



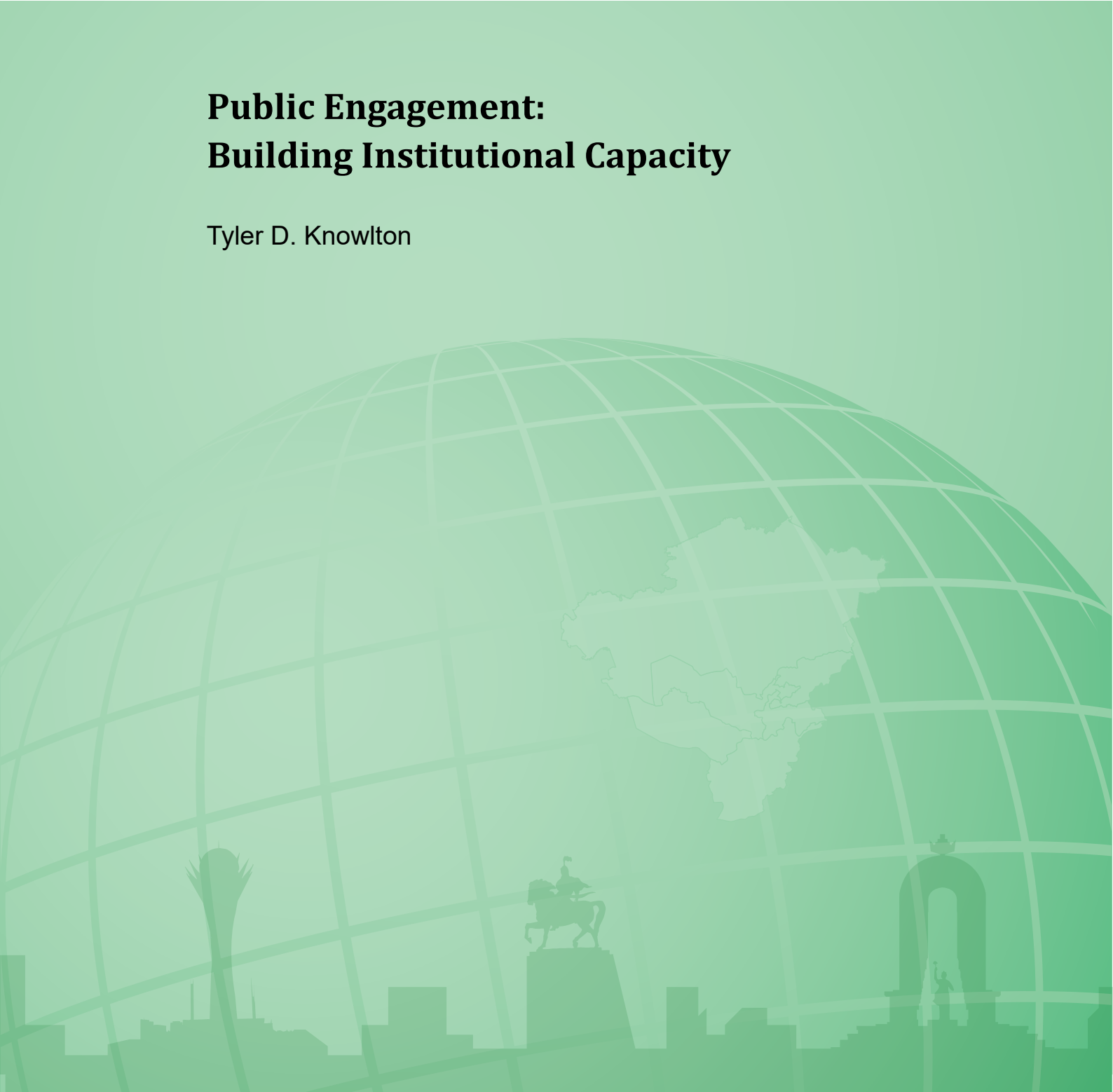
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GRADUATE SCHOOL OF DEVELOPMENT  
Institute of Public Policy and Administration

# **Public Engagement: Building Institutional Capacity**

Tyler D. Knowlton



**OCCASIONAL PAPER NO.1, 2013**





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## **Abstract**

Across OECD governments, there is a growing trend towards inclusive policy making whereby a broad range of citizens and groups are involved in decision-making processes—or in other words, public engagement. In contrast to closed-off and technocratically-driven policy development, public engagement broadens the number of voices heard in any policy decision and democratizes the process. This paper presents a primer to public engagement with a focus on how it is best structured within a bureaucracy. Throughout it is argued that: i) public relations and communications are functions of public engagement; ii) providing the appropriate structures and processes for the organized decentralization of public engagement expertise within ministries can be the foundation for participatory policy making and; iii) centralized coordination within the bureaucracy is a necessary component of such structures and processes.

## **Keywords**

Government Structures, Public Service, Public Engagement, Public Policy

**JEL Codes:** H83, H11

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### **About the author**

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## Introduction

A government ministry consults citizens on proposed changes to land use regulations in order to confirm that the new regulations will have the desired effects. A city councilor engages local residents to create a budget for the upcoming year that reflects the needs and values of the local population. A government appoints an independent commission on forestry reform and holds an online question and answer session to gather new and innovative examples of forestry practices from across the world.

These three different interactions between institutions and the public are all examples of governments involving individuals, groups and organisations in the process of creating public policy. They are all forms of public engagement.

The practice of public engagement arose in large part out of disillusionment with earlier forms of public consultation by governments that had been deemed, at best, informative, and, at worst, manipulative; where those in positions of power made policy without considering the opinions of affected communities and individuals. The practice of public engagement is therefore grounded in notions of participatory democracy and shared power. It presumes that communities and individuals who are impacted by policies should be meaningfully involved in the policy process and that there is valuable information to be learned from such practice. Public engagement requires a fundamental change in how public policy is formulated, conducted and implemented.

This paper provides an introduction to public engagement practice. It is organised around four major questions:

1. What is public engagement;
2. Why is it important;
3. How is it done; and
4. How is it bureaucratically organised (in other words, where should it 'sit' as a function of government).

This last question concerning bureaucratic organisation is really about building institutional capacity so that public engagement forms a regular and meaningful part of policy development. It is also about setting standards for how public engagement is conducted within a bureaucracy so that there is consistency and lack of duplication.

This paper is intended for use by public servants and government officials seeking advice in preparing their institutions for a collaborative and participatory approach to policy making. Throughout, case studies are used to illustrate public engagement in practice.

## 1. What is Public Engagement?

As its name implies, public engagement is about involving ‘the public,’ - which is defined here as any individual, group of individuals, organisation or institution that has an interest in, or is affected by, the outcome of a decision - in the policy process. This positions public engagement as key function of policy making.

Broadly understood, public policies are political, managerial, financial and administrative mechanisms designed to meet explicit public goals or outcomes. While public policy development is ideally informed by rigorous weighing of the relative merits of different approaches using the best available data and expertise, it remains somewhat subjective because it recommends what *should* be done. Public policy implies *action* and public engagement democratises this process. Traditional models of policy development, where experts dictate reforms based on their internal expertise, are democratised to consider the opinions, guidance and feedback of individuals, organisations and communities that are affected by policies or have particular expertise and insights to share. For example, proposed regulations on mining industry waste water management might engage communities in close proximity to mining activities to better understand the effects on the surrounding community and environment and the feasibility of proposed solutions. Community members would have certain insights on how water is used, managed and affected that would be difficult for an outsider to understand. Involvement by the community in this way democratises the process, allowing the community to become aware of and engaged *in* the issue and propose solutions.

What constitutes ‘the public’ in a public engagement process is diverse and complex. The individuals, organisations and communities that constitute ‘the public’ will be different for each project and even the stages within a project. The term ‘public engagement’ is used here rather than ‘citizen engagement’ in order to recognise that, in the spirit of inclusion, all of those who are interested in, affected by, or involved with the outcome of a decision may not necessarily have citizen status. This not only includes new immigrants and those who may not yet have citizen status, but also international organizations such as human rights groups.

### 1.1. Public Engagement, Public Participation, Public Relations and Communications

The terms public engagement, participation, public relations and communications are often used to describe similar functions, but they have very different meanings.

**Public participation** tends to be more informal and initiated by the public and is not part of a formal government process. **Public engagement** on the other hand is a more formal process that takes place within government ministries, departments and agencies. The United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs (UNDESA) distinguishes between public (or citizen) engagement and public (or citizen) participation by examining where the initiative originated, either *within the institution or from the public*.

Citizen engagement needs to be distinguished from more informal participatory approaches to policy development, also known as citizen participation, as the concept of engagement intentionally emphasises an active, intentional partnership between citizens and decision makers which is promoted and conducted by government authorities, in contrast to actions taken by the sole initiative of citizens. Citizen engagement refers to the public's involvement in determining how a society steers itself, makes decisions on major public policy issues and delivers programmes for the benefit of citizens. ...Citizen engagement aims at giving citizens spaces and tools to process and analyse information on policy alternatives and share with them a real stake in decision making process and in monitoring and evaluation.<sup>1</sup>

Positioning public engagement as part of the policy making process formalises its function, moving it away from more informal 'public participation'.

**Communications** functions in government involve communicating information out to a recipient (or the public). It is an informative function, but does not necessarily open discussion. Unlike public engagement, communications does not require receipt of information back from the receiver. It is often a one directional function. **Public relations** is the practice of how the spread of information is managed between a government and the public.

Communications and public relations are both important parts of public engagement. However, in a government context, the two must be clearly defined in relation to one another to be able to create the appropriate organisational structures and separate roles and responsibilities. It is important to ensure that the two functions are complementary. In other words, communications and public relations (that is, communicating information to the public) are an integral part of public engagement, but must be *functions of* the engagement process. They are tools to ensure that a public engagement initiative is successful.

Although many governments have become experts in communications and public relations, building their capacity to engage the public is a relatively recent development. Canada, for example, has a long history of arm's length commissions, consultations and even institutions tasked with engaging the public. Though these techniques and processes are still used, in the past decade Canadian federal and provincial public services have been developing internal capacity to engage the public in policy decisions as well.

## 2. Why is Public Engagement Important?

There is growing international recognition that public engagement is an essential component of good governance. It has been recognised as a basic human right and as an important foundation for government openness, accountability and transparency. As summarised in a Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Magdalena Sepulveda Carmona:

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Guidelines on Citizens' Engagement for Development Management and Public Governance*, Development Management Branch, Division for Public Administration and Development Management, 2011: 9. <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un-dpadm/unpan045265.pdf>



Participation is a basic human right in itself, a precondition or catalyst for the realisation and enjoyment of other human rights, and is of fundamental importance in empowering people living in poverty to tackle inequalities and asymmetries of power in society.<sup>2</sup>

Beyond this basic foundation of public engagement as a right, many governments are recognising that collaboration with the public in their decision making processes is a foundation for more open, transparent and accountable government. The public increasingly expects and demands that government be more open and are “calling for greater civic participation in public affairs, and seeking ways to make their governments more transparent, responsive, accountable and effective”.<sup>3</sup> There is growing demand from the public to not just be *aware of* public policy decision making, but to be *involved in* the process as well. As governments tackle major issues such as the allocation of resources within a society, top-down technocratic expertise may neither be sufficient to grasp the complexities inherent to contemporary policy making, nor appropriate to gain acceptance and legitimacy for policy reforms.

Public engagement is important because it can lead to more *intelligent* policy making since more views, needs, information and interests inform the policy process. But it is equally important for the creation of more *efficient* and *effective* public policy. Well-structured engagement practices set priorities, negotiate trade offs and seek to build consensus on issues *upfront*. Where there is mistrust of expert advice (or government more generally), engagement practices may advance mutual understanding and allay conflict. Such practices increase the awareness and interest of the public in an issue, often leading to smoother policy implementation. Communication of expectations, priorities and goals during engagement exercises may increase fiscal responsibility and lead to new forms of partnerships between governments, organisations and communities. Finally, public engagement practices may be a legal or policy requirement in the case of national or international agreements.

Canada has a long history of public engagement in the form of Commissions of Inquiry, more commonly known as Royal Commissions. Such Commissions have three core features: 1) They are independent of government; 2) They have the ability to mobilise research and experts; and 3) They have the capacity to hold hearings that go beyond the scope of a Ministry. Such commissions create a formal way for governments to delegate investigative or advisory powers to a person or group of people outside of the institution. They are independent bodies that have the capacity to mobilise experts and the public, and hold certain unique judicial powers, such as the ability to hold hearings and break through otherwise inaccessible, bureaucratic systems. Royal Commissions aim to “carry out full and impartial investigations of specific national problems”.<sup>4</sup> In order to do this, Royal Commissions undertake significant public consultations, expert interviews and in-camera meetings. The results of these exercises most often end up in reports containing many policy recommendations.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Magdalena Sepulveda Carmona*, Human Rights Council, 23rd session, A/HRC/23/36, 2013: 3.

<sup>3</sup> Open Government Partnership, *Open Government Declaration*, Open Government Partnership, 2011. <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/open-government-declaration>

<sup>4</sup> Library and Archives Canada, *About Royal Commissions*, Government of Canada, 2013. <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/indexcommissions/001079-120-e.html>

Royal Commissions are established to bring in new perspectives and involve outside actors in solving some of Canada's most challenging and often, controversial issues. Since Canadian confederation in 1867, there have been over 200 Commissions of inquiry on many difficult topics, such as the 1967 Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism that helped foster a new vision of Canada. However, since 1867 much work has also been done in the field of public engagement to help governments and institutions bring outside expertise and perspectives into the decision making process for those issues that may be important for, and have a major impact on, a single community. A Royal Commission is just one of many public engagement tools available to policy makers and governments. The challenge lies in understanding the decision making process and how it affects various members of the public. Only then can we select the appropriate tools of engagement.

### 3. How is Public Engagement Done?

Creating effective public policy is an increasingly challenging undertaking. The complexity of the issues and topics that policy seeks to address has made collaborative decision making a necessity if institutions are to develop holistic approaches to dealing with issues such as environmental protection, security and poverty.

...The traditional view of policy making is that it is essentially the search for the best ideas—even the “right” idea—to solve a problem or achieve a public goal. ...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.<sup>5</sup>

Involving the public in the policy making process through public engagement offers a way to confirm the knowledge that exists within the institution (as is the outcome of traditional ‘consultations’), and a way to harness knowledge and expertise that exists externally. To create the culture and circumstances that can support meaningful public engagement and avoid what Arnstein calls ‘Manipulation’ and ‘Therapy’ (see section 3.1.) and what the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) calls “fake dialogues,” we must make a clear distinction between what public engagement is and what it is not.<sup>6</sup>

The term ‘public engagement’ can mean many things and as a result is at risk of becoming a generic term for the interactions that an institution has with the outside world. In response to this trend, various professional organisations, academic institutions, government and non-governmental organisations are making concerted efforts to make clear connections between public engagement and the decision making process. For government, this means thinking about public engagement as part of the policy making process.

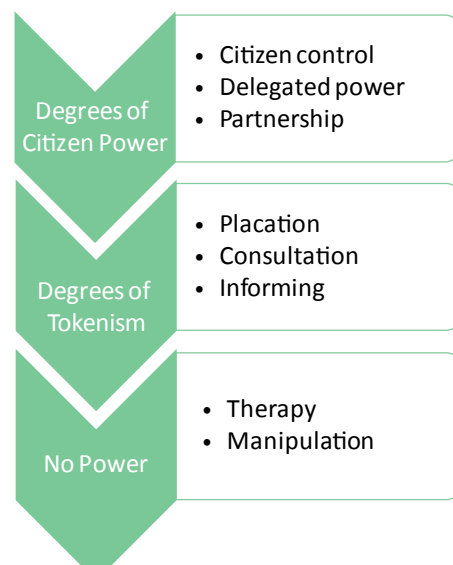
<sup>5</sup> Don Leniham, *Rescuing Policy: The Case for Public Engagement*, (Ottawa: Public Policy Forum, 2012): 36-37. <http://issuu.com/ppforumca/docs/rescuing-policy?e=5463789/2665623>.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Guidelines on Citizens' Engagement for Development Management and Public Governance*, 2011: 10.

### 3.1. Public Engagement as a Spectrum

An effective way of illustrating the differences between the communications functions of conversation, advertising, marketing and ‘spin’ and the policy functions of public participation and engagement, is to break down the field into segments categorised by the type of involvement the public has in the decision making process. The most common way to segment public engagement is in a spectrum or ‘ladder’ organised by level of impact or the degree of power the public will have in influencing the final decision. Two examples of this type of representation are Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation<sup>7</sup> and The International Association for Public Participation’s (IAP2) Spectrum of Engagement.<sup>8</sup> These examples illustrate the evolution of the public engagement spectrum over time and the eventual separation of public relations/communications functions from policy and decision making roles.

Figure 1. Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation



Source: Arnstein (1969).

In Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation, we see that the segments are organised by the corresponding level of citizen power that comes with each section. The bottom of the ladder has two categories (Therapy and Manipulation) that delegate “No Power” to the citizen. This is followed by Degrees of Tokenism which includes a category that is also in the IAP2’s Spectrum of Engagement (see Figure 2); “Informing” the public.<sup>9</sup> At the top of the ladder are three categories delegating power to the citizen; Citizen control, Delegated power and Partnership.

The IAP2’s widely used Spectrum of Public Engagement is made up of five levels of increasing public impact and is designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation defining the public’s role in any community engagement programme. The Spectrum shows

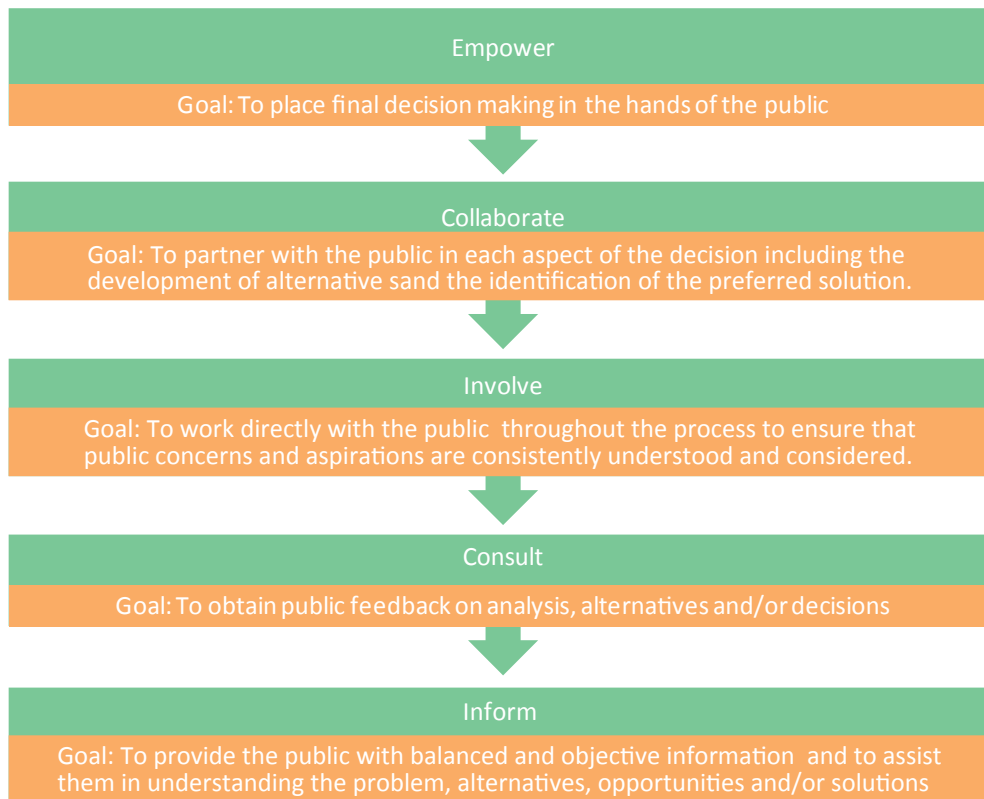
<sup>7</sup> Sherry R. Arnstein, “A Ladder of Citizen Participation,” *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 35, no. 4 (1969): 216-224.

<sup>8</sup> International Association for Public Participation, *Public Participation Spectrum*, IAP2, 2013. <http://www.iap2.org.au/resources/iap2s-public-participation-spectrum> 2013.

<sup>9</sup> In the case of IAP2, we could argue that ‘Informing’ the public does not meet our definition of engagement as it does not bring the public into the decision making process.

that differing levels of participation are legitimate depending on the goals, time frames, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made. However, and most importantly, the Spectrum makes explicit the goals for public engagement at each level.

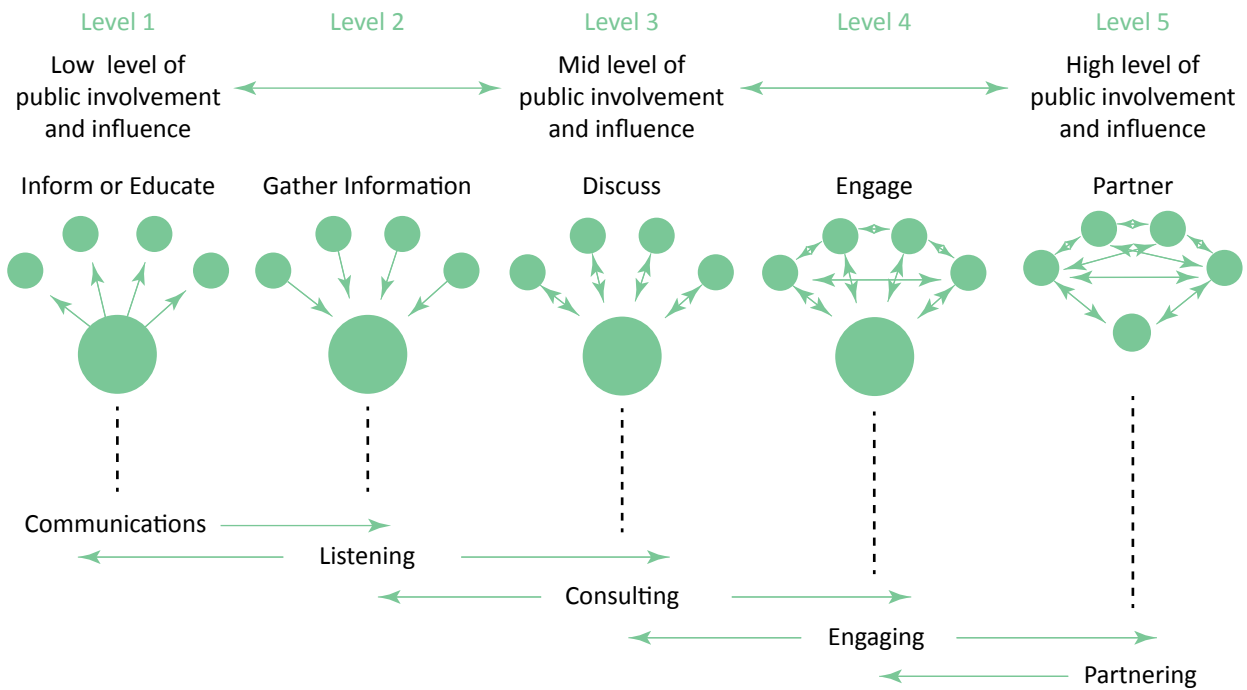
**Figure 2. International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Engagement**



*Source: IAP2 (2013).*

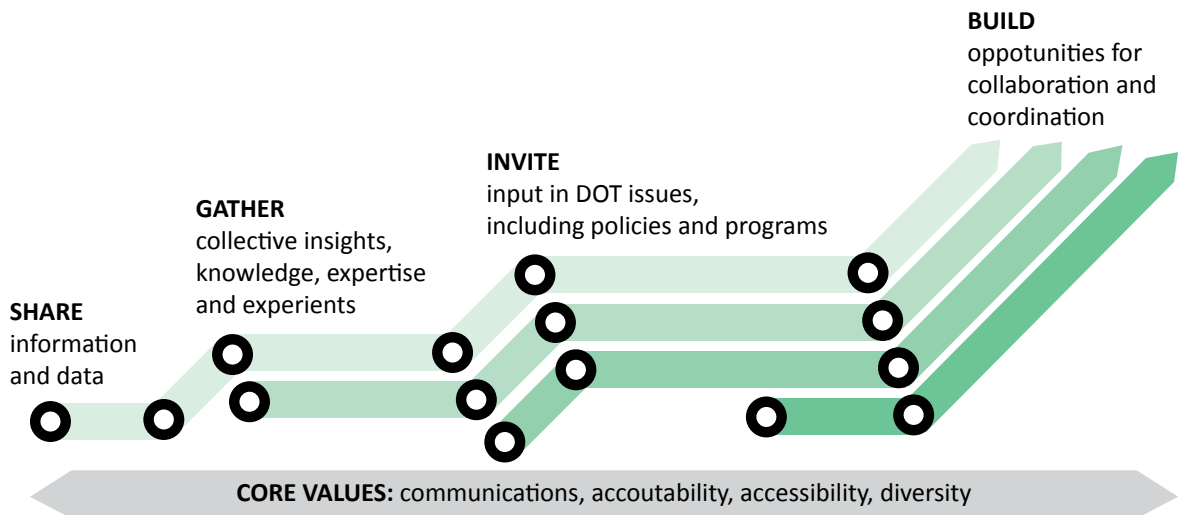
There are several examples of organisations that have created their own spectrum of public engagement (see Figures 3, 4 and 5). Some have simplified the spectrum to suit their particular organisation while others have added in many other layers of engagement to capture the particular complexity of their decision making process. The common trait that links these spectra to one another is the idea that varying degrees of power in the decision making process will be delegated to members of the public, external organisations or a combination of both.

**Figure 3. Health Canada’s Policy Toolkit for Public Involvement in Decision Making**



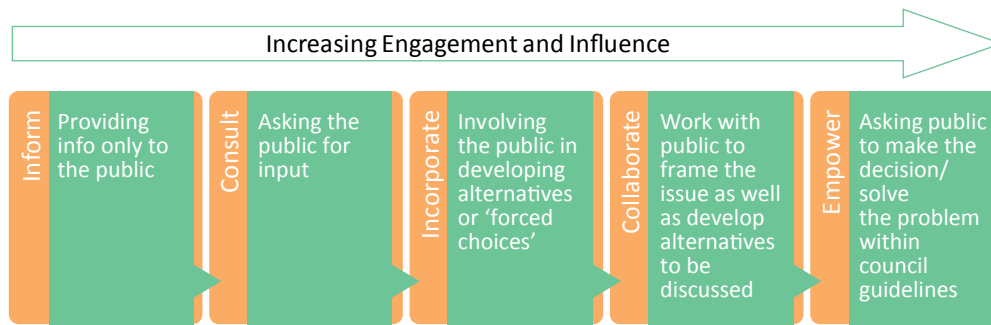
Source: Canadian Institutes of Health Research (2010).

**Figure 4. United States Department of Transportation Public Engagement Model**



Source: United States Department of Transportation (2013).

Figure 5. Building Effective Public Engagement in California



Source: National Council on Citizenship (2011).

Mapping public engagement on a spectrum based on the amount of power delegated from the institution to the public, while allowing for the fact that different segments of the public will be involved in different roles at different times throughout each initiative, is an essential factor in creating meaningful engagement programmes.

It is important to determine the expected level of involvement various members of the public or external organisations might have in each scenario. The internal expectations of the organisation, balanced with those of the public, will determine the purpose of the engagement exercise and which step of the spectrum is appropriate.

### Case 1: Public engagement and megaprojects: Canada's Northern Gateway Pipeline

Major infrastructure projects tend to have high levels of environmental, financial, economic and social risk and are politically contentious. Due to the breadth and scale of such projects, sophisticated engagement processes are commonly employed to garner public input and establish consensus. Canada's proposed Northern Gateway Pipeline is an excellent example of a complex major infrastructure project that is incredibly divisive.

In the early-2000s, Canadian energy company Enbridge proposed the construction of a 1,170 kilometre twinned pipeline to import natural gas and export oil sands bitumen, extending from Alberta's northern oil sands all the way to a marine terminal on the coast of British Columbia. Not only is the project ambitious in scope, it would traverse across endangered boreal forest, two provincial jurisdictions and the territories of numerous Aboriginal governments. Approval for the project is complex, involving multiple governments and regulations at different scales. Environmental and socioeconomic assessments will feed into the decision making process.

Federally, a Joint Review Panel for the Enbridge Northern Gateway Project has been mandated by the Minister of the Environment and the National Energy Board to assess the environmental effects of the project and review its application. The Panel is an independent body composed of three experts with backgrounds in environmental regulation, energy law and geology respectively. Panel members have conducted a public process to receive and consider all information on record concerning the environmental and socioeconomic impacts of the proposed pipeline. As part of this process, the panel has conducted public hearings across both provinces and has considered both oral and written testimony from members of the public, Aboriginal peoples and environmental and industry organisations. The Panel will consider and compile all this evidence and will release a report stating that it is either in favour or opposed to the pipeline. In doing so, it is being asked to consider whether the pipeline is in the public interest.

The public engagement process has been structured through this independent body to reduce the perception of federal interference. The federal government has been a vocal champion of the project along with the Alberta government, while the Province of British Columbia and many Aboriginal governments stand opposed. The arm's length nature of the Joint Review Panel is meant to allay fears that there will be political interference in the approval process. However, the vocal support of the federal and Alberta governments amidst the review process has, to many, undermined its independence.

The Northern Gateway pipeline was first proposed over a decade ago. Even as the Joint Review Panel embarks upon its decision, the process is by no means over. If approved, the project will require further negotiation with provincial and Aboriginal governments to meet concerns about issues such as oil spill response times. Given the highly politicised nature of the project, it has been critical to structure a process that seems fair and allows for meaningful public input. The Joint Review Panel structure has not been without criticism, particularly by environmental groups.<sup>10</sup> Once the panel recommendations are made, it will remain to be seen if public consensus on whether or not to proceed with the project exists. If there is a chasm between the Panel's findings and the opinions of impacted citizens, political pressures may mount regardless of the Panel's recommendations.

### 3.2. Public Engagement Planning Steps

This section outlines four steps in the form of questions that practitioners should ask themselves when embarking on a public engagement process: 1) *Why* involve the public; 2) *When* to engage the public; 3) *Who* should be engaged; and finally 4) *How* should the engagement be done?

#### Step 1: Why Involve the Public?

This step is the starting point for any public engagement exercise. The purpose of engaging the public needs to be determined upfront in order for the process to be meaningfully applied to decision making. Planners should answer the question "Why are we involving the public in this decision making process?"

Because many policy issues are complex, any project may have several purposes for involving different members of the public, external organisations, special interest groups and other stakeholders. To determine who should be involved and in what capacity, the planner must first thoroughly *map the project decision making process*. In doing so, they will be able to identify the opportunities for public involvement at each stage of the process.

<sup>10</sup> Erin Flegg, "In Victoria, Joint Review Panel hears criticism and complaints about proposed Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline," Vancouver Observer, January 4, 2013. <http://www.vancouverobserver.com/politics/victoria-joint-review-panel-hears-criticism-and-complaints-about-proposed-enbridge-northern>

## Case 2: Clear Purpose and Clear Language: The United Kingdom's Consultation on Better Measures of Child Poverty

Clearly communicating *why* members of the public are being included in a decision making process and what *impact* they will have on the final decision is crucial to creating a successful and meaningful engagement process. Equally important is to: define what the scope of the discussions will be; clearly communicate the process; outline what past processes led to the current situation; and provide clear and concise information to the public. The United Kingdom's (UK) recent engagement efforts to determine new measurements of child poverty illustrate the necessity of these points.

In 2012, the UK Coalition Government launched a consultation to help them determine new measures of child poverty in the UK. This engagement process builds upon previous work done with members of the public to eradicate child poverty: "We spoke to children, young people and charities to inform this document and we will continue to work with them throughout the consultation, ensuring that we capture what it really means to live in child poverty".<sup>11</sup>

Despite this acknowledgement, the engagement process has been criticised for two reasons. First, the government failed to clearly communicate the significant history of collaborative work that had already been done to tackle child poverty. For example, while there had been an "admirable history of engagement between academics and government over the measurement of child poverty dating from the mid-1960s", the report did not recognise this legacy or its contributions.<sup>12</sup>

Second, the government's motives were questioned for conducting consultations late in the decision making process, calling into question the level of impact of public input on the outcome. In the words of Professor John Veit-Wilson of Newcastle University, "This consultation is not about how to measure child poverty but about how to describe it better... [it is] simply about how best to present that fact to the British public. It is an exercise in market-testing the public acceptability of the predetermined message and not an enquiry into different types of measurement."<sup>13</sup>

Both of these factors undermined public faith in the process from the onset. Public engagement is about relationship building and requires a level of trust. Recognising past relationships and their achievements can be as important as building new ones. Additionally, conducting consultations at a late stage in the decision making process can appear to be tokenism.

### Step 2: When to Engage the Public? Mapping the Decision Making Process

Determining when to engage the public in a decision making process begins with a detailed understanding the particular project's process. The stages in a decision making process can be described as follows:

1. Set specific goals
2. Identify the problems and resources (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)
3. Select standard performance measures
4. Develop alternatives

<sup>11</sup> Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, UK Government. *Measuring Child Poverty: A Consultation on Better Measures of Child Poverty (2012)*. Presented to Parliament, 2012: 2. <https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/Measuring%20Child%20Poverty%20Consultation%20Document%20final.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Bradshaw, "Consultation on Child Poverty Measurement," *Poverty And Social Exclusion in the UK (PSE UK) Policy Response Working Paper, 8 (2013): 1*. [http://www.poverty.ac.uk/system/files/attachments/PSE\\_policy\\_working\\_paper\\_No.\\_8,\\_Bradshaw,\\_CONSULTATION\\_ON\\_CHILD\\_POVERTY\\_MEASUREMENT.pdf](http://www.poverty.ac.uk/system/files/attachments/PSE_policy_working_paper_No._8,_Bradshaw,_CONSULTATION_ON_CHILD_POVERTY_MEASUREMENT.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> John Veit-Wilson, "Measuring Child Poverty: A Response to the Consultation," *Northeast Child Poverty Blog*, July 29, 2013. <http://northeastchildpoverty.wordpress.com/2013/02/12/measuring-child-poverty-a-response-to-the-consultation/>



5. Select best alternative
6. Acquire and allocate resources
7. Execute selected decision
8. Evaluate decision using metrics
9. Monitor and control using feedback
10. Repeat<sup>14</sup>

Each stage in the process provides a potential opportunity to involve the public or a segment of the public, depending on what each party's goals are. The following case study of the Canadian Province of New Brunswick's development of a poverty reduction strategy illustrates this multi-staged engagement process.

### Case 3: New Brunswick Poverty Reduction Strategy

As one of Canada's smaller provinces, New Brunswick has a population of under 800,000. Constitutionally, Canadian provinces are responsible for most aspects of social policy, while the federal government provides support through fiscal transfers and partnership funding. The New Brunswick Poverty Reduction Strategy was a provincial initiative and the federal government was not involved.

In this case, the decision making process was structured as follows:

1. Set specific goals
2. Identify the problem
3. Develop alternatives
4. Select best alternative

In stages one and two, the provincial government set the specific goal of developing a poverty reduction strategy, while also acknowledging the problem that the province's needs could overwhelm the government's ability to address them. At the third stage of the decision making process (developing alternatives), the provincial government conducted a significant engagement exercise consisting of a dialogue session to which all New Brunswickers were invited to participate online.

The fourth and final stage (selecting the best alternative) consisted of two rounds of public engagement. The first assembled 30 experts from the public in a series of deliberative discussions. The results of these discussions were then fed into the selection stage of the engagement process, which brought together leaders from the provincial government and the public to select the best alternatives.

Given that the final stage in most decision making processes is "Repeat", we can draw on the outcomes of this case study to form the new goals of the next round in this decision making process: *...reduce income poverty in the province by 25 percent and deep income poverty by 50 percent by 2015, through a list of "priority actions."* This turns the decision making process into a decision making cycle and moves the institution closer to the principle of sustained engagement.

By mapping the decision making process and identifying opportunities to involve the public based on internal and external expectations (Step 3 below), it is possible to easily identify the scope of the engagement process. This in turn will allow the institution to clearly communicate how the public will impact the decision being made.

<sup>14</sup> Shawnta S. Friday-Stroud and J. Scott Sutterfield, "A Conceptual Framework for Integrating Six-sigma and Strategic Management Methodologies to Quantify Decision Making," *The TQM Magazine*, 19, no. 6 (2007): 570.

### Step 3: Who Should be Engaged? Identify and Segment the Public

With the decision process mapped, it is now time to identify all the stakeholders (individuals, groups of individuals, organisations or institutions) that have an interest in, are involved with or are affected by the outcome of this decision. When working through the process of identifying which individuals, groups, organisations or communities make up ‘the public’ for any given project, it is important for public engagement practitioners to pay attention to power relations. All groups and individuals do not come into an engagement process with equal resources. Well-resourced groups including industry and paid lobbyists can have a stronger voice in public policy decision making because of their resources, abilities and professional connections. It is important to structure processes that are as inclusive as possible and that pay attention to the inherent inequalities of the groups and individuals being consulted. The section below outlines three key concepts that are essential to developing an engagement strategy that seeks out knowledge of those who may be outside of the vocal majority: social license, inclusion and skills, expertise and abilities.

#### *Social License*

The concept of social license is based on the idea that a project or business can proceed with the approval of the local population. Although this concept is generally used to describe the relationship between a company or project and the community involved, we can also apply it to one person or a small organised group of people that speaks on behalf of a broader population.

Problems can arise when an organised group attempts to represent those who may not have the time, skills or financial means to self-organise. Individuals who are socially and economically marginalised may lack the time, resources and skills to have a sustained presence in policy making. Paul Pross notes that “the very act of organising representation for such groups often results in transforming the messages they wish to send to the government and the public”.<sup>15</sup> Organised groups often represent marginalised populations (such as church organisations and anti-poverty groups) and while they may “speak on behalf of their constituents, [they] do not necessarily speak for them”.<sup>16</sup> This brings into question the quality of the representation that such groups offer.

For those planning public engagement projects, this means ensuring that those who purport to represent their communities or any group other than themselves, have the *social license* to do so. In other words, those who are speaking on behalf of others have their permission and are able to impart their knowledge and accurately reflect their needs and opinions.

#### *Inclusion*

During the exercise of identifying all those affected by or interested in the outcomes of a decision, the planner will ideally work with a team to bring different perspectives into the process. This is the first step to building an inclusive list. Many institutions have gone beyond incorporating planning best practices into their work and have formally adopted inclusion policies that dictate how their ministries and local governments will provide services, create policies and operate in general. For example, in 2009, the Mayor of Seattle, a large metropolis in the United States, released an executive order on inclusive outreach and public engagement as part of a broader

<sup>15</sup> A.Paul Pross, *Group Politics and Public Policy*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1986): 246-247.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

effort to end institutionalised racism in local government as well as to encourage participation by all their residents while promoting multiculturalism. This order commits all city departments to: developing and implementing outreach and public engagement processes inclusive of people of diverse races, cultures, gender identities, sexual orientations and socio-economic status.<sup>17</sup>

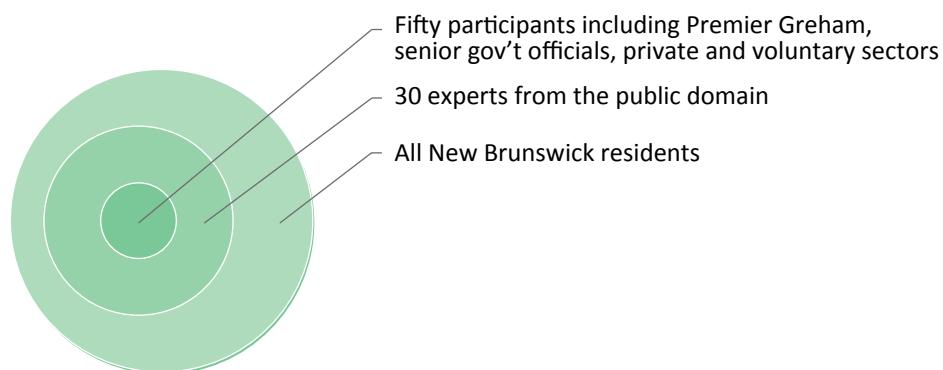
Being inclusive involves ensuring that all those interested in and affected by the outcomes of a decision are involved, and able to express their opinions and impart their knowledge in a fair and equitable way. Often, public engagement initiatives can be co-opted by those who are professionally involved in the issue at hand. Lobbyists, professional associations, industry representatives and non-governmental organisations can all overwhelm the voices of private citizens. The onus is on government to ensure that their engagement processes are designed to give all participants access.

#### *Skills, Expertise and Abilities*

Once an exhaustive list of those who make up the public has been created, the planner can then begin to segment this list by various categories which can be used to determine how and when certain segments of the public should be involved in the decision making process. Examples of categories include levels of interest, expertise, and impact. The segmenting exercise can be done by placing the identified segments of the public into a number of concentric circles representing varying levels of involvement based on predetermined categories (interest, impact, expertise), with the centre circle representing those with the highest level of involvement (and proximity to the final decision) and expanding outward to those with the least (see Figure 6).

In the previous case study (Case 3), the planners in New Brunswick used ‘expertise’ and ‘level of involvement’ as a way to segment the members of the public they had identified. All segments of New Brunswick residents were invited to participate in the first stage, followed by a more focused segment of 30 experts from the public domain, and finally an even greater focused segment consisting of 50 participants including the province’s Premier, senior government officials and representatives from the private and voluntary sectors.

**Figure 6. Segmenting for Public Participation**



Purpose, people and process (Why, Who, When/How) must come first in the planning process in order to choose which tools and techniques will best serve the institution’s

<sup>17</sup> City of Seattle, =Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement Guide=, Seattle Office of Civil Rights, 2009. <http://www.seattle.gov/rsji/docs/IOPE%20guide%2001-11-12.pdf>

purpose and those of the public. The next section briefly discusses the tool selection process with recognition that every project and every segment of the public will require, sometimes dramatically, different approaches.

#### Step 4: How Should the Engagement be Done?: Choosing the Right Tools and Techniques

Choosing the correct tools and techniques for a public engagement project can help ensure that the project is a productive and positive experience for all those involved. Knowing what tool and technique to use for each scenario is a skill that is developed from experience and knowledge of the subject matter, the preferences of the local public and the wide variety of available options. Many institutions and professional associations have attempted to categorise the various tools and techniques in relation to an engagement spectrum. The IAP2 Spectrum of Engagement some example of techniques for each stage of the spectrum (see Table 1).

**Table 1. International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Techniques**

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Promise to the public	We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate this into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Example techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fact sheets</li> <li>• Web sties</li> <li>• Open houses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public comment</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Public meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Deliberative polling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizen advisory committees</li> <li>• Consensus building</li> <li>• Participatory decision making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizen juries</li> <li>• Ballots</li> <li>• Delegated decisions</li> </ul>

*Source: IAP2 (2013).*

The Government of the State of Victoria in Australia has also compiled an excellent online resource for selecting public engagement tools and techniques based on the IAP2 spectrum. They have presented all the tools in a chart that corresponds with varying levels of delegated power. They have also developed a checklist with a series of questions for engagement planners to answer:

- Does the tool match your overall programme objectives, purpose of engagement and anticipated outcomes? (In particular, refer to the objectives, outcomes and uses for each tool.)
- Are you being inclusive of all stakeholders? If not, what do you need to consider in order to be more inclusive?

- Can you adapt this tool to better suit your work and community context?
- Have you developed an evaluation method for this tool in your plan? Will it capture the tool's success and effectiveness in engaging the community as well as capturing new ideas and learning for incorporation next time?<sup>18</sup>

The ability of the planner to navigate the previous steps and use the guides listed here, will depend on their own skills and training. Beyond the ability of the individual planner and the merits of a strong engagement plan, authentic and meaningful engagement also requires the culture and institutional structures to support the entire process.

The following section explores the structures within institutions that can enable an engagement culture and build the institutional capacity needed to enter into productive policy making relationships with the public.

#### Case 4: Public Engagement Logistics: The Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy

Nova Scotia is a Canadian province with a population of just over 900 000 people located on the eastern coast of the country. To deal with major issues like the economy, public health care or provincial infrastructure, significant collaboration is required between the provincial Government, municipalities, non-governmental organisations and members of the general public in order to fully understand the topics, develop options and even choose and implement ideas and solutions. In the fall of 2012, the Premier created The Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy (ONE NS) as a body independent from government tasked with a mandate to produce a report with recommendations on developing the provincial economy. The ONE NS commission consisted of five appointed commissioners and a staff of two full time employees and a part time support person. In order to fulfil their mandate and produce this report, the ONE NS commission developed a public engagement strategy that would incorporate extensive knowledge of the population as well as the nuance of each community.

The strategy was built around specific direction given by the premier to do two rounds of province wide public meetings on the subject of the provincial economy. Given this direction, the commissioners and their staff then developed an 18 month, 3-phase plan that used the two mandated rounds of public meetings to book-end a research phase of engagement. Each phase of public engagement had its own deliverable, building up to the final report, as illustrated below:



<sup>18</sup> Victoria State Government, *Effective Engagement: Choosing the Right Tool*. Department of Environment and Primary Industries, Victoria State Government, 2013. <http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/effective-engagement/toolkit/choosing-the-right-tool>

The first “Exploration and Discussion” phase of public meetings and digital engagement was designed to foster discussion, not only between the commissioners and the public, but also between those individuals, groups of individuals, and organisations that chose to participate. With this purpose in mind, the structure of these meetings was important. Below is a sample agenda from one of the public meetings:

7:00pm – Welcome and opening remarks  
7:15pm – Opening interactive word selection exercise  
7:45pm – State of the Nova Scotia economy presentation  
8:00pm – Small group discussions on three questions  
8:30pm – Report back  
8:45pm – Closing interactive word selection exercise  
8:55pm – Closing remarks and call to action

Along with these public meetings the ONE NS commission ensured that phase 1 included multiple ways for members of the public to submit ideas and recommendations, join and continue the discussions, and learn about key issues. These alternate channels included email, online submission forms, post, and various social media channels.

Because the public meetings were generally scheduled during the evening, the commissioners were free to meet with specific stakeholders in each location during the day. For example:

09:00am – Meet with Mayors and CAOs of various municipalities  
10:00am – Meet with Chambers of Commerce  
11:00am – Meet with Fishing Industry Representatives  
01:00pm – Meet with Young Entrepreneurs  
02:00pm – Meet with Mining Industry Representatives  
04:00pm – Meet with Community College Representatives

All of these meetings were supported by ongoing discussions and collaboration on the “ONE NS” Website and through various social media channels.

This first phase of public engagement resulted in an interim report containing the general themes that had emerged during this portion of the engagement process. The interim report served as the basis for Phase 2, the research round of engagement that preceded the final, province-wide public meetings and a renewed push of digital discussion with the public.

In the research phase of this initiative, the ONE NS commission explored the themes identified in the interim report and began to formulate draft recommendations, grounded in research, to bring forward in the final phase of public engagement. To conduct this research, the commission staff worked with various stakeholders and consultants to produce a high level, well researched discussion paper introducing some of the concepts that would form the basis of the final report and recommendations to government.

The final phase of public engagement mirrored the initial first round of public meetings and online discussions, but with a more focused purpose. This round of public engagement was designed to foster conversations based on the high level version of the draft recommendations to government introduced in the discussion paper.

The three underlying concepts that guided the ONE NS commission's use of tactics are

- the use of digital technologies and social media to enhance discussions, to increase the number of submissions, and to extend the reach of all in-person meetings between commissioners and the public,
- the deliberate selection of collaborative meeting spaces and techniques designed to create relationships and foster discussion between the meeting attendees as well as with the commissioners,
- and continued communication with the public during and in between phases.

#### **4. HOW is Public Engagement Bureaucratically Organised? Building Institutional Capacity**

There are two sides to public engagement - the (internal) participation of involved institutional actors and the (external) involvement of members of the public. While recognising the importance of building external capacity in public engagement, this paper focuses on the institution's role in the process and strives to provide guidance in building the institutional capacity necessary to create meaningful participatory policy making opportunities and to support citizen-led engagement activities. This requires a culture change in many organisations, but what is necessary to initiate such a shift? This section explores the idea that culture change and building institutional capacity is initiated and supported by the proper organisational structure and support from both senior management and the skills that reside in line ministries and subject matter experts.

It outlines a two-pronged approach consisting of:

1. High level support from senior management in the form of public engagement principles; and
2. The creation of a central office of public engagement support with a mandate to build internal capacity.

##### **4.1. High Level Support: Principles, Standards and Planning**

Establishing a set of principles and having senior management make an open commitment to them provides the foundation for all subsequent public engagement related activities and assets. This commitment is a starting point to create a culture of public engagement. These principles can also serve as the foundation for other materials to be created in a coordinated manner. Training courses, handbooks and guidelines, specific templates and, most importantly, a public engagement planning process, can all flow from the principles and standards documents. Such principles are often written in high-level terms as a statement of values that will guide engagement and set the stage for more detailed activities.

## Case 5: Scotland's National Standards for Community Engagement

Scotland has established Principles of Community Engagement that underpin its National Standards for Community Engagement. They are:

1. Fairness, equality and inclusion must underpin all aspects of community engagement, and should be reflected in both community engagement policies and the way that everyone involved participates.
2. Community engagement should have clear and agreed upon purposes, and methods that achieve these purposes.
3. Improving the quality of community engagement requires commitment to learning from experience.
4. Skill must be exercised in order to build communities, to ensure practice of equalities principles, to share ownership of the agenda and to enable all viewpoints to be reflected.
5. As all parties to community engagement possess knowledge based on study, experience, observation and reflection, effective engagement processes will share and use that knowledge.
6. All participants should be given the opportunity to build on their knowledge and skills.
7. Accurate, timely information is crucial for effective engagement.

The high level nature of these principles allows them to be flexible enough to be used at any level within the bureaucracy to support public engagement activities. However, without clearly articulating the institution's public engagement expectations of their workforce at an operational level, the principles alone are not enough to empower those responsible for the central support function of building internal capacity. To build the accountability and consistency in public engagement that sets the foundation for culture change, public engagement standards need to be established.

### *Setting Engagement Standards*

Developing public engagement standards is an opportunity to create a collaborative and educational process for the entire institution. These standards should flow directly from the high-level public engagement principles, but should specify what the institution is committing to. If we compare the Scottish National Standards for Community Engagement with their Principles, we can see that the Principles speak to what the Engagement will be: "Community engagement should have clear and agreed purposes and methods that achieve these purposes"<sup>19</sup> The Standards meanwhile outline what the institution will do. In the case of Scotland, these are outlined as follows:

1. **Involvement:** We will identify and involve the people and organisations who have an interest in the focus of the engagement.
2. **Support:** We will identify and overcome any barriers to involvement.
3. **Planning:** We will gather evidence of the needs and available resources and use this evidence to agree on the purpose, scope and timescale of the engagement and the actions to be taken.
4. **Methods:** We will agree and use methods of engagement that are fit for the purpose.
5. **Working Together:** We will agree and use clear procedures that enable the participants to work with one another effectively and efficiently.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



6. **Sharing Information:** We will ensure that necessary information is communicated between the participants.
7. **Working With Others:** We will work effectively with others with an interest in the engagement.
8. **Improvement:** We will actively develop the skills, knowledge and confidence of all the participants.
9. **Feedback:** We will feed back the results of the engagement to the wider community and agencies affected.
10. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** We will monitor and evaluate whether the engagement achieves its purposes and meets the national standards for community engagement.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the differences in format and wording, we can draw explicit links between Scotland's principles and standards of community engagement (see Table 2).

**Table 2. How Standards Operationalise Public Engagement Principles**

Principle	Standards
Fairness, equality and inclusion must underpin all aspects of community engagement, and should be reflected in both community engagement policies and the way that everyone involved participates.	Involvement: We will identify and involve the people and organizations who have an interest in the focus of the engagement. Support: We will identify and overcome any barriers to involvement.
Community engagement should have clear and agreed upon purposes, and methods that achieve these purposes.	Planning: We will gather evidence of the needs and available resources and use this evidence to agree on the purpose, scope and timescale of the engagement and the actions to be taken. Methods: We will agree and use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose. Working Together: We will agree and use clear procedures that enable the participants to work with one another effectively and efficiently.
Improving the quality of community engagement requires commitment to learning from experience.	Improvement: We will actively develop the skills, knowledge and confidence of all the participants. Monitoring And Evaluation: We will monitor and evaluate whether the engagement achieves its purposes and meets the national standards for community engagement.
Skill must be exercised in order to build communities, to ensure practice of equalities principles, to share ownership of the agenda, and to enable all viewpoints to be reflected.	Working With Others: We will work effectively with others with an interest in the engagement.
As all parties to community engagement possess knowledge based on study, experience, observation and reflection, effective engagement processes will share and use that knowledge.	Sharing Information: We will ensure that necessary information is communicated between the participants.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Principle	Standards
All participants should be given the opportunity to build on their knowledge and skills.	Feedback: We will feed back the results of the engagement to the wider community and agencies affected.
Accurate, timely information is crucial for effective engagement.	Sharing Information: We will ensure that necessary information is communicated between the participants.

Source: *Communities Scotland (2005)*.

Not only will these principles and standards provide the foundation for an engagement culture, they will also outline the institution's expectations for good public engagement planning and how it fits together with the policy making process.

### *The Planning Process*

The public engagement planning process should be designed to build projects that are focused, meaningful and productive for all parties involved.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has created the following 5 step planning process:<sup>21</sup>

#### 1. Gain Internal Commitment

Task 1: Identify the decision-maker(s).

Task 2: Profile sponsoring organisation's approach to public engagement.

Task 3: Clarify the scope of the decision.

Task 4: Identify stakeholders and their issues of concern.

Task 5: Determine sponsor's expectation for the level of engagement.

#### 2. Learn From the Public

Task 1: Understand how people perceive the decision.

Task 2: Develop a comprehensive list of stakeholders.

Task 3: Correlate stakeholders and issues.

Task 4: Review/refine the scope of the decision.

#### 3. Select the level of participation

Task 1: Assess internal and external expectations.

Task 2: Select level on the Spectrum.

Task 3: Assess "readiness" of sponsoring organisation.

#### 4. Define the process and participation objectives

Task 1: Understand the existing decision process.

Task 2: Set public participation objectives for each step in the process.

Task 3: Compare decision process with public participation objectives.

Task 4: Check to confirm objectives meet needs.

<sup>21</sup> International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), =Five Steps for Public Participation Planning=, IAP2, 2005. <http://www.projectaddwater.com/Portals/2/docs/IAP2s-5-Steps-Process.pdf>

5. Design the participation plan
  - Task 1: Integrate baseline data into plan format.
  - Task 2: Identify the public participation techniques.
  - Task 3: Identify support elements for implementation.
  - Task 4: Plan for evaluation.

Creating a planning process for public engagement that aligns with an existing policy making process will lead to greater integration of the two. Although this may tend to draw the engagement planning process away from the standards and principles, it is essential to maintain explicit links between the planning process and the public engagement standards, as was done between the standards and principles. The next section focuses on the first step of developing, implementing and supporting all that has been covered so far.

## **4.2. Structures: Central Office of Public Engagement Support**

In this section, we will examine three ways a bureaucracy can incorporate public engagement into its policy making process. First, one can centralise the function of public engagement and all aspects of planning and implementing projects that fall into the public engagement category. This includes all engagement expertise including strategic planning and operational aspects. This centralised approach is often employed in the strategic communications world in which employees of the central office are embedded within individual ministries. Centralising all aspects of public engagement within government, as happens with other functions, provides a great deal of central control.

The second option is to allow each individual ministry to develop separate approaches to public engagement and to take responsibility for carrying out individual engagement activities. This includes developing individual ministerial organisational charts, placing the function where they see fit. In this model, there is the potential for customised approaches and flexibility, but also the potential for variations in quality.

The third and recommended option is a blend of the first two and involves centralising the function of building institutional capacity to engage the public, as opposed to creating a central public engagement office that develops and implements plans and projects. This approach helps to maintain standards and consistency and allows for a coordinated decentralisation of expertise. It keeps specific subject matter and geographic knowledge within ministries and branches of government while encouraging inter-ministerial collaboration and knowledge sharing. In this scenario, a centralised engagement office exists to support, coordinate and advise ministries in their engagement efforts, rather than to plan, implement and analyse on their behalf.

By this rationale, the office exists to support public engagement at a corporate level and to focus on capacity building and innovation instead of developing or implementing specific engagement strategies. The 'public' for a centralised public engagement office is therefore other government ministries, departments, agencies and offices.

The reporting and organisational structure of a centralised office of public engagement ensures that a corporate approach is maintained and that the guidance provided by the

office is not unduly affected by political influence. The office works to advise agencies across government, and should report directly to a senior official in a centrally located ministry.

An example of such an organisation is the newly formed Office of Public Engagement in the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Office has a mandate within the Executive Council to “ensure every Provincial Government department can launch effective, targeted and interactive public consultations, including social media”.<sup>22</sup> The Office “builds on the existing strengths of current functions and coordinates the efforts of departments to increase access to information resources”.<sup>23</sup> Under this mandate, the office can be given the responsibility of developing public engagement principles and standards as well as all of the supporting resources and tools necessary to begin corporately building the skills needed to uphold these standards.

In a central office, the newly formed team is able to achieve its mandate of engagement support with relatively few resources. By focusing on developing standards, giving guidance to ministries and serving as a central source of training opportunities and learning materials, a small office can coordinate and give strategic direction on public engagement at the corporate level, allowing ministries engaging in public engagement to drive innovation and best practice within a supported framework.

#### *Working with Ministries*

There are two ways to create a supportive framework for public engagement.

The first is to formalise the interaction between ministries and the central office of public engagement, creating a formal network of public engagement practitioners distributed throughout the public service by embedding public engagement experts within each ministry. These experts act as a link between the central office of public engagement and their ministries and provide operational and strategic support for ministerial engagement activities. This structure is similar to that found in the communications and public relations sectors. However, in this case, the goal of the public engagement professionals is to uphold standards rather than control messaging.

Option two provides an alternative in which the public engagement function is built into the policy making process and community. If good public engagement has direct links to the policy decision making process, building public engagement capacity within the policy making community makes sense. In this case, the connection between the central office of public engagement and ministries is through the network of various policy offices of ministries. This places the responsibility of incorporating public engagement practices into policy-making processes directly on policy makers. In this scenario, the central office of public engagement bears the responsibility of clearly articulating what good public engagement is and of ensuring that this network has access to the training and resources necessary to meet those expectations.

<sup>22</sup> Government of Newfoundland & Labrador, About the Office of Public Engagement, Government of Newfoundland & Labrador, 2013. <http://www.ope.gov.nl.ca/office/index.html>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

Meaningful public engagement in the policy making process can be a difficult and challenging undertaking. It requires sustained and on-going relationships between organisations and the public; repeated and authentic efforts to involve new people in the process; and an on-going commitment to building engagement capacity. The outcomes of these efforts will make the process increasingly productive and rewarding for all those involved.

As the world becomes more connected through digital technologies, the potential for collaboration between institutions and the public on complex policy problems grows exponentially. The ability of institutions to determine what expertise is available to them and where to find it has never been greater. However, the need to maintain strong relationships remains the same. Building, not only public trust in the institution, but the institution's ability to trust the public lies in a corporate understanding of the value that engaging the public brings. Consistency, transparency and an authentic desire to bestow authority on the public through collaboration begins with building the institutional structures and processes to support the inevitable culture change that faces all institutions and their decision makers engaged in this important work.

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