

Citizens' Dialogue Experience: Follow-up Survey Results

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by

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Executive Summary

Does participation in deliberative dialogues influence how citizens see their role in public affairs? To what extent does this kind of engagement stimulate citizens to become more involved in public affairs? These are the kinds of questions that CPRN felt were important to explore further with the Canadians who participated in the 2002 *Citizens' Dialogue on Canada's Future*. This report presents the results of a follow-up survey that was sent to all 408 dialogue participants. 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 dialogue experience.

Survey results support a key finding of the *Citizens' Dialogue*: Canadians want a more clearly defined space within the governance process and are willing to play a more active part in public affairs. Key survey findings, highlighted below, are based on the 162 completed questionnaires.

- 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 (e.g. 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.¹
- A small number of survey respondents remain sceptical: will public officials listen to what ordinary Canadians have to say, and does public involvement really have 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.

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

Résumé

La participation à des dialogues délibératifs influence-t-elle la façon dont les citoyens perçoivent leur propre rôle dans les affaires publiques? Dans quelle mesure des initiatives de participation publique exercent-elles un impact sur la participation des citoyens aux affaires publiques? Tels sont les types de questions que les RCRPP jugèrent important d'étudier plus à fond avec les gens qui ont participé au *Dialogue entre citoyens sur l'avenir du Canada : Un contrat social pour le 21e siècle*. Ce document contient les résultats d'une enquête de suivi qui fut envoyée aux 408 personnes qui ont participé au dialogue; l'enquête avait pour but d'obtenir des renseignements précis visant à déterminer si les activités et les opinions des participants à l'égard de la participation publique avaient changé depuis leur participation à ce dialogue et, le cas échéant, dans quelle mesure elles avaient changé.

Les résultats de l'enquête confirment une conclusion majeure du *Dialogue entre les citoyens* : les Canadiens souhaitent qu'un espace plus clairement défini s'établisse au sein du processus de conduite des affaires publiques et ils sont disposés à jouer un rôle plus actif dans les affaires publiques. Les principaux résultats de l'enquête qui sont résumés ci-dessous se fondent sur les réponses contenues dans les 162 questionnaires que nous avons reçus sur les 408 que nous avons envoyés.

- Une proportion de 91 pour cent des répondants ont jugé que les dialogues sont un moyen utile d'améliorer les communications avec les décideurs et entre les Canadiens, tandis que 77 pour cent d'entre eux ont indiqué qu'ils seraient disposés à participer à d'autres dialogues semblables.
- La majorité des répondants (69 pour cent) ont indiqué qu'ils avaient fait des efforts supplémentaires pour se tenir au courant des affaires publiques (par exemple, en lisant des journaux et des magazines, et en écoutant la télévision).
- Par ailleurs, 45 pour cent des répondants ont révélé que leur participation aux affaires publiques (par exemple, participation à des rencontres communautaires, rencontres avec des représentants politiques) s'était accrue depuis la tenue du dialogue; de façon limitée ou modérée pour 40 pour cent, et de façon substantielle ou très substantielle pour 5 pour cent.
- Les attitudes des répondants concernant l'importance de la participation publique se sont modifiées de façon positive (comme en témoignent les cotes attribuées avant et après la tenue du dialogue) dans le contexte de leurs réponses à des énoncés concernant 1) le rôle des citoyens dans le discours public, 2) les perceptions quant à l'aptitude à contribuer aux politiques publiques et 3) le bien-fondé de s'engager dans des délibérations sur les politiques publiques avec d'autres citoyens et des décideurs².
- Un nombre limité de répondants à l'enquête sont demeurés sceptiques quant à la mesure dans laquelle les autorités publiques étaient disposées à écouter ce que le citoyen moyen avait à dire et ils continuent à se demander si la participation

² Soulignons que les deux ensembles de données sur les cotes attribuées avant et après le dialogue furent recueillis *après* la tenue du dialogue.

publique exerce une incidence véritable sur le processus d'élaboration des politiques publiques.

Ces résultats laissent entendre que l'expérience du dialogue public a permis aux participants d'acquérir une connaissance plus approfondie de leur potentiel en tant que citoyens et de les animer d'un sentiment plus profond de responsabilité civique et d'intérêt pour les affaires publiques. Plusieurs participants ont modifié de façon positive leur comportement et leurs attitudes à l'égard des affaires publiques, ce qui indique que l'incidence du *Dialogue entre les citoyens* s'étend bien au-delà des séances de dialogue d'une durée d'une journée. On reconnaît de plus en plus la nécessité d'une participation plus poussée des citoyens au discours public – des dialogues délibératifs peuvent contribuer à combler ce besoin, tout en incitant aussi les Canadiens à jouer un rôle plus actif dans le discours public. Le rapport apporte d'autres précisions sur ces questions et d'autres résultats de l'enquête.

Acknowledgements

CPRN wishes to thank the citizens who took time out of their busy schedules to complete and return the follow-up survey. The insight that we have gained into citizen attitudes and behaviours following the dialogue is invaluable, and will assist CPRN in its on-going citizen engagement initiatives.

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1. Citizens' Dialogue on Canada's Future: Participant Follow-up Survey

1.1 Overview of Citizens' Dialogue on Canada's Future

In the fall of 2002, CPRN and its partner in the dialogue project, Viewpoint Learning Inc., invited a representative sample of Canadians to participate in a day-long deliberative dialogue at 10 locations across the country. The dialogues sought to define citizens' vision for Canada ten years from now, the steps needed to achieve that vision, and the role citizens, their communities, markets and governments should play to realize that future. The report, *Citizens' Dialogue on Canada's Future: A 21st Century Social Contract*, which presented key findings and policy implications, was released in April 2003.

A key finding to emerge from the *Citizens Dialogue on Canada's Future* was evidence that citizens want to assume a more active role in public policy, and now demand a more clearly defined space in the governance process. Citizens across the country voiced their insistence that governments demonstrate accountability for their actions; in turn, they recognized that they have to take greater responsibility for their own actions. For citizens, this also included the notion of playing a more active citizenship role in public affairs.

1.2 Purpose of the Survey

In April 2003, CPRN sent a follow-up survey to all 408 dialogue participants, to determine what impact, if any, participation in the dialogue had had on their attitudes towards public involvement and their involvement in public affairs. The survey also provided CPRN with a measure of the degree to which participants had been able to follow up on their stated desire to become more engaged in public discourse.

The surveys were sent by mail and electronically. To encourage response, a self-addressed stamped envelope was included. Participants who received the questionnaire by e-mail could return the survey electronically. A follow-up reminder was sent to all participants several weeks after the survey dissemination.

1.3 Response Rate and Profile of Respondents

In total, CPRN received 162 completed questionnaires, which is a 40% response rate. This substantial response rate³ suggests that the dialogue participants were highly engaged in their day of dialogue, and were eager to follow-up on their experience by responding to the questionnaire. CPRN received only 5% of the questionnaires by e-mail; the vast majority of respondents opted for regular mail.

³ *A Portrait of Canadian Fundraising Professionals – Results of the AFP/CPRN Survey of Fundraisers 2002*, by Kathryn McMullen (2003) reported a response rate of 36% which is within the normal and acceptable range for response rates for surveys.

Table 1 compares the demographic profile of questionnaire respondents with that of the dialogue participants. The middle column shows the percentage of total survey respondents by various categories (e.g. gender and age). The column on the far right indicates the percentage of dialogue participants who responded to the questionnaire, by each category.

- Fifty-six percent of survey respondents were women; in the dialogue, there was a more even mix of women and men (51% and 49% respectively).
- Fewer people under 25 years of age (18%) and between the ages of 25 and 44 (33.5%) responded to the survey than participated in the dialogue.
- A higher proportion of older people (over the age of 65) responded to the questionnaire (56%) than did other age groups.
- Almost all of the visible minority participants responded (90%), whereas only a third of the Aboriginal participants replied to the survey.

Table 1: Demographic comparison : questionnaire respondents and dialogue participants

Category	Number of Survey Respondents	Percentage Distribution of all Respondents	Number of Dialogue Participants	Percentage of Participants Responding⁴
Gender				
Male	72	44	198	36
Female	90	56	210	43
Total	162	100	408	40
Age				
Under 25	8	5	44	18
25-44	57	35	170	33.5
45-64	66	41	139	47
65+	31	19	55	56
Total	162	100	408	40
Other Categories				
Visible minorities	27	17	30	90
Aboriginals	4	2.5	13	31
Disabled	13	8	16	81

Source: Based on survey demographic data provided by questionnaire respondents, and on dialogue participant demographic data provided by EKOS Research Associates.

⁴ Note that the percentages in this column do not add up to 100 as these figures indicate the percentage of participants who responded under each demographic category.

While the survey results provide useful insight into impacts of the citizen dialogue experience, it should be cautioned that they are not generalizable to the broader population. The sample was self-selecting from the 408 citizens who participated in the dialogue, and results are based only on the 162 survey responses received.

2. Follow-up Survey Results

The follow-up survey included two sections: the first focused on the activities of dialogue participants and the second on their attitudes toward public affairs.⁵

2.1 Impact on Activities

The first section explored activities related to public affairs. It included questions about the type of public activities respondents had been involved in and what, if any steps they had taken to stay more informed of public affairs.

Level and Types of Activity in Public Affairs (Question 1)

- Just over half of the respondents (52.5%) indicated that their level of activity in public affairs had not changed since participation in the dialogue.
- Forty-five percent of respondents said that their activity in public affairs had increased (40% by a small or moderate amount, and 5% by a high or very high amount).
- A small number of respondents (2.5%) indicated that their level of involvement in public affairs had actually decreased.
- Cross-tabulations by age and education revealed the following:
 - Increase in activity was highest for those aged 65 and over (at 64%), while the rate of increase for those between the ages of 25-44 and 45-65 was 40% and 39% respectively⁶.
 - Increases in activity do not correlate with higher levels of education. For example, while 42% of those with high school or less showed an increase in activity as compared with 48% for respondents with a graduate degree, the highest rate of increase occurred amongst those with some community college or university, at 52%.

Table 2: Results: Increase/decrease in level of activity in public affairs

Category	Actual number	Percentage
Decrease	4	2.5
No change	82	52.5
Small/moderate increase	62	40
High/very high increase	8	5
Total	156	100

Respondents indicating increased activity were asked to identify the types of activities in which they had become more involved and were provided with a list of possible responses. Their responses are listed below in rank order:

⁵ Please refer to the Appendix for a copy of the questionnaire.

⁶ Note that only a small number of respondents (4) below the age of 25 indicated an increase in activity; this data has therefore not been included in the main body of the report.

- Attendance at community meetings (50)
- Meetings with political representatives (35)
- Letter writing campaigns (23)
- Demonstrations (15)
- Political party fund-raisers (11)
- On-line dialogues (10)

Other activities in which respondents indicated they were taking part included:

- Volunteering with community projects (2)
- Working with a trade union (1)
- Participation in elections (1)

Reasons for Decrease in Activity (Question 2)

The four respondents who indicated that their activity in public affairs had decreased indicated the following reasons:

- Lack of interest (2)
- Family responsibilities (1)
- Burn out (1)

Additional Steps to Staying Informed about Public Affairs (Question 3)

A majority of respondents (69%) indicated that they had taken additional steps to remain informed of public affairs. Respondents were asked to indicate which sources of information they used most often. They are listed below in rank order:

- Newspapers and magazines (95)
- Television (91)
- Talking with friends, family, colleagues (68)
- Radio (57)
- Internet (39)
- Public presentations/meetings (25)

Respondents also indicated other sources of information that they had referred to:

- Conversations with public officials/politicians (2)
- Contact with NGOs (1)
- Letter writing (1)
- Schools (1)

The percentage of respondents who indicated that they made efforts to stay informed of public affairs is higher than those who increased their participation. This is not surprising as it requires less effort to absorb and stay abreast of public affairs than to actively engage in public discourse. However, greater knowledge of public affairs can be viewed as a positive step towards increased levels of confidence in one's capacity to engage.

Cross-tabulations by gender and age for question three revealed that:

- 75% of women indicated that they had taken additional steps, compared with 63% of men.
- 83% of respondents aged 65 and over indicated that they had taken additional steps, compared with 65% of respondents aged 25-44 and 64% of respondents aged 45-64.⁷

There was no clear correlation between education levels and whether respondents had made more of an effort to stay abreast of public affairs:

- 63% of respondents with a high school education or less had taken additional steps, as compared with 72% of respondents with a college/trade certification, 70% of those with some college or university, 68% of those with a Bachelor's degree and 72% with a graduate degree.

Cross-tabulations were also conducted on Questions 1 and 3, to measure the extent to which respondents who had indicated increased or decreased levels of activity, had also taken additional steps to stay informed of public affairs. The results are:

- 61% of those who had taken additional steps to keep current on public affairs also increased their level of activity in public affairs (by either small, moderate, high or very high amounts), and 39% did not.
- 17% of respondents who had not taken any additional steps to stay abreast of public affairs had increased their level of activity in public affairs, and 83% did not.

Intent to Become More Involved in Public Affairs (Question 4)

Note that results to Question 4, “Do you plan to become more involved in public affairs as a result of your participation in the Dialogue?” have not been included in the report as they did not provide additional insight into impacts of the citizen dialogue experience.

Other Comments (Question 5)

Most respondents (89%) to question 5 indicated that any changes to their actual or intended involvement in public affairs had already been expressed by their answers to previous questions. Additional comments provided under this question include:

- “*Simply, I find myself more aware of public affairs*” (Respondent 36),
- “*I read more articles and books relating to relevant ideas*” (Respondent 111), and
- “*Our [music] band has decided it’s time to become more political*” (Respondent 144).

⁷ Since only a small number of people under the age of 25 responded to the survey, this data has not been included in the report.

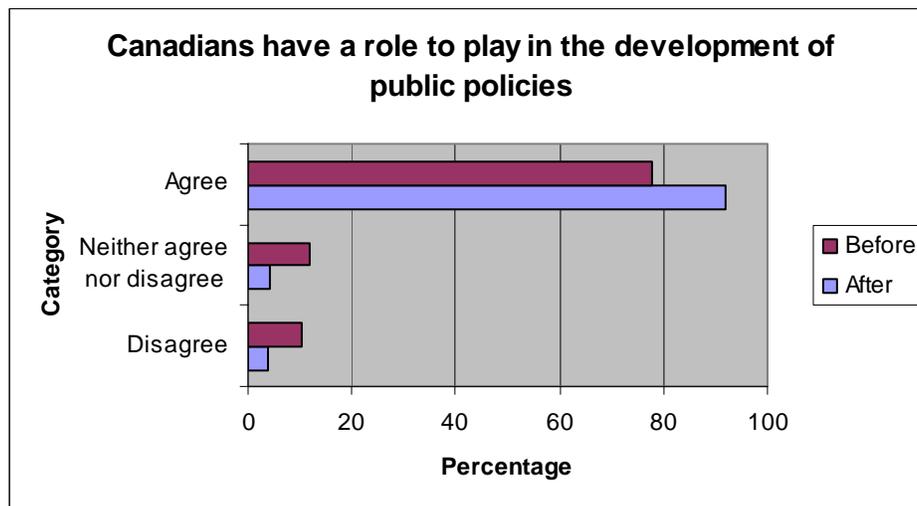
2.2 Impact on Attitudes

This section dealt with attitudinal change towards public involvement. To measure the degree to which change had occurred, respondents were asked to rate the level of their agreement or disagreement with three statements on public involvement - according to how they *think* they would have rated them prior to the dialogue (as both sets of data were collected after the dialogue), and how they would rate those same statements now, after the dialogue. Respondents were also asked if their attitudes towards public involvement had changed, and if so, in what ways.

Measuring Attitudinal Change Before and After the Dialogue (Questions 6 & 7)

The following charts illustrate before and after shifts which occurred for each statement. As seen below, agreement with all three statements increased consistently in the pre to post dialogue ratings. Correspondingly, respondents' level of disagreement and ratings under *neither agree nor disagree* dropped substantially from before to after dialogue ratings.

CHART 1: Statement 1 – Canadians have a valuable and critical role to play in the development of public policies.



- *Agreement* with the first statement, “Canadians have a valuable and critical role to play in the development of public policies” increased from 78% to 92%.
- *Disagreement* with the first statement dropped from 10.5% before the dialogue to 4% after the dialogue, while *neither agree nor disagree* responses dropped from 12% to 4.5%.
- Cross-tabulations on the survey responses revealed that the greatest positive shift occurred for respondents aged 25-44, moving from 65% to 84%. The levels of agreement for respondents aged 45-64 and over 65 years were higher and changed less (85% to 97%, and 87% to 97%, respectively).

CHART 2: Statement 2 – I am capable of making a positive contribution to the public policy process.

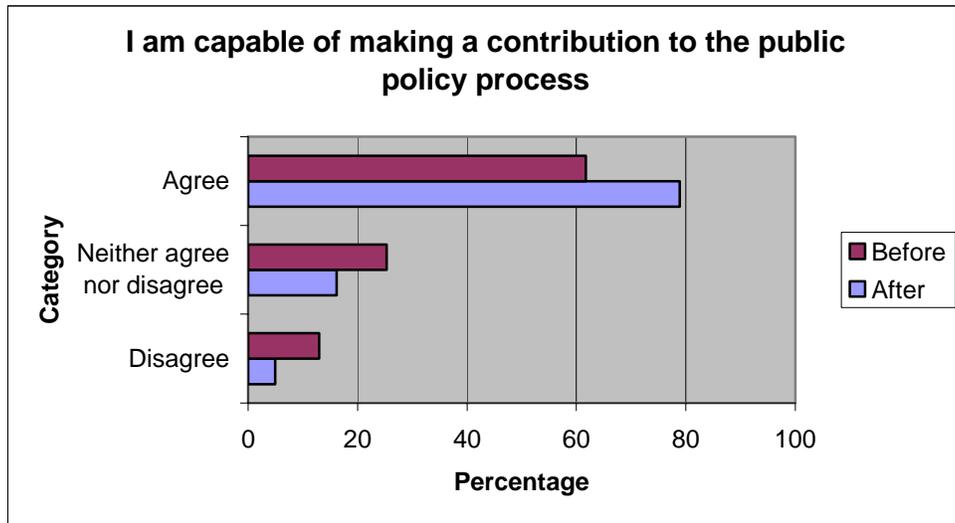
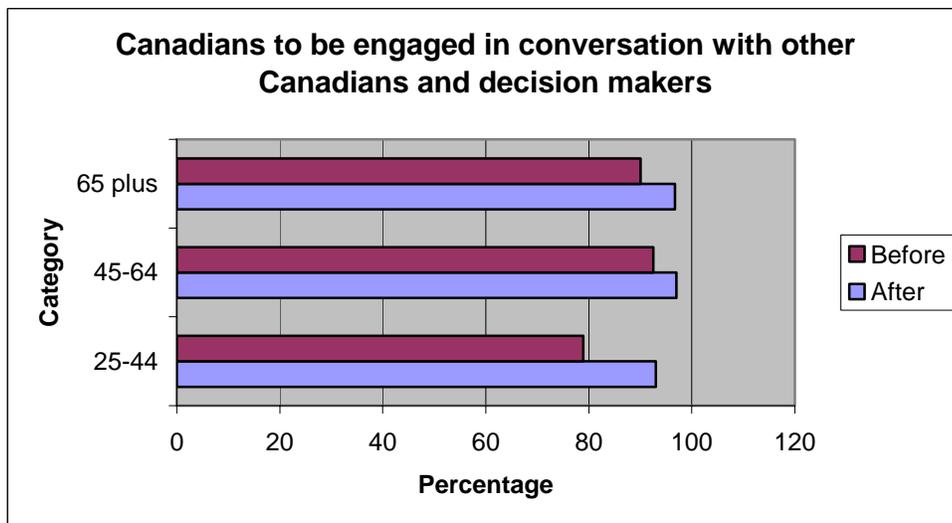


CHART 3: Statement 3 – Canadians should be engaged in conversation with other Canadians and decision-makers about public issues affecting our country.



Similar patterns are found for the remaining two statements:

- *Agreement* with the second statement, “I am capable of making a positive contribution to the public policy process” increased from 62% to 79%.
- *Disagreement* dropped from 13% before the dialogue to 5% after the dialogue, and *neither agree nor disagree* dropped from 25% to 16%.

- While visible minorities were far less likely to agree with the second statement before the dialogue, their attitudes became much more positive afterwards – increasing from 41% to 67% compared with 67% to 81% for the others.
- *Agreement* with the third statement, “Canadians should be engaged with other Canadians and decision makers about public issues affecting our country” rose from an already high 88% to 96%.
- As shown in the third chart, cross-tabulations by age revealed that those aged 25-44 experienced the greatest positive increase (from 79% to 93%) compared with changes for those aged 45-64 (from 93% to 97%) and for respondents aged 65 and over (from 90% to 97%).

These shifts suggest that the value of public dialogues goes beyond attempting to influence public policy. They also serve as an important mechanism for increasing citizens’ confidence in their ability to participate in public policy discussions, and strengthen their understanding of the role that ordinary Canadians engaged with each other and with decision makers can play in public discourse.

Interestingly enough, data cross-tabulations by education for each of the three statements revealed minimal differences. For example, post-dialogue agreement with the first statement was 96% (for those with high school or less), 95% (for those with some community college or trade certification), 79% (for respondents with a Bachelor’s degree), and 95% (for those with a graduate degree).

Changes to Thinking about Individual Role in Public Affairs (Question 8)

To provide a different measure of attitudinal change, respondents were asked to explain whether their thinking about the role that they can play in public affairs had changed since participation in the dialogue. Forty-five percent of respondents indicated that their thinking had changed, while the remainder (55%) indicated no change.

Table 3: Has your thinking about the role that you can play in public affairs changed since your participation in the dialogue?

Category	Actual number	Percentage
Yes	71	45
No	88	55
Total	159	100

Only those respondents indicating changed thinking were asked to provide further explanation. The most often-cited comments, as highlighted in the box on the next page, revealed that:

- respondents now have a better appreciation of the impact that public involvement can have;
- respondents are more confident and interested in engaging in public affairs; and
- respondents are more aware of the value of sharing their ideas with public officials and through other forms of public engagement.

“...someone has to step forward and lead discussion. I can now attempt this” (Respondent 14)

“I feel myself and all of us have been far too lazy. We need to become educated, informed, and participate.” (Respondent 23)

“...more awareness of the value of communication of my own thoughts and ideas to provincial legislature members” (Respondent 12)

“I was pleasantly surprised at the seriousness of this citizen dialogue exercise in which I participated. It’s surprising and reassuring that our ideas can make a small difference.” (Translated from the French - Respondent 41)

“After listening to myself and others I realized how important my opinion and the opinion and ideas of other Canadians is.” (Respondent 59)

“I now believe phone calls or letters to my MP/MLA about issues will have an impact.” (Respondent 143)

- Respondents aged 25 - 44 demonstrated the highest positive response rate to this question. Fifty-six percent of those aged 25-44 replied positively to question 8, as compared with only 39% for respondents between the ages of 45-64, and 38% for respondents aged 65 and older.
- The education cross-tabulation revealed that respondents with higher levels of education more often felt that their thinking had changed. Table 4 demonstrates these rates:

Table 4: Response Rates (percentages) to Question 8 by education levels

	High School or Less	College Certificate or Trade Certification	Some Community College or University	Bachelors Degree	Graduate Degree	Total Responses
(Percentage)						
Thinking has changed	24	43	44	50	67	45
Thinking has not changed	76	57	56	50	33	55
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

2.3 General Impact

Participation in Other Dialogues (Question 9)

Most respondents (88%) reported that they had not taken part in previous dialogues. Of the few who had, responses indicated a wide range of dialogue topics, including:

- Health
- Aboriginal issues
- Meech Lake Accord
- Legal aid
- Waste management

Dialogues to improve communications with decision-makers and amongst Canadians (Question 10)

Most respondents (91%) felt that dialogues are a useful way of improving/communications with decision makers and amongst Canadians. Only those respondents who indicated no to this question were asked to provide written comments to accompany their answer. Their comments, provided in the quote box below, fell into three categories:

- scepticism about whether public involvement really has any impact, and if government listens to what citizens have to say;
- doubts about the actual dialogue process, and the suggestion that changes need to be made to the dialogue format (e.g. more time required), and
- outright cynicism about the process (expressed by only three respondents).

“Politicians have their agendas and what the people of Canada say really doesn’t appear to be a priority.” (Respondent 9)

“Like work within political parties, these dialogues are largely a waste of time because issue-centered lobbying by concerned and organized citizens remains far more effective in getting things done.” (Respondent 37)

“The whole process was designed in such a way as to push us in specific directions. Our hesitations and objections were not addressed. I have a strong feeling that the organizers obtained the results they wanted which had been defined in advance.” (Translated from the French - Respondent 39)

“My feelings and those of several others I talked to was that the intent of the process was to lead the focus to a pre-determined conclusion and the only focus was toward those inclined to the view of the moderator.” (Respondent 100)

“Maybe – we know we participated in the dialogue but how do we know as participants that the decision makers saw it and are taking the results into consideration.” (Respondent 92)

“I believe it can improve communications with others. Unfortunately, unless a “pull” indicates a need, our political system is unresponsive to individuals.” (Respondent 151)

Cross-tabulations by gender, education levels and visible minority status revealed some small differences:

- 94% of women agreed that dialogues are useful, while slightly fewer men (88%) agreed with the statement.

- Higher education levels were associated with slightly less agreement with the idea that dialogues are useful. For example, 85% of respondents with a graduate degree felt that dialogues are useful, compared with 90% of those with a Bachelor's degree and all respondents with high school or less.
- 96% of visible minority participants felt that dialogues are useful, while only 91% of all others felt the same way.

Willingness to Participate in Similar Dialogues (Question 11)

The majority of respondents (77%) indicated that they would be willing to participate in a similar dialogue, 19% said that it depends, and 4% said no. Respondents who indicated no or depends were asked to give further explanation. Some expressed scepticism (mirrored by some dialogue participants) about governments' ability to listen. Others said that their participation would depend on the subject, their availability, location, and whether they feel able to contribute to the topic.

Willingness to Participate Without an Honorarium (Question 12)

Seventy-four percent of respondents indicated that they would be willing to take part in a dialogue that did not provide them with an honorarium. The remaining respondents who indicated that they would *not* participate (see comments in quote box below) without an honorarium provided a variety of explanations:

- time and contribution should be recognized,
- family and work responsibilities to consider, and
- honoraria help to increase participant's motivation levels.

“Instead of participating in this session, I could have worked and earned wages. And in addition, the different ideas and opinions that I have acquired through diverse life experiences, such as education, work, social relationships, etc., well deserve an honorarium.” (Translated from the French – Respondent 44)

“This was work! My time is worth something more than a boxed lunch!” (Respondent 78)

“It's just that time is at such a premium for most of us and we are asked to participate in many worthy causes – how else to choose?” (Respondent 94)

“... it's more polite and civilised and genuine to provide an honorarium. It's a way to recognize our contribution to humanity – a way to support who you have chosen.” (Translated from the French – Respondent 135)

“The first time I went because of curiosity, money, for the debate and to hear what others had to say (in that order). We all chose to “lose” our day off because at least there was \$100 at the end. I believe that this is what also motivates our politicians to get out of bed every morning. Volunteer work is a good thing but to make sure it is done well and seriously I would pay a salary or an honorarium.” (Translated from the French – Respondent 155)

Other Policy Issues for Dialogue (Question 13)

Respondents were given a list of possible dialogue topics, and asked to choose which ones they felt would be most useful for public dialogues. Their responses are listed below in rank order:

- Public education (117)
- Environment (109)
- Poverty and social marginalization (108)
- Canada's relationship with the US (104)
- Accountability (96)
- Role of Canadian military (84)
- Canadian values and identity (83)
- Economic development (80)
- International development (60)

Other policy issues that respondents felt would be good dialogue topics were:

- health care issues (10)
- the justice system (8)

Other Comments (Question 14)

Respondents were invited to add other points. The two types of comments that emerged were:

- dialogues are a valuable experience
- dialogues are a useful way of communicating with other Canadians and decision makers

“Dialogue should be aired coast to coast on TV repeatedly. It is a valuable education for all citizens.” (Respondent 54)

“I feel that this was a worthwhile exercise to get the ideas and opinions of the average Canadian to the policy makers.” (Respondent 59)

“It was a wonderful experience, I would do it again. I hope this report will not only encourage change in government policy but show how many great ideas the ‘average Canadian’ has.” (Respondent 107)

3. Survey Results – Policy Implications

3.1 Survey and Dialogue Results: How Do They Connect?

Results from the survey validate and reinforce the governance findings from the *Citizens' Dialogue*, and provide further insight into citizens' thinking. As noted, the response rate for the survey was substantial, at 40%, suggesting that participants were actively engaged during the dialogue, and were eager to follow-up on their day-long experience.

Greater interest in public affairs (69% of respondents), and increases in involvement in public affairs (45% of respondents) are consistent with two connected themes that emerged from the dialogue: citizens' thirst for greater engagement in civic life, and a realization that individuals must invest greater effort and more time to fulfill their civic responsibilities.

Most respondents (91%) felt that dialogues are a useful way of improving communications with decision makers and amongst Canadians, and 77% said that they would be willing to take part in similar events. Respondents' attitudes towards public involvement, as reflected by the before and after dialogue ratings, are congruent with dialogue findings. These survey results mirror sentiments expressed by dialogue participants – their appreciation for the dialogue experience, their strong belief that governments need to be more engaged in conversation with Canadians, and their sense that citizens should take a more active part.

Another similarity, albeit expressed by only a minority of dialogue participants and survey respondents, is the scepticism voiced about whether governments will listen to what they have to say, and whether any of their suggestions would actually influence government decision making.

3.2 Survey Results Support Research on Citizen Engagement

There is widespread recognition of the need for greater involvement of ordinary citizens in public policy discussions, a perspective also shared amongst citizens themselves (*Rethinking Citizen Engagement Study*, EKOS, 2003; *Citizens' Dialogue on Canada's Future*, MacKinnon et al, 2003; *Canadian Society Today*, Pollara, 2003; *Report on Democratic Reform*, Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, 2002, etc.). The 2003 Pollara Study reports that 94% of poll respondents felt that citizen participation in the development of public policy was either very or fairly essential. This research helps to explain why:

- survey respondents were so sure (at 91%) that dialogues are a useful way of improving communications with decision makers and amongst Canadians; and
- most survey respondents (77%) would be willing to take part in other similar kinds of dialogues.

The Public Policy Forum (PPF) undertook a similar follow-up survey with participants of a Citizens' Forum on Clean Air (*The British Columbia Regional Citizens' Forum on*

Clean Air - the Public's Voice II: One Year Later, July, 2002). The follow-up survey was conducted 11 months after the original Forum; respondents included the original cohort of citizens who took part in the forum, as well as a control group of 100 randomly selected British Columbia residents. PPF's purpose in conducting a follow-up survey, similar to CPRN's, was to look at the impact of the Forum experience on participants and to compare results with the control group. It is encouraging to note that CPRN's survey findings with respect to behavioural changes are consistent with the Clean Air Citizen Forum follow-up survey results:

- At the Citizens' Forum, participants indicated that they would be willing to act in a variety of different ways to address issues of air quality. In the follow-up survey, respondents reported that they had indeed acted on their intent (e.g. 85% had changed their personal behaviour, 72% drove less, 85% bought greener products, and 31% had written to someone). These increases suggest that participation in citizen engagement initiatives has a long-term positive impact on levels of participation.

Both the Pollara and EKOS polls confirm what has been said elsewhere; that the public believes there is a significant disconnect between government and citizens, and that governments are perceived to be uninterested in what ordinary citizens have to say. For example, 82% of those polled in the Pollara study agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "Generally, those elected to Parliament soon lose touch with the people". Sixty-eight percent of poll respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statements, "People like me don't have any say about what government does", and "I don't think government cares what people like me think." The EKOS *Rethinking Citizen Engagement* study reveals similar kinds of beliefs. In addition, the PPF survey indicated that the respondents' strongest concern was whether their input to the Citizens' Forum would influence decision makers. Thirty-one percent of respondents said that future Citizens' Forums should be able demonstrate concrete results in terms of impact on policy.

Another aspect of public involvement which requires further exploration is the link between civic literacy and levels of political participation. Does greater knowledge of public affairs lead to higher levels of participation in political life? Henry Milner (*Civic Literacy in Comparative Context*, July 2001) believes that there is a strong correlation between levels of political knowledge, or civic literacy, and engagement in civic affairs, arguing that a lack of political knowledge impedes citizens' ability to effectively take part in public affairs. He refers to civic literacy as "the knowledge to be effective citizens", and adds that democracy is made stronger by the presence of citizens with high levels of civic literacy. If this is the case, deliberative dialogues serve another function: to strengthen the development of civic literacy skills which provide a foundation for increased participation in public affairs.

4. Concluding Comments

The follow-up survey has provided insight into how the *Citizens' Dialogue* affected and influenced citizens. Of greatest importance are three key results:

- 91% of survey respondents believe dialogues are a useful way of improving the quality of communication amongst Canadians and with decision makers; and 77% would participate in another dialogue, if invited.
- A large majority of those who responded - 69% - devoted more time and effort to being informed of public affairs following participation in the dialogue, and 61% of these respondents also increased their level of activity in public affairs.
- 45% of respondents increased their participation in public affairs.

These results suggest that the dialogue experience provided participants with a realization of their untapped potential as citizens, and had an enabling impact on a significant number of participants, increasing their engagement in public discourse. When the results are broken down by demographic categories, it is possible to identify those most influenced by various aspects of the dialogue experience:

- **Respondents aged 65 and older** - their levels of participation increased the most (64%), and over three quarters of this age group (83%) had taken additional steps to stay informed of public affairs;
- **Respondents aged 25-44** – 65% had made the effort to become more informed, and 40% increased their level of activity;
- **Female respondents** – 75% indicated that they had taken additional steps to stay informed on public affairs (as compared with 63% of men); and 94% of women agreed that dialogues are a useful way of enhancing communication (as compared with 88% of men);
- **Visible minorities** - their confidence in their own ability to participate in public affairs increased at a higher rate following participation in the dialogue than it did for other participants; and
- **Differences in education levels** – did not have a significant impact on activity or information gathering.

The results show that the influence of the *Citizens' Dialogue* extended far beyond the actual one-day session – the vast majority of participants' behaviours and attitudes towards public affairs changed or shifted after taking part in the dialogue. This finding, specifically related to the *Citizens' Dialogue*, supports CPRN's conviction that deliberative dialogues do contribute to civic education and can play an integral role in stimulating a greater sense of civic responsibility and interest amongst citizens who take part in dialogues.

There is widespread recognition of the need for greater citizen involvement in public policy discussion. Deliberative dialogues can help to fill this gap, *and* encourage Canadians to play a more active role in public discourse.

References

EKOS, *The Rethinking Citizen Engagement Study*, 2003.

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McMullen, Kathryn, *A Portrait of Canadian Fundraising Professionals – Results of the AFP/CPRN Survey of Fundraisers 2002*, July 2003.

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Pollara Study, *Canadian Society Today*, 2003.

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Appendix

Follow-up Questionnaire Citizens' Dialogue on The Kind of Canada We Want

Thank you for participating in the **Citizens' Dialogue on The Kind of Canada We Want**. We hope the experience was a positive one. To help us with our on-going research on citizen engagement in public policy, we would appreciate it if you could take a few moments to answer the following short questionnaire and return the completed form in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope. **It will take approximately 15 minutes to complete this questionnaire.** The feedback that you provide will help us to better understand the impact our work has on Canadians who take part in public dialogues. Please be assured that your responses will remain confidential and all survey results will be presented anonymously.

If you have questions about the survey, please contact Nandini Saxena, Researcher, CPRN at (613) 567-7484 or by e-mail at nsaxena@cprn.org.

Section 1: Activities

We would like to know if your **activities** related to public affairs have changed in any way as a result of your participation in the **Citizens' Dialogue on The Kind of Canada We Want**.

1a. Has your activity in public affairs at the local, provincial or national level **increased, remained the same or decreased?** (e.g. community meetings, political party activity, etc.) Please rate on a scale of 0 - 5 (where 0 reflects a decrease, 1 reflects no change, 3 reflects a moderate increase, and 5 is the highest rate of increase) by circling the number that most closely corresponds with your experience.

0	1	2	3	4	5
Decrease	No Change	Small Increase	Moderate Increase	High Increase	Very High Increase

1b. If your level of activity in public affairs has **increased**, please mark an X in all boxes that accurately reflect what kinds of activities you have become more involved in. *If you indicated a decrease in the previous question, please skip this question and go directly to question 2.*

Meeting with political representatives	()
Attendance at community meetings	()
Letter writing campaigns	()
Political party fund-raisers	()
Demonstrations	()
On-line dialogues	()
Other	()

If other, please explain:

2. If your activity in public affairs at the local, provincial or national level has **decreased**, please mark an X in the box or boxes that most accurately explain the reasons why. *If you indicated an increase in the previous questions, please skip this question and go directly to question 3.*

- Work commitments
- Family responsibilities
- Lack of interest
- Other

If other, please explain:

3a. Have you taken any additional steps to keep yourself informed about public affairs? Please mark an X in the appropriate box.

- Yes
- No

3b. If yes, please mark an X in the box or boxes that most accurately reflect the sources of information that you have used to do this.

- Newspapers & magazines
- Internet
- Television
- Radio
- Talking with friends, family, colleagues
- Public presentations/meetings
- Other

If other, please explain:

4. Do you plan to become more involved in public affairs as a result of your participation in the Dialogue? Please mark an X in the appropriate box.

- Yes
- No

If yes, please explain:

5. Has your actual or intended involvement in public affairs changed in other ways not asked about here? Please mark an X in the appropriate box.

- Yes
- No

If yes, please explain:

Section 2: Attitudes

This section asks about what impact, if any, your participation in the **Citizen's Dialogue on The Kind of Canada We Want** has had on your **attitudes** about individual involvement in the public policy process.

6. Prior to the Dialogue, how would you have rated the following statements? Please rate your responses on a scale of 1-5 (where 1 represents strongly disagree, 3 reflects neither disagree nor disagree, and 5 reflects strongly agree), by circling the number that most closely corresponds with what your attitudes were.

6a. Canadians have a valuable and critical role to play in the development of public policies.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

6b. I am capable of making a positive contribution to the public policy process.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

6c. Canadians should be engaged in conversation with other Canadians and decision-makers about public issues affecting our country.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

7. After having participated in the Dialogue, how would you rate the same statements? Please rate your responses on the same scale (where 1 represents strongly disagree, 3 reflects neither disagree nor disagree, and 5 reflects strongly agree), by circling the number that most closely corresponds with your attitudes.

7a. Canadians have a valuable and critical role to play in the development of public policies.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

7b. I am capable of making a positive contribution to the public policy process.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

7c. Canadians should be engaged in conversation with other Canadians and decision-makers about public issues affecting our country.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

8. Has your thinking about the role that you can play in public affairs changed since your participation in the Dialogue? (i.e. in relation to other Canadians, your neighbourhood, the government, and international affairs) Please mark an X in the appropriate box.

Yes ()
No ()

If yes, please explain:

Section 3: General

This section asks other general questions about your thoughts on individual involvement in the public policy process. Please mark an X in the appropriate box.

9. Have you taken part in similar kinds of dialogues?

Yes ()
No ()

If yes, please explain the reason for the dialogue(s) and when it was held:

10. In your opinion, are dialogues a useful way of improving communication between decision-makers and amongst Canadians?

Yes ()
No ()

If no, please explain:

11. Would you be willing to participate in similar kinds of dialogues?

Yes ()
No ()
Depends ()

If no or depends, please explain:

12. Would you be willing to take part in a dialogue that did not provide you with an honorarium, but which covered your out of pocket expenses?

Yes
No

If no, please explain:

13. On what other policy issues do you feel would be most useful to hold public dialogues?

Aboriginal issues	()
Accountability	()
Canada's relationship with the US	()
Canadian values and identity	()
Economic development	()
Environment	()
International development	()
Poverty and social marginalization	()
Public education	()
Role of the Canadian military	()
Others	()

If others, please explain:

14. Are there any other comments that you would like to make?

Section 4: Additional Demographic Information

The following information will help us better interpret the results of the questionnaire and will be kept in the strictest confidence. Please mark an X in the appropriate box.

15. Your Gender:

Male ()
Female ()

16. Your Age:

Under 25 ()
25-44 ()
45-64 ()
65+ ()

17. What is the highest level of schooling you have completed?

- Elementary school or less
- Some high school
- High school
- Community college/CEGEP
- Professional/trade certification
- Some community college or university
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate degree

18. What is your place of residence (i.e. village, town or city and province)?

19. Do you consider yourself to be a member of a visible minority?

- Yes
- No

20. Do you consider yourself to be an Aboriginal person?

- Yes
- No

21. Do you consider yourself to be a person with a disability?

- Yes
- No

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire and for returning it to us in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope!

We promise to send you a summary of the survey results once available.

Questionnaire de suivi

Dialogue entre citoyens sur le Canada que nous voulons

Merci de votre participation au **Dialogue entre citoyens sur le Canada que nous voulons**. Nous osons croire que cette expérience s'est révélée positive pour vous. Pour nous aider dans la poursuite de nos recherches sur la participation des citoyens aux politiques publiques, nous apprécierions que vous preniez quelques minutes pour répondre à ce court questionnaire et que vous le retourniez dûment rempli à Nandini Saxena, chercheuse aux RCRPP, à l'adresse : nsaxena@cprn.org **Il ne vous faudra qu'environ 15 minutes pour remplir ce questionnaire.** Vos réactions nous aideront à mieux comprendre l'impact qu'exercent nos travaux sur les Canadiens qui participent aux dialogues publics. Nous tenons à vous assurer que le caractère confidentiel de vos réponses sera préservé et que les résultats du sondage seront présentés de façon à sauvegarder l'anonymat des participants.

Si vous avez des questions n'hésitez pas à communiquer avec Nandini Saxena au (613) 567-7484 ou à l'adresse suivante nsaxena@cprn.org

Section 1 : Activités

Nous aimerions savoir si vos activités relatives aux affaires publiques ont changé d'une façon ou d'une autre par suite de votre participation au **Dialogue entre citoyens sur le Canada que nous voulons**.

1a. Votre participation aux affaires publiques à l'échelle locale, provinciale ou nationale s'est-elle **accrue**, est-elle **demeurée la même** ou a-t-elle **diminué** (par exemple, rencontres communautaires, activités liées aux partis politiques, etc.) ? Veuillez utiliser une échelle de 0 à 5 (dans laquelle 0 reflète une baisse, 1 reflète aucun changement, 3 reflète une hausse modérée et 5 est le taux d'augmentation le plus élevé) en inscrivant un X dans la case située au-dessus du chiffre qui correspond le plus étroitement à votre expérience.

<input type="checkbox"/>					
0	1	2	3	4	5
Baisse	Aucun changement	Faible hausse	Hausse modérée	Forte hausse	Très forte hausse

1b. Si votre niveau de participation aux affaires publiques s'est **accru**, veuillez inscrire un X dans toutes les cases qui reflètent précisément les types d'activités auxquelles vous avez participé davantage. *Si vous avez indiqué une baisse en réponse à la question précédente, veuillez sauter cette question et passer directement à la question 2.*

Rencontre avec des représentants politiques	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participation à des rencontres communautaires	<input type="checkbox"/>
Campagnes d'envoi de lettres	<input type="checkbox"/>
Activités de levée de fonds pour des partis politiques	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Démonstrations
- Dialogue en ligne
- Autre

Si vous avez coché autre, veuillez expliquer :

2. Si votre participation aux affaires publiques à l'échelle locale, provinciale ou nationale a **diminué**, veuillez inscrire un X dans la ou les cases qui reflètent le plus précisément les raisons de cette baisse. *Si vous avez indiqué une hausse en réponse à la question précédente, veuillez sauter cette question et passer directement à la question 3.*

- Obligations professionnelles
- Responsabilités familiales
- Manque d'intérêt
- Autre

Si vous avez coché autre, veuillez expliquer :

3a. Avez-vous pris des mesures supplémentaires pour vous tenir au courant des affaires publiques ? Veuillez inscrire un X dans la case appropriée.

- Oui
- Non

3b. Si vous avez coché oui, veuillez inscrire un X dans la ou les cases qui reflètent le mieux les sources d'information utilisées.

- Journaux et magazines
- Internet
- Télévision
- Radio
- Conversations avec des amis,
des membres de la famille, des collègues
- Présentations/rencontres publiques
- Autre

Si vous avez coché autre, veuillez expliquer :

4. Prévoyez-vous vous intéresser davantage aux affaires publiques par suite de votre participation au Dialogue ? Veuillez inscrire un X dans la case appropriée.

Oui

Non

Si vous avez coché oui, veuillez expliquer :

5. Votre participation actuelle ou projetée aux affaires publiques s'est-elle modifiée d'autres façons que celles indiquées ici ? Veuillez inscrire un X dans la case appropriée.

Oui

Non

Si vous avez coché oui, veuillez expliquer :

Section 2 : Attitudes

Cette section vise à déterminer l'impact, le cas échéant, que votre participation au **Dialogue entre Canadiens sur le Canada que nous voulons** a eu sur vos **attitudes** concernant une participation individuelle au processus d'élaboration des politiques.

6. Avant votre participation au Dialogue, quelle cote auriez-vous attribuée aux énoncés suivants ? Veuillez utiliser une échelle de 1 à 5 pour qualifier vos réponses (dans laquelle 1 reflète un profond désaccord, 3 reflète ni un accord ni un désaccord et 5 reflète un accord profond) en inscrivant un X dans la case située au-dessus du chiffre qui correspond le plus étroitement à votre attitude avant votre participation au Dialogue.

6a. Les Canadiens ont un rôle valable et essentiel à jouer dans le processus d'élaboration des politiques publiques.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5
En profond désaccord	En désaccord	Ni en accord ni en désaccord	En accord	En accord profond

6b. Je suis en mesure de faire un apport positif au processus d'élaboration des politiques.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5
En profond désaccord	En désaccord	Ni en accord ni en désaccord	En accord	En accord profond

6c. Les Canadiens devraient participer à des dialogues avec d'autres Canadiens et les responsables des politiques concernant des enjeux publics qui ont une incidence sur notre pays.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5
En profond désaccord	En désaccord	Ni en accord ni en désaccord	En accord	En accord profond

7. Après votre participation au Dialogue, quelle cote attribueriez-vous aux mêmes énoncés ? Veuillez utiliser la même échelle de 1 à 5 pour qualifier vos réponses (dans laquelle 1 reflète un profond désaccord, 3 reflète ni un accord ni un désaccord et 5 reflète un accord profond) en inscrivant un X dans la case située au-dessus du chiffre qui correspond le plus étroitement à votre attitude.

7a. Les Canadiens ont un rôle valable et essentiel à jouer dans le processus d'élaboration des politiques publiques.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5
En profond désaccord	En désaccord	Ni en accord ni en désaccord	En accord	En accord profond

7b. Je suis en mesure de faire un apport positif au processus d'élaboration des politiques.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5
En profond désaccord	En désaccord	Ni en accord ni en désaccord	En accord	En accord profond

7c. Les Canadiens devraient participer à des dialogues avec d'autres Canadiens et les responsables des politiques concernant des enjeux publics qui ont une incidence sur notre pays.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5
En profond désaccord	En désaccord	Ni en accord ni en désaccord	En accord	En accord profond

8. Votre conception du rôle que vous pouvez remplir dans le domaine des affaires publiques a-t-elle changé depuis votre participation au Dialogue (c'est-à-dire, par rapport aux autres Canadiens, à votre quartier, au gouvernement et aux affaires internationales) ? Veuillez inscrire un X dans la case appropriée.

Oui	<input type="checkbox"/>
Non	<input type="checkbox"/>

Si vous avez coché oui, veuillez expliquer :

Section 3 : Aspects généraux

Cette section vise à soulever d'autres questions générales concernant vos opinions sur la participation individuelle au processus d'élaboration des politiques publiques. Veuillez inscrire un X dans la case appropriée.

9. Avez-vous déjà participé à des types de dialogues semblables ?

Oui

Non

Si vous avez coché oui, veuillez expliquer les motifs du ou des dialogues et quand ils se sont tenus :

10. À votre avis, les dialogues sont-ils une façon utile d'améliorer les communications entre les responsables des politiques et entre les Canadiens ?

Oui

Non

Si vous avez coché non, veuillez expliquer :

11. Seriez-vous disposé(e) à participer de nouveau à des types de dialogues semblables ?

Oui

Non

Ça dépend

Si vous avez coché non ou ça dépend, veuillez expliquer :

12. Seriez-vous disposé(e) à participer à un dialogue si on ne vous versait pas d'honoraires mais que vos menues dépenses vous étaient remboursées ?

Oui

Non

Si vous avez coché non, veuillez expliquer :

13. Sur quels autres enjeux de politiques croyez-vous qu'il serait des plus utile de tenir des dialogues publics ?

- Questions autochtones
- Obligation de rendre compte
- Relations entre le Canada et les États-Unis
- Identité et valeurs canadiennes
- Développement économique
- Environnement
- Développement international
- Pauvreté et marginalisation sociale
- Système public d'éducation
- Rôle de l'armée canadienne
- Autres

Si vous avez coché autres, veuillez expliquer :

14. Y a-t-il d'autres commentaires que vous aimeriez soumettre ?

Section 4 : Autres données démographiques

Les renseignements suivants nous aideront à mieux interpréter les résultats du questionnaire et leur caractère confidentiel sera rigoureusement sauvegardé. Veuillez inscrire un X dans la case appropriée.

15. Votre sexe :

- Homme
- Femme

16. Votre âge :

- Moins de 25
- 25-44
- 45-64
- 65+

17. Quel est le plus niveau de scolarité le plus élevé que vous avez atteint ?

- École primaire ou moins
- Quelques années du secondaire
- École secondaire
- Collège communautaire/CEGEP
- Certificat professionnel/ou d'une école de métiers
- Quelques années de collège communautaire ou d'université
- Diplôme de baccalauréat
- Diplôme d'études supérieures

18. Quel est votre lieu de résidence (c'est-à-dire, village, municipalité ou ville et province) ?

19. Vous considérez-vous comme faisant partie d'une minorité visible ?

- Oui
- Non

20. Vous considérez-vous comme étant un(e) Autochtone ?

- Oui
- Non

21. Vous considérez-vous comme une personne qui souffre d'un handicap ?

- Oui
- Non

Merci d'avoir pris le temps de répondre à ce questionnaire et de nous le retourner par courrier électronique !

Nous vous promettons de vous envoyer un résumé des résultats du sondage lorsqu'ils seront disponibles.



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