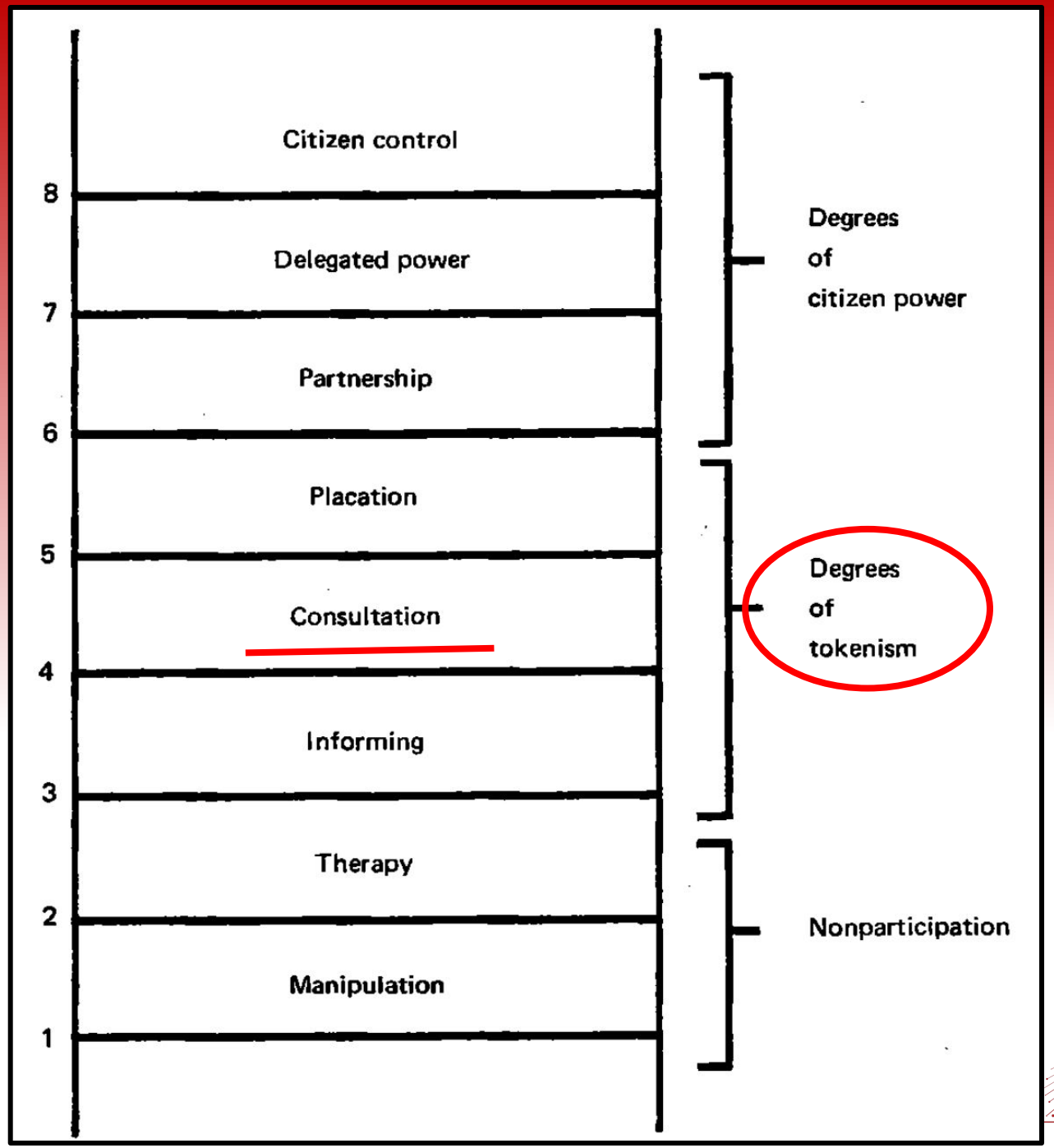
Therapy (Step 2): "Those crazy community members think *we're* the problem. We have to teach them otherwise!"

Eight Steps of the Ladder



Informing (Step 3): "This is what we're doing and why. Sorry, no questions."

Eight Steps of the Ladder

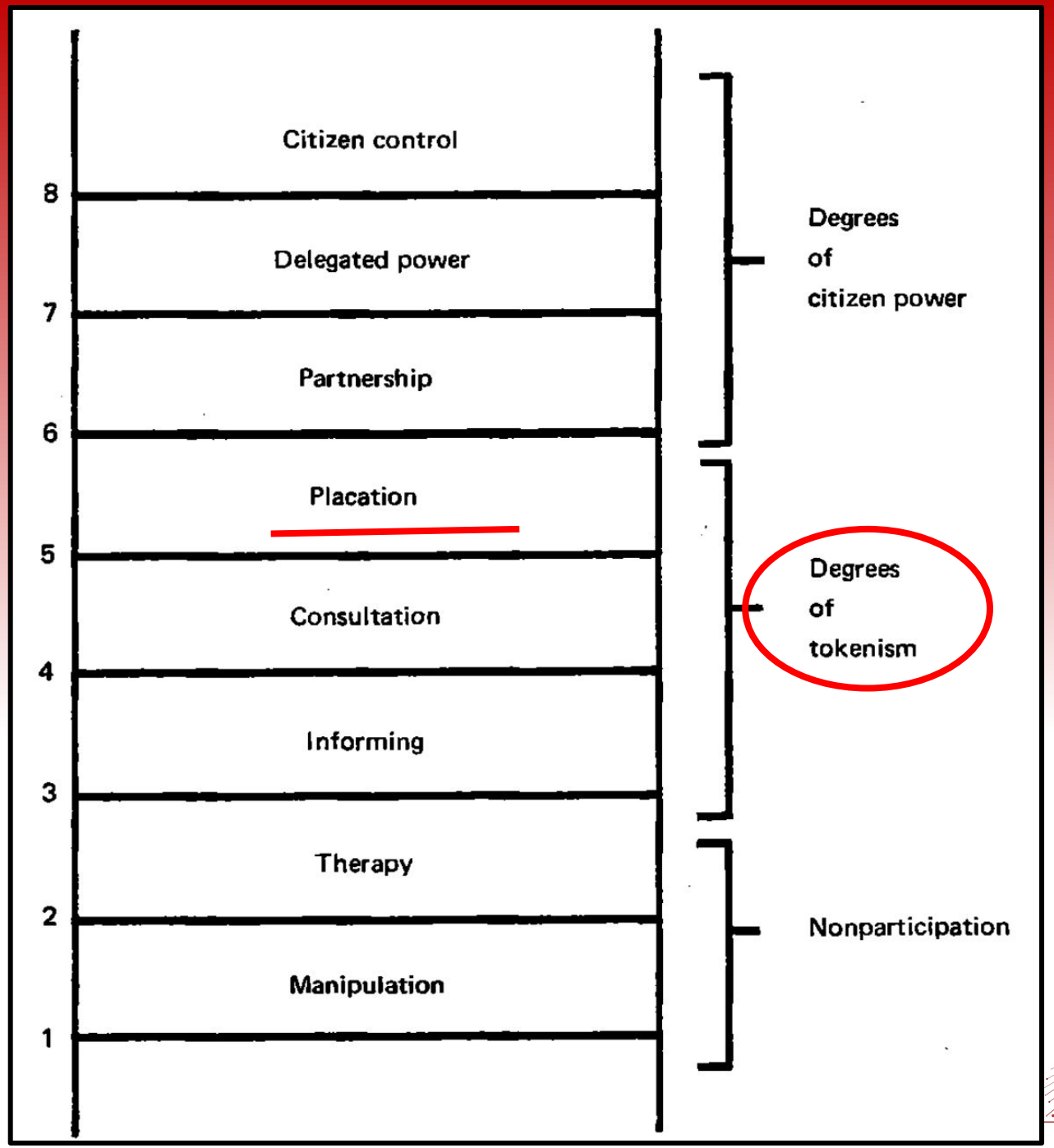


Consultation (Step 4): "This is what we're doing and why. Sure, you can ask a few questions."

Eight Steps of the Ladder

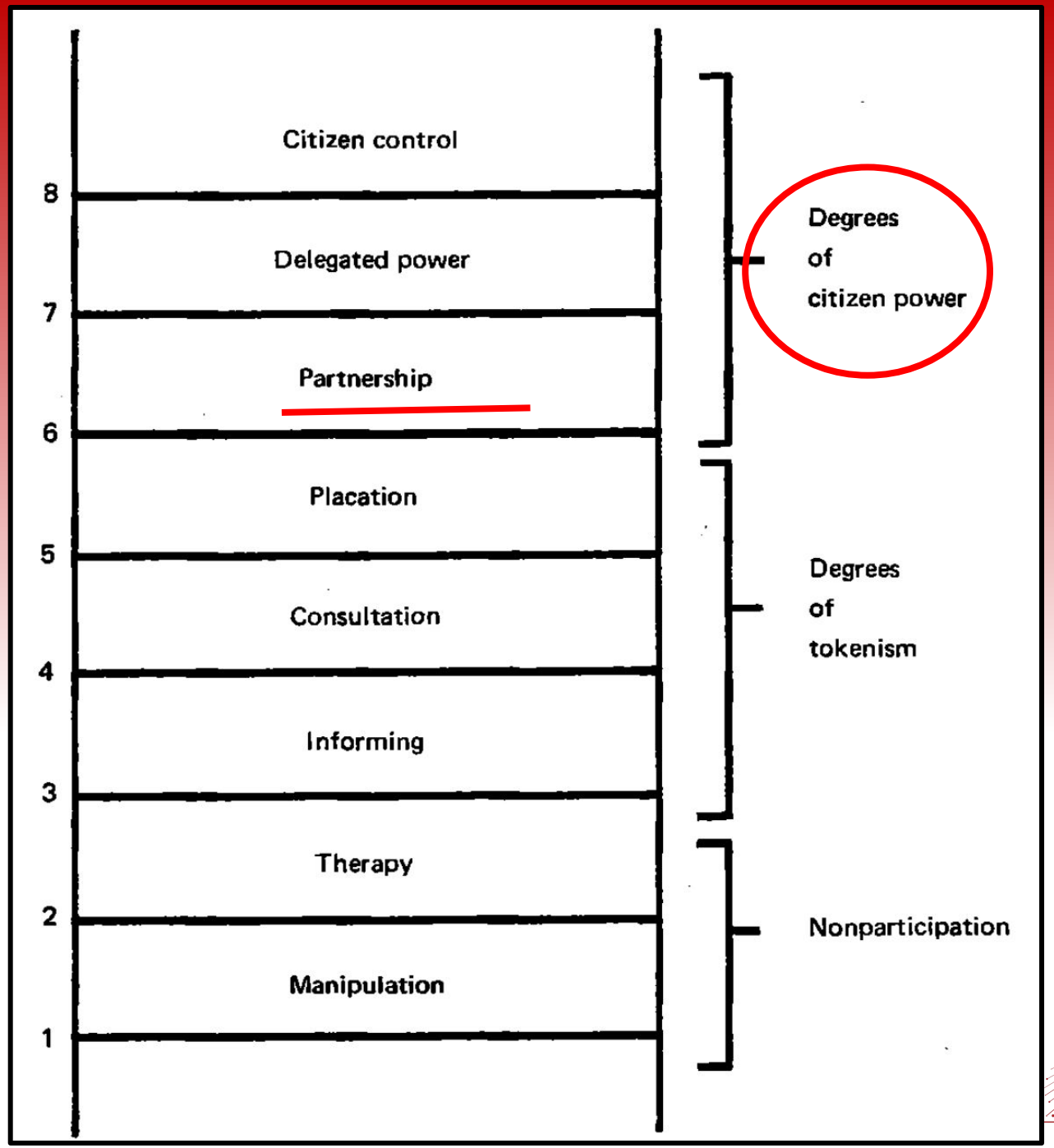
<u>Placation (Step 5):</u> You're there to fill a chair.

"We have a person from X community on the board, so we *obviously* valued their participation!"



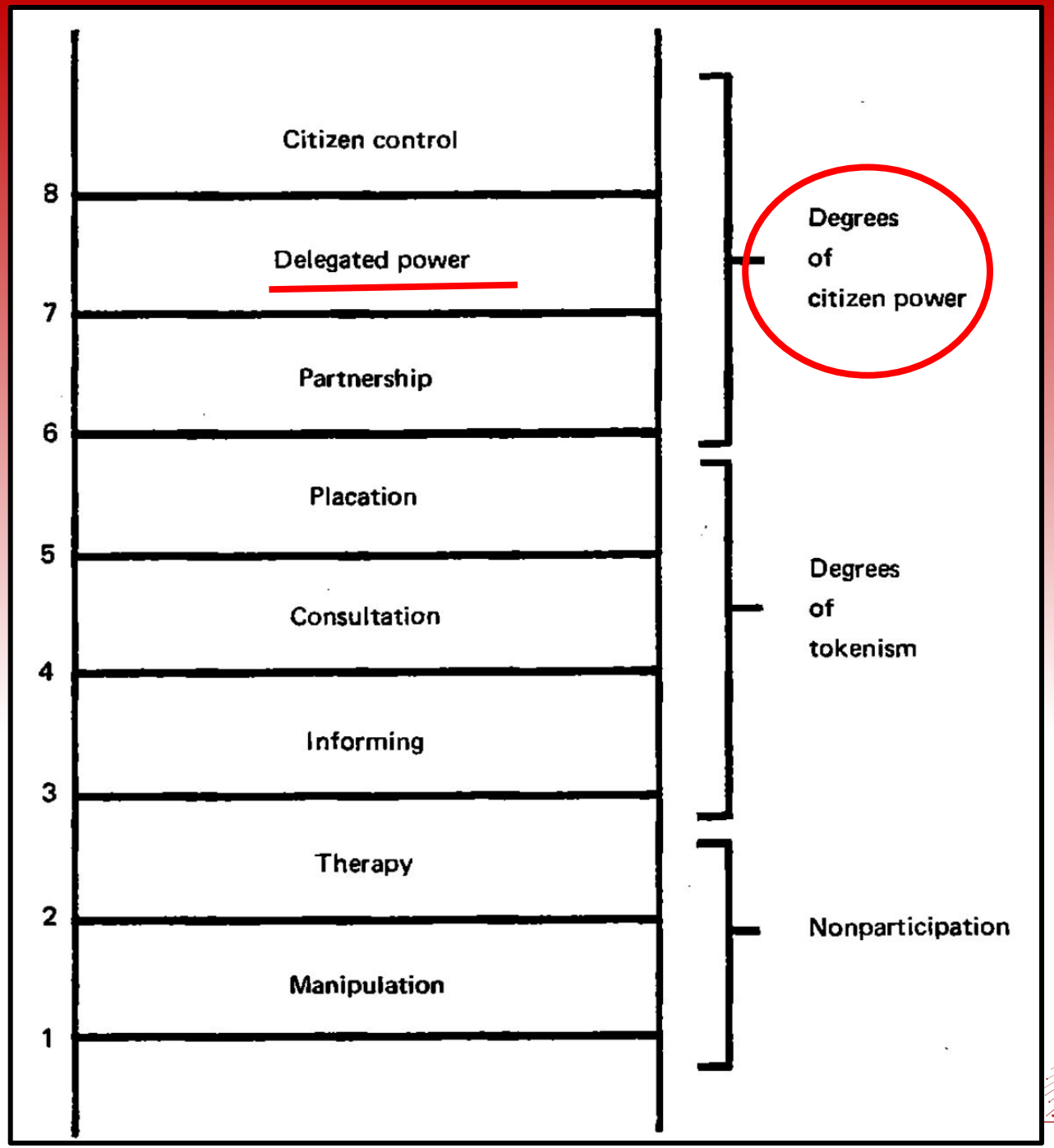
Eight Steps of the Ladder

Partnership (Step 6): You're still on the committee, but can make suggestions, vote, veto, etc. But you're playing by *their* rules.



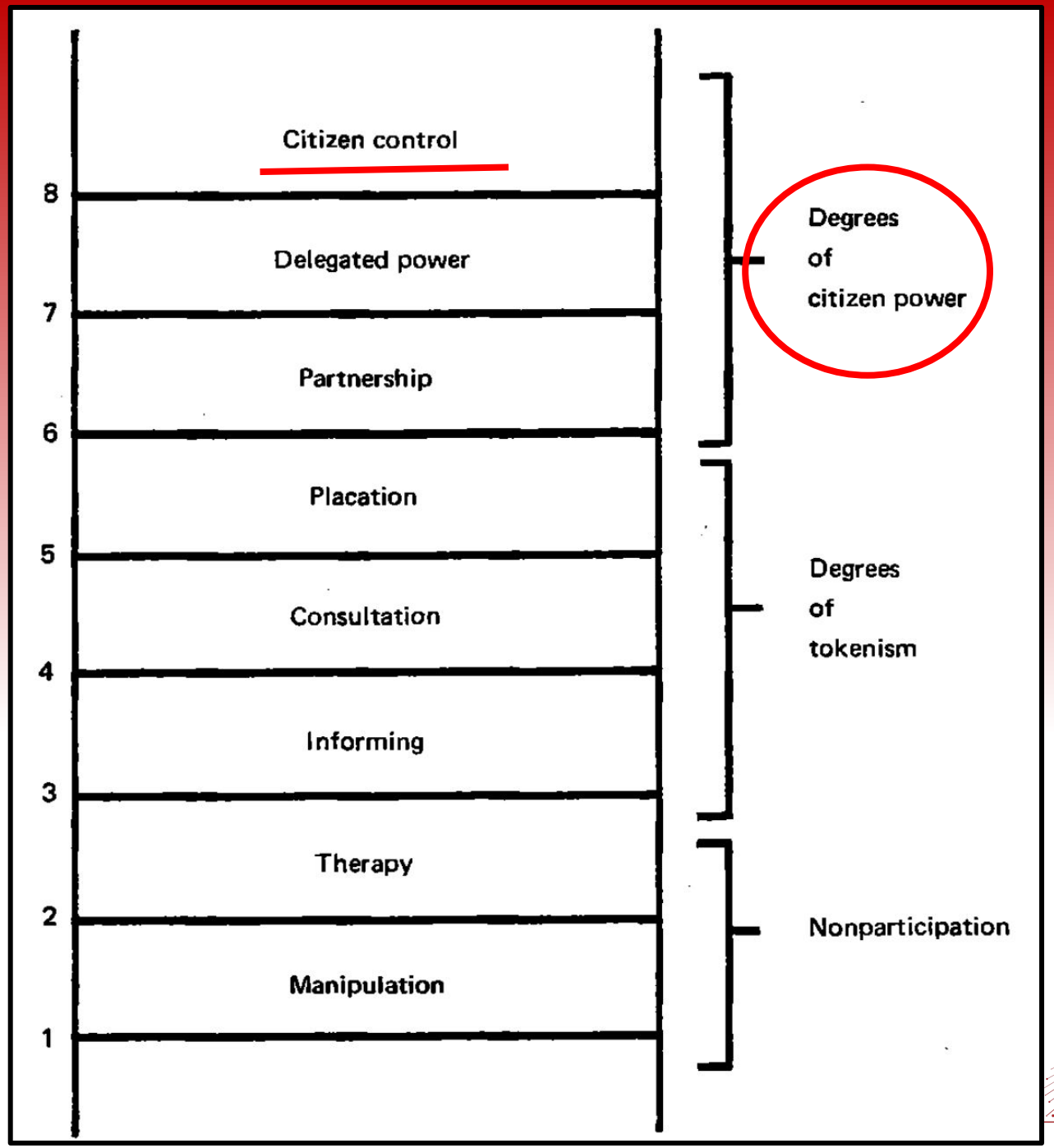
Eight Steps of the Ladder

Delegated Power (Step 7):
Similar to “partnership,” but citizens can change the rules if they want.



Eight Steps of the Ladder

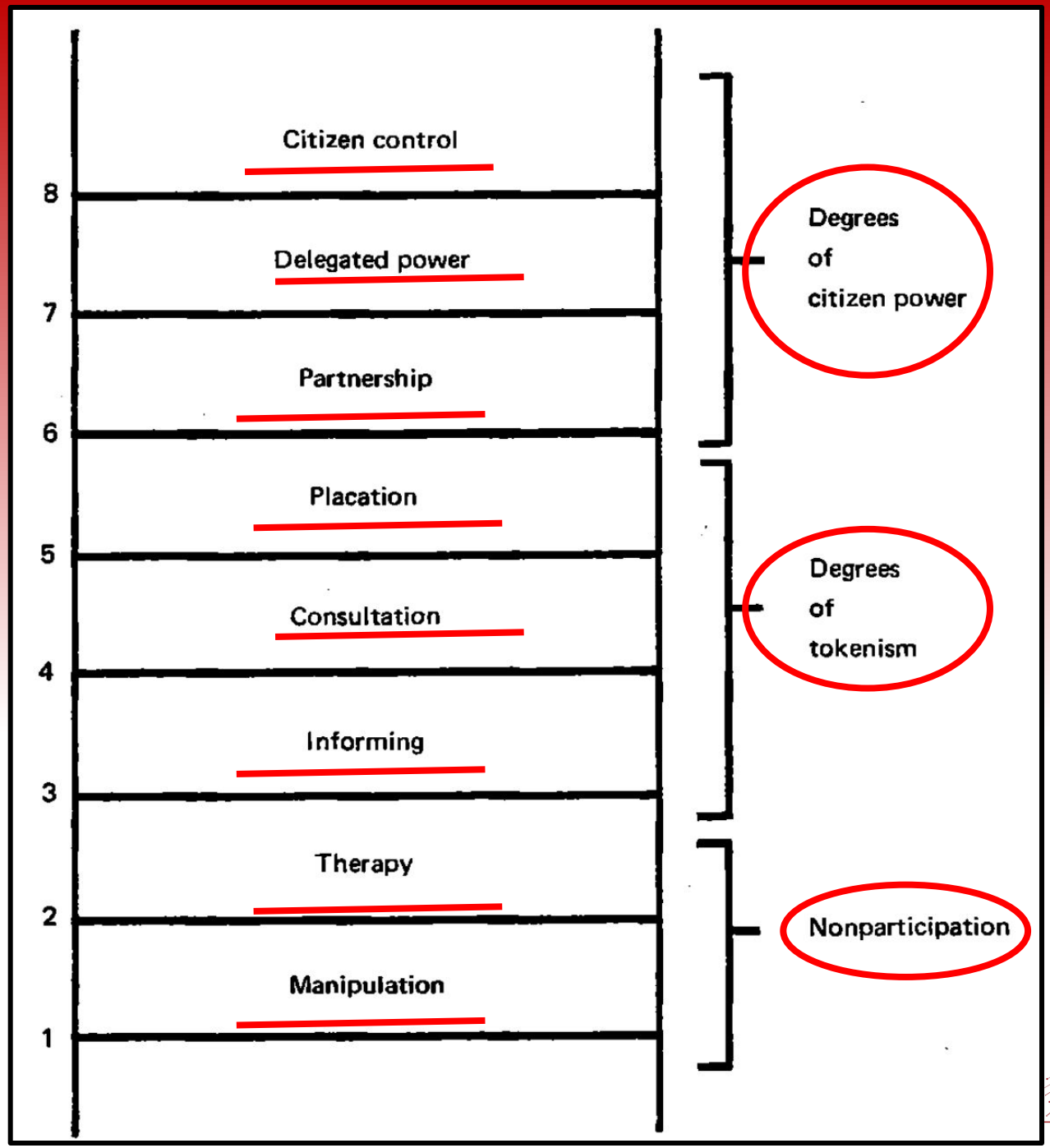
Citizen Control (Step 8):
You hold all (or at least most) of the cards.



Eight Steps of the Ladder

- These steps add *nuance* to each of the three categories
- Lines can blur…
  - Hard to distinguish one from the other

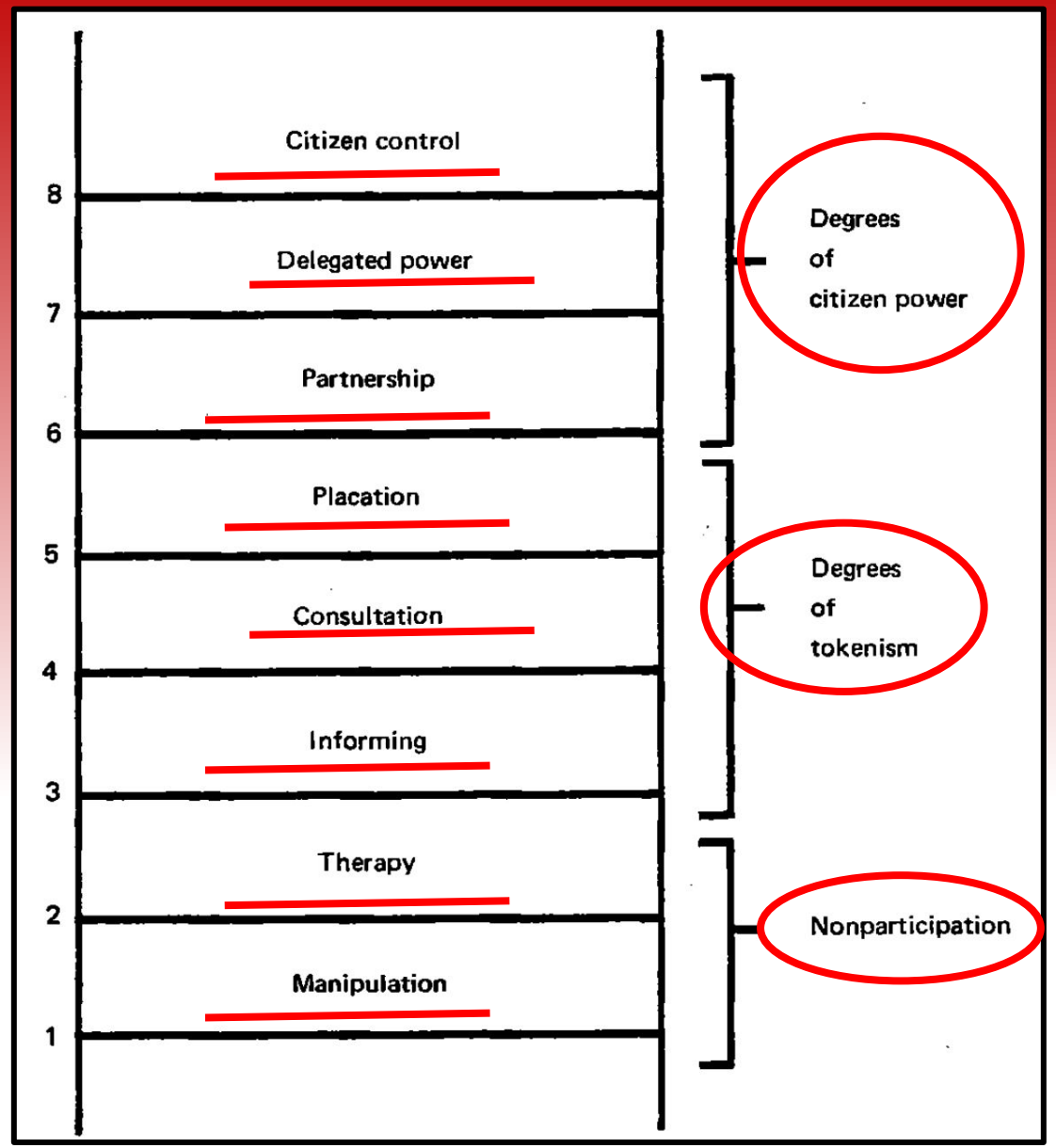
- Do you have experience with any of the steps?



Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation

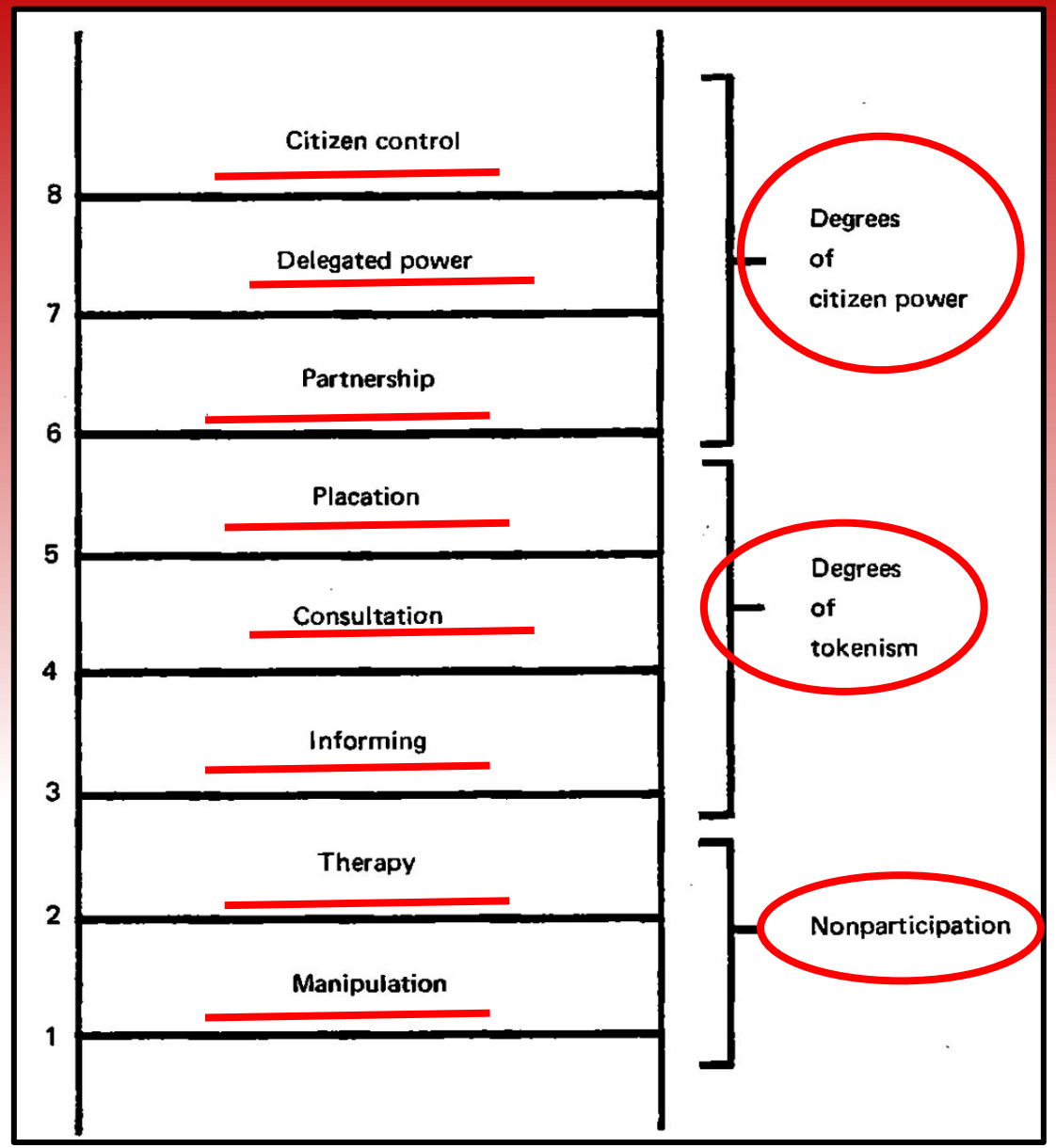
In pairs, ask yourselves:

- How would you describe this workshop? Why?
- How about your school?
- Where do you see limits to this classification method?
- Do you have experience with either a category or a step?



Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation

- Arnstein's Ladder isn't perfect
- Has been criticized for rigidity
- Works best as a "rule of thumb"
- My take: helpful to remember if you're doing community engagement
  - Either in internship or in life!

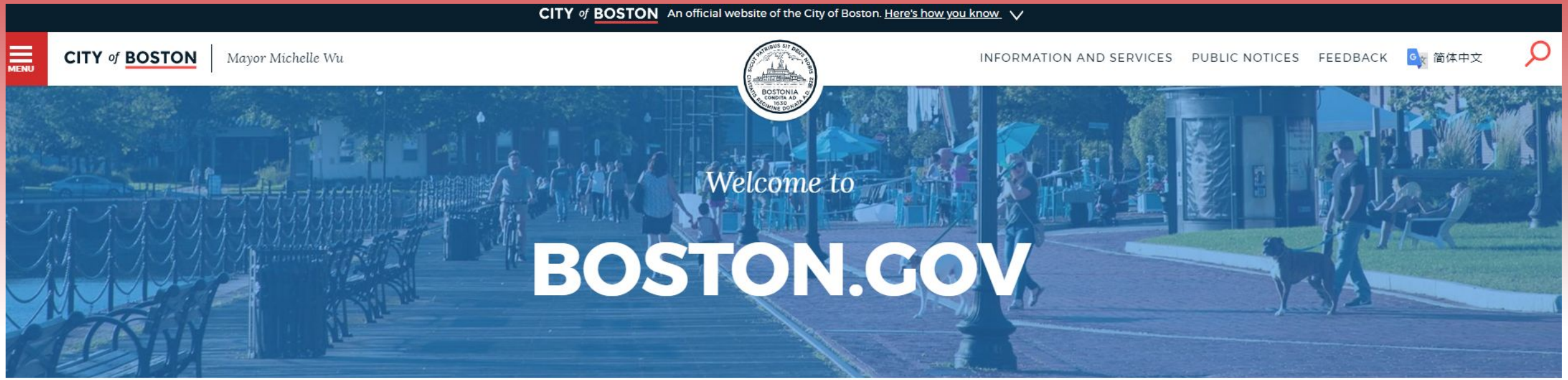


How do we apply this to tech policy and AI?

Three examples of AI and public use:

- Boston.gov and Google translate
- Google and traffic flow
- AI and forest fires

Scenario #1: Google Translate on Boston.gov



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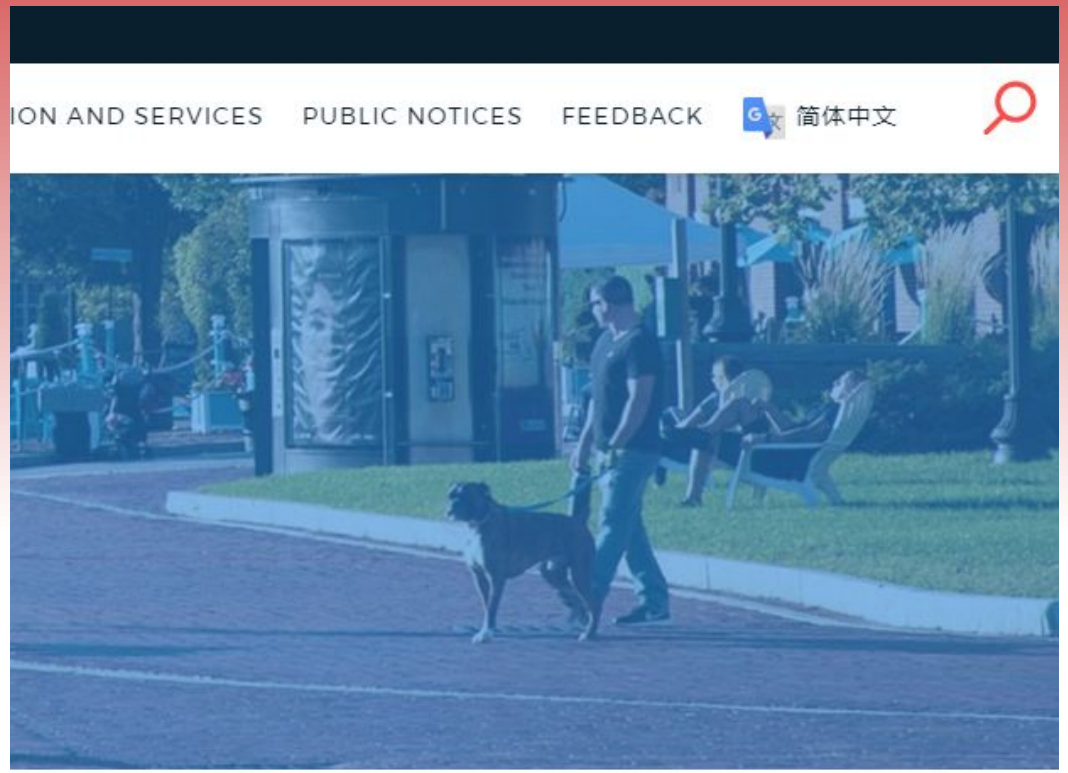
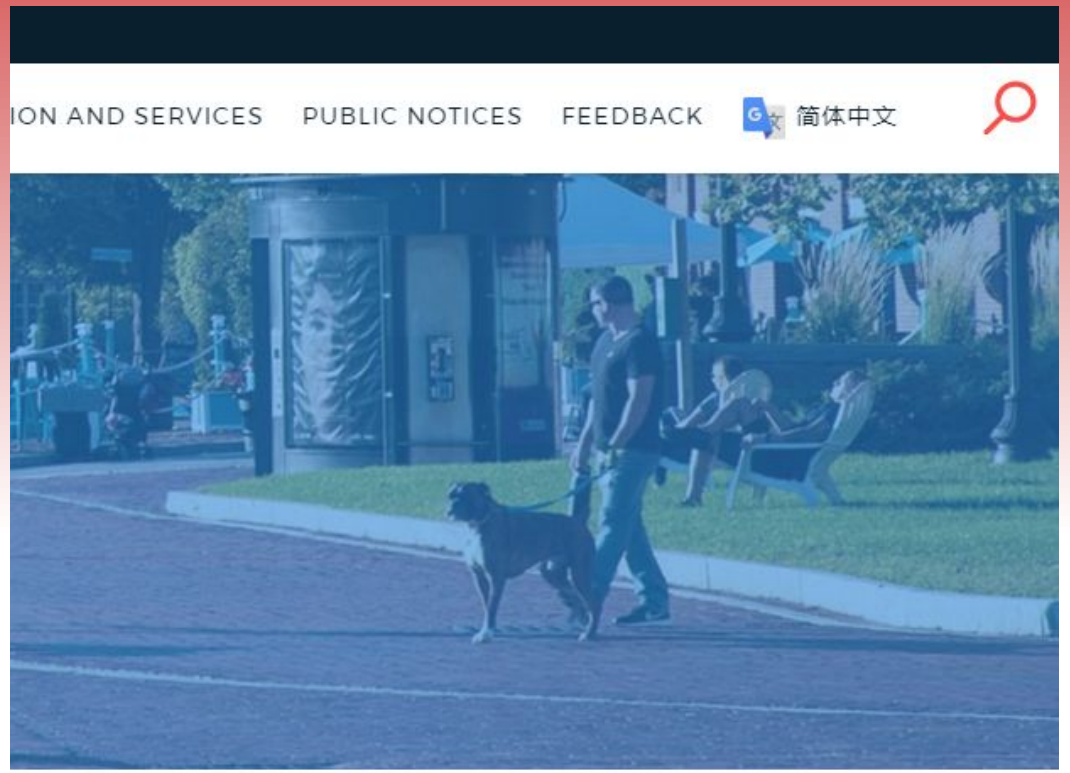


The key questions:

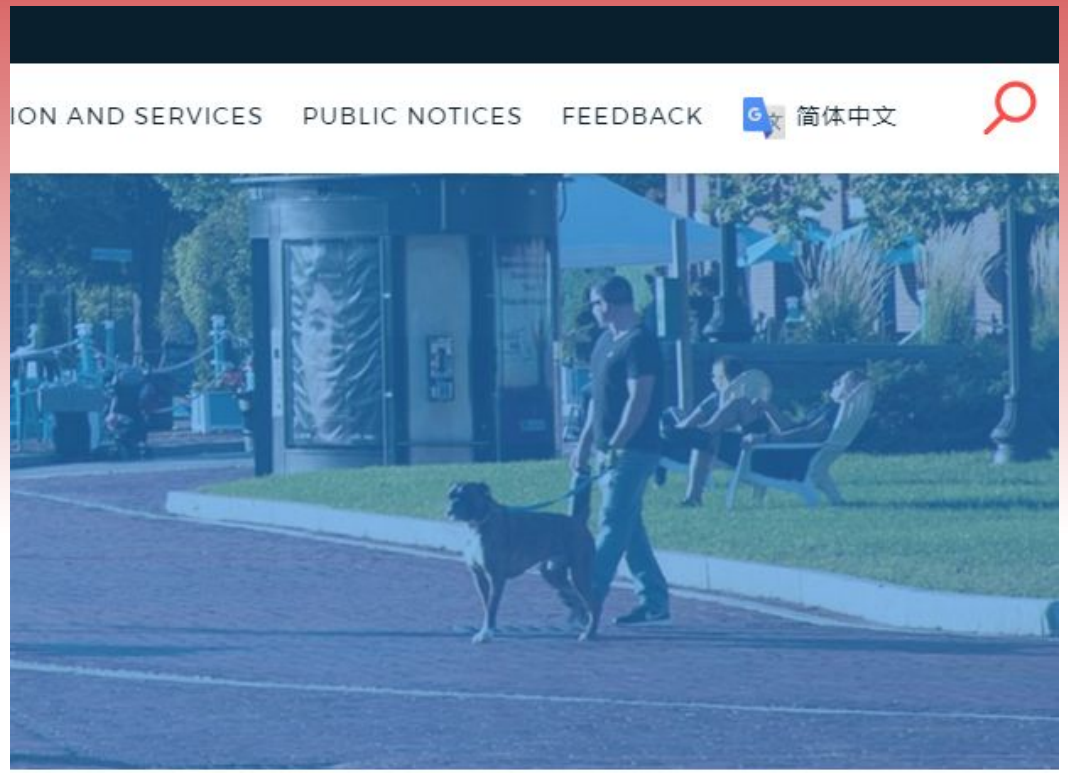
- What's the value of this?
- Is there an *expanded* way that this could be used?
- Could there be an ethical drawback?

Scenario #1: Google Translate on Boston.gov



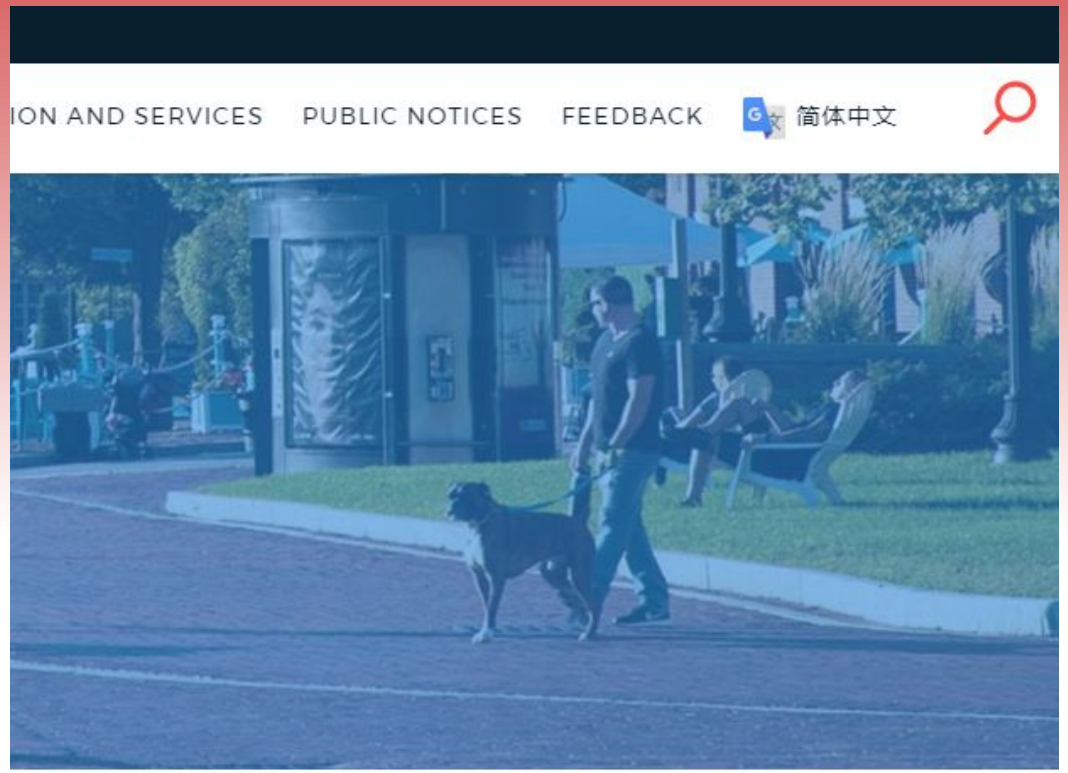
- What's the value of this?
  - Any guesses?
  - Takeaway: It's an easy, convenient access to critical information for non-English speakers

Scenario #1: Google Translate on Boston.gov



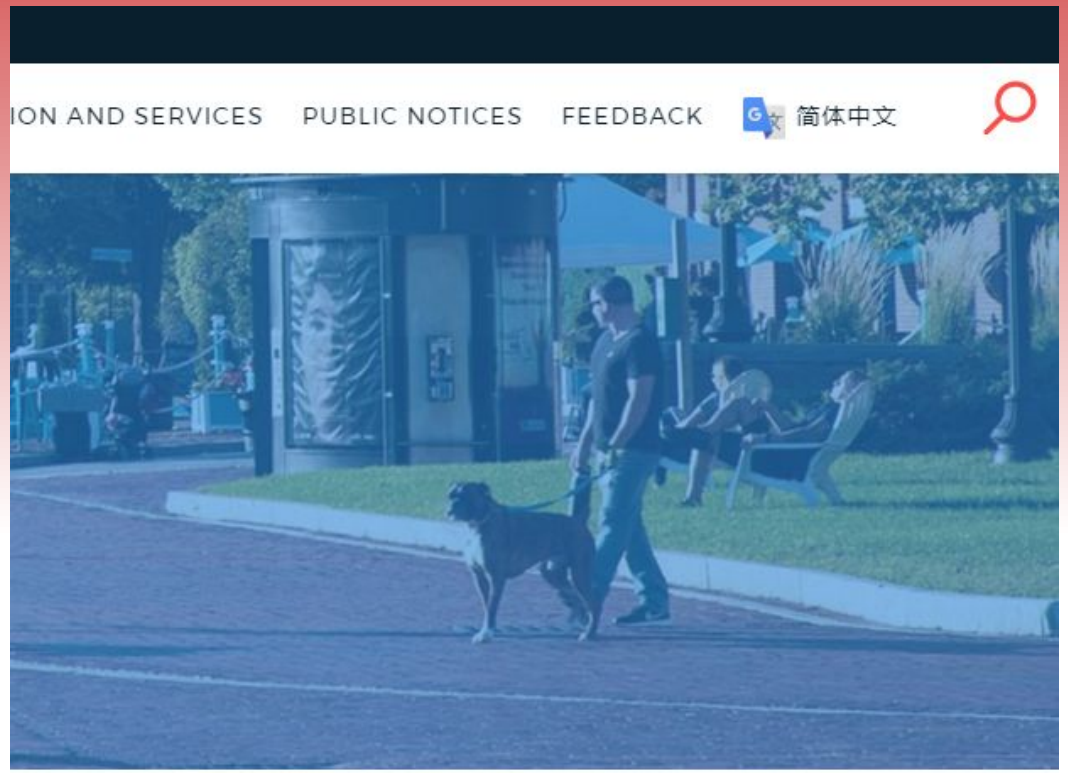
- Is there an *expanded* way that this could be used?
  - Suggestions?
  - One suggestion: can automated translation services move beyond the website?

Scenario #1: Google Translate on Boston.gov



- Could there be an ethical drawback?
  - Thoughts?
  - Drawback: Translation is probably the first one we think of (more in a bit)

Scenario #1: Google Translate on Boston.gov



City of Boston disclaimer:

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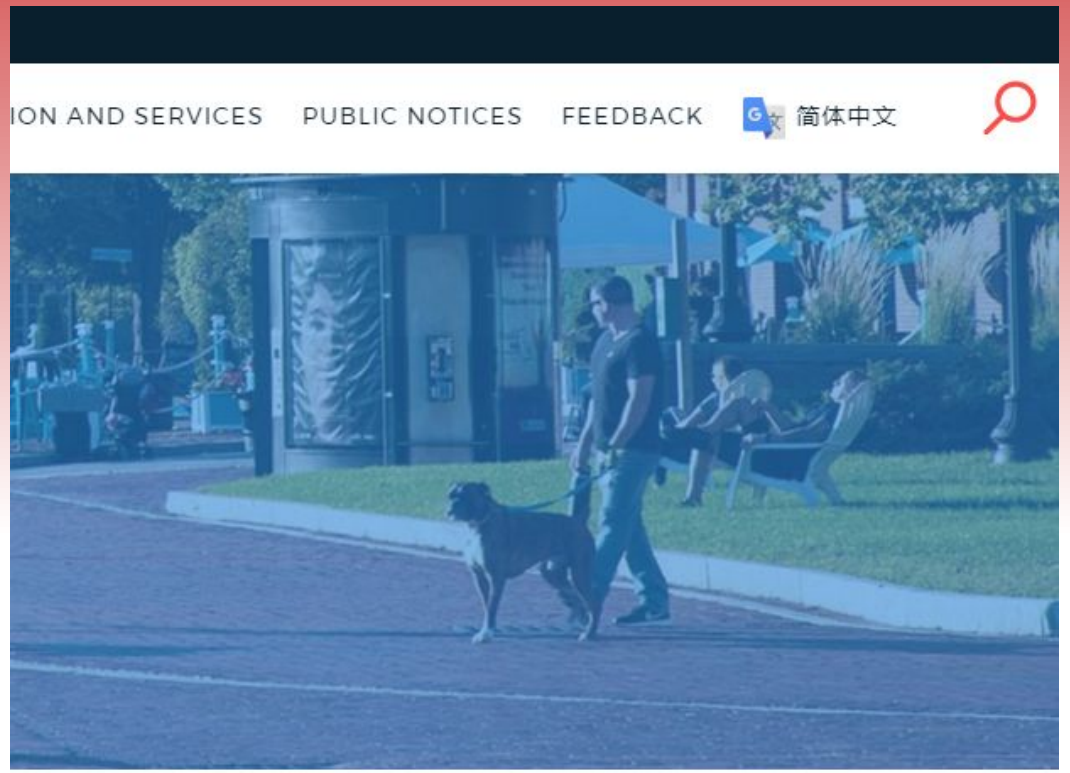


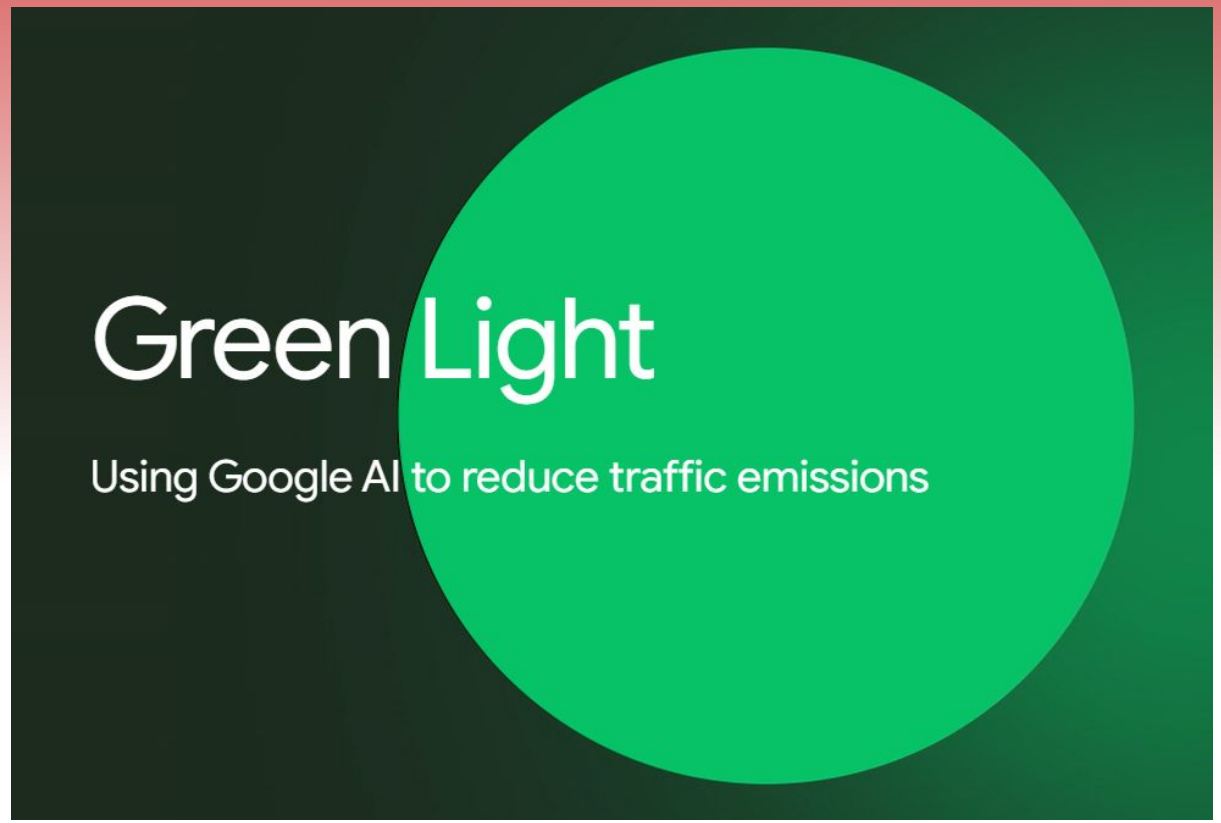
Imagine…

- You represent a small community which speaks a language not listed (ex: Lakota).
- There are concerns about the costs and logistics of creating a Lakota version of Boston.gov
- City Hall promises a working group to look into the matter.
- Members of the community will sit on the group as observers only

- Where is this on Arnstein's Ladder?

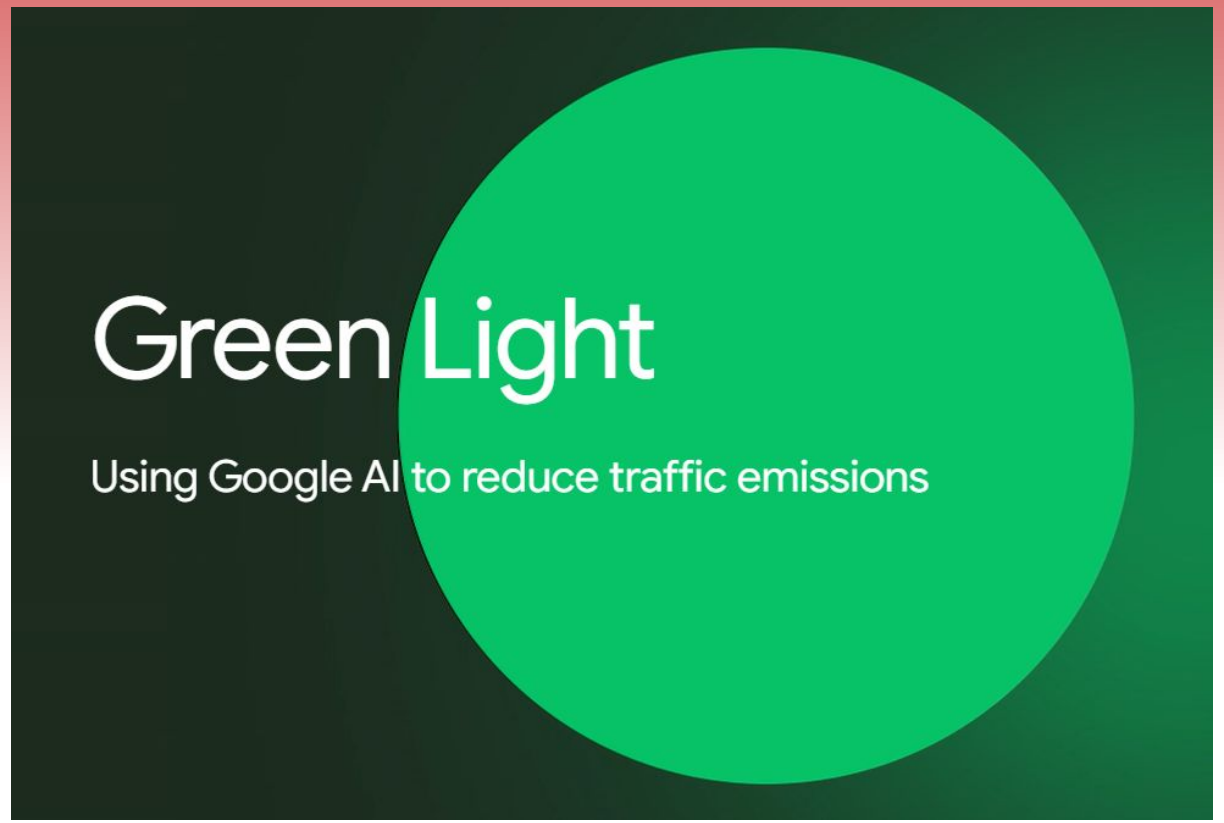
Scenario #2: Google's Green Light

- Uses AI and traffic data from Google Maps to adjust traffic signal timing
- Aims to reduce pollution from stop and go traffic.
- Currently used in Seattle, as well as 12 other cities around the world



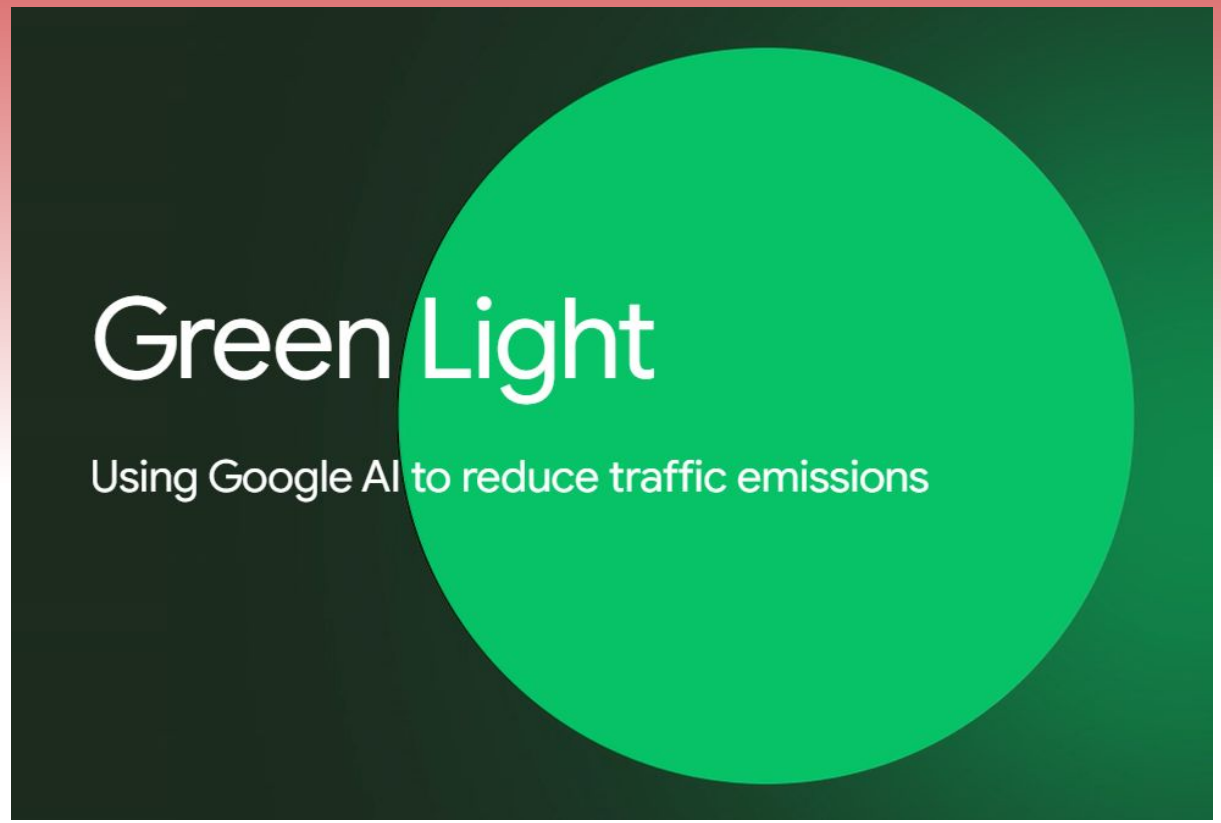
Scenario #2: Google's Green Light

- What's the value of this?
  - What's your guess?
  - Some takeaways:
    - Reduces pollution in cities
    - Less stop-and go-traffic when driving



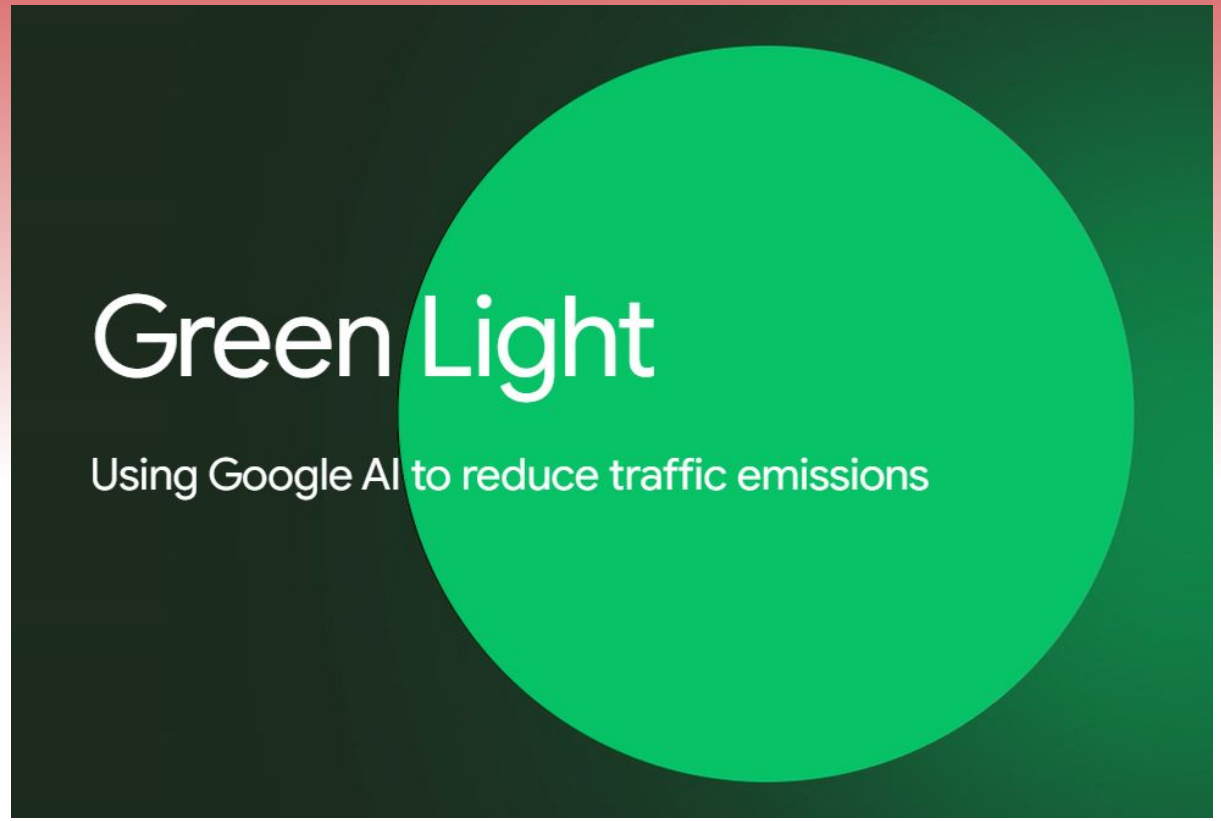
Scenario #2: Google's Green Light

- Is there an *expanded* way that this could be used?
  - What's your suggestion?
  - One suggestion: If extended to more intersections it could reduce traffic and emissions even more



Scenario #2: Google's Green Light

- Could there be an ethical drawback?
  - What do you think?
  - Some drawbacks:
    - Harder for pedestrians to cross the street
    - Increased number of cars due to less traffic
    - May prioritize certain vehicle types over others

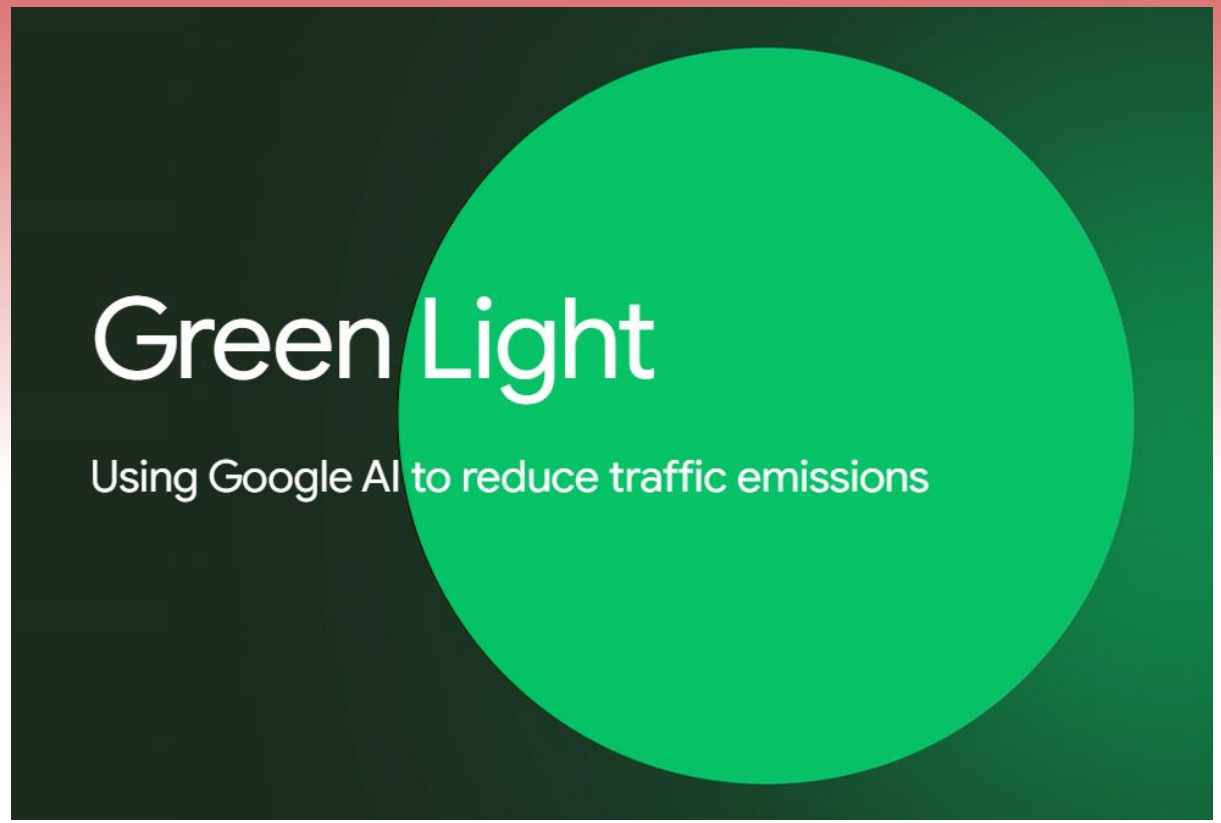


Scenario #2: Google's Green Light

Imagine…

- Your city has decided to implement this program at major intersections.
- A vote will be held to determine the first intersection
- After the city receives the recommendations from Google, the city traffic engineers will decide whether to approve them

- Where is this on Arnstein's Ladder?



Scenario #3: Use of AI to Control Wildfires in California

- Alerts fire departments about potential fire before humans detect it.

  Has significantly helped reduce the spread of wildfires and the damage of properties in California.

Scenario #3: Use of AI to Control Wildfires in California

- What's the value of this?
  - What's your guess?
  - One takeaway:
    - Early detection of fire outbreaks, allowing for faster response and potentially reducing the spread of fires.

Scenario #3: Use of AI to Control Wildfires in California

- Is there an *expanded* way that this could be used?
  - What's your suggestion?
  - One suggestion:
    - This AI system can be used to predict the occurrence of a fire outbreak, allowing fires to be prevented rather than merely controlled.

Scenario #3: Use of AI to Control Wildfires in California

- Could there be an ethical drawback?
  - What do *you* think?
  - Some drawbacks:
    - Frequent false alerts and panic. The AI picks up fog, dust, and steam, and falsely identifies them as fires.
    - Training on biased environmental data can cause the AI to perform better in certain areas, leading to some areas being under-protected.

Scenario #3: Use of AI to Control Wildfires in California

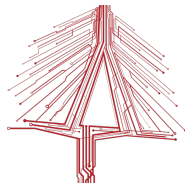
Imagine…

- You live in California in a city prone to wildfires.
- A survey was distributed to gather members' opinions on the newly implemented AI fire detection system.
  - You participated in the survey and provided honest feedback, stating that the system makes you constantly panic due to frequent false alarms.
- Your city mayor decides to keep the system despite your opinion.

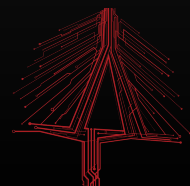
- Where is this on Arnstein’s Ladder?

Questions so far?

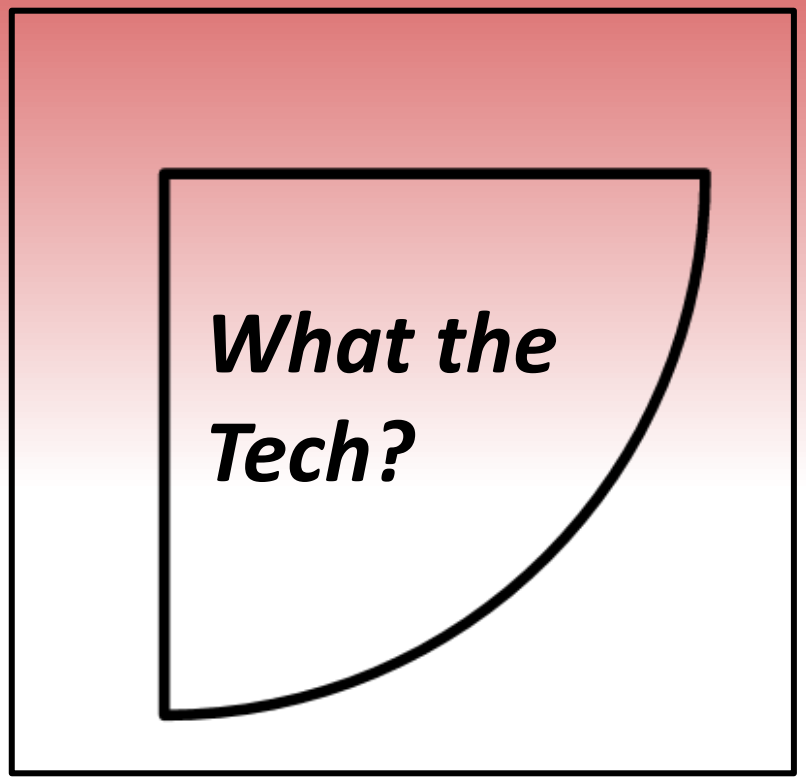
Next: Work on Final Project



HALFWAY POINT



AI AND ADVOCACY IN OUR COMMUNITIES



Next will be about:

- Tech equity
- Bridging the digital divide
- The importance of advocacy
- Where does AI fit in?
  - Slides courtesy of Tech Goes Home
- Debrief

Tech Goes Home

Digital Equity Matters.

Mission

To close the digital divide.

Vision

Tech Goes Home exists to eradicate digital inequity. We believe this problem is solvable by activating the intrinsic power in communities.

Who We Are

Of the people we serve:

- **86%** are people of color
  - (39% Black, 30% Latinx)
- **52%** live in households that make under $20,000 a year
- **60%** are English language learners

Launched in Boston **20+ years ago**. Now serving Eastern MA, Western MA and most recently, Central MA.

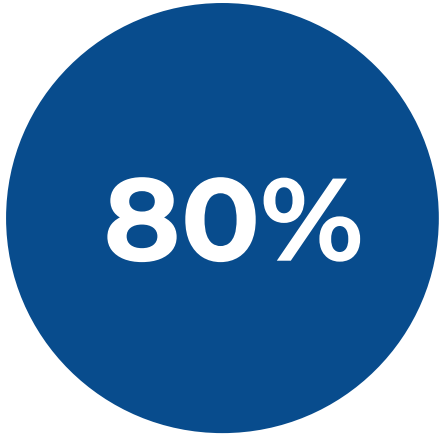
22,000 graduates and nearly **14,000 devices** distributed in the past 5 years alone

Sampling of Our Impact

Digital Access

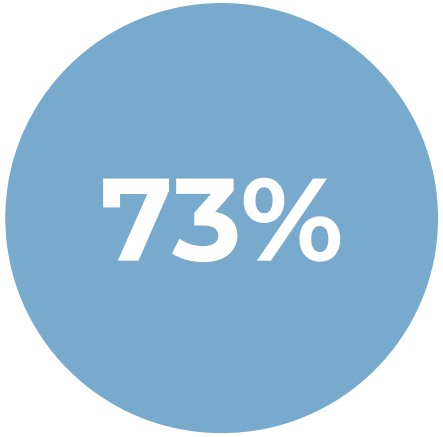
Graduates have used their new digital tool and skills to **communicate online**

Educational Opportunity



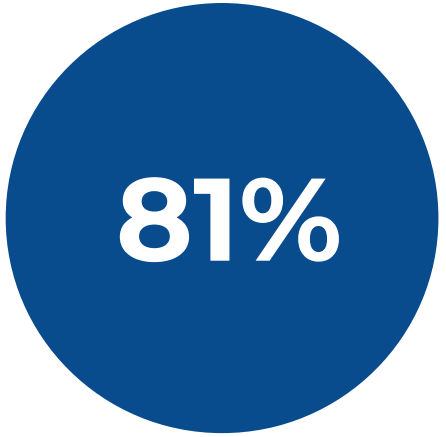
Caregivers are **more involved in their child's education** as a result of their TGH course

Health & Wellness



Graduates have leveraged skills they gained in their TGH course to **access health and wellness resources**

Economic Mobility



Graduates **got a job, got a pay raise, entered a work training program, or started a business**, and 94% of those said TGH contributed to their career accomplishment.

What does the Massachusetts Digital Divide Mean?

In the Commonwealth

- **1M** without fixed internet connection
- **16.5%** of households lack a computer at home
- **18%** of households lack a broadband subscription

What This Means

- **Adults** can't apply for jobs at nearly all employers
- **Students** can't participate in online learning or complete school work
- **Seniors** become ever more isolated and cut off from their loved ones
- ***All ages can't access telehealth and critical resources***

Tech Goes Home: Advocacy within the Community

- Marwa Alnaal Testimony at the Committee on Advanced Information Technology, the Internet and Cybersecurity
- The TGH Advocacy Community Fellowship was built to create a group of community members equipped to champion digital inclusion on the front lines. Fellows gain expertise in communication, media relations, policy analysis, and strategic advocacy development. This program fosters professional development for both fellows and instructors, supporting their diverse career aspirations. Centering and elevating the voices of TGH instructors and learners is paramount, ensuring those most affected by digital inequity inform decision-making and drive systemic change, ultimately promoting a more equitable digital landscape.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzVFsmttclw

TGH

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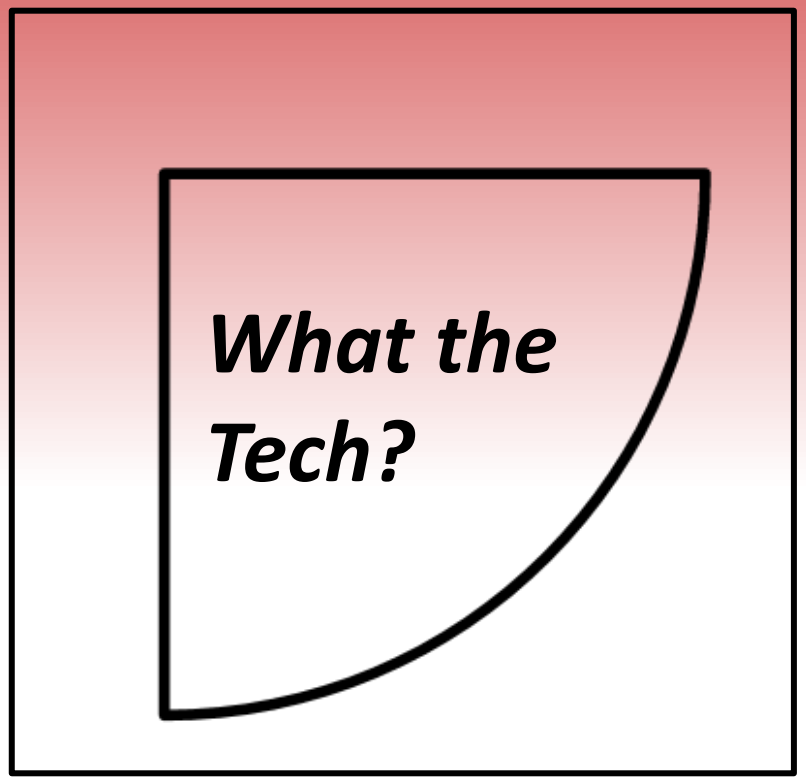
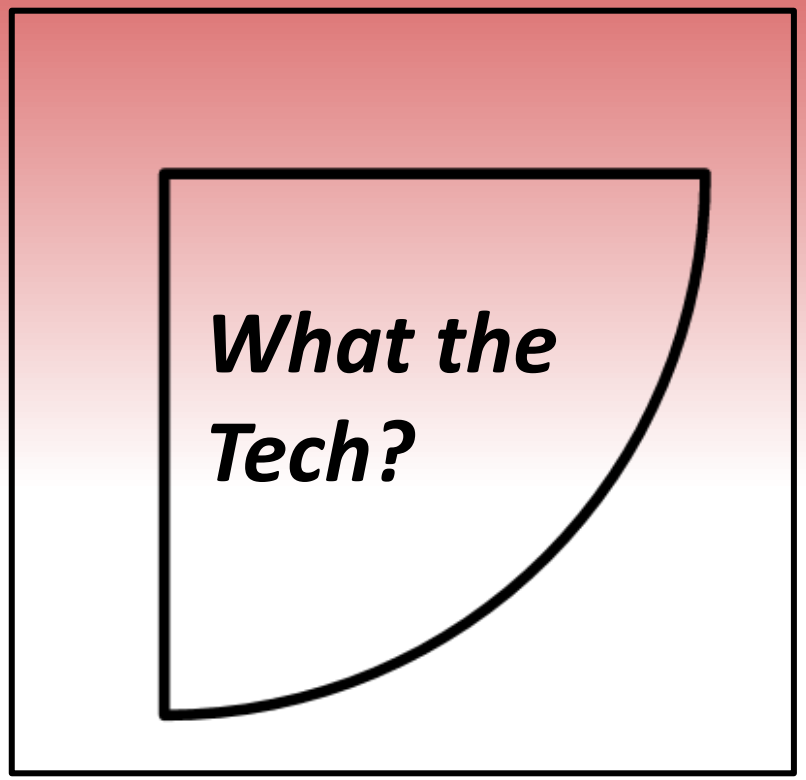
SCAN ME



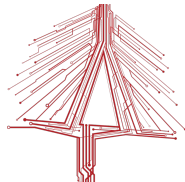
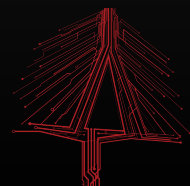
- Activity!
  - Do you think… [pick tech equity question]?
  - Why or why not?
  - Argue in front of “panel”



- Debrief!
- A chance for you to tell us how it’s going. For instance:
  - What went well this week?
  - What didn’t?
  - What are you excited for?
  - What are you unsure about?

Thank you!

Next time: project prep/presentation!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