Evaluating Public Involvement

Friday, July 18, 2003 – Public engagement initiatives can serve a multitude of purposes.

They can be seen as a means of gathering intelligence in support of more effective policies and programs. They can be seen as a means of exerting influence on government, of taking part in the shaping of our common future. They may provide an opportunity for networking and sharing knowledge among a variety of interested parties, from policy wonks and academic experts to the citizen-participants. The list could go on. The importance you attach to any one aim depends on your relationship to the process, but none are unimportant.

Clearly, evaluating the success of an exercise in public engagement is a complex affair. Yet, for many participants the exercise isn't over until a transparent and effective evaluation has been completed. Without such an assessment a public now eager to participate could become disenchanted and reluctant to take part in what may appear to be just another hijacking of the democratic process.

For organizations, like CPRN, who are pursuing a public involvement agenda, the need to develop a strong evaluation model is urgent. To this end, CPRN agreed to coordinate a workshop to examine the literature on evaluation of public involvement activities and to share experiences among groups active in the field.

The workshop, held in Ottawa in February 2003, brought together a group of 20 representatives from the private sector, six federal government departments and four NGOs.

The report of the workshop proceedings and two of the key background documents are now posted on our Web site.

You can access ***A Report on the Workshop on Evaluation of Public Involvement Activities***.

You can access a Powerpoint presentation of ***Evaluating Public Participation Programs – One evaluator's experience***, by Jane Cooper, Cooper & Associates Research.

Finally, you can also access a paper by Abelson J, Forest P-G, Eyles J, Smith P, Martin E, Gauvin F-P, entitled ***Deliberations about Deliberation: Issues in the Design and Evaluation of Public Consultation Processes*** (printed in **Social Science and Medicine 57 (2003)**).

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