



CPRN RCRPP

Asking Canadian NGOs What Matters on Aging

Final Report on Five Dialogues

Conducted between

October 2001 - February 2002

February 2002

Prepared by Sandra Zagon, Public Involvement Program
In collaboration with
One World Inc.

Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) Inc.
600-250 Albert Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6M1
www.cprn.org

Table of Contents

1. Background	3
2. Approach	3
3. Dialogue Process	4
4. Results of Data Gathering and Analysis	6
5. Reflections on the dialogue process	8
Annex A Asking Canadian NGOs What Matters on Aging, Background Paper	
Annex B Letter of Invitation, Agenda and Participant Kit	
Annex C Moderator's Guide and Recorder's Guide	
Annex D Moderator and Recorder Feedback Forms	
Annex E Pre- and Post-Dialogue Questionnaires	
Annex F What Matters to Canadian NGOs on Aging: An Analysis of Five Public Dialogue Discussions	
Annex G What Matters to Canadian NGOs on Aging: Reflections on the Five Dialogues Conducted between October 2001 and February 2002	
Annex H Project Team	

Asking Canadian NGOs What Matters on Aging

1. Background

In April 2002, the UN will host the Second World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid, during which the General Assembly will respond to and adopt a UN International Strategy for Action on Aging 2002, now in draft form. The Strategy's goal is to ensure that people everywhere can age with security and dignity, continuing to participate in society as citizens with full rights. The Strategy calls for changes in attitudes, in national and international policies, and in community and corporate practices that support the aging population in reaching its full potential.

As a member of the General Assembly, Canada is preparing a response to the draft Strategy. Part of this process involves seeking input from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on how the Canadian government should continue to plan and ensure readiness for an aging society. This input will be obtained through a series of public dialogue sessions with Canadian NGOs.

CPRN, in concert with One World Inc., was contracted to assist Health Canada and Human Resources Development Canada, on behalf of a federal interdepartmental committee of 28 departments, develop the engagement tools, methodology and analysis framework. CPRN then was to apply those tools and undertake a series of public dialogues with representatives of Canadian NGOs on what was important to them in terms of aging.

This report describes the approach taken in this work and the results of the dialogues, including the testing phase. It also provides recommendations and suggestions for adjustments to be made if Health Canada wishes to move forward with further dialogues with citizens at large.

2. Approach

Under the active direction of the project manager, a team of skilled consultants was constituted to

- prepare a background paper for use by a select group of representatives from several federal government departments, brought together to identify the precise issue for consideration in the dialogues (Annex A)
- design and facilitate an issue selection session
- design and facilitate an issue framing session
- create a readers' group to provide advice on material intended for dialogue participants
- prepare the participant material, through consultations with the readers' group and departmental advisors in Health Canada and HRDC, and research on the general issue and specific elements of interest

- develop the dialogue protocol, and moderator and recorder materials
- develop the pre- and post-dialogue questionnaires and data analysis framework
- ensure appropriate language level and presentation for all dialogue tools
- set up two and run three pre-test dialogue sessions, including the recruitment of some participants for these sessions (two sessions in English in Ottawa and one session, in French in Montreal)
- prepare a report on the results of this work
- undertake a further two dialogues with the revised materials and process
- prepare a final report on all five dialogues.

The elaboration of the background paper and the participant material was an iterative process, requiring several drafts that were successively refined by the project team with input from the departmental advisors in Health Canada and HRDC and the readers' group. The departmental advisors in turn consulted with other members of the interdepartmental committee on seniors and aging.

The work was begun in late August 2001 and the results of the dialogue pre-tests were made available by mid-November. Two additional dialogues were held in early February 2002. A third dialogue in French was to have taken place but due to insufficient interest on the part of NGOs invited to be part of this initiative, it did not. This report therefore provides the results of five dialogues, four in English and one in French, which took place in October 2001 and February 2002.

Throughout the process, the team was guided by the methodology set out in *Public Dialogue, A Tool for Citizen Engagement*.¹ Issue selection and issue framing sessions, which helped in developing the themes for dialogue, drew on the work of One World Inc.

3. Dialogue Process

Dialogue groups Five dialogue groups in all were held. Four dialogue groups in English were held: three in Ottawa on October 22 and 25 and on February 7 and one in Toronto on February 8; one group was held in French in Montreal on October 26. The first, third and fourth English groups comprised a purposively selected diverse group of up to ten NGO representatives, whereas the second Ottawa group was made up of 12 representatives of the National Advisory Council on Aging, who were in town for a national conference. The Montreal group was similar to the English groups in that nine representatives of NGOs with diverse mandates responded to our invitation to participate. (A sixth group in French was to be held in February but insufficient interest on the part of invited NGOs prevented this from happening.)

Profile of dialogue participants Forty-seven individuals in total participated in the dialogues, with an average of 9 participants per session. These individuals represented 35 distinct NGOs, including the one session with 12 volunteer members of the National Advisory Council on Aging (see the appendix for the full listing of participating

¹ Public Dialogue: A Tool for Citizen Engagement, Centre for Public Dialogue, January 2000

organizations). Half of the organizations represented had at most six paid members; 31 percent had 100 or more paid personnel; and, about 57 percent had at least 100 volunteers actively serving on their behalf.

Many of the organizations (41 percent) were nationwide in scope and most based either in Quebec (27 percent) or in Ontario (27 percent). Of the 35 organizations, three-fourths reported working on senior-related issues at the community level. A majority worked at both the provincial (57 percent) and national (63 percent) levels as well. Only one in five reported working on seniors' issues at the international level.

The representatives of half of the participating NGOs identified their organizations as serving the general population of Canadian seniors rather than targeting specific groups. Two groups served mainly multicultural groups, while four others targeted ethno-specific groups (Jewish, Italian, Metis, and Inuit).

In terms of the work of the participating NGOs, in addition to NACA, one in three groups reported advocacy as a central facet of their work, which might entail health issues, retirement income or financial security, basic rights, multicultural groups, women's issues, or seniors with disabilities. Other participants described their groups as providing education or information, conflict resolution, community activities, or other supports for seniors as needed. In brief, the participants had extensive experience in working with or advocating on behalf of seniors.

The participants were fairly represented in terms of their gender split, but not on the basis of the other demographic characteristics assessed. Compared to average Canadians, these representatives of NGOs were considerably older, more educated, and more likely to have been born and raised in Canada (speaking English, French, or both).

Intent of the dialogues The intent of the three sessions held in October 2001 were twofold:

- to test the suitability of participant material as a stimulus for discussion in the dialogue groups
- to test the dialogue protocol as a stimulus for input

The intent of the two dialogues held in February 2002 was to deepen the understanding of NGOs values on aging, with the view to strengthen Canada's efforts in planning for its aging society.

Process Participants for all dialogues received a participant kit (Annex B) in advance of their session along with a letter confirming their participation and directions on how to get to the session. The kit was used throughout the session. In all three groups, participants were asked to consider three elements of aging:

- maximizing participation
- enhancing well-being
- respecting diversity

Moderator and recorder materials were prepared to support the dialogue protocol – these were also tested in the sessions. These materials are included in Annex C; the moderator and recorder feedback forms are included in Annex D.

Pre- and post-dialogue questionnaires were also developed in keeping with public dialogue methodology. These questionnaires, administered at the outset and at the conclusion of the actual dialogues, provide a quantitative assessment of any shift occurring in dialogue participants' feelings as a result of working with and listening to the values expressed others in the group. The pre-test questionnaires are included in Annex E.

All material included in the various annexes were the ones used in the February dialogues and were revised as a result of the October 2001 three pre-test dialogues.

Reflections on the process used in these dialogues with the view to the future are provided at the close of this report.

4. Results of Data Gathering and Analysis (Annex F)

Overview

- **All dialogues worked well** and interesting data were collected about citizens' views and concerns about aging and preparing for an aging society. Each session began with the moderator providing an overview of the session and a general discussion of the three themes to be discussed. (These themes had been selected through issue selection and framing sessions with government officials and NGO representatives in the planning stage of the project). Participants then completed the pre-dialogue questionnaire. The heart of the dialogue focussed on three themes concerning aging. Following the in-depth discussions, the moderator then worked with the groups to identify common ground with respect to values, trends, and barriers. The moderators wrapped up the sessions with a brief discussion of participants' perceptions and reflections on their experiences with the dialogue sessions. The dialogue session concluded with the administration of the post-dialogue questionnaire.
- Most of the dialogue participants clearly agreed that **each theme – maximizing participation, enhancing well-being, and respecting diversity – should be included in any comprehensive strategies proposed to address seniors' issues.** Moreover, in many instances, the themes naturally wove together – for example, the idea that maximizing participation would enhance the well-being of seniors, or that a greater respect for diversity correlates with less stereotyping and hence greater opportunities for participation.
- Common themes emerging from the discussions and through the flip chart materials were relatively straightforward for the most part. **Core values** or principles included **choice, flexibility, access, and autonomy or independence.** Some suggested that **diversity** should also be recognized as a common value. **Respect for the individual,**

regardless of the individual's background, **adopting a holistic perspective toward aging, lifelong learning and volunteering** also received considerable attention.

- **Common barriers** included first and foremost the **perception of widespread stereotyping and negative attitudes toward seniors. Other barriers** noted frequently were: both **physical and technological barriers, disempowerment** among the seniors (the sense that failures tended to be linked to or blamed on individual shortcomings), and a **relative lack of integrated services or service information.**
- There was some consensus about the **need for government to take action to change attitudes towards seniors and aging, to address the gender divide, and to promote respect for the diversity of the population, including Aboriginal peoples and ethnic groups.**
- As well, participants believed that the **government should** do more to **improve access to the health care system, ensure greater financial security among retirees, provide more home care alternatives and supports, recognize the special needs of women and Aboriginal peoples, offer more respite care, promote the exchange of more accurate information about seniors, and encourage healthier, more active aging and participation among seniors.**

Highlights of the Three Themes on Aging

Maximizing participation

- Generated the broadest ranging discussion, with nearly four dozen specific sub-themes, grouped into larger categories as covered in the participant material
- **Work and retirement.** More flexibility in retirement options would be helpful. Also, there are gender issues that should be examined, given that older women have limited historical participation in the work force and job-related benefits. Given that women have not enjoyed the same work experiences, incomes or retirement benefits as men, some may be inclined to or need to continue working when a senior. It is all about choice.
- **Lifelong learning.** Received enthusiastic endorsement from all groups. An area of concern was the relationship of younger and older workers and the disinterest in the former to learn from the latter.
- **Volunteering.** Further sentiments were expressed about seniors' contributions not being appropriately valued. In spite of some barriers to volunteering, including parking fees and meal coverage during volunteer activities, there is general recognition of the importance of volunteering for seniors.
- **Barriers.** These include physical limitations, economic issues, cultural differences, social isolation, knowledge deficits, stereotypes and discrimination.
- **Active aging.** Three views to consider: 1) seniors should remain active and have much to offer and gain through work or volunteering; 2) at the same time, caution is required to prevent active aging being seen as a panacea and potentially blaming individuals if they are in poor health (e.g., you're ill because you haven't been active enough). Systemic issues and life situations also have an impact (e.g., poverty and

social exclusion in one's early years), as do certain illnesses that are hereditary or gave no known source, e.g. arthritis; and, 3) a cultural expectation that all members of society have to be active could lead to a negative view that seniors who are relatively inactive are unproductive. The value of choice surfaces again...being inactive should be an acceptable choice.

- **Agism attitudes** and **stereotyping** need to be dealt with, not only as impediments to maximizing participation, but as a reflection of inaccurate information and cultural differences.

Enhancing well-being

- **Lifestyle, social and structural impediments** – poverty and social exclusion for example - **in the early years** all influence well-being in the later years.
- **Maintaining autonomy** in directing personal decision-making is key, while underlining the importance of informal supports (friends and family) and formal supports (health care, home care, adequate housing, etc.) Autonomy was seen as being conceptually preferable to independence. The latter assumes that all dependencies are negative whereas society, families, etc. are built to some degree on interdependencies.
- **Transportation**, particularly in rural locales, and **caregiver burden** are issues to be reckoned with, as are **health care supports, technology, poverty, literacy levels and cultural differences**.

Respecting diversity

- The plight of **Aboriginal seniors, on and off reserves**, requires special attention.
- **Seniors**, like the rest of the population, **are not a homogenous group**. With respect to multiculturalism and diversity, some resources should be dedicated to **ethno-specific delivery of programs and services** for seniors. Particular attention should be given to seniors, **first generation immigrants, with little command of either official language**, to prevent their further marginalization.
- The situation of **senior women**, who often have less secure **incomes** than their male counterparts, surfaced in this discussion as well as the earlier discussion on participation.

The report in Annex F provides in-depth analysis of the results of the five dialogue sessions as well as a complete analysis of the answers to the pre- and post-dialogue questionnaires and any noteworthy shifts in attitude.

5. Reflections on the dialogue process

The participant materials offered a solid foundation for a good dialogue that encourages participants to explore the various themes in-depth. The process worked well to facilitate a quality dialogue. However, there are some learnings from this stakeholder-focused process that are worthy of review for future processes:

- **Give notice that dialogue is different from consultation** - in the participant material that they receive prior to the session and at the outset of the session, particularly if participants are well acquainted with government consultation processes, as is the case with NGO representatives.
- **Reduce scepticism** - by including more information in the participant kit about what public dialogue is and what are its ground rules. This is to fend off scepticism from participants who may be wary about being manipulated or co-opted. It is also important to clarify how the issue themes were chosen and developed.
- **Provide information on other consultation channels** - to satisfy participants' queries about other opportunities to provide input on the draft strategy being developed.
- **Dialogue can release new ideas and thinking** - particularly if participants are open to this form of engagement. It gives stakeholders an opportunity to step outside of their usual frames of reference and to engage at the level of values.
- **Participation** - in effective dialogues, should involve about 10-12 people. In at least one group, there were only six people. This tends to offer a limited diversity of perspective. It may be interesting to explore why it was/is difficult to engage stakeholders in this process.

More details are provided in Annex G: What Matters to Canadian NGOs on Aging: Reflections on the Five Dialogues Conducted between October 2001 and February 2002.