

# A Report on the Workshop on Evaluation of Public Involvement Activities

Ottawa, Ontario

February, 2003

## Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the following practitioners and policy analysts, who played a key role in the design and conduct of CPRN's workshop/roundtable on evaluating public involvement activities/programs:

Dr. Julia Abelson, McMaster University

Jane Cooper, Cooper and Associates Research

Albert Deslauriers, Analyst, Outreach, Industry Canada (for his notes from the discussions)

Jessica Gibbs, Status of Women Canada

Mary Hegan, Health Canada

Barbara Legowski, Consultant, Health Services Research

Dr. Susan Phillips, Carleton University

Sharon Stroick, Chinook Consulting

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*Evaluating Public Participation Programs, One Evaluator’s Experience*, J. Cooper,  
Cooper & Associates Research (Powerpoint presentation and background paper available  
upon request from CPRN)

## Background

In September 2002, public involvement practitioners and policy analysts in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors in the National Capital Region, came together for a two-hour round table in Ottawa at CPRN's invitation. The intent of the round table was to exchange practical information and plans on public involvement activities. Prior to the close of the meeting, participants agreed that they wanted next to focus on evaluating public involvement activities and programs. CPRN agreed to coordinate the workshop, with assistance from a number of volunteers.

## Purpose

The purpose of the workshop was to learn more about evaluating public involvement activities and programs. Prior to the workshop, CPRN circulated to confirmed participants several pertinent references, academic and other papers, containing evaluations of various public involvement initiatives. The background documentation included a case study provided by Jane Cooper, Cooper and Associates, on *Evaluating Public Participation in the Environmental Assessment of Trade Negotiations*, which she had prepared for the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade in December 2002.

## Participants<sup>1</sup>

About 20 representatives from the private sector, six federal government departments and four non-governmental organizations presented a diverse perspective of views.

## Agenda

Mary Pat Mackinnon, Director of CPRN's Public Involvement Network, welcomed participants and set the context for the workshop, referring to the decisions made at the September 2002 CPRN Round Table on Public Involvement. After brief introductions, Jane Cooper, Cooper and Associates Research, presented highlights from her recently completed study on *Evaluating Public Participation in the Environmental Assessment of Trade Negotiations*. Her presentation provided a concrete backdrop to a plenary discussion of the challenges and barriers to evaluating public involvement activities and how these might be overcome.

## Discussion Highlights<sup>2</sup>

1. The integrity of the evaluation process risks being compromised unless the evaluation criteria are vetted or validated at the outset of the evaluation by participating publics and stakeholders.
2. Timing of the evaluation is important.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A for the Participant List.

<sup>2</sup> Our thanks to Albert Deslauriers at Industry Canada for these highlights.

- Experience has shown that it is difficult if not premature to evaluate at the beginning steps of the public involvement initiative; results would likely be more informative if one was to evaluate at the end of a given public involvement initiative.
3. The objectives of the public engagement/involvement processes should point to appropriate evaluation criteria.
    - Objectives of the public involvement initiative: Will the process be deliberative or is it one sided?
    - ‘Deliberative’ means that the public has a chance to talk with one another, learn from each other and have the chance to create networks.
  4. Credible public engagement processes must include an up-front planning phase, to allow a more seamless alignment of public engagement objectives and evaluation criteria.
    - It would be wise to change the perception of evaluation as an activity designed to catching errors to one which permits learning from mistakes.
  5. Poorly conceived public engagement initiatives, lacking a credible evaluation component, will inevitably diminish the public’s already critical view of outreach/consultations activities.
    - Transparency is an important issue: the public often wants to see how their input was used or how it influenced the results.
    - There may be a backlash if this process is not in place.
  6. Public engagement planners need to pay more attention to demographic data and societal trends when designing and evaluating initiatives.
    - Planners need to assess who should be involved, why and how the public should be engaged, and what they need for effective involvement. Not all groups have the same requirements or preferences for their involvement.
    - Do they feel the issue or specific public involvement initiative is important to them?
    - Language needs to be tailored to particular audiences. One should not have to be an expert in the field/topic of consultation to understand the material clearly and comment on it.
  7. Terminology is important. Public involvement, public consultation, government/media relations...what is being evaluated?
  8. Making the “business case” for public involvement may be the most difficult (and in some cases impossible) thing to do, in terms of evaluating the success of public engagement initiatives, but it is a calculation that MUST factor into the equation.
    - There are issues of cost, resources and cost-effectiveness, which must be addressed. By way of example, the engagement strategy for the Innovation Strategy cost about 50 ¢ per Canadian (\$14M in total). Was it worth the expense?

- With public involvement, one needs to be mindful of the intangibles or non-monetary value of the effort. A case in point is the increase in democratic capacity and experience gained by citizens who have participated. Increasing participation by citizens in public involvement initiatives could counter the democratic deficit represented by a decrease in voting.
  - Evaluation needs to be included in the project's budget from the outset, as it is more difficult to do once the project is completed.
  - NGO participation in a given consultation may depend on the duration of the consultation and the opportunity/ies to provide input. NGOs want to devote their limited resources to the process or the part of the process that will have the most impact. For this reason, they may not get involved in a given public involvement project until its later stages, particularly in a prolonged initiative with multiple consultation points. Evaluation plans need to take this reality into consideration.
9. Barriers against public involvement still exist.
- Funds for public involvement initiatives, particularly after large exercises like the Royal Commission on the Future of Health Care (Romanow), may be scarce. Some policy makers are still unsure about involving the public in the policy process.
  - Fear of evaluation results is also a barrier. For example, building a web site for public input with few members of the public actually using the web site is not positive. However, to prevent recurrence, lessons need to be learned and evaluation can provide those lessons.
10. There is no substitute for undertaking and sharing case studies, and for sharing lessons learned.

## Next Steps/Conclusions

From the feedback provided by participants at the close of this round table (See Appendix C), it is clear that more attention than that afforded by this workshop/round table needs to be directed at evaluating public involvement activities and programs. For its part, CPRN's Public Involvement Network intends to include evaluation as an integral part of its research agenda in the coming months and to involve partners with likeminded interests, the purpose of which is to improve the practice of public involvement and linkages with the policy process in Canada.

**Public Involvement Evaluation Workshop - February 6, 2003  
Participant List**

Ms. Judy Berger Sr. Policy Evaluator Health Products and Foods Health Canada Ottawa, ON K1A 0L2	Ottawa, ON K1A 0L2 Ms. Judy Humenick Manager, Policy Government On-Line Canadian Heritage Hull, QC
Ms. Jessica Brinkworth Policy Analyst Health Canada Ottawa, ON	Ms. Barbara Legowski Consultant, Health Services Research Ottawa, ON
Ms. Sylvie Cantin Director, Public Involvement and Outreach Office of Consumer and Public Involvement Health Canada Ottawa, ON	Ms. Johanne Lortie Policy Officer Government On-Line Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Ottawa, ON
Ms. Jane Cooper Cooper & Associates Research Metcalf, ON	Ms. Sarah Mayes E-Services/CyberServices Canadian Heritage Hull, ON
Mr. Albert Deslauriers Analyst, Outreach Internal Trade and Outreach Industry Canada Ottawa, ON	Ms. Mary E. Moreland Senior Policy Officer Innovation Secretariat Industry Canada Ottawa, ON
Ms. Jessica Gibbs Communications Consultations Officer Status of Women Canada Ottawa, ON	Ms. Mary O'Neill Program Officer Organizational Development Canadian Council for International Co- operation Ottawa, ON
Ms. Stephanie Hardy Evaluation Unit, Policy and Promotion Division, Biologics and Genetic Therapies Directorate Health Canada	Mr. Wayne Scott Deputy Director General Canadian Heritage Hull, QC
Ms. Mary Hegan Office of Regulatory and International Affairs Health Canada	Ms. Christiane Seyer Consultations Officer Consultation & Liaison

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**CPRN Workshop on Evaluating Public Involvement Activities/Programs**

**February 6, 2003**

**250 Albert Street, 14<sup>th</sup> Floor Boardroom**

**Agenda**

- |                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>8:30 – 9:00</b>   | Networking and continental breakfast                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>9:00 – 9:15</b>   | Opening remarks, context setting and round table                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>9:15 – 9:45</b>   | Highlights from “Evaluating Public Participation in the Environmental Assessment of Trade Negotiations”, Jane Cooper, Cooper and Associates Research                                                                |
| <b>9:45 - 10:45</b>  | Challenges and barriers to evaluating public involvement activities, and overcoming them <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Utility</li><li>• Impact/outcome</li><li>• Doability</li><li>• Resources</li></ul> |
| <b>10:45 – 11:00</b> | Where to from here? Wrap up and next steps                                                                                                                                                                          |

Workshop/Roundtable on Evaluation of Public Involvement Activities/Programs – Summary of Evaluation Comments <sup>3</sup>
<p>QUESTION ANSWERS/COMMENTS</p> <p>1. Did this roundtable/ workshop meet your expectations? In what way?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Too much talk about Public Involvement (PI) and not enough about evaluation</li> <li>• I would like to hear various frameworks for evaluation → make concrete discussions and ideas</li> <li>• Yes, in part. Expected more info on the actual DFAIT consultations.</li> <li>• Yes, -in looking at a framework –in looking at barriers/challenges from government perspectives</li> <li>• Didn't realize so little attention has been paid to evaluation of PI</li> <li>• Yes, excellent opportunity to hear issues from a variety of departments, individuals</li> <li>• Yes, was useful as intro and on evaluation</li> <li>• Impressed by quality of discussion among participants.</li> <li>• Yes, focused discussion points, well moderated.</li> <li>• Yes, very interesting range of well informed participants.</li> <li>• Yes (2)</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> Compiled by Cynthia Waters from forms completed by workshop participants at the close of the workshop

Workshop/Roundtable on Evaluation of Public Involvement Activities/Programs – Summary of Evaluation Comments

<p>2. Were there any issues not addressed?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What about public participation in community and voluntary groups, etc?</li> <li>• Tools and methodologies</li> <li>• How to use public involvement in policy decisions</li> <li>• Credible process → doesn't necessarily produce credible results</li> <li>• How to use evaluation outcomes or format evaluation outcomes</li> <li>• Not knowing what others are doing</li> <li>• The example is a very limited example – hear a bit of other examples</li> <li>• Useful as intro.</li> <li>• Good for the time allocated.</li> <li>• No, pretty wide-ranging discussion.</li> </ul>
<p>3. Was enough/too much time allocated for discussion?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perhaps too much.</li> <li>• Good length (4)</li> <li>• Enough but not focused enough.</li> <li>• ½ hour more needed</li> <li>• Appear that more time may have been appropriate/desirable</li> </ul>
<p>4. Was the format and time appropriate for information-sharing?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes (4)</li> <li>• Format good for discussion, ½ hour more needed</li> <li>• Yes – as starting points</li> <li>• Yes – 2-3 hours is easy to schedule.</li> <li>• Yes – should end at 10:30</li> </ul>

Workshop/Roundtable on Evaluation of Public Involvement Activities/Programs – Summary of Evaluation Comments

<p>5. Would you participate in another CPRN roundtable on public involvement? Are there topics or issues which you would like to see on a future public involvement open house/roundtable/workshop agenda?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes. Public involvement techniques related to topics/objectives</li> <li>• Yes. Evaluation case studies—designing and implementing frameworks</li> <li>• Yes. Would find further discussion on evaluations useful</li> <li>• Yes. Links between consulting stakeholders/NGOs versus citizens directly</li> <li>• Yes. Cost-time impact? One suggestion for a future event: comparison of costs of various forms of public involvement/engagement/consultation –Second suggestion: How much time does it take to do public engagement sincerely? (examples and experiences)</li> <li>• A future workshop/roundtable could emphasize electronic consultation. I know a dozen people at my ministry that would be interested.</li> <li>• Yes. (3)</li> <li>• No</li> </ul>
<p>6. Who else should be invited to or included in future public involvement learning events?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elisabeth Barot, Canadian Commission for UNESCO, would like to be on your invite list. Phone: 566-4414 ext. 5567 email: <a href="mailto:elizabeth.barot@unesco.ca">elizabeth.barot@unesco.ca</a></li> <li>• More in “big time” consultations – Health, Foreign Policy renewal, etc. and processes etc.</li> <li>• Public involvement experts to speak about techniques and what different ones deliver.</li> <li>• Keep building your list → nice to have a cross-section of folks: public, private, research bodies</li> <li>• Broader representation across depts. valuable. Also, public opinion/engagement researchers view interesting addition</li> <li>• Broad invitation</li> <li>• Perhaps some “participants” types?</li> </ul>

Workshop/Roundtable on Evaluation of Public Involvement Activities/Programs – Summary of Evaluation Comments

<p>7. Would you be prepared to pay \$25 to participate in a future public involvement learning event similar to this one?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Would depend on topic – not for an event like this</li><li>• Yes. (4)</li><li>• Yes, I believe my section would be willing to pay a fee to participate in other workshops especially if they were on public consultation and evaluation</li><li>• Yes, but difficult in how to pay mechanics! Petty cash. Don't want to stop people from attending.</li><li>• Not sure. It depends on topic and agenda.</li><li>• Yes and especially if it was possible to put it on a Dept. of Canada credit card or if there was a yearly subscription—events 12 x \$25= \$500 year. Much easier to process and not waste admin time, either yours or ours.</li><li>• What about a subscription fee for a series of workshops.</li></ul>
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