



Judith Maxwell, *President*

## Reaching Out, Connecting the Dots

*“Canadians feel they have less and less voice influencing policy, strategy and decision-making... the shrinking of trust corresponds to a shrinking hopefulness.”* (Centre for Ethical Orientation)

Facts and opinions fly in all directions. People are too busy to read, too busy to attend public meetings. Trust in politicians, in governments, in business leaders has been declining for decades. The airwaves are full of adversarial comment. Yet we lament the quality of public discussion in Canada.

In a knowledge-based society, one would expect more. We have an educated population, a sophisticated media, long-established democratic traditions, a robust civil society, and remarkable penetration of Internet use. So, what is missing?

Other countries face these challenges too. They try to keep the national conversation going through a range of institutions, depending on the political culture. In countries where employers and labour leaders, working together, organize

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

the pension and health insurance systems, private sector leaders are involved in frequent discussions on the state of the nation. Others rely on legislative committees or create advisory commissions to advise on volatile issues such as the size of equalization payments. In others, the media invests heavily in policy content and stimulates daily conversation on important issues. A few governments actually encourage citizens and their representatives to participate in panels or juries to work through difficult ethical and policy choices. Canada has at times used royal commissions for this purpose. Still others rely upon policy institutes to generate new ideas and to stimulate discussion.

The basic ingredients appear to be a) multiple voices independent of and in addition to government, and b) public spaces where important issues can be explored in depth and many voices can be heard. The critical factor seems to be the open competition of ideas in a public arena – a national conversation.

The challenge here in Canada these days is that, while the issues are more complex and the time for reflection is short, policy capacity – inside and outside governments – has been deeply curtailed after an era of fiscal restraint. Government has become more managerial and less policy driven. At the same time, trust and confidence in government has been sliding, heightening demands for open dialogue, greater transparency, and more third-party scrutiny of policy choices.

Canadians are looking for reliable and objective sources of ideas and evidence in a world dominated by strident advocacy and highly partisan debate. They also seek disinterested convenors willing to host the exchange of ideas in a non-threatening environment. I like to think that CPRN offers such a neutral space where diverse ideas can meet and be tested.

*“A policy institute is ‘between government on one hand and universities on the other, but not a formal part of either.’ Their purpose is to ‘bring organized intellectual effort to bear in a timely fashion on complicated questions which are likely to become the subjects of public policy decision.’”*

(Ronald Ritchie, quoted in Manson Singer)

Canadian Policy Research Networks was established in 1994 for the very purpose of stimulating dialogue and debate through evidence-based policy research developed through active engagement across regions, disciplines, sectors and jurisdictions. It was designed to integrate social and economic thinking, with a view to deepening Canadians’ understanding of the human side of the economic agenda. (See The Story of CPRN, on p. 8.) In recent years, we have sought to demonstrate that far from being in conflict, good social policy *is* good economic policy.

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**“Judith, thank you for enlivening the debate on public policy... and for inviting our participation.”**

- Social Worker

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Our task is to address issues at the heart of the social-economic nexus – in the workplace and the labour market, in communities and cities, in the health care system, in families and in citizen-state dialogue. We do this based on good research, careful synthesis and continuous dialogue. We explore policy options *and* the governance required to implement policy. For nothing gets done in this country without a careful look at how decisions are made and who gets to participate in that decision.

We achieve this integration by involving thinkers and actors from many corners of Canadian society in the research process and, second, by engaging unaffiliated Canadians.

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**“You have been a great example to many people on what can be accomplished when you mix together vision, intelligence, and determination. Glad to read that you are still staying as a researcher.”**

- Front-line Worker

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This open and interactive approach to policy research is the CPRN trademark. It begins with the way we determine the research question, continues through the examination and interpretation of results, and ends in our extensive outreach programs. After about 25 public servants and leaders from social agencies working in communities participate with others in the roundtables and phone meetings built into the research process, our job is to communicate the results with their peers living and working in other parts of the country.

We do the outreach in a number of ways. The broadest coverage is achieved through our Web site, and the 5,000 subscribers who receive weekly updates on our activities through *e-network*. And because our subscribers are in turn connected to so many other people, the announcement of a new study on *e-network* can result in 30,000 downloads in less than a month. This is a best seller! At annual rates, this one institute is currently generating over 1 million downloads.

Other aspects of the outreach effort are more targeted – briefings for government officials across Canada, public speeches, participation in conferences, advisory committees and so on. In our *Cities and Communities* theme, Neil Bradford (a Research Fellow from the University of Western Ontario) and others have met with community groups across Ontario and in a number of other provinces. These face to face discussions are remarkable learning experiences for both the researchers like Neil and the community leaders. What they have in common is their desire to help make Canada a more just, prosperous and caring society.

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**"My memories of you and your work go back to the time when I first started working. You were always an icon for me. I read your reports with great anticipation and great interest."**

- Corporate Executive

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Our Public Involvement Network, through its citizens' dialogues, has demonstrated new ways of drawing Canadians across the country into the policy process, on the assumption not only that they are eager to take part and have much to offer but that effective policy cannot happen without their input. This year, our primary focus has been on a dialogue with young adults, most of who feel excluded from the public realm – only 30 percent bothered to vote in the 2004 election.

What CPRN has created is a series of public spaces where people take off their official hats so they can engage in a thoughtful exchange of ideas with fellow citizens from other domains – social, government, business, labour and academic. The clash of ideas and the identification of common ground are the key ingredients for good policy research leading to sensible policy options. This, I believe, is a public good. It is something we jointly create that serves the interests of many citizens.

The word "networks" in our name underlines the importance we place on building the vital relationships that link researchers with policymakers, practitioners, community activists, and citizens. We see those relationships, part of our "social capital," as a critical productive factor and key to our resiliency as a society. A successful, sustainable society is one inclusive enough to integrate all its constituents into a web of relationships around the challenges of their daily lives.

Of course, creating and sustaining public spaces and public goods presents a further challenge – how to pay for them. And that is why they are so scarce in this day and age.

The typical response is that if all benefit, then all should pay. And they can pay through their taxes or through direct contributions. At CPRN, we depend on both.

The organization has been sustained by federal grants since the beginning. Performance has been reviewed twice – in 1999 and 2005. Both evaluation reports have given us a good report card, while showing new insights and where there is room for improvement (and both are accessible from our Web site). We are pleased to report that the grant has just been renewed until March 2010.

We depend, too, on gifts and contributions from other actors who believe in what we do – foundations, non-profits, businesses, labour unions, and many individuals (see the list on p. 37). We are grateful for this support, and strive every day to make the best possible use of the funds available. We also strive to earn more support.

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**"Let me offer you my sincere congratulations for CPRN's record of success. In the decade since its founding, your organization has earned a reputation as one of Canada's leading sources of high quality, evidence-based policy research. I can attest, first hand, to the influence of your publications on policy development across the civil service."**

- Senior Federal Manager

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## The Way Forward

As Ron Ritchie pointed out in the quote earlier, a policy institute has to stay ahead of the policy agenda, anticipating what the big issues will be and preparing the knowledge base needed to resolve those issues when the time comes. Looking ahead for the next few years, CPRN has identified five big, crosscutting themes (see Research Themes for 2006-2010, p. 6) to guide the research program. All four Networks will contribute to the achievement of this research agenda, which we will address in collaboration with research partners in government, community and the non-profit sector.

We think it is an exciting agenda and everyone on the team is gearing up to be the best we can be.



**Senior Management, from left to right, back row:** *Cynthia Williams, Ron Saunders, David Hay, Mary Pat MacKinnon, Peter Puxley, Tom McIntosh.*  
**Front row:** *Al MacKay and Judith Maxwell.*

## CPRN Attribute Ratings

	1 (VERY LOW)	2	3	4	5 (VERY HIGH)	MEAN RATING
Relevance	0.3%	1.3%	11.6%	44.3%	42.5%	4.3
Overall quality	0.3%	0.3%	7.3%	56.2%	36.0%	4.3
Ease of accessing research reports/information	0.7%	2.6%	14.4%	44.0%	38.4%	4.2
Understandable to readers	0.3%	1.1%	12.0%	55.0%	31.7%	4.2
Thoroughness/comprehensiveness	0.1%	1.1%	14.0%	56.2%	28.6%	4.1
Academic standards/rigour	0.1%	0.8%	16.0%	56.5%	26.5%	4.1
Provides new perspectives/insights	0.8%	2.3%	21.8%	49.7%	25.3%	4.0
Objectivity	0.5%	1.7%	18.0%	59.4%	20.3%	4.0

Based on attribute rating of 1 (very low) to 5 (very high).

Source: Survey of CPRN Users, Evaluation of the Federal Grant Provided to the Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc., Social Development Canada.

### *Research Themes for 2006-2010*

Over the next few years, working with our research partners, the following policy themes will guide the programs of CPRN's four research networks.

#### *Implications for Canada of an ageing society, such as:*

- Changes in labour markets and workplaces,
- Retirement transitions, and
- Families and caregiving.

#### *Re-examine the policy principles of the Canadian social model:*

- Policies for social protection,
- New models of delivering health and social services, and
- Effective pathways to learning and work.

#### *Explore the links between social and economic policies:*

- Healthy workplaces, health human resource planning and job quality,
- Early childhood development, and
- Healthy communities.

#### *Strengthen governance and accountability in public life:*

- In health and social care systems,
- In federal-provincial-city relationships.

#### *Build a healthy democracy and strengthen citizenship by:*

- Encouraging all Canadians, especially youth, to participate in public life as full citizens,
- Creating the neutral spaces for policy dialogue among Canadians and between Canadians and their leader, and
- Living well with diversity.

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"Congratulations on your tenth Annual Report. You appear to be doing excellent work on topics close to our hearts. Just a note to say 'Well done!'"

- Think-tank President

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**"CPRN's research is viewed as high quality and objective by those accessing the material. Approximately 92% of online survey users responding (n=907) rated the overall quality of CPRN's research and information as high or very high, and 83% rated CPRN's academic standards or rigour as high or very high."**

Source: Social Development Canada.  
External Evaluation of CPRN, 2005.

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"CPRN provides valuable information to our agency in a wide range of areas, from governance to public policy and economic trends. Working together with CPRN on issues that have a national impact is of great importance to me."

- Federal Agency President

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## *Passing the Torch*

At the end of the year, CPRN will have a new leader. I will become a part-time Research Fellow, after 11 years as President. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to all those who have invested their time, money and energy in this enterprise. CPRN is unquestionably the peak experience of my long career, but it is not the end. As I shift gears, I will turn my attention to writing and research. CPRN will remain close to my heart in coming years. Au revoir.



## References

Centre for Ethical Organization. 2003. *Aiming High: Renewing Trust in a Time of Suspicion*. Toronto.

Manson-Singer, Sharon. 1996. "Think Tanks: Annotated Bibliography with an Emphasis on the 1990's." Mimeo. Centre for Research on Economic and Social Policy. University of British Columbia.



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"I was especially pleased to see sustainability emphasized by CPRN. As you note, Canadian public policy must be evidence-based and must contribute to achieving the multiple bottom lines of Canadian communities – the social, political, economic, cultural as well as environmental."

- Federal Cabinet Minister

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## The Story of CPRN

Policy innovation in Canada goes in long cycles. In the 1960s, federal and provincial governments together filled the gaps in the social safety net. In the 1970s, they struggled with stagflation, with limited success. The period of the mid-1980s to mid-1990s was a time of retrenchment and serious economic reforms – in trade, industrial policy, fiscal and monetary policies. And this time most of them succeeded in putting their economic house in better order. But during that period, social policy was either ignored or treated as a source of cost savings.

Since 1997, innovations in children's policy, higher education and health care have begun to unfold. But much remains to be done to make the most effective use of large provincial and federal social programs, to mobilize communities to build their "soft tissue" and to address the social and economic risks of coming decades.

In 1994, CPRN was founded with the purpose of rebuilding capacity across Canada to address the human side of the public agenda. Our mission is to help make Canada a more just, prosperous and caring society. Our focus is on the public good.

To take advantage of the Internet and to avoid the rigidities of government or academic models of research, we are non-profit. This status allows us to think out-of-the-box, be eclectic and use multiple disciplines to address the challenges. But you need three more ingredients to make a non-profit policy institute work – people (especially researchers with policy skills), money and an audience, including those who participate in the research process.

### INGREDIENT 1: *People*

We have been blessed since the beginning by the creativity and the willingness to take risks shown by our own staff, and by the numerous academics and consultants who work with us (about 40 per year). They are all supported by an amazing team of committed people in IT, contracting, administration, event co-ordination, publishing.

### INGREDIENT 2: *Money*

Funding for this enterprise has come from a series of research alliances with federal and provincial ministries, cities, foundations, corporations and others that were prepared to share the cost and the risk. The federal government has also provided foundational funding in the form of grants established for four to six years. The initial grant has been renewed twice, following an in-depth, independent evaluation of performance. The third grant will take effect in 2006.

### INGREDIENT 3: *Audience and Participation*

Audience has come to us mainly through the Internet. The Web site is now generating 1 million downloads annually – a phenomenal degree of interest for a small think tank. A recent independent survey of our weekly subscribers provided high marks for relevance, quality, and accessibility – always the attributes CPRN strives for.

**Our thanks and praise for every one of these people: staff, researchers, funders, audience and stakeholders. CPRN belongs to you.**

