Elusive Vision: Collaborative Federalism

Friday, November 19, 2004 – Collaborative federalism – Ottawa and the provinces working together in the best interests of their citizens – is a dream most Canadians can get behind. But it's still largely a dream.

Despite our current knowledge that no one level of government can tackle our thorniest public policy challenges alone, that collaboration is still too rare.

In a paper published in the Spring 2004 edition of *Canadian Public Administration* (Vol. 47 #1), Tom McIntosh, Director of CPRN's Health Network, takes a new look at federal relationships. In ***Intergovernmental Relations, Social Policy and Federal Transfers After Romanow***, McIntosh explores the new and old intergovernmental dynamics around federal transfers to the provinces for health and social policy spending in the aftermath of the Romanow report and the decision to split the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) in two.

The federal government initiated that split (into the Canada Health Transfer and the Canada Social Transfer) unilaterally, though the provinces have now agreed to it. The federal government has also been increasing its own social spending in areas of provincial jurisdiction in recent years. The provinces' response has been to take an increasingly hard line towards Ottawa's unilateral actions, hence the creation of the Council of the Federation and its focus on the so-called fiscal imbalance in the federation.

Such dynamics make the intergovernmental commitment to collaborative federalism ring somewhat hollow. McIntosh argues that the inability of both orders of government to take collaborative federalism and policy interdependence seriously poses significant threats not only to the health of the federation, but also to efforts to create healthy public policy.

You can download a copy of his paper by clicking here.

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Learning from Citizens' Dialogues

Since its inception, CPRN has been a Canadian leader in public involvement. Two years ago, the creation of the Public Involvement Network (PIN) signalled a new commitment by CPRN to help develop the theory and practice of citizen engagement in this country. To date we have undertaken five citizens' dialogues using a deliberative methodology: *The Quality of Life in Canada: A Report Card; The Future of Health Care in Canada; A 21st Century Social Contract; The Ontario Pre-Budget Dialogue, and; The Long-term Management of Used Nuclear Fuel.*

To take full advantage of the lessons those experiences have to offer practitioners and others interested in the field of deliberative dialogue, the PIN hosted a roundtable in May of this year with the ten facilitators and note takers from the two most recent dialogues.

The goals of the roundtable were to;

- Review the dialogue process and identify what worked well and areas for improvement;
- Explore lessons learned in framing complex and/or technical/scientific issues for public dialogue;
- Continue to build a community of practice, or network, of deliberative dialogue practitioners to share and expand knowledge.

The report on those discussions covers topics such as the benefits from dialogue for participants, clients and the political process, the challenges of handling complex technical issues, and how best to prepare participants to tackle such difficult questions.

You can access or download a copy of the ***Report on CPRN's Dialogue Process and Methodology Roundtable, May 27, 2004*** by clicking here.

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