Chapter VII. Getting Started

This chapter sets out some guidelines and references for planning and executing a citizen engagement initiative. It is not prescriptive but rather, it frames issues as questions to help in the planning process. It is written so as to encourage the adaptation of the materials to particular needs and context.

a) Preparation

1. Determine goals and rationale, plus assess context

To begin with, consider why citizen engagement is an essential component of the envisaged policy or program development process, and identify the purpose of engaging citizens. The goals set at the beginning will inform the remainder of the planning decisions. These goals may evolve as the citizen engagement initiative progresses, but without a clear upfront understanding it will be difficult to keep focused. It is also important to place this initiative within an organizational/departmental context, as well as a broader political and societal context. Conducting a brief “environmental scan” will help. Take the time to sit with team members and decide on the what’s, when’s and why’s.

Consider the spectrum: listening, sharing power and decision-making

As discussed in Chapter II, citizen engagement involves a spectrum of approaches and methods. As shown in Table 3, each level of the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum represents a different degree of power sharing with citizens. Involving citizens requires a genuine commitment to listening to, analyzing with transparency and reporting on what citizens have to say with the purpose of having their input influence and inform the outcomes. It is not about consulting them after a decision has been made. Working at the “empower” end of the spectrum requires a real commitment by the department or organization to do everything possible to implement what citizens decide. Determining what the department or organization is capable of, (at the organizational and broader government or societal level), is essential in order to choose methods and ensure that citizens are not “turned off” by false promises.

If the organization/department is ready to move towards the “empower” side of citizen engagement, the BIAS FREE Framework (available at www.globalforumhealth.org) may be helpful. This framework outlines a process to assist in uncovering the hierarchies at play in a given setting. By uncovering hierarchies, one can begin to see how power affects processes, structures and decisions. This helps us to move beyond these power structures towards a more equitable outcome. While the original document is written specifically for the health research community, the authors state that it can be applied in a wide variety of settings including both policy and programming contexts.
2. **Assessing citizen engagement requirements**

Before starting, it is important to confirm that the necessary conditions are in place to help ensure the success of the proposed citizen engagement project.

**Time**

In the world of politics, timing is of utmost importance. Undertaking an “environmental scan” should identify key periods in the process that require citizen input, and when it will be beneficial to have reports or events to leverage during these times. Expect the process to take longer than expected, and make allowances for this in the timeline. While not all citizen engagement projects are time intensive, working with citizens will usually take longer than consulting experts.

**Resources**

One of the biggest obstacles to citizen engagement is the cost involved in executing the plan. As elaborated in the next section, budget expenses do increase once transportation, compensating for lost work time, building internal capacity in staff, etc., are factored in. So, in this early planning phase, take the time to properly explore the array of different methods (discussed below) and their associated scope, timeline, associated costs, etc. A strong argument for the benefits of citizen engagement (some of which this handbook aims to provide) will be required in the face of competing projects and status quo processes.

Government budget allocations do not routinely provide resources for citizen engagement, which hints toward an under-valuing of citizens’ knowledge. As Philips and Orsini argue, the barriers to funding citizen engagement suggest that there is a need to transform the current political culture if citizen engagement is to flourish.

The range in budgets is wide. Citizen engagement projects can cost anywhere between $5,000 and $2 million! The devil is in the details of the plan – the method chosen, the scale (organizational to federal) and the number of participants – all greatly influence budget.

**Capacity**

Organizations that have chosen to institutionalize citizen engagement will likely need to develop internal capacity. This can present some challenges and opportunities to plan for, such as:

- defining and filling new roles and responsibilities as well as acquiring or adapting skills to execute these roles
- fostering the capacity of decision-makers to genuinely listen to citizens
- incorporating this new source of information as part of the evidence-base with which to inform program and policy decisions.

These will be further discussed below in section b) Designing the process.

**Conditions for success**

The following are overall conditions for success in citizen engagement endeavors that have been adapted from Abelson and Gauvin.
Table 6. Key Conditions for Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Conditions for Success</th>
<th>Questions to Ask</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Representativeness</td>
<td>How will citizens be chosen so that they are representative of the population?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Will impartial facilitators/moderators be chosen? Is a fair process in place to give all involved a chance to participate, not favouring one perspective over another?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early involvement</td>
<td>Will citizens be involved in setting the agenda? Defining the rules of the process? Choosing experts? Defining their need for information?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencing the policy decision</td>
<td>Will priorities or decisions made affect the policy decision? Is there willingness within the organization/department for this to happen? Is there a genuine commitment by the organization/department to the process and its outcomes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing information</td>
<td>Is there a plan/budget to prepare an information package for participants? Will it be verified or tested to ensure that it is clear and easily understood by a broad audience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources accessibility</td>
<td>Have participants been provided with enough time for to inform themselves and to discuss amongst themselves? Has money been provided for transportation, time off work, childcare, etc.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured decision-making</td>
<td>Are the objectives clear, realistic and transparent? How will it be made clear to participants, from the beginning, how the information generated will be used? Has a communication strategy been developed to inform the general public and participants of how citizens will have affected the decision?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Abelson and Gauvin

Some questions to consider:

- How will citizen engagement fulfill the strategic directions and goals of the organization/department?
- What is the vision for the project/initiative and how does it tie into the organization/department’s vision? How is that communicated through this project?
- What is the decision to be made or question to be answered?
- What is the federal/provincial/regional context?
- Are there issues to be aware of (i.e. lobby groups, highly visible or charged issues, connections to other projects, etc.)?
- Do all members of the team understand the spectrum of citizen engagement options and what the choice in method implies for sharing power with citizens? Is there a commitment to implementing the changes that arise from the process?
- Is there adequate time to prepare the citizen engagement project, to carry it all out in time to influence the desired decision? If time is limited, what options and short cuts are possible (e.g. engaging external consultants, modifying components)?
- Are there resources available to carry out the citizen engagement project?
For further reading:
Involve, a UK-based organization dedicated to public participation in policy has a report entitled *The True Costs of Public Participation* available at
www.involve.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=main.viewSection&intSectionID=390.

b) Designing the process

Once it has been decided that citizen engagement is the right strategy, the next stage is to plan the process. The following section is intended to help one think through the necessary steps to design a citizen engagement process.

**Key success factors for design:**

- Create a “mix of mechanisms”. More than one method of participation may be needed to: address issues; accommodate the range of interests and knowledge; and meet public needs and the ability to participate (e.g. location, timing).
- Consult the department’s corporate consultation staff to help coordinate involvement efforts with other parts of the government/department and avoid overburdening participants.
- Conduct a risk assessment of the potential costs (e.g. social, fiscal, political, integrity of institution) that are associated with implementing the public involvement initiative.
- Make relevant, easily understandable information available to participants early through a variety of means.

1. **Developing internal capacity: new roles and responsibilities**

Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC) created an Online Consultation Centre of Expertise (OCCoE) to enhance government capacity for online consultation. In addition to developing a number of helpful resources for online citizen participation, it also elaborated a list of essential roles that are easily transferable to other forms of citizen engagement. These roles can be filled either internally or by an external contractor and some can be combined into one position. These roles are briefly outlined in Table 7.
### Table 7. Roles and Responsibilities to Consider

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role Title</th>
<th>Description of Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convener/Project Manager</td>
<td>• The leader of the process who brings together other players and oversees the process and outcomes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Moderator/Facilitator      | • Ideally an impartial outsider<sup>25</sup>  
• Knows the subject well enough to navigate with ease  
• Orchestrates a process with a group of people towards a commonly agreed-to set of goals  
• Encourages the participation of all those present |
| Subject Matter Expert      | • Provides timely, short term expertise (can be in house or external) and offers in depth knowledge about the breadth of information, consequences and debatable issues of a subject |
| Educator                   | • Acts as an intermediary between the expert and the citizen, distilling complex ideas into clear language  
• Helps experts or decision-makers to clarify their ideas and facilitates face to face discussions  
• Develops information booklets/workbooks for participants |
| Content Manager            | • The “librarian” of knowledge – sorts, categorizes and maps  
• Translates knowledge between different fields/sectors  
• Sets the stage for the Subject Matter Expert |
| Issue Manager              | • Researches, tracks and analyzes the opinions and positions of various stakeholder groups, communities or populations over time  
• Assists in framing the issue to be of relevance to populations of interest  
• Assists in implementation |

Source: Adapted from PWGSC’s *Online Consultation Centre of Expertise Research Compendium (2007).*

**Training staff in citizen engagement**

According to many sources, one of the biggest cultural obstacles to citizen engagement comes from staff and decision-makers’ inability to listen to what citizens have to say. This is a cultural issue that has largely arisen from professionalization and specialization that leads experts to believe that non-experts have nothing or little to contribute (i.e. “What could Joe at the bus stop have to say about a complex policy issue?”).

While it is certainly true that experts have greater technical knowledge than lay people, in the world of politics, decision-making is informed by more than facts; moreover, experts themselves often disagree on facts. Most public policy decisions are underpinned by value assumptions and value choices. Different values lead to different sets of priorities – perspectives are informed by experiences and personal beliefs. While not a content expert, the “lay person” has valuable experiential knowledge to share. Thus, many experts benefit from exposure to and training in citizen engagement, bringing them to an appreciation of the role of citizen input and priorities in a policy process.
For further reading:

Vancouver Coastal Health’s department of Community Engagement has done considerable work in the area of internal capacity building for citizen engagement. To obtain a copy of the workshop outlines, contact sue.davis@vch.ca.

2. Framing the issue in public terms

It is no secret that there is a disconnect between government and the public. One strategy for overcoming this is to “put yourself in the other’s shoes” – no easy task. In order to have the desired participation, the sought input and to meet defined goals, it is essential that the issue is framed in a way that enables a heterogeneous public to engage with the issue. This framing will inform all communications strategies, including publicity material, the information packages provided to participants, the shape of the actual event and the feedback given after the event. It will also influence who attends the event, what kind of options are explored and ultimately, the outcomes. In other words, this is a crucial step in the design process.

Take the following example from Environment Canada, which under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA) is required to consult the public. Here is the title of the first of many public consultations that were taking place during the summer of 2007, which the public was invited to participate in:

Notice of intent to amend the Domestic Substances List to apply the Significant New Activity provisions under subsection 81(3) of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999 to benzenamine, 2,6-dinitro-N,N-dipropyl-4-(trifluoromethyl)-(trifluralin); 1,3,5-triazine-2,4-diamine, 6-chloro-N-ethyl-N'(1-methylethyl)-(atrazine); 1,3-benzenedicarbonitrile, 2,4,5,6-tetrachloro-(chlorothalonil); 1H-indene-1,3(2H)-dione, 2-[(4-chlorophenyl)phenylacetyl]-chlorophacinone; benzene, 1,1'-(2,2,2-trichloroethyl)…

As an intelligent citizen, would you participate in this consultation? Unless one has a PhD in biochemistry, the answer is probably no. While this example is a blatant one, it does point to a fundamental challenge of framing issues in terms the public can understand and thus engage with.

While using appropriate and accessible language is important, it is not enough. Issue framing also requires careful thinking about what information, alternatives and potential solutions are and how they are presented. This is discussed in section 7: Providing credible information to support citizens’ participation.

Here are three options to start thinking about how to frame the issue:

- Test the event title, outreach material and issue framing workbook for clarity and understanding on the target groups.
- Hire a specialist in knowledge translation and/or use plain language to ensure that the intended message is being communicated.
- Involve representatives of the public or specific “publics” in the framing process. The Kettering Foundation (www.kettering.org) and the National Issues Forum (www.nifi.org/discussion_guides/index.aspx) have extensive experience in this area. Their work has
involved the public in both the naming of a problem, along with discussing choices on how to solve it. According to these groups, investing in this work upfront will increase the chances of people being mobilized by 10 times!

For further reading:

3. **Recruitment: random, purposive or self-selective**

There are a wide variety of strategies to recruit people to come to an event. Please consult Chapter V Engaging members of specific populations as a necessary compliment to the following strategies.

Here are some of the most commonly used recruitment methods:

- **Random**: Much like in research, it is important to randomly select a sample of participants (usually with help from professional polling firms) from the target population in order to legitimately extrapolate findings to a broader population. This has the advantage of reaching people that other methods will likely not reach. It may be appropriate to initially over sample hard to reach or specific populations, since their later drop-out rates are higher, and this will ensure more representative data collection.

- **Purposive**: If there is interest in the input of a specific population, it may be most helpful to only do outreach to that community. This can include working with other organizations that have an established relationship with the community of interest.

- **Open**: This is achieved with an open invitation for people to participate in an event(s) – a simple first-come, first-serve concept.

- **Self-selective**: This method can be used in combination with purposive or open recruitment. Participants are selected from those who respond to an open or purposive invitation to create a group that represents the population(s) of interest to the event goals. This is a good alternative to random recruitment for those with a limited budget.

The following questions introduce several issues that need to be considered before choosing a recruitment method:

**What is the scale of the event?** Random recruitment is useful when working at the provincial, federal or large urban level but may not be required at the local or regional level. Open invitation may not be appropriate for a federal event, as it may overwhelm expectations.

**What are the event goals?** Is the goal to reach a conclusion that can be generalized to a population at large? Or is the goal to obtain a broad spectrum of different perceptions from the public?

**What population is being targeted?** If the goal is to hear from the entire population of a given area, then random selection may be a good choice. If the issue at stake is specific to one or a few different populations, then purposive or self-selective may be more appropriate.
Who will be making decisions regarding the issue at stake? A citizen engagement project will be more successful if decision-makers are involved in the planning of an event(s) or even if they simply attend the event(s). Specific invitations to them should be issued and (repeated) follow-ups conducted. Their participation in the event(s) will carry much more weight than if they simply receive a final report.

For further reading:
The Study Circle Resource Center has comprehensive guides targeted at getting a diverse group of people together on a local or community level. It also has a guide on organizing multicultural study circles. www.studycircles.org/en/Page.Organizing.RecruitParticipants.aspx.

4. Logistics: time, place and other considerations

While these two issues may seem obvious, there are some important questions to take into consideration:

- **Physical Space**: Does the department/organization have the physical capacity to accommodate the number of participants targeted? If not, where will the event(s) be held? What will it cost? Can the room(s) be arranged to accommodate the process (e.g. plenary and breakout small group discussions)? Is it a pleasant and comfortable space with windows? Are acoustics and lighting adequate? Is there wall space for flip charts?

- **Access**: Will the desired population be able to access the space, physically, socially and economically? (see Chapter V)

- **Neutrality**: If the event deals with a politically charged issue, has a “neutral” space been chosen that abides by all sides’ needs?

- **Timing**: Has sufficient time for the process been allocated?

- **Language**: Has language translation/interpretation been arranged?

- **Childcare**: Is childcare (or elder care) being offered at the event, or a stipend for those who have young children?

5. Choosing methods to match goals

Form must follow function. The choice of methods must reflect goals, time, budget, the issue at hand and the context. Various methods can be adapted to particular needs and contexts and many can be adapted to an online environment (see the next section). There is no right method to accomplish given goals. As previously discussed, many success factors have to do with the details that are quite independent of the method, such as facilitation, providing balanced information, etc. The following frameworks may help in thinking about which methods match specific goals and circumstances.
Table 8. Framework for Selection of Engagement Techniques

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step in Policy Process</th>
<th>Agenda Setting</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the agency trying to accomplish at this stage?</td>
<td>• Establish the need for a policy reform</td>
<td>• Define the key challenges with an issue</td>
<td>• Evaluate alternative policy proposals</td>
<td>• Establish programs, guidelines, and effective processes to deliver public benefits</td>
<td>• Monitor policy outcomes to determine whether the goals of the policy are being met during implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the rationales for doing public involvement?</td>
<td>• Establish values</td>
<td>• Involve the public in identifying and stating in their terms the problems a policy will address</td>
<td>• Engage the non-expert public in understanding how policy prescriptions will address values, priorities, and outcomes</td>
<td>• Ensure broad public awareness and support of policy</td>
<td>• Ensure policy outcomes meet public goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the key challenges?</td>
<td>• Risk of raising expectations that input will become policy</td>
<td>• Incorporate expert and experience-based knowledge cooperatively</td>
<td>• Ensure that ordinary people who will be impacted by policy are involved</td>
<td>• Communicate process and outcomes broadly</td>
<td>• Develop appropriate accountability mechanisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which engagement techniques might work best?</td>
<td>• Deliberative Poll</td>
<td>• Citizens Jury</td>
<td>• 21st Century Town Meeting</td>
<td>• Public hearing</td>
<td>• Social monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ChoiceWork Dialogue</td>
<td>• Consensus Conference</td>
<td>• Consensus Conference</td>
<td>• Mainstream media</td>
<td>• Scorecards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 21st Century Town Meeting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Which engagement techniques might work best?</td>
<td>• Uses a random scientific sample</td>
<td>• Is cost-effective</td>
<td>• Engages large segments of the population</td>
<td>• Is cost-effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Clarifies values</td>
<td>• Uses a random scientific sample</td>
<td>• Cultivates shared agreement</td>
<td>• Reaches large numbers of citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Quantifies opinion shifts</td>
<td>• Allows for in-depth, technical issues exploration</td>
<td>• Uncovers public priorities</td>
<td>• Engages citizens in their community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Generates media attention</td>
<td>• Incorporates expert views</td>
<td>• Generates media visibility</td>
<td>• Distributes information collection widely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 1 provides one page summaries of a variety of popular methods for citizen engagement and includes a brief description, some strengths, limitations, examples and some key references to obtain more information. The methods listed in Appendix 1 include:

- Citizens juries
- Citizens panels
- Consensus conferences
- Scenario workshops
- Deliberative polls
- Citizens’ dialogue.

For further reading:

The National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation’s website has an excellent search engine for resources that it has compiled from a wide array of different sources. Recommended source for specific information on any one method or for broader discussions of issues: www.thataway.org/exchange.

The Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC) has a Centre for Governance Dialogue with a number of useful toolkits (managerial, operational and theoretical). The Managerial Toolkit has brief descriptions of key citizen engagement methods with references. www.quantumgovernance.ca/toolkit/index.html.

The National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation’s Engagement Streams Framework provides a very useful table with various methods according to primary goal, group size, length of session and participant selection: www.thataway.org/exchange/files/docs/ddStreams1-08.pdf.

Health Canada’s Policy Toolkit for Public Involvement in Decision Making has a table on page 24 entitled “Matching Action to Needs” that pairs methods with the various levels of its framework. The toolkit also provides descriptions of a wide variety of methods. www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/pubs/public-consult/2000decision/index_e.html.

For a comparative table of various methods, including a brief description, strengths, weaknesses, recommendations for use and references see www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook/compareparticipation.pdf.


The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has number of useful documents at www.iap2.org.

6. Consider online citizen engagement

Online consultation and citizen engagement represent the new face of democracy. In the words of Stephen Coleman (p. 5):

> Just as ICTs [information and communication technologies] have had profound effects upon ways that people work, shop, bank, find news and communicate with friends and families, so they will establish new channels to connect citizens to hitherto remote institutions of governance.

27
Coleman argues that the Internet possesses the capacity to renew representative democracy, but that most governments have not realized this full potential. Most governments merely employ ICT to conduct polls and surveys. Very few have sufficiently explored the more challenging potential – that of supporting online public engagement in policy deliberation.

Online forums should try to adapt and build on face-to-face processes, and include introductions, icebreakers, background information and discussions according to the Best Practice recommendations of the Public Works and Government Services Canada’s Online Consultation Centre of Expertise. Most citizen engagement methods can be adapted to an online environment, but this requires much creativity, planning and support. Table 9 presents some of the opportunities and challenges of online citizen engagement (some of which are common to all citizen engagement exercises).

Table 9. Challenges and Opportunities of Online Citizen Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Transparency and speed</td>
<td>• Selection and representation of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased citizen access to information</td>
<td>• The digital divide – determined by age, gender, income and race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased access to public opinion for policy makers</td>
<td>• Information overload (both citizens and solicitors of information)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Potential to increase number of participants</td>
<td>• Asynchronous dialogue leading to less focused conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Institutional scepticism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are a variety of online technologies that can be utilized to reach goals, including email, instant messaging, mailing lists and newsgroups, forms (including surveys and petitions), chat rooms, bulletin boards, online forums, message boards, wikis and weblogs. Choosing the right technology is a matter that must be decided in a given context, keeping in mind budgets, goals and timelines.

For an example of a successful online consultation at the federal level, please refer to the Chapter VIII case example 3. outlining the online citizen engagement conducted by the Canadian House of Commons Sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada also has forums called Policy eDiscussions through which Canadians can discuss and inform current debates (http://geo.international.gc.ca/cip-pic/participate/menu-en.aspx).

For further reading:

7. Providing credible information to support citizens’ participation

To best engage citizens they should have access to key background information and facts, as well as a range of approaches, perspectives and solutions associated with the public issue under discussion. The information should be provided well ahead of time, in accessible, neutral language and format (for the general population, aim for a grade nine comprehension level).

Generally, it is important for participants to receive material in advance. It should include an easy to follow agenda, background information on the issue and several options from different perspectives to consider in thinking about potential solutions. These solutions, as discussed above in the section on framing, are best derived from dialogue/conversations with the public about the issue. The solutions should articulate the pros and cons and trade-offs implicit in each decision. See examples below.

For further reading:

Workbook examples:


The National Issues Forums Institute has a number of Issue Books/Discussion Guides available online at www.nifi.org/discussion_guides/index.aspx.

8. Facilitators/moderators

Facilitators or moderators play a key role in any citizen engagement process. They serve as the conductor, guiding the group through what can be an emotionally demanding albeit fairly structured discussion. Their ability to provide impartial guidance is one key to the success of citizen engagement efforts, as citizens who feel their opinions are not heard will not respect the outcomes of the event.

There are different views about the relative importance of having a facilitator who has expertise on the subject under discussion. If facilitators are very well-informed about an issue, it is likely that they may have well-entrenched opinions, which may make it harder for them to remain scrupulously impartial (this may be particularly the case for facilitators who are tied to the department or organization hosting the event). On the other hand, their knowledge can prove helpful in keeping conversations on track. An alternative is to find a skilled facilitator who is less well-versed in the subject matter to whom information can be provided (see examples listed below).
For further reading:
The International Association of Facilitators is a member based organization with online resources and a database of facilitators: www.iaf-world.org.


CPRN has guidebooks for facilitators of dialogues available online, including Facilitators’ Guide: Citizens’ Dialogue on the Management of Used Nuclear Fuel in Canada. 2004. To obtain a copy, contact info@cprn.org.

9. Planning for evaluation and analysis

Key success factors for evaluation:

- Evaluate and report on participants’ involvement, contributions and conclusions/decisions.
- Provide staff with training and development opportunities on designing, planning and evaluating public involvement exercises.
- Disseminate best practices, methods and tools across the department in order to learn from the experience and enhance the department’s capacity for judgment.

Often evaluation is not addressed until the end of a process when it may be too late to properly capture key information, and analyze/evaluate the valued knowledge that has been generated. Integrating these considerations into the planning process at the outset will save time and frustration at the end, and enable better learning from the process as it is taking place.

The following are elements of a good evaluation practice, as defined by Pruitt and Thomas:

- Clearly define what is to be evaluated: What is to be analyzed based on goals (process, outcomes, impact, outputs, etc.)? What is to be measured/observed?
- Build evaluation into the dialogue process: Has evaluation been adequately planned for, allowing time and resources for the evaluation process?
- Involve participants: How will participants (citizens, politicians, staff, etc.) be involved in the evaluation of the process/outcomes?
- Develop quantitative and qualitative indicators: What data, qualitative and/or quantitative, will capture the learnings from the project? How will project outcomes be recorded based on data needs? Is it necessary to obtain consensus from participants?
- Balance a learning orientation with an outcome orientation: Can the evaluation be designed to provide ongoing learning throughout the project and determine when goals are met?

For further reading:
Involve (UK) has developed a guide called Making a Difference: A guide to evaluating public participation in central government, available at www.involve.org.uk/evaluation/.


10. Reporting to decision-makers and participants

How and what is reported to whom is clearly dependent on the project and the obligations surrounding it. This is an important aspect of transparency, which is part of what distinguishes citizen engagement from consultation. Reporting audiences should include not only funders and decision-makers, but most importantly, participants. Reports should include an overview of the process used as well as outcomes and clearly indicate where in the decision-making process the input fits and what will happen with that input. An example of a report is provided below.

Key success factors for feedback to participants:

- Maintain an ongoing dialogue with participants.
- Inform participants of the findings (when appropriate and possible share draft report with participants for their review) and impacts on proposed policy, legislation, regulation and program changes.
- Provide participants with information on next steps.

It cannot be emphasized enough how important it is to give transparent feedback to participants. Reporting to participants in a transparent fashion is fundamental to the philosophy underpinning citizen engagement. Without it, power can be maintained in the hands of decision-makers, protecting decision-making processes from the scrutiny of citizens. Citizens should know how their participation helped in making a decision. Reporting to citizens means careful consideration of what they will want to know and should be written in a language that they will understand. If more than one event is planned, communicating with participants between events can keep momentum, help link the events and encourage their continued involvement. This is also a great opportunity to thank participants for their time and efforts and to invite them to participate further, if appropriate.

Document projects

While the numbers are growing, there are relatively few well-documented and evaluated cases of citizen engagement publicly available in Canada. Documenting and publicizing citizen engagement projects, complete with successes, challenges and lessons learned, will make an important contribution to learning in this field.

For further reading:


National Issues Forums has a number of resources online, including: A New Report – Public Thinking about Democracy’s Challenge: Reclaiming the Public’s Role. 2006. www.nifi.org/.
Summary of questions to consider for the planning process:

Developing internal capacity:
- Do the other members of the team understand citizen engagement?
- How open are other staff and decision-makers to citizen input?
- Is internal training required?

Framing:
- Have materials been pre-tested on the target populations?
- Is the issue dealt with objectively and in an accessible way?

Recruitment:
- What is the scale of the event?
- What are the goals?
- What population(s) is(are) to be reached?
- What groups have been vocal about the issue and/or who will feel the impact of the decision?

Logistics:
- Have all issues been considered including: timing and timeframe; space for the event; accessibility; neutrality; childcare; etc.

Choosing a method:
- What will the timeline and budget allow for?
- What methods will clearly match goals? Do goals include having citizens generate new ideas and/or having them make deliberate choices about policy or program directions?
- What methods match the organizational vision/mission/goals?
- Is the organization committed to having the citizen input influence and inform the outcome? Is the department/organization able to accept or integrate the decisions or recommendations that emerge from the project? In other words, are false expectations being generated in citizens by virtue of the methods that have been chosen?

Online citizen engagement:
- Is there adequate internal capacity for an online project, or does it need to be built or provided externally?
- What are the reasons for using online citizen engagement? What will it add to the project?
- How will the limitations of the online environment be overcome?
Information to provide participants:

- Who will write the material and for what audience (taking into consideration literacy levels of the target population)?
- What information will be provided to participants and how will framing considerations be implemented in this material?
- How will information be provided to participants (documents sent in mail, website, etc.)?
- Does the material need to be translated, and if so, into what language(s)?

Facilitation:

- Is it important to have a facilitator that is well-informed on the subject matter?
- How important is the perception of neutrality regarding the facilitator?
- If external facilitators are to be hired, how will they be involved in the planning and design of the citizen engagement project?

Evaluation and analysis:

- Has evaluation been adequately planned for, allowing time and resources for the evaluation process? How will the event be recorded? How will consent be obtained from participants?
- What will be analyzed based on the project goals (process, outcomes, impact, outputs, etc.)? What will be measured/observed?
- How will participants (citizens, politicians, staff, etc.) be involved in the evaluation of the process/outcomes?
- What data, qualitative and/or quantitative, will capture learnings from the project? How will project outcomes be recorded based on data needs? Is there the need to obtain consensus from participants?
- Can the evaluation be designed to provide ongoing learning throughout the project and determine when goals are met?

Reporting to decision-makers and participants:

- In what format will participants receive feedback (letter, pamphlet, booklet, etc.)?
- How will feedback be distributed (email, website, mail, etc.)?
- Based on the evaluation or expressed expectations, what might be some key information to include?
- Who will write the feedback, and for what audience (taking literacy levels and language into account)?
- In circumstances where the policy or program outcome will not be known for some time, how best to report back?
c) Implementation

Sufficiently investing in the planning phase of a citizen engagement process will ensure that the implementation flows relatively smoothly. Here are some considerations for ensuring that events run smoothly:

- Set ground rules that will ensure respect, fairness and safety. They can be as simple as: be on time, don’t cut others off when speaking, etc.
- Ensure that staff members (including facilitators) are clear about their supportive roles during the event.
- Give participants: an agenda and clear explanation of the process – why they are here and how they will move forward together; an explanation of the role of all those present; and an idea of how the knowledge generated will be used and reported.
- Where appropriate, have content experts on site to answer questions (under the direction/guidance of the facilitator).

Key success factors for implementation:

- Ensure participants understand the policy development process.
- Be clear on the role of participants and how their views will be considered in the decision-making process.
- Be flexible to accommodate participants’ reasonable new requests relating to process design.
- Allow for and allot time for participants to “vent”. This should be expected and can be viewed as a natural, healthy part of the process. Once completed, participants can move forward in their thinking.
- Timing is key – finding the elusive “just right” timing requires orienting the process to peak opportunities in the political and policy decision-making process.

For further reading:

It is beyond the scope of this handbook to detail all of the many aspects of implementation that may emerge. For those wanting detail on implementation, see related section in Pruitt, Bettye and Philip Thomas. 2007. Democratic Dialogue – A Handbook for Practitioners. Canadian International Development Agency, IDEA, UNDP and GS/OAS. www.idea.int/publications/democratic_dialogue/index.cfm.

Highly recommended websites in addition to CPRN’s:

Canadian Community for Dialogue and Deliberation: www.c2d2.ca.
Involve: www.involve.org.uk.
International Association for Public Participation: www.iap2.org.
Hansard Society: www.hansardsociety.org.uk/.
AmericaSpeaks: www.americaspeaks.org/.