



Citizen Engagement: A Vital Tool for Public Policy

Public Sector Executives Network

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Outline

- CPRN and the Public Involvement Network
- Citizen engagement: what is it and why bother?
- CPRN & selective Canadian examples
- International examples
- Challenges and opportunities for the public service



Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN)

- Non-profit national policy think tank (1995)
- Mission: to create knowledge and lead public debate/dialogue on social and economic issues of importance to Canadians
- Seeks to create a more just, prosperous and caring society
- 4 Networks: Family, Work, Health and Public Involvement



Defining Citizen Engagement in Policy

- OECD Definition (2001)

“Active participation recognizes the capacity of citizens to discuss and generate policy options independently. It requires governments to share in agenda-setting and to ensure that policy proposals generated jointly will be taken into account in reaching a final decision.”



Citizen Engagement and 21st Century Democracy

- Updating representative democracy
 - Deliberative democracy (Lukensmeyer, 2004, Barber, 1995; Cameron, 2002)
 - Citizen at the centre
 - Voting is necessary but not sufficient
 - Need for public judgment (Yankelovich, 1991)
 - Importance of social capital, social cohesion and civil society (Putnam 1995, 1998; Jenson, 1996, 1998)



Consultation < Citizen Engagement

- Public participation continuum: inform → consult → involve → collaborate → → empower (IAP2)
- Passive → reactive → participative → empowerment → leadership (Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement)
- Consultations: typically expert-focused, bilateral
 - Polling/Focus groups: top of mind opinion, little opportunity for learning
- Engagement: interactive social learning, citizen-focused, collective wisdom
 - Shared power, mutual respect and reciprocity



Attributes of Citizen Engagement

- Participate as individuals and as groups
- Initiated by citizens, governments or intermediaries
- Exchange of views, deliberation, learning
- Information provided and responsibility to inform themselves
- Open, inclusive and respectful process
- Long enough for deliberation, more than one-time event
- Accountable and transparent (*Abele et al, 1998*)



Why Engage Citizens?

1. Disconnect between citizens and government/public institutions
 - Declining trust, fewer voting
 - Demands for greater accountability
 - More educated, less deferential
2. Citizens' input needed – along with technical experts and stakeholders
3. Legitimacy and sustainability of policy and programs depend on 'fit' with citizens' values



Benefits of Citizen Engagement

- Creates more **trust** between citizens and governments
 - Better public policies
- Builds **knowledge** / **understanding** of complexity of public issues and choices
- Supports **mutuality** and **co-operative** relationships
- Encourages **shared accountability** for action
- Advances **civic literacy**



When to Engage Citizens

- On cross-cutting issues of significance
- Opportunity to influence the outcome
- Need for new directions, find consensus, identify trade-offs
- Throughout the policy cycle
 - Issue identification through to evaluation
 - Policy and program design and implementation



Requirements for Citizen Engagement

- Governments commit to:
 - Relationship building (citizens with citizens; citizens with government)
 - Clear expectations for learning and contribution
 - Opportunities for learning and collaboration
 - Info to fill gaps in public understanding
 - Resources and realistic timeframes
 - Funds / support for civic activities to enable participation
 - Sharing power and agenda setting



Political Considerations

- Will to nurture a culture of civic engagement
 - Space for citizens to develop/exercise citizenship capacities
 - Citizens more likely to change behaviour and accept change when involved in determining priorities/making tradeoffs
- Political courage to promote open-ended discussion, prepared for surprises
- Decisions for the longer-term
- Withstand criticism from Opposition and media



Citizen Responsibilities

- Citizens must be prepared to:
 - Take a public interest perspective & listen to other points of view
 - Respect roles
 - Devote time and thought
 - Deliberate on tough choices and trade-offs (not a wish list)
 - Support policies and act on commitments



CPRN Citizen Engagement Experience

- Experiments in 1990s with informal engagement (Values, QOLIP)
- Since 2001, four Citizens' Dialogues
 - Random selection, representative samples
 - Structured but open-ended conversations to surface values and set directions
 - Rigorous research standards
- Transformative effects – empowering, enabling and mobilizing participants



Recent Dialogues

- Citizens' Dialogue on the Long-term Management of Used Nuclear Fuel (2004)
- Citizens' Dialogue on the Ontario Budget Strategy 2004-2008 (2004)
- Citizens' Dialogue on Canada's Future (2003)
- Citizens' Dialogue on the Future of Health Care in Canada (2002)



CPRN Deliberative Dialogues

- Build on ChoiceWork Dialogue methodology (Viewpoint Learning Inc.)
- Provide a neutral space for citizens to have a voice
- Support people working through difficult choices
- Experiential learning in group process/diverse views
- Seek to surface common ground while acknowledging differences
- Offer insight into what matters to people and why
 - Values that underlie their choices
 - Acceptable and unacceptable tradeoffs
 - What conditions they impose



Dialogues Surface Values – Define Policy Space

- Values run deep - what people hold most dear
- Societal values define the parameters for public policy
- Consistency with societal values needed for:
 - Legitimacy and sustainability of public policy
 - Defining and making difficult trade-offs
 - Sustained action by citizens to implement policies: key where success required behavioural change at individual, community and societal level



Canadian Experience: Some Examples

5 provincial democratic renewal initiatives:

- New Brunswick Commission on Legislative Democracy
- PEI Commission on Electoral Reform
- British Columbia: Citizens' Assembly
- Ontario Democratic Renewal Secretariat
- Quebec: Estates General → Reform of Democratic Institutions



Canadian Examples cont'd

- BC Citizens' Assembly (2003 – 2005)
 - Outcome: recommendation on electoral reform to form question for referendum in 2005
 - 160 randomly selected citizens draw from ridings
 - Learning phase: 6 alternate weekends
 - Hearing phase: 49 hearings in regions throughout BC
 - Final deliberative phase (fall 2004) leading to Dec. report
 - Legislature to create mechanism for public debate leading to a referendum on the date of the next election: May 17, 2005



Canadian Examples cont'd

- Municipal participatory budgeting processes
 - E.g. Toronto, Ottawa, Guelph, Vancouver
 - CURA Research proposal: Building Community and Government Capacity for Deliberative Local Governance
- Community Health Boards
 - Quebec, Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan legislative mandates to bring citizen input into regional health system planning
- Quality Health Councils in Ontario and Sask.



International Examples

- United Kingdom

UK Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health

- Patient and Public Involvement Forums: legislative mandate

In Service of democracy: consultation on e-democracy

- Audit on Political Engagement

Code of Practice on Consultation (2004)

- 6 consultation criteria mandatory on all consultation documents



International Examples cont'd

Denmark

- Board of Technology
 - Formal annual reports to Parliament on CE processes
 - 'Promote technology debate and public enlightenment concerning the potential and consequences of technology'
- Consensus conferences
 - Lay people deliberate to deliver consensus on selected issues
- Patients' choice and User Boards
- Specially designed processes



International Examples cont'd

Brazil

- Municipal participatory budgeting processes
 - 130 Brazilian cities (1997 – 2000) have adopted various versions
 - Vehicles for citizen education, improvements to infrastructure and services to poor communities, fosters civic discourse
- Brazilian Youth Policies - National Youth and Democracy Dialogue



Citizen Engagement Challenges

- Scepticism about the value and benefits
 - Willingness to accept 'non-expert' knowledge
- Citizens' scepticism about whether their voices will be heard and valued
 - Risk cynicism if not taken seriously
- Fear of outcomes/losing power/making change
 - Status quo is comfortable
 - Democracy is messy and unpredictable



CE Challenges cont'd

- Resources, skills and time required for good engagement
- More research to understand and assess impacts
- Institutional reforms to effect systemic change
 - Scaling up and sustaining engagement
- Political cultural change
- Role of media



Citizens, Parliament and the Public Service

- Need for dialogue on the respective roles of Parliament, Executive and Public Service
 - Collaboration not competition (the same public)
 - Living with complexity: policy making and policy implementation lines blurred
 - Ethics and accountability: unintended consequences
 - Seeking innovation and creativity in serving Canadians



What the Public Service Can Do

- Involve at the outset
- Be clear about purpose of engagement
- Connect participation to action
- Be open to learning & transparent about influence on policy/program
- Undertake research & evaluation
- Commit to relationship building (ongoing)
- Create mechanisms & devote resources for building, collecting and sharing knowledge



Your Wisdom and Vision is Needed!

- What is your vision for citizen-public service engagement?
- What would it look like?
- What would need to happen to make that vision a reality?
- What role would you play?
- Who needs to be involved?



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