



CPRN RCRPP

Quality of Life: What Matters to Canadians

Lessons Learned

Quality of Life Indicators Project

**Prepared for Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN)
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Foreword

While much activity is underway in Canada on quality of life indicators, until now there has been no initiative of a national scope that seeks input from citizens.

CPRN is seeking to fill that void. We have been working with a Steering Committee representing a broad cross-section of organizations interested in developing a prototype set of national indicators to track Canada's progress in quality of life. Our fundamental goal for the Quality of Life Indicators Project is to create a national set of indicators that reflects the range of issues that truly matter to Canadians. By helping to create a common language for dialogue across the public, private and voluntary sectors, the prototype will enable a more balanced discussion on public priorities across social, economic, environmental and other dimensions of quality of life.

The project reports include six discussion papers, each of which will be of interest to different audiences:

- This paper, *Quality of Life: What Matters to Canadians – Lessons Learned* focuses on the project context, dialogue methodology, lessons learned and next steps. An internal document, this report is intended for distribution primarily among CPRN staff and consultants.
- *Asking Citizens What Matters for Quality of Life in Canada – Results of CPRN's Public Dialogue Process, October 2000*, includes the analysis of the findings from the citizen dialogue sessions. It is intended for a small audience, including researchers, academics and policy makers.
- *Indicators of Quality of Life in Canada – A Citizens' Prototype* includes the prototype set of national indicators and information on how it evolved. It is intended for a wide range of audiences, including researchers, policy makers, the media and members of the public.
- An evaluation report of the Quality of Life Indicators Project will be of interest to CPRN staff, consultants and funders, community practitioners and others working in the area of public involvement and societal indicators. (Forthcoming in Spring 2001)
- A report card on national indicators will describe the testing of the prototype (see the *Next Steps* section of this report). The first report card will provide citizens, researchers and public policy leaders with a solid foundation for determining where Canada currently stands on quality of life. These audiences will also be able to assess the usefulness of the prototype and whether Canada should undertake a regular accounting of its quality of life. (Forthcoming in Summer 2001)
- A generic evaluation framework has been developed to guide the assessment of the Quality of Life Indicators Project and lay the foundation for other public involvement projects that may be undertaken by CPRN and others. (Forthcoming in Spring 2001)

I want to thank Miriam Wyman for the preparation of this report. As well, the many people who have been involved in the project, including Sandra Zagon, Project Manager, and her team of independent consultants and researchers, indicator experts, moderators and note-takers for the dialogue groups, and members of the Steering Committee, all have made an invaluable contribution in shaping the project. Many thanks of course to the participants in the cross-Canada dialogue groups – their input is the basis for the prototype set of national quality of life indicators.

A special word of appreciation goes to our funders, who include The Institute for Research on Public Policy, The Atkinson Charitable Foundation, Canadian Pacific Charitable Foundation, the Treasury Board Secretariat, the Policy Research Initiative, Canadian Rural Partnership, Human Resources Development Canada, National Round Table on the Environment and on the Economy, Privy Council Office, and NOVA Chemicals.

Judith Maxwell

Executive Summary

The 1990s saw a renewed interest in societal indicators in Canada and abroad, particularly at the community level. Up until now, however, no Canadian initiative to develop societal indicators has been national in scope or attempted to balance input from citizens with that of experts and leaders from public, private and voluntary sectors. With the Quality of Life Indicators Project, Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) is addressing this issue. Launched in 1999, the project aims to:

- bring citizen's voices to the research effort
- raise awareness among Canadians about what constitutes quality of life
- build connections among the various individuals and organizations working in this field
- develop a common language for dialogue across sectors
- capture the attention of policy makers, leaders, academics and researchers
- promote debate on public priorities in social, economic, environmental and other spheres

From the beginning, the project has focused on engaging citizens in the development and validation of quality of life indicators. For this reason, the research emphasis has been on involvement processes that allow a high degree of deliberation and engagement. Building on current research in the area, the project used a public dialogue process to encourage a select number of Canadians to speak with each other about what constitutes quality of life.

The indicators project was led by a Project Manager, with guidance from a Steering Committee whose members collectively hold a broad range of expertise on indicators, social research, public involvement and other quality of life projects. The team of consultants assembled for the project had experience in indicator projects, research methodology, dialogue processes, moderator training, documentation, participant recruitment and communications. Funding for the project was provided by the public, private and not-for-profit sectors.

This report provides an overview of the project's background and process. Section I sets the context for the project, with information about the project's origins and development, funding, background research, project organization and key project milestones.

Section II describes the methodology developed for the dialogue sessions, including the approach to the research, the process for participant selection and orientation, the format for the dialogue sessions, training of moderators and note-takers, the location of dialogue sessions and the project's communication plan.

Section III focuses on lessons learned as a result of the project, highlighting aspects of the project that worked well and pointing to those areas that can be improved. The primary goal of this section is to provide advice and guidance to future projects that require both assembling a project team and engaging citizens.

Section IV sets out a road map for future work by CPRN and others related to various aspects of the project, as well as for the body of indicator research in Canada. It focuses on sharing and communicating the findings from the Quality of Life Indicators Project, building on results and contributing to the future of public dialogue as an important means of public involvement.

I Setting the Context

The 1990s witnessed a revival of interest in societal indicators in Canada and abroad, particularly at the community level. To date, however, no Canadian initiative to develop societal indicators has been national in scope or attempted to balance input from citizens with that of experts and leaders from the public, private and the voluntary sectors.

Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) is seeking to fill that void with the Quality of Life Indicators Project. Working with a Steering Committee representing a broad cross-section of government, private and public organizations, CPRN is developing a prototype set of national indicators that will track Canada's progress in quality of life. The project, which builds on current research in the area, uses a public involvement process to determine the views of Canadians about what constitutes quality of life.

The inspiration for the project came from a Leaders' Forum convened by the Public Policy Forum in June 1999. This was the third in a series of meetings dedicated to building greater collaboration between the voluntary sector and business and between the voluntary sector and governments. Leaders concluded that they needed a common language for dialogue across sectors to promote debate on public priorities in social, economic, environmental and other spheres. Identified as both credible and uniquely situated to coordinate such an initiative, CPRN launched the Quality of Life Indicators Project, establishing a Steering Committee for the project in 1999. The same year, Sandra Zagon joined CPRN as Project Manager for the project.

A. Project description

The goal of the Quality of Life Indicators Project is to develop a prototype set of national indicators that will track Canada's progress in quality of life and enable broad-based discussion of Canada's condition. The project is driven by input from citizens and indicator experts, with advice provided by a Steering Committee representing diverse interests.

The primary intent of the indicators prototype is to engage collectively policy makers, leaders, academics, researchers and members of the public in work on quality of life issues. Other goals are to raise awareness among Canadians about what constitutes quality of life and to build connections among the various individuals and organizations working in this field.

There are two unique aspects to CPRN's Quality of Life Indicators Project: first, it is national in scope; and second, it emphasizes the views of individual citizens, as distinguished from official community leaders, organizational representatives, government officials and "experts" in indicators or in fields relevant to quality of life.

B. Funding

Funding for the project was provided by the public, private and not-for profit sectors, including the Policy Research Initiatives, Treasury Board Secretariat, Human Resources and Development Canada, Canadian Rural Partnership Federal-Provincial Relations Office of the Privy Council Office, the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, the Atkinson Charitable Foundation, the Institute for Research on Public Policy, the Canadian Pacific Charitable Foundation and NOVA Chemicals.

C. Preliminary research

Three background papers were commissioned as part of the project to synthesize current research and understanding about quality of life projects and indicators, and the extent to which they reflect how Canadians perceive their quality of life. The papers, which are described briefly below, were instrumental in determining what information to provide to citizens and how best to do so.

A Sampling of Community- and Citizen-Driven Quality of Life/Societal Indicator Projects, by Barbara Legowski, reports on 21 citizen- and community-driven quality of life indicator initiatives that have taken place in the past 10 years in cities across Canada including Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto, and Hamilton-Wentworth. The paper includes a profile for each project, describing its purpose, design, context, funding, outputs (vision, values, indicators), outcomes and lessons learned. For projects involving citizens, the profiles also address the role of citizens and experts, the mechanisms used to gather citizen input and lessons learned about the process of citizen engagement. See Annex B.2.

A Survey of Indicators of Economic and Social Well-being is a technical paper by Andrew Sharpe (Centre for the Study of Living Standards) that surveys the major indicators and indexes of economic and social well being that have been developed at the national and international levels. The paper presents an overview of societal indicators, summarizes the best-known and most important indexes of economic and social well being, and discusses a number of issues that must be taken into account in constructing such indexes. See Annex B.1.

Review of Canadian Quality of Life Survey Data, by Matthew Mendelsohn of the Department of Political Studies at Queen's University, reports on academic and commercial surveys that have been undertaken over the last ten years in the area of quality of life. It examines four types of questions used in various polling initiatives: Canadians' satisfaction with their quality of life; their satisfaction with various elements in their lives deemed important to quality of life (e.g., their personal health); their satisfaction with how the system was performing on a number of elements deemed to be important to quality of life (e.g. the health care system); and the factors they viewed as important to quality of life. Mendelsohn concluded that there were not enough consistent data available to assess changes in the quality of life of Canadians over time. His

findings also indicate that there has been no major attempt in the past 20 years to record the views of Canadians on their quality of life. See Annex B.3.

D. Project organization

A Project Manager oversaw all aspects of the project, including funding, ongoing relations with Steering Committee members, and locating and coordinating personnel to plan and implement citizen dialogue, communications, reporting and evaluation. The Quality of Life Indicators Project is guided by a Steering Committee, whose members come from across Canada and collectively have a broad range of expertise with respect to social and economic research, indicators and other quality of life projects. The Project Manager maintains contact with Steering Committee members by phone and email. The group has held a number of meetings by conference call and has met for two all-day workshops.

E. Timelines and milestones

Following are key dates in the project schedule:

1998	Planning Paper on societal indicators initiated
June 1999	Leaders' Forum, Public Policy Forum
October 1999	Appoint Project Manager
October 1999-	Define project (purpose, objectives, resources)
March 2000	Establish Steering Committee
	Communicate with Steering Committee members and other interested parties
	Build project resources (personnel)
	Raise funds for project
	Prepare background papers
	Plan March workshop
March	Hold workshop with Steering Committee
April	Report on outcomes of March workshop, engage in further discussions
June	Plan next stages, develop citizen information kits and refine methodology
July-September	Develop material and test dialogue process, select locales and participants
October	Conduct field work, dialogues with citizens and natural groups
November	Conduct analysis
	Plan workshop to discuss findings from dialogues with citizens and natural groups
December	Hold workshop with Steering Committee
	Hold workshop with indicator experts and develop approach to creating prototype
January - March	Develop prototype and validate with citizens

2001 Communicate project results (targeted and mass)
March and beyond Evaluate project

The following events mark milestone events in the process:

March workshop

The first face-to-face meeting of the Steering Committee took place on March 28th, 2000 in Ottawa. Chaired by Judith Maxwell, President of CPRN, the meeting brought together 30 people interested in developing a set of national indicators to measure Canada's progress in quality of life. Participants representing a broad cross-section of individuals and organizations reviewed current knowledge in the field and made recommendations on how best to involve citizens in the process.

In advance of the workshop, the Steering Committee and workshop participants received copies of the Legowski and Sharpe papers as well as two 'options papers' developed by working committees. One of the options papers explored ways to obtain citizen input (process options), while the other focused on what information citizens should receive to assist in their deliberations (content options). See Annex D.1.i. and ii. for Process Options Working Paper and Content Options Working Paper.

The results of the workshop were summarized in a report, providing clearly established goals and purpose for the project. See Annex D.1.iii. for workshop report.

October consultations

During October 2000, 40 dialogue groups were held across Canada. See Annex C.3. for locations and dates of dialogue sessions.

December workshops

On December 12, 2000, the Quality of Life Indicators Project Steering Committee, staff and consultants met with selected participants from the October dialogue sessions to review findings and make recommendations to indicator specialists. The following day, the indicator specialists met to develop an approach to creating the prototype set of national quality of life indicators.

II Involvement Methodology

Following is an overview of key elements of the planning process for the Quality of Life Indicators Project citizen dialogues. The dialogue methodology and the information kits for the October 2000 citizen sessions were developed during July and August of the same year. The findings were analyzed in November in preparation for a scheduled workshop of Steering Committee members on December 12th. Following the December meeting, the findings were prepared and distributed to participants.

A. Project team

The project team assembled for the dialogues brought a range of expertise to the project, including experience in indicator projects, research methodology, dialogue processes, moderator training, documentation, participant recruitment and communications. Under the guidance of the Project Coordinator, and with input from members of the Steering Committee, the team developed the dialogue process, finalized research instruments including questionnaires and feedback forms, prepared materials for participants and moderators, recruited and trained moderators and recorders, recruited participants and organized the dialogues.

The Steering Committee assisted in a number of critical ways – for example, by ensuring the citizen involvement focused on grassroots perspectives, the dialogue methodology was sound and participant materials were clearly presented and appropriate.

Indicator specialists assisted the team in preparing the synthesis report on value frameworks and indicators, and in testing the dialogue process. This helped considerably in speeding up planning and design of the process, and adds substantially to the credibility of the prototype.

This team approach was essential to the success of the citizen involvement and to the project as a whole, and has helped to build and nurture the various communities with an interest in quality of life.

B. Research approach

From the outset, the Quality of Life Indicators Project has focused on involving citizens in the development and validation of quality of life indicators. For this reason, the research emphasis has been on processes that encourage a high degree of deliberation and engagement.

Based on the outcomes of the March 28th workshop and further discussion with members of the Steering Committee and others, the project team chose an open-ended approach to obtaining citizens' views on quality of life indicators, rather than presenting participants with a set of indicators for their confirmation and validation. The intent was to have

participants focus on what matters to them with respect to quality of life and to allow new ideas to emerge.

Fundamental to the research approach was an emphasis on dialogue rather than debate. Dialogue is characterized as collaborative rather than confrontational, and its aim is to weigh alternatives, respect and share perspectives, listen for meaning and seek common ground.

A sound project plan was developed to ensure that information was gathered systematically and consistently, and that it could be used for input into prototype development and feedback to citizens. It was decided that participants would meet in dialogue groups of eight to ten people for approximately three hours. A trained moderator – assisted by a recorder – would guide participants through a systematic protocol to reflect on issues related to quality of life.

Professional researchers acted as consultants throughout the development of the project plan. Pre-and post-dialogue questionnaires were prepared in conjunction with information materials for participants. The pre-dialogue questionnaire was intended to stimulate participants' thinking at the beginning of the session and to provide "baseline" information to researchers. The post-dialogue questionnaire measured any shift in views that might have taken place over the course of the session; it also included a number of evaluation questions to provide feedback on participants' views of the session itself. To ensure comprehensive and consistent transcripts were taken of each session, a protocol was developed for recorders and moderators. Two pre-test sessions held in Ottawa and Montreal tested both the process and content for the consultations. Modifications were made based on comments from the pre-test moderator, participants and observers.

Overall, the project plan was designed to ensure that the citizen dialogues would generate reliable and anonymous information – both quantitative and qualitative – from both individuals and groups.

C. Participant selection and preparation

Participant selection process

Given the cost constraints for the project and based on relevant research¹, the decision was made to consult with a total of 250 people in small group settings (i.e., 25 groups of 10 citizens each).

As a result of discussions on and following the March 28th Steering Committee meeting, as well as input from sampling experts, it was decided to convene 25 groups in three categories (random, hard to reach, and influencers) across Canada. Convened by invitation, these groups were intended to reflect the diversity of the Canadian population:

¹ Patricia Hayes. A Public Dialogue: From Start to Finish, a paper prepared for the Centre for Public Dialogue by phconsulting, Ottawa, December 1999.

- *Random groups*: Citizens were selected according to a number of criteria for representative diversity including background, geographic location, urban/rural mix, employment status, education, gender, socio-economic status and age.
- *Hard to reach groups*: It was considered important to reach people who are not often enough involved and for whom special recruiting efforts might be necessary. Such “hard to reach” groups included people of various ethnic backgrounds, Aboriginal people, seniors, young people, students, the homeless and single mothers. (See Annex C.1.iii for details on recruitment.)
- *Influencers*: An effort was also made to obtain input from groups of “influencers,” people who were identified as decision-makers or influential in their professional lives. These groups were identified through professional contacts.

Recruitment materials

Environics prepared a recruitment script in close collaboration with the Project Manager. It provided potential participants with information about the Quality of Life Indicators Project, the timing and location of dialogues, the dialogue process and remuneration for participating (i.e., honoraria and reimbursement of expenses for parking and childcare). See Participant Recruitment Guide, Annex C.1.iii.

Participant materials

Effective dialogue materials were essential to the success of the consultations. They needed to convey to participants in simple, accessible language the subject of the dialogues, varying perspectives on the issue and how the research findings would be used.

With this in mind, the Quality of Life Indicators Project team devoted considerable energy to developing a suitable package of materials about quality of life in Canada. The aim of the materials was to encourage citizens to identify indicators for tracking Canada’s progress or lack of it in ways that were meaningful to them. In keeping with established principles for effective dialogue with the public, it is essential to give participants an opportunity to review materials in advance of the sessions and to provide sufficient background so participants would understand the goals and context of the project. To this end, a participant kit was prepared and distributed, which included:

- A handbook including:
 - a letter of welcome from Judith Maxwell
 - summary information about the project and CPRN
 - background information to stimulate participants’ thinking about quality of life
 - definitions of some commonly used terms
 - frequently asked questions and answers about the project
 - an overview of the dialogue session
 - information about the dialogue process

- Other materials designed to stimulate thought and discussion about quality of life, including:
 - quality of life indicator cards (see *Issue framing*, below)
 - recent media headlines on education, society, health and the economy
 - sample sets of indicators developed in other quality of life projects (including those by the Conference Board of Canada, Assembly of First Nations, Canadian Council on Social Development, Canadian Institute for Health Information, Calvert-Henderson).

D. Format of the dialogue sessions

Quality of life was presented to participants as both a personal and national concern - participants were encouraged to think about what was important in their own lives as well as what mattered to them as citizens of Canada.

Information from the Legowski paper, which identified and categorized the frameworks of other indicator projects, served as the starting point for framing the discussions about quality of life. A set of 4" by 6" cards was developed, reflecting aspects of quality of life related to a variety of theme areas including, for example, health, society, economy, environment and education. These cards were intended to serve as a vehicle for initiating discussions about quality of life and as a complement to background information about the project and other quality of life work in Canada. Participants received the cards in advance of the session as part of their Participant Kit. In the session itself, participants could refer to the cards, although they were encouraged to think in an open-ended way. The dialogue session itself was divided into three parts. In Part 1, the group was asked to develop a collective portrait of quality of life by answering the question "what does quality of life mean to you?". As participants identified important aspects of quality of life, the moderator wrote their ideas on cards and participants assisted in clustering and sorting them into identifiable categories.

In Part 2 of the session, group participants identified four priorities from their collective portrait and reflected on what information they would need to know to determine whether these aspects of quality of life were staying the same, getting better or getting worse.

The focus of Part 3 was on reporting about quality of life. Participants identified credible types and sources of information and explored the roles and responsibilities various people and groups might play in working towards an improved quality of life.

Before the dialogue began, each participant was asked to complete a pre-dialogue questionnaire, providing demographic information as well as individual ratings about the importance of various issues to the overall quality of life in Canada. Following the dialogue, participants completed a post-dialogue questionnaire, reviewing their initial choices and evaluating the session. They were also given the opportunity to request

follow-up information about the project and were asked about their willingness to participate in the December 12th workshop.

E. Moderator and recorder preparation

Moderator materials

Moderator materials were designed to include everything a moderator would need to carry out and provide feedback on a dialogue group. The materials included:

- An overview of the moderator's role
- Tips for preparing for and conducting the sessions
- Materials needed to prepare for the session
- A detailed overview of the dialogue process
- Dialogue support materials (e.g., information on debates vs dialogues, ground rules for participating)

A Moderator's Feedback Form was also developed to augment information from participants. Moderators summarized their perceptions of dominant themes and indicators (what mattered most to people, broad areas of agreement, areas of disagreement, main linkages between themes), made comments on the guides (both for participants and moderators), and on the process for moderating each session. See Moderator' Guide, Annex C.2.i and Moderator Feedback Form, Annex C.2.iii

Recorder protocol

To help ensure standardized production of complete transcripts of each session, recorders/note-takers were provided with a detailed protocol prepared by the project's methodologist. For the most part, discussions were recorded on portable computers and were supported by audiotapes of each session. See Recorder Protocol, Annex C.2.ii.

Moderator and recorder training

The Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC), through One World Inc., was contracted to draw on their network of trained facilitators (moderators and note-takers) across Canada. Conference calls were held with moderators and note-takers to work through the moderator's guide and recorder protocol in detail, sort out logistics and make arrangements for moderators and recorders to convene 'hard-to-reach' and 'influencer' groups in several communities.

During the dialogues, moderators and note-takers had ongoing access to project staff. In addition, e-mail summaries of group discussions and dialogue tips were circulated. Following the consultations, a conference call 'de-brief' was held with all moderators and recorders.

F. Locations and dates of dialogues

Forty dialogue sessions were scheduled in 20 different locations across the country during the month of October. For locations and dates, see Annex C.3. The sessions were as follows:

- 34 in English; 6 in French
- 29 in urban settings; 11 in rural settings
- 20 with participants recruited by a recruiting firm; 20 with participants recruited by CPRN or third parties
- 5 with participants considered hard-to-reach
- 7 with participants considered influential

Participants (excluding students and influencers) received promotional items – a pen and a cloth carrying bag – featuring the project and CPRN logo and web site information. A majority of participants received an honorarium for taking part in the sessions.

G. Communication plan

An important part of the project is to communicate information about both the process and the results of the citizen dialogue sessions to participants, existing and potential partners in the private, voluntary and academic sectors, and members of the public. Allium Consulting Group Inc. assisted in the preparation of material for the dialogue sessions and developed a project communication plan. It includes communication tools and activities planned to the end of June 2001.

III Lessons Learned

This section of the report provides an overview of challenges faced and lessons learned over the life of the Quality of Life Indicators Project. Informed by conversations with project staff and consultants, as well as CPRN support staff, it highlights aspects of the project that worked well and points to areas that can be improved. This section is intended to offer advice and guidance to future projects that require assembling a project team and involving citizens in a dialogue process.

A. Citizen Involvement

Developing the dialogue process

An effective dialogue process was essential for obtaining the necessary information from citizens. Several elements of the development approach were particularly helpful:

- the project's experts (in process, content and communications) took an iterative approach to developing the process
- team members had few preconceived ideas about what would work and requested extensive input, both informally and formally, via teleconferences with Steering Committee members, team members and others
- project team members modeled the dialogue process by encouraging and supporting dialogue among themselves

Lessons Learned:

- *Lead time* – The timelines for the project were tight, with a target completion date of December, 2000 and citizen dialogue sessions scheduled for October, 2000. Development of the dialogue process and materials (separate, though inextricably linked processes) took place between May and September, which meant that some team members were not available because of vacation plans. Organizers learned of the importance of flexibility among team members in accommodating the work to be done, and of ensuring adequate lead time for completing various phases of the project.
- *Team-building:* Team building is essential, particularly in a high-pressure project such as the Quality of Life Indicators Project. Substantial efforts were made to communicate clearly and frequently and to bring team members together as often as possible. In future projects, it would be helpful to:
 - involve communications experts as early as possible
 - have frequent conversations among team members
 - ensure that all team members share the vision and understanding of tasks and timelines
 - allocate tasks clearly

- find ways to orientate new team members when they are brought into the process
- involve CPRN team members early and often

Developing dialogue materials

Developing effective dialogue materials was key to a successful involvement process with citizens. The challenge of finding a common and appropriate language among the various fields/elements that make up quality of life (e.g., economy, health, environment, and social issues) demanded a creative, collaborative approach to developing materials that included the following key elements:

- sharing expertise: a content expert drafted materials, which were then reviewed by a communications specialist
- taking an iterative approach to developing materials: dialogue materials went through multiple drafts with input from Steering Committee members, team members and staff
- pre-testing materials: two pre-tests were undertaken, with some time allowed for evaluation and necessary modifications
- conducting conference calls: telephone conference calls were scheduled, as needed, to share ideas, concerns and comments

Lessons Learned:

Key areas for improvement include involving communications experts earlier in the process and holding more frequent three-way discussions among the Project Manager, the content writer and the communications specialists. This would increase the communications specialists' familiarity with the project and encourage a shared vision. It would also offer significant advantages for defining and streamlining communications tasks, including citizen materials and report outlines.

Developing the Project Methodology

It was a challenge to develop a methodology that was both appropriate to quality of life issues (which are rooted in people's everyday experience, but have become rather technical) and suited to dialogue groups with "ordinary" citizens.

Lessons Learned:

- *Pre-testing:* A full-fledged pretest should be conducted to examine materials for participants, moderators and note-takers, as well as all questionnaires. It would also be helpful to hold more than two pre-test sessions with a broader array of participants; this would help fine-tune materials and refine the methodology.
- *Longer sessions:* To allow for full discussion and wrap-up, consideration should be given to holding sessions that are longer than three hours. This, in turn, has implications that must be considered: e.g., longer sessions would not be suitable for

evenings; participants might require higher honoraria; and it is important to set reasonable expectations for participants who are essentially volunteers.

- *Background information:* Because quality of life is highly subjective and part of people's everyday lives, citizens were able to participate in discussions even if they had not reviewed the background materials fully. This suggests that, for familiar topics, less background information may be required.

Conducting dialogues

A separate assessment report has been prepared on the roles and responsibilities of the moderators and recorders, and their interaction with national organizers. That report can be found in Annex C.2.iii. Issues not addressed in the report are highlighted below:

Lessons Learned:

- *Citizen recruitment:* While the agency responsible for recruiting citizens for the random dialogue groups was largely successful in convening groups in major centers, groups in some locations did not meet the required size. As well, the agency was unable to recruit participants in several locations – fortunately, moderators and note-takers were able to assist.

In addition, the responsibility for getting dialogue materials to participants rested with CPRN. This split responsibility between the recruiting agency and CPRN led to considerable inefficiency. In future, sharing of responsibilities must be more carefully articulated. This, in turn, requires a clear understanding of the requirements for participants, as well as how the dialogue groups fit into the overall project timelines. The Project Manager must convey to all parties how the project is unfolding so they can better understand their role in it.

- *Lead time:* As recruitment must be done immediately before the dialogue groups, effective contingency planning is required to address such issues as participants not receiving their materials in advance. Possible solutions include: asking people to come early to review materials; providing moderators with extra kits for each session; and including these contingency scenarios and plans in the guide for moderators.
- *Capacity to respond:* As the project unfolded, the number of groups increased from 25 to 35, and ultimately to 40. While this added to personnel demands and costs, it was important that this enthusiasm be accommodated. In future, project budgeting and planning should build in contingency funds (and some additional time, if possible) to allow for adjustments, if necessary.
- *Intensity:* The citizen dialogues took place over a two-week period, with some moderators and recorders conducting three or four sessions in one week. Each session demanded a great deal of energy and attention on the part of moderators and note-takers. These demands can be addressed by allowing greater flexibility in the

timetable for dialogues (if project timelines permits), or having a larger pool of moderators and note-takers available.

- *The unexpected will happen:* Both municipal and federal election campaigns were under way during the consultation period. To some extent, these events diverted people's attention. At the same time, participants focused on the role of governments and relationships between citizens and governments, and made significant contributions to the dialogue sessions. While one cannot always plan for the unexpected, it is important to keep in mind that the unexpected will take place, and to muster the necessary flexibility and resourcefulness to respond.

The experience of carrying out the Quality of Life Indicators Project dialogue groups highlights a number of additional areas that can be improved:

- *Early scheduling of dates and locations:* Finalizing session dates and locations (both city and facility) well in advance allows adequate time for recruitment of participants and delivery of packages.
- *Increased incentives:* Focus group participants expect to receive an honorarium or incentive for their participation. Project participants received a small honorarium. This may be one reason for the number of "no shows." Recruiters suggested that increasing the incentive to \$50 for a two-hour session and even more for longer sessions would help avoid this situation.
- *Delivery of materials:* If packages are being sent to participants by courier, it is important to establish the most convenient and accessible address (home or work) for delivery. As noted above, it would also be helpful for moderators to have some additional packages on hand for those who do not receive them in advance.
- *Directions and parking information:* Participants would benefit from having directions to the session location, as well as parking information.
- *Participant replacement procedure:* It is important to establish an agreed upon replacement procedure for participants who drop out in advance of a session, including a cut-off date for finding replacements. This is especially important if information packages must be sent in advance.
- *Local source of materials:* It would be helpful to provide local recruiters with copies of the information packages. This could minimize delivery problems and also make it easier to get information to replacement participants.
- *Central administrative support contact:* It would be helpful to have a central contact in CPRN for administrative support. This would facilitate the creation and updating of mailing lists, distribution of information, etc.

B. Communications and Network Building

Communications and network building were important elements of the Quality of Life Indicators Project. Although the communications experts joined the team in August, a communications plan for the project was finalized only in October 2000. However, given the high degree of public involvement in this project, it would have been extremely helpful for the communications plan to be in place sooner (ideally, during the summer), as communications experts have a key role to play in ensuring accessibility of language, and in the packaging and presentation of materials.

Network building is an ongoing process that helps to promote the project, creates links with related work and keeps people informed in an ongoing way. Over the course of the project, the Project Manager built a network of close to 325 people (citizens, federal public servants, journalists, indicator researchers and practitioners, and others), who are contacted regularly. An important aspect of the Quality of Life Indicators Project has been its role in identifying partners and building a community of interest in the project. (Partnership here refers to people – and organizations – that can help move a project forward; it does not necessarily imply a financial contribution.)

Communication out

Extensive efforts were made to disseminate information about the project through the CPRN web site, news releases following project milestones, and the promise of feedback to participants who took part in dialogue sessions.

Communication among team members

For reasons of efficiency as well as convenience, the Quality of Life Indicators Project team made extensive use of such word-processing functions as “track changes” and of e-mail and teleconferencing (in addition to frequent phone calls and face-to-face meetings, when possible). This has allowed team members to share ideas and information, resulting in effective communication and more focused work.

Communication within CPRN

While the majority of the project work was contracted out, a number of key functions were provided by CPRN staff members. In future, it will be important to consider how and when best to bring in-house colleagues more completely into the project team.

C. Project Administration/Management

Project management/governance

A complex project, the Quality of Life Indicators Project required that the Project Manager:

- assist in recruiting Steering Committee members
- assist in finding project funding
- identify and work closely with others in the world of indicators research
- plan and implement all aspects of the project

- act as senior researcher for the project
- build a project team

Significant effort was required to nurture the Steering Committee and to find ways of drawing on members' expertise and networks (such as funding suggestions, hosting and convening dialogue groups, providing guidance on content and process).

For similar projects in the future, additional support should be provided. As well, tasks should be allocated to appropriate levels within and outside the host organization.

Financial management

Three aspects of financial management are particularly important: establishing a comprehensive and realistic project budget; assembling the funding; and reporting on financial data. Since the Quality of Life Indicators Project was a first of its kind for CPRN, there are important lessons to be learned.

Project budget: The project budget must be comprehensive and realistic, based on a solid understanding of project requirements. As well, the project must have the ability to respond to needs with appropriate resources. The following observations bear further consideration:

- In order to establish an accurate and comprehensive budget, it is important to determine the plan up front, including how it will be executed, what resources will be required and implications for the entire organization.
- Because funding was not yet in place when the Project Manager arrived, she was required to participate actively in fundraising while attempting to establish the project's objectives and methodology.
- Anticipating the costs of involving citizens must be part of a comprehensive budgeting process.
- Funding was needed for ongoing administrative support, particularly for:
 - communicating with suppliers on routine matters
 - mailings to moderators/recorders
 - contact lists
 - logistics for dialogue groups
- Contingency funding was needed; plans changed over the course of the project and it was important to be able to respond to opportunities and requests for involvement as they arose (e.g., the addition of three high school groups and three rural dialogue groups).

Funding:

- It was a challenge to find funders for qualitative citizen involvement work
- Timing of funding affected the ability to plan; as mentioned above, fundraising activities had to be undertaken at the same time as planning for project activities and design of the dialogue process.

Financial reporting: The Quality of Life Indicators Project was carried out under the auspices of CPRN, which developed detailed financial reporting systems. It is important

to allow time for learning these systems and for meeting all necessary reporting requirements.

Timing

In hindsight, the initial schedule outlined in October 1999 was unrealistic as the project took longer than planned. It is important not to underestimate the complexity and scope of projects such as the Quality of Life Indicators Project. A number of factors contributed to delays – for example: funding was not readily available; the Project Manager was new to CPRN; and additional background papers were required to orient the Steering Committee adequately.

Project support

CPRN staff provided invaluable support to the Quality of Life Indicators Project, including invoicing, distribution of dialogue materials, and web site and electronic communications support. For future projects, it would be helpful to involve internal support staff earlier on in the process and to seek out opportunities for enlisting staff as team members. Given additional and more timely information about the project, staff would be better able to adjust their work schedules to accommodate project requirements and to contribute their valuable expertise.

Lessons learned:

- *The value of good networks:* The Project Manager had extensive experience in project planning and public involvement, as well as established professional and collegial contacts. These complemented the extensive networks available to CPRN.
- *Allocating appropriate time to various elements:* Planning the dialogue process and preparing dialogue materials took longer than anticipated. It is important to prepare a time budget that, like the financial budget, is both comprehensive and realistic.
- *Use of in-house team members:* Not enough time was devoted to drawing CPRN staff into the project, preparing them for their support roles and drawing on their experience and expertise. For future projects, this should be done at the earliest possible stage.

Contracting

Most of the work related to the Quality of Life Indicators Project was conducted by consultants and external researchers, working on contract to CPRN and under the direction of the Project Manager. In general, contractual arrangements worked well. The following aspects of the contracting process were particularly effective.

- *Central coordination function:* The Project Manager brought together a number of players over the course of the project to provide expertise and fill a variety of roles. She worked closely with team members to ensure that tasks and expectations were clearly communicated.
- *Pre-existing relationships:* Many of the consultants and researchers already had working relationships with CPRN or other quality of life indicator projects. For this reason, members began their involvement with a level of comfort that encouraged good communication and the capacity to build a team.
- *Iterative approach to statements of work:* The Project Manager prepared statements of work in consultation with each contractor and researcher and individual statements were shared with other team members. Each statement of work highlighted the need to work closely with other team members and to provide advice and guidance as needed. This iterative approach contributed to team members' clarity about tasks, and to a sense of responsibility and accountability among individual members and for the team as a whole.
- *"Up to" time estimates:* Because much of the work was being undertaken for the first time and because team members were working together on many aspects of the project (in particular, preparation of consultation materials), it was difficult to provide accurate time estimates for completing the work. To accommodate this uncertainty, contracts specified "up to" a mutually agreeable number of days.
- *Tolerance for ambiguity:* (Note: this applies overall, not only to contracting!) All team members and support staff demonstrated considerable tolerance for ambiguity, which was a great help in dealing with a project which, by its nature, demanded flexibility, patience and quick response.

Lessons learned:

- *Early clarity about allocation and division of work:* At the outset of the project, there was considerable ambiguity about allocation and division of work. Ideally, this would be resolved earlier on in the process.
- *Communication clarity:* Where more than one organization is contracted for project-related work, there is a need for clarity with respect to both communication and invoicing. This concern surfaced when moderators and notetakers for the public dialogue sessions were under contract with One World, Inc. and also had contracts with CPRN for arranging meeting spaces, providing honoraria to dialogue participants, etc. In particular, there is a need for increased clarity regarding responsibility for expenses. For future projects, it would be helpful to set out each organization's responsibilities clearly.
- *Contingency planning:* To the extent possible, some time and resources should be available to address unexpected situations. Over the course of the Quality of Life Indicators Project, many such circumstances arose. For example, there was no initial plan to provide honoraria for citizens participating in the dialogue groups. As well,

moderators and notetakers found locations for and convened some dialogue groups when the contractor responsible for recruitment was unable to obtain participants.

- *Contract clarity:* It is important to maintain good relations with contractors, since there is always the prospect of the next project. This experience indicates that it is important to be as clear as possible with respect to contract deliverables, including financial consequences for non-compliance.

Documentation

The Quality of Life Indicators Project maintained a full and accurate paper trail. From the beginning, snapshots of the project and its progress were widely shared and revised as the project moved forward. Meeting reports, summaries of meetings and conversations, transcripts of flip chart notes, etc. were prepared thoroughly and promptly. This enabled the project team and others to follow the project closely and will provide excellent institutional memory.

Accommodating the unexpected

It is important for project leaders to know that the unexpected will happen and to be sufficiently flexible to respond quickly and appropriately. As luck would have it, the December 12th workshop to review findings of the citizen consultations coincided with a major snowstorm. As a result, many participants from outside Ottawa were unable to attend. With the assistance of modern technology and excellent support assistance, slides for two major presentations were sent by e-mail so they could be shown while presenters gave their presentations by teleconference.

D. Conclusions

Overall, the Quality of Life Indicators Project was characterized by good working relationships and an overall sense of commitment to the work. The project team was created from a diverse set of individuals, who had extensive and relevant experience. Members of the team worked well together, all necessary tasks were completed and documented, and schedules were met. This can be attributed to a number of key factors, including:

- central coordination function
- clear statements of work
- an open, transparent, task-oriented approach to all aspects of work
- willingness to work together as members of a team
- shared vision, goals and objectives
- complementary and overlapping abilities
- lack of “ego” – willingness to put ideas forward, to have them challenged, to build on others’ comments and advice
- iterative approach to the development of processes and materials
- tolerance for ambiguity
- flexibility with respect to roles and tasks

Furthermore, citizens who participated in dialogue sessions across Canada were unambiguous in their praise. Participants relished the opportunity to participate and felt similar opportunities should be more frequent, confirming the notion that citizens want a sense of involvement with each other and with decision makers.

List of Annexes

Annexes are available at the CPRN web site www.cprn.org or upon request.

A. STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

B. BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. 'A Survey of Indicators of Economic and Social Well-Being', by Andrew Sharpe
2. 'A Sampling of Community- and Citizen-Driven Quality of Life/Societal Indicator Projects', by Barbara Legowski
3. 'Review of Canadian Quality of Life Survey Data', by Matthew Mendelsohn

C. PUBLIC DIALOGUE MATERIALS

1. **Quality of Life Public Dialogue Participant Kit and participant materials, including**
 - i. Pre- and Post-Dialogue questionnaires
 - ii. Ground Rules for Public Dialogue and Dialogue vs. Debate
 - iii. Participant Recruitment Guide
2. **Quality of Life Indicators Project Public Dialogue Session Moderator and Recorder Materials, including**
 - i. Moderator's guide
 - ii. Recorder protocol
 - iii. Moderator Feedback Form *Please note that this is not accessible from the CPRN web site but is available on request from CPRN*
 - iv. Assessment Report
3. **Locations and Dates of Dialogue Sessions**

D. WORKSHOP MATERIALS

1. **March 28, 2000, Workshop Report and materials including**
 - i. Process Options Working Paper
 - ii. Content Options Working Paper
 - iii. Workshop report – 'Asking Citizens What Matters for Quality of Life'

2. December 12, 2000, Workshop Report and materials, including

- i. Participant List
- ii. Participants' Information
- iii. Break-out sessions notes
- iv. Workshop report – 'Learning from Citizens About What Matters for Quality of Life'

3. December 13, 2000, Workshop Report and materials, including

- i. Participation List
- ii. Workshop notes

E. MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

Please note that annexes E2 and E3 are not accessible from the CPRN web site but are available on request from CPRN

1. Quality of Life Indicators Project Snapshot

2. CPRN e-network news, including

- i. 'There's a new destination at CPRN's web site! You can now tap into the latest happenings in the Quality of Life Indicators Project formerly "Societal Indicators"'. CPRN e-network news, May 5, 2000
- ii. 'Canadian Data on Quality of Life Are Inadequate by Matthew Mendelsohn'. CPRN e-network news, September 15, 2000
- iii. 'Quality of Life Indicators Project'. CPRN e-network news, March 20, 2001

3. CPRN News Releases, including

- i. 'What Does It Truly Mean To Be #1'. CPRN News Release, October 11, 2000
- ii. 'One Step Closer to Quality of Life Indicators for Citizens'. CPRN News Release, December 15, 2000

CPRN Funding Sources

CORE FUNDERS

Canadian International Development Agency
Citizenship and Immigration
Fisheries and Oceans
Health Canada
Human Resources Development Canada
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Transport Canada

CORPORATE SUPPORT

BCT. Telus Communications
Canadian Pacific Charitable Foundation
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