



Agriculture and
Agri-Food Canada

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A Guide to Consultation and Citizen Engagement



Canada

A Guide to Consultations and Citizen Engagement

Additional copies may be obtained by contacting the
Consultations and Intergovernmental Relations Division at (613) 759-7262.

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Introduction

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) is committed to the continuous enhancement of its decision-making processes. The *Guide to Consultations and Citizen Engagement* and the principles within it have been developed to provide ideas, suggestions and information on best practices and approaches for encouraging and facilitating public involvement in the policy-making process. The Guide has been designed using a variety of resource materials and was produced by the Consultations and Intergovernmental Relations Division, Policy, Planning and Integration Directorate, Strategic Policy Branch.

The most appropriate method of consultation or citizen engagement can vary greatly across the department and be dependant on the issue, timing and objectives of the exercise. This *Guide to Consultations and Citizen Engagement* will help in determining which method would best suit the needs of the user.



Definitions

Public Participation is the umbrella term used to describe the spectrum of processes that the government can employ to enable citizen involvement in government policy-making or activities. This spectrum spans from government information sharing with the public on one end to co-managed or shared service/program delivery between citizens and government on the other. As one moves from one end of the spectrum to the other, the level of influence on decision-making increases. This Guide focuses solely on consultation and citizen engagement methodologies.

Consultation is defined by the Privy Council Office (PCO) to be “the processes through which governments seek the views of individuals or groups on policies, programs or services that affect them directly or in which they have a significant interest.” Consultation can occur at any point in the policy-making process. Examples of traditional methods of consultation include public meetings, advisory committees and focus groups.

Citizen engagement is defined by the PCO as “the processes through which governments seek to encourage deliberation, reflection and learning on issues at preliminary stages of a policy process, often when the focus is more on values and

principles that will frame the way an issue is considered.”² It also denotes shared agenda-setting and open time frames for input, a forum for citizens to engage in a dialogue with each other, as well as participation from non-traditional stakeholders. Examples of citizen engagement processes include citizen juries, search conferences and deliberative opinion polls.

Citizen engagement differs from consultation in that citizen engagement processes emphasize in-depth deliberation and dialogue, focus on finding a common ground among participants, entail greater time commitments and have a potential for building civic capacity. At times, policy development processes can combine both consultation and citizen engagement elements.

Citizen engagement, from the beginning of the process, involves citizens in developing public policies that affect them. It is an ongoing process, not a one-time forum for airing fixed positions. During a citizen engagement exercise, citizens often discuss issues with each other, while government listens or observes.

Public Participation Spectrum



¹ Policy Statement and Guidelines on Consulting and Engaging Canadians (*draft*), Privy Council Office, May 2000 p.6

² “Policy Statement and Guidelines on Consulting and Engaging Canadians”, (*draft*), Privy Council Office, May 2000

Key principles of a Public Participation Process

Certain key principles should drive the process, including:

- **Inclusiveness** – the capacity of organizers to bring to the table all parties with a stake in the issue.
- **Accountability** – Citizens want a commitment that governments will take their views into account when making decisions. Decision makers – both elected officials and public servants – have a responsibility to effectively consult citizens, to listen, and to be accountable to citizens in explaining how their views have been considered in the decision-making process. After each initiative, participants should receive a report of how their input was considered.
- **Commitment** – There must be a shared commitment from all levels of the organization that results from the consultation or citizen engagement exercise will be considered in the decision-making process.
- **Clarity** – There must be clear objectives and a clear understanding of the process of involvement and feedback.
- **Accessibility** – Appropriate measures must be taken to ensure that all Canadians have equal access to the process, regardless of such things as language, physical disabilities, socio-economic or regional backgrounds. Also, some participants might require support for travel and accommodation.
- **Mutual Respect** – There must be respect among all participants for different views and standpoints.
- **Transparency** – Proceedings must be open and accessible. The processes should be well publicized and all participants should have access to all relevant materials.
- **Outcomes must not be predetermined.**



Before beginning a public participation activity, one should be aware that engaging in a consultation has the potential to raise expectations that the government will follow whatever course of action is recommended. Participants and the public need to understand at the outset that, while government sincerely wants citizen input and will listen carefully to suggestions, it cannot guarantee following a recommended course of action.

Context-The Changing Notion of Governance

There has been a change in the public environment over the past decade in terms of how Canadians desire to be governed. There was a time when Canadians were content to voice their views to government once every four or five years at election time. Citizens were satisfied to leave public policy decisions to bureaucrats, politicians and experts. This is no longer the case.

Today, Canadians are demanding a say in issues that affect their lives on an ongoing basis. They are not satisfied with being presented with ready-made decisions. When the government launched *Public Service 2000 in 1989*, the results from the *Task Force on Service to the Public* captured the increased desire of Canadians to be consulted, “*Canadians are no longer prepared to accept ready-made decisions*

passively. With the growth of citizen activism and participatory democracy, they want input and participation in shaping policies and in improving programs and services... The Public Service must become more accessible and visible, one that engages the public in the decision-making process. Informal and formal consultation on public policy and operations matters must become systematic, routine and authentic.”

Today, Canadians are demanding a say in issues that affect their lives on an ongoing basis. They are not satisfied with being presented with ready-made decisions.

Since the release of the Task Force report, the demand for public involvement in government has continued to grow. “Rethinking Citizen Engagement” by Ekos Research Associates was one of the studies that captured this change in public attitude. In this study, Canadians were recorded as stating that they felt that average citizens should have more influence on decisions around major public issues.³ When the survey asked whether citizens would prefer to be consulted or to be engaged, 33% preferred consultation and 46% preferred engagement. Ekos also found that in the year 2000, 75% of Canadians felt that the average citizen should have the most influence in defining public policies in Canada, while 25% thought that the average citizen actually had the most influence.⁴ Further, 68% of Canadians thought that there are currently too few citizen engagement exercises on Canadian public policy.⁵ Some attribute this change in the public environment to such factors as the increased level of education among citizens, the rapid and widespread accessibility of information through telecommunications and the information highway, and the strength and influence of the media.

³ “Rethinking Citizen Engagement”-Presentation to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Ekos Research Associates Inc.

⁴ “Rethinking Citizen Engagement” -Top Line Results-Part 1: The Citizens’ Panel, August 15th, 2000, Ekos Research Associates Inc.

⁵ Ibid.

Planning a Consultation or Citizen Engagement Initiative

There are integral elements and considerations that should be part of any successful consultation or citizen engagement initiative. The following provides a brief overview of each of these elements.

Planning

Thorough advance planning is the basis of any consultation. This must include: clearly stated objectives and expectations and a detailed process for carrying out the activity; evaluation and communication; timing that does not create conflict; opportunities for linkages across the department and between federal departments; and methods of sharing and using the information gained from the process.

Particular attention must be given to the development of a well-rounded and representative list of participants.

Participants

In selecting organizations and individuals to take part in *consultations*, strive to find a productive and positive balance among experience and tradition, diversity and innovation and ensure regional representation, where appropriate. Both the department's needs and participants' prerogatives are important when inviting people to consultations, whether they contribute as individuals or as representatives of an organization. The level and degree of information gathered from participants should be proportional to the impact the consultation may have on departmental policies or programs.

A *citizen engagement* process should not seek to exclude any group, but should also engage individual members of the public in their capacity as citizens who have a stake in the issue, not

necessarily as experts or representatives of interest groups. Citizen engagement frequently involves a randomly selected and demographically representative cross-section of citizens. It is important that all participants are given an equal playing field in which to participate, regardless of their backgrounds. Because personal responsibilities may prevent people from participating, flexible schedules, convenient meeting places and times, and the use of electronic tools should be considered for both consultation and citizen engagement initiatives.

The level and degree of information gathered from participants should be proportional to the impact the consultation may have on departmental policies or programs.

Communication

One of the important elements of a good consultation or engagement exercise is inclusion. For that reason it is important to use a variety of communications mechanisms to get your messages across, especially when organizing citizen engagement exercises, which should include a demographically representative sample of the public. A single communication mechanism, such as the internet, might not reach your entire audience. Communication with the public should also be attuned to language and cultural sensitivities.

Departmental clients, citizens and staff have the right to expect consistent, clear messages regarding departmental consultations and citizen engagement initiatives. The purpose, planning, timing and results of these processes are essential and are the responsibility of those managing the process within the department. Inter-branch committees and corporate communication and consultation managers help make linkages and provide advice.

Resources (Budgeting)

Consultation and citizen engagement play a key role in policy and program development, therefore human and financial resources must be allocated during annual planning to ensure the implementation of the appropriate level and type of consultation to make sound decisions. The budget and the human resources available impact directly on the type and extent of any public participation process and should be planned for at the outset.

Participant Funding

The Government of Canada is developing *Participant Guidelines for Federal Consultations*, as a companion piece to the *Federal Policy on Consulting and Engaging Canadians*. These guidelines should be consulted when determining consultation funding considerations, which might include to maximize the inclusiveness and accessibility of federal consultations, to minimize or eliminate costs to participants insofar as possible, and to balance the provision of resources for consultations with the protection of public funds.

Some participants who could make a contribution to policy or program development may not have the resources required to participate; financial assistance or other support might be needed for their representation to be assured. This is especially true for citizen engagement processes, which, by definition, involve individual members of the public who should not be expected to bear the cost of participating. Be aware of the demands (in time, money and other resources) the process puts on the participants and provide resources to allow more stakeholders to participate. All participants receiving funding should be provided with materials outlining the guidelines for reimbursement and funding (travel, accommodation, incidentals, etc.).

Evaluation

Post-consultation evaluation is needed to assess whether consultation goals have been met, whether the logistics were adequate and to ensure departmental consultation processes are recorded, refined and improved. Methods of gathering structured feedback from departmental representatives, selected participants and any other parties involved (e.g. consultants or contractors) should be viewed as an essential part of the consultation process. There should also be an effort to assemble the consultation team immediately after the consultation to share perceptions of the event.

Training

Planning and carrying out effective and appropriate consultations and citizen engagement requires current information on the best practices and approaches. To help ensure effective departmental practices, resources are available in a number of forms. These include a variety of widely available documents, information on or access to workshops and seminars, and departmental expertise, which can be accessed through such sites as the Privy Council Office's Communications and Consultations website. AAFC's Consultations and Intergovernmental Relations Division also offers training in consultations and citizen engagement from time-to-time. You can find a myriad of information and tools on the Consultations and Intergovernmental Relations website at <http://agrisource.nrc.agr.ca/policy/cir-cri/>.

Major Steps in a Consultation or Citizen Engagement Process

The following is an outline of the main steps to follow when planning a consultation or citizen engagement initiative. While many of the stages are identical, citizen engagement does differ in certain respects. Any differences will be indicated.

I Preparation

- Describe scope and objectives
- Identify strategic considerations
- Choose the project team
- Discuss funding
- Identify participants/stakeholders
- Consider timing
- Plan to evaluate

II Design

- Select a consultation or citizen engagement method
- Plan logistics
- Methods of consultation and citizen engagement

III Implementation

- Select a venue, room layout
- Implement plans
- Decide on facilitation
- Explain the process
- Monitor results

IV Synthesis

- Analyze data and draft results

V Feedback

- Collect data, analyze and respond

VI Follow up

- Identify impact of change
- Develop work plans
- Report on progress

VII Evaluation

- Assess content and process of consultation

VIII Application

- Apply results

I Preparation

Describe Scope and Objectives

Identify the scope and objectives, then determine the type of consultation activity best suited to achieving these objectives. In order to manage the initiative and determine its success, expectations must be clear.

Consider the following:

- Clear and simple goals, objectives and expectations for a consultation are essential. Be sure you are clear about why you are consulting and what you expect to gain from a consultation.
- State the main objectives in specific, observable and measurable outcomes (e.g. a technical opinion, a procedure, recommendations).
- Identify where this consultation is situated in terms of the policy-making process (i.e. is this a first step, a middle assessment or is this the step from which a policy decision will be taken.)
- Note the long and short-term results that can be expected, including any secondary results (informal outcomes or spin-offs) that could be significant in terms of other initiatives or organizational purposes.
- Take into consideration when the organization will need to have the results of the consultation and ensure that the consultation process chosen will yield results in the desired timeframe.
- Consider participant objectives and expectations.

Identify the Strategic Considerations

Start by reviewing any knowledge that already exists, either formally (research, surveys, etc.) or informally (brainstorming, informal contacts) before beginning. Determine if there are any consultations that have been implemented or which are underway that are related or will have an impact on your consultation. Consider whether

other federal or provincial departments should be informed or participate in the consultation. Finally, examine the public environment to determine whether any elements will affect the outcome of your consultation.

Choose the Project Team

For effective consultation management, it is important to determine:

- deliverables for each team member;
- human and financial resources required, their source and when they will be needed;
- time required to accomplish tasks;
- deadlines and dates for key actions; and
- external skills and supports needed.

Decide who is key to the process and how decision-making is to be handled. Set out who should be kept informed and when. Brief everyone so they are comfortable with what is going to happen, the background on the subject matter involved, and why there will be a consultation. Designate a central contact person for internal and external purposes.

- Identify other specific expertise or skills that will be required and determine who can provide these.
- Inform and involve communications staff early in the process.
- Identify how senior management will be kept informed.
- Determine other departmental personnel/branches to be involved.
- Agree on how regional personnel will be involved.



Discuss Funding

According to the *Participant Funding Guidelines for Federal Consultations*, a companion piece to the *Federal Policy for Consulting and Engaging Canadians*, participant funding should be provided based on the principles of inclusiveness and accessibility, while being mindful of the effective management of public funds. The Guidelines provide direction on what and when to provide funding and list some considerations for deciding whether or not to provide funding, such as:

- eligible individuals and stakeholder groups with limited financial resources who are able to make a contribution to policy or program development;
- individuals such as rural citizens, women, youth, Aboriginal peoples, visible minorities, and minority language individuals, to ensure a representative demographic mix of Canadians; and
- individuals from all regions of the country, particularly for consultations on issues or initiatives that are national in scope.

The Guidelines can be accessed through the Privy Council Office's, Communications and Consultations Secretariat's homepage at:

http://publiservice.pco-bcp.gc.ca/comcon/contentconsult_e.htm

Identify Participants/Stakeholders

When deciding who should participate, consider the scope and complexity of the issue and the range of interests that should be considered, so that sufficient input is sought and reflected in the consultation. It is important not only to consider AAFC's traditional clients, but its non-traditional constituency as well (i.e. consumers, environmental groups, academics, etc.) and the important insight that they could bring to the issue.

Establish criteria for stakeholders and, using this criteria, draw up a list of stakeholders who should be consulted. Also, identify those who will not be consulted and explain why.

- Consider other federal departments, the provinces, territories or foreign governments.
- If in doubt about including participants, it is better to include them.
- Consider the nature of the issue. Is it horizontal in scope? If so, consideration should be given to including non-traditional groups, such as environmental, aboriginal and consumer groups. If these groups are to be included, it will be important to inform the government department that deals primarily with the group so that there is no duplication or over-consultation of the groups in question.
- List those who should be informed about the consultation, but not necessarily directly involved, such as other government departments.
- If possible, get feedback and input on your participant list from key colleagues or an informal group created to help guide the consultation.

According to the *Participant Funding Guidelines for Federal Consultations*, participant funding should be provided based on the principles of inclusiveness and accessibility, while being mindful of the effective management of public funds.

Possible stakeholder criteria:

- direct interest in an issue;
- knowledge or experience related to the issue;

- affected by a change in policy/programs/regulations arising from the consultation;
- needing to learn more about a policy, program or regulation due to future implications for the participant.

Also, establish which other individuals should attend the session and what roles these individuals should play, (i.e. active vs. non-active, technical resources, observers, facilitators, provincial government representatives, etc.).

Consider Timing

Selecting the appropriate time to consult is important, not only for the department's requirements, but for the participants.

- Note pre-determined deadlines.
- Note other key events or deadlines that may affect participants during the time allocated for the consultation.

Consideration should be given to holding a consultation in conjunction or directly proceeding another event in order to cut down costs, if both events are going to involve the same participants. Also, sensitivities should be shown towards the personal schedules of the participants and the time commitments that will be asked of them.

Please note that the Consultations and Intergovernmental Relations website located on AgriSource is home to two important sources of information that can help in these situations. Firstly, there is

AgriConnexions, a database of key agriculture, agri-food and other industry associations including links to provincial and territorial government profiles. Secondly, there is a Key Events calendar that outlines main events and meetings involving AAFC's constituents. Both can act as good resources when planning consultations and choosing participants.

- Note other active issues that could influence how participants perceive or address the subject of the consultation.
- Allow for significant advance notice of the meeting as this could greatly affect your participation levels.
- Consider opportunities and/or obligations for coordinating with others.
- Leave adequate time for reading documents, internal consultation within associations, getting feedback, etc.

Plan to Evaluate

While monitoring and fine-tuning may be required during a consultation (i.e. lengthening or reducing the time allotted for meetings or recognizing the need for additional participants), the entire process must also be evaluated at its conclusion.

Consider the following:

- impact – did the consultation deliver results that were used and ultimately had an effect on government policy, programs or services?
- roles fulfilled (i.e., departmental employees, consultants, stakeholders, advisors)
- process selected (i.e., questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, meetings)
- information provided (i.e., documentation, environmental scans, experts)
- information gathered (i.e., stakeholder selection, feasibility of recommendations)
- the contractor/contracting services that aided in the organization/facilitation of the session
- the meeting facility

Setting up the evaluation parameters at the beginning of the process makes it easier to assess information at the end. This can include designating someone outside the process to carry out the evaluation. Evaluations can be done in a variety of ways, such as interviews or surveys with some or all of the involved parties.

The Consultations and Intergovernmental Relations website on AgriSource is home to two important sources of information: AgriConnexions, a database of key agriculture, agri-food industry associations and a Key Events calendar that outlines main events and meetings involving AAFC's constituents.

II Design

How to Select a Consultation Method

A variety of consultation processes or methods exist. Choose the best method to fulfill the objective of the consultation. Consider such factors as available resources (human and financial), timeframes, the complexity of the issues and the level of controversy or risk.

In planning, consider a variety of approaches. A detailed listing of consultation methods, along with some of their key features, follow in the section entitled Methods: strengths and weaknesses. Large consultations may require or benefit from combining more than one process.

Plan Logistics

A logistics plan should be developed that includes the appropriate financial resources, realistic timelines and skilled people or it may fall short of expectations or even fail.

- Allow time for approval processes, delivery of documents and call-backs to ensure participation.
- It is imperative to choose a proper venue for your event - details on this to follow in later sections.
- Ensure that the project leader/budget controller be kept informed on all aspects of human and financial resource implications on an ongoing basis.
- Develop contingency plans for too little/too much participation and review confirmed participants for desired representation based on your original selection criteria.
- Confirm logistical arrangements (e.g. access, technology hook-ups, notices, location, hospitality, room set-up, registration, etc.).
- Where possible or useful, make backup arrangements.



- Select and brief meeting chairs, facilitators and other resource people.
- Arrive at the consultation early and confirm that support people are prepared and ready.
- Review the *Official Languages Act*. Consider your participants' requirements at the beginning of the process. Is translation and/or interpretation required for most, some, or all of the participants? Is it required in all regions? Throughout the entire process or at selected times? What about the translation of documents prepared before, during and after the consultation? Some options include whisper interpretation, simultaneous interpretation, and separate English and French sessions. Allow time for translation and/or interpretation at all stages, wherever it is required, from invitation letters to background documentation and final reports.

Methods: strengths and weaknesses

Depending on the circumstances, any of the following techniques can be effective tools. Choosing which to use largely depends on the results you are trying to achieve and the degree of citizen partici-

pation you want. This can range from asking questions and listening to answers to full, citizen-focused governance.

Consultation: Listening

Consider using these tools if your intention is to ask people a question and listen to their response:

A. Toll-free lines – A designated phone number to collect comments, opinions or ideas.

Strengths

- impersonal, people can feel more comfortable with participating
- time efficient
- can be used over time and evolve as issues develop

Weaknesses

- requires capable expertise to ensure responses are accurate
- susceptible to crank calls

B. Interactive websites – Websites designed for participants to respond to posted document(s), such as questionnaires or surveys, or to post their own organizational position papers. Responses, feedback, revised documents can then be added over time. Should usually only be used in conjunction with face-to-face methods.

Strengths

- comparatively fast, inexpensive and logistically simple way to request and obtain information
- well-designed website can provide great variety of reference information selected by reader
- provides 24 hour, 7 day/week access to participants

Weaknesses

- not all participants will have access to computers and/or internet
- confidentiality and security concerns
- could be neglected by participants if other means of communication are available

C. Decision support software – A structured computer-based method of allowing participants to vote on specific issues. Allows participants to see ranking/priority of various options.

Strengths

- responses are anonymous
- facilitates comparison of group response vs. individual response
- multiple issues creates a solid database

Weaknesses

- expensive to set up
- may be imposing to some people or not taken seriously by others
- dependent upon a facilitator for analysis
- issues may be oversimplified to accommodate the technology

D. Polling – A process where trained interviewers ask a specific population segment a list of pre-tested questions.

Strengths

- can be used for crisis management studies
- useful for determining position on subject, (i.e. yes/no or multi-selection process)
- good for discovering perceptions
- can be used as a non-binding voting mechanism
- can be cost-effective for reaching dispersed populations
- more valid results than some methods

Weaknesses

- results can be skewed, unless sample and survey are properly constructed
- obtaining results could be time consuming
- participation rate is highly dependent on interest in subject matter
- questions must be carefully developed to ensure results are useful
- all responses get equal weight

E. Interviews – Selected individuals are asked a series of questions to gather information on a specific topic, such as a project or policy, by a trained interviewer.

Strengths

- good way to obtain both factual and impressionistic information
- helpful in building understanding of issue/problem
- conducting several interviews is helpful in dealing with very complex issues
- usually done on a one-to-one basis
- can be done quickly
- can collect in-depth data

Weaknesses

- requires a well-developed understanding of your information needs
- individuals usually interviewed once, so no common ground is established
- time-consuming
- requires skilled interviewer and extensive analysis

F. Questionnaires – A list of questions that require the recipient to provide responses.

Strengths

- can be extended to a wider segment of the public
- includes those who won't go to public meetings
- can be tailored to reflect local nature of issue
- can be done by mail, Internet, or telephone

Weaknesses

- difficult to statistically analyze
- some members of the public will not take part
- difficult to develop valid questions
- low return rate

G. Surveys – A process for collecting information and opinions. This include a variety of methods, including questionnaires, computer voting, phone-in responses.

Strengths

- useful in reaching widespread audience

Weaknesses

- can be time-consuming
- no interaction/feedback between participants

Consultation: Dialogue

Consider using these tools if you want to encourage a two-way dialogue:

A. Advisory committees or boards – Selected members participate in ongoing discussions and/or decision-making for a designated purpose.

Strengths

- good when information or technical expertise are essential to decision-making processes
- understanding of nature/impact of problem is crucial to policy, program or service development
- influence with decision-makers/general public, etc. can be developed
- easier to schedule than public/large meetings

Weaknesses

- may be highly structured, requiring effort to plan, participate and manage
- may be dominated by vocal minority
- others may feel advisory group doesn't represent them
- advisors may confuse their role with that of decision-makers

B. Roundtables – bring together industry representatives, government agencies and non-government organizations to discuss specific issues in which they have a common interest.

Strengths

- experts may discuss issues and develop strategies unhindered by having to explain or simplify the discussion
- gives experts and industry a sense that government appreciates their contribution

Weaknesses

- since the general public would not be represented, recommendations could come out in favor of special interest groups rather than in favor of the public good
- small group of participants, unlikely to represent all interest groups
- decisions that only have government and industry input might be hard to “sell” to citizens

C. Task forces – are struck to study a specific issue/topic with citizens, industry, other levels of government and other stakeholders on a specific issue (for example, review of a piece of legislation), after which the task force prepares a report with recommendations for action.

Strengths

- documents provided ahead of time permit participants to develop an informed opinion
- experts provide an opportunity to lead the discussion and clear up misconceptions through testimony
- macro-level issues with broad social implications seem to have the greatest success in this format (i.e. the environment, fisheries, etc.)
- provides participants an opportunity to participate in policy deliberation

Weaknesses

- engages those who are already involved in public affairs, usually resulting in a non-random sample
- administrative complexities and time constraints are prohibitive, especially in the case of travelling taskforces
- potential for being unresponsive depending on the mandate
- potential for the agenda to be captured by special interest groups
- risk that report's recommendations will come out contrary to the set policy direction resulting in the recommendations not being implemented

D. Fora – bring together stakeholders (both traditional industry representatives and citizens) to discuss issues and reach a common understanding, but not necessarily a consensus.

Strengths

- creates an opportunity for understanding other points of view
- may be short-term and several fora may be operating simultaneously
- provides participants with an opportunity to participate in policy deliberations

Weaknesses

- potential for representatives of stakeholder groups not to be representative of all, or most of the stakeholders
- can be costly
- potential for one group to dominate discussion or “hijack” the event

E. Conferences – usually large-scale meetings taking place over one or more days with a key issue or theme to be discussed through sub-topics.

Strengths

- provides a useful venue to showcase programs, challenges and issues of the day (similar to workshops)
- provides an open arena
- can accommodate a wide range of participants

Weaknesses

- some people are reluctant to speak in large meetings
- may be dominated by a vocal minority
- planning requires a long lead time
- may be expensive

F. Focus groups – a structured process for collecting information, where specifically selected participants provide reaction to specific policies, projects or issues.

Strengths

- explores questions of particular interest to conveyor
- participants are able to hear others' ideas and test their thinking against the reactions of other participants
- can produce more thoughtful results
- provides an opportunity to determine the range of views on a specific issue
- very useful for conducting background research prior to consultation and/or for testing clarity of options at end of consultation
- relatively inexpensive
- quick response and reaction

Weaknesses

- discussion may lose focus unless clear questions are posed
- careful background research and preparation are essential
- views of a small focus group are not representative of the general population
- no opportunity for detailed responses when 10-15 participants are involved, unless questions are limited

G. Open house – A planned event that allows stakeholders and the public to meet with staff/organizers to review and discuss specific issues.

Strengths

- involves the entire staff of the organization
- informal discussions are normally more positive

Weaknesses

- requires precise planning
- some people will want to turn it into a public meeting
- off-track issues are brought up

Citizen engagement: Consensus/citizen-focused governance

Consider using these tools if your objective is to conduct a full citizen engagement process, where the goal is consensus or citizen-focused governance:

A. Workshops – Combination of a meeting and an advisory group, workshops attempt to achieve specific results/steps in a plan.

Strengths

- effective when there is a tightly constrained time frame and a need to tap knowledge of a group of experts
- can frame problem in relevant/specific terms while mobilizing external expertise in its solution
- group work identifies areas of agreement and areas that require further work

Weaknesses

- requires considerable preliminary research and organization, for example, problem needs to be carefully defined and participants well selected for their knowledge, credibility and representation
- no guarantees that consensus will be achieved
- may result in statements that generate opposition

B. Citizen juries – bring together a small, randomly selected group of people to hear expert “witnesses” on a particular issue, then deliberate and issue findings and recommendations. There are no judges but instead two jury moderators. The citizens jury is used mainly to discuss complex issues or problems, such as in highly technical or scientific fields where citizens have to be well informed to make an enlightened decision.

Strengths

- citizen input is from a group that is informed and representative of the public
- jurors attempt to face the issue impartially with a commitment to treat the issue fairly
- deliberation process permits participants time to digest the material and form an informed opinion rather than offer a knee jerk reaction type of decision associated with more brief consultations
- potentially leads to increased public support for resulting policy

Weaknesses

- length of ‘front end’ planning and organization is typically 3-4 months
- cost tends to range between \$25,000-\$90,000 depending on geographic breadth, number of jurors, and the amount of staff time necessary to organize the process
- time commitment of participants is typically 4-5 full days

C. Citizens' panel – a large group, usually between 600 and 2500, of demographically representative individuals that act as a sounding board for government policy and initiatives. The sample can either be randomly selected or selected based on knowledge or experience of the subject area (i.e. agriculture). The panel can be used to obtain qualitative or quantitative information, identify trends and changes in attitude on an ongoing basis.

Strengths

- provides a database of individuals that can be used over a long period of time for a wide range of research and consultation
- consultations can be held with the help of caucusing software - more cost-effective than bringing individuals together each time

Weaknesses

- long preparation time
- expensive to set up
- few opportunities for the group to meet face-to-face

D. Study circles – a small-group deliberation involving from 5 to 20 people, who meet regularly over a period of weeks or months to address policy issues, usually with a trained facilitator and basic ground rules for discussion.

Strengths

- increased responsibility of participants over time ultimately leading to group control over the content of the discussions and the group process
- brings participants into active leadership roles
- structure built on cooperative learning, democratic participation, collective wisdom of the group
- simple and easy to manage
- inexpensive and accesses local resources and ideas
- ability to connect participants and organizations interested in the same action/ideas

Weaknesses

- size constraints limit the group to between 5 and 20
- community wide study circle programs are benefited by an administrator who puts in the labour-intensive process of coordinating the program, thus an added expense

E. Search conferences – typically involve from 20 to 60 people with a stake in a common issue.

The search conference involves participants in building an agenda of how to address this common issue and then work progressively, primarily in large-group plenary sessions, for two or three days on developing a future plan that would address common obstacles. This is done with the understanding that participants will take results back to their communities to affect positive change.

Strengths

- permits participants to build the agenda for the conference, thus developing a sense of ownership over the process and its outcomes
- consideration of an issue is based on local information from the past, present, and future
- results in participants developing a sense of ownership over the plan leading to a greater commitment towards implementation

Weaknesses

- potential for discussion to be mired in the problems and conflicts of the past, rather than being a forward looking instrument of problem solving
- it may be difficult to get organizers to buy into an open-ended agenda and an unpredictable/unstructured process

III Implementation

Select a Venue, Room Layout

Site selection is an important element of any consultation or citizen engagement event. If possible, venues should be chosen at a site located closest to most of the participants. Another venue consideration is the need to accommodate out-of-town participants. In order to save on time and transportation, the best option is to rent a venue that also has the capacity to house your participants.

Ideally, public meetings need a plenary room big enough for the expected turnout, with enough smaller rooms or areas to break the plenary group into sub-groups of eight to twelve, if required. Roundtables in the plenary room can be an alternative to separate sub-group space if they have enough space between them. Other criteria are good lighting and ventilation, wall space to hang flip charts, and flexibility to move tables and chairs depending on the turnout. Other considerations include ensuring that there is adequate space in all your meeting rooms for simultaneous interpretation booths and technical equipment.

For groups of 20 or less, an open “U” is a good physical layout. For groups of more than 50, theatre style is best.

For groups of 20 or less, an open “U” is a good physical layout. For groups of 30 to 50, roundtables work well. For groups of more than 50, theatre style is best, but needs two or three wide aisles for the facilitator to move through the audience. A very large open “U” with chairs layered in rows has also been successful. Always inspect the meeting place before choosing it. Consider accessibility, washrooms, on-site equipment and services, and local transportation to and from the site.

Implement Plans

Implementation means carrying out the consultation design and carrying through with logistical planning.

- Provide documents written in plain language well in advance of meetings or workshops so participants have sufficient time to read and analyze them.
- If individuals have been invited to represent the views of an organization, as opposed to their own personal knowledge and views, they must be given time to consult within their own organizations. Some organizations must defer to boards, while other associations will not act without membership positions on key issues.
- Participants will have their own workloads or agendas that will either interfere with or augment participation in a consultation.

Explain the Process

Explain the entire process at the start. Points to be covered include:

- the purpose and how the process will work;
- the underlying public involvement principles that will guide the process, (i.e. respect accountability, etc.);
- why the participants have been asked for their input;
- how data will be recorded and how it will be used following the consultation;
- the end product and how will it be used;
- future opportunities for involvement following the conclusion of the project;
- estimated time frames for action.

Decide on Facilitation

The facilitator gives the participants a process for providing their input, brings discipline to the process, encourages full participation, and ensures that all information/data provided is captured. This usually involves the use of flip charts and/or a laptop displayed on an overhead screen to record input. With large numbers of participants or breakout groups, more than one facilitator may be required.

It is important to note that engaging a general facilitator is good for general topic areas. However, in the case where a subject area is regionally specific or very technical it is very important to have a facilitator who is familiar with the acronyms, terminology and the subject matter. Further, while the use of an internal facilitator is acceptable, independent facilitators can bring credibility to the process.

Facilitation should be conducted by a credible, independent, bilingual (if required), trained facilitator/contractor/firm.

Monitor Results

Be prepared to assess what is taking place during a consultation process and to make adjustments, if needed. For example, if a one-day meeting is not going well, call a break, evaluate and take action to achieve better results. In a conference setting,

participants should be spoken to on an informal basis throughout the first day. The planning team should then meet at the conclusion of the day to see if a restructuring of the agenda is necessary. In a longer-term consultation, gather feedback throughout the process using participant evaluation forms or participant surveys. If an ongoing advisory committee process is not working well, consider having an independent party interview participants and prepare recommendations to improve the process. Or bring in a professional to work with the group for a designated period of time.

Consider assembling the planning team immediately following the session to get “instant” feedback on the process and messages. It is also recommended to write up a short report on the common messages and feedback from participants for managers, project leaders and senior officials within 48 hours of the event.

The facilitator gives the participants a process for providing their input, brings discipline to the process, encourages full participation, and ensures that all information/data provided is captured.

IV Synthesis

Analyze Data and Draft Results

Once a consultation has been completed, compile all the data gathered and synthesize it into key themes and messages for use in the draft report or final product.

- Compile all of the information from the consultation, in its various forms, into a single place.
- Separate the information into broad themes, with associated ideas.
- Establish a duplicate file, and remove ideas that are identical in words and meaning. Keep all original documents in successive drafts for purposes of transparency.
- Be consistent in terminology and writing style.
- Use plain language: concise, unambiguous and value-free.
- Information should be oriented to how participants will use it and what they need to know to use it as part of the consultation.
- A document's layout should help the reader understand the text.
- Circulate the document to participants for their feedback before the document is finalized; their commitment is important, because it may contain solutions, new directions, approaches or policies.

- The end product could be:
 - a vision,
 - a strategy formulation,
 - an operational plan,
 - a simple action plan,
 - policy recommendations or changes,
 - program changes,
 - views and opinions expressed, or
 - legislative/regulatory changes.

The format could be in the form of:

- “as it was heard” report;
- survey results (statistical reporting); or
- analysis of common messages or themes.

An executive summary should be considered if the report is long.

V Feedback

Collect, Analyze and Respond

When seeking feedback from consultation participants, remember to allow a reasonable amount of time for documents to be distributed and read. Clearly state what you are looking for: detailed comments, comments on key points, participants' approval or that of their organization, etc.

- Choose the most appropriate means of obtaining feedback (written comments, telephone interview, follow-up meeting).
- Make sure that the information and request for feedback goes out within a month following the event.
- Ensure that all of the participants have sufficient time, opportunity and ways to provide feedback. Ensure they receive the report in the official language of their choice.
- Modify the plan/product according to the feedback received if possible.
- Produce the final report and forward it to all those who participated in the consultation.
- Share the results of the consultation with a wider audience. Besides participants, decide who else should receive a report: program officers, managers, communications staff, etc.
- Ensure that the entire feedback process is documented and reported on; issue an information statement or progress report.



VI Follow up

Identify Impacts

The entire point of a consultation may be lost at this step. Consultations may affect numerous aspects of an organization, including:

- organizational strategy
- informal structures
- resources
- linkages to other organizations
- formal structures
- policies
- management processes
- technology
- image of department
- products and services

To assess the impact of recommendations arising from a consultation on current strategies, policies and approaches, including changes to legislation:

- list all of the areas affected by the consultation information;
- identify the results, both positive and negative, of the changes to the affected areas;
- provide recommendations on how to proceed.

Develop Work Plans

Areas in the organization that are affected by the results of the consultation should create work plans based on the accepted recommendations resulting from a consultation. These work plans should include measurable targets to track achievement and accountability for meeting goals. Alternatively, a simple action plan may be used.

Welcome additional feedback from participants and change work plans as required. This evolution will help maintain commitment to the plan. Work plans should be reviewed during implementation to ensure they do not deviate from the original intent.

Consider the following:

- the step in the plan, (i.e. goals);
- the activities required to achieve the goals;
- adherence to schedule, planned versus actual;
- comments on problems and progress.

Report on Progress

Remember that the principle of accountability requires that participants be kept informed of results and outcomes. A progress report on how plans are being implemented or information used following the consultation will help to demonstrate results to the participants.

VII Evaluation

Assess the Content and Process of the Consultation

A variety of means can be used to assess a consultation including: a focus group, post mortem, client evaluation, survey and team member evaluation.

An evaluation report with recommendations should be forwarded to planning team members and managers. Evaluations help assess whether the goals of the consultation have been met but also to help ensure a positive atmosphere for future consultation projects and to improve consultation methods.

- Compile the evaluation information gathered throughout the consultation process.
- Perform further evaluation on all aspects of the consultations content and process.
- Outline any priority issues that have surfaced.
- Ensure that the evaluation process is documented and reported on, and a report or at least an information statement is produced for all involved with the consultation.

VIII Application

Apply Results

The purpose of a consultation is to gather information and insights that can be fed back into the policy-making process. If this is not done, the effort to consult has been wasted.

Appendix 1

Other Resources/Sources of Information

The Consultations and Intergovernmental Relations Website <http://agrisource.ncr.agr.ca/policy/cir-cri/english/home.html>

This website, which can be accessed through AgriSource, includes a wide range of consultation tools and information on consultation and citizen engagement techniques. The tools that can be accessed on the site include the Guide to Consultations and Citizen Engagement, AgriConnexions, archived editions of the Consultations Network Newsletter (CNN), a list of key consultation events, a consultations schedule, consultations planning template, web consultations planning template, a consultations evaluation template and a facilitators database.

The Privy Council Office's (PCO), Communications and Consultation Secretariat Website: http://publiservice.pco-bcp.gc.ca/comcon/comcon_e.htm

This website contains all the Government of Canada Policies and Guidelines for Consultations and Citizen Engagement. This includes PCO's *Policy and Guidelines on Consulting and Engaging Canadians, Participant Funding Guidelines* and a *Practical Guide to Public Consultations*.

Government guidelines for electronic consultations and evaluation will be added in 2001.

This website also contains a listing of consultation managers across the government as well as other consultation and citizen engagement resources and links.

**Consultation Notebook: Year 2001
Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA)
(formerly Regulatory Affairs Division, AAFC)**

A detailed (60 page) manual that provides extensive details on consultations, including a variety of case studies. Can be used for any type of consultations but is geared toward regulatory consultations.

Includes a very good reading list. Regulatory consultation is also discussed in the *Regulatory Policy and Management Standards: Compliance Guide*.

The Government of Canada Internet Guide
http://publiservice.gc.ca/services/guide/5_8e.html

This site contains many case studies on the use of electronic consultation.

**A Guide to Public Involvement
Canadian Standards Guide International,
March 1996**

A detailed guide to planning and implementing public involvement processes from the beginning to the end. It includes helpful checklists for every area of the process.

Policity.com – Citizen Participation Centre
Institute On Governance

“A community devoted to citizen-centered governance -where citizens and practitioners alike come together to contribute to a growing body of knowledge in the field of citizen participation and community action. The link below will take you to a full listing of related websites and resources.”

<http://www.policity.com/CP/Public%20Library/links.htm>

**Quality Services Guide 1: Client Consultation
Treasury Board**

A four-page document that lists TB definitions of consultation, critical success factors and performance indicators. Provides a reading list that includes a wide variety of sources.

Appendix 2

Consultations Planning Tool I

Project:

Project Authority:

Contact:

Strategic Considerations:

1. What is the issue? Why was it decided to hold a consultation?

2. What are the desired results of the consultation?

What visibility/profile do you want to give the consultation?

3. Who is leading the consultation (who is funding it)?

4. Who is being consulted? Who needs to be aware of the consultation? Will consumers / citizens have an opportunity to participate? (Consider demographics, language, gender, age, culture, etc.)

5. Where are we in the overall process?

a. What is the time frame?

b. Is it connected to other key events?

c. Current milestones / target dates

6. Considerations

a. Minister / Deputy Minister awareness and involvement

b. Resources available (eg: budget, staff involvement, funding policy)

c. Relevant federal acts/policies (Official Languages Act)

d. Political and regional, and federal-provincial implications

e. Communications Branch involvement (eg: Communication Plan)

f. Other players and roles (eg: OGDs as observers)

7. Next steps – Considerations for next meeting:

a. Location and Facilities

b. Format

c. Products

d. Follow-up

e. Evaluation

Appendix 3

Consultations Planning Tool II

Planning and Logistics:

1. Location / Facility

2. What work has been done? (eg: facilitator hired, policy papers, invitations, participant list, speakers, special guests, etc.)

3. Proposed format (eg: agenda, speakers, breakout sessions, exposition); and number of participants expected. Define length and type of session (eg: focus group, half day session, full day workshop)

4. What products are needed to support the consultation? (eg: websites, letters, discussion documents, workbooks, surveys, information in advance, background material, etc.)

5. Special requirements (eg: physically challenged, simultaneous interpretation, translation)

Follow-up / Evaluation:

6. What is the follow-up plan?

a. Is there a report?

b. Who will prepare the report?

c. Will participants have the chance to comment on the report?

d. What will be done with the input / final report?

e. Will the report be public? How and when will it be distributed?

7. What is your evaluation plan? Who will conduct it?

Appendix 4

Website Planning Tool

This planning tool has been developed to assist you in establishing a website for your consultation. Websites can be an efficient and relatively inexpensive method of collecting input or feedback from stakeholders or the general public. These are some points that you will want to consider before meeting with a website designer.

The website established for consultations should be part of your existing site, if applicable. The location of the consultation website can also be advertised on AAFC's homepage, so that with a simple click a participant can access your consultation website.

Basics your site should contain:

- a short introduction to the consultation;
- guidance to participants on how to respond;
- a deadline for responses;
- a disclaimer (sample attached);
- a warning that responses can be accessible under Access to Information, however, confidentiality under the Privacy Act will apply;
- the consultation document(s);
- other related background information;
- links to other related sites or information;
- a contact name, address, telephone number, fax number and a dedicated e-mail address to enable participants to forward their responses or their questions;
- an auto thank you response to be sent automatically to all who submit comments; and
- a short outline of the next steps in the consultation process, how input will be used as well as time lines and where any results, report(s) or information from the consultation can be found.

Other important considerations:

- all materials must be in both official languages and time must be allocated for translation;
- sufficient time must be allocated for the development and actual construction of the website;
- the website must meet the Government of Canada guidelines and the Federal Identity program;
- the website designer should have an electronic version of all documents, graphs, charts, graphics etc. (Remember that graphs, charts etc. are time consuming to convert into HTML and can result in increased costs.);
- decide how long you want the site to be live and how long you want the site advertised on AAFC's homepage;
- decide who will have proxy to the dedicated e-mail address to collect, track, read and analyze responses;
- to assist in the evaluation of the consultation process, you can request that an AAFC Online representative provide a statistical report on the site traffic;
- AAFC Online has a check list that you must complete;
- if you are asking quantitative (yes/no) questions you will want to consider setting up a database to process the input;
- visit the AAFC Online developers' corner for more tips and information at http://agrisource.nrc.agr.ca/guide/dvind_e.cfm

Who you should meet:

- Early in the development process AAFC's access to information representative must be advised of the consultation plan and website plan.
- Contact AAFC Online representative to discuss your plans to advertise the website and to request that a statistical report of website traffic be maintained.
- Meet with a website designer to discuss your plans. They offer valuable advice tailored to your needs, as well as a cost and time estimate for the project.
- Corporate Services Branch offers website design services. If you decide to use an outside contractor for design services, they should also meet with an AAFC Online representative.

Sample Disclaimer from AAFC Online:

This information is provided free of charge to the public. There are no express or implied warranties whatsoever by Her Majesty relating to either the accuracy or completeness of this information. The information may be copied and reused, provided it is accurately reproduced and the source is credited. Persons using this information waive any and all claims against Her Majesty relating to this information and agree to indemnify and save harmless Her Majesty and all her representatives and information providers against any and all claims resulting from or arising out of any use to which this information may be put.

Appendix 5

SAMPLE

Participant Evaluation Form

	Excellent 5	Good 4	Average 3	Poor 2	Very Poor 1	Not Applicable
1. The objectives of the conference were clear.						
2. The conference materials were useful.						
3. The topics covered were appropriate.						
4. The facilitator managed the agenda and discussions well.						
5. You had sufficient opportunity to participate in the breakout session discussions.						
6. The travel arrangements were well organized.						
7. The accommodation arrangements were well organized.						
8. The registration was well-run.						
9. The facilities were comfortable and appropriate for the conference.						
10. The food was of good quality.						
11. The next steps are clear.						

12. What motivated you to come to the Conference?

13 a. Your overall impression of the Conference was good?

Yes No

b. Why or why not?

14. Should we do anything differently (topics, events, speakers, sessions)?

15. General comments:

Options for Consideration:

1. Speakers - Were they relevant to the subject? Were they interesting?

2. Breakout sessions - The objectives of the breakout sessions were clear.

3. Appropriate use of technology.

4. Exhibits - Were they informative?

**5. Were the participants representative of: different regions, population
(youth, Aboriginal peoples, women, etc.)**
