

Engaging citizens for decision making

A summary of

Sheedy, A., MacKinnon, M.P., Pitre, S., & Watling, J. (2008). Handbook on Citizen Engagement: Beyond Consultation. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Policy Research Networks, retrieved from: <http://cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1857&l=en>.



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for Methods and Tools
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des méthodes et outils

How to cite this NCCMT summary:

National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools (2011). *Engaging citizens for decision making*. Hamilton, ON: McMaster University. (Updated 18 September, 2017) Retrieved from <http://www.nccmt.ca/resources/search/86>.

Categories:

Method, Stakeholder analysis and engagement

Date posted:

March 31, 2011

Date updated:

September 18, 2017

Method

Relevance For Public Health

This handbook is relevant for any public health practitioner interested in implementing a citizen engagement initiative to address a public health issue. For instance, this document provides information on the strengths and limitations of different public participation methods, including citizen juries, citizen panels and deliberative polls.

Description

Drawing on work at the Canadian Policy Research Networks, the *Handbook on Citizen Engagement: Beyond Consultation* is a concise reference document on [citizen engagement](#). The aim of this handbook is to close the gap between government and citizens, allowing decision-makers to reconnect with citizens' needs, priorities and values.

Citizen engagement is based on the belief that people should have a say in the decisions that affect their lives. This document is relevant to public servants and politicians in effecting social change from within government.

There are different levels of public involvement in decision making. Moving from more passive to more active forms of public involvement, they include:

1. **Public communication:** information is disseminated from the government to the public. This includes ads, reports, press releases, websites, etc.
2. **Public consultation:** the government asks for public input on a specific policy issue, having provided the public with information on the concern. Public consultation methods include public meetings, public opinion polls, public hearings, focus groups, referenda, etc.
3. **Public participation:** information is exchanged between the public and government, involving dialogue. The purpose of the interaction is to transform the opinions of both parties into informed judgments. Public participation methods include citizen juries, citizens' panels, consensus conferences, deliberative polls, citizens' dialogues, etc.

Citizen engagement has become the 'new' public participation. Its purpose is to replace token participation with more deliberative means of ongoing engagement. Citizen engagement gives greater emphasis to information and power sharing, mutual respect and reciprocity between citizens and their government than do more traditional methods of involving the public in decision making.

Citizen engagement refers to public participation characterized by interactive and iterative deliberation between citizens and government officials to contribute meaningfully to specific public policy decisions in a transparent and accountable manner (Phillips and Orsini, 2002; cited in Health Council of Canada, 2006).

Decision-makers have identified criteria for informed, effective and meaningful public participation as follows:

- clear communication about the purpose of the consultation and its relationship to the larger decision-making process
- identifiable links between the consultation and the decision outcome
- information presented clearly, honestly and with integrity

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- procedural rules that promote power and information sharing among participants and decision-makers
- processes viewed as legitimate by citizens and decision-makers.

This method consists of these sections:

Chapter II: What is Citizen Engagement?
 Chapter III: Why Citizen Engagement?
 Chapter IV: Institutionalizing Citizen Engagement
 Chapter V: Engaging Members of Specific Populations
 Chapter VI: Engaging Aboriginal Communities
 Chapter VII: Getting Started
 Chapter VIII: Case Examples
 Chapter IX: Practical Tips
 Appendix A: An Overview of Public Participation Methods

Implementing the Tool

Who is Involved?

Community development workers, health promotion officers and others who may act as a liaison with different community groups would be involved in delivering this method, in addition to program managers, supervisors and program directors.

Steps for Using Tool

This method contains the following sections, with additional reading for each section.

Chapter II: What is Citizen Engagement?

Citizen engagement emphasizes a sharing of power and information and a mutual respect between government and citizens. It is appropriate at all stages of the policy development process, and serves to infuse citizens' values and priorities throughout the policy process in an iterative manner. The Canadian Policy Research Network's approach to citizen engagement proposes genuine dialogue and reasoned deliberation as a means of generating new and innovative ideas. In the processes of citizen engagement, citizens represent themselves as individuals rather than representing stakeholder groups.

There are three types of citizen engagement frameworks:

1. The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) developed the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum (p. 6-7: www.iap2.org)
2. Vancouver Coastal Health's Community Engagement Framework (p. 8)
3. Health Canada's Public Involvement Continuum (p. 8)

Chapter III: Why Citizen Engagement?

There has been a recent shift from a top-down model of government to horizontal governance, which is the process of governing by public policy networks including public, private and voluntary sector actors. The rationale for this shift is based on the understanding that better decisions are made when the affected stakeholders are involved. The potential benefits of citizen engagement include:

- making legitimate decisions;
- making better policy;
- overcoming polarization, reducing conflict and looking for common ground;
- building competent, responsible citizens;
- engaging citizens in political life; and
- including minorities.

Chapter IV: Institutionalizing Citizen Engagement

Very few governments in Canada have institutionalized citizen engagement, which involves both structural and cultural components. Institutionalization involves citizen engagement becoming a regular part of the policy process and being valued by the public and policy-makers. Four criteria for institutionalization are:

- Public involvement is a core element embedded in the policy process.
- Public input is given substantial weight in policy development processes; it cannot be a token effort.
- The commitment to institutionalized public involvement is government-wide as opposed to concentrated in certain departments.
- The efforts to institutionalize public involvement include the public service and parliament.

Chapter V: Engaging Members of Specific Populations

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Exclusion of specific groups from civic participation due to historical barriers is still evident today. Several categories of exclusion relate to barriers to civic participation (see Table 5 on p. 15). For example:

- cross cutting barriers
- poverty
- ethno-cultural and newly-arrived Canadians
- age
- ability
- gender

Chapter VI: Engaging Aboriginal Communities

There are very strong moral, legal, historical and practical reasons for engaging with Aboriginal communities for decision making in policies and programs that affect their lives. Both cultural and structural roots to the exclusion of Aboriginal peoples need to be addressed. Citizen engagement can advance reconciliation between government and Aboriginal communities. The Government of Saskatchewan has developed a series of principles to guide consultation with Aboriginal communities. Some of these principles are:

- Consider whether government action may adversely affect Treaty or Aboriginal rights when developing new initiatives or changing existing activities.
- Ensure consultations are genuine and conducted with integrity and in good faith with the intent of upholding the honour of the Crown.
- Directly engage Aboriginal peoples in the consultation process.
- Give Aboriginal peoples a say in how the consultation process will unfold.
- Ensure consultation leads to the establishment of respectful and lasting relationships.

Chapter VII: Getting Started

This chapter provides steps for planning and executing a citizen engagement initiative. See questions to guide the planning process on p. 35-36.

A) Preparation

1. *Determine goals and rationale, plus assess context:* listening, sharing power and decision-making
2. *Assessing citizen engagement requirements:* time, resources, capacity, conditions for success.

Some questions to consider include:

- 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?

B) Designing the Process

1. *Developing internal capacity: new roles and responsibilities:* train staff in citizen engagement
2. *Framing the issue in public terms*
3. *Recruitment: random, purposive or self-selective*
4. *Logistics: time, place and other considerations*
5. *Choosing methods to match goals:* Framework for selection of engagement techniques (p. 29)
6. *Consider online citizen engagement*
7. *Provide credible information to support citizens' participation*
8. *Facilitators/moderators of the citizen engagement process*
9. *Planning for evaluation and analysis*
10. *Reporting to decision-makers and participants*

C) Implementation

1. *Key success factors for implementation*

Chapter VIII: Case Examples

1. *Vancouver Coastal Health's Community Health Advisory Committees*
2. *The Romanow Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada*
3. *The Subcommittee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities*
4. *Toronto Community Housing Corporation's Tenant Participation System*
5. *Ontario Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform*

Chapter IX: Practical Tips

The Canadian Community on Dialogue and Deliberation (www.c2d2.ca) provides opportunities for practitioners to share their experiences in citizen engagement.

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Appendix A: An Overview of Public Participation Methods

A summary on these public participation methods:

- citizen juries (p. 49)
- citizen panels (p. 50)
- consensus conferences (p. 51)
- scenario workshops (p. 52)
- deliberative polls (p. 53)
- citizens' dialogues (p. 54)

Evaluation and Measurement Characteristics

Evaluation

Information not available

Validity

Not applicable

Reliability

Not applicable

Methodological Rating



Not applicable

Tool Development

Developers

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Method of Development

This handbook was developed from a comprehensive literature scan on citizen engagement and public participation in Canada conducted in 2006 by the Canadian Policy Research Networks. This literature scan is the basis of the document *A Learning Guide to Public Involvement in Canada*, which led to conducting key informant interviews for this handbook, *Handbook on Citizen Engagement: Beyond Consultation*.

Release Date

2008

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Resources

Title of Primary Resource	Handbook on Citizen Engagement: Beyond Consultation
File Attachment	None
Web-link	http://cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1857&l=en
Reference	Sheedy, A., MacKinnon, M.P., Pitre, S., & Watling, J. (2008). <i>Handbook on Citizen Engagement: Beyond Consultation</i> . Ottawa, ON: Canadian Policy Research Networks, retrieved from: http://cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1857&l=en .
Type of Material	Handbook
Format	On-line Access
Cost to Access	
Language	English
Conditions for Use	Copyright © 2008 Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc.

Title of Supplementary Resource	Primer on Public Involvement
File Attachment	None
Web-link	http://www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?l=en&doc=1519
Reference	Health Council of Canada (2006). <i>Primer on Public Involvement</i> . Toronto, ON: Health Council of Canada. Retrieved from: http://www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?l=en&doc=1519
Type of Material	Report
Format	On-line Access
Cost to Access	
Language	English, French
Conditions for Use	Copyright © 2005 Health Council of Canada

Title of Supplementary Resource	Towards More Meaningful, Informed and Effective Public Consultation
File Attachment	None
Web-link	http://www.chsrf.ca/publicationsandresources/researchreports/opengrantscompetition/04-02-01/4895b6ca-2142-46ac-ab92-cbc76bfa089c.aspx
Reference	Abelson, J., Forest, P.G., Casebeer, A., Mackean, G., et al. (2004). <i>Towards More Meaningful, Informed and Effective Public Consultation</i> . Ottawa, ON: Canadian Health Services Research Foundation. Retrieved from: http://www.chsrf.ca/publicationsandresources/researchreports/opengrantscompetition/04-02-01/4895b6ca-2142-46ac-ab92-cbc76bfa089c.aspx
Type of Material	Report
Format	On-line Access
Cost to Access	
Language	English
Conditions for Use	Not specified

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