

# ***Citizens' Dialogue Experience: Follow-up Survey Results***

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## **Executive Summary**

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## Executive Summary

Does participation in deliberative dialogues influence how citizens see their own role in public affairs? To what extent do public involvement initiatives influence citizens' participation in public affairs? These are the kinds of questions that CPRN felt were important to explore further with citizens who participated in the *Citizens' Dialogue on Canada's Future: A 21st Century Social Contract*. This paper presents the results of the follow-up survey that was sent to all 408 citizens who participated in the dialogue; the survey was designed to elicit specific information about whether and how participants' activities and thinking in regards to public involvement had changed since their participation in the dialogue.

Survey results support a key finding of the *Citizens' Dialogue*: Canadian citizens desire a more clearly defined space within the governance process and are willing to play a more active part in public affairs. Main survey findings are highlighted below, and are based on the 162 completed questionnaires received out of the 408 questionnaires sent.

- Ninety-one percent of survey respondents felt that dialogues are a useful way of improving communications with decision makers and amongst Canadians, and 77% indicated that they would be willing to participate in similar kinds of dialogues.
- The majority of respondents (69%) indicated that they had taken additional steps to stay informed of public affairs, (for example by reading newspapers and magazines, and watching television).
- Forty-five percent of respondents indicated that their activity in public affairs (e.g. attending community meetings, meetings with political representatives) had increased since the dialogue; 40% by a small or moderate amount, and 5% by a high or very high amount.
- Respondents' attitudes towards the importance of public involvement shifted in a positive direction (as seen in their pre and post dialogue ratings) in response to statements about 1) the role of citizens in public discourse, 2) perception of ability to contribute to public policy and 3) the value of engaging with other citizens and decision-makers on public policy.<sup>1</sup>
- A small number of survey respondents remain sceptical about whether public officials would listen to what the average Canadian has to say, and questioned if public involvement really has an impact on the policy process.

These results suggest that the dialogue experience provided participants with greater insight into their own potential as citizens, and stimulated a stronger sense of civic responsibility and interest in public affairs. Many participants changed their behaviours and attitudes towards public affairs in a positive direction, indicating that impacts of the *Citizens' Dialogue* spread well beyond the one-day dialogue sessions. There is growing recognition of the need for greater citizen involvement in public discourse – deliberative dialogues can help to meet this need while also encouraging Canadians to play a more active role in public discourse. The report elaborates these and other findings.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that both data sets for before and after dialogue ratings were collected *after* the dialogue.