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CONSULTATION GUIDELINES FOR MANAGERS
IN THE FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVICE

Canadians desire and demand more direct involvement in government decision-making. Parliamentary institutions provide for the democratic representation of all Canadians. Canada's democratic political traditions provide for the establishment of broad public policy directions and priorities. **Accordingly, it is the policy of the Government of Canada to pursue and to promote consultation with Canadians in the development of public policy and in the design of programs and services.**

Ministers propose legislation. Parliament enacts legislation. Departments and public servants support government priorities and legislation through the effective provision of service to the public, which includes an ongoing and open consultative culture.

Consultation with Canadians supports and strengthens the individual roles of ministers and the collective responsibilities of Cabinet in the decision-making process. In recognizing the rights of Canadians to have their voices heard and their views carefully considered, consultation also provides ministers and their officials with the ideas, input, opinions and options put forward by the public for responsive and responsible policy and program decisions, and for the establishment of government priorities.

Consultation enhances service to Canada and to Canadians by involving members of the public in program and policy matters that affect them directly or indirectly. Public consultation benefits both those in government and those served by government by:

- creating a climate in which the government and the public can exchange views, ideas, and information that result in policies and programs responsive to public priorities, needs, and concerns;
- broadening the decision-making sphere by engaging all interested members of the public in seeking consensus on policy and program objectives;
- providing the public with a better understanding of policy and program options, and government responsibilities and constraints; and,
- promoting a more favourable environment for decisions, thus maximizing the potential for concurrence and minimizing the potential for conflict.

Consultation takes many forms, both **formal** and **informal**. Informal consultation occurs regularly and routinely, involving public servants in a variety of settings and circumstances. Whether the activity is a telephone call, a "coffee shop" encounter, an over-the-counter discussion, or a personal letter, public servants should take advantage of all situations to assure clients and stakeholders that their ideas are important and their views are valued. Informal consultation should be a regular part of any organization's consultation activities. It is an important and personal means of relating to and serving members of the public.

There are many more formal and structured means of public consultation. These include departmental advisory bodies, public discussion papers, open houses, focus group meetings, multi-stakeholder negotiations, "armchair" discussions, targeted briefings, workshops, questionnaires, toll-free telephone lines, and town hall meetings. Organizations themselves are best positioned to identify who their consultation partners are and how they can be consulted.

While the types of formal and informal consultation activities are various, there are attributes that apply to all. **Appendix A** lists a set of principles that should be considered in the context of an organization's consultation activities. The important thing is for each department and agency to know its stakeholders and to have a consultation strategy established that appropriately encourages and provides for input from the public.

Consultation is not synonymous with consensus. It is, however, a process that permits and promotes the two-way flow of ideas and information among all sectors of society and between them and the government. The process ensures that Canadians are aware of and consulted about options that ultimately will become decisions affecting their lives. Effective consultation is based on principles of openness, transparency, integrity, and mutual respect. As with the communications function, consultation is a shared management responsibility, that is, one that is the responsibility of every manager in the public service. As with all management responsibilities, satisfactory consultation requires good planning, research, analysis, advice and feed-back.

The Government of Canada's commitment to meaningful, open, and ongoing public consultation requires the commitment of ministers, senior managers, line departments, and central agencies. Each must demonstrate leadership in building a client-centred and consultative culture.

MINISTERS determine government priorities in consultation and provide leadership in consultation through their respective departments and agencies. Ministers ensure that their clear responsibilities in determining public policy are not compromised and that public servants are not drawn into partisan political controversy. Ministers define the consultation responsibilities and authority of ministerial staff and establish procedures for liaison with ministerial staff and deputy ministers.

DEPUTY HEADS identify and implement systematic means by which effective consultation becomes part of the department's routine practices. In so doing, deputies devise departmental consultation policies or other appropriate administrative mechanisms that reflect the government's consultation guidelines. Deputies are accountable for ensuring that consultation is an integral part of program design and delivery. Deputies are accountable for ensuring that consultative skills receive full consideration in staff hiring, training, and development decisions.

THE PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE provides advice and guidance on developing and implementing consultation and support to promote effective consultation by and among departments through the collection and exchange of information on organizations' consultation policies, strategies, and activities, on innovations, and on exemplary consultative practices.

TREASURY BOARD SECRETARIAT supports the creation and maintenance of a consultative culture by developing ways of promoting easy public access to information about government services (thus enhancing public awareness and interest in government policies, programs, and services) and by helping organizations develop consultation policies and evaluate and learn from their consultation experience.

THE CANADIAN CENTRE FOR MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT and the **PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION**, through its Special Operating Agency for Training and Development, develops appropriate training methods to ensure that public servants both in the National Capital Region and in the regions have access to training and development in consultation.

Evaluation, including client validation, is essential to the development of a consultative culture in government.

THE COMMITTEE OF SENIOR OFFICIALS assesses the performance and commitment of deputy heads with respect to consultation and improved service to the public, both within departments and agencies and with clients and stakeholders.

Departments and agencies are encouraged to evaluate regularly the quality of internal and external consultation. Periodic surveys will be conducted by central agencies to assist departments and agencies in monitoring and assessing the development of a consultative culture within their organizations and with clients and stakeholders.

This and other information respecting the government's consultations will be included in the annual report of the Head of the Public Service to the Prime Minister on the state of public service renewal in Canada.

PRINCIPLES OF CONSULTATION

- (1) Consultation with Canadians is intrinsic to effective public policy development and service to the public. It should be a first thought, not an after-thought.
- (2) To be effective, consultation must be based on openness, trust, integrity, mutual respect for the legitimacy and point of view of all participants, and transparency of purpose and process.
- (3) The outcome of consultation should not be predetermined. Consultation should not be used to communicate decisions already taken.
- (4) The initiative to consult may come from inside government or outside - each should respond as constructively as it can.
- (5) Whenever possible, consultation should involve all parties who can contribute to or are affected by the outcome of consultation.
- (6) Participants in a consultation should have clear mandates. Participants should have influence over the outcome and a stake in implementing any action agreed upon.
- (7) Some participants may not have the resources or expertise required to participate. Thus, financial assistance or other support may be needed for their representation to be assured.
- (8) Effective consultation is about partnership. It implies shared responsibility and commitment: a clear, mutual understanding of the issues, objectives, purpose, and expectations of all parties is essential; the agenda and process should be negotiable; any constraints should be established from the outset.
- (9) Participants should have a realistic idea of how much time a consultation is likely to take and plan for this in designing the process.
- (10) All participants must have timely access to relevant and easily understandable information and commit themselves to sharing information.
- (11) Effective consultation will not always lead to agreement; however, it should lead to a better understanding of each other's positions.

- (12) Where consultation does lead to agreement, whenever possible, participants should hold themselves accountable for implementing the resulting recommendations.
- (13) Effective consultation requires follow-through. Participants are entitled to know what use is made of the views and information they provide; they should also be made aware of the impact their ideas and involvement ultimately have on government decision-making.
- (14) The skills required for effective consultation are: listening, communicating, negotiating and consensus building. Participants should be trained in these skills.

* The **Principles of Consultation** are modelled on the sixteen principles enunciated in the October 1990 Report of the Task Force on Service to the Public and reflect the comments of departmental Deputy Heads.