

***Citizens' Values and the Canadian Social
Architecture: Evidence from the Citizens'
Dialogue on Canada's Future***

by

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Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

This paper is one of a series of research reports prepared for the Family Network's *A Social Architecture for Canada's 21st Century* project. It draws on the results of CPRN's dialogue with citizens on the future of Canada and aims to use their values and logic framework to influence the design of social architecture. The paper asserts that inclusion of citizens' voices in social policy is important for both pragmatic and democratic reasons. New social architecture will be accepted more readily and will have greater utility if citizens believe they have had the opportunity to shape and actually influence its design.

In the fall of 2002, a random sample of 400 Canadians came together in ten different locations across Canada to participate in a structured dialogue on their vision for their country ten years out. Their deliberations produced two results:

- A revised social contract that reframed the future roles for government, citizens, business and communities. There is continuity and change in the roles for government while the roles for citizens, communities and business are significantly enhanced.
- A restatement of core Canadian values based on a strong belief that Canada needs a "moral compass" to guide behaviours in all spheres of private and public life. In discovering the broad consensus that emerged among strangers in these dialogue sessions, these core values became a distinctive and confident expression of Canadian identity.

The paper discusses Canadian core values in relation to social architecture choices, elaborates on citizens' logic framework in relation to roles and responsibilities for social well-being and concludes with observations on social policy challenges and implications.

Core Canadian values, as defined by the citizens themselves, are the foundation for the social contract. The social contract depends on a network of interconnected societal relationships that operate within the context of these core values. The dialogue surfaced the following core Canadian values:

- *Shared community*: despite regional, linguistic, ethnic, cultural and socio-economic differences, citizens found they had many shared values and these values reinforced their sense of attachment to their shared community of Canada.
- *Equality and justice*: each person is to be respected, valued, and treated equally – this operated as a moral imperative for the collectivity and the individual. Compassion for the vulnerable and marginalized is an integral part of this value.
- *Respect for diversity*: valuing ethnic, cultural and religious diversity and lifestyle choices (e.g., different family types). While celebrating the Canadian mosaic, they see diversity within the context of shared norms and values – not as an end in itself.
- *Mutual responsibility*: this means a web of interconnected, reciprocal and interdependent relationships among all societal actors.

- *Accountability*: an expectation that all institutions, public and private, be ethical in behaviour, honest, transparent and prepared to accept responsibility and consequences for wrongdoing. Citizens also assigned themselves higher standards, acknowledging that accountability is a two-way street.
- *Engaged democracy*: a larger role for citizen involvement in the public sphere. Citizens value and want greater opportunity to engage with decision-makers on issues that affect their collective quality of life.

Citizens called on governments and civic institutions to create more space for open discussion of core values, especially with newcomers. They know that values do evolve but they want this evolution to happen through a conscious and deliberative process that engages as many Canadians as possible in that discussion.

In their reframing of governments' role in the Canadian social contract, citizens insist that political leaders continue to be responsible for pooling economic, social and public safety risks on behalf of citizens. There is little call for less government overall but citizens do demand more accountable, strategic and intelligent institutions that are more engaged with the public. They don't expect governments to be in the business of direct job creation but rather to serve as catalysts for economic development in partnerships with business and the not-for-profit sector.

Citizens see the private sector as the main driver for economic development and they have expanded its role to encompass a larger, more engaged social function. They expect business to be more accountable to their employees, shareholders and the communities in which they do business. The private sector's expanded roles included: greater investment in employee upgrading, partnering with education institutions and governments, partnering with communities to fulfill corporate social responsibility, greater investments in innovation and environmental protection and more attentiveness to good governance and ethical standards.

Citizens are expected to become more actively involved in governance, taking more time and effort to become informed about public issues and to take greater responsibility for their lifestyle and consumer choices so as to contribute to better environmental and health outcomes. They are also expected to maintain primary responsibility for family caring, albeit with important supports from governments, business and communities. They put a high value on citizens' role in contributing to a "working society" for without this Canadians would not be able to maintain or improve their quality of life. Within this context, they accepted that the future called for greater focus on lifelong learning and skills upgrading. While accepting individual responsibility for working and learning, they do expect governments and employers to actively support them through a variety of coordinated mechanisms and incentives.

In articulating their vision for Canada and choosing actions to make that vision concrete, Canadians identified challenges that demand redesigned policies and new investments. Social policy architects will have to grapple with these challenges.

Equitable access to education and training

This is citizens' linchpin in linking support for market-based and social equity approaches: accessible, affordable education is essential to fight poverty and social exclusion and to achieve a productive, innovative and competitive economy. Clearly there is a gap between current reality and citizens' vision. New policies are needed to achieve greater equality of access to post-secondary education and reduce inequality of opportunity.

A working society with a living wage

Again, citizens' vision and reality are not in sync – too many Canadians work full-time and yet are still in or close to poverty and exclusion. Citizens agreed on the problem and argued for a variety of remedies: increases to minimum wages, low wage supplements, housing supports, child care subsidies, health benefits, etc. Policy and decision-makers need to focus attention on this issue because it is so central to how people marry their support for market-based and social equity policies. There is a need for continued deliberation among citizens and experts on which policy instruments to use to address this inequity.

Community-based, accountable programs

Coordination, collaboration and integration of policies, program design and delivery across government silos is a tall order for policy-makers, especially given that citizens are also looking for flexibility to tailor programs to address local needs and opportunities. Creativity and innovation will be needed to balance these two drivers: greater efficiencies and policy coherence and responsiveness to specific community circumstances.

Distinctive social programs coexisting with growing continental and global integration

Notwithstanding their appreciation for the economic benefits of Canada's close economic relations with the United States, citizens demand that governments chart an independent course on social policies. Decision-makers will need to be mindful of citizens' insistence on maintaining independence in this policy sphere while citizens must be prepared to provide clear direction and make tradeoffs when they arise.

While citizens do not bring policy and technical expertise, obviously needed to create the blueprints, they do know what they want the completed building to be used for and what it should like. It is, at the end of the day, their building and who better to have a say in its dimensions and purposes than the owners.