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Chris Murray, City Manager, Hamilton



DON LENIHAN
Rescuing Policy
The case for public engagement



Public Policy Forum
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David Eaves, Blogger and Public Policy Entrepreneur

About the Author

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Rescuing Policy

The Case for Public Engagement

Don Lenihan

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Public Policy Forum

Building Better Government

The Public Policy Forum is an independent, not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of government in Canada through enhanced dialogue among the public, private and voluntary sectors. The Forum's members, drawn from business, federal, provincial and territorial governments, the voluntary sector and organized labour, share a belief that an efficient and effective public service is important in ensuring Canada's competitiveness abroad and quality of life at home.

Established in 1987, the Forum has earned a reputation as a trusted, non-partisan facilitator, capable of bringing together a wide range of stake-holders in productive dialogue. Its research program provides a neutral base to inform collective decision making. By promoting information-sharing and greater links between governments and other sectors, the Forum helps ensure public policy in our country is dynamic, coordinated and responsive to future challenges and opportunities.

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Foreword

By David Mitchell, President & CEO
Canada's Public Policy Forum

It's difficult to ignore the democratic soul-searching going on today. We're living through a time when the role of the state in the lives of citizens is being re-evaluated on a global scale. And while this has been accelerated by economic uncertainty and the efforts of governments to address fiscal pressures and new realities, changing attitudes preceded the downturn of the past few years. Indeed, generational change, the growing influence of social media and a deepening disenchantment with the established order have been incrementally eroding trust in institutions for more than a decade now. This has manifested itself in a myriad of ways in Canada, including large numbers of citizens turning their backs on government and the democratic process.

Yet we know that for big issues—such as the economy, climate change, poverty, innovation and health care—we still look to government for help and solutions. The problem, of course, is that governments don't have all the answers and can't solve these problems on their own. More than ever, partnerships and collaboration are required. And this is where public engagement becomes important.

Unfortunately, the old style of public engagement is also part of the problem. I'm referring to the well-worn practice of governments staging stilted stakeholder consultations with citizens that include the usual suspects and interest groups trotting out their often predictable positions and tired advocacy to bored elected representatives and public officials who have likely heard it all before. This is actually the opposite of engagement and effectively serves to turn off and squeeze out those citizens who genuinely wish to participate in a policy dialogue. And too often, that's where it ends.

However, that's not to deny an appetite among members of the public to engage; it's simply an indication that we require new ways to support them doing so.

At the Public Policy Forum, we have gathered thousands of individuals over the past few years in every region of Canada. In conferences, workshops and small roundtable discussions, we've probed issues of governance and policy on matters as diverse as generational change, leadership, productivity, health policy, the future of media, immigration, energy, education and social innovation. In virtually every instance, the need for public engagement has been raised. It's clear to me that there's both a desire for new and imaginative ways to solicit citizen input on matters of public policy, as well as a recognition that public engagement is one of the profound challenges of our times.

Fortunately, Don Lenihan has been applying his considerable energies and intellect to this challenge. Based upon his experience in the dynamic political laboratory of New Brunswick, his ongoing work with most senior-level Canadian governments and our emerging work at the municipal level, and complemented by a prospective pilot project in Australia, there's strong evidence that a fresh approach to public engagement can work. The Public Engagement Project, which Don leads, is based upon an insightful theoretical framework, and is informed by practical application and the professional experience of numerous public servants. At essence, this groundbreaking work demonstrates that it's insufficient for citizens to simply express their views to governments. Even on the rare occasions when authentic forums for such consultations are available, this isn't enough. Don argues persuasively that the public can and should also be involved in deliberations with government, helping to identify the best policy options. And he goes even further, suggesting that in some instances the public should also be seen as a partner in helping to implement chosen policy directions.

This framework is based upon sound principles and offers great promise for a new compact between governments and citizens. It also points toward a practical way to accommodate public expectations in a new policy environment. In fact, one of the great benefits of public engagement for elected representatives and public servants is the implied shared accountability for action and the delivery of services to communities.

It would be a mistake, in my view, to seize upon this innovative model only because of the current state of public finances. While I believe it's true that, in an age of austerity, public engagement can provide a cost-effective way to deliver government services, this should not be the sole reason to embrace such an approach. Rather, public engagement should be seen as a way to rebuild trust by developing public policy in a genuinely collaborative fashion. And, as Don Lenihan points out, the connections between policy development and service delivery are inextricable.

Public engagement may have its most direct application at the level of local government; however, there is little doubt that it can and should be scalable on a regional and even national basis. Most important is the democratic dialogue that it implies, engaging not only citizens, but also the public service and politicians in new and exciting ways. In fact, it's not going too far to suggest that public engagement holds the key to revitalizing our democracy and making our institutions of government more relevant to an emerging generation.

This is a book for our times. *Rescuing Policy: The Case for Public Engagement* clearly articulates a framework for collaborative governance, offering a vision for how governments can move forward more confidently in partnership with the broader community. This is, of course, an idealistic vision. And I believe that, more than ever, we need to make room for idealism in politics and public policy. Ultimately, that's the promise of public engagement.

Preface

In 2009, Canada's Public Policy Forum launched the Public Engagement Project to explore new ways of thinking about how governments, stakeholders, communities and ordinary citizens can work together—collaborate—to find and implement solutions to complex problems, such as climate change, poor public health or the failure to innovate.

The project involved seven provincial/territorial governments—British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Nunavut—the Canada School of Public Service, the City of Hamilton and the Government of Australia. It established an online dialogue with more than 500 officials from participating governments, and held some 30 workshops across Canada and in Australia. In addition, the project drew on several innovative projects, three of which are discussed at length in this book: the Canadian Sport Policy Renewal Process, Australia's Community Engagement Project and New Brunswick's Poverty Reduction Initiative.

This book is the final report of the Public Engagement Project.¹ When I began writing it, I was torn between two quite different versions—one short, one longer. The longer one would be for a more informed and specialized audience—largely public servants who are familiar with public engagement, generally disposed to believe in it, and the most likely people to read a book about it.

1 This is the third work on public engagement that I have authored or co-authored in the last five years and is meant to consolidate and complete the work begun in the first two. The first one, *Progressive Governance for Canadians: What You Need to Know* (2007), was co-authored with John Milloy, Graham Fox and Tim Barber. The second one, *It's More Than Talk: Listen, Learn and Act* (2008) was my final report to the Government of New Brunswick after serving for a year as the government's adviser on public engagement. Both documents can be downloaded, free of charge, from the Public Policy Forum website at www.ppforum.ca

The short version would be aimed at a broader audience, including public servants, but also political people, journalists, academics and members of the business community. Many of these people don't know much about public engagement or, worse, think they do, but have quite antiquated or even misinformed views about it.

If public engagement is to succeed, we all need a clearer, shared understanding of the subject. I concluded that a book that explains not only what public engagement is, but why we need it and how it can work, might make an important contribution, so that is the book I decided to write.

My goal was to make a compelling case for public engagement, to do so in a non-technical style, and to keep the book short enough that it could be read in a single sitting. This has proved to be a challenging task. Writing a short book, it is said, is harder than writing a long one, and I now believe this to be so. How well I've succeeded I leave to the reader to judge.

There is more: the book is also a polemic of sorts. It takes an uncompromising stand on what might be seen as a very controversial issue. But this is not an ideological or partisan disagreement over a public policy issue. It is a principled disagreement over the kind of government we need for the future.

The same circumstances that lead me to argue for public engagement are leading many political strategists to opt for a much more transactional approach to politics and policy-making, something we can call "the consumer model" of politics.

In this approach, political parties avoid what I call Big Ideas and instead offer smaller, more easily deliverable benefits, such as special tax breaks or regulatory changes, to targeted groups in exchange for their support.

These measures are then clustered around broad market-tested themes, such as cracking down on crime, managing the economy, promoting national security or rolling back big government.

Unfortunately, overreliance on the consumer model leads to three troubling consequences:

- Big issues like climate change or poverty reduction are increasingly ignored;
- Winning elections, rather than promoting the public good, becomes the driving force behind policy-making; and
- Political parties are increasingly dominated by professionals with high levels of expertise in public opinion research, marketing and communications, who see the grassroots members of the party as an obstacle to designing a platform that can win an election.

Chapter 1 has much to say about why political parties of all stripes are finding consumer politics attractive and why it, in turn, threatens to produce these results. The main task in that chapter is to position public engagement as an alternative to consumer politics. Chapters 2 to 6 then develop public engagement as an alternative. The basic argument is that complexity is the public issue of our times and the solution is to make the policy process more collaborative. Public engagement provides a sound methodology for achieving this goal. Chapters 7 and 8 return to the issues raised by the consumer model in Chapter 1 and consider how we can put public engagement to work as an alternative.

So, insofar as this book is a polemic, it is about a choice between two approaches to governance. Modern democratic societies like Canada, Australia, the U.S. and the U.K. are coming to a fork in the road, and political parties and citizens will have to decide which way they want to go. Indeed, colleagues who work in the international community have insisted that this fork is equally real in many other countries around the globe. This book proposes and defends public engagement as the only real alternative to the consumer model.

Before concluding, I should add a word about the role of social media in public engagement. If this book has very little to say about such tools, it is not because I think they are unimportant. On the contrary, used well, they could greatly increase the scope and reach of public engagement processes, as well as the range of options available for designing them. I am hopeful about the role they will play in the future.

However, it is important not to put the cart before the horse. Before we talk about how to use social media to enhance public engagement, we need to be clear on the basic approach, the rationale behind it, and the principles on which it rests. That is the task of this book. Once this work has been done, we will be better positioned to move on to the question of how social media might extend, enhance or even transform existing public engagement options.

Finally, let me make it clear from the start that, while the book draws on many people and sources, I alone am responsible for the views expressed in it.

Don Lenihan

Acknowledgements

Many people have contributed to this book—far too many to name them all, but I must try to cover the bases. First, let me single out a few individuals who played a key role, including David Mitchell, who was remarkably patient and encouraging all the way through; my wife, Susan Delacourt, whose inspiring work on the consumer model of politics I have borrowed from freely and extensively; Lynelle Briggs, whose leadership was like a bright star in an often dark sky; Chris Vas for his hard work on the New Brunswick case study; and last, but certainly not least, my splendid editor, Hope Kamin, to whom I owe a huge debt for making a very difficult book as readable as possible. While she can't be blamed for the shortcomings, she has a large share in any of the successes.

On a more general level, let me extend my sincerest thanks to the governments and organizations that participated in the Public Engagement Project, including the Governments of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nunavut, the City of Hamilton and the Government of Australia. Very special thanks to the Canada School of Public Service for its support for this project. I am especially grateful to the members of the Working Group, who participated in our conference calls to discuss and comment on various chapters, and who organized events in their jurisdictions (they are listed in Appendix 3). My warmest regards to our friends in Australia who read parts of the manuscript, sponsored workshops there, and worked so hard to launch a terrific project to test the ideas, and, especially, to John Hennessy for his interest and support. Finally, thanks to all the people who participated in the online dialogue and/or the many workshops across Canada and Australia. I look forward to continuing to work with all of you, as we build the engagement community and move the public engagement agenda forward.

Don Lenihan, November 2011

C h a p t e r 1

Do Big Ideas Still Matter?

Politics in the Age of Complexity

For most of our history, mainstream political parties in Canada have seen themselves as big policy machines. They were the primary vehicles for brokering ideas to solve issues and unite the public around common goals. We can call this the Big Ideas approach. Of course, not all big initiatives have united Canadians. Some have done as much or more to divide them. But, on balance, the approach has served both provinces and the country well.

Some federal examples—of both the good and not-so-good variety—include John A. Macdonald’s National Policy, Wilfrid Laurier’s English-French partnership, John Diefenbaker’s Bill of Rights, Pierre Trudeau’s bilingualism policy and National Energy Policy, and Brian Mulroney’s Meech Lake constitutional accord and Free Trade Agreement. On the provincial side, we could cite Louis Robichaud’s Equal Opportunity Program, Tommy Douglas’ Medicare, and René Lévesque’s Bill 101.

By comparison with the past, political parties today seem increasingly reluctant to propose big ideas. This is especially true at the federal level. Why? In a nutshell, it is a lot harder to broker big ideas than it used to be. Over the last few decades, the complexion, organization and political culture of Western democratic societies has been changing.

We are culturally and ethnically more diverse, less rooted in our communities and more mobile. Globalization has brought new commitments and obligations. The Internet connects people and organizations in innovative ways. Distant events now are often linked, flash around the globe at lightning speed and have changed our view of time and space. And, finally, citizens are more educated and more informed on issues, and correspondingly less willing to defer to leaders who broker backroom deals. Politically speaking, these changes have resulted in two very important trends: growing complexity and interdependence; and growing public expectations around transparency and accountability.

Growing complexity means that policy issues today often can't be solved by a government acting alone. Consider the Conservative Party of Canada's 2005-6 election promise to reduce wait-times in hospital emergency wards. Conservative Leader Stephen Harper said that, if his party won, he would make good on this promise, along with four others:

- Create new accountability legislation, in response to Justice John Gomery's report on the Liberal sponsorship scandal.
- Create tough new legislation to crack down on crime.
- Reduce the good and services tax (GST) to five per cent, from seven.
- Turn the former Liberal government's new child-care program into a direct payment scheme for parents.

Once in power, however, the new government quickly realized that to reduce wait-times it needed the support of provincial governments, professional associations and hospitals. Some of these parties turned out to have different views of the issue and its solution. As a result, progress was slow and, after a series of

disappointing starts, the issue was quietly dropped from the government's agenda.

The Conservatives did deliver on their four other promises, something that was relatively easy by comparison. Three of these promises were focused on changing how government conducts its own business.² Thus legislation was drafted to change the rules on how government interacts with lobbyists (accountability); the government also cut the GST and changed how it delivered support for child care. As for the crime issue, the government delivered various crime bills, although their effectiveness has been the subject of much debate.

In the end, reducing wait-times was the issue that most clearly required the government to project its influence beyond its own boundaries in ways that would change how other people and organizations work. It failed because the government had no authority to compel the others to change, nor did it have an effective plan to persuade them to do so.

The lesson for all political parties that aspire to be governments is that we now live in a multi-stakeholder environment where real solutions often require high levels of collaboration across organizational boundaries. Governments can no longer govern alone, as they once did. This makes it increasingly risky to propose big initiatives. As the Conservatives learned, winning office is no guarantee that a promise can be kept, even a relatively small one.

There is a second, related lesson. The Conservative government also seems to have been unable or unwilling to use its networks to broker or perhaps even force a deal, as it might have done in the past. In today's world, governments do not wield the influence and control over the public they once did. Stakeholders and citizens alike are much more inclined to speak their minds on issues, and

² In fact, passing the necessary legislation required cooperation from other parties in Parliament, as the government was in a minority situation.

to disagree with or even challenge the government. Indeed, traditional methods of putting pressure on stakeholders, or of calling on citizens to heed their leaders, can easily backfire. A striking example is the failed Meech Lake Accord, where the fierce public backlash over the “11 men in suits” (Mulroney and the premiers) making backroom deals sent a clear message to political leaders that this way of making decisions was no longer acceptable, and that the public would not be cajoled or bullied by elites.

More recently, we can look at the 2009 proposed sale of New Brunswick Power to Hydro-Québec. In this case, Premier Shawn Graham made a surprise announcement that his government had decided to negotiate the sale of this provincial asset to Quebec. In the premier’s view, the deal was “too good to refuse.” He argued that the offer was time sensitive and so a decision had to be made quickly. Senior advisers were confident the deal would “sell itself.”

In fact, reaction from members of the public was swift and overwhelmingly negative. Support for the premier and his government plunged. Yet, for the most part, this was not opposition to the deal itself, but to the Premier’s decision to sell the utility without asking them first. Ten years earlier, say his advisers, the public would simply have accepted that it was the premier’s right to make such a decision. Now they insist on being consulted.

There are many such examples, from Canada and elsewhere, but the point should be clear: Backroom deals are increasingly unacceptable. The public expects a higher standard of transparency and accountability in policy-making. The question now is whether this combination of growing complexity, on one hand, and expectations for higher transparency and accountability, on the other, means that governing parties are losing their capacity to undertake big initiatives. Perhaps the Big Ideas approach is a product of different times, when we lived in a simpler, more stable world, with a less educated, more deferential population. If so, what does this say about our future?

The Consumer Model of Politics

The growing complexity of issues and the public's demand for greater transparency are not the only forces that are changing politics. Over the last 30 years, the fields of communications, marketing and public opinion research have grown in size and importance to the point where they now dominate politics. High-ranking party officials are often specialized in, and very skilled at, these arts. This, in turn, has given rise to an attractive alternative to the Big Ideas approach. Instead of brokering big policies to win elections, parties now often try to create smaller, more targeted initiatives that accomplish two things: they please a critical mass of subgroups, and they can be presented as part of an overall package that reflects key trends in public opinion, such as job security, fiscal responsibility or law and order.

We can call this the consumer approach, because it sees governing more as a transaction, not unlike that between a shopkeeper and a customer. Political parties try to give the public what they think it wants in exchange for their votes. Of course, this view of politics as a kind of consumerism is not new. There is a rich literature on it reaching back at least to the 1960s. But something has changed. Today, this approach is backed by a rapidly growing arsenal of new techniques, infrastructure, databases and tools, all of which suggests it is entering a new phase. As Susan Delacourt and Alex Marland observe:

...it's at least useful, for anyone trying to understand the nature of political campaigning in this day and age, to understand how the lessons of business marketing are increasingly being applied to the transactional relationship between politicians and voters...marketing is what happens when the product shapes itself around the consumers' demands—often before it even hits the sales floor or the ad campaign. It's the attempt to give the people what they want, sometimes before they know they want it.³

3 “From sales to marketing: the evolution of the party pitch” by Susan Delacourt and Alex Marland, in *Policy Options*, September 2008.

Today, parties are turning to sophisticated databases to help them segment the population into demographically significant subgroups; they use public opinion research to find out about group preferences; they tailor their policies to appeal to particular subgroups and to conform to broad popular trends; and they use marketing tools to offer these goods back to the public in exchange for their votes.

As a way of doing politics, the consumer approach is much more than an effective way of winning support. It is also a way to avoid the need for backroom deals, and, if the policies are well targeted, to ensure a government can deliver them without multi-stakeholder support—or, at least, with a minimum of such support.

Governing or Winning?

But if the new consumer approach has obvious appeal, there is also a hitch. This kind of politics raises a serious question about a party's leadership: Is there something they really want to achieve as a government or are they just trying to win an election? Consider how differently the goal of winning looks to political parties, depending on whether they see it through the lens of the consumer approach or the Big Ideas approach.

The task of brokering big ideas is closely linked to a party's core values. Thus, Liberals might focus on ways to promote greater equality of opportunity, say, through health care or regional economic development, while Conservatives might focus on policies that support smaller government, such as tax cuts. But brokering big ideas has never been easy. It requires give and take on the part of different groups, which can raise awkward questions about a party's "real values," expose rifts and factions within it or alienate potential supporters it is trying to court—all of which, in turn, can compromise its chances of winning. As a result, political parties have always had to walk a careful line between chasing big ideas and winning elections—between doing what they believe is

right, and what is expedient. But if this need to balance idealism and pragmatism is a fundamental part of real, day-to-day politics, good leaders know that the goal of uniting the population behind big initiatives is the lifeblood that flows through political parties and instills in their members a sense of purpose. Without it, there is no real mission.

With the consumer approach, parties see politics differently. The approach does not aim at building coalitions around values, big ideas and causes. It is not about taking people somewhere, but about finding out what they already want, and then giving it to them. In fact, the consumer model sees big initiatives as a liability, not an asset. They require huge investments of effort, resources and political capital for what are increasingly seen as low and risky returns. In addition, taking firm positions on bigger issues may alienate the very people the party is trying to win over with its more targeted messages and micro-policies. Finally, big issues usually come down on the wrong side of the complexity and transparency issues. Of course, governments can't always sidestep big issues; nevertheless, from the consumer model viewpoint, the general rule stands: Where possible, avoid them. Parties should focus on creating smaller, targeted policies that deliver a plurality of wins, and that hang together as a package that appeals to voter preferences.

So how is the consumer approach changing party politics? As Adam Curtis reveals in his documentary film, *The Century of the Self*, Bill Clinton's first term in office provides a remarkable example of this transformation. Clinton's personal journey not only highlights the basic difference between the old and new thinking, but, in hindsight, his 1996 election campaign appears to have been a turning point for democratic politics generally. It helped established new rules and standards for how electoral politics is done and, as such, is well worth a closer look.⁴

⁴ The following draws heavily on Curtis' account of Clinton's move to consumer politics, which is presented in Episode 4 of *The Century of the Self*, 2002.

When Clinton first appeared on the U.S. stage, he was an adherent of Big Ideas politics, but he was not averse to the use of marketing tools to help shape his ideas and his campaign. In the 1992 election campaign, his team had already taken to testing all their policies in focus group sessions. Strategists like James Carville were pragmatic about these new ways. According to Carville, the team thought the strategy would help them win the election, but there was never any intention of governing by focus group. They would lead with ideas, arguments, evidence and values.

Things did not turn out as expected. No sooner had Clinton taken office than his new government learned it had inherited a \$300 billion deficit. Plans for big spending on new projects vaporized. Instead, Clinton's administration faced a stark choice between cutting spending and raising taxes. Although Clinton knew that cutting spending was by far the more popular option, after some deliberation, he chose to bite the bullet, show leadership and raise taxes. Clinton believed he could rally voters to the view that it was wrong to offload the burden of deficit reduction on the poor and working poor.

In fact, the strategy was a disaster. In the 1994 mid-term elections, the Republicans, led by Newt Gingrich, pounded Clinton relentlessly with their drumbeat of tax relief and smaller government. The middle class evidently liked what it heard and responded by passing control of the Senate and Congress back to the Republicans. It was a clear repudiation of Clinton's leadership. His decision to "do the right thing" may have been bold, humane and a testament to his belief in traditional politics, but it failed to win over the voters. In the past, perhaps the public would have deferred to a charismatic leader like Clinton, but, as we have seen, something has changed. The public is now less willing simply to follow their leaders. Citizens feel they have a right to make their own choices. The tactical brilliance of Gingrich's campaign was that it told them

exactly what they wanted to hear, and then affirmed their right to choose it. It was as though Clinton never saw what hit him.

Following the election, Clinton's prospects for a second term were bleak, at best. Perhaps out of desperation, he set up a secret meeting with Dick Morris, a leading pollster and consumer-politics guru, to ask for help. Morris claims he was blunt with Clinton, saying that he told Clinton that he, Morris, could win Clinton a second term, but only if Clinton agreed to do exactly what he said—something that would require a fundamental change in Clinton's approach to governing.

Step 1, decreed Morris, was for the party/government to scrap any new policy ideas it had. Policy would be built from the ground up, based on public opinion research. Step 2 involved a massive survey to determine the psychological profiles of swing voters. Once the results were in, Step 3 was to create a series of small policy initiatives, which were targeted at subgroups of swing voters, based on these profiles. For example, one group involved parents who were worried about the impact of violence and pornography on their children. In response, Morris repackaged Clinton as a defender of the nuclear family. He dressed the President in military fatigues and sent him out in front of the TV cameras with high-ranking officers to convey strength and affirm his conservative, law-and-order values. He had Clinton declare he would install V-chips in TV receivers to block out pornographic shows, and he got Clinton to promise to install cell phones on school buses to ensure quick communication in the event of danger. With Morris leading the way, the Democrats targeted an array of other groups of swing voters in similar fashion. The strategy paid off, with Clinton easily winning a second term in 1996.

Curtis' account of this remarkable campaign concludes with comments from some of Clinton's most senior advisers, who were less than thrilled by their leader's conversion to consumer politics. Then-Secretary of Labour Robert Reich recalls the tense debates he

and other members of the cabinet had with Clinton over Morris's new direction, and, in particular, his order to scrap their policy ideas. Reich was particularly incensed by this, arguing to Clinton that the reason for getting elected in the first place was so that they would have a mandate to do something. Otherwise, he asked, what was the point of holding office? Clinton, he reports, shot back that the point of politics is to get elected. Without that, he snapped, there is no mandate to do anything.

This exchange pinpoints the difference between Big Ideas politics and the consumer approach. If traditional politics requires that a balance be struck between pursuing goals and winning—between doing what is right and what is expedient—it nevertheless holds that, in the end, ideas, values and causes are why parties exist. Winning may be important, but it is a means to the end, not the end.

Not so for the consumer approach. As Morris rightly maintained, consumer politics is a whole different way of doing—and seeing—politics. In this view, winning is the primary goal. It is also the litmus test of what is the “right” thing to do because winning signals that a party has offered the public what it wants—and that is the ultimate aim of consumer politics.

If this kind of logic sounds both unsettling and familiar, well, perhaps it should. Since Clinton's conversion in 1994, the shift to consumer politics has progressed rapidly in countries around the globe, including Canada.⁵ The signs are increasingly visible. Consider:

- Election platforms have growing lists of micro-policies, designed to please subgroups of voters.
- The culture of the parties is becoming more professional and technocratic, as the task of crafting and marketing policies demands ever-higher levels of technical skill and expertise.

5 Episode 4 of *The Century of the Self* goes on to tell the story of how the consumer approach shaped Tony Blair's views and the rise of New Labour in the U.K. For some observations of how the consumer approach is taking root in Canada, see Delacourt and Marland in *Policy Options*, cited above.

- Party bureaucracies and, by extension, governments are becoming more centralized and controlling, as marketing and communications replace policy debate.
- Big issues are left to fester because of the risks in addressing them.

But this is only the beginning. The big wave, it appears, is yet to come. A whole new generation of tools is coming online, including huge databases, data-mining techniques, and new online tools, practices and skills for marketing and communications. As these tools mature, we are poised for a virtual revolution in policy-making and governance. But is this the revolution we want?

Those who believe politics should be about more than satisfying wants and winning elections should resist—resolutely. Big issues like poverty or low productivity growth are threatening and real. Effective responses to them require effective plans. But such plans are more than packages of micro-policies, based on public opinion research. They are sets of ideas, values and tasks that have been vetted, tested, organized and integrated around a goal. Moreover, in an increasingly interdependent world, such plans can be implemented only with the collaboration of other stakeholders, communities and ordinary citizens. Government can't do the job alone.

To achieve this, a political party that wants to govern effectively must be ready to lead public opinion, not just follow it. But, as we have seen, people today want more room to make their own choices, so the question now is: What kind of leadership and governance is right for this new policy environment?

Simply put, both the leadership and the governance must be more bottom-up, and less top-down. This is not the same thing as Gingrich's clever end-run around Clinton in 1994, when he offered people what they already wanted so they would feel free to choose it. Rather, it means finding new ways to challenge them to work through issues together with government, and to develop a shared plan of action that everyone can implement together. In

short, to lead from the bottom up is to challenge the public to take some ownership of the issues and some real responsibility for solving them. This, in turn, requires a fundamental rethinking of the public policy process as we have known it—which brings us, finally, to the primary task of this book: to provide such a rethinking. Let's begin here with a brief review of how ideas about public policy and policy-making have changed over the last two decades. This sets the stage for a deeper discussion in Chapter 2 of how a more bottom-up, or collaborative, approach would work.

The New Policy Environment

It is now commonplace to view policy from a *holistic* perspective. A striking example is found in work around the determinants of health. When policy experts talked about health 25 years ago, they focused mainly on the role the health system played in curing illness and healing injury. The discussions of the day centred on issues like the availability and quality of doctors, hospitals and pharmaceuticals.

At some point, policy makers began to recognize that the goal of curing illness was largely reactive. Instead of waiting until people were ill before acting, they reasoned, it would be better to put more emphasis on preventing illness and promoting wellness. An ounce of prevention, as the old saying goes, is worth a pound of cure.

This new perspective raised all sorts of questions about what it means to be healthy and its causes: What is the difference between wellness and health? Is wellness more than a physical condition? How is it related to other factors, such as stress in the workplace, cultural background or income levels? Who is responsible for promoting wellness? How should governments marshal their resources to promote it?

Over the last two decades, questions like these have linked the discussion of wellness to discussions of issues in many other policy fields. Analysts have identified how a wide range of social,

cultural, environmental and economic factors interact to influence public health.⁶ Work on these interconnections has fundamentally changed how analysts think about policy issues around health and wellness. For example, there is now a huge body of information and data on the connections between health and income. It shows, for instance, that people with low incomes have higher rates of diabetes.

Two decades later, policy fields that used to be regarded as essentially distinct from public health are routinely seen as closely connected to it in all kinds of ways. Policy analysts refer to this interconnectedness as “complexity,” a term we have already encountered in our discussion. In essence, to say an issue is complex is to say that its causes and solutions involve a variety of links to other policy fields that are often hidden from view and surprising in their origins.

Of course, the holistic turn in policy thinking is not confined to health policy. Issues are now looked at holistically in most policy fields, including education, transportation, national security, training and skills development, economic development and the environment. Moreover, the impact of this shift in thinking is now felt beyond policy; it is pushing political parties and governments to draw some far-reaching conclusions about the policy process itself. Increasingly, *how* policy-makers arrive at ideas—the process—is as important as the ideas themselves.

This is new. The traditional view of policy-making is that it is essentially a search for the best ideas—even the “right” idea—to solve a problem or achieve a public goal. The policy process was designed to help decision-makers test ideas to find the best one.

Consider the issue of poverty. A left-leaning party might argue that poverty is the result of a lack of opportunities for education,

6 These factors include income and social status, social support networks, education, employment and working conditions, social environments, physical environments, biology and genetic endowment, personal health practices and coping skills, healthy child development, health services, gender and culture.

while a right-leaning party might argue that overly generous social programs have created dependency. Public debate is then supposed to test the ideas by letting the two sides fight it out to see who can win the most support. If the education side wins, resources may be channeled into creating new programs for schools. If the tough-love side wins, such programs may be dismantled or scaled back.

Policy-making has been thus a largely *competitive* process that aims at producing winners and losers. The basic assumption is that, in a fair fight, most of the time the best idea will win. Decisions can then be carried out by public servants, operating under the leadership of a minister. In the past, this worked reasonably well. Because issues were less complex they did not require high levels of cooperation with stakeholders, communities or the general public. Government was a relatively self-contained producer of programs and services, and citizens were relatively passive consumers of them.

When it comes to complex issues like poverty today, however, this model is increasingly unworkable for two reasons—complex issues don't respond to simple solutions, and finding and implementing complex solutions requires collaboration, not competition.

To say that poverty is complex is to say that it has multiple causes. These may include a lack of education and/or dependency—the two are hardly exclusive—but they may also include cultural or gender barriers, illness, lack of opportunity, technological change, economic shock, and a range of other things, including causes not yet recognized. Moreover, the particular cluster of causes will be different in different places. Thus the causes of homelessness in Winnipeg, which has a large aboriginal population, are importantly different from those in Vancouver, where the problems are often related to drug use.

Sorting all this out is not a competitive undertaking, but a *collaborative* one. It starts by identifying which causes are at work in which communities. Once that has been done, it goes on to identify

the solutions that are appropriate to each community. Unlike political debate, such a process is deeply collaborative in two ways:

- Government must engage stakeholders and citizens in a dialogue to identify the key causes at play in their community. Such a process taps the community's collective experience by asking its members to explain how poverty is affecting their families, friends, neighborhoods and workplaces, and then "mapping" these causes. Every community is different and such a dialogue is a way of bringing those differences to light.
- The solutions, like the causes, will be complex and must involve the community as a whole, not just government programs and policies. Thus, families may need to support their members in new ways, businesses may need to change how they hire people, and governments may need to redesign programs. Everyone has a role to play. Unless the community as a whole is engaged, they will feel no responsibility to help deliver the solutions.

The consumer model of politics not only discourages this kind of dialogue from happening, it actually prevents it. Rather than drawing on the public's collective experience of the issue, the process is dominated by small groups of political professionals. They market-test different views of the issue, select the one they are best positioned to sell, and then pit it against the opponent's view in a winner-take-all contest. To the victor go the spoils—that is, control over government's resources.

In fact, real solutions to complex issues not only require that stakeholders, citizens and communities be fully involved in the policy process; they require genuine collaboration between governments and the public. Everyone has a role to play. This, in turn, means that a government can't simply declare, say, an anti-poverty strategy and then expect citizens and stakeholders to comply. If it wants them to play ball, it must give them a real and meaningful say in developing the strategy. Collaborative policy-making is as much about building and managing the relationships among all

of the players involved as implementing the right ideas. In short, process matters.

The Impact on Public Services

We should say something here about how the rise of complexity and the holistic turn is affecting public services. Like political parties, public services traditionally played a unique and privileged role in the policy process. Once a political party assumed power, it usually relied on the public service as the main source of its policy ideas. There was a relatively clear division of labour between elected officials, who were the decision-makers, and appointed officials, who provided expert advice in the development and implementation of policy. In the Westminster system, public servants were expected to remain neutral in this task. Their role was to create options, and then advise the government on the risks and opportunities around implementing them. Public servants were not expected to advise government on the political trade-offs this might involve. That discussion was supposed to happen at the cabinet table.

So in the old world the policy process was essentially a search for the best ideas. This search was carried out by professionals, usually working behind closed doors. The options they developed were then presented to the elected officials, who debated them, made the choices and finally announced them to the public.

For many issues, this model of policy-making is no longer viable. In the new policy environment, policy-making must be more open, dynamic and interactive. One consequence is that the process is no longer just a search for the best ideas. A variety of stakeholders will often be involved and they will have different perspectives on, and interests in an issue. As a result, what looks like the best idea to one organization may not look like the best idea to another. Also, because stakeholders are often involved from the very beginning of the process, “political” choices around trade-offs and priorities cannot wait until after the options have been proposed. They will

be part of the policy discussion from the outset. This raises questions about how the public service can provide advice on an emerging policy from a neutral perspective, which, in turn, is putting pressure on public services either to relax their traditional commitment to neutrality or to assume a less influential role in the process. Issues like these pose key questions for the public services of the future. We hope this book sheds new light on them.

Five Principles for Rethinking the Policy Process

The overarching lesson here—and the starting point for this book—is that complexity is a game-changer. The policy process has to become more collaborative. The old policy process was designed for a simpler world, where governments were busy building roads and bridges, regulating basic trade and commerce, and establishing law and order. With the rise of complexity, that approach to policy-making is breaking down. Redesigning and rebuilding the policy process must now become an urgent priority. At least four basic principles of holistic or collaborative policy development can be drawn from what we have said so far, and the effort in this book to redesign the public policy process will start from them and build on them:

1. **Good policy is comprehensive:** Good planning and policy development in major policy fields should be comprehensive, in the sense that it should take important links to other policy fields into account. A new generation of policy goals is emerging that are holistic in nature. They include issues such as wellness, sustainable development and lifelong learning. These are *societal* goals, in the sense that they explicitly recognize that different policy fields, such as the environment and the economy, are deeply interconnected.

2. **Real progress requires public participation:** Societal goals—and the complex problems they present—are bigger than government in the sense that their achievement requires effort and action on the part of stakeholders and citizens. Wellness is a good example. It takes more than good hospitals, well-trained doctors, pharmaceuticals or universal access to the health-care system. Building a healthy community requires an informed and engaged public who are ready, willing and able to take some real responsibility for promoting their own health through, for example, proper nutrition, exercise and work-life balance. In short, the public has a critical role to play in promoting wellness, just as it does in solving a range of other issues, from illiteracy to climate change. In order to meet this condition, holistic policy-making aims to engage the public more fully in all stages of the policy process.
3. **Societal goals require long-term planning:** Societal goals like wellness or sustainable development are long-term goals that require ongoing dialogue, action and adjustment. No single piece of legislation or strategy will achieve them; nor will they be achieved in the usual four-year mandate of a government. The policy process thus must be seen as cyclical, in the sense that it aims at building a close, long-term working relationship between government, stakeholders and citizens, based on evidence, learning, mutual interest and trust.
4. **Every community is different:** Issues that look similar at first glance are often very different just below the surface. As we have indicated, for example, research shows that the profile of homeless people in Winnipeg, Vancouver and Toronto is different. As a result, so are the causes and

solutions of the problem. While this does not mean there is nothing useful to say about homelessness at a provincial or national level, it does mean that good policy-making must allow for real flexibility in solutions and implementation at a variety of levels.

5. **The public have new expectations:** We've already seen that the public's expectations around transparency and accountability have changed. We can add this to the list of four principles, to give us five in all.

Recognition and acceptance of these five principles is growing. Taken together, they combine to form the starting point for the argument in this book that policy must be developed and delivered in a new way—one that rewards governments, stakeholders, communities and ordinary citizens for working together to find shared solutions to complex issues.

And, indeed, a new way of doing policy has been emerging for some time. It responds to issues around the Big Ideas and consumer approaches by rethinking the public policy process to make it more open, inclusive, transparent, accountable, and “bottom-up” or collaborative. We call it **public engagement**, which, in effect, is a process, or methodology, for collaboration. Without some such alternative, we think political parties and governments will simply continue to ramp up their capacity for consumer politics. In Chapter 7 we will revisit this list of the five principles of public engagement to provide a modified and more comprehensive list that can help guide practitioners, as they try to put the theory into practice.

This book starts from the premise that Canadians are approaching a fork in the political road. One path takes us deeper into the technocratic world of political marketing and consumer politics. The other aims at a renewal of the role of ideas, values

and participation in politics through a more collaborative kind of public policy process. Still, we are not proposing an either/or, black-or-white decision. Things are rarely that simple. While we believe public engagement is the basis for a real and appropriate alternative to consumer politics, it doesn't exclude all the tools of consumer politics. Public engagement does not oppose any and all political marketing. It is not against citizens expressing wants or political parties trying to satisfy them. Nor does it deny that political parties should want to win. The challenge is to get these things back into perspective. The real problem with the consumer approach is not that it legitimizes them, but that it reduces politics to little more than this. This, in turn, effectively eliminates the responsibility of political leaders and parties to foster real deliberation or find new ways to deal with complexity.

So if public engagement makes space for consumerism, it does so against the backdrop of a broader understanding of the public interest and of democratic deliberation and citizenship, much as the Big Ideas approach did before it. This puts some real parameters around where and when consumerism is appropriate. By contrast, consumerism alone obscures the bigger picture. It tries to keep the world a simpler place, responding to complexity with slogans and misleading analogies about politics as a business and voters as customers.

In sum, the fork in the road is real and political parties and citizens will have to decide which way they want to go. This book lays out public engagement as the basis for a viable alternative to consumer politics. Its basic argument is this:

Complexity defines the public policy context of our times and the right response is to make the policy process more collaborative. Public engagement provides a sound methodology for achieving this goal. It places a new and powerful tool in our hands for building sustainable, cohesive communities at the local, regional, national and even international levels.⁷

⁷ For the purposes of this book, the term “community” is not restricted to geographical communities. A community is a group of people and/or organizations who are linked together by any of a number of bonds, such as geography, language, culture or a common goal. By the same token, there are different kinds of communities, such as regional ones, ethnic ones or communities of interest.

Complexity and the New Policy Environment: Lessons from the Sport Policy Process

The Canadian Sport Policy Process

In the last chapter, we saw how growing complexity is changing the policy environment. We concluded that to respond effectively governments must rethink the policy process. What does this involve? We can use the Canadian Sport Policy Renewal Process to illustrate how complexity is affecting the policy process and how and why it needs to change.

The Canadian Sport Policy Renewal Process involves the federal government and all 13 provincial and territorial governments, as well as a wide range of stakeholders from the sport community. It is a two-year process to develop a successor to the original policy, which was adopted in 2002. As things stand, the sport community is ambivalent about the new more holistic policy environment, and divided about what it means for their policy-making task. This, in turn, has spawned a far-reaching discussion of the role of policy and has led to some innovative ideas about the policy and how it might be implemented. In order to bring this out, let's start by summing up what we can call the conventional approach to policy-making:

- Set clear goals for the policy.
- Use discussion and debate to narrow down the options for achieving the goals.
- Choose the best option.
- Use the policy to prescribe that option (or key parts of it).

Those leading the Sport Policy Renewal Process realized from the outset that the process could not be a conventional case of policy-making. There were simply too many interests and actors in the sport community to reach agreement on a set of well-defined goals or a path to achieve them. A key challenge comes from what is known as the community-building side of sport, a catch-all term for the many ways that sport makes a contribution to other policy areas, such as public health, immigration, criminal rehabilitation, education or economic development—what we called, in Chapter 1, holistic connections. As the original Sport Policy already recognized in 2002:

Today, sport is widely accepted as a powerful contributor to social and personal development. Nevertheless, the magnitude of sport's influence surprises many Canadians. To develop a comprehensive sport policy and to design actions to make that policy effective, it must be clearly understood that sport's impact and contribution encompasses social and personal development, health and well-being, culture, education, economic development and prosperity, tourism and entertainment.

Evidence for this can be found in the stories people tell about the many ways sport has affected their lives. Thus, in one person's experience, it is a multi-billion dollar industry, while, for another, it is a powerful support for families or community integration, and so on. The sport community contains a complex web of social,

economic and cultural connections, linking people from virtually every part of society.

Although government officials and stakeholders from across the community place a very high value on sport's contribution to community-building, they disagree on what, if anything, a new policy should say about it. Some think the policy should take clear steps to encourage community-building, say, through more partnerships with organizations outside sport. Others feel that, however beneficial, community-building is a by-product of sport and that a new policy should remain focused on sport's central goals.

The stakes here are high. Among other things, a policy will influence how resources in the area are used and where new investments are made. By the same token, it can be a tool to attract new resources or leverage existing ones. The problem, however, is that no one knows for sure how a commitment to promote community-building would play out. Some worry that it might stretch already-limited resources. In this view, a commitment to community-building might burden the community with new responsibilities and costs, which it is not well positioned to meet. Others disagree. They reply that, on the contrary, it would bring new resources and participants into the community and, ultimately, make a significant contribution to the central goals of the policy. In this view, to avoid the community-building question is to miss a huge opportunity for advancing sport's central goals.

When differences of opinion like this arise within a policy community, governments usually try to resolve them through consultation. They invite stakeholders to make their case, listen to their views, and then make a decision based on the evidence. We've already seen (Chapter 1) that this is essentially a competitive process, and that, in a fair fight, the best idea will win. This won't work in the Sport Policy case. The problem is that members of the community do not agree on how to define the problem they are trying

to solve. There are different ways to frame the problem, but doing so automatically advantages one side over the other.

One side argues that the process should focus on clarifying and strengthening the core goals of sport—what we might call its core business. Presumably, this means the consultation would focus on issues around these goals and ask questions about how the policy could help organize the community more tightly around the core business. In keeping with this, government would most likely consult with individuals and organizations that were also focused on these issues. Needless to say, in this scenario, the process would be skewed toward the creation of a policy that encourages the community to stick to its knitting.

The other side wants a more inclusive process; one that would recognize and involve non-traditional voices, such as stakeholders from the health sector or municipalities. Without these voices at the table, they rightly fear that community-building would be ignored, if not suppressed.

Both positions are backed by strong arguments. Those in favour of a more inclusive approach will say it is simply arbitrary for the policy to ignore the links between sport and other policy areas on the grounds that, say, public health is not part of sport's core business. They will see this as a misplaced effort to keep the discussion "focused" by ignoring the growing complexity of the field and, indeed, of our society. But, they will say, the facts speak for themselves. Sport is many things to many people; and it contributes to a wide range of goals, from entertainment and personal fitness to community integration and local economic development. There is no single, authoritative way to define how or why people participate in it or what goals they are seeking to achieve when they do. Thus, while third-generation Canadians may enrol their children in hockey in the hope of producing the next Great One, new Canadians who enrol their children in the same league may

be far less interested in building high-performing athletes, than in getting their kids integrated into their new communities.

Those favouring the core business approach will reply that a sport policy must be more than a junk drawer into which anything and everything can be thrown. To treat everyone's reasons for engaging in sport as equally valid is to risk creating a policy hodge-podge that provides no real direction or guidance to the community. In this view, a key task of policy-making is precisely to make hard choices between goals and options that conflict, and to draw clear boundaries around the enterprise. In the end, some options must win out over others. That, after all, is how policy-making has always been done.

Community-building poses a new kind of challenge to the conventional policy process. It raises questions that go beyond the usual task of identifying core goals and finding the best path to achieve them. It raises questions about the purpose of the policy, what kind of discussion is appropriate to the tasks this poses, and who should be involved. This, in turn, raises questions about the process by which these questions should be answered.⁸

Mapping as an Alternative to Debate

There is a way to deal with this situation, one that finds middle ground between the opposing views. However, it requires a rethinking of the process. Rather than seeing the process as a competitive struggle to find the best solution to a problem, we must see it as a collaborative effort to adjust to the growing complexity of the field. An important step involves what we call mapping the policy space.

We experimented with this approach in one of our sport policy

8 Since this chapter was written, the Public Policy Forum has completed a further engagement process on community-building through sport for the Sport Policy Renewal Process. The results can be found in the report *Community-Building through Sport: Final Report of the Community Perspectives Project*, which is available at <http://www.pforum.ca/engagement-community/documents>

workshops.⁹ At the outset, we asked delegates not to use the meeting to advocate for their preferred view of what sport is or what it should try to achieve. Instead, we asked them to look on one another as a resource, and to see themselves as part of a team of experts whose collective experience was needed to catalogue different views, goals, issues and options around sport; to identify how these things are connected with each other, if at all; and to test the limits of the tensions and opportunities they create. In effect, we asked the participants to use the workshop to explore and describe the policy space around sport rather than to advance their particular interests.

The task of “mapping” the policy space thus replaces debate with dialogue, competition with collaboration. It recognizes that the interests, goals and approaches of the stakeholders can and do vary greatly, and, as a result, that a search for the one right path—or even the *best* path—is almost certain to fail. Nevertheless, mapping does not abandon the idea that a new policy can help organize the community around a set of goals. The point is rather that such a policy will not prescribe a single path to alignment because the sport community does not agree on a single, well-defined view of the key goals and the core business.

For example, the goal of increasing participation is one of four main goals at the centre of the existing sport policy. It is also a point of tension within the community. While most agree that participation should remain a core goal, there is disagreement on how it should be defined. Some think it should be linked to organized competition, so that “participation in sport” means belonging to a hockey league or diving team. Others think this definition is too

9 In October 2010, the Public Policy Forum hosted a two-day workshop in Toronto with some 65 delegates from provincial and territorial governments, and the federal government, as well as stakeholders from the sport community and other policy areas that benefit from sport, such as health and correctional services. The workshop provided an opportunity to explore some of the issues and options emerging around the renewal of the Canadian Sport Policy.

narrow, and insist that an acceptable definition should include non-organized, non-competitive activities like recreational cycling.

It is important to see what is really at issue in this disagreement. Those who argue for a broader definition of participation are interested in how sport also promotes other goals, such as public health, which, strictly speaking, is not part of sport's core business. Nevertheless, the close connection between sport and health is exactly what many people find appealing in an activity like cycling. Without it, they would stop. The link is therefore something public health advocates want to strengthen, celebrate and, ultimately, leverage. Not surprisingly, those in the sport community who agree will view the efforts by others to define sport in a way that excludes recreational cycling as arbitrary and self-serving.

There is a way to manage policy tensions like these without having to choose one or the other. In an increasingly complex policy environment, core goals should not be over-defined. Indeed, a bit of vagueness can sometimes be helpful. For example, instead of trying to define the goal of participation in a way that resolves this disagreement, a mapping approach would:

- describe the goal of participation in a way that leaves the two options open; and
- create a special section in the policy that contains a list and description of the different “lenses” through which stakeholders and the public view participation.

Once drafted, the policy document would thus reflect the fact that the policy community agrees that participation is a core goal, but it would also show how and why different groups in the community view this commitment differently.

To take this kind of approach is thus to lean more to a *descriptive* than *prescriptive* approach to policy-making. Rather than trying to deal with complexity by avoiding it, the process looks for ways to allow diverse views to co-exist. This, in turn, allows everyone to

agree to pursue and promote, say, greater participation in sport, but in their respective ways. Those in favour of recreational cycling would see participation through the lens of public health. New Canadians who enrol their children in hockey might see it through the lens of social integration. Those hoping to produce the next Wayne Gretzky would see it through the lens of excellence. While there are tensions between these views, they are not irreconcilable and can certainly co-exist. Each government could then use the policy map to confer with its stakeholders and decide which lenses were most widely used in its jurisdiction and how it wants to promote or support the public's use of these lenses.

Note, however, that this does not mean the “lenses section” of the policy document must include any definition someone wants to add. Like conventional policy-making, the mapping approach strives to reflect and incorporate the values, principles, goals and rules that apply in real life, which is the ultimate guide to map-making. This requires rigorous reasoning, attention to evidence, and, where appropriate, fair-minded compromises and trade-offs, in order to arrive at a relatively clear, coherent and accurate representation of the policy space. But, whereas the conventional approach to policy-making treats clarity and precision as a great virtue, a preoccupation with it here can be counterproductive, especially when we are talking about core goals. In the map-making approach, coherence and clarity don't automatically trump other key values, such as inclusiveness. Tensions and complexity are a real part of the policy landscape and mapping strives to include and incorporate them. At the same time, by getting everyone to stand back and work together to map the policy space, the approach often uncovers new and surprising links between key points on it, and, along with this, new ways to manage tensions and advance core goals. Indeed, such discoveries are a key source of innovation and creative development within the field.

Action and the Community Approach

Now if, as we have argued, complex issues can't be solved by government alone, the public will have to play an active role in implementing the solutions. But stakeholders and citizens won't assume any real responsibility for the plan unless they have a real say in developing it. We can call this the **Golden Rule of Public Engagement**. It says that, if governments really want citizens and stakeholders to take some ownership of the issues, it is not enough simply to ask them for their views on the solutions. Governments must engage the public in a real dialogue where all parties work through the issues and arrive at the action plan together.

The mapping exercise plays a key role in meeting both conditions. By inviting community members to define their place on the map, it gives them a real say. However, this also positions them to play a meaningful role in the achievement of the goals. Indeed, the whole point of mapping is to allow governments, stakeholders and citizens to clarify their respective interests and shared goals together so that they can align themselves more closely around the goals. The map thus becomes the starting point for developing a shared action plan, in which all the participants must commit to some real action.

Although the policy document doesn't prescribe what anyone should do—everyone is free to choose their own course of action—everyone is expected to make a meaningful contribution to implementing the policy. Once the mapping phase has been completed, governments, stakeholders and citizens must work together to develop a plan to address the issues (or achieve goals) within their community.¹⁰ To see how this works, let's return to our earlier discussion of wellness (Chapter 1) and ask how this community approach could help build a healthy community.

Suppose a group of health organizations in some city is planning

¹⁰ On the definition of communities, see footnote 7.

to launch a healthy community initiative, perhaps along with the municipal government. Success will require more than good health services or trained professionals. It will take an informed and engaged citizenry working together with civil society, the business community and governments, to encourage exercise, promote proper nutrition, address poverty, provide community leadership, and so on. An effective plan must engage individuals and organizations from across the community, many of whom may have had no real working relationship before, but who find they are now joined in the pursuit of this goal. Everyone has a role to play.

An accurate description (a “map”) of the policy space would be extremely useful here. It would provide a valuable planning tool for setting priorities, finding new ways to work together or to strengthen work already underway, and for members to reach out to individuals and organizations in other policy fields. This last point is especially important. A healthy community initiative touches just about every other policy area, from culture and immigration to education and training. Bringing these “outsiders” into the project is therefore a priority, but it must be done the right way. More specifically, if members of the health sector want to form *sustainable* partnerships with organizations outside the sector, these relationships should be designed to serve the interests and core businesses of both partners.

For example, people in the health community might turn to organizations from the sport community and propose that they work together to develop a campaign to promote wellness through participation in team sports. In this way, the sport community will not have to stray from its core business—promoting sport—to get involved. On the contrary, the project is designed to align the business of sport with the wellness initiative. At the same time, organizations from the health sector should look for ways to leverage their own networks to support the campaign, say, by distributing brochures and information in hospitals, clinics and doctors’ offices.

Moreover, such a partnership needn't be limited to two organizations. It may involve a whole cluster of them from inside and outside the health sector. In the present example, the partners might invite local media to join in by airing reports on the initiative or doing interviews with leaders of the campaign.

Through such initiatives, people and organizations from various communities will begin to form a *wellness network*. This network will have different thresholds of membership. The principal members are, of course, organizations from the health sector. But through initiatives like the one above, they will build relationships with organizations outside the health sector, such as members of the sport community. As this multi-tiered, multi-sectoral network evolves it will create new capacity for collaboration on public health, while also contributing to sport and the other policy communities that are involved. Building and leveraging these kinds of synergistic relationships is the key strategic goal—and the critical strength—of the community approach.

This approach is now endorsed by stakeholders in a range of policy areas, such as sustainable development, life-long learning, innovation and crime prevention. In other words, within, say, a single geographical community, such as a city or a region, various networks of communities can and will evolve around these goals. They will overlap and intersect at many points, as governments and stakeholders forge the kind of partnerships just discussed. From the viewpoint of the community as a whole, the vision is of a new form of community integration, based on a shared commitment to a range of societal goals, such as wellness, life-long learning, crime prevention, youth development and sustainable development. In this vision, the community as a whole is evolving toward what we might call a *network of networks*.

The lesson for the sport community is that it should be working to find its place within this network of networks. It should use the current process to lay the foundation for building new relationships

with other networks, while remaining distinct from them. The sport community could then leverage these relationships to help support its own goals, while offering non-sport organizations an opportunity to leverage sport's impressive infrastructure to help them achieve their goals.¹¹ Recreational cycling is a case in point. It leverages powerful synergies between sport and public health and, in the process, provides the basis for a mutually beneficial working relationship between the two fields. But this does not mean the two fields dissolve into one. Nor does it mean the sport community takes on the responsibilities of the health sector or vice versa. Rather, the two communities are learning how to collaborate with organizations outside the boundaries of their traditional policy silos. They are thus finding their place in the network of networks that makes up a well-aligned community.

The Ongoing Dialogue

If this vision sounds a little too ambitious, let's be clear: no one expects communities to be transformed into networks of networks overnight. While there are many good examples of activities that lend themselves to the development of holistic relationships, such as recreational cycling, there is still a long way to go to fully realize this vision. It will take time, effort and investment. The participants in the Sport Policy Renewal Process should not expect to resolve all their issues around community-building through a single round of dialogue or a single action plan. The initiative should be presented and understood as a long-term commitment to developing a more collaborative approach within the sport community. This, in turn,

11 In 2003, Canada had some 33,600 sports and recreation organizations, accounting for 21% of the nation's 161,000 non-profit and voluntary organizations. These range from large, national, umbrella organizations to small neighbourhood hockey teams. The sport community is the second largest group in the voluntary sector, surpassed only by faith-based organizations. It is a huge reservoir of organizational infrastructure and, indeed, of social capital, which could be leveraged by other policy fields, such as public health or sustainable development.

means all the partners must be willing to see the process as a cyclical one that will lead to ongoing action and adjustment.

The long-term goal of the community approach thus is not just to solve a problem, but to build a new kind of working relationship—a genuine partnership—between the participants. As this relationship develops, they will come to understand one another better, they will begin to share a common way of speaking about the issues, and they will develop new ways of working together. Their discussions will become more focused, disciplined and productive. As a result, they will also become more trusting of one another and more willing to make adjustments and compromises to reach solutions. All this should be reflected in the policy document, which, in turn, should be viewed as a work in progress, to be periodically reviewed and revised.

Moreover, the ongoing dialogue should not be seen as something that happens only periodically, when the policy is being revised. The policy is supposed to provide the broad context in terms of which other dialogues can and will take place. These could involve the federal government or individual provincial and territorial governments and their respective sport communities; or municipal governments and theirs; or even groups of sport organizations. These dialogues, in turn, will lead to other plans and initiatives, including new partnerships and, where there is much agreement on the goals the sport community is trying to achieve, possibly conventional policies.

In sum, the idea of an on-going dialogue is not just about very high-level talk. It is about creating a culture of continuous learning, improvement and achievement across the sport community. It is about building the kind of long-term relationships needed to deal effectively with long-term issues at every level of the community. It is about transforming the way policy is made by transforming the policy process from a competitive, winner-take-all debate into a collaborative dialogue.

Rethinking the Public Policy Process

We have seen that making policy usually involves controversial choices between different options. While most people recognize and accept that reasonable people can disagree on such matters, these same people often have strong beliefs about which options are best or right. As a result, they will respect policy choices that conflict with their own views only if they believe that the *process* by which the choice was made was legitimate and fair.

However, modern democracies like Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States face growing dissatisfaction with the policy process. Its fairness and legitimacy are regularly called into question. We can now see why.

Growing complexity means policy fields that used to be viewed as relatively distinct and self-contained are increasingly seen as interconnected. Recreational cycling is one example. It creates deep links between sport and health, which, in turn, have raised new questions in the Sport Policy Renewal Process: Should a discussion of sport policy include stakeholders from the health community? Is a policy option that promotes both traditional sport goals *and* health goals preferable to one that promotes only sport goals?

How questions like these are answered will affect the process by which policy options are chosen. However, there is no single, right or wrong answer to such questions and, as we saw, people often disagree on them. As a result, in the new policy environment people not only disagree over the options; increasingly, they also disagree about the process by which the options will be chosen.

The lesson is that the conventional policy process was not designed to accommodate this kind of interdependence. In the old policy world, when policy fields were viewed as relatively self-contained, a debate over options rarely raised questions about the process. Today, however, policy fields are linked in all kinds of unexpected ways. As new connections surface, they change how people view the issues, which, in turn, can change how they think

the issues should be discussed and resolved. This may put them in conflict with others who wish to ignore such connections or, perhaps, to focus on yet other connections to other policy fields.

This kind of conflict occurs with increasing regularity. When it does, we must begin looking for new processes by which to resolve our policy differences. In short, to build communities, we need to rethink the policy process. The mapping technique explored in this chapter is an important step in that direction. The next two chapters deal more systematically with the challenge of rethinking the policy process, and they set out and assess the options that are available.



C h a p t e r 3

Advocates, Advisers or Partners: Putting “the Public” in the Public Policy Process

The Two Test Questions

We’ve seen that in the new policy environment issues are far more interconnected and that this, in turn, can raise questions about the fairness and legitimacy of the policy process. We’ve also seen that in this new environment the solutions to issues often require action from citizens and stakeholders who are part of efforts to find common bonds among communities and to build networks. We can use these insights to formulate two basic questions that consolidate our thinking so far on when and why we need a different kind of policy process:

- Is government able to frame its issue in a way that stakeholders will accept, or does the issue need to be reframed?
- Is government able to implement the solutions on its own?

The first question asks whether or not government can clearly state what kind of input it is looking for from the public when it consults them on a topic, and whether the public will agree that it is asking the relevant questions. In other words, can government raise questions about an issue (and the options for responding) without getting bogged down in a discussion of various links to

other policy fields and whether these links should change how we see the issue?

Regarding the second question, as a government looks ahead to the kinds of options that are likely to emerge as solutions to a question, it will often be able to assess whether the public will have a role in their implementation or not. For example, if the issue is, say, how to reduce obesity, the public will almost certainly have a role, such as getting exercise or changing their eating habits. On the other hand, if the solution is a simple regulatory framework, government may be able to implement this on its own, say, through legislation.

We will call these the **Two Test Questions** because the answers to them determine whether or not we can expect to deal effectively and fairly with a particular issue through a conventional policy process. As we have seen, in the new policy environment it is increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for government to frame many issues in a way that the public accepts, and to deliver the solutions on its own. In such cases, the answers to both Test Questions show that the conventional policy process won't do. Governments must take a more collaborative approach to policy-making.

Three Approaches

The basic difference between a conventional policy process and a complex one like the Sport Policy process is that the former relies more on competition, while the latter relies more on collaboration. When it comes to making and implementing public policy, governments have lots of experience with competitive processes. Consider, for example, the use of markets to regulate the economy, the adversarial approach to deciding cases in the courts, or the use of elections to choose a government. All are essentially competitive processes.

By comparison, governments are far less skilled at designing public processes that rely on collaboration. They simply don't have

the experience. Nevertheless, collaboration is not new. It has a long history. This ranges from small local initiatives like Neighbourhood Watch, which aims to make the streets safe, to large-scale international emergency relief efforts, like the one that followed the earthquake in Haiti in January, 2010.

In the new policy environment, collaboration is an increasingly critical condition of successful public policy, so governments need to learn a lot more about how such processes work. This chapter and the next one aim at laying a solid foundation by distinguishing between three basic approaches to formulating policy:

- consultative;
- deliberative; and
- engagement.

In brief, our analysis will show how the consultative approach rewards competitive behaviour, and is a winner-take-all proposition. This undermines our efforts to deal with complex issues. By contrast, the deliberative approach requires real collaboration. It involves the public in a dialogue where they must work through the issues, and find solutions, together. Unfortunately, the deliberative approach stops short of challenging the public to take some responsibility for delivering the solutions. Finally, engagement rewards collaboration both in the dialogue stage around the issues and in delivering the solutions. As such, it is a far more promising way of dealing with complex issues.

The Consultative Approach

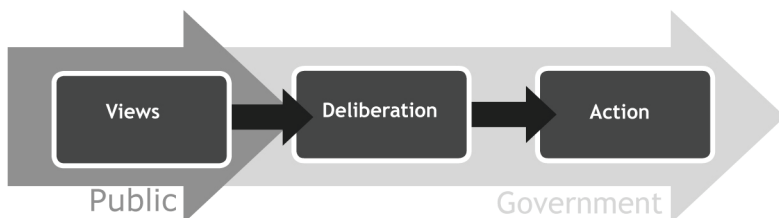
Of the three approaches in our framework, the consultative is the most common. The format for this approach is highly flexible, ranging from small meetings to large conferences or even cross-country public hearings. In this approach the contact between government and the public can take place face-to-face, online, by mail or by telephone. The participants may give formal presentations,

express their views at a microphone or complete a survey. Despite such differences in format, however, the basic goal of this approach is always the same: to give the public an opportunity to influence government planning and decision-making by presenting their views on an issue to officials.

Consider a consultative approach to forging policy to regulate greenhouse gases. Government (or a committee of its representatives) poses a question to the public, such as: What are acceptable emission limits? It then sits at the front of the room (metaphorically or literally) and listens as the public replies, posing occasional questions or listening to interesting exchanges between participants. Finally, it retires to the privacy of the antechambers to deliberate over what it has heard and make its decisions and recommendations. Accordingly, we can divide the process into three basic stages:

- Stage 1: The committee solicits and gathers the public's views of the issues.
- Stage 2: The committee deliberates over the public's views (and other relevant material) to arrive at an official view of the issues.
- Stage 3: The committee develops recommendations to the minister for action on these issues.

We can represent the respective roles played by government and the public this way:



As we can see, the public's role is only to present their views. The deliberation and action are up to the government.

The metaphor of a game is a useful tool for showing how changes in the structure of a process lead to changes in behaviour. When someone plays a game for the first time, he or she will begin by asking such questions as: What is the object of the game and what are the rules; what is my role as a player and how do I win?

The answers to these questions will shape the person's expectations, strategy and behaviour when playing the game. Let's imagine the public policy process as a game. To play it well, a participant must understand how the game works. What, then, are the objectives, roles, rules, rewards and sanctions in the consultative approach?

For most individuals and organizations the main objective will be to advance their interests by using their time before the government's committee to try to influence the decisions it will make when it retires to the antechamber. Thus, business groups may argue that limits on emissions should be lower rather than higher, while environmental groups may argue the reverse.

As for their roles, the approach casts the participants as advocates for a cause, much as a lawyer's job is to advocate for the client. So the participants must compete with one another for the ear of government.

Next, if the goal is to influence the decision-makers, the players will quickly realize that this is a zero-sum game. Insofar as one participant gains influence, the others lose it, which means that, in the end, the approach creates winners and losers.

Given this situation, it will be in the participants' interest to create a sense of urgency around their views, seeking out studies, statistics or experts that support their positions or bring competing claims into disrepute.

In sum, the consultative approach is a competitive process that invites the public to try to convince the decision-makers to side with their various points of view. In principle, there is nothing wrong with this and it often works well, but, as we saw in Chapter 2, there

are limits. If the participants disagree on the definition of the problem, this changes how at least some of them will view the process as a whole and how they will participate in it.

The following example is based on a real policy process and shows how easily such disagreements can arise and how frustrating they can be to participants who feel that the process is stacked against them.

Imagine that a provincial government committee is seeking advice on how to deal with expected labour shortages in a particular area of the province. Representatives of the business community who come before the committee might argue that more immigration is the right response. This is a time-tested response to labour shortages that is likely to fit comfortably into the range of policy options government is considering.

But now imagine representatives from an anti-poverty organization coming forward to not only challenge the solution proposed by business, but to challenge the validity of the very issue the committee has raised—namely that there is a looming labour shortage. These people might want to argue that there is no shortage of labour at all because marginalized groups, like aboriginal people or the disabled, could easily fill the gap, and that the social barriers to their full participation in the workforce are the real problem. In these representatives' view, asking how to deal with a labour shortage simply avoids the real issue the committee should be considering, which is how to remove the barriers.

In this case, the participants are not just advancing a different solution to the issue. They are trying to broaden the discussion by arguing that two issues that are normally seen as distinct—the labour supply and the marginalization of some groups—are linked in an important and relevant way. Seeing this, they think, should change how we understand the problem under discussion. Unfortunately, the consultative approach puts them at a huge disadvantage. First, the process has already been defined as a search

for answers to an impending labour shortage. Officials are likely to view an effort to refocus their attention on the removal of social barriers as beyond their mandate. Getting them to revisit the mandate will be an uphill battle, at best. Second, the process provides little or no opportunity for such participants to directly engage or challenge those who agree with how the issue has been framed, such as the business community. In short, the anti-poverty activists will feel the process has been defined in a way that excludes, or at least marginalizes, their views. What are their options?

On one hand, they can defer to officials and accept their claim that their view is outside the mandate. The officials may still be willing to note it in the report, but it almost certainly won't be acted on. On the other hand, the activists can conclude that the process is treating them unfairly so they are justified in using whatever tactics they can to force the committee to listen to their views. For example, they might make exaggerated, provocative or dubious claims in the hope that it will attract some media attention. Or they might try to manufacture a crisis of some sort to put pressure on officials. In other words, short of giving up, the only real option left to them is to act like a squeaky wheel and see if they can get some grease.

In fact, the squeaky wheel strategy often turns out to be an effective one. The consultative approach is extremely vulnerable to this kind of gaming. Whether we are talking about advocates who rightly feel excluded from the process, or communications-savvy organizations that are willing to use any available opportunity to advance their views, it is now widely recognized that the consultative approach has no real way to check participants who decide to act like squeaky wheels, and here's why.

With the consultative approach, government is asking the public to give their views on a particular issue. But when someone is only stating a *view*, it is very difficult to criticize him or her for doing so. Especially when this is in response to the question: What's your

view on the issue? After all, everyone is entitled to their view. As a result, the consultative approach has no effective way of holding participants to account for what they say in Stage 1, which is the “views-collecting” stage. This, in turn, makes it easy for them to exaggerate, embellish or misrepresent their positions, or to distort and malign those of others, in order to attract attention, invent a crisis or embarrass the government. In short, this approach often rewards bad behaviour.¹²

For process managers, this lack of accountability is the fly in the ointment. They know all too well how easily policy processes based on the consultative approach can be derailed by theatrical tactics, especially when dealing with big public issues like employment or the environment. It is their job to ensure that the process does not go off the rails and that it reaches its conclusion. The use of tactics therefore makes them very nervous. If participants start to play this game, officials are likely to take defensive action, say, by becoming secretive, controlling or manipulative, in an effort to silence or marginalize such voices.

In sum, if they agree on the problem, people are often willing to play according to the rules of the consultative approach. This is the issue raised by the first of our Two Test Questions: that the participants must accept the way the issue has been framed. If participants don't accept this, at least some of them will view the process, the objectives, the rules and their role in it, differently. In short, a

12 Someone may reply that it is the job of the media to provide some accountability, say, by challenging extreme views. But this misunderstands their role in reporting on public debate. The media is supposed to be unbiased in their reporting. So if someone is exaggerating or spouting nonsense and the media want to show this, they usually do so by turning to someone “more reasonable” and asking for an alternative view, which is supposed to provide contrast. The two positions are then presented to the public as equally viable possibilities and the citizen is expected to choose between them. Far from sanctioning someone for excesses, however, this actually rewards them by treating their exaggerated claim on par with a serious one. The Tea Partiers used this knowledge to extremely good effect by, for example, declaring that the Obama health reforms would lead to the creation of bureaucratic “death committees.”

disagreement of this sort changes their expectations with respect to the process. Now the game looks unfair to them and they are likely to start playing it differently, which usually means disruptively. This, in turn, puts officials on the defensive so that they start trying to control the process. The overall result can be very damaging to the legitimacy and effectiveness of the process.

Finally, let's recall the second of our Two Test Questions, which asks whether government can deliver the solutions on its own. Suppose the answer is no and that stakeholders and citizens have a role in helping to deliver the solutions. How does the consultative approach assign this role? Suffice it to say that it doesn't. By sending the public home after Stage 1, the stage at which their views were sought, and then delivering a report and recommendations to government at the end of Stage 3, the consultative approach sends the unambiguous message that the task of taking action belongs to government, which, of course, implies that the problem belongs to government.

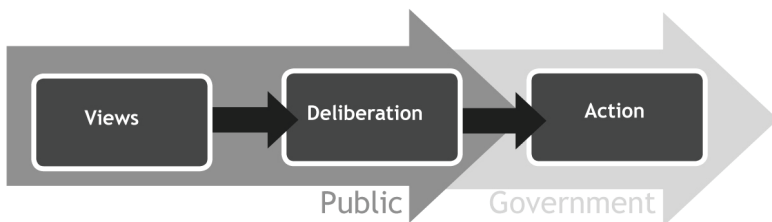
From the viewpoint of the new policy environment, this may be the most perverse effect of all. After all, when we are dealing with complex issues, the whole point is to get the public to assume some ownership and responsibility for implementing the solutions, yet the process ultimately drops the problem squarely back in government's lap. It thus not only rewards bad behaviour, it is ultimately self-defeating.

However, for the moment, at least, let's stay focused on the framing question, which is the first of the Two Test Questions. The right way to deal with this is to replace the competitive approach with a different kind of discussion, one that rewards participants for working together to reframe the issue—that is, for engaging in an exploratory dialogue rather than a winner-take-all debate. In the next section, we look at how the deliberative approach supports this kind of discussion.

The Deliberative Approach

The deliberative approach asks the public to do more than just give their views. It also asks the public to participate in the task of deliberating over these views, along with government. The task here is to use dialogue to work through the issues together, weighing evidence for competing claims, seeking compromises and trade-offs to deal with competing values and priorities, and arriving at strategies for how to proceed. Once this work is done, government will make the final decision on what it will do. The deliberative approach thus casts the public in the role of an adviser to government.

The motivating idea here is that involving the public in the deliberation stage of the policy process will lead to a more transparent, accountable, responsive and, therefore, legitimate outcome. Ultimately, the assumption is that the public should be more willing to accept the results because they've played a key role in the deliberations. In such a process, we can represent the respective roles of the public and government as follows:



In effect, the deliberative approach extends the public's role from traditional consultation to the next stage. Involving the public in Stage 2—deliberation—moves the participants from debate to dialogue, changes the dynamic of their interaction from competition to collaboration, and introduces a measure of discipline and accountability into the discussion. Here's why.

First, moving the participants from Stage 1 to Stage 2 changes their roles. In Stage 2 they are asked to look on themselves as a team

and to use their collective experience to explore how the issues are connected by mapping the policy space. This gets participants working together in a non-confrontational way, and helps them arrive at a more comprehensive picture of the various positions and issues, which, in turn, usually helps them find a more acceptable way to frame the issue. Nor should it be difficult to get this conversation going. After all, the usual reason for moving beyond the consultation stage is that the participants disagree on how to frame the issue, which signals that at least one of them is already arguing for a more holistic view.

Second, the deliberative approach changes the rules around accountability. If the consultative approach has no effective way of holding the participants to account for the views they present in Stage 1, the deliberative approach makes up for this in Stage 2. To map the policy space, participants will have to align and consolidate conflicting views. In the process, they will rightly ask one another for evidence to support the views they proposed in Stage 1. If someone is unable to provide evidence for, say, a crisis they claimed was building, now there will be scrutiny and, possibly, criticism from their peers. Given that participants will learn in Stage 1 that they will face this kind of scrutiny in Stage 2, they will be much more circumspect about the claims they make there. The same goes for tactics like intransigence or grandstanding.

But there is also a downside to the deliberative approach. It can create unrealistic expectations around what government can or should do. When citizens work on a public policy issue, they rarely see it the way government does. Concerns over, say, jurisdictional responsibilities or bureaucratic processes and rules will occupy a very small part of their discussions, at best. Instead, they will focus on how the issues affect them personally, through their families, friends, colleagues, neighbourhoods, businesses and communities. As a result, the solutions they propose are likely to include actions that go well beyond what a government is ready, willing or able to

deliver, even though they might make a real contribution to solving the problem.

For example, the proposed solutions may require changes in public behaviour, such as better eating habits to curb obesity; or changes in the practices of businesses, such as the willingness to stock and display healthier foods in school cafeterias. Government thus may find itself unable to act on many of the recommendations. This, in turn, will likely be greeted by the participants with anger and disappointment. They may feel that government has misled them and that it is really following its own agenda.

In fact, the real culprit here is the process, not government. The structure of the process casts the participants in the role of advisers. Their job is to get the issues on the table (Stage 1), then work through them together and arrive at solutions (Stage 2). Their role in the process concludes with them packaging their findings in a set of recommendations, then handing them back to government, which is supposed to implement them (Stage 3). In practice, this means they end up shoehorning all kinds of issues and responsibilities into the recommendations to government that really belong to them.

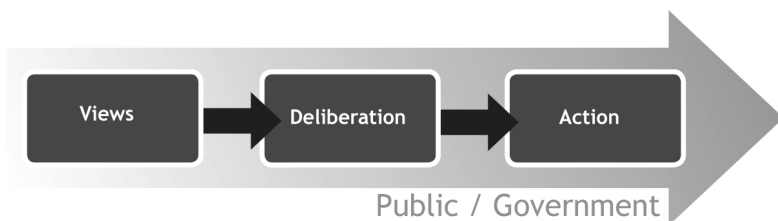
However, the real lesson here is not that such solutions are bad, but that the public's role in the process is not finished. The process needs to go another step and move the participants into the third stage: action.

In this stage, the participants would begin asking themselves what role *they* should play in implementing the solutions, along with government. Thus, in a process aimed at reducing greenhouse gases, this third stage of the dialogue would get the public to focus on the steps they are prepared to take to make their proposed solutions work, such as driving smaller cars or conserving energy—and to set them out in an action plan. Adding this third stage to the public's role thus moves us from the deliberative approach to public engagement.

The Public Engagement Approach

We've seen that the consultative and deliberative approaches create very different roles for participants. The consultative approach casts them as advocates for their cause by having them compete with one another for influence over decision-makers. In contrast, the deliberative approach casts the public as advisers by getting them to work together to reframe issues and arrive at solutions, which they can then recommend to government.

The public engagement approach, which is the main focus of this study, also creates a special role for participants. It casts them as partners with government by getting them to work together with government to find *and* implement solutions to complex issues. The public thus participates fully in the action stage of the dialogue and takes on some responsibility for solving the issue. We can represent the three stages of the approach, and the respective roles played by the public and government, as follows:



Engagement represents a big step for citizens and stakeholders as they work toward building communities and networks to help government formulate policy. It means they must be willing to assign themselves some specific tasks to help solve the issue. Will they agree? The engagement approach aims at getting them to do so by rewarding and challenging them in special ways.

As with the deliberative approach, Stage 2 of the process involves a dialogue that will allow participants to explore and reframe the issue, and to propose solutions. However, in public engagement there is a difference. This time the participants are fully aware that

they will be participating in the action dialogue in Stage 3 and that, as a result, they will have to commit to some action.

This changes how the participants see the process as a whole and their role in it. In particular, when they are reframing the issue and finding solutions in Stage 2, the dialogue will include a discussion of how the issue is connected to them or their organization—and of the extent of their personal or corporate responsibility for helping to solve it. For example, if the issue is how to limit climate change, participants may be asking one another whether the cars they drive are too big or whether flying across the country for a business meeting is really necessary.

Once agreement has been reached on the issue and the options, the participants move to Stage 3 where they engage in a different kind of dialogue: developing an action plan. Now the discussion focuses on who is best positioned to do what. The working assumptions are that everyone has a role to play in implementing the options; that all participants will assign themselves a task that is appropriate to their resources and interest in the issue; and that each one will take responsibility for completing that task.

The action dialogue thus allows the public to see clearly what tasks will need to be performed, which ones fall to them, and why their role is critical for success. At the same time, the process empowers them by giving them some real control over the solutions, and challenges them to take some real ownership of the issues.

In the public engagement approach, empowerment and responsibility are two sides of the same coin. Exploring them together is a critical part of the dialogue process. Rather than just asking clients to give their views on a particular issue, the process is designed to encourage them to reflect, discuss, challenge, and be challenged; to weigh competing priorities and to decide which ones are really most important; to make trade-offs with others who have

competing goals or values; and to identify their respective roles in achieving common goals.

Government is a full participant in this process, not just an observer. It seeks to work with citizens to help them resolve issues. It therefore must be flexible in its approach and willing to consider new ways to do things, as they come up with new solutions. In practice, this means the process should terminate in a plan of action that assigns responsibilities to both government and the public. By getting government to commit to actions, the process links the dialogue directly to decision-making. By getting the clients to commit to actions, it invests them with a sense of ownership and responsibility for the solutions. The goal is thus to build a real partnership by working together. This is an iterative process, which, over time, will lead to an ongoing realignment and integration of the policies, programs and services within government departments.

In public engagement, government gradually assumes the role of enabler and partner, while transferring some of the responsibility for finding and implementing solutions back to citizens. This is *not* about absolving government of its responsibilities or off-loading them on the public. It is about finding a better balance between the respective roles of government and the public in solving issues, one that gives citizens a real sense of control over the programs and services they receive in exchange for a willingness on their part to take on more responsibility for solving issues.

Traditional consultation processes fall far short of this. They aim at little more than getting citizens to provide feedback to government. It is then up to government to decide how to act on the findings. This only reinforces the paternalism in the existing political culture, which tends to view government as the primary owner of the problem, and the primary problem solver.

At the same time, it should be kept in mind that not every issue is a complex one that requires public engagement. Our public engagement framework recognizes that many issues can and should be

solved through the consultative or deliberative approaches. The Two Test Questions set out at the beginning of this chapter help us decide when public engagement is appropriate and when traditional decision-making will do. Basically, if government finds that it is unable to frame the issue or deliver the solutions without the public's help, public engagement is needed.

This new, engaged and activist role for citizens and stakeholders also has consequences for government. If citizens and stakeholders are now expected to assume responsibility for action, and are empowered with some real control over solutions, government must be willing to recognize and engage them as full partners in the policy process. In practice, this means that government cannot simply declare how things will be done. Partnerships, after all, are a two-way street. If the new relationship is to succeed, there must be real give and take; everyone must have a real say.

This raises a final point about the engagement approach. We've been saying that the three approaches to the policy process involve three basic stages: views, deliberation and action. Public engagement requires an additional stage—evaluation. This is about more than assessing whether the solutions that have been proposed are working. The partners will also need to assess how well the partnership itself is working. What does collaboration through public engagement add to the policy process? We will take up the evaluation question in the next chapter, but there is another set of questions that must be addressed first: Can government really be a partner with the public? How would this work in practice?

Over the last two decades, there has been much discussion of partnerships, and there have been some successes. Nevertheless, real partnerships with shared ownership, decision-making and accountability are the exception to the rule. Most “partnerships” are really some form of contractual arrangement. Does this mean real public engagement is also likely to be rare—the exception to the rule? To answer these questions we now shift our attention away

from policy-making and onto a whole different side of government business: the delivery of public services. If real and meaningful partnerships between governments are all about sharing responsibility and ownership, this is where the rubber hits the road.

Service delivery is the part of government that deals with implementing policies and solutions.¹³ It includes a bewildering array of systems and practices, which, in turn, are organized into service areas, such as education, policing, health services or services to businesses. Approaching service delivery as a partnership involves a fundamental change for governments. The systems and practices have evolved on a basis very different from partnership. Far from being a two-way street, government has traditionally seen the public as passive recipients of government services. Indeed, as the word “delivery” suggests, government services are viewed as things that government creates on its own and then leaves on citizens’ doorsteps, much like the morning paper or the mail. A real service partnership between government and the public must overcome a huge hurdle. It must change the way the service-delivery system (and culture) works—a task that might well be compared to halting a loaded super-tanker that is cruising through calm waters.

To help us understand what this involves, and how the engagement approach can help us achieve it, we now turn to an examination of how service delivery has been evolving over the last two decades and why the idea of a partnership around service delivery is not only workable, but timely.

13 In referring to service delivery as the area responsible for implementing policies and solutions, for simplicity, the discussion glosses over a number of important administrative distinctions. Further, a distinction is usually drawn between programs and services, though the difference is often less than clear. Again, for simplicity, this book uses the word “services” almost interchangeably with “programs.”

C h a p t e r 4

Joining Up Services

A few years ago, the Crossing Boundaries National Council conducted a cross-country consultation on citizen-centred services.¹⁴ During one phase, we worked with teachers in a Toronto high school to develop an unusual research project for their political science students: “What do you think it’s like to go out and get government services?” we asked the students. Most had interacted with government before. For example, the majority had drivers’ licences, transit passes and health cards. Some even told stories of losing their wallets and having to go to a number of offices around the city to replace the contents.

We pushed them a step further. We asked them to look into what would be required to start a business of their choosing. What permits and licences would they need? What would they have to do to get them? We gave them just enough direction to get started and then left the rest to them.

When we met again a few weeks later to hear their reports, they had a lot of interesting things to say. Some described the experience as “daunting,” “*very* time consuming” and a “big, full circle that got me nowhere.” Others felt that it was “overall, a positive

14 “Privacy in the Information Age: Government Services and You,” Don Lenihan and David Hume, Crossing Boundaries National Council, August 2005. The Crossing Boundaries National Council is discussed in Appendix 1.

experience” or even “a great experience.” But virtually everyone agreed on one point: Getting the things they needed to start riding stables, jewelry businesses, clothing manufacturers and nightclubs could—and should—be a lot easier. Why?

When they turned to government to get a business number, a restaurant licence, record-of-employment forms or agricultural permits, students found they were getting bounced from department to department, and between levels of government. The process made little sense to them. The various steps in the process were disconnected and scattered so that the students were forced to act as the connecting link between them; and their ability to get the information they needed or closure to the various steps was unreliable and frustrating. They were confused and annoyed as they struggled to navigate through what seemed like an unending series of offices, departments and levels of government.

These findings won't surprise many people. Most of us have stories of our own to tell. For their part, governments have been very busy trying to improve the disorganized and fragmented state of their services. In Canada alone, scores of initiatives have been launched to reduce bureaucracy and simplify services. Yet, after more than two decades, the results are mixed, at best. Why?

First, although experts have argued that improving service delivery is about fixing government's organizational and administrative problems, often through better technology, this is misleading, at best. In fact, improving service delivery often involves controversial choices that can have a major impact on the services. It can change who gets them, what kind of services they are and, indeed, whether they will continue to exist at all. In short, better service delivery is not just about modernizing government operations or streamlining processes. It often involves important and controversial *policy* decisions.

Second, because these changes involve policy decisions, creating teams of officials simply to carry out the reforms has proven

seriously inadequate. This often leads to delays and disagreements within government over which choices are the right ones. In the end, the process often bogs down, deepening cleavages within government, rather than overcoming them.

These issues are well known to senior officials. They are also a key reason why some are so cautious—even skeptical—about public engagement. These officials fear that, if they can't even reach agreement on these issues inside government, they certainly won't be able to reach agreement on them if they bring the public into the discussion. Before government should try to collaborate with the public, they will say, it must get its own house in order.

This is not only wrong, it gets things exactly backwards. Public engagement is a key part of the solution to these problems. Citizens care about the disorganized and fragmented state of government services. Engaging them in a discussion about this not only can lead to greater alignment of these services, it can make a huge contribution to helping governments align their own internal processes and goals, something they have been unable to do on their own.

This chapter shows how and why ordinary citizens have a very important role to play in helping governments overcome some of the key internal obstacles to change. We start by looking at recent trends in service delivery, go on to show how they launched a wave of transformation within governments around the world, and, finally, show how engaging the public on services is the logical next step in this transformation.

From the Citizen-Centred Approach to Joined-Up Government

Much of the recent effort to transform government has focused on reducing red tape, streamlining government bureaucracy and putting information and services online. We can call this wave of reform the citizen-centred approach because its basic principle is that government services should be designed and delivered in

ways that work well for the people, businesses and organizations that governments serve, rather than for government. In this view, a citizen shouldn't have to go to five different offices to get, say, a business licence, even if five different departments are involved in issuing it. The departments should find ways to work together behind the scenes to make the service feel simple, seamless and user-friendly to the public.

The citizen-centred approach is closely connected to performance measurement (PM). In PM, managers use rigorous standards to evaluate and improve their services. We can break the process down into four basic steps:

- Set clear standards for how the service should be delivered.
- Design and deliver the service in ways that aim to meet these standards.
- Verify whether the standards are being met.
- Adjust the service to close any gaps between the service and the standards.

For example, suppose the goal of a special bus service for seniors is to help ensure they remain socially active. In formulating the performance measures, managers will begin by setting standards for how the service is to be delivered, such as that the bus should arrive within 10 minutes of the scheduled time, should stop in front of seniors' residences, and that the driver should be courteous and helpful to the passengers.

Once the service has been in use for a time, managers will ask the passengers to fill out a satisfaction survey, in which they rate the quality of the service with respect to these standards. Officials will then use this information to review how well the service is meeting the standards and to determine whether there are ways to improve it. For example, they might decide that the driver needs more training in order to meet the standards of courteousness. Finally, this process is supposed to be cyclical so that, if managers repeat it on a

regular basis, any gap between how the service is delivered and the standards that it is supposed to meet gets smaller after each cycle, making services increasingly citizen-centred.

This approach to service improvement has been highly effective, and some form of it is now used by governments around the world. The British government's Customer Service Excellence standard provides a good example. CSE rests on a rigorous set of standards for measuring customer satisfaction in the following five areas:

- delivery of promised outcomes and handling of problems effectively;
- timeliness of service provision;
- accuracy and comprehensiveness of information, and completion of progress reports;
- professionalism and competence of staff, and fair treatment of customers; and
- staff attitudes, including friendliness, politeness and sympathy toward customers' needs.

Initiatives like CSE, however, do not give the whole picture. PM and the citizen-centred approach have also evolved in another direction. As managers experimented with PM, they realized that the goals of different services often converge on a broader, overarching goal. For example, the special bus service mentioned above allows seniors to remain socially active. But bus services are not the only services available to seniors. Home-care services help them prepare meals and clean their homes. Special subsidies on heating costs help them cope with rising costs on a fixed income. Although these services have quite different goals, the goals could be said to converge on the higher goal of helping seniors remain in their homes as long as possible.



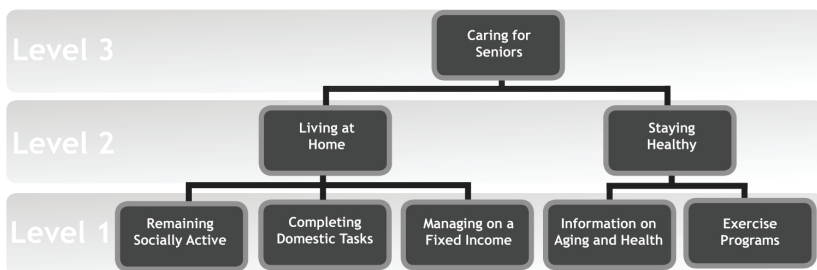
Recognition that service goals can converge this way led to a breakthrough in service improvement, fueled by the new idea that citizen-centred service was about more than applying PM to individual services. Services that converged on the same goal could be joined up into clusters. Managers could then work on improving whole clusters of services at the same time.

For example, seniors applying for home care services *and* heating subsidies should not have to shuttle from place to place, fill out various forms, or complete different tasks. Ideally, they would go to a single service counter or website and complete a single application form, while dealing with a single service provider.

Furthermore, setting an overarching goal meant managers could fine tune the goals of each of the individual services to ensure that they were all clearly aligned and sharply focused on achieving the overarching goal.

The new joined-up services approach thus aimed to simplify whole clusters of services by merging and combining administrative processes, while aligning different service goals around a new overarching goal.

As the work progressed, a further consequence became clear. Managers realized that the strategy of aligning service goals around overarching goals could be repeated at a higher level to create what were in effect clusters of clusters, as the following diagram illustrates:



This pyramidal stacking of goals needn't—and often doesn't—stop here. In principle, it could go on endlessly, though, for practical purposes, governments have found that they usually cannot manage more than four or five such levels, which most governments now have. Typically, these might include:

- individual program goals (e.g., a bus service for seniors);
- program cluster goals (e.g., seniors living at home);
- departmental section goals (e.g., caring for seniors);
- department-wide goals (e.g., quality services for seniors);
- government-wide goals (e.g., promoting wellness).



Today, government planning processes are usually based on this pyramid approach. PM is then applied at each level, so that individual program goals are aligned around program cluster goals, which, in turn, are aligned around section-wide goals, and so on all the way up to the government-wide goals. As the cycles of PM progress, the result should be a gradual tightening of goals, services and standards at all levels until, eventually, the whole of government is joined up and working like a single, highly integrated system. In this view, joined-up government is the ultimate goal of the citizen-centred approach.

So while PM started out as a tool for improving the quality of individual services, today it is emerging as an ambitious effort to coordinate and align activities across the whole of government. Some form of joining up of services has now been adopted by

governments around the world. Many have made significant progress by organizing services into key clusters, such as services for seniors or youth or services linked to key events, such as birth and death; by ensuring that the quality of services is consistent across telephone, mail, Internet or in-person services (aligning channels); by making related services accessible from the same source (co-location); and by streamlining application processes.

Nevertheless, all is not well in the land of joined-up government. The goal of joining up services inside government has proved not only elusive, but divisive.

The Problem of Joining Up Services

Let's return to our example of the three services—special bus service, home care and heating subsidies—that were joined up through the goal of keeping seniors in their homes. All three services are supposed to converge on this overarching goal. Setting such a goal serves as a signal to managers that they are supposed to streamline, adjust, consolidate and refine the lower-level services in ways that will strengthen their contribution to the overarching goal. This not only includes adjusting and refining how each service is delivered (e.g., whether the bus stops at seniors' homes or how courteous the driver is), but may also include adjusting the goals in ways that will help sharpen their focus on the overarching goal.

If this seems sound in theory, however, it creates problems in practice. Imagine trying to refine the delivery of the bus service so that it focuses more sharply on "living at home." Presently, the goal of the bus service is to help seniors remain socially active. What if some of the seniors who are using the service are not living in their own homes? Some may be living in seniors' residences or with their children. Should the goal or the service standards (or both) be adjusted to shift the service away from this group and onto those

who are still living at home? If so, how far in this direction should it shift? What is the right balance?

This, in turn, raises further questions about the role and origin of overarching goals: Who decided that the overarching goal of these services was to keep seniors in their homes? Why should there be an overarching goal at all? Could there be a different one? Why aren't we tweaking the overarching goal to fit the lower level services, rather than the reverse?

Questions like these have bedeviled efforts to join up services. It is not just that officials don't know where the right balance lies when they are adjusting goals, standards and indicators. It is that often they *cannot* know because there is no "right" balance. This balance is not something that can be discovered, say, through rigorous analysis based on expert knowledge. It is something that must be decided—and therein lays the rub.

A kind of Catch-22 underlies this whole approach to service improvement: Joining up services requires that managers set the right goals at each level of the pyramid. But what qualifies as the "right goal" shifts and changes, depending on how managers think the services in question should be joined up. This Catch-22 greatly weakens the legitimacy and effectiveness of efforts to join up services, in the following way.

In theory, an overarching goal is supposed to focus the services under it. The higher up the pyramid a goal is placed, the more services and goals this will include until, at the highest level—the government-wide level—such a goal should affect everything in the system, as its influence cascades down through the various levels of the pyramid.

In practice, however, things rarely work out this way. If a manager sets a goal at one level, he or she often lacks the real authority or capacity to ensure that others act on it, even if they are supposed to. As a result, efforts to mobilize people and resources around a new goal may meet with anything from casual indifference

to foot-dragging to outright refusal to comply, from managers who disagree with the goal—and such disagreement is a regular occurrence.

It would be a mistake, however, to dismiss these disagreements as petty, bureaucratic turf wars. They are often founded on deeply held views about which goals are the right ones, and how services should be aligned, to best serve the public. Goals adopted by officials at one level may be viewed as arbitrary, unwise or even destructive by officials whose services or resources are affected.

Sometimes these impacts are intentional and reflect real differences of opinion over what will best serve the public. Other times they are accidental and are simply unforeseen consequences of decisions made elsewhere in the system. Either way, managers who are adversely affected may resist the new direction, quietly or not, to protect their own services and clients, and may even campaign to block progress or have the decision reversed.

After two decades of trying to join up services, two things are now clear. First, notwithstanding the widespread belief that service delivery and policy can be separated, joining up services requires more than administrative or organizational change, or even the application of rigorous service standards. It also requires the alignment of goals, which is a very different kind of task. Alignment is a *policy* exercise, and policy exercises are all about making choices between competing options.

Second, trying to arrive at the right goals through intra- and intergovernmental planning and negotiations is a formula for endless process, often with little real progress. The Catch-22 means decisions to align goals often lack the legitimacy and/or authority needed to command the respect of officials from across the system and to drive real change inside government.

If governments really want joined-up services, something has to change. A new and more authoritative way of making these decisions is needed, one that can command the respect of officials from

across a government and, indeed, from across different orders of government.

The one voice that has this kind of authority is that of the clients or users who are being served—the citizens.¹⁵ If the whole point of *citizen-centred* service really is to organize services around citizens' needs and preferences, the obvious way to settle the question of how services should be joined up is to ask the users for their views. There is a way to do just this, and a timely and innovative project in Australia helps us see how.

The Co-design Community Engagement Prototype Project—An Australian case study

In December 2009, the Australian government announced the Service Delivery Reform Agenda. The goal was to improve the quality of public services by giving people more control over how they interact with government when accessing these services, and by providing better support and assistance when they need it. Greater citizen involvement in service design was recognized as central to achieving this objective. In May 2010, the Australian government released *Ahead of the Game: Blueprint for the Reform of Australian Government Administration*, which proposed a new ethos around service delivery based on “putting people first.”¹⁶

Today, “co-design,” or “collaborative design,” has become the basis for service delivery reform in the Australian Department of Human Services. Co-design is an innovative way of improving services by involving users in the task of designing them. In the conventional approach, government designs a service, delivers it, collects feedback from the users on how well it works, and then uses the feedback to improve the service. Co-design takes

15 The word “citizen” in “citizen-centred service” includes stakeholders, such as community organizations or businesses.

16 The publication is available for download at: http://www.dpmc.gov.au/publications/aga_reform/aga_reform_blueprint/index.cfm

this to the next level by directly engaging users at the design stage. Government works collaboratively with them to identify and test design options that will ensure that services work well for the users. Co-design thus “puts people first” by engaging users in ways that let them help shape services right from the start. The Australian Department of Human Services is currently developing a new co-design capability to enable it to work collaboratively with the public on a range of services.

The idea that co-design could spearhead a new phase in service delivery reform fits nicely with our discussion so far. Like the citizen-centred approach to services, co-design can be applied at two basic levels: improving individual services administered by the department; or joining up clusters of services across government. The Australian Department of Human Services is developing and experimenting with co-design approaches on both fronts.

In order to improve individual services, the department is exploring ways to introduce a new collaborative design model that puts the customer at the centre of strategic and project planning for services. The department is drawing on new techniques from current work in “design thinking,” such as “blueprinting” and “prototyping,” which are supposed to make ideas visible, tangible and persistent. It has also been developing the technique of Customer Journey Mapping (CJM), an approach that works with users to “map” the full range of their experiences as they access a service. The knowledge gleaned from this exercise is then used to help redesign the service in ways that make it more closely reflect the users’ needs and preferences. The department’s approach to customer journey mapping stresses the importance of better understanding the needs of service users, and of capturing perspectives on the service experience that they are uniquely positioned to report.

On the second level, co-design is applied to what we’ve been calling joined-up services. As with individual services, this means tapping the users to help solve issues around service delivery. When it

comes to joining up services, however, the public's role can become more complex and may often involve sustained dialogue and deliberation over time. Officials sometimes call this 'big-C' co-design. To test it, the Australian Department of Human Services undertook a Co-design Community Engagement Prototype, which, as this book is written, is still underway.

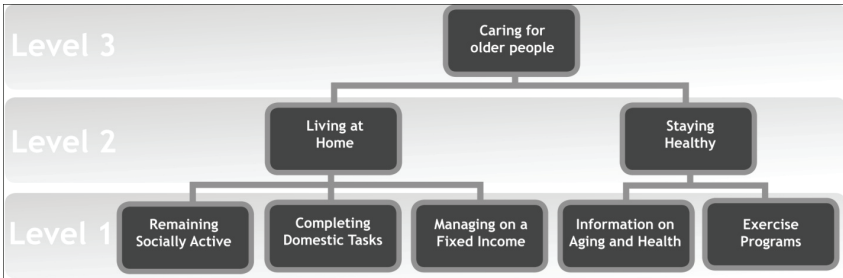
The project involves a series of community dialogues in nine municipalities in the state of Victoria. Each dialogue includes citizens, community organizations and local governments, as well as representatives from the federal government and state governments. In each case, up to 30 participants are meeting six times to actively identify and discuss ways to identify improvements to service delivery for selected customer groups, including joining up public services in a pre-selected area, such as services to older people, working families or single parents. The key outcome from each of the site-based engagement activities will be an action-orientated report recommending ways to improve service delivery, including through connections to other levels of government and other service providers.

Because this is a research project, however, the timelines are short. All nine dialogues were to wrap up by November 2011. If real progress was to occur, the discussions needed to be highly focused. Each group was therefore expected to make some early and important choices about where it wanted to concentrate its effort and attention.

To help them get started, the department conducted a survey of citizens and community organizations in each of the nine communities to gather views on how well services were working in the designated area, and to map the range of services available. The results of the surveys were presented to the various groups and provided the points of departure for their discussions. As part of their training, the facilitators were instructed on how a public engagement

approach can be used along the lines proposed in Chapter 4 to help the participants join up services.

Suppose, for example, that one of the communities focusing on services to older people examined the survey and decided to focus on the overarching goal of caring for older people. They might then try to resolve this goal into further sub-goals, such as living at home and staying healthy, as indicated in the diagram below:



The discussion would then use the survey (and the expertise around the table) to explore how effectively existing services could achieve these goals.

For example, the participants would consider whether there were gaps that needed to be filled. They would ask whether further refinement was needed to the overarching goals, which, in turn, would likely involve changes to the range of services (and other goals) that fall under them. Alternatively, these reflections might lead to adjustments to the goals and standards of the particular services. Finally, such changes would become part of an action plan that would not only include adjustments to government services, but likely to community services—and even the activities of ordinary citizens.

In the end, the process as a whole will follow the three stages of the public engagement approach: Views, Deliberation and Action:

- The survey on how well services were working (and early reactions to it in the dialogue process) corresponds to the **Views** stage.

- Participants' efforts to set goals and align services under them involve a reframing of issues and identification of solutions, and thus correspond to the **Deliberation** stage.
- Finally, the process culminates in recommendations that should involve all three orders of government and community organizations, which corresponds to the **Action** stage.

Scale, Flexibility and Responsiveness

When people hear about public engagement they often imagine large, high-profile processes that focus on big policy issues, such as poverty, climate change or innovation. And, indeed, public engagement can and sometimes should take this form. As we will see in the next chapter, New Brunswick's Poverty Reduction Initiative is a case in point. It involved people from across the province in a major overhaul of the government's welfare system, as well as a rethinking of the roles of business and the not-for-profit sector in reducing poverty.

Nevertheless, public engagement is not a cookie cutter for big processes. It is a methodology for collaboration, and collaboration is possible in all kinds of situations, big and small. Sometimes this involves large-scale processes like New Brunswick's, and sometimes it involves small local initiatives like Neighbourhood Watch.

Australia's Co-design Community Engagement Prototype project demonstrates the flexible nature of public engagement with respect to both scale and content. On scale, the project is quite compact. It aims at highly focused discussions with relatively small groups of people. On the content side, the project avoids tackling big policy issues head-on. Instead, it links policy discussions to the practical task of improving services within a community.

In this approach, local governments are seen as the gateway to the public. They are well positioned to serve as intermediaries between the public, on one hand, and federal and state/provincial governments, on the other, for at least two reasons. First, most

municipalities already have highly localized programs, ranging from Neighbourhood Watch to heritage committees, which can be tapped to mobilize and engage the public on a wide range of issues.

Second, the public's strong sense of membership in and commitment to their communities can be a powerful incentive for citizens to participate in dialogue and, ultimately, commit to action. People are far more likely to get involved in a dialogue that immediately affects their families, friends, homes, neighbourhoods and workplaces than one based on broad policy issues, such as poverty, climate change or innovation. They are also far more likely to make a serious commitment to action on local issues.

Although the Co-design Community Engagement Prototype project targets geographical communities, public engagement could focus on other kinds of communities as well, such as linguistic and cultural communities, or even communities-of-interest, such as professional associations or the environmental movement. What matters to the process is that the participants share common bonds and goals by virtue of their membership in some kind of community. Public engagement is all about working together—collaborating—to achieve such shared goals and solve related issues.

The Australian project also shows us how public engagement allows a flexible and nuanced response to issues in a way that discussions of big policy issues may not. The latter tend to hover at 30,000 feet and, as a result, things that look very different on the ground often get blurred. Not surprisingly, this kind of policy-making tends to cast issues in a generic way that, historically, has often led to one-size-fits-all solutions. Most policy-makers today agree that such solutions are likely to be wanting, for the simple reason that every community is different. For example, the needs of Inuit living in Canada's far north, or Aboriginal communities in Australia's Northern Territory, will be quite different from seniors living in Toronto or Sydney. If the needs are different, the solutions must be too, so a one-size-fits-all approach won't work.

The Australian project deals with such differences by pushing decision-making down to the local level. This will bring such differences into focus and allow communities to arrive at different solutions. While the issues under discussion will have generic similarities, such as seniors' need for home-care services or transportation, the specific character of these needs will be different in different communities, as will the solutions. Transportation needs in a rural community, for example, may be solved by car-pooling or a special bus, while in an urban setting the solution may be to distribute free bus passes.

The Co-design Community Engagement Prototype project thus allows each community to identify which needs are specifically important to it and to discuss how they can best be met. Once this has been done, members of each group will review the range of services available to their community and discuss what changes are needed to better meet their needs. Participants will conclude their dialogue by laying out a community action plan for improving services so that the services will better meet the needs in that community.

The goal of the action plan is to align services from all three orders of government, as well as local community services and even the work of volunteers. Including these non-governmental services in the dialogue is especially important. A community initiative to get volunteers to mow seniors' lawns makes an important contribution to helping seniors stay in their homes. Similarly, if the children of these seniors regularly help out with tasks around the home, this also contributes to the goal. Putting these services on the table during the dialogue means that, if there are ways they too can be adjusted to fit better with other services in the cluster, this should be discussed and, where appropriate, included in the action plan.

Community organizations and community members thus have a key role to play in the process, both in helping to identify

solutions and deliver them. This involves a major departure from how governments normally consult the public on service delivery. Rather than having each order of government engage citizens separately on issues citizens see as interconnected, it takes a more holistic approach. Governments must be willing to sit down with citizens and community organizations and have a single discussion on how to solve the issues in their community. Moreover, when they do, officials cannot impose all kinds of bureaucratic conditions on what services participants will or will not be allowed to talk about. Many services converge on a goal like keeping seniors in their homes. They come from all three orders of government, as well as community organizations. It is not only unrealistic to expect users to sort out which government, department or organization owns which one, it is counterproductive. The questions that need to be answered are not jurisdictional ones. They are about how to get better results: Do we have the right service goals? Are services aligned in ways that maximize the use of the resources to achieve them?

So the real lesson from the Australian Co-design Community Engagement Prototype project is that engagement on services should aim at much more than joining up government services or even joining up government(s). Ultimately, it aims at joining up entire communities through a genuine partnership between citizens, community organizations and the three levels of government. If this community-centred approach is a better way of doing business, it is not because it favours one level of government over another, but because it moves governments and the community beyond the traditional view that citizens are passive consumers of government policies and services, and toward a new view in which they are full partners in governance.

Hopefully, the Australian project will demonstrate that the three levels of government are ready, willing and able to engage the public this way. If so, they could use the approach to work

together with community organizations and citizens on a range of goals, from reducing rates of preventable diseases through healthy living to reducing carbon emissions through more environmentally friendly lifestyles. The project could serve as a prototype for a new approach to intergovernmental collaboration, based on the principle that: *When the three levels of government agree to work together with citizens and stakeholders to align services, they are, in effect, agreeing that the public's views should serve as an authoritative point of reference to help governments resolve their differences over how best to accomplish the task.* By the same token, the public's participation in the dialogue should be a constant reminder to officials that their first priority is to serve the public. If government officials fail to respect this principle, the dialogue will quickly stall.

To sum up, as the Co-design Community Engagement Prototype project suggests, the existing top-down approach to goal-setting within government should be complemented with a bottom-up approach based on public engagement.

We can call this approach to improving services a collaborative partnership. Collaborative partnerships put service delivery on a new footing by transforming the role of the public from one of passive consumers of government services to active participants in their design and delivery. This invests clients with some real control over the services and a sense of ownership and responsibility for making them work. Today, service providers for a wide range of client services agree that the right way to improve client services is through collaborative partnerships.

An Evaluation Framework for Public Engagement

Chapter 2 concluded with the observation that the participants in the sport policy renewal process should not expect to resolve all their issues around community-building through a single round of dialogue or a single action plan. That initiative, we said, should be viewed as a long-term commitment to developing a more

collaborative approach within the sport community. This, in turn, means the partners must look on the process as a cyclical one that will lead to ongoing action and adjustment.

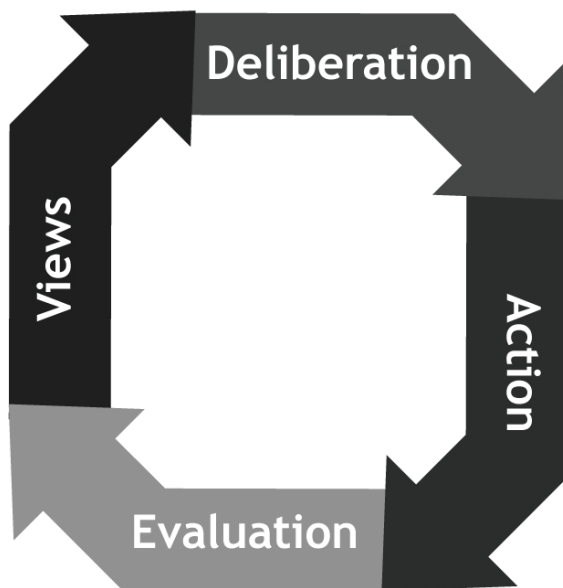
The same should be said of the kind of collaborative partnerships we have been discussing. The long-term goal of a project like the Co-design Community Engagement Prototype project is not just to solve a few problems around some services and then move on. It is to build a new kind of working relationship—a genuine partnership—between all the participants in a particular service area, such as services to seniors or working families. As this relationship develops, they will come to understand one another better, they will begin to share a common way of speaking about the issues, and they will develop new ways of working together. Their discussions will become more focused, disciplined and productive. As a result, they will also become more trusting of one another and more willing to make adjustments and compromises to reach solutions.

At the end of Chapter 3 we introduced a fourth stage in the public engagement approach—that of evaluation—and promised to return to it at the end of this chapter. We now want to link the idea of the ongoing dialogue to this fourth stage of evaluation. Taken together, they form a key part of our claim that public engagement is a methodology for collaboration. The four stages of the approach can be represented as follows:

Views → Deliberation → Action → Evaluation

We have seen that each stage has a different function in the dialogue process and, accordingly, each stage has its own set of rules, which reflect the task to be carried out. Arriving at the end of such a process—the action plan—may involve important progress on the issue, but it should be viewed as only a first step. Sustainable solutions to long-term issues depend on the participants' willingness to continue the discussion—to see it as an ongoing dialogue

that will lead to ongoing action and adjustment. The process thus should be seen as a cyclical one, whose long-term goal is not only to solve a problem, but to build a new relationship between the participants. We can represent it as follows:



As this new relationship develops, the participants come to understand one another better, they begin to share a common way of speaking about the issues, and they develop new ways of working together. By the same token, they become more understanding of one another's interests and concerns, more trusting, and more willing to make adjustments and compromises to reach solutions. As a result, their ongoing dialogue becomes more focused, disciplined and productive. So the idea of an ongoing dialogue is not about talk for talk's sake. It is about building the kind of long-term relationships needed to deal effectively with long-term issues. If it takes more time, resources and energy at the beginning, that investment is amply paid back over the longer term.

Dialogue plays a critical role at every stage. It allows the parties

to forge partnerships in which they discuss and challenge one another's assumptions, compare and contrast views, weigh competing alternatives and set priorities. They must reach agreement on how the relationship will work, what it is supposed to achieve, and how they will make this happen. If this dialogue fails to get started or breaks down, there will be no real collaboration and, ultimately, no partnership.

On the public's side, this means getting beyond just an expression of wants and opinions. The public must be ready, willing and able to listen, reflect, consider options, and accept change. On government's side, the relationship must be more than a display of power or authority. Government must be responsive to citizens and stakeholders, respectful of their views and flexible in its approaches.

In short, building and maintaining a collaborative partnership requires very special attention to the quality of the dialogue. This, in turn, calls for a special tool to monitor and evaluate progress. Such an evaluation framework should provide reliable standards and indicators to assess whether the dialogue is leading to real collaboration and partnership, as well as tell us how to identify and employ best practices that can help strengthen the dialogue and the partnership. In our view, the standards and indicators for a successful dialogue and a successful partnership will rest on five critical conditions:

- trust;
- openness;
- mutual respect;
- inclusiveness; and
- personal responsibility

Trust is the starting point of any sustainable partnership. Without it there will be no willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue and the relationship will stall. Openness encourages self-examination, the weighing of evidence, the willingness to share information and ideas and to search for new opportunities and solutions. Mutual respect ensures that the partners will listen to one another and that there will be give and take. Inclusiveness ensures that all those with a real stake in the service are represented in the dialogue. A sense of personal responsibility is necessary to ensure that the dialogue is not just about talk, but that the parties will seek to understand their roles and fulfil their responsibilities. These five factors are mutually reinforcing and, as the partnership evolves, will strengthen and enhance one another.¹⁷

¹⁷ A more detailed sketch of how this proposed evaluation framework would work is provided in Appendix 2 at the end of this book.

The Political Objections to Public Engagement

If the consultative approach to policy-making was once a beacon of democracy, in recent years that light has dimmed. Processes often become unruly, are commandeered by partisans and advocates, or officials are left sorting through a jumble of demands and options. The now-infamous U.S. town halls on health care may be a watershed. They were a spectacular example of just how wrong things can go.

In July 2009, President Barack Obama's proposed health-care reforms were introduced into the U.S. House of Representatives. The president urged his fellow Democrats to use the summer break to hold town hall meetings on the bill with their constituents. In America, this is a time-honoured way of engaging citizens in the policy process and of building support for initiatives. The format allows citizens to meet with their elected representatives, pose questions about key issues, provide comments on them, and hear the views of others. It has been a favourite tool for community-based, democratic debate and discussion since the days of the American Revolution.

When members of the fledgling Tea Party movement heard about the plan, they saw something else—the chance to drive a stake through the heart of Obama's health-care reforms. Goaded by

radio talk-show hosts like Rush Limbaugh and Fox News Channel's Glenn Beck, the Tea Partiers had already declared health-care reform a line in the sand for the Obama regime. The town halls were perfect cover for a full-scale ambush. Tea Partiers simply marched into the meetings, took control of the floor, and shouted down their befuddled hosts—all in front of the TV cameras.

As a piece of partisan political maneuvering, the tactics worked brilliantly. For the Democrats, it was a disaster, pure and simple. It nearly killed health-care reform. Although Obama eventually succeeded in getting things back on track, it was only after he withdrew the bill, revised it and spent a wad of his rapidly diminishing political capital.

In recent years, this kind of hyper-partisan politics seems to be reaching critical mass. Whether it's the belligerent tone of parliamentary debate, viciousness in the blogosphere, the growing use of attack ads or the demagogic rants on talk radio, the chances for civilized dialogue and debate seem to be disintegrating around us.

Given this climate, some strategists will be shaking their heads when they hear that this book calls for a more engaged role for the public in the public policy process. They will reply that the U.S. town halls are a clear warning to policy-makers of how easily public processes can be derailed by partisan tactics or citizens' anger. Given the current, frenzied state of politics, they will say, these exercises are just too risky for the returns.

This chapter addresses such concerns. It identifies six "political pitfalls" that may worry strategists as they weigh the costs and benefits of public engagement. While there is no foolproof answer to all the pitfalls, the argument here is that the risks can be managed. We use the province of New Brunswick's successful Poverty Reduction Initiative to show how and why.

The New Brunswick Poverty Reduction Initiative

In October 2008, New Brunswick Premier Shawn Graham announced his government's Poverty Reduction Initiative. From a political perspective, poverty reduction qualifies as a Big Idea—and therefore a risky one. The scale and scope of New Brunswick's needs could easily overwhelm the small government. Poverty reduction is also one of those ideologically charged ideas where debate easily succumbs to partisan politics. From the viewpoint of the Opposition parties or critics in the media, launching a public debate on poverty reduction could be the equivalent of waving a red flag in front of a bull.

Nevertheless, Graham not only decided to tackle poverty reduction, but used the occasion to test the viability of the public engagement approach. Thus, in launching the initiative, he declared that he not only wanted to arrive at a strategy that would transform how the province addressed poverty, but one that would be jointly owned by government, stakeholders and the general public.¹⁸

Such a goal would leave many political strategists shaking their heads. Their gut reaction would be to kill the project before it got out of the planning room. The political risks, they would say, are just too great. These risks can be distilled into six basic objections that, in one form or another, are often raised against big public processes on Big Ideas like poverty reduction:

- The public will not take any real responsibility for the solutions that are proposed.
- Ordinary citizens lack the skills and training needed to work through complex policy issues in an orderly and objective way.

18 For the benefit of non-Canadian readers, New Brunswick is one of Canada's smaller provinces. It is home to some 750,000 people, and is located on the Atlantic coast. Under the Canadian Constitution, provinces have sole responsibility for most areas of social policy. While the federal government is often involved in social programs, this is usually through some form of funding partnership. The federal government was not directly involved in the planning or implementation of the Poverty Reduction Initiative.

- Big dialogue processes often turn into endless talkfests that only distract government from the real task of governing.
- Looking to the public for solutions might saddle the government with bad policies.
- Big dialogue processes can make the leader a sitting duck for opponents, who will assail the leader as weak, adrift or lacking in ideas.
- Big Ideas like poverty-reduction are potentially wedge issues that opponents can use to polarize public opinion and turn a dialogue process into an ugly shouting match.

How damaging are these six pitfalls to the argument that public engagement can be used to realize Big Ideas?

The New Brunswick project managed to navigate through all six without calamity. At the end of the day, the process produced a collaborative strategy that makes real progress on changing how the province deals with poverty. While the final proposals were not perfect, they were substantial and “progressive” in nature. Moreover, the debate remained civil—even thoughtful—throughout, as the following points attest:

- David Alward, who is now the premier but at the time was Leader of the Official Opposition, gave his full support to the process. Alward participated in the initiative’s Final Forum where the solutions were adopted, and in a press interview described the experience as “incredibly emotional and moving.” He also promised that, should he become premier, his government would build on the initiative, rather than undo it. He has kept his word.
- When legislation to implement the action plan was introduced in the legislature, the opposition Progressive Conservative Party greeted it with a standing ovation.
- Going into the process, New Brunswick had the lowest minimum wage in the Atlantic region. Yet business leaders from

across the province agreed to a proposal to allow it to rise quickly to the Atlantic average.

- Of more than 50 press clippings from major dailies in the province that were reviewed for this chapter, assessments ranged from cautious optimism to glowing praise for the process, the solutions and the leaders.

So, the poverty reduction project not only avoided the six pitfalls, it produced respectful discussion and debate and, ultimately, a level of agreement on major policy initiatives that is rarely seen in the acrimonious world of partisan politics. According to Kelly Lamrock, the government minister responsible for the process, one of the most memorable things about the process was that political adversaries were engaging one another in a real discussion of the issues, rather than playing the usual partisan games.

So what happened here? Was Graham just lucky? If so, that is bad news for all of us, for, as we have said, all major policy fields today are complex. As a result, almost any big issue now requires more than a *government* strategy; it requires collaborative action. But if collaboration requires dialogue, and dialogue processes really are politically perilous, street-smart political leaders will work hard to avoid them. Unfortunately, as we saw in Chapter 1, this also means they will be unable to deal effectively with big issues. It is a short step from here to the world of consumer politics, in which, as we said in Chapter 1, political parties offer micro-policies to targeted groups in exchange for their votes.

The poverty reduction project's success rests on the "bottom-up" nature of the engagement process, which not only succeeded in transferring some ownership and responsibility to the public, but also changed the normal rules of political debate in a way that significantly reduced the opportunities and rewards for partisan politics. As we shall see, the welcome news is that the right kind of process can allow a government to manage, perhaps even overcome, the six pitfalls.

The Process

The Poverty Reduction Initiative process had three stages, each of which involved a different subset of “the public.” Each stage also included individuals who have experienced poverty, to ensure the voices and perspectives of the poor and working poor were present throughout.

The Views Stage (Dialogue Sessions): In Stage 1, from January to March 2009, 16 dialogue sessions were held around the province. All New Brunswickers were invited to attend and share their views on the best ways to reduce poverty. They could also participate online, or by letter, fax or brief. About 2,500 people responded. The findings were then assembled in a report, titled *A Choir of Voices*, which provided the basis for the discussions in Stage 2.

The Deliberative Stage (Roundtable Sessions): Stage 2 took place from May to August 2009. The plan was to assemble a cross-section of 30 experts from the public domain, ask them to meet at a series of roundtable discussions, review the findings from Stage 1, and propose a menu of options to implement the findings. The experts were not there to debate and advance their own views, but to build on the work begun by citizens.

The Action Stage (Final Forum): The Final Forum was held on Nov. 12 and 13, 2009, and was facilitated personally by Premier Graham. Fifty participants came together to debate the options from Stage 2; they included senior leaders from the government, business and the voluntary sectors. Together they adopted the first-ever poverty reduction plan for the province, which commits all the participants to work together to reduce income poverty in the province by 25 per cent and deep income poverty by 50 per cent by 2015, through a list of “priority actions,” including:

- raising the minimum wage to the Atlantic average;
- restructuring and increasing welfare rates by up to 80 per cent;

- raising the allowable asset exemption by redefining the “economic unit” that determines household income for people in poverty;
- launching a new drug plan for people living in poverty;
- providing stable funding for homeless shelters;
- providing funding for five integrated early learning sites;
- moving from a rules-based to an outcome-based assistance system, and from passive assistance to employment orientation, within five years;
- introducing an early-learning and child-care act in the legislature;
- creating a crown corporation to oversee implementation of the action plan and to lead further iterations of the poverty reduction process; and
- committing the three sectors to work together to develop “social inclusion networks” across the province to provide new forms of support and opportunities for the poor and working poor.

Now we can look to see if the action plan answers those six basic objections that are often raised against big public processes on Big Ideas.

Will the Public Take Responsibility?

If there were doubts about whether this process would yield a significant collaborative action plan, they should be laid to rest. As this partial list shows, the plan is forward looking, comprehensive, ambitious and collaborative.

Consider the move from a rules-based to an outcome-based assistance system. The system had been criticized for being too tightly tied to compliance with rules. For example, when welfare recipients found a job, most automatically lost their medical and/or dental benefits, potentially leaving these people worse off than

before. This was a huge disincentive to finding work. By focusing more on the goal of getting people back to work, and less on the rules of qualifying for benefits, officials will gain some flexibility in how they deal with individual cases. Thus, in future it should be possible to let someone keep their medical benefits for a time after they find a job if, say, that encourages the person to accept a minimum-wage job.

Or consider such actions as the creation of five new integrated early-learning sites, which will be the responsibility of the McCain Foundation; or raising the minimum wage, the cost of which will be borne by businesses—especially small businesses. Actions like these clearly show that non-governmental actors are willing to take on some responsibility, thus overcoming the first pitfall that we described.

The proposed community economic and social inclusion networks will take collaboration another big step forward. If these networks are to be built, government, non-profit organizations and business will need to make real changes in how they conduct their day-to-day business. The plan commits them to working together to do this by better aligning their activities and resources at the community level and working to mobilize citizens. So, neither the dialogue nor the work is finished.

Finally, the project as a whole will be led and coordinated by a new crown corporation, called the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation. It is expected to lead and coordinate an on-going cycle of dialogue and action, slowly building a new kind of social partnership around the goal of eliminating poverty. It will have four vice-chairpersons, one each from government, the non-profit sector, business, and people who have experienced poverty. A 22-member board of directors, with representatives from the same four groups, will oversee the corporation.

In sum, the action plan is genuinely collaborative and, as such, clearly shows that the public is willing to take some ownership and

responsibility for solving issues, which answers the first of our six pitfalls. The key to having achieved this lies in the three-stage process. Rather than treating the public as a passive observer of government activities, it was designed to challenge people and organizations to see themselves as full partners in both the decisions and the responsibilities around reducing poverty. The public rose to the occasion.

Are Citizens Up to the Task?

Our second pitfall says that ordinary citizens lack the skills and training they need to work through complex policy issues in an orderly and objective way. In this view, at the very least, engaging them in such a dialogue would require the development of new skills. In the case of the Poverty Reduction Initiative, citizens attended dialogue sessions around the province. At the sessions, they broke into smaller, facilitated discussion groups where they presented and discussed their views. By all reports, they did so respectfully, thoughtfully and often articulately. As the process moves into the next phase of developing the economic and social inclusion networks, the public will be called on to play an even more engaged role.¹⁹

This kind of dialogue and cooperation is not unusual. Over the last decade, there has been a lot of experimentation with deliberative processes. While they do not commit the participants to taking action, these processes do require reflection, consideration of evidence, weighing of alternatives, compromise and priority setting, as well as good will, mutual respect and often a major commitment of time. Deliberative processes have been used in many places with considerable success and have shown that citizens are ready, able and willing to participate.

Here in Canada, the Government of British Columbia's Citizens' Assembly provides an excellent example of a deliberative process

¹⁹ For more on this, see the New Brunswick case study in Appendix 1.

involving citizens. It brought together 160 randomly selected citizens from across the province to discuss and make recommendations on electoral reform. The group began meeting in January 2004. Their mandate was, first, to see if they agreed on the need for some form of proportional representation; and, second, if they did, whether they could come to agreement on a particular model.

The government promised that, if both conditions were met, the Assembly's proposal would be put to the general public in a referendum in the provincial election in 2005. If the public then approved it, the government would introduce legislation so the new system could go into effect for the election of 2009. Ontario used a similar process to carry out its own experiment on electoral reform in 2006-07.

The B.C. citizens' assembly reached agreement on the need for a new system and a model. When the model was proposed to the voters, however, it was narrowly defeated. Because the vote was so close, the government decided to pose the question to voters a second time in the election of 2009, where it was ultimately voted down again, this time by a wider margin. The Ontario assembly also reached agreement, but, as in B.C., the proposal failed to pass in the provincial referendum.

In both assemblies, citizens participated whole-heartedly, often at high personal cost. They gave up their weekends for several months, sat through long and often complicated learning sessions, and then worked through the options together until they arrived at a conclusion. Moreover, they did what their political representatives may not have been able to do. They reached almost unanimous agreement on an option for electoral reform. This not only shows that citizens are ready, willing and able to participate more fully on complex issues, but that they can be relied upon to work together and to find solutions to problems that may elude their governments.

As the example makes clear, using dialogue to solve problems is *not* a highly specialized skill. On the contrary, dialogue is one of the most basic social skills we possess. Each of us knows intuitively how it works, why it works and when it works. Participants therefore don't need a lot of training in the complex rules, practices and skills of dialogue to participate fully in a process. They mainly need to get in touch with their own intuitive ability to use language.

This is not to deny that participants need leadership and direction. They do. A well-designed process is one source of direction. Another comes from the officials who lead and facilitate it; both the designers and the facilitators need special skills and training. Their challenge is, first, to build a process that sends the right signals to participants about the tasks at hand and their respective roles in performing them; and, second, to get participants to recognize and begin responding to the signals. Both tasks require a sophisticated grasp of the rules and structure of dialogue, careful planning around how a proposed dialogue will unfold, and experience at managing group dynamics.

Does Public Engagement Lead to Talkfests?

The third potential political objection is that a commitment to public engagement is likely to lead to an explosion of talkfests that go nowhere, while distracting governments from making decisions and governing. In fact, no process, large or small, should be allowed to go on interminably. While the right participants must be at the table and must have the time needed to work through the issues, a well-designed and well-executed process will be focused and disciplined, have clear milestones, and lead to action within a reasonable period of time. The participants themselves will usually insist on this.

As for the claim that public engagement might distract governments from making the hard decisions they need to make, the reason for turning to engagement is that governments are

increasingly unwilling and/or unable to make such decisions. Far from distracting them from such responsibilities, public engagement is all about helping governments to fulfil them.

Having made these points, it is worth noting that governments still have a lot to learn about how to design and deliver public engagement processes. It is certainly possible that they will do this badly, which can lead to all kinds of problems, such as talkfests. The rule of thumb here is that, in these early days, launching more than one or two at a time is probably unwise. A large project like the Poverty Reduction Initiative, for example, requires considerable resources and focused leadership from both the public service and political levels.

Will Government Get Saddled with Bad Policies?

The fourth pitfall—the possibility that government will be saddled with bad policies—is a red herring. In New Brunswick’s Final Forum, no one had the power to compel government to choose one option over another, any more than government had the power to compel, say, the private sector to do so. Former premier Graham reports that, as options were being discussed in Stage 2, cabinet members spent many hours discussing them.²⁰ This allowed ministers to prepare various scenarios, unite around key options, and be sure they weren’t taking for granted what options were likely to be proposed at the Final Forum or how they would respond. According to Graham, the process in no way compromised government decision-making. On the contrary, it legitimated the final choices. Public engagement doesn’t require governments to give up their decision-making authority, just to exercise it differently—that is, collaboratively.

²⁰ See the case study in Appendix 1.

Does Engagement Make a Leader Look Weak?

As for our fifth pitfall, most political leaders know all too well that issues like poverty are complex, and that governments lack the resources to make more than a small dent in them. Often, the political climate leaves little room to acknowledge this, let alone call on the public to help solve problems. If political leaders talk of such processes, they leave themselves open to charges that they are weak or stalling, or that they lack concrete plans. By comparison, opponents who claim to have concrete plans look decisive and competent, and therefore attractive to voters.

Unfortunately, such plans are usually formed without the full participation of stakeholders and communities. As a result, they can't assign the public any real tasks or ask them to contribute new resources. "Government strategies" are usually plans to mobilize resources from across a number of government departments to solve a problem or achieve a goal. Thus, a poverty reduction strategy might mobilize resources from social assistance programs, education, health and regional economic development in ways that mutually support the goals of the strategy.

While any effort by a government to coordinate across its departments should be applauded, this kind of strategy has two related shortcomings. First, in all but the most exceptional cases, major new funding on a scale large enough to make more than a dent in big issues like poverty is unlikely. Secondly, if poverty reduction is the new priority for a government, the resources to support it will likely be found by changing existing priorities. In other words, existing resources will be reassigned from one goal to another. While realigning goals and resources can be a good thing, too often this amounts to robbing Peter to pay Paul. One administration declares poverty to be its priority so it launches a major effort to realign and refocus the government's resources around poverty. Another party gets elected (or the same one with a new mandate or new leader), sets new priorities, and the shell

game starts all over. While in principle there is nothing wrong with changing priorities and realigning resources, creating “government strategies” has now become the main way that one government distinguishes itself from another and tries to appeal to voters. The unhappy truth here is that governments spend a great deal of time and money playing this kind of shell game and that most of these strategies achieve very little.

In developing a strategy to address issues like poverty, innovation, climate change or skills development, the real challenge is to bring new resources, skills and authorities to bear on the problem, and on a scale that can make real progress on the issue.

This, of course, pushes us in the direction of public engagement. A *community* strategy, as opposed to a *government* strategy, is one that enlists resources and organizations from outside government in the task of solving problems. It also enlists the general public. In the past, policies surrounding tasks such as providing security, building infrastructure and providing services could be devised by a relatively small number of public servants, operating under the leadership of a minister. This did not require the same level of cooperation with stakeholders, communities and even the general public. In the new policy environment, real solutions require a very different kind of process, which requires different leadership, culture and organizational structures.

This poses a dilemma for political leaders. On one hand, if they propose a major process to consult with the public on issues like poverty or innovation, they run the risk of being assailed by opponents as weak, indecisive, lacking in ideas and “caught up in process.” On the other hand, they can’t propose a plan that brings in new resources or assigns real responsibilities to the public without such a process. Public engagement provides a way through this dilemma. Because it gives the public a real say in the task of developing the strategy, it creates a new line of defence against partisan

attacks on the process. New Brunswick's process provides a telling example of how this works.

At the outset, Graham named three co-chairs to lead the process: Lamrock, who was Minister of Social Development; Leo-Paul Pinet, a well-known leader in the voluntary sector; and Gerry Pond, a highly respected leader in the business community.

At one point, Alward, the Opposition leader who had also agreed to participate in the process, unexpectedly published a letter in one of the daily newspapers accusing Lamrock of failing to take immediate action on some outdated rules around welfare benefits, which were being discussed in the process. He went on to say that, if elected, his government would not wait to make these changes.

One way to interpret these events is to assume Alward was trying to put Lamrock on the defensive by suggesting he was hiding behind the process and then challenging him to show "real" leadership. If so then these turned out not to be normal circumstances. An immediate reply appeared in the Letters to the Editor section of a major daily, not from the Minister, but from the other two co-chairs, who, in effect, told him to stop playing partisan politics.

Their message to Alward was clear. Lamrock had made a commitment to respect the process, and the process was not over. It was therefore wrong for Alward to call on him to take action at this time. Furthermore, having also signed onto the process, Alward himself was obliged to let the process run its course.²¹

In political terms, this was an extraordinary turn of events. The co-chairs were not only declaring that the public was a real partner in the process, but that, as its leaders, they were willing and able to exercise some control over the political debate around it. The warning to politicians on all sides was clear: Partisan politics has no place in a process where the public is a full partner.

21 David Alward's article is available at: <http://telegraphjournal.canadaeast.com/city/article/829555>. The letter from the co-chairs is available at: <http://telegraphjournal.canadaeast.com/search/article/833318>

Much to Alward's credit, he not only heard the message, but took it to heart. He abandoned his challenge to the Minister and resumed the non-partisan stance he had taken until then. As the new premier of New Brunswick, he has emerged as a strong and committed champion of public engagement, even making himself Minister Responsible for Citizen Engagement.

On reflection, perhaps none of this should be too surprising. After all, in a democracy when citizens “speak,” politicians are supposed to listen. A public engagement process like this one puts that principle into practice in a new way by providing a platform from which the public can speak more authoritatively and clearly about an issue than it usually does, or is asked to do. A politician who tries to undermine such a process through partisan tactics does so at his or her peril. By the same token, once politicians recognize that such a process gives the public a new voice in the policy process, the dynamics and rules of normal political debate will change. Indeed, as the remarkably positive coverage in the media suggests, even journalists—who normally pull no punches when it comes to big government processes—seemed to understand that the New Brunswick process had somehow shifted the terrain and, as a result, they treated it with respect. It is worth adding here that the media and politicians in British Columbia showed similar deference to, and respect for, the province's Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform in 2004.

Does Engagement Create an Opportunity for Wedge Arguments?

Our final pitfall concerns the threat of wedge arguments. To say that an issue like poverty is complex is to say that it can have a wide variety of causes, such as cultural practices, economic status, gender differences, education levels and so on.²² In a debate, leaders, commentators and advocates respond to this kind of complexity by

22 See the discussion on the holistic turn in Section 4 of Chapter 1.

trying to “frame the issue;” that is, they try to establish how it will be positioned and understood in public debate.

Framing is a critical step in determining solutions. For example, if poverty gets framed as an educational issue, resources are more likely to flow in that direction. On the other hand, if it gets framed as the product of laziness, the public might become impatient and resentful toward people in poverty and might take a punitive attitude toward them. So the stakes here are high and the effort to “win” the framing debate often creates a highly charged, partisan environment.

This environment may also be the perfect opportunity for wedge arguments. The strategy is simple, but potentially devastating. Someone with media influence—often a politician—seeks to polarize public opinion by framing the debate around a highly emotional, black-and-white view of the issue. This is then backed up by simplistic, partisan slogans. Thus someone might argue that the only real solution to poverty is “tough love,” and that spending programs that support the poor simply reward laziness. If this succeeds, it will divide the public and likely derail any dialogue process that aims at collaboration.

The New Brunswick process minimized the risk of wedge politics. In the Views stage, ordinary New Brunswickers were invited to express their views, simply and directly. Because the exchange was between citizens, politicians were expected to listen, not speak, so there was no real opportunity for them to drive a wedge into the dialogue. Of course, participants didn’t always agree among themselves, but they tended to listen to one another and to be respectful of their differences.

Now, contrary to what some might think, this is not unusual. Although citizens can become enraged and unruly at town hall meetings, as the Obama health-care meetings showed, most often their anger is directed at politicians, not at each other; and it is usually based on a belief—too often justified—that government is not

really listening. The key to getting citizens to behave like responsible adults is to treat them as such. In practice, this means assuring them that their voice will have a real impact on the outcome. The New Brunswick process achieved this in two ways. First, it made each stage more transparent by conducting it in public. Second, it ensured each stage built systematically on the one before it, leading to a greater sense of continuity in the process.

In the Deliberation stage, experts were instructed to work together to find fair and reasonable ways to assess and implement what citizens had to say in the Views stage. This did not mean that every utterance by every citizen had to be turned into an option. Choices had to be made, but this was supposed to happen in a way that was transparent and fair. By contrast, traditional consultation usually limits the role of the general public to giving (and exchanging) views. Moreover, most of the real deliberation and decision-making happens at a later stage, usually behind closed doors.

How far the New Brunswick process actually achieved these two conditions is open to debate, but the basic principle is sound: Most citizens do not expect government to do everything they say. They simply want to know that they *have* a say. The New Brunswick process did a good enough job on this that by the time the Views and Deliberation stages were completed the dialogue had essentially been framed in an orderly, disciplined and democratic way.

We can now see how a different kind of approach to policy-making might have prevented the Tea Partiers from seizing control of those U.S. town hall meetings on health care, and thus, the whole process of health-care reform. In a public engagement process where the participants had begun to develop a sense of ownership of it, they would likely have resisted these disruptions and taken action to block the attempted coup. However, because the town hall process was a conventional form of consultation, the participants saw it as belonging to government, not them. They were there as guests of the government and, in many respects, as

spectators of one another. If the Tea Partiers used the occasion to attack the government's reforms, the other participants did not feel any responsibility or authority to do much to stop it.

By contrast, when a genuine sense of participant ownership and accountability emerges in a process, it creates a different dynamic. As the participants begin to feel and express their sense of ownership, government ownership recedes. This makes partisan attempts to disrupt the process increasingly difficult and risky. After all, by attacking the process, partisans like the Tea Partiers would no longer be seen to be attacking government, but rather their fellow citizens. Moreover, they would be doing so at a time when others had come together to assume their civic duty and try to solve real community issues. Indeed, the troublemakers would likely find themselves facing off against another group of citizens, but one that spoke with much greater legitimacy and authority than that of the miscreants. In sum, using such tactics to undermine the work of government is one thing. Using it to undermine the work of fellow citizens is quite another.

C h a p t e r 6

The Principles of Public Engagement: A Summary

Over the last five chapters we've looked at public engagement from a variety of perspectives, such as how it can vary in scope and scale, apply to service delivery or strategic policy, or involve citizens, stakeholders or both. Now it's time to consolidate the main ideas from our discussion. This chapter provides an overview of the public engagement approach and reference points to guide practitioners who may want to experiment with it. We begin with an overview of the stages of the public engagement approach, and then set out 18 principles that guide its implementation. The list of principles is not definitive, so new ones could be added later or existing ones modified.

The Process Template

In our discussion of the public engagement framework in Chapter 3 we saw that public engagement processes have three key stages: Views, Deliberation and Action. We can now draw on our discussion in Chapter 4 to add a fourth stage, Evaluation, as well as a few comments on ongoing dialogue. The tasks to be performed in the four stages are as follows:

Views: In the first stage the participants are asked to state their views on the issue. They are encouraged to tell each other how they

see it and how they would solve it. This signals that, unlike in the consultative approach, engagement treats issues holistically from the start. It allows participants to propose new connections between issues and to explain why these links are important. By giving participants a chance to get this on the table, the engagement approach ensures that everyone feels included and reassures them that the first of the two test questions—the reframing question—will not be swept under the rug.

Deliberation: Once all the views are in, the discussion moves to the second stage and the participants are asked to consolidate the views, reframe the issue, and propose broad solutions:

- Consolidating views means eliminating bad ones and aligning good ones. For the most part, this involves fairly conventional analysis and there is a wide range of rules and strategies for carrying it out, from citing evidence to support claims to making compromises and trade-offs on competing values and goals.
- Reframing is trickier. It is about reaching agreement on new holistic connections, which are the beams and trusses from which a new frame will be assembled. Mapping the policy space is the main technique for finding these links.
- Once the issue has been reframed, participants must propose and outline solutions to the issue. These are meant to be high-level options, not detailed plans.

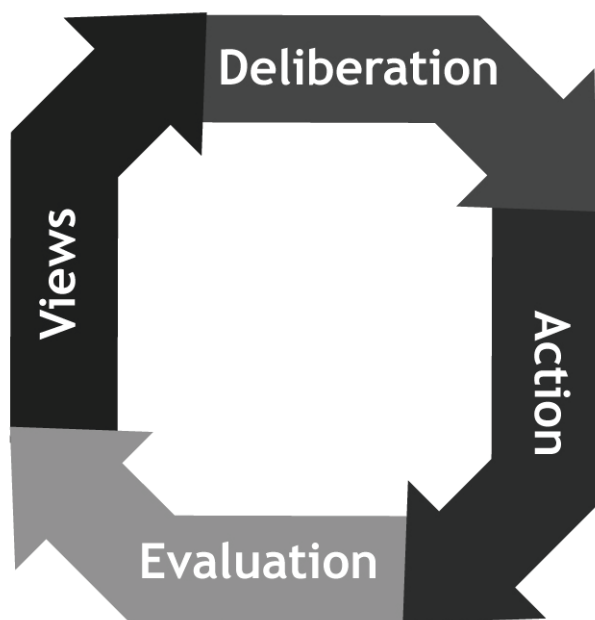
Action: In the third stage the task is to develop an action plan that can deliver the solutions. That discussion has two parts:

- Developing a strategy to implement the solutions: The plan must be efficient, effective and realistic, and it must treat all the interests around the table fairly.
- Assigning roles and responsibilities: All the participants must be ready, able and willing to propose specific actions they (or their organizations) will take to move the strategy forward.

These two discussions will be carried out together so that, as the strategy is being developed, questions will be vetted about the willingness and capacity of the participants to assign themselves responsibility for delivering some part of it.

Evaluation: Finally, the group must adopt a set of indicators to assess their progress. Certainly, these indicators will focus on the effectiveness of the proposed strategies and action plan, but they must also help the group assess the overall effectiveness of the process and strengthen it as the group goes forward. The evaluation framework for this will be based on the five conditions of successful collaboration set out in Principle 16 below.

The Ongoing Dialogue: Finally, as described in Principle 17 below, the public engagement approach is usually meant to be a cyclical process of dialogue, action and learning, which leads, eventually, to a transformation in the relationship between government and the participants, as indicated in the following diagram:



Principles of the Approach

- 1. There is a new policy environment:** Over the last few decades, the policy environment has been transformed by a variety of new social and economic forces, including information and communications technologies, globalization, environmental change, population growth and mobility, and higher levels of education. These forces have combined to make virtually all societies more fast-moving, interdependent and diverse. As a result, the policy environment has become exponentially more complex. The macro effects on policy-making can be summed up in two major implications: issues are far less self-contained and more interconnected than only a few decades ago; and solutions to issues often require the participation of a variety of players, including private- and third-sector organizations and ordinary citizens.
- 2. There are new public expectations:** In democratic countries like Canada, Australia, the U.S. or the U.K., changing social and economic circumstances, especially higher education, have been accompanied by a major change in the public's expectations around government. The public today is less deferent to, and less trusting of, governments than were earlier generations. They now expect a greater say in issues that concern them and are far less tolerant or accepting of backroom deals. Today, the public expect governments to be far more transparent, accountable and responsive to their needs and concerns.
- 3. Good policy is comprehensive:** In the new policy environment, policy-making should be more comprehensive or holistic; that is, new linkages resulting from the growing interdependence of policy fields should be reflected in policy development.
- 4. A new set of policy goals is emerging:** Recognition of the need for more holistic approaches to policy has resulted in a new generation of policy goals that are holistic in nature. Examples include wellness, sustainable development and life-long

learning. These societal goals explicitly recognize that policy fields from across the spectrum are deeply interconnected. Thus, sustainable development views the environment and the economy as inherently linked. Efforts to develop a sustainable economy must take into account the impact on the environment, and vice versa. Societal goals like these are emerging in every policy field and increasingly dominate policy thinking.

5. **Real progress toward societal goals requires public participation:** Societal goals such as wellness, literacy or reducing climate change—and the issues around them—are bigger than governments in the sense that their achievement/solution requires effort and action on the part of stakeholders and/or citizens, not just governments. Achieving wellness, for example, takes more than good hospitals, well-trained doctors, pharmaceuticals or universal access to the health-care system. Building a healthy community requires that members of the public be informed and engaged, and that they be ready, willing and able to take some real responsibility for promoting their own health through, for example, proper nutrition, exercise and work-life balance. Public engagement aims to engage the public more fully at each stage of the policy process. This participation may involve citizens, stakeholders or both, depending on the issue.
6. **Taking responsibility implies having some control:** Traditional governance treats the public (citizens and stakeholders) as passive consumers of government's policies and programs. If governments are now going to ask the public to assume a new level of ownership and responsibility for outcomes, this relationship must change. In future, the decision-making process must give them a real voice in developing the solutions. In Chapter 2, we called this the Golden Rule of Public Engagement. It says that the public should have a greater say in the process—and thus a sense of control over the outcomes—in exchange for a new level of responsibility for implementing the solutions.

- 7. Decisions are made collaboratively:** Giving the public a bigger say does not mean that citizens or stakeholders can simply tell government what to do. Public engagement is about collaboration, not devolution. In collaboration, all the partners sit down together to discuss the issues and options. Everyone, including government, is expected to listen to the others, try to find common ground and make reasonable compromises.
- 8. Accountability is shared:** When stakeholders, citizens or communities agree to work together to solve problems or achieve goals, they become responsible and accountable to one another, both for the quality of their participation in the process, and for the commitments they make in the action plan. Regarding the process itself, participants are expected to be respectful of one another and to participate in good faith, and a well-designed engagement process has the means to protect itself against disruptions, such as grandstanding, intransigence or exaggeration. As the participants work together, a sense of collective ownership of the process builds, and the group will show little tolerance for troublemakers who seek to undermine or retard progress. Regarding the action plan, in public engagement, a minister is accountable in all the usual ways for those parts of the action plan to which officials have committed on his/her behalf, so engagement processes do not weaken or undo traditional ministerial accountability. However, they extend accountability to each of the participants, who are responsible to one another for the commitments they have made in the plan.
- 9. The approach requires trust, but also builds trust:** The challenge of public engagement is to get participants to collaborate in good faith. Participants will only agree to make compromises or commit to action if they believe others will do the same. This requires trust and good will. Without this, the process will stall. However, if public engagement requires trust and good will, it

also builds them. As the dialogue progresses through a number of cycles, participants come to know and understand each other better. They share ideas and undertake projects together. Trust and good will develop along with the new relationship.

- 10. Public engagement is inclusive:** Solving complex issues through dialogue requires a genuinely representative range of perspectives. Leaving out some key voices, say, because their views conflict with others, leads to solutions that are inadequate or unsustainable or both. Including these voices may create conflicts over how issues should be defined or resolved, but it also provides the creative tensions that lead to innovative ways of viewing and solving issues.
- 11. Every community is different:** Issues that look similar at first glance are often very different just below the surface. To return to the example we've cited earlier, research shows that the profile of homeless people in Winnipeg and Vancouver is different. As a result, so are the causes of, and solutions to, the problem. While this does not mean there is nothing useful to say about issues like homelessness at a provincial or national level, it does mean that good policy-making should allow for real flexibility in the solutions and implementation at the community level. Moreover, communities are not just geographical. A community is a group of people and/or organizations linked together by any of a number of bonds, such as geography, language, culture or a common goal. The main condition for public engagement is that the participants share common goals or interests that would benefit from greater collaboration. As a general rule, the more cohesive the community, the more effective engagement is likely to be.
- 12. Local governments are the gateway to the public:** Local governments are often best positioned to lead public engagement initiatives, for at least two reasons. First, most municipalities already have highly localized programs, which can be tapped

to mobilize and engage the public on a wide range of issues. Second, the public's strong sense of membership in and commitment to their communities can be a powerful incentive for citizens to participate in dialogue and, ultimately, commit to action. For these reasons, local governments can often serve as intermediaries between the public, on one hand, and federal and state/provincial governments, on the other.

- 13. Citizens' voices must be heard:** When citizens talk about public policy, they tend to rely on narrative and their focus is on outcomes. Stakeholders are usually more focused on policy options, planning and costs and benefits. Consultation blurs these differences so that over time the voice of citizens has been increasingly assimilated to that of stakeholders. Public engagement provides a forum in which these voices can be distinguished and co-exist, and thus allows citizens to regain their own voice in the policy process.
- 14. Public engagement is fully scalable:** Public engagement processes need not be large in scale or scope. They are often small, highly focused community initiatives, such as a neighbourhood literacy program or a community economic development initiative. Public engagement is not about size. It is about how governments can use deliberative discussion to unite a group of people around a common goal and mobilize them to work together to achieve it.
- 15. Policy and service delivery are linked:** The doctrine that policy and service delivery should be separated is misleading, if not wrong. While it is useful to distinguish between them, they are more like opposite ends of a continuum than different things. Recognizing their interconnectedness is critical for improving service delivery, especially as concerns joined-up services. This involves more than modernizing administrative processes. It involves important policy choices.

16. Collaboration requires a new measurement framework:

Collaboration is a new way of doing business for governments. We need to replace existing measurement tools with a new evaluation framework based on five conditions that must be fulfilled to have successful collaboration:

- trust;
- openness;
- inclusiveness;
- mutual respect; and
- personal responsibility.

17. Societal goals require ongoing dialogue and action: Societal goals like wellness or sustainable development will not be achieved through a single piece of legislation or strategy; nor will they be achieved in the usual four-year mandate of a government. Their pursuit must be seen as a journey with many milestones. Public engagement establishes a long-term, cyclical effort to transform the working relationship between government, stakeholders and citizens from one that is based on passivity to one based on engaged collaboration and partnership.

18. Public ownership of the process changes the political dynamic: A traditional consultation process is the responsibility of the minister whose department launches it. As such, the process is a fair target for criticism by opposition parties or commentators in the media. Normally, they will not hesitate to criticize such a process. The outcome with public engagement is different. As the public begins to take ownership of the process, the political dynamic changes. Politicians and commentators recognize that to criticize such a process is not to criticize a politician or the government, but rather the citizens and stakeholders who are participating in it. This is a risky course of action for an opposition politician, or even a media commentator. To attack citizens or stakeholders who are sitting down

together to try to solve a problem is, in effect, to attack democracy itself, and they do so at their peril. Experience shows they are far more likely to show respect and deference for such a process. This, in turn, provides a way of bringing some discipline to the growing excesses of partisan politics and a way of helping to create an environment where genuine discussion and debate around complex issues, such as poverty or climate change, is possible.

C h a p t e r 7

Reclaiming Politics

This book opened with the claim that the Big Ideas approach to policy-making has been deemed by many political strategists to be outdated. Political parties have traditionally tried to win elections by rallying a majority of the population around a major policy initiative, such as public health care or expanded trade. However, growing complexity and changing public expectations around transparency and accountability have made the Big Ideas approach increasingly difficult and risky for political parties. Too often they find they can't deliver on their promises.

Chapter 1 then went on to show why the consumer model of politics has emerged as the preferred alternative. It involves a much more transactional approach to politics and policy-making, where political parties offer smaller, more easily deliverable benefits, such as special tax breaks or regulatory changes, to targeted groups in exchange for their support. These measures are then clustered around broad market-tested themes, such as cracking down on crime, managing the economy, promoting national security or rolling back big government. In essence, the consumer model deals with complexity by avoiding it.

Early in the book, we identify three worrying consequences of this trend:

- Big issues are increasingly ignored;
- Winning elections, rather than promoting the public good, is becoming the driving force behind policy-making; and
- Political parties are increasingly dominated by professionals with high levels of expertise in public opinion research, marketing and communications, who see the grassroots of the party as an obstacle to designing a platform that can win an election.

In Chapters 2 to 7, public engagement is proposed and developed as the basis for an alternative to the consumer model of politics. This approach starts from the assumption that citizens, stakeholders and communities have a critical role to play in finding and implementing solutions to complex issues, such as climate change or population health. By opening up the policy process to greater public involvement, public engagement allows governments to pursue Big Ideas in a new way—one that is systematic, transparent, accountable and responsive.

This chapter brings the discussion full circle. It returns us to the issues raised in the early part of the book and the choices that lie ahead. In effect, countries like Canada, Australia, the U.S. and the U.K. are at a fork in the road. If we continue down the path of the consumer model, we risk undermining democracy. Alternatively, if we want to choose to use public engagement as a response, we must be prepared to make some changes in how we conduct our politics. This chapter considers where and why.

Planning for the Longer Term

First and foremost, governments need public engagement to compensate for the ongoing erosion of social cohesion. Globalization, new technologies, education, travel and immigration are weakening many of the bonds that held communities together in the past, fragmenting views and rendering them more volatile. People are more educated, less deferential, less culturally and racially homogeneous; they travel more, and they often live in more than one city

in their lifetime. In practice, this means coherence and resilience in the public's views is diminishing, which, in turn, makes planning and decision-making more difficult.

In past, this was much less of a problem. The key forces of social cohesion—culture, language and religion, for example—were relatively stable and were passed down from generation to generation, through institutions and practices. This provided a kind of background stability and cohesiveness that policy-makers took for granted. As a result, it was much easier for them to get support for Big Ideas. It also allowed governments to count on enough stability in the circumstances around these ideas to move ahead with a plan to achieve them.

All this has changed. Events now move so fast and issues are so interconnected that an unforeseen event can derail a government's entire agenda. Worse, such changes are becoming a regular occurrence, as the last two presidents of the United States would attest. George W. Bush's presidency was defined by a sudden and unexpected attack on the World Trade Center, which happened after he came to office. For Barack Obama, the near collapse of the financial system and ongoing concerns flowing from it have forced him to make huge decisions that will impact the public policy agenda for years, if not decades.

As the policy environment becomes less stable and cohesive, governing becomes more difficult. This is now reaching crisis levels, so societies like Canada must find new ways to compensate for the loss of stability and cohesion. In fact, there is only one viable strategy: establish long-term goals and mobilize the community and its members around them. As governments, businesses, organizations and individuals plan and organize together to achieve these goals, they will create new forms of stability, cohesiveness and resilience to change.

This strategy will succeed only if the public participates fully; and they will participate fully only if they have a genuine sense of

ownership and commitment to the goals. Simply *consulting* with the public on such decisions, and then implementing top-down solutions will not make this happen. As we have seen, it leaves the public feeling more like passive observers than full participants, and often does more to divide the community than unite it.

The consumer model of politics makes the public feel even more disengaged. Because it relies heavily on technical expertise around public opinion research, communications and marketing, it leaves little room for long-term planning or real debate on issues. From a strategist's viewpoint, "too much democracy" is seen as a bad thing. For example, real debate within a governing party can send a carefully planned communications strategy into a tailspin—and a political party's polling numbers along with it. The solution of choice is to script the government/party message around broad themes and slogans, then issue an edict that caucus members, even cabinet ministers, stick to the talking points, or risk being expelled from the team. The result is not only policies that are increasingly shallow, ineffective and devoid of any real public purpose, but a marked trend toward centralization, with power usually being consolidated in the hands of a few highly placed strategists in the government leader's office.

This trend is not the product of a single government or ideology. It has been observed and discussed in governments around the world. Indeed, strategists usually don't see this kind of control as a political issue at all, but rather as a management issue. In this view, as issues and events become more complex and fast moving, governments must work harder to keep control of the people and events around them, in order to keep control of their agenda. Top-down management thus appears as the means to contain rising risk and uncertainty.

Ironically, however, top-down management not only fails to increase government effectiveness, it actually reduces it. Recall that complex issues require collaboration; unfortunately, a top-down

approach to policy-making pre-empts collaboration. This, in turn, makes a government even less able to respond to complex issues and, as a result, pushes it in the direction of ever cruder measures of control, from slogans to spin to obfuscation to secrecy to stealth. In short, the consumer model of politics creates a vicious circle: the faster events go, the harder a government feels it must pull on the reins; the harder it pulls on the reins, the less influential and effective it becomes; the less influential and effective it becomes, the more desperately it tries to compensate through command-and-control methods. In the end, this not only utterly fails to solve complex problems, it undermines democracy as well.

The real challenge is to rethink our governance practices in a way that is better suited to our complex, fast-moving society, but which also meets the public's expectations for a higher standard of democratic governance, rather than a lower one. At bottom, this means finding a way to reintroduce the kinds of policy commitments—Big Ideas—that provide real direction and create real engagement and cohesion among the public. In practice, this means giving the public a meaningful role in choosing and implementing these ideas, especially where this involves long-term commitments. Ways and models for this are emerging. The three main cases discussed in this book provide examples:

- The Sport Policy Renewal Process described in Chapter 2 helps us see more clearly how complexity is changing the policy process and how dialogue can be used to respond by reframing issues and finding new solutions through collaboration.
- In Chapter 4 we saw how the Government of Australia is using community dialogue processes involving all three levels of government, stakeholder organizations and citizens to design, shape and deliver better services at the community level.
- In Chapter 5 we saw how New Brunswick used a province-wide dialogue process involving citizens, experts and decision-

makers from government, business and the voluntary sector to develop and implement a new approach to poverty reduction.²³

In all three cases, stakeholders, communities and/or citizens are playing a major role in helping to set new long-term goals and to begin organizing around them. While these initiatives are only early efforts at public engagement, and are far from perfect, they are heading in the right direction. They provide a foundation on which to build and there are many useful lessons that can be drawn from them. A number of other interesting experiments are under way in other places, such as the Canadian Territory of Nunavut's Poverty Reduction Project and the Total Place Initiative in the United Kingdom.²⁴

Political parties can and should learn from experiments like these. There is a real opportunity to use them to reconnect with the public in ways that will allow parties to refocus on Big Ideas, but to do so in a manner that leads to more accountable, transparent, effective and responsive government. Public engagement provides the basis for this, but to make it work we must be ready to make some basic changes in our approach to politics.

In brief, political parties must reject the consumer approach and must, instead, provide the kind of leadership and organizational capacity needed to make collaboration work. A first step would be to start developing credible "engagement plans," that is, plans that show how particular Big Ideas might be achieved, and that can be vetted in an election campaign.

23 On New Brunswick's work with public engagement, also see the case study in Appendix 1.

24 The Total Place Initiative is a Communities and Local Government pilot program, which was launched by the British government to test new approaches to efficient use of resources and service improvement in local areas. The program draws on the knowledge and experience of business, and the voluntary and public sectors to examine how public money is spent in a local area and how it can be used more efficiently to improve local services. One of the intended outcomes of the project is to explore ways in which these three sectors can work together to provide a wide range of public services under one roof.

From Big Ideas to Engagement Plans

People sometimes ask if there would still be a role for political parties in a more collaborative, bottom-up approach to democracy. The answer is yes. Public engagement is perfectly consistent with pluralism. It allows people to hold different values and visions of society and to join together to achieve them. For example, one party might argue that, if elected, it will focus on health-care issues because this supports its vision of a caring society, while another might argue that it will focus on helping grow small businesses because this supports its vision of a more self-reliant society.

However, if commitments like these are to be more than empty slogans they must be linked to specific goals. In the old days, stating such a goal in a platform—say, promising universal health care or a new program to support start-up businesses—would have been enough. If elected, the new government would turn to the public service for advice on how to fulfil its promises. Today, parties must start from a different premise: the issues behind such goals are complex, so that the goals cannot be achieved by only by government. A broad cross-section of people and organizations will have to work together to achieve them. Parties therefore should use election campaigns as opportunities to present and debate their respective plans for how to make their engagement processes work. Such engagement plans must be grounded in reliable evidence, genuine interests and needs, as well as plausible assumptions. Efforts to bend or obscure the truth for partisan purposes would be very risky and carry a high price.

For example, suppose a party proposes a plan to mobilize stakeholders around a major energy project in a certain region of the country; suppose further that the plan rests on the assumption that the project will not lead to serious environmental damage, even though there is strong evidence to the contrary. In a traditional consultation process, the government might get away with this, because it would have considerable control over the process. Thus,

it could suppress evidence, say, by denying critics a real chance to make their case, while stacking the process with friendly experts.

This won't work if public engagement processes are in place and are expected by the voting public. Sooner or later the half-truths and misinformation will almost certainly be exposed. After all, public engagement is all about dialogue and deliberation around the issues, and government does not control the process. Nor can a party spin the message and turn to mere slogans to cloud the debate. Public engagement dialogues are designed to cut through such tactics.

So, governments that think they can use public engagement for partisan purposes are likely to pay a high price. Or, more likely, the process will never get off the ground in the first place. As a rule of thumb, stakeholders are well informed in their areas, and those who find themselves on the other side of the government's agenda will be unwilling to support a bad engagement plan for much the same reasons that investors are unwilling to put their money into a bad project.

A party that wishes to reinvent itself around public engagement must be willing to make a serious commitment to preserving the integrity of the process, whatever its own policy preferences. It must base its engagement plan on facts, reasonable assumptions, trust and goodwill. It should approach a campaign as a chance to propose Big Ideas, but also be prepared to back them up with a credible engagement plan.

Developing such a plan will be as important to the election platform as the choice of Big Ideas. It will also require new kinds of skills and expertise, from a sophisticated knowledge of how engagement processes work to new ways to frame and propose issues. While the skills and expertise needed to make the consumer model work—things like public opinion research, marketing, communications and data mining—could be very useful here, public engagement would employ them for a very different end—namely,

finding and implementing solutions to complex problems, rather than winning elections. So, let us be very clear here: if this book is highly critical of the consumer approach to politics, this is not a call to reject the tools, skills and knowledge that have developed around it. That would be to throw the baby out with the bath water. Our quarrel is with how the tools, skills and knowledge are being used to reshape our politics. Public engagement would put them to a very different use.

Finally, for some tasks, such as setting long-term goals, political parties will need to mobilize potentially large numbers of citizens. This kind of engagement requires genuine dialogue and action, often in people's own neighbourhoods and communities. This will require strong and vibrant political organizations on the ground with links to the community. Local party organizations, meetings and events will be essential in building such networks. While this kind of capacity-building poses real challenges, it could also be a golden opportunity to renew the conventional role of the party grassroots, who could be called upon to help carry out this kind of local or neighbourhood engagement.

Crafting the Public Message Together

There is a further consequence of the public engagement approach that we touched on in the last section, but now needs to be made more explicit. Public engagement changes how the communications process works—and it does so in ways that challenge some of the deepest assumptions of contemporary governance.

In a traditional consultation process, once government has heard from the public, it goes behind closed doors to deliberate and make decisions. When the final decisions have been made, there is a new discussion around how they will be made public. Typically, communications specialists are called in to help craft a “message” that is supposed to put the decisions in the best light. This is accompanied by a communications strategy, which is a plan to get the message

out with the least possible interference. As we have just seen, the consumer model pushes this even further by placing rigorous controls on those who carry the message out to the public to ensure that they “stay on message” and refrain from engaging in any real dialogue or debate around the issues.

Public engagement rejects this top-down approach and instead opens up the process by giving the public a real role in crafting and communicating the message. New Brunswick’s Poverty Reduction Initiative is a good example. In Chapter 5 we saw how it was used by the government of New Brunswick to reform social assistance through a bottom-up or collaborative approach to policy-making. Now we can note that the participants also played a big role in crafting and delivering the message about solutions to others.

In fact, the government had little choice about this. Because the deliberations and decision-making involved the public, all the participants were entitled—indeed, expected—to speak publicly about the process, their views, the options and, ultimately, their decisions, and to do so in real time. In the end, the process not only worked well, but, as we saw in Chapter 5, from a communications perspective it was a remarkable success. This shows that, when it comes to public engagement, communications experts’ deep fears around losing control of “the message” are misplaced. Done properly, a collaborative approach to communications can be far more effective than traditional top-down approaches. The third and final stage of the Poverty Reduction Initiative, the Final Forum, offers at least four noteworthy lessons about how and why this is so:²⁵

- The messages coming out of the Final Forum could not be crafted or controlled by government. They emerged from the dialogue as the participants sorted through the issues, and the commentary

25 The Final Forum was held on Nov. 12 and 13, 2009, and was facilitated personally by Premier Graham. Fifty participants came together to debate the options from Stage II; they included senior leaders from the government, business and the voluntary sectors, as well as persons who had lived in poverty. Together they adopted the first-ever poverty reduction plan for the province. See Chapter 5.

around the process and action plan was compelling and consistent. The lesson seems to be that when people work collaboratively on solutions to a problem like poverty, they tend to develop a clear and consistent message to explain to themselves what they are trying to accomplish. They don't need the help of communications experts to get it right.

- The participants had no trouble accepting that accountability for the success or failure of the process did not fall to government alone. For example, leading up to the Forum there was a serious disagreement within the business community over how its members should contribute to the action plan. Big business favoured raising the minimum wage, while small businesses opposed this idea. In the end, small businesses came on side, but only after this disagreement had threatened to derail the process. Nevertheless, the commentary and criticism around the issue was not directed at the government, which was neither praised nor blamed for the idea of raising the minimum wage or the controversy around it. Everyone seemed to understand and accept that, if being a full partner in the process gave participants a right to help make the choices, this also meant they would bear a full share of the responsibility for making the process work. Thus, government should be held accountable or praised for the role it plays in the process, not for every concern or disappointment that arises.
- Because there was shared ownership of the process, there was a range of authoritative and credible voices to report on the decisions made at the Forum. They all had their own reasons for participating, for what they were contributing, and for how they believed the process could benefit them, their organizations and communities, and, most of all, New Brunswickers. This, in turn, lent credibility to the process that it would never have had if the government were the sole spokesperson for the process.

- Because the public was seen to be a full partner in the process, the rules of partisan debate changed. Opposition parties and critics were far more circumspect about their comments than if they had been addressing them only to a government minister. After all, in a democracy, when citizens “speak,” politicians are supposed to listen. Public engagement is a new kind of platform from which the public can speak more clearly and authoritatively about an issue. A politician—or media commentator—who tries to undermine such a process through partisan tactics does so at his or her peril.

None of this is meant as the last word on how a collaborative approach to communications will work. There is much to learn here, and the approach will evolve over time. Nevertheless, at least this much seems clear: a collaborative approach to policy-making implies a collaborative approach to developing and spreading the message, and this, in turn, means a fundamental change in how we do politics.

A final aspect of the public engagement approach that must be raised here concerns the question of shared accountability.

Can Governments Share Accountability?

In the Westminster system, a government receives its mandate from the people through an election. A minister then directs the public service with respect to policy in order to fulfil the mandate. The public service implements those directions through a chain of command that reaches all the way down to frontline service providers and office clerks. If the chain of command is broken, accountability is lost.

Political people often worry that collaboration will undermine the Westminster system. In particular, they worry that shared responsibility for implementing solutions will blur accountabilities and, in the end, lead to inaction. “When everyone is responsible for something no one is responsible for it,” or so goes the objection.

We have already seen that this misunderstands how public engagement works. Public engagement terminates in an action plan where all the participants have a role. When the minister's officials sign off on some commitment in an action plan, the minister remains responsible for his or her commitment—and the resources involved—in all the usual ways. Participating in a public engagement process doesn't change this. Public engagement therefore does not weaken ministerial accountability.

But there is a more far-reaching lesson to be drawn here. The Westminster system emerged from a different era. Its system of accountability was designed to track how government officials use the state's authority and resources. It therefore assumes that, when it comes to policy, programs and services, government is the primary decision-maker and actor, which, as we've seen, reflects the conditions of an era that is now gone. Today this kind of accountability puts cabinet ministers in the untenable position of assuming full responsibility for issues and goals that are bigger than government, and therefore beyond their control.

Politicians are increasingly uncomfortable with this situation. The more complex and interdependent issues become, the more pressured they feel to make promises they know they cannot keep. As we have seen, the shift toward the consumer model is largely an effort to escape from this trap, that is, to avoid making promises to deliver on Big Ideas. Unfortunately, from the viewpoint of democracy and good governance, the cure is turning out to be worse than the disease.

In the end, public engagement is the only real answer to complexity. Rather than weakening accountability, public engagement actually strengthens it by allowing us to clarify roles and responsibilities in a way that makes genuine collaboration possible. The critical tool for this is the shared action plan, which we

have discussed at various points in this book.²⁶ It requires that the partners sit down together and analyze the solutions in order to identify and assign themselves the appropriate tasks for delivering those solutions. This not only clarifies who is responsible for what, it changes our traditional Westminster view of accountability by assigning some of the responsibility to stakeholders, communities and citizens.

In this new view, government is no longer seen as the primary decision-maker and actor. When it comes to complex issues, its role is, first of all, to convene and lead processes that will unite the players around a shared solution and plan of action; and, second, to make an appropriate contribution to the action plan as a major partner in the process. Accepting this will require an adjustment in the public's expectations around politicians and political parties, but such an adjustment is long overdue.

Launching the Journey

We are fast approaching the point where the consumer model of politics is not only unproductive, but a serious threat to our democracy. As we noted, it leads to policies that are more and more narrowly focused and, as a result, incapable of resolving major issues. If this were not bad enough, we can now see that it also tends to consolidate power in the leader's office, eventually isolating him or her from the cabinet, the caucus, the public service, the party members and, ultimately, the public.

If we go too far down this road, we not only risk undermining the key practices and institutions of our democracy, we risk killing its spirit. Ordinary people feel increasingly disengaged from what they see as government that is cynical, elitist, detached and unresponsive. They are beginning to despair of the prospects for anything better.

²⁶ See Chapters 3, 4 and 6.

As we stated earlier in this book, there is a choice. Political parties and governments do not have to give up on Big Ideas. Public engagement provides the basis for a real and viable alternative to the consumer model. It allows governments to tackle big issues and still govern effectively. Putting it into practice will not be easy. Governments, the policy community and the general public must come to terms with new ways of doing things. This will take time and effort. It cannot be achieved through a single big bang, but, rather, should be seen as a journey—a journey that we must make together. The time to embark is now.

Putting Public Engagement to Work: Eight Recommendations for Governments

Here are eight recommendations that federal, provincial and territorial governments in Canada and elsewhere can act on to move the public engagement agenda forward. Some of these steps must be taken by one level of government acting alone, while others require intergovernmental collaboration. For the most part, these recommendations will also be appropriate for many municipal governments, depending on their size and available resources. In addition, Recommendation 7 includes organizations outside government.

1. Each government should name a minister responsible for public engagement.

In the spring of 2010, New Brunswick Premier Shawn Graham named the first minister in Canada responsible for public engagement. When the new Conservative government took office in the fall of 2010, Premier David Alward not only continued the position, but elevated its importance by assigning himself the role of minister responsible for citizen engagement.

Every federal, provincial and territorial government should name a senior member of cabinet as minister responsible for public engagement. His or her duties should include:

- representing public engagement at the cabinet table;
- developing an official policy on public engagement for the government (see below);
- providing information, support, guidance and expertise to government departments on the development and implementation of public engagement processes, and leading the effort to build capacity within the government; and
- disseminating what is learned from research and engagement projects and providing public leadership on the topic.

2. Each government should create a secretariat to support the minister responsible for public engagement.

A new secretariat for public engagement should be created within each government that names a minister responsible for public engagement. The secretariat should be provided with the appropriate resources to support the minister in carrying out his or her duties.

3. Each government should develop an official policy on public engagement.

The minister responsible for public engagement should develop an official policy—or at least a set of guidelines—on public engagement to provide direction to officials in his or her government as they consider how, when, where and why they should launch public engagement initiatives.

4. Each government should undertake at least one significant pilot project in the near future.

One of the best ways for governments to learn about new methods and approaches, and build capacity, is through the

use of pilot projects. While most governments are carrying out projects that experiment with collaboration, there are few good examples of full-scale public engagement projects. More effort should be put into the development of such pilots.

All governments, whether or not they have appointed a minister responsible for public engagement, should plan and undertake at least one major public engagement project in the near future to raise awareness among the public, develop capacity within the government and the public policy community, and contribute to the evolution of the approach. Such a project should be led by a senior minister or mayor, and should be given enough time and resources to carry out the process properly.

5. Governments should work together to develop and test a public engagement evaluation framework.

Without an appropriate evaluation framework for public engagement, the approach will remain *ad hoc* and less than systematic. The development of an evaluation framework should be a key priority for all governments. This should be a collaborative effort in which governments share learning and best practices across jurisdictional boundaries.

6. Governments, the business community and non-governmental organizations should all work together to raise awareness and help build a strong pan-Canadian engagement community.

Members of the public policy community should work together to build public awareness, capacity and credibility around public engagement by:

- carrying out joint pilot projects that will help foster a shared approach and vocabulary for public engagement;
- sharing risk, cost and learning through collaboration, including the development of new online tools;

- supporting activities such as conferences, workshops and other forums where government officials can explore and develop the ideas along with colleagues from other parts of the public policy community; and
- supporting the establishment of a pan-Canadian, online forum for governments, organizations and individuals on public engagement.

7. Each government should create a multi-sectoral forum to promote collaboration within its jurisdiction.

NB2026 is a non-partisan, multi-stakeholder leadership forum in New Brunswick. The organization was established by government, but operates at arm's length from it and includes senior representatives from politics, business, the voluntary sector, academia and the public service. This body meets regularly to provide leadership within New Brunswick on collaboration and public engagement.

- Federal, provincial and territorial governments should create similar bodies within their own jurisdictions to provide a multi-stakeholder, non-partisan forum to provide leadership on collaboration and public engagement.
- Community stakeholders, members from the business community and others from outside government should treat this forum as a vehicle to build capacity and awareness within the larger policy community; to provide leadership on public engagement; and to discuss and explore their respective roles and responsibilities in working with governments and each other to advance the public engagement agenda.

8. Political parties should engage their membership in a research and dialogue process to assess how public engagement can contribute to the renewal of politics.

Political parties in Canada and elsewhere should launch major internal research and dialogue processes to assess:

- the impact of the consumer model on politics and on their respective organizations;
 - the role that public engagement could play in addressing big policy issues, such as climate change, health-care reform or poverty reduction; and
 - the prospects for renewal of the role of political parties through public engagement.
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Postscript: Ready, Willing and Able

I have now received many comments on earlier drafts of the manuscript, most of them encouraging. This final version of the book contains lots of revisions based on these comments. In closing, I'd like to turn my attention to two comments that have not been fully addressed.

One is that the book says nothing about where the Public Engagement Project (PEP) goes from here. Recall that this book is, after all, the final report from that project. Is there a plan for the future? The second comment focuses on the recommendations in Chapter 8. Several people noted that earlier versions said nothing about the responsibilities of organizations and individuals outside government. What should they be doing to move the public engagement agenda forward?

I have already made some changes to Chapter 8 to respond to the second point—notably, in Recommendations 6 to 8—but a few more words are in order and I'd like to use this postscript to say them. My plan is to say something about the role of the engagement community at large by saying something about where the PEP—and my own work—goes from here.

At the moment, there are no plans to launch formally a third phase of the PEP. I hope that over the last three years enough work

has been done through the project that the seminal ideas have been planted in government. Nevertheless, the main objectives of the project remain valid and I now plan to focus my work at the Public Policy Forum on three of them.

1. **Build the community:** Building a national engagement community has always been a central goal of the PEP. Over the last three years, we've made real progress through the workshops, the online dialogue and the pilot projects. The challenge now is to consolidate the gains locally, nationally and perhaps even internationally.

This work will likely involve conferences, roundtables and other such activities, to explore key public engagement issues, compare and contrast different models and approaches to public engagement, identify opportunities to experiment, and discuss how we can all work together more effectively to promote public engagement.

Of course, the PEP is not the only effort to build a public engagement community. There are a number of other important networks and organizations in Canada that are active in the field, including IAP2 and C2D2. We all agree that there should be more contact between us. I hope to make this a priority in the future. One idea in particular occupies me.

In the past, I have argued that the engagement community needs a space online where we all gather and meet. We must be able to exchange ideas, information, news, greetings and gossip. This shouldn't be a closed, private place, like the dialogue site we use for the PEP. It should be wide open so that interested people from other areas, such as politics or journalism, can drop in anytime and find us. That's how word will spread.

One way to do this would be for all of us who are interested in public engagement to work together to create a national dialogue space on Twitter. We can do this just by using a special hashtag. A

hashtag consists of a number sign followed by a string of letters, and it looks like this: *#cdnpoli*.

If you enter this particular hashtag on Twitter, you'll see a stream of posts on all aspects of Canadian politics. Contributors are people from across the political spectrum and a wide range of backgrounds, from pundits to business people.

A number of hashtags for engagement already exist, such as *#participation* and *#demopart*. A key task for the future should be to mobilize the community to get online and use them.

2. Promote education and training: As our own experience and knowledge of the field grows, the Public Policy Forum will continue to develop and offer new courses and seminars to members of the public policy community. In particular, we plan to make a greater effort to reach out to organizations outside government, such as professional associations and the business community, to raise awareness and encourage action.

I have had a long-standing plan to produce a manual or textbook on public engagement, one that provides detailed instructions on key tasks, such as designing engagement projects, facilitating the dialogue, and stewarding relationships. I hope to begin work on this project in the not-too-distant future.

3. Encourage governments to launch pilots: In the recommendations, I say governments should be actively experimenting with public engagement by carrying out pilot projects. There is some movement in this direction, but more effort is needed. I see this as a high priority for the Public Policy Forum. We will work hard to convince governments to experiment in this area, as well as to act on the other recommendations.

At the same time, we will work to encourage other members of the public policy community to advocate for such projects and, where appropriate, to participate in them.

Let me conclude on a personal note. I view all of these goals as a personal mission, and I look forward to working with people and organizations from across the public policy community who also want to realize them. While readers may not agree with everything I have said in this book, I hope at least the basic message about the need to rethink the public policy process will resonate with them. If the book helps to create a sense of urgency around this point, it has served its purpose.

I'll see you along the way...

Don Lenihan, November 2011

Appendix 1

Innovating Government through Public Engagement:

The Case of New Brunswick²⁷

Christopher Vas²⁸ and Don Lenihan

Let's begin by declaring the central finding of this study: Public engagement (PE), as we will describe it, works. It helps citizens, communities and stakeholders work together with government to frame policy issues, identify solutions and share responsibility for implementing them. PE is very different from the consultative approach that governments usually employ when they involve the public in the policy process. In that approach, members of the public do little more than provide government with their views on an issue. In public engagement, the public also participates in making trade-offs, setting priorities, balancing competing objectives and proposing solutions. In addition, the public is ultimately expected

27 This case study was made possible through a grant generously provided by the Institute of Public Administration Australia – University of Canberra Public Administration Research Trust Fund.

28 At the time of writing the case study, Christopher Vas worked in the Australian Government. He is now Deputy Director of the HC Coombs Policy Forum at The Australian National University in Canberra, Australia. He can be contacted via email at christopher.vas@anu.edu.au

to take some responsibility for delivering the solutions. This does not mean that the traditional approaches to involving the public no longer apply, only that PE is better suited to deal with the growing complexity around many policy issues.

In New Brunswick, a small province in Canada's Atlantic region, the public engagement approach was used to create a dialogue with members of the public, and brought them in as partners in proposed solutions to two complex policy goals—eliminating poverty and nurturing life-long learning. PE advanced major policy changes—including an overhaul of the province's welfare system—in these areas and facilitated bipartisan support for them.

Former Liberal premier Shawn Graham launched New Brunswick's involvement with public engagement, and current Progressive Conservative Premier David Alward is continuing it. As Alward says,

“Governments do not have all the solutions to problems. Getting broad-based engagement from academia, civil society, private sector and the non-governmental organizations is critical. ... Governments make better decisions when people who are impacted by these decisions are involved in the process. ... The challenge is for government to remain relevant to the people.”

New Brunswick's involvement with PE is only about four years old, yet the province has already made significant strides. It has created a ministerial position that focuses on public/citizen engagement. It has established the Economic and Social Inclusion Crown Corporation, which operates at arm's length from government and carries out a range of important tasks around engagement. It has established a secretariat responsible for advising officials on public engagement, is creating an official policy to guide the public service, and there are real signs of culture change within the bureaucracy.

This case study focuses on New Brunswick's decision to commit to using the public engagement approach to policy-making, a commitment that has resulted in a collaborative, bipartisan effort to reduce poverty and to launch a unique initiative on learning.

I. Bringing Public Engagement to New Brunswick

In the late 1990s, several federal departments and provincial governments, including New Brunswick, began meeting to consider the impact that information and communication technologies would have on government and governance. Canadian governments were seized with the idea that new information and communications technologies could be used to make government services far more integrated and seamless. However, as the project—known as Crossing Boundaries and led by Don Lenihan—progressed, it became clear that integrating services was far more complex than first thought. Research from Crossing Boundaries showed that improving services was about much more than using new electronic tools to “modernize government operations.” Real integration would require considerable effort around coordinating policy across programs, departments and even governments, something that called for a new, more engaged role for the users of the services, whether businesses or citizens. This led to some early discussions around the need for public engagement.

The Crossing Boundaries project evolved into the Crossing Boundaries National Council (CBNC), a formal structure that included both elected officials and senior public servants from each province, as well as from the federal level. The Council's mission was to build on the findings from the early years of Crossing Boundaries and, in particular, to promote collaboration among levels of government as a critical condition for improving government services. In the Council's view, the real challenge facing governments was around rising complexity and the need for governments to work together more effectively to solve issues. Jody Carr,

a Progressive Conservative MLA, and David McLaughlin, deputy to Premier Bernard Lord, were the two New Brunswick representatives on the Council.

In March 2007, the Council released its final report, *Progressive Governance for Canadians: What You Need to Know*, a discussion of how public engagement could address the challenges of governance amid the growing complexity that makes it increasingly difficult for governments to solve policy issues without collaboration across programs, departments, levels of government and with stakeholders. In a complex world, the report argued, simple solutions will not suffice. On the contrary, complex issues require complex solutions, which, in turn, require the participation of citizens, stakeholders and communities.

Shawn Graham became New Brunswick's premier after the October 2006 provincial election. During the campaign, the Liberal leader made an unusual promise: if elected to replace the Progressive Conservatives, his government would aim to make New Brunswick self-sufficient by 2026. The only real definition he gave for this concept was that by that date the province should no longer be receiving equalization payments. Once elected, Graham and his staff knew that the mandate to create self-sufficiency required a long-term plan for change. Liberal MP Andy Scott, a member of the Crossing Boundaries National Council, invited Lenihan to meet members of Graham's staff, and Lenihan outlined how such an ambitious undertaking would indeed require deep and meaningful public involvement.

Graham invited Lenihan to serve as an adviser to the provincial government on public engagement for 12 months. In April 2007, Lenihan began meeting with senior officials, political staff and stakeholders to develop and launch a series of small projects to develop and test the ideas around engagement. These included projects on skills development, wellness and sustainable communities.

Lenihan's final report, *It's More Than Talk: Listen, Learn and*

Act, was released at a conference in Fredericton in April 2008. The report set out a framework to provide the province with a systematic approach to engagement. It contained a number of recommendations, including:

- that the framework form the basis for an official policy on public engagement to be phased in over several years. (In the end, the government opted for a series of guidelines based on the framework.)
- that the government launch a high-profile, large-scale public engagement process, with the Premier providing strong and visible leadership. (This recommendation led to the Poverty Reduction Initiative.)
- that a forum be created to incorporate representation from across sectors and help promote a new culture around public engagement. (A similar recommendation had been advanced by the New Brunswick Business Council, which wanted a non-partisan, multi-stakeholder forum that could advise government. These two proposals eventually led the government to create the Self-Sufficiency Roundtable, which later became NB2026, a body comprising 36 members.)

The report made it clear that public engagement should not be seen as the answer to every issue. Many issues should continue to be dealt with through the more traditional consultative approach. Others would require public deliberation but not public action.

Premier Graham officially endorsed all the recommendations in the report, some of which were to be acted on immediately, others of which would require more time. By the next election, most of the recommendations had been implemented.

By the fall of 2008, the Public Engagement Project was launched nationally, bringing together eight provinces (including New Brunswick) to work together to develop and test the ideas that emerged from the New Brunswick conference. The PEP is now in

the final stage of its second phase. This case study is written as part of the final report from that project.

2. Political leadership and collaboration

In response to Lenihan's recommendation that the government undertake a major pilot project, Premier Graham launched the province's poverty reduction strategy at a news conference in October 2008. New Brunswick is a small province with a big poverty problem. When the project was launched, approximately 13.8 per cent of its 750,000 people were living in poverty, including about 13,000 single mothers, 23,000 people under the age of 18 and 11,700 seniors. About 39,000 individuals were receiving social assistance and 16,000 families and 46,000 single people had incomes of less than \$20,000 per year. Food banks were serving approximately 92,000 adults and 26,000 youths (under 18) every year. In 2006, the unemployment rate was close to 9 per cent, and the province had the lowest minimum wage in the Atlantic region.

The decision to tackle poverty using the public engagement approach required political vision and courage. Graham seems to have realized traditional consultation by the government with stakeholders and the community wouldn't work with such a complex problem. He knew that real progress would require shared responsibility and accountability among citizens, stakeholders and government. As he said:

“Governments run on a four-year mandate. In today's generation of instant gratification everyone expects to be responded to by a tweet in 22 seconds or an email within an hour. To implement policy change that people won't see the benefit for even 10, 15, 20 years down the road—because that's the benchmarks we were setting—I knew there was huge political risk... There's a huge difference between consultation and engagement. In traditional consultation, governments

can go out and say they have listened. Engagement asks people and stakeholders to be part of the solution by bringing them to the table. How do you make people believe and empower them to be part of the solution? There are even challenges getting this to the public service. Some were forthcoming, some resistant, some not challenged, some sceptical. Overall, there was a level of enthusiasm to try something different... This is the model for the future.”

Graham took three initial steps to set the public engagement approach to a poverty reduction strategy on the right path:

- He achieved bipartisanship. Opposition parties are rarely inclined to throw their support behind the government they oppose, especially on a major initiative, yet this is just what happened in New Brunswick. When Graham invited Progressive Conservative Opposition Leader David Alward to join in a non-partisan effort on poverty, Alward agreed. Alward seems to have understood from the start that real progress on such a complex issue would come only through a more collaborative approach that unites stakeholders, the community and politicians, and so agreed to put partisan differences aside and participate, despite the political risk this posed.
- He persuaded private-sector stakeholders to participate. The private sector has not, traditionally, seen itself playing a major role in a policy area such as poverty. Getting these stakeholders to agree required a high level of trust, along with credible leadership. Working together, Graham and Alward were able to establish such a rapport with stakeholders outside government.
- He got the public service on side. These were the people who would play a critical role in designing and carrying out this new kind of policy process, and the vision and skill of key public service leaders would be crucial to making the process work.

Graham selected a team of three to co-chair the process—Social Development Minister Mary Schryer (and later Minister Kelly Lamrock); communications industry executive Gerry Pond, representing the private sector; and Léo-Paul Pinet, a widely respected leader in the not-for-profit sector. A steering committee comprising a few deputy ministers was also established to consider likely outcomes from the PE process and its potential impact on policies and programs already in place. A project team was also set up under the Department of Social Development, comprising a project head, manager and a handful of project team members, including researchers to consider issues relating to the design and coordination of the process and to look after communications with the media and the public.

3. New Brunswick's Poverty Reduction Initiative: Public Engagement in Action

The public engagement approach to making policy can be generally described as having three stages: In the **Views** stage, the government gives stakeholders and members of the public a chance to express their views and begin a dialogue on a subject. In the **Deliberation** stage, participants engage in a dialogue aimed at reframing the issue to explore and propose solutions. In the **Action** stage, the dialogue among all the participants continues, with the goal of figuring out what role each of them must play in implementing the solutions. In short, public engagement facilitates the sort of shared responsibility that is critical to solving complex policy issues, those that initiatives led and managed only by government have failed to solve. In traditional policy approaches, government seeks the public's views, retreats to deliberate on proposed solutions and then attempts to implement solutions. Public engagement addresses shortcomings of this process by involving the public in an expanded role in the Deliberation stage and also involving them fully in the Action stage.

The aim of the poverty reduction strategy's public engagement process was to come up with a collaborative plan of action that was designed and owned by New Brunswickers and not just government. Here's how it worked.

Phase I: The Views Stage (Dialogue Sessions)

From January to March 2009 the government asked people who had opinions on, interest in or personal experience with poverty to participate in 16 sessions in 14 communities across the province. This initial phase of the project aimed to raise public awareness of the poverty issue, make sure that government and New Brunswickers were on the same page in the way they understood the poverty problem and to get diverse stakeholders interested in collaborating on solutions. Co-chairs made introductory comments about the PE process at each of the sessions, and project team members then led them.

Participants at the sessions sat at round tables and were grouped by birth month to ensure that each of these small discussions took place among a cross-section of the population. Government officials were asked to stay away from these sessions so that irate participants wouldn't simply use them to vent their frustrations at politicians or bureaucrats.

The central questions that guided the discussion at each table were: "What is poverty and what causes it?" and "What do you think can be done to reduce poverty?" Each group received a guide to help its discussion, and the project team trained and placed facilitators with each group to help the discussion progress smoothly. Participants were encouraged to relate their specific experience and provide other factual information, but were asked to refrain from using the setting to simply push their own interests. The facilitators tried to bring discussions to a consensus without compromising any individual views or perspectives. They tried especially to encourage contributions from people who were living in poverty.

At the end of each session, the facilitators provided a summary of the discussion to the project team.

The project team also received input through written submissions from individuals and community groups and through emails from the public. In addition to the formal sessions, the project team reached out to people living in poverty by meeting with them (through an outreach officer employed by the project team) in places such as food banks. The project team also employed the services of a well-known member of the First Nations community to ensure the views of aboriginal communities were taken into account. The project team designed a facilitator's handbook that was available on the project website for groups that wished to convene their own discussion sessions and provide input to the process separately.

In all, the project team received input from about 2,500 sources. This was compiled into a report called "A Choir of Voices," which was used as a guide to the subsequent phases. The report was released in June 2009.

Phase II: The Deliberation Stage (Roundtable Sessions)

The deliberative phase of the process took place in eight days spread over four months (May to August 2009). The leadership team chose a representative sample of 35 people to participate in this phase. They were to build on the initial consultation phase by examining the views that had been expressed and expanding them into a set of options on how to reduce poverty. They were to determine possible visions for the poverty reduction strategy, as well as sets of objectives and actions, and appropriate accountability and monitoring mechanisms. All of these options would be up for consideration in the next phase.

During the first two days of Phase II, participants were guided through an orientation to become acquainted with one another and to provide them with an appreciation of the responsibilities

they were assuming and just what was required of them during the public engagement process. The group identified its own working protocols and rules of engagement. The other six days were dedicated to deliberating on the issues identified in the “A Choir of Voices” report, and to identifying suitable policy options that would be considered by participants in Phase III. (Of course, participants were encouraged to think about the issues at hand even during the days and weeks that the group wasn’t meeting, and bring these thoughts to the six days of deliberations.) Two guest speakers were invited to relate their experiences with poverty plans that had been implemented in Ontario and Newfoundland.

At the conclusion of this phase, the group produced an “options document” that was provided to the co-chairs for consideration in Phase III. The leadership team decided that rather than publicly releasing the entire document at the end of this stage—they feared it might be misinterpreted as the actual action plan—a more general version of the document would be released.

Phase III: The Action Stage (Final Forum)

Premier Graham chaired the Final Forum—the implementation stage—in November 2009, in which 48 leaders representing public, private and non-governmental sectors, and members of the community were invited to discuss the options brought forward from Phase II. Community leaders who had experienced living in poverty were given special attention by the project team to make sure their voices were heard. Opposition Leader Alward also participated in this phase. This bipartisan support sent a critical message that any plan and agreement reached in this phase would survive a political transition, should there be one after the next election. The deputy ministers’ steering committee was also invited to participate at this point so they could assess the impacts any action might have on their departments and programs.

This phase was divided into two sessions of one and a half days

each—the first for orientation and the second for decision-making. The challenge here was for the group to collaborate, negotiate and agree on which option or options should be acted upon, and which sectors would be responsible for specific elements of the plan.

The forum resulted in a five-page action plan called *Overcoming Poverty Together: New Brunswick Economic and Social Inclusion Plan*, with a vision of ensuring that New Brunswickers living in poverty would have the resources to meet their basic needs and live with dignity, security and good health. The goal was to reduce income poverty by 25% and deep income poverty by 50% by the year 2015. To assure that the responsibility to address poverty was shared and collaborative, the plan advocated the establishment of Community Economic and Social Inclusion Networks.

The plan also outlined actions that had to be taken to achieve the goals, including:

- immediate reform of social assistance, including extension of health benefits for up to three years for anyone coming off social assistance until a provincial prescription drug program is introduced; elimination of the social assistance rate program for single employable people; and application of the household income policy only to social assistance recipients who are in a spousal relationship;
- an increase in the minimum wage to the average Atlantic Canada wage level;
- introduction of an early-learning and child-care act;
- introduction of a vision- and dental-care plan for children in low-income families; and
- opportunities for people to keep earned income as they transition to work.

Apart from the government, organizations such as the McCain Foundation took on responsibility for establishing five integrated early-learning sites, and for providing literacy mentors to young

students. An effort also arose to develop comprehensive strategies to address such things as housing and tenancy issues, early-learning and child-care issues, teacher training and educational opportunities. Today Graham reflects back, saying,

“People felt empowered as part of the decision-making process. They were asked to be part of the solution, they had to contribute to be part of the solution... Getting (industry leader) J.K. Irving at the table sitting next to a person receiving income assistance was empowering and an incredible experience.”

During the process, participants came to understand that governments alone did not have the answers to the poverty problem in New Brunswick. The process allowed poverty to be redefined as an issue that required involvement from, and collaboration among, every sector of society if solutions were to be found. Government would have to engage with all sectors in genuine partnership.

In a press interview, Alward described the experience as “incredibly emotional and moving.” He also promised that, should he become premier, his government would build on the initiative, rather than undo it. As premier of New Brunswick, he has remained committed to the process.

The superior leadership displayed by the co-chairs gave the community a voice in the process, and brought stakeholders together with government. The civil service played an effective role in planning and managing this public engagement process in a way that showed creativity and foresight.

4. Progress on the Poverty Reduction Initiative

Graham’s government moved to implement a number of the proposals that came out of the poverty reduction public engagement project. Legislation to create a Crown corporation, the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation (ESIC), was passed in

April 2010. The Act established a 22-member board, comprised of a corporation president, four government ministers, one opposition member of the legislature, four representatives from the private sector, four from the non-profit sector (including small and medium-sized businesses), and eight people with experience living in poverty. The board chair position rotates annually, and among representatives from the different sectors. In the first year, the board was chaired by a member from the non-profit sector, Léo-Paul Pinet, who was followed by Monique Richard, a member from the poverty community.

Meanwhile, in an election in September 2010, less than a year after the Final Forum of the Poverty Reduction Initiative, Graham's Liberal government was defeated by Alward's Progressive Conservatives. One of the major issues for voters in the campaign was the lack of consultation with the public on the government's proposed sale of New Brunswick Power to the Quebec government. Ironically, Graham announced the controversial proposal—without any provision for consulting the public—in mid-2009, right in the midst of the poverty reduction project—one of the most elaborate public engagement processes ever undertaken in Canada. His government felt the backlash from voters who seemed more upset by the lack of consultation than the proposed sale.

Since his election, Alward has reiterated his support for implementing the poverty reduction plan under the ESIC and has made it a funding priority for his government. But he did not stop there. As premier, he created a cabinet responsibility for citizen engagement, and took on this responsibility himself. He has also created a secretariat to support citizen engagement, advise officials and ministers on initiatives, and develop a policy for the government as a whole.

Work continued on the poverty reduction strategy. Stephan Leclair, ESIC executive director, set about establishing Community Inclusion Networks (CINs) to coordinate poverty reduction efforts

at the local level through a regional development plan. Eight of the 12 CINs have been approved by the ESIC. To minimize duplication, each CIN must be brought under the auspices of an organization that is already incorporated, and already has administration, financial and other support infrastructure. Vibrant Communities Saint John is one such CIN, created with the support of the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative (BCAPI). The CINs are to focus on five key issues: community transportation, affordable housing, education, employment and development of more inclusive and collaborative communities.

ESIC has a budget of \$2.7 million, including an operating budget of \$500,000. It has five staff members who mobilize resources and networks, help with community coordination and otherwise support the CINs. This might seem like a modest contingent with modest resources, considering the task is to reduce poverty by 2015. However, the intent was never to create a massive organization. Collaboration was always the key. So can it meet the goals? Leclair notes:

“There is a good dynamic, goodwill and feeling when I speak to stakeholders in the community. A lot of momentum has been created through the plan and PE process. My feeling is that people are very happy to be part of the solution and ready to roll up their sleeves and make things happen. That for me is so exciting. I’m looking forward to evaluating and seeing the result of all this in the next year when all the CINs are in operation. Our job is to keep up this momentum and help the CINs to connect with the relevant players.”

Although the ESIC is currently funded primarily by the government, the corporation anticipates receiving support from various sectors in the coming years, including from foundations and other

organizations. For instance, the ESIC has received \$900,000 from the Regional Development Corporation, for community transportation projects.

Under the ESIC Act, a public engagement process exercise must be held in 2015 to evaluate the outcomes of the action plan. PE seems to be here to stay. Of course, success is also critical for the PE process to become institutionalized in the way governments operate. As one deputy minister said:

“Success is what is needed to retain confidence in such an engagement process. Not just politically but also at the various levels. It is important to see the needle move and use performance indicators to measure success.”

ESIC has approximately 15 performance indicators to track its performance until 2015. But aside from quantitative measurements, value must be placed in the partnerships created at the local level, some of which will spill over as the government addresses other policy issues.

5. New Brunswick’s Learning Initiative: Public Engagement Work Continues

In 2009, the Graham government created the Self-Sufficiency Roundtable, which included members from government, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and academia. Two government ministers and then-Opposition Leader Alward were also members. The roundtable members agreed to focus on four priorities in the quest to make New Brunswick self-sufficient by 2026—social justice, prosperity, identity and sustainability. Later, as the Self-Sufficiency Roundtable became the body known as NB2026, these priorities were broken down into 28 specific areas to be considered for action, including education and learning at a number of levels. At the time of writing this study, the group was

chaired by Gino LeBlanc, who had headed a commission on francophone schools.

At the recommendation of NB2026, the government was considering as early as September 2009 starting another public engagement initiative, this one on education and learning. However, issues surrounding the proposed sale of New Brunswick Power were consuming the province, and the Learning Initiative was put on the back burner. By March 2010, Graham agreed to forge ahead, however. Mindful about a possible change of government in an upcoming election, the members of NB2026 nominated Alward to be a member of the Learning Initiative. Alward assured the members of NB2026 that he would support the initiative, in opposition or in government.

The public engagement process for the Learning Initiative was patterned along the same lines as the poverty reduction process. Two co-chairs were selected to lead it, with a third spot held open until after the election for a representative from the government. Andy Scott was appointed a co-chair, along with retired teacher and principle Marie-Paul Theriault. The third spot was eventually filled by Jody Carr, the new minister for education and early childhood development.

Governor General David Johnston launched the Learning Initiative, sponsored by NB2026, in November 2010. The endeavour, now titled Learning: Everybody's Project, was intended, as Scott noted, to help ensure the province's prosperity by fostering a culture of life-long learning to maximize the knowledge and creativity of its citizens.

For this initiative, the co-chairs were aided by the appointment of four more people who were well known in the community and could bring diverse experience and networks to the process. The four were: Natalie Gerum, a postgraduate student who put her studies on hold; Dennis Cochrane, former vice-chancellor of St.

Thomas University; Shelly Polchies, a member of the First Nations community; and retired educator Anne-Marie LeBlanc.

The public engagement process for the Learning Initiative would have four phases: outreach, views (dialogue), deliberation (roundtable) and action (the final forum). The outreach phase, an addition to the PE process, was designed to publicize the initiative and solicit wide public response before the actual collaborative work got underway. A project team, which included members of the public service, framed two basic questions to put to the public from April to September 2011: “How important is learning to you?” and “If New Brunswick were to become Canada’s ‘learning province’ what would it look like?”

During the outreach phase, the team was to gauge the public’s response in order to narrow the topic before the parties were brought together for dialogue in the Views stage. Some of the issues that emerged in the outreach phase had to do with class sizes, learning in the workplace, early childhood education, literacy and numeracy, and the exodus from the province of young people seeking educational and employment opportunities.

At the time of this writing, about 900 “informed communities” had already been engaged in the learning project and each of the co-chairs had committed to conducting about 25 meetings. Executive directors of a number of non-governmental organizations had volunteered to spend two days a month on conducting similar meetings with their stakeholders.

6. Challenges Facing Public Engagement

New Brunswick’s current and previous governments have striven to move ahead on major policy initiatives through collaboration and non-partisanship. Graham has described the challenge this way:

“The challenge within democracies and politics is they think with an electoral cycle in mind. In such a context, how do you bring other political parties to be part of the process? It is important to put the politics aside for the betterment of the public that you’re trying to serve. This is a major challenge for political leaders today, where you live and die by the sword. It takes strong leadership to empower your political adversary, who could use the information he/she receives for political benefit.”

As well, the community and its diverse sectors have been willing partners with government in the bid to address complex policy issues. The public engagement process has enabled the discussion to flourish. As LeBlanc has said:

“Politicians like to make political decisions. As a community, we need to marginalize this and help politicians let go of their lens of the political advantage of a policy decision. Engagement creates this impact. This changes the role of politicians. It doesn’t diminish it.”

As we have seen, the initiative for public engagement doesn’t have to come only from government. While the government did initiate the poverty reduction process, it was the independent body NB2026 that took the lead in the Learning Initiative. In both cases, the decision to rely on a public engagement process was based on the same conclusion: Effective solutions to complex policy issues require genuine collaboration between government, stakeholders and the community.

However, the public engagement approach is not without challenges. How do you bring to the table stakeholders for whom a

change in policy might be to their disadvantage? For instance, a decision to raise the minimum wage might be acceptable to large businesses, but could be seen as difficult or even disastrous for small businesses. The New Brunswick poverty reduction process was criticized because small business stakeholders were not at the negotiating table. For some stakeholders, participating in the process requires them to have a long-term vision for the province's well-being, rather than only a focus on their own short-term goals. This can be difficult. It takes strong leadership to make all stakeholders believe in such a vision and to get them onside.

At the practical level, performance indicators and accountability measures must be established. Stakeholders are more likely to believe in a plan that can be measured and evaluated for its success.

As well, the civil service must be up to the challenge of implementing the solutions that emerge from public engagement processes. Public servants must adapt to the two-way street of the collaborative process. Trust, openness, mutual respect, inclusiveness and a sense of personal responsibility and commitment are important characteristics of a progressive civil service.

Finally, once introduced to the public engagement approach, citizens might come to expect that any major policy decision will without fail be made through a lengthy negotiation and collaboration with the community. However, this is not possible in practical terms. For instance, once action is decided through the public engagement process, governments have to rely on various sectors to carry out the programs. Collaboration can't take place at every level of execution.

Public engagement offers governments an approach for collaborating with stakeholders and citizens on complex policy issues. Alward nicely sums up the challenges and the risks of failing to adequately involve the community in solutions:

“Politicians have less credibility than just about everybody in society...I want to find new ways to change how government works for the people...it’s easier said than done...you need to do it in an organized way... the last thing you want to do is engage and not see results, not only for the people, but also for the government... Failure will eventuate if I do not engage and be inclusive with New Brunswickers and bring them in to work on a vision of prosperity. That’s why I’m not concerned about opening up opportunities for the Opposition party to have a voice.”

7. What’s next for Public Engagement in New Brunswick?

“PE is about partnership, empowering people, involving them in decision-making and jointly forging a future...the process is important and must be followed... Today, in New Brunswick, any proposed legislation about regulation change is first made available online for public comment. This has never been done before... What is clear is that the community wants to be involved. When they are involved, you get much better outcomes. ”

Minister Jody Carr

It seems safe to say that, for the moment at least, the need for greater public involvement in the policy process has been recognized and accepted by New Brunswick’s leaders. Perhaps ironically, this results as much from Shawn Graham’s failure to engage the public as from his successful experiment with poverty reduction. If there were lingering doubts about whether the public today expects a bigger say in key decisions, Graham’s decision to move unilaterally on the sale of New Brunswick Power put them to rest.

That decision cost him his government. Most in the political class drew the lesson, if they hadn't already.

As for David Alward, if he was an early and enthusiastic advocate as Opposition leader, as premier he has backed this up with specific actions. Under his leadership, the public service is busy formulating a policy to guide public engagement. The new secretariat in the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs is providing institutional leadership, training officials from across government and building a community of practice. The initiative on learning is moving forward and looks likely to move the yardsticks on engagement yet again. And, of course, Alward has made himself Minister Responsible for Citizen Engagement, signaling the seriousness of his commitment to it. Where will this lead?

A tantalizing hint is found in a recent speech Alward gave at the Public Policy Forum's annual Testimonial Dinner. He began by explaining why public engagement is important and reiterating his commitment to it. He went on to speak about the emerging crisis in health care, declaring that the current system is unsustainable. Real action is needed. He concluded as follows:

“That’s why I believe it’s time for a national dialogue on health care. We need to start discussing our common challenges and tackling them through a collaborative approach.”

Is Alward planning to become an emissary to the rest of the country, carrying the message of public engagement to other provinces and other premiers, perhaps to the country at large? It is an interesting prospect. Renewal of the health-care system may be the one issue that could engage the entire country. If so, strong, clear, committed political leadership would be critical to launching and sustaining such a dialogue. Is Alward planning to provide that leadership?

We must wait and see. In the meantime, other questions command our attention: Will citizens expect elaborate public engagement processes to be rolled out for every complex policy problem? Will public engagement be as useful in the delivery of services as the development of policy? What other jurisdictions are moving forward on this file? What new lessons will we learn from the Poverty Reduction Initiative and the Learning Initiative, as that work progresses? Could a province like New Brunswick lose its newfound commitment and slip back into traditional consultation?

These questions—and many more—are posed and considered at length in *Rescuing Policy: The Case for Public Engagement*, the final report of the Public Engagement Project. It can be downloaded at www.ppforum.ca. We invite the reader to follow up.

8. Conclusion

In bringing this study to a close, let's return to the claim we made at the start: public engagement works. Given what we have learned through this case study, however, perhaps it would be better to conclude by saying that public engagement can work. In the end, that is the really important lesson from the New Brunswick experience. By carrying out its pilot projects, creating a minister responsible for public engagement, setting up a secretariat, defining a policy for the public service, building a community of practice, and seeing public engagement survive a transition in political leadership, New Brunswick has shown that public engagement really can work; and, indeed, it has begun to show how it can work. In this, the province is clearing a path that others can follow.

And others are following. For example, Phases I and II of the Public Engagement Project have involved 12 of Canada's 14 federal, provincial and territorial governments in a dialogue around this topic, including some 1,500 public servants. Now the project is reaching out to municipalities, non-governmental organizations and the business community. In the Canadian north, the

Territory of Nunavut is undertaking its own poverty reduction initiative. Australia is using public engagement to better align and deliver services in key areas, such as services to seniors or to working families. The province of Ontario is planning an engagement project to integrate services to businesses. British Columbia's new premier, Christy Clark, has declared engagement a key goal of her government.

In short, what began in New Brunswick as a series of small pilot projects to explore the prospects for collaboration between that government and stakeholders, communities and citizens within the province, appears to be emerging as a trend. If so, how far might this go? What are the limits of public engagement?

For instance, can public engagement really change the way our politics work? We saw how in New Brunswick it led to bipartisan cooperation to reduce poverty. Will this trend continue or will partisan politics reassert itself?

Is public engagement really scalable? That is, can a country the size of Canada or Australia really have a "national" dialogue? How would that work? What about a national action plan?

How binding is a government's commitment to public engagement likely to be? Can a successor government easily revert to old ways of doing things?

If public engagement processes can be launched by non-governmental organizations, should we expect this to become a big part of the future? How would this affect our democracy?

Is there a fit between public engagement and other political systems and cultures? Would public engagement work in countries such as India or China?

Presumably, the answers to such questions will come in time. For the moment, however, it will suffice to say this: New Brunswick has let the genie out of the bottle, and it will be difficult to put it back in. As the final report of the Public Engagement Project notes, in the last two decades citizens have become far less deferential toward

governments. They expect to have a real say on issues that matter to them. Public engagement shows how this can be done, which, in turn, is not only likely to reinforce these new expectations, but to create rising demand for processes that are more transparent, accountable and responsive. Will governments respond?

Here too, the New Brunswick experience provides reason for optimism. It shows that public engagement also brings real benefits to governments. It not only gives them a new way to make progress on complex issues, such as poverty or climate change, it allows them to do so in a way that shares risk, accountability and resources, and builds public trust.

Our real hope, then, is that as this becomes clearer to governments, they will come to see public engagement as an inevitable next step in the evolution of modern democratic governments. Indeed, one day they may ask themselves why so many people hung on to the old ways for so long. On that hopeful note, let us conclude this study with a nod in New Brunswick's direction—the little province that not only could, but did.

Appendix 2

Postscript to Chapter 4:

Notes on an Evaluation Framework for Collaboration

If effectiveness is the capacity to use available resources to achieve goals, public engagement moves the yardsticks on effectiveness. We have seen that the goal of solving complex problems cannot be achieved without the participation of citizens, stakeholders and communities working together. Collaboration thus makes a vital contribution to effectiveness. Unfortunately, conventional performance measures do not capture this very well.

Conventional performance measures fall into two categories: those based on client satisfaction and those based on the achievement of goals (outcomes). Measuring satisfaction usually involves tools that are based on a subjective assessment of service quality, such as satisfaction surveys. People who receive the service are asked to reflect on their experience of it and then to rate it. As we noted in Chapter 4, this is a reliable way to evaluate service quality.

When it comes to measuring outcomes, however, subjective impressions are highly unreliable. Outcomes refer to how things are in the world, independently of what we feel about them. Outcome

measures, therefore, need to be objective. Typically, they are based on either scientific knowledge, such as the measures for health or environmental outcomes, or knowledge from the social sciences and humanities, such as measures for innovation or other forms of economic and social change.

Collaborative processes aim at achieving outcomes, so we need outcome measures to evaluate them. Where services are involved, satisfaction surveys may also be required. But these two kinds of measures won't give us the full picture. In particular, they won't give us the information we need to:

- assess how and where collaboration is making a real contribution to the outcome; and,
- systematically improve collaboration, say, by identifying best practices.

To get the information we need for these tasks, the collaborative part of the process must be separated from the rest and assessed differently. This requires a new, third type of measurement tool. What kinds of indicators are appropriate for this?

In collaborative processes, the success or failure of the dialogue is a reliable indicator of the quality of the collaboration. When the dialogue goes well, the parties are usually collaborating effectively. When it breaks down, they are not. To find reliable indicators for the quality of collaboration, then, we need to start by finding the conditions for successful dialogue.

We know a lot about what makes dialogue successful. After all, we have been engaging in it since the beginning of time. Dialogue is the key to developing and maintaining all kinds of successful collaborative relationships, including friendships, business partnerships and marriages.

Over time we've become quite skilled at judging how well dialogue is working within a relationship. If we were not, we would have a hard time knowing when, say, a marriage or business

relationship was prospering and when it was in trouble. Although we can certainly be deceived for short periods of time, we do fairly well at spotting dialogue that is going badly. When we do, we tend to withdraw our trust in the person(s) involved, at which time the dialogue usually breaks down. In short, even if we have never tried to list the conditions that lead to successful dialogue, we have an intuitive idea what they are.

This appendix outlines an evaluation framework for collaboration based on the five conditions for successful dialogue that were described at the end of Chapter 4. First and foremost, effective dialogue requires trust, which is the primary condition. The other four support trust by interacting in ways that help to build trust, and thereby create the conditions for successful dialogue.

These five conditions can be used to create an evaluation framework for collaboration that includes benchmarks and specific indicators for any particular process.

The Benchmark for Trust

1. Trust is demonstrated by a high level of willingness among the parties to continue working together to build the partnership.

In the end, the acid test of a successful partnership is the willingness of the partners to continue to work together and, perhaps, to expand the partnership. Depending on the particular partnership, a wide range of more specific indicators can be drawn from this. For example, they might include:

- willingness to continue meeting and to view the dialogue as a cyclical process;
- belief that the process is working; and
- agreement to expand the partnership into new areas.

The Benchmark for Openness

2. Openness is demonstrated by a willingness to share views, information and knowledge relevant to the dialogue.

While much of this will focus on government, these indicators also apply to the partners outside government. Examples of particular indicators might include:

- number of relevant documents made available to the partners;
- willingness to provide regular briefings and updates to each other; and
- willingness to share plans, directions, concerns and other things that may shape behaviour.

The Benchmark for Mutual Respect

3. Mutual respect is demonstrated by a willingness to seriously entertain alternative views.

Evidence of mutual respect is provided by real changes and adjustments in the partners' existing views, goals, policies, practices and so on. Indicators might include the number and scope of changes in position resulting from the dialogue process.

While these are sometimes hard to pin down, they are nevertheless crucial indicators of an authentic dialogue process. One place to look for them is in the reports from collaborative processes. Each report contains a summary of the discussions, points of view, positions and so on, which have been expressed during the dialogue. As the dialogue progresses, particularly through several cycles, comparisons of past reports with present positions may show how various parties' positions have evolved as a result of the dialogue.

The Benchmark for Inclusiveness

4. Inclusiveness is demonstrated through public agreement that the right people are represented in the dialogue.

It is difficult to know exactly where the boundaries of an issue lie. In part, this will be a decision made by the process planners. Nevertheless, it is not arbitrary or just up to them. If there are organizations or individuals left out of the process, but who insist they should be part of it, this is a strong indication that the boundaries have been drawn too narrowly. By the same token, if there are people or organizations inside the process who are never sure why they are there, this is an indication that the boundaries have been drawn too widely.

The Benchmark for Personal Responsibility

5. Personal responsibility is demonstrated by a willingness of the people involved in the collaboration to assign themselves tasks based on the findings of the dialogue process.

The most obvious place to look for indications that this standard is being met is in the action plan, though other sources are also important. Specific indicators might include the willingness of participants to:

- contribute time or resources to supporting the process;
- recruit new members to the process;
- spend time with others in their normal spheres of contact to inform them of the work underway and to gather their input;
- communicate the findings of the process to others in their network; and
- defend the process against partisan attacks or criticism.

Table of Benchmarks and Indicators for Evaluating Service Partnerships

SUCCESS CONDITIONS	Trust	Openness	Mutual Respect	Inclusiveness	Responsibility
PERFORMANCE BENCHMARKS	High level of willingness of the parties to continue the dialogue	Increased sharing of views, information and knowledge relevant to the dialogue	Real changes and adjustments in existing views, goals, policies, practices and so on	Agreement that the right people are present in the process	Willingness to self-assign tasks based on the dialogue process
PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Willingness to continue meeting and to see the dialogue as a cyclical process Belief that the process is working Agreement to expand partnership into new areas	Number of relevant documents made available to the partners Willingness to provide regular briefings and updates to each other Willingness to share plans, directions, concerns and other things that may shape behaviour	Number and scope of changes in positions resulting from the dialogue process	No people or organizations outside the process demanding that they be a part of it. No people or organizations inside the process who feel they have no real role in it.	Willingness to contribute time or resources to supporting the process Willingness to recruit new members to the process Willingness to spend time with others in your network informing them of the work underway and getting their input Willingness to communicate the findings of the process to others in your network Willingness to defend the process against partisan attacks or criticism

Appendix 3

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Gouvernement du Canada | Government of Canada

"Governments work best when they include people in the decisions that touch their lives. Lenihan's work provides a thoughtful analysis of the factors that influence decisions, and draws a roadmap toward new models of citizen engagement."

Hon. David Alward, Premier of New Brunswick

This groundbreaking work demonstrates that it's insufficient for citizens to simply express their views to governments... Don argues persuasively that the public can and should also be involved in deliberations with government, helping to identify the best policy options. And he goes even further, suggesting that in some instances the public should also be seen as a partner in helping to implement chosen policy directions...

This is a book for our times. *Rescuing Policy: The Case for Public Engagement* clearly articulates a framework for collaborative governance, offering a vision for how governments can move forward more confidently in partnership with the broader community. This is, of course, an idealistic vision. And I believe that, more than ever, we need to make room for idealism in politics and public policy. Ultimately, that's the promise of public engagement.

From the Foreword by David Mitchell

Look inside the front cover to see what other readers had to say.

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