

# Public Engagement Guide



Office of Public Engagement

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### ***Introduction***

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador recognizes the importance of engaging residents on a wide range of important public policy issues. It is increasingly being recognized that the process through which policy-makers reach decisions is just as important as the outcomes themselves. As such, public engagement plays a key role in the democratic process. The public is more connected, educated and informed than ever before, and they increasingly expect to participate in the decision-making process. When the public is engaged, government can utilize its expertise to make better quality decisions in which residents have a high level of confidence.

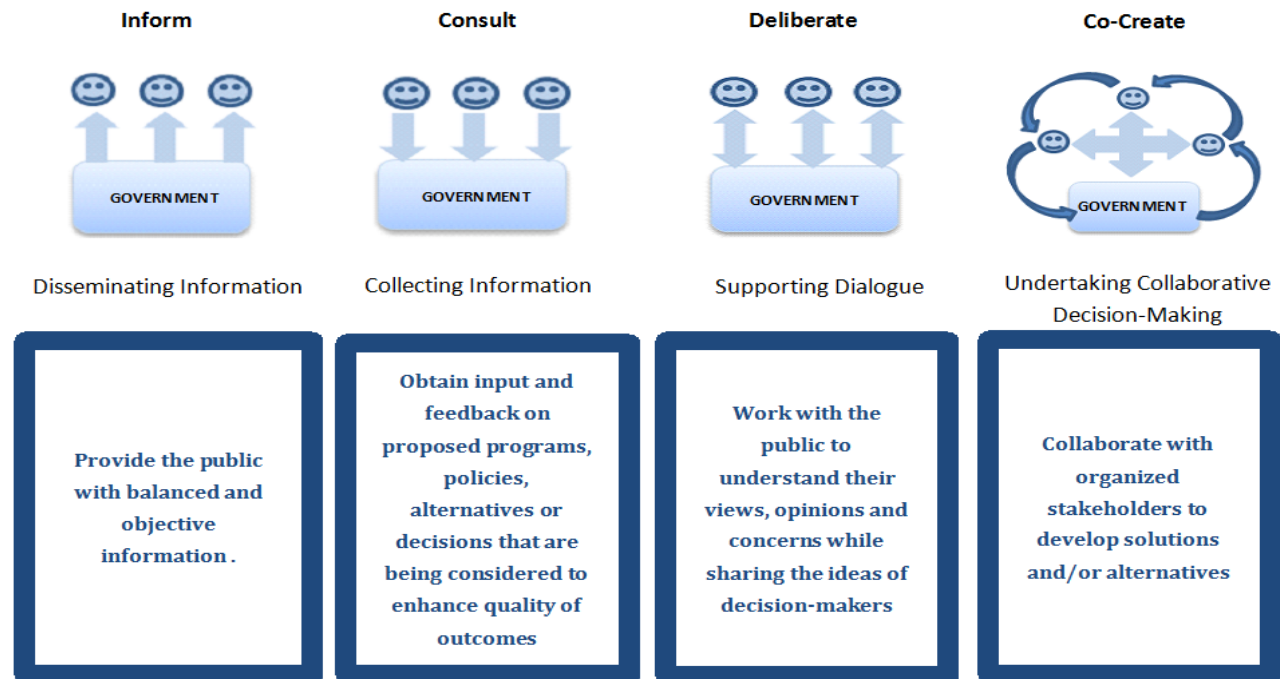
This document outlines the Office of Public Engagement's guiding principles that shape public participation efforts undertaken by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. The purpose of this guide is to help departments implement successful public engagement processes. It outlines how public engagement can be used, when it should be used and who it can typically involve. It seeks to provide a starting point from which those considering engaging the public may quickly acquire the basic knowledge required to design, conduct, and evaluate engagement activities. This manual will help clarify key terms (i.e. exactly who is 'the public?'), expectations (when should the public be engaged?), and what to do with information obtained during the process (how do we report results and incorporate public input into decision-making?). Ultimately, it should help the user determine the extent of their need to involve the public, what form of public engagement is appropriate for their purpose and how to evaluate the effectiveness of the process.

### ***What is Public Engagement?***

Facilitating the involvement of the public can inform and improve public policy. Obtaining such involvement allows government to make decisions that are responsive to the needs and will of the residents of the province. Effective public engagement ensures that the public are involved in the appropriate way at the correct time.

Public engagement may consist of a wide array of activities that range from informing to the co-creation of policy. The Office of Public Engagement has developed a 'Spectrum of Public Engagement' (see Figure 1) to outline what is involved in each level.

Figure 1 - Spectrum of Public Engagement



Engaging the public rarely falls neatly into a single category. Instead, typical engagement involves a hybrid of these activities, and sometimes borrows elements from across the entire spectrum. Numerous other continuums such as the one above have been developed (most notably the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation; see also the Health Council of Canada Spectrum of Public Involvement). The above illustration reflects the experience of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Figure 2 – PE Spectrum Activities

Inform	Consult	Deliberate	Co-Create
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A decision has already been made</li> <li>• Provide facts and or results concerning a policy or program</li> <li>• Immediate action is required</li> <li>• Simple issue</li> <li>• Build awareness</li> <li>• No opportunity for public to influence final outcome</li> <li>• Goal is to create awareness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen and gather information</li> <li>• Assist in policy refinement and/or formulation</li> <li>• Test ideas/concepts with the public</li> <li>• Clarify issues or concerns with a program or policy</li> <li>• Advisory for government</li> <li>• Goal is to improve decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goal oriented bilateral and/or multilateral information exchange</li> <li>• Options developed are respected</li> <li>• Obtain 'buy-in'</li> <li>• Communication of alternative perspectives, expectations and concerns</li> <li>• Goal is to generate ideas and/or set the stage for problem-solving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government and stakeholders create alternatives to complex issues/challenges</li> <li>• Decision-makers agree to implement the solutions to the extent possible</li> <li>• Goal is to undertake shared actions and decision-making</li> </ul>

Public engagement includes any efforts to involve the public in decision-making or problem solving efforts. While this sometimes simply includes information dissemination, it may also include consultation, deliberation or co-creation. It is of utmost importance to decide what type(s) of engagement are desired before designing any public engagement process.

### ***Inform***

- Providing information to the public in order to raise the level of understanding surrounding an issue or topic that may be of practical concern to residents. Individuals and stakeholders are then able to properly assess and evaluate the impacts of policies and initiatives proposed by government

### ***Consult***

- Facilitating public input and dialogue on alternatives or decisions. This allows the public to have an opportunity to provide input on policies and initiatives before they are finalized. Typically, consultation focuses on a specific group of stakeholders during the early or middle stages of the policy/initiative development while establishing clear parameters within which stakeholders' views may be accepted

### ***Deliberate***

- Working directly with the public to ensure that their aspirations, concerns and analysis are understood and taken into consideration

### ***Co-Create***

- Working directly with stakeholders in the active development of alternatives and the identification of preferred solutions

In order for public engagement to be meaningful, residents and stakeholders potentially affected by the decision should:

- Be involved and have the opportunity to influence the outcome *before* it is determined
- Have an opportunity to impact future policy or decisions

***Key Point #1:*** A wide range of public engagement activities exist, including informing, consulting, deliberating and co-creating.

## *Public Engagement Guide*

Public engagement is most typically characterized by mutual information exchange with residents and stakeholders. There are several directions that information can flow:

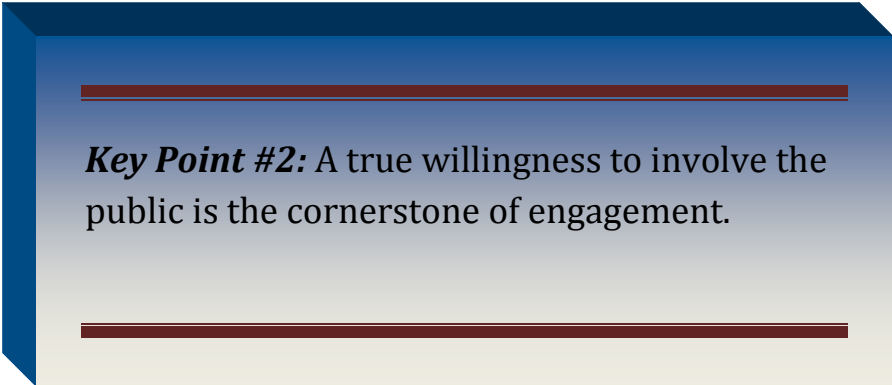
- From government to individual
- From individual to government
- In both directions as dialogue

The goal of these exchanges is to generate benefits for all involved. Typically, government departments are able to make better informed decisions while residents gain policies and programs that better reflect their needs.

Due to the vital role of information, it is essential that the public is informed about an issue when providing feedback or input. Sometimes, the public will already be informed or possess specialized knowledge not available to decision-makers. At other times, the public will need to be provided with the relevant information before it is able to provide input and advice. Engaging the public for the sake of ‘rubber stamping’ a predetermined decision may result in cynicism, particularly if the decision runs counter to much of the received input. Understanding the damage that may occur if engagement activities are used inappropriately is an important consideration.

Sometimes the prevailing public opinion will be misinformed on a particular topic or concern. It is therefore essential that the public are provided with information which will allow them to make a more informed decision. Undertaking such information provision efforts reduces the likelihood of cynicism occurring when expert opinion and research opposes public opinion.

Public engagement processes and practices should be guided by a commitment to values such as being accountable, transparent, respectful, inclusive and responsive to the needs and expectations of the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. These values are outlined in Figure 3.



***Key Point #2:*** A true willingness to involve the public is the cornerstone of engagement.

**Figure 3 – Public Engagement Values**

<b>Accountable</b>	Demonstrates sensitivity to timelines, is cost-effective and demonstrates that results and outcomes are consistent with expectations
<b>Transparent</b>	Demonstrates openness, honesty and transparency of purpose when engaging the public and ensures that the same principle applies when communicating results
<b>Respectful</b>	Respects participants’ and stakeholders’ time and input
<b>Inclusive</b>	Engages the public with inclusivity at the forefront
<b>Responsive</b>	Addresses participants’ concerns and provides timely feedback

***Why is Public Engagement Important? What are the Benefits?***

Engagement efforts have the ability to improve both the quality and quantity of information available to the public and decision-makers. This is important when prominent issues or projects are at the forefront of the public consciousness. The desire of the public to actively participate in the decision-making process has been heightened over the past several decades. This has been due to a number of factors:

- Rising education levels;
- The public possess greater access to information due to the existence of a wide variety of media sources; and,
- The information age has created a newly critical populace who may no longer accept a ‘top-down’ model of decision-making.

The decline of deference to government decision-makers means that information and decisions are more likely to be accepted when they are developed collaboratively with residents rather than behind closed doors. Outcomes that have been developed in conjunction with public input will be more readily accepted. This is often because such outcomes are often of higher quality, and gathering a diversity of input is integral to the process.

Engaging the public provides numerous benefits, including:

- Facilitating the development of better policy;
- Enabling better informed, better quality and more sustainable decisions;
- Obtaining greater support and public acceptance (i.e. less conflict surrounding decisions);
- Facilitating the development of more informed officials, politicians and residents;
- Strengthening democratic institutions and reducing cynicism;
- Building cooperative relationships and generating mutual understanding;
- Focusing attention on important issues;
- Obtaining valuable information about the public environment and potential impacts;
- Enhancing understanding of the public's interests, concerns and priorities;
- Creating a positive foundation for working with interested parties which helps to build trust, resolve problems, make informed decisions and reach common goals;
- Increasing communication, transparency and accountability to the public;
- Avoiding or minimizing adverse effects or unintended consequences of decisions;
- Addressing public concerns early in the process, thereby reducing likelihood for conflicts, costly delays, etc.;
- Correcting misinformation or rumours;
- Aligning the project design with public priorities and expectations management before significant resources have been invested in detailed project planning; and,
- Increasing the credibility of decisions and decision-makers.

**Key Point #3:** With the increase in overall public education levels and the decline of deference, the public is becoming less and less accepting of decisions where they have had limited input

Gaining access to specialized knowledge held by the public is a major benefit of public engagement. Residents and stakeholders will often possess technical information which is important to decision-makers. Information may not only be technical in form, it may also include knowledge that only residents could possess, such as how they would react to a new policy or program. The values held by residents can only adequately communicated by the individuals themselves.



## ***Consultation, Deliberation and Engagement***

There are numerous ways to define 'engagement'. Alternative terms such as 'involvement' and 'participation' have often been used interchangeably in its place. The presence of similar terminology can and does muddle dialogue concerning the topic of public engagement. Discussions around public engagement are often marked by confusion as practitioners attach a variety of meanings to commonly used terms.

Public engagement and public consultation are also terms which are often used synonymously. Despite this common usage, in practice these terms possess distinct meanings. Consultation is part of a continuum of options within the broader area of public engagement which also includes informing, deliberating and co-creating.

***Key Point #4:*** Clearly communicating what is meant by specific terms (such as 'engagement', 'consultation' and 'involvement') is important when interacting with the public.

### ***Key Point #5:***

Engaging the public allows for decision-makers to access specialized knowledge from the public.

While many people often think of consultation as the key means for engaging the public, it is simply one of the possible tools that may be utilized by practitioners. It is often helpful to consider public engagement as having three 'levels'. These levels include:

- **The 'Consultative Level'** - Obtaining the views of the public (i.e. public meetings/focus groups)
- **The 'Deliberative Level'** - Drawing on the views of the public and other relevant material to deliberate over the issues (i.e. workshops, deliberative polling)
- **The 'Action Level'** - Developing recommendations for action (i.e. participatory decision-making, formal partnerships and/or acting together).

Deliberative processes involve the public more intensively than consultative ones. Instead of simply providing their views, the public work through the issues together with government. Often, this type of process will involve considering evidence, identifying common ground, and determining steps forward to achieve mutual goals. Ultimately, once this process is complete government is largely responsible for making any final decisions.

Action or co-creation processes require a collaborative effort between the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, stakeholders, communities and residents. In such settings, government works with the public at a variety of engagement levels (views/deliberation/action) in order to achieve a desired goal or solve an issue or problem. While government does not necessarily give up any authoritative power, it does integrate the public into aspects of the decision-making process.

### ***Residents versus Stakeholders***

Residents and stakeholders typically represent the two typologies of individuals who participate in public engagement processes; however, their motivations for participating are slightly different. A 'stakeholder' is an individual who has an interest in an issue or decision. Typically, this individual represents a group or organizational interest that has a stake in the outcome of a particular decision. A resident also has interest in a topic and a preference for a certain decision, but may not necessarily have a formal stake in the outcome. Both are important sources of input, as stakeholders are more likely to be the holders of technical knowledge while residents typically hold more 'value knowledge' (i.e. knowledge of how proposed changes would impact them).

***Key Point #6:*** Clearly communicating what is meant by specific terms (such as 'engagement', 'consultation' and 'involvement') is important when interacting with the public.

### ***Elements of Meaningful Public Engagement***

Before outlining how and when to use public engagement processes, it is essential to understand the elements that make such engagement meaningful for the public as well as the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. These elements include:

- Sufficient notification of the engagement activity/process;
- Information that is comprehensible and accessible to the public;
- A reasonable timeline for participation (i.e. get out early to avoid the notion that a decision is already made);
- The appropriate level of engagement is utilized;
- Sensitivity to public/stakeholder values;
- The process is adaptive to the needs of participants; and,
- Results are transparent and communicated in a timely manner.

The above elements outline what differentiates meaningful engagement from other types of public involvement. The quality of the process depends on ensuring that these elements are respected and integrated into your public engagement activities.

### ***Principles of Public Engagement***

In order to ensure that public engagement activities are meaningful (based on the elements outlined above), the following key principles are critical:

1. Public engagement is centered around the idea that those who are impacted by an issue or decision should have an opportunity to influence outcomes and choices.
2. Public engagement ensures that the input of the public will play a role in the decision-making process.
3. Public engagement seeks to ensure that decisions are sustainable by making all participants aware of the various interests and points of view surrounding an issue or decision.
4. Public engagement seeks to ensure the involvement of residents and stakeholders who may be affected by or interested in an issue or decision.
5. Public engagement ensures that those taking part in the engagement process have an opportunity to determine how they will participate.

6. Public engagement ensures that those involved possess the information required to meaningfully participate in the process.
7. Public engagement ensures that participants are informed of how their contributions were considered, used and/or not used.

(adapted from IAP2)

By implementing the above elements and principles into public engagement processes, departments can ensure that involving the public is a meaningful experience for participants and valuable to the work of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

### ***When to use Public Engagement***

Public engagement is not a ‘silver bullet’ for complex issues and is not suitable for every situation. In fact, when used incorrectly or at inappropriate times, engaging the public can do more harm than good. When the Principles of Public Engagement are not adhered to, participants may feel that their contribution was ignored or pointless. They may feel wary of the process and refuse to participate in future public engagement activities.

It is important to consider your public engagement strategy from the outset of a program or project. The earlier a department is able to determine whether or not public engagement is appropriate, the more likely such activities will be successful. This is because timely planning allows residents and stakeholders to become informed about the process, provide input during the design stage and ensures that their input has the potential to inform and/or influence decisions. When determining if public engagement is appropriate it is important to consider the following questions:

- Is there a clearly defined question or concern?
- Is there a readiness to learn from and respond to ideas generated by the public?
- Are interested and/or potentially impacted residents and stakeholders identifiable?
- Are there adequate resources available to conduct meaningful engagement activities?
- Is the public interested in the issue or question at hand?
- Does the issue have the potential, through public engagement efforts, to foster animosity between groups with differing values?

(adapted from CEAA, 2008)

### ***The Costs of Not Conducting Public Engagement***

It is essential that before you decide whether public participation is appropriate for your project that you consider the possible impact of not involving the public. Possible impacts of not engaging the public include:

- Setbacks and increased costs due to stakeholder lobbying during an initiative;
- Lack of project and decision buy-in from stakeholders; and,
- Loss of credibility or legitimacy with the public.

If the public is not involved in a decision where they feel they should have had input, there is a potential that cynicism towards government and its commitment to public engagement may result. One consequence of this is that future GNL efforts to engage the public may potentially be ignored or criticized. Cynicism may also develop if an inappropriate form of engagement is utilized, as it is not only essential to understand *if* public engagement should be used, but also *what type* of engagement should be used according to the particular situation.

### ***Matching Tools with Degree of Engagement***

When considering what tools and/or activities to utilize in your public engagement process, it is important to remember the following:

- There are many tools/activities available;
- Depending on goals or form desired, different tools/activities (often in combination) can be used;
- It is key to understand how tools and activities align (i.e., ‘what goes with what’) – its more art than science; and
- Typically, complex issues of high interest to the public will have intensive engagement events and processes that use a variety of interlocking tools and activities. Oppositely, simple issues of minimal interest to the public will typically adopt a minimalist approach.

In order to select the appropriate tool(s) to match the desired degree of engagement it is important to consider several things:

- The current degree and/or type of interaction among participants (i.e. do participants have similar or dissimilar views, values and beliefs?);
- The number of people who can participate (physically able to participate/willing to participate);
- The ability to accommodate different levels, types, or formats of participation as per audience need.
- Time commitment to plan, implement, report back and evaluate;

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- Cost;
- Desired level of public/media visibility; and,
- The general level of knowledge concerning the issue at hand

Technology is increasingly utilized to support public engagement activities. There are a number of benefits associated with using technology for public engagement including:

- Cost (relatively inexpensive);
- Scheduling (interactions can occur at mutually suitable times);
- Access to relevant groups (people with shared interests tend to congregate online); and
- Aligns with changing social habits (digital social networks are conducive to interaction and participation).

Audience response software can be used online or in-person to quickly poll and obtain input from participants, which can then be used to facilitate further discussions. E-participation methods such as email, chat, news and dialogue groups, as well as virtual communities are also useful when residents and stakeholders are spread over a large geographic area.

### ***Forms of Public Engagement***

As noted in the first section, varying degrees of public engagement exist, ranging from informing to co-creating. This section briefly outlines the various forms of engagement, the promise and purpose of each, and some examples of tools that constitute each type as outlined in Figure 4.

The degree to which the public is engaged will vary from event to event, depending on the circumstances and desired outcomes. As such, it is important to consider and decide what type of engagement tool(s) to use.

#### **Limited or low-involvement forms of public engagement should be used when:**

- There is no decision to be made;
- Issues are low priority or routine;
- Providing information to the public would be most effective;
- There are legislative requirements defining a limited level of engagement;
- Interest in the issue is limited to a few select groups;
- There is considerable consensus amongst the public on the issue; and,
- There is a large requirement for technical or professional expertise.

***Key Point #7: The form of public engagement utilized should correspond with the size, scope and the nature of the issue at hand.***

**Comprehensive or higher-level public engagement should be used when:**

- Decisions necessitate public feedback and/or public input may impact decisions;
- Success of the initiative relies on public buy-in;
- Government may not have all the expertise or information it requires to make an informed decision;
- There are legislative requirements defining a comprehensive level of engagement;
- Numerous groups have an interest in the issue; and
- There is a lack of consensus or conflict amongst stakeholders and/or the issue involves a variety of personal principles and values.

**Figure 4 - Forms of Public Engagement**

Form of Engagement	Promise	Purpose	Tools
<b>Inform</b>	We will provide the public with the information required to understand the issue	To facilitate increased knowledge of the issue and the decisions concerning it	Fact sheets, web sites, open houses, pamphlets, social media
<b>Consult</b>	We will provide the public with clear and coherent information regarding the issue, welcome the public's thoughts on the topic, and indicate how their input affected the outcome	To obtain feedback on analysis, alternatives or decisions	Public comment, focus groups, questionnaires, public meetings, Twitter town halls, online idea forums
<b>Deliberate</b>	We will engage the public in two-way conversation to make certain that the public's thoughts and concerns are factored into proposed solutions/decisions	Greater level of participation by stakeholders as they assist in idea generation	Workshops, deliberative polling, advisory committees
<b>Co-Create</b>	We will rely on relevant stakeholders input in combination with organizational expertise to incorporate recommendations into decisions to the maximum extent possible	Shared ownership between the organization and the stakeholders as the community is involved in each aspect (and the outcomes) of the decision	Consensus-building, participatory decision-making, panels, formal partnerships, informal coalitions, alliances, networks

Adapted from the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

### When deciding whether or not to engage the public:

- Estimate the level of public interest (no interest, some interest, high interest).
- Determine if the public needs additional information concerning the issue/policy.
- Determine the types of views (positive/neutral/negative) held by public towards the issue/policy.
- Determine if participation by the public will be meaningful (see elements of meaningful public engagement).

### ***Who should be Involved and Why?***

When undertaking public engagement activities it is imperative to understand exactly who your target audience is, regardless of the form your engagement will take. It is critical to understand what decisions are at stake, what the timeframe is, and what financial and human resources are available when determining who should be involved in the process. Important questions include:

- Who are the relevant stakeholders?
- Who are the relevant and interested individuals/residents?
- Are there any groups that may have a stake or interest that we have not considered?
- Who will likely be impacted by this decision/proposal?

Numerous other factors may determine who is or should be engaged. These factors include:

- *Proximity* - those within/close to an area affected by a potential decision will be more inclined to participate;
- *Economics* - those residents and/or stakeholders who could potentially be affected economically will be more inclined to participate;
- *Habit/Tradition Shifts* - those prevented from taking part in a traditional/cultural activity will be more inclined to participate;

***Key Point #8:***  
*Constraints can limit who can be involved, and this may undermine the integrity and validity of the overall public engagement process.*



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- *Mandate* - those negatively affected by a proposed change to a program, policy, service or governance structure will be more likely to want to participate; and,
- *Values* - those who feel a decision may either support or conflict with their strongly held beliefs.

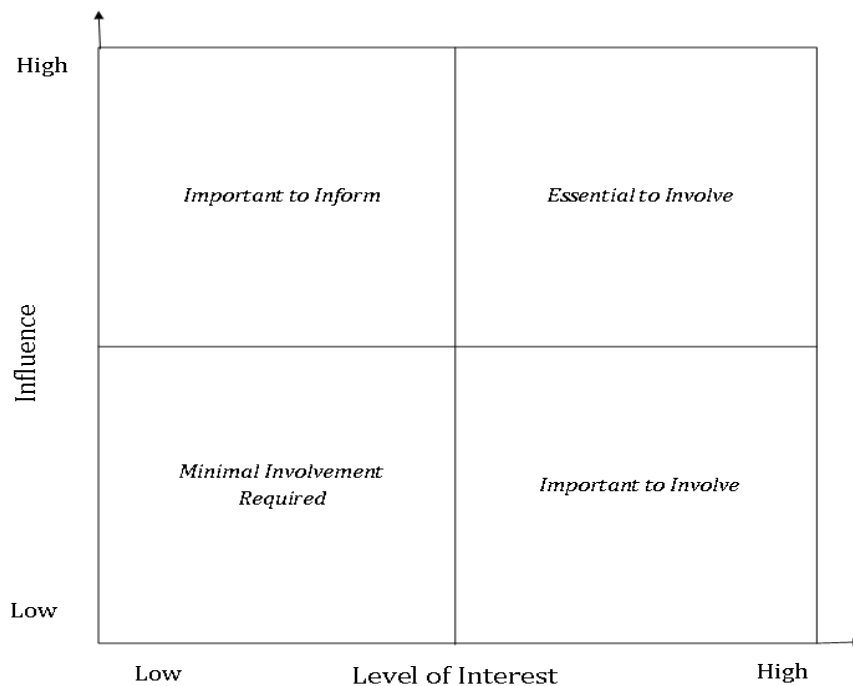
Based on these factors and constraints, it is important to determine whether or not you can effectively and efficiently engage the required audience. If you engage the wrong people or do not engage all of the relevant groups, you risk undermining the engagement process and fostering cynicism.

### ***Selection of Participants/Stakeholder Mapping***

Identifying who should take part in public engagement activities is a key aspect of preparing for a public engagement process. Stakeholder mapping – a process by which organizations, groups and individuals who have an interest in the issue at hand are accounted for – can be used to guide public engagement process design efforts. Any entity that has a concern with a particular policy, program or issue may be considered a stakeholder. Those who are likely to realize benefits or incur costs may also be considered stakeholders.

Stakeholder mapping efforts are particularly useful for public engagement because they allow for the identification of key actors while simultaneously generating information about stakeholders' positions and knowledge-levels. Stakeholders can be mapped according to their level of influence and level of interest, as noted in Figure 5.

**Figure 5 - Stakeholder Mapping**



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The process of identifying stakeholders for a stakeholder map can involve a number of activities such as:

- Collective discussion;
- Gather suggestions from community members;
- Gather suggestions from organizations who are involved in the policy area or issue under consideration; and,
- Gather suggestions from identified stakeholders.

### ***Encouraging Turnout at Public Engagement Events***

Some of the most effective methods to inform potential participants of an upcoming public engagement event, and which can enhance event turnout, are:

- Flyers;
- Posters;
- Handouts;
- Media releases;
- Newspaper, radio, television, online and billboard advertisements;
- Social media; and
- Direct contact with pertinent stakeholders and clients.

### ***Empowering Marginalized Individuals/Groups***

Residents and stakeholders who find themselves in disadvantaged situations (i.e., lacking resources, knowledge, skills or awareness) are often less capable of participating in an engagement activity than those not disadvantaged. For inclusive public engagement, efforts to support and empower these individuals to participate are required if their concerns and insights are to be heard. It is important to identify what potential barriers exist to resident and/or stakeholder participation – Common barriers include event location, child care needs, language issues and timing/scheduling of events – and to take steps to remove such barriers for disadvantaged people.

## ***Planning Public Engagement***

Once it has been determined that there is a need for public engagement, it is time to begin planning how to meaningfully involve the public. Some elements to consider in your planning process include:

1. *Establishing goals (expectations)*
  - What do you want to achieve?
  - Are you seeking tangible (i.e. solutions) or intangible results (i.e. promoting positive attitudes, facilitating cooperation)?
  - Do you have sufficient resources (financial, human and time) to accomplish your goal(s)?
2. *Develop an engagement strategy*
  - Who are your stakeholders? How will you involve them?
  - Will you involve residents?
  - What level of engagement is required for each?
  - What tools will you utilize?
3. *Communicate your plan*
  - How will you inform the public and relevant stakeholders of your intentions to engage them?
  - How will you inform staff of your goals and strategy?
4. *Implement your plan*
  - Have you identified the steps required to implement your plan?
  - Are you able to monitor and adapt the process if circumstances require?
5. *Reporting/follow-up*
  - How will you acknowledge the contributions of participants?
  - How will you provide a record of the engagement process and demonstrate that the participants have been heard?
  - How will you inform participants of what the next steps in the process will be and how their input may impact a program/process/policy decision?
6. *Evaluation*
  - Have you identified which evaluation techniques (i.e. interviews/evaluation forms) will be utilized?
  - Have you developed evaluation criteria/measures?

## ***Communicating the Results***

Communicating the results of a public engagement effort back to those who have participated is a fundamental principle of engaging the public. Communicating results back to the public ensures that those who contributed understand how their insights and ideas were or were not acknowledged, understood and appreciated. Information to be shared could include:

- Discussions;
- Possible solutions considered;
- Areas where opinions diverged and or converged; and
- How decision-makers were able to use the input received

Sharing information should not simply be a one-time event that occurs at the end of a multi-faceted engagement process. Instead, where possible, information should be shared with the public (particularly participants) on an ongoing basis. Preferably, this would occur at various known times during the overall public engagement process. Participants should also be recognized for their contributions and made aware of the timeline concerning any decision(s) at hand.

## ***Evaluating the Process***

An evaluation should be built into any public engagement process to ensure that resources employed were used in an efficient and effective manner, and to ensure learning. Some elements to keep in mind when evaluating your public engagement activities are:

- Consider what you wish to accomplish in your engagement activities and determine if you achieved what you set out to do;
- Ensure that the results you wish to achieve can be observed and measured;
- Ensure that you identify what you wish to achieve at the beginning of the engagement planning process in order to ensure the integrity of the evaluation process; and
- Determine whether or not information gathered was used to inform the discussion and/or implementation of public policy.

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***Key Point #9:*** *Evaluating a public engagement process is a critical yet often overlooked step. Understanding what worked well and where improvements can be made will increase the efficiency and efficacy of future engagement activities.*

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Some questions to consider when evaluating your public engagement activities are;

- Did you satisfy the goals you had set out at the outset of the planning process?
- Did your engagement activity adhere to the Principles of Public Engagement set out in this guide?
- Did you effectively map all critical participants and stakeholders?
- Did you include potential participants in the design of your engagement activity?
- Were the tools you chose most appropriate given your unique circumstances and constraints?
- Were individuals and stakeholders given adequate opportunity to participate in all aspects of the process?
- Were the needs of persons with disabilities considered?
- Was the received input relevant and valuable?
- Were you able to use it in any way? How?
- Were all critical issues addressed?
- Did you effectively record and analyze the input received?
- Did you allocate sufficient resources (time, human and financial)?
- Was the activity completed within your budget?
- Were participants provided with feedback regarding how their contribution was/will be used?
- Were participants generally satisfied with the activity? Were organizers?

(Adapted from The City of Fort Saskatchewan, 2012)

### ***Final Thoughts***

Many governments have accepted that there is a need to do a better job of engaging the public in policy and decision-making. High quality engagement processes are a necessity to accomplish this task. Such engagement recognizes the value and needs of stakeholders and residents. It requires dedication, planning, and adequate resources in order to be effective. Recognizing, valuing and utilizing the immense knowledge possessed by the public through engagement will ultimately lead to better policies and decisions, reduced acrimony and conflict, enhanced civic participation and a strengthened democracy overall.

## **Appendix A**

### Office of Public Engagement – Examples of Public Engagement

**Project Name:** *Regional Council Community-Based Research (CBR) Project – Access to Health Services*

**Partner(s):** *Corner Brook-Rocky Harbour and Stephenville-PAB councils and MUN Health Research Unit*

#### **Public Engagement Activities Involved:**

- Co-developed a CBR project examining access to health services in the region
- This was a highly **collaborative project** between the councils, regional planners, and MUN. The recommendations and input of the councils in the research planning process were incorporated and used
- Council **consulted with the general public** through paper and online questionnaires (over 1,000 were completed across both regions)
- Council involved the public in **informal focus groups** to obtain their input, opinion and feedback on access to health care in the region
- Council **provided input/suggestions** on the final research report created on the project (these were incorporated)
- Council **informed** public on this research through social media, radio and conference presentations

**Project Name:** *Provincial Population Growth Strategy (PPGS) - Department of Advanced Education and Skills*

**Partner(s):** *Population Growth Strategy and the Workforce Development Strategy*

#### **Public Engagement Activities Involved:**

- Developed a public engagement process to inform the Provincial Population Growth Strategy
- 12 sessions held across the province as well as focused engagement sessions with youth and the Association of New Canadians
- Invitations were sent to stakeholders and sessions were open to the public
- Sessions focused on **sharing information** with public related to demographic shifts, workforce development/demand and immigration options/opportunities and gathering feedback related to same
- The sessions **used a deliberative dialogue process** using **roundtable discussion, electronic polling, and theming** to work through a series of questions ensuring participants were given ample opportunity to provide feedback on key topics and as well as suggestions for what may have been missed
- Feedback analyzed by staff and used to inform the PPGS

**Project Name:** *Baltimore High School - Participatory Communications (Community Radio) Event*

**Partner(s):** *School staff and local Community Youth Network (CYN)*

**Public Engagement Activities Involved:**

- **Worked collaboratively with staff, students and local CYN** to develop a public engagement session related to youth and career planning
- One session held which included all students/staff from grade 7-12 and linked public via community radio and webcast
- Session was designed to incorporate new and old technologies (webcasting and community radio) as a learning/capacity building event
- Session **focused on information sharing** (Getting the Message Out and Youth volunteering) **and gathering feedback** which helped to inform youth engagement sessions provincially
- **Students were consulted** on the types of information they needed or questions they needed answers to in order to make informed career decisions
- Public engagement design **included deliberative dialogue** (round table discussion), theming and electronic polling as well as roaming reporters to connect the school session to the public
- Students took on roles as table facilitators, recorders and roaming reporters during the session
- Information gathered helped to inform subsequent youth public engagement sessions and community and school gained experience/exposure in using participatory communications (community radio) in public engagement events

## **References and Further Reading**

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