Public Dialogue:
A Tool for Citizen Engagement

A MANUAL FOR FEDERAL DEPARTMENTS
AND AGENCIES

Acknowledgments

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A Tool for Citizen Engagement

Three things stand out in opinion polls taken in Canada over the past 15 years.

One, people want changes in the way governments run many programs. **Two**, they want to be involved in making those changes. **Three**, they feel unable to make the changes they want.

The desire for change, the thirst to be involved, the feelings of alienation and frustration— these are some of the things that can be addressed by participating in a public dialogue group.

Source: Suzanne Peters, *Exploring Canadian Values, A Synthesis Report*, Canadian Policy Research Networks, 1995

Welcome to Public Involvement and Public Dialogue

Public involvement is a broad term that can be used to refer to all of the methods governments use—communication, consultation and citizen engagement—to communicate and gain citizen input on programs or policies. Each of the existing processes for public involvement is appropriate for the purposes for which it was designed.

Communication

Public meetings, workshops, toll-free numbers, Internet sites, multi-media presentations and workbooks can be effective ways of reaching and providing information to the public.

Consultation

Focus groups, advisory groups, public opinion polling and calling for briefs can be useful for gauging opinion, obtaining reaction to preliminary proposals or options from a stakeholder or client group, and determining what additional information or modification may be needed to develop proposals further.

Citizen engagement

Public dialogue, search conferences, citizen juries, deliberative polling, and study circles are appropriate tools to support in-depth thinking by citizens about key public policy issues, and to inform policy and the decision-making process with citizen perspectives and values.

Citizen engagement can prove to be an important tool for policy and program development when:

- A deeper understanding of **underlying or changing values** is required to formulate action plans for something such as recruitment into the public service
- An **emerging issue** does not yet have an owner—or where there are multiple owners and each needs strategic information to formulate a response
- A firm position has not yet been taken by a Minister or the government and **open discussion of options** is desired
- An issue is sufficiently **controversial** that its true dimensions need to be better understood, such as with genetically modified foods
- A sophisticated exploration of **potential trade-offs** is needed such as in the case of environmental protection and economic development
- The government needs citizen commitment to face a **complex challenge** such as climate change

Citizen engagement is a process of interaction between decision-making bodies (often governments) and citizens affected by those decisions. It is about giving citizens a voice on issues that matter to them and that will have an impact on their lives.

Citizen engagement differs from more traditional forms of public involvement or consultation by encouraging in-depth discussion, reflection and learning, and promoting a focus on common ground. It recognizes and accepts that citizens will add value and it allows new options to emerge. There are no pre-determined outcomes and the process can be ongoing.

Citizen engagement processes offer governments ways to hear more fully from citizens. They also help citizens to develop their abilities and capacities to become more involved. Citizen engagement is not intended to displace representative institutions or traditional relations with stakeholder organizations, but rather to broaden and enhance democratic participation in issues of public policy.

The chart below sets out the distinguishing characteristics of communication, consultation and citizen engagement. It identifies the main characteristics of each, the tools used and appropriate uses.

Tools for Public Involvement

	Communication	**Consultation**	**Citizen Engagement**
Main Characteristics	**'Information out'** Citizens as audience	**'Information in'** Response to communication Vocal citizens and stakeholders to be taken into account	**'Interaction'** Deliberative dialogue Citizens as partners Capacity building Feedback to citizens Accountability
Tools	Advertising Media campaigns Press releases Print and electronic materials Workshops Toll-free numbers	Polling Focus groups Public meetings Hearings Briefs Workshops Toll-free numbers	Public dialogue Study groups Deliberative polling Citizen juries Search conferences
Uses	Alerting Informing Educating Promoting action Managing issues	Soliciting positions Refining solutions Finding trade-offs among interest groups Managing issues	Listening and learning Surfacing values Synthesizing solutions Understanding trade-offs Prompting action

Purpose of this manual

This manual focuses on **public dialogue,** a particularly effective tool for involving ordinary citizens in a meaningful way. **The aim of public dialogue is to understand the range and intensity of public views expressed on a given issue.**

It gives you what you need to start developing the plan and materials for public dialogue:

- Explains in detail how to conduct public dialogue sessions
- Addresses issues of particular concern in undertaking public dialogue
- Shows how public dialogue can be integrated into departmental activities

This manual provides a comprehensive step-by-step guide to the public dialogue process. It provides information about how the materials to support public dialogue are developed, and anchors public dialogue in a clear research methodology and analysis plan.

Part 1 of this manual is intended for government managers (referred to as coordinators) who will be planning or coordinating a public dialogue group/process.

Part 2 is intended for moderators engaged to run public dialogue groups.

Part 3 is comprised of appendices that expand on information in Parts 1 and 2.

Who will find this manual useful?

People who need to know about public dialogue, and:

- Need to understand what public dialogue is and where it can be most useful
- Are trying to decide whether to use public dialogue as part of the consultation repertoire on a particular issue or issues

People who need to coordinate and/or run public dialogue groups, and:

- Have a public dialogue to conduct and need to know how public dialogue works
- Have to develop and write the materials required to support public dialogue
- Will moderate a public dialogue
- Have to put together a team to conduct a public dialogue that might include departmental content/knowledge specialists, field staff, moderators, research methodologists and content analysts

People who need public input to make decisions, and:

- Need to evaluate public dialogue as a tool
- Have responsibility for applying results to their policy and program development processes

What is public dialogue?

Public dialogue:

- Strives to inform policy and program development with an expression of citizens' underlying values
- Honours all perspectives and can help to establish common ground by using a highly structured protocol to search for a creative synthesis of perspectives, rather than emphasizing the choice to be made among them
- Gives participants an opportunity to listen to other views, enlarge and possibly change their own point of view
- Opens the possibility of reaching a better solution
- Allows citizens to share in responsibilities and locate themselves and their actions in outcomes
- Provides information in the form of a workbook or guide carefully crafted to represent several perspectives on an issue, lending a layer of complexity and struggle to the discussion

A public dialogue group brings together a group of eight to ten people to work through a workbook or guide that includes basic information on the issue to be discussed, an issue statement and a number of viewpoints. The viewpoints represent divergent, sometimes opposing perspectives on the issue statement, pushing participants to consider the very real tensions that exist in public policy formation. The group moderator encourages participants to consider and reflect on each of the viewpoints provided. Participants are not limited to the viewpoints presented in the issue guide and are encouraged to place alternative viewpoints on the table for deliberation.

A dialogue session can last up to three hours and in this time, participants move from defining values and identifying common ground to putting forward concrete steps that can constructively inform policy development.

Used as one of a number of possible research tools, public dialogue offers a means to add to the existing knowledge around any given policy issue. It can be used in combination with other research methods, thereby strengthening the quality of information in and capacity for solid analysis. Public dialogue is one way to help departments develop advice for their ministers and contribute to the overall policy-making and program development function.

When governments are looking for a deeper understanding of core values or for guidance on priorities, they need a process that provides time and space for deeper reflection and deliberation. The more deliberative tools, like public dialogue, require listening, learning, working through, and building respect for the views of other people. In doing so one can get closer to true dynamics of opinion, confront biases, and hear alternative points of view by all involved in the process.

How does public dialogue differ from traditional focus groups?

Public dialogue differs from traditional focus groups and other means of citizen engagement in a number of ways:

- The format encourages deliberative discussions or **"choice work,"** wherein participants explore the tensions embedded in different views of an issue[1].
- The process respects all perspectives as it allows the **underlying values** of participants to surface and common ground to emerge.
- The information distributed to participants in advance of the group helps provide a **context** for the discussion and stimulate participants' thinking.
- It can reach those people or groups most likely to have an interest and groups can be constituted to ensure they are **inclusive** and reflect the diversity of the Canadian population.
- It asks participants to identify potential **indicators of success** and to suggest next steps or areas where they would like to initiate changes[2].

Public dialogue can influence policy immediately as well as over time, and can be used in a multi-stage approach on major policy issues. On major issues, it can take a decade or more to change policy. The role of deliberation is to keep that long journey on track and away from unproductive complaining and blaming[3].

Public dialogue in action

Initially launched in 1996 by the Canadian Policy Research Networks, *The Society We Want* (TSWW) is a highly structured public dialogue process that brings Canadians together to talk on their own terms about the future of their country. It provides a rare opportunity for individuals to engage in dialogue around topics that are important to them. The process is built around a workbook or kit that focuses on a social policy issue of national scope and importance, such as the health care system or adapting to the changing world of paid work. The kit puts forward an issue statement, and three divergent perspectives on that issue statement.

After each viewpoint and any emerging viewpoints are discussed, the group is asked to put forward indicators that would demonstrate that society is moving in the direction they would like to see. Participants are often asked to focus on what their next steps might be, both as individuals and as a group, thus focusing on specific suggestions and allowing participants to take ownership and responsibility for outcomes.

In addition to creating a forum for dialogue, TSWW is also grounded in a sound research methodology. Information from dialogue groups is captured on both an individual and group basis. Each participant completes a carefully developed research questionnaire, and moderators provide input. All flip charts used throughout the discussion are collected for input to the analysis. These sheets and all feedback forms are returned to Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN), the non-profit and non-partisan research organization in which TSWW sits, for analysis. The outcomes further inform CPRN and their ongoing input to policy development. A newsletter is used to share results with participants.

[1] Yankelovich, Daniel. *Coming to Public Judgement: Making Democracy Work in a Complex World.* Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991.

[2] Robson, Colin. *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1993

[3] Kettering Foundation. *Making Choices Together: The Power of Public Deliberation..Dayton*: Kettering Foundation, June, 1997.

How many groups do you need to get enough public input?

A series of 25 to 50 groups should be sufficient to elicit a range of public views on a particular issue and to provide reliable information. In many cases saturation—the point at which no new information comes forward from additional groups—is reached within the first dozen dialogue groups[4]; information from additional groups is important in validating initial findings. When statistical validity is sought, the number of groups should be 100-150, in order to represent a sample of 1000-1500 people.

Integrity of process

To be successful and have meaning, public dialogue depends on a strict integrity of process.

This tool must be used in a way that is:

- **Transparent**—all options for a given policy issue or decision must be included in the discussion and no material information should be withheld from the groups.
- **Accountable**—the organization conducting the process must commit to a continuing involvement on the part of participants, at a minimum by conveying to them the outcome of the public dialogue process.
- **Rigorous**—public dialogue is a highly structured process which is delivered in a consistent fashion across groups; it adheres to a rigorous research methodology.

The benefits of public dialogue

As a tool for citizen engagement, public dialogue has several unique benefits.

Public dialogue has the capacity to involve many people.

Public dialogue has the ability to reach and involve large and diverse groups of people. First, public dialogue often takes place in a safe and familiar setting—possibly at a public library or community centre—and does not involve public speaking or other activities that some may find intimidating. This makes the process attractive, accessible and inviting to a large cross section of the population. Second, public dialogue need not require a large time commitment on the part of participants. Third, any number of public dialogue sessions can happen simultaneously, thus allowing many people to be engaged on an issue within tight time frames over the course of a week or month.

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[4] Joe Michalski, Senior Research Associate, Canadian Policy Research Networks.

Public dialogue permits the synthesis of divergent viewpoints.

Public dialogue is a highly structured process where the emphasis is placed on finding a creative synthesis of a number of perspectives, rather than making a choice between them. This reflects the very real complexities that governments face in decision making. Public dialogue does not force participants to make artificial choices or establish "right" or "wrong" answers. Instead the process respects all perspectives as it allows the underlying values of participants to surface and common ground to emerge.

Public dialogue provides for high quality output that can be used to inform policy.

Public dialogue is grounded in a solid research methodology, and citizen input is captured through a number of analytical reporting methods. This ensures rigorous documentation and reliable output. Public dialogue allows for reflective discussion that examines the trade-offs among a number of perspectives on an issue, providing for enriched material to inform the policy-making function.

Public dialogue can provide quality input in a one-shot or iterative process.

One three-hour public dialogue session can result in valuable and useful information. Public dialogue is also a powerful tool when used in an ongoing and iterative process, given the required time and resources.

Public dialogue is complementary to other processes that distil public opinion.

Public dialogue can be used in combination with other processes, such as deliberative polling. It is complementary, rather than in opposition to other mechanisms that collect the views of citizens. It can be structured to take into account the very complex array of players with which departments and Ministers must work.

How public dialogue works

Public dialogue brings Canadians together in small groups to deliberate on issues that matter. Each group includes a moderator and eight to ten citizens.

Before the dialogue, participants receive relevant materials, including:

Generic information:
- Agenda for the dialogue group
- Background information on the public dialogue process

Information specific to the issue to be discussed:
- Issue statement
- Issue perspectives
- Fact sheets

The dialogue lasts two to three hours. During that time, a moderator uses a structured process to move the group through a discussion of divergent perspectives (usually three) on the issue. During the dialogue, the moderator notes citizens' comments on a flip chart.

Dialogue is structured in such a way that participants are not forced to reach consensus or make decisions. During the in-depth, deliberative discussion, participants' underlying values surface. The dialogue often results in the expression of trade-offs that participants find acceptable.

Indicators of Success are actions or achievements that will show that our society has been successful in addressing the issue we have been discussing. These are messages for departments and Ministers to note regarding citizens' expectations and on what citizens will hold their government accountable.

By the end of the session, the participants will have generated:
- **Indicators of Success** (actions or decisions that would tell them progress was being made on the issue)
- **Next Steps** they might take as individuals or as a group related to this issue
- The **Citizen's Issue Summary**—a questionnaire that captures the views of the individual participant about the issue under discussion. This research instrument is developed and grounded in established social science research methods.
- **Demographic information**

All information is anonymous. Individuals' names are linked neither to demographic information nor to points of view on an issue. However, participants have an opportunity to provide their names and addresses if they would like to receive further information on the issue and find out about the outcomes of the dialogue sessions.

Once the session is over, the moderator completes a feedback form that summarizes the indicators of success and the next steps, and makes a general statement on the outcome of the dialogue group. The moderator returns the form, the flip chart notes and the citizens' individual input forms to the department.

Appendix 1 contains a Sample Citizen's Agenda for a Dialogue Group.

The Coordinator's Guide

Research and analysis–planning for effective results

At the beginning of the process, it is important to develop a research plan, including plans for analysis, interpretation and dissemination of results, so that materials are designed to capture the information required out of the public dialogue. It is also important to set aside resources for later on in the process, to let the participants know how their information was used.

The purpose of a sound research plan is to have good, systematic, consistent information for input to the processes around decision making, policy and/or program development, and for feedback to citizens. Carefully developed issue guides and experienced moderators are also critical to the success of public dialogue sessions. Their success also relies on well-crafted designs for implementing the sessions, documenting the information, and analysing the results.

One or more professional researchers should be engaged to help plan for the research and analysis component of the work. They will be extremely helpful in the three phases of implementing public dialogue sessions: planning the documentation so that good data can be collected; organizing the data once it is collected so that it can be analysed; analysing and interpreting the data and report writing.

In the planning stage, professional researchers:

- Act as consultants throughout the development of all elements of the issue guide
- Develop the research and analysis plan including all feedback forms

In the data collection stage, professional researchers:

- Document the approach to analysis

In the analysis stage, professional researchers:

- Are involved with analysis of input and report writing
- Contribute to determining the format and content of feedback to the participants
- Assist in writing the final evaluation of the process

The following sections of the Coordinator's Guide address participant selection or "sampling," data collection, data coding and database structure, analytic strategies, feedback and dissemination plans.

Public dialogue materials

A public dialogue process requires materials for moderators as well as materials for citizen participants. The materials are meant to:

Be issue specific

- Identify the issue and the diverse perspectives on it.

Make the process transparent

- Provide a detailed picture of what happens in a dialogue group, including the roles of the moderator and the citizen participants.
- Provide clear information about what happens to citizens' comments following the dialogue, and how citizens will know what has happened.

Provide a framework for citizen input

- Provide supporting documentation on the issue and the perspectives to be discussed.
- Capture the content of the discussion and feedback from the moderator.

Dialogue materials are central to the success of public dialogue. They convey in simple, accessible language the issue to be discussed, the perspectives on it, and how the information generated from the discussion will be used.

Dialogue is not meant to promote a particular view or agenda. Information must be relevant to citizens and presented in an objective, neutral manner.

The tool used to conduct public dialogue groups is called an ***Issue Guide***.

Citizens' materials—The Issue Guide

At the beginning of the process, we recommend forming an **Issue Guide Development Team**, including the department's content people, i.e. people who know and understand the issue. The team may involve several representatives from a number of divisions within a department—people with expertise in social science research methods, and people with experience in communication and public involvement. This team assists in the development of the materials, plans the analysis and establishes the means by which results will be communicated to dialogue group participants.

There are a number of important considerations in developing an Issue Guide. These include:

- **Language**—Participants may not necessarily be fluent in English or French; public dialogue materials should be available in the languages spoken in the community. If translation is not possible, arrangements may be made with local agencies to provide contact people who can provide information in the necessary languages. Using plain language is also very important.
- **Relevance**—The issue should be relevant to participants. They should have some interest in the issue, even if it doesn't have a direct impact on their lives.
- **"Provocativeness" of perspectives**—The perspectives developed (usually three) should capture the tensions and challenges of the issue.
- **Volume of information**—The information should be short, crisp and clear.
- **Research methodology**—At the beginning of the process, it is important to develop a research plan, including plans for analysis, interpretation and dissemination of results, so that materials are designed to capture the information required out of the public dialogue.
- **Testing**—It is important to pre-test dialogue materials with members of the public to determine that the materials are well understood, that language and wording are appropriate, that they stimulate dialogue and that they generate sound results. It is helpful to indicate in the materials that testing has occurred.

Elements of an Issue Guide

The Issue Guide is central to the dialogue and is sent to the participants in a group about10 days before. An Issue Guide typically includes:

- A **Backgrounder** to explain the public dialogue process
- An **Agenda** to give the participants an idea of how the public dialogue session will unfold
- Four pieces of **information** specific to the issue:
    - **Issue Title**
    - **Issue Statement**
    - **Perspectives**
    - **Fact Sheets**

Pre-test the perspectives with members of the public ahead of time to identify potential areas of difficulty.

Backgrounder

The Backgrounder explains the public dialogue process. It describes how dialogue groups work, what happens with the information, outcomes and decisions, and how citizens will be informed of the results. It distinguishes dialogue from debate and indicates who should participate, why, and what happens to the information.

The Backgrounder demonstrates to participants that citizen input is necessary, welcome and important to the decision-making and policy-making processes. See **Appendix 2** for a Sample Backgrounder.

Agenda

The agenda briefly describes how the dialogue session will proceed. You may want to include a message from a Minister to explain how the group is important to the decision-making process.

Issue Title

The Issue Title is a phrase or brief sentence that identifies the issue in a straightforward, self-explanatory way. It should make the topic for the dialogue very clear, such as "The Health Care System," or "Adapting to the Changing World of Paid Work."

Issue Statement

The statement should be short—not more than one page in length. Use three or four paragraphs that clearly set out key aspects of the issue and present areas in which disagreement is possible or where all options are not presently achievable. The first paragraph introduces the issue. Subsequent paragraphs concisely introduce tensions and difficulties; for example, one paragraph could be devoted to issues surrounding each of the perspectives to follow. The concluding paragraph asks key questions, reflecting the content of the diverse perspectives and setting up the discussion to follow.

The issue statement:

- Provides an objective, balanced and lucid context for the issue
- Articulates the intended objective or purpose of the dialogue
- Is sufficiently provocative to spark interest and thinking
- Is unbiased in its presentation
- Contains no implications of a particular agenda
- Leads clearly into the three or four perspectives or views to be discussed in depth
- Includes strong supportive data
- Refers to the fact sheets

Perspectives/Viewpoints

Few issues are clear cut, with readily apparent solutions or resolutions. The aim of the perspectives is to demonstrate the kinds of tensions policy makers face as they struggle to reconcile competing or conflicting perspectives and to make decisions that are best for people in Canada. Perspectives help to elicit discussion and reflection about the different approaches that may be taken to the issue. Participants may agree or disagree with the perspectives; they may have additional perspectives to suggest; and they may find creative ways to address the tensions and trade-offs that are genuinely new.

To that end, identify the key perspectives or viewpoints around which the department wishes to have the in-depth dialogue. Three perspectives are recommended for a good discussion.

- Identify each perspective with a short, clear sentence.
- Elaborate each perspective with a short, pithy paragraph to assist citizens in addressing the tensions and trade-offs among the perspectives.

Participants should be clear that the intent of the perspectives is not to elicit any particular view, and that they are intended to help people discuss the merits of the different positions.

Fact sheets

Two to three pages of relevant, clearly documented and sourced background information on the issue to be discussed are sufficient for fact sheets.

Fact sheets are meant to provide background information on the issue statement and associated perspectives. This material, which goes to citizens before the dialogue group, provides information points, facts, and data ensuring that all participants have some substantiated material with which to begin their thinking. Using pie charts and graphs is helpful, as is polling data. Fact sheets help citizens understand the full range of information on the issue.

Citizen Input Forms

Each Issue Guide uses a variety of ways to capture individual and group feedback on the dialogue group. Citizen Input Forms document individual responses and comments and concerns of group members. It is important that information gathered in public dialogue groups be anonymous. Participants' names, demographic information and viewpoints on issues are not linked together.

Capturing the discussion requires a consistent approach across groups with a clear and valid research methodological foundation. That is, the input forms are directly related to the research and analysis plan for the dialogue process and are best developed in conjunction with it. Please see the Research and Analysis section of this manual for details.

Citizen Input Forms include:

Citizens' Issue Summary Form—This is completed by each participant once the dialogue has finished, and returned to the moderator before participants leave. Typically, it includes statements scaled from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," which are designed to elicit the participant's individual responses to the perspectives discussed.

The questions or statements should be clear, succinct and tied to the information presented in the Issue Guide. The statements are best developed using established social science methodological practices associated with sound question writing. Expertise in developing these questionnaires is typically available at the social science and political science faculties of many universities.

The Citizens' Issue Summary form also indicates the importance of the information to the dialogue process, and should note that the information is anonymous and that nothing on the form can identify the person who completes it.

Demographic Information Forms—Demographic information helps to ensure that a range of different groups have the opportunity to discuss the issues, and is most useful in the analysis phase to assess whether groups of people in the same or different regions tend to view the issues in similar or different ways.

Use Statistics Canada or other mainstream survey instruments to formulate the questions on the demographic forms. Consider the information you will need for your analysis and ask only those questions. Remind participants through a short statement at the top of the form that the information is anonymous.

To permit analysis at the individual and group level, keep the Citizens' Issue Summary Forms and the Demographic Information Form together. Note that the names of individual participants do not appear on either of these forms.

Selecting participants

The aim of public dialogue groups is to understand the range and intensity of public views on a particular issue. It is not possible or advisable to propose a standard approach to participant selection—in some cases one may choose to target particular demographic segments of the population; in other cases, a selection that reflects the range of possible groups and individuals in Canada (i.e. a more representative selection) may be appropriate. The sampling method must be tailored to the overall objectives of the dialogue exercise.

One common approach is non-probability sampling, which is similar to quota sampling, where the researcher attempts to ensure adequate participation of the various demographic groups of interest. This involves identifying the range of groups of people who are most likely to be directly affected by the issue. Once the groups affected are identified, it is a matter of ensuring that the groups have equal access to the process. And, as discussion groups are implemented, the coordinator and the researcher monitor the diversity of both the groups and the participants to ensure that the broadest possible base of people has been engaged in the public dialogue process.

Based on experience to date, about 25 to 50 groups should be sufficient for most issues. It continues to be a challenge to ensure that different groups have access to the process. Therefore extra effort in monitoring and in outreach activity is required to ensure the highest degree of diversity possible is achieved bearing in mind resource constraints.

Aim to involve participants who reflect the diversity that characterizes Canada. Be as inclusive as possible—involving people of different ages, backgrounds, levels of education, ethnicity, etc.

Plan for groups of eight to ten people. Fewer than eight may not give a range of viewpoints, more than ten may mean not everyone is heard.

Plan for a diverse group of participants. Include people of different ages and backgrounds to ensure that as broad a range of perspectives as possible is brought to bear on the issue under discussion.

To find members of the public:

Contact community-based organization such as libraries, the YM/YWCA, church groups and neighborhood community associations—include those which are multi-cultural—to find "ordinary" citizens who are not necessarily advocates for an issue.

It is also possible to contact associations with a possible interest in the issue, asking them to nominate people who would speak from a personal perspective, putting aside their advocate "hat" for the session.

Participants who respond to an ad in a community newspaper or to a sign posted at the local library announcing the public dialogue group are considered to be self-selected.

For self-selected groups:

- Send out a note to appropriate groups/associations.
- Post an announcement in the neighbourhood.
- Post information on your Web site and invite people to contact you.
- Put ads in community newspapers and on community bulletin boards.

Note that self-selection is an option, but is not recommended for all groups, since viewpoints from "non-aligned" participants are necessary when you are looking for representative views from the public.

Data collection

Professional moderators are key to capturing the core issues and the tenor of the discussions associated with the public dialogues. They collect data from the participants using flip charts and the Citizen Input Forms developed early in the process. Moderators also contribute their own impressions of the sessions on the Moderator Input Form. (It is possible to audiotape or videotape sessions; this is, however, more complex and more costly and requires additional methodological expertise.)

The purpose of the data collection process can vary with the specific project, but common objectives include capturing the following for purposes of reporting and analysing:

- Summary information from participants and moderators alike with respect to key substantive issues identified or otherwise addressed through the discussions and feedback forms
- Descriptions of the settings
- Summary demographic information regarding the participants

As noted above, the data collection instruments and protocol are developed prior to the actual dialogue groups. The materials should be tested with members of the public or in focus groups ahead of time to make sure language is clear and that the materials will generate discussion and therefore the data being sought.

Once a dialogue has been completed and the moderator has completed the compilation of the input forms, the materials from the discussions should be forwarded to the department and/or researcher, who will be responsible for coding and analysing the information. The researcher could also be engaged to prepare the report on the findings.

Data coding and database structure

The information collected is analysed on both an individual and group basis as presented in the following table.

Data Sources for Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis

Data Source	Unit of Analysis	Coding Strategy
Citizen's Issue Summary	Individual	Quantitative
Demographic Forms	Individual	Quantitative
Moderator Input Form	Group	Qualitative/ Quantitative
Flip Chart Notes	Group	Qualitative

For analysis purposes, a database should be created to accommodate individual-level information and group-level information. The database should contain all the information gathered from the individual participants and, at a minimum, the group setting information from the moderators.

A database of participants should also be created, with individual information tied to the groups in which they participate, for information purposes as well as to provide feedback. All participant information must remain confidential and anonymous.

Moderators

The moderator is a key component to the success of public dialogue sessions. Moderators should have considerable experience in group facilitation. They need to be comfortable in presenting the materials, explaining the purpose of the dialogue, keeping groups on track, and ensuring that a full discussion occurs using the materials as prepared.

Moderators need an in-depth briefing on the issue under discussion as well as support materials from the department requesting the session. They need to understand the objectives of the department in order to draw out the information to be analysed later, and to respond to questions from participants: What is the purpose of the dialogue? What will happen after the dialogue group? How will they know what happens?

While they are moderating a session, they are handing out and collecting participant issue summaries and demographic information, and taking notes on a flip chart. At the end of a session, they complete the Moderator's Input Form, summarizing indicators of success, next steps and their impressions of the session.

Briefing the moderator about the public dialogue session

It is recommended that a letter be sent to the moderator(s) early in the process to define the project and the moderator's role in the project, and to begin the briefing process. The letter could come from a senior person in the department who is associated with the dialogue.

The points to be made in the letter include:
- The need for research
- A brief description of how public dialogue fits in with other research taking place
- A brief description of the nature of the information expected as a result of the public dialogue sessions
- How the research will be applied in making decisions about existing issues, policies, programs

Practical information:
- A brief description of where else dialogues are taking place in the country or in the region
- An indication of plans to hold a briefing session on the issue

Expectations and appreciation:
- A brief description of how the department or agency sees the role of the moderator in a dialogue group. For example, parts of the moderator's role include being a neutral person facilitating the discussion, collecting research data, making sure everyone is heard, making sure data is correctly identified.
- A brief description of the tasks of the moderator such as booking space, confirming participant attendance, and collecting forms (if applicable, other field staff may be contracted to handle logistics)
- Appreciation for their role

Moderator's materials

The moderator's materials are more detailed than the citizen's materials. They include everything that the moderator of a public dialogue group will need to plan, carry out and provide feedback on the group.

They include the following:

- **Moderator's Guide** gives the moderator clear, step-by-step information about all aspects of the public dialogue process.
- **Moderator's Issue Guide** is an annotated version of the Citizens' Issue Guide that includes prompter questions to help steer and deepen the dialogue. The moderator might also receive additional information for a more in-depth understanding of the topic under discussion.
- **Moderator Input Form** offers the Moderator an important opportunity to document the dynamics and special features of each dialogue group, and becomes a qualitative research piece. The form includes a summary of the Indicators of Success taken from the session's flip chart notes, and a summary of Next Steps. It also includes space for the moderator to submit his or her thoughts on the session.
- **Fact Sheets** and **Backgrounder** are the same as those provided to the group participants.
- Input forms include the **Moderator's Input Form, Citizen's Issue Summary Forms, Demographic Information Forms** and **Participant List**. When completed, these forms are used in the analysis of the information generated by the dialogue groups later on.
- A bulletin board notice could be included to be posted in appropriate locations to announce the dialogue and to solicit self-selected participants, if desirable.

Feedback to citizens

Citizens will likely ask questions about how their information will be used such as "what happens after?" "how will my participation matter?" And "what will be done with my input and how will I know?"

Early in the process, put resources aside to offer the participants feedback after the dialogue sessions are finished. The dialogues should offer participants an opportunity to identify themselves and their addresses to receive the results of the dialogue or any other updates the coordinators of the project believe might be of interest. The process of self-identification, however, must be separate from the data collection process so that the input provided by the participants truly does remain anonymous.

Nor should participants be identified in the reporting phases. Instead, the reporting should always present aggregate trends (rather than citing specific citizens or even individual organizations participating), both as summaries of individual participants and in describing the characteristics of the participating groups. The bottom line is that the reporting should not compromise the anonymity of the participants, and yet each participant should have the opportunity to be "in the loop" at appropriate stages following their participation in the dialogue groups. Plans to disseminate the aggregated information should also be made if appropriate.

Tips about feedback

When talking about feedback, be realistic about how the results will be used. Make clear and concrete commitments to the form and timing in which the results of the dialogue will be shared.

Ensure that the feedback process itself is documented and circulated to participants with an information statement or progress report on next steps.

Ensure that citizens know how and where to get information on the results of the dialogue.

Decide at the outset what form your feedback will take, e.g., a report, a news release, statements in the House of Commons. Indicate to participants how they can expect to hear of the results of this process.

Make sure that information and feedback go out promptly—within weeks, not months.

Possible message:

We appreciate the time you are taking to give us your thoughts on this important issue. Your comments are helping us understand how Canadians think about it and will contribute to the decisions we make.

Our discussions with citizens are taking place over the next xxx months. You can reach us with your thoughts and comments by phone (number), fax (number), e-mail (address) or through our Web site (address) during that time. If you would like information about the outcomes of this process and the ways information will be used, please provide us with your name and address at the end of the dialogue session, and we will be sure to return to you with this information.

Evaluation

It is important to build opportunities into the public dialogue process to assess how well it is meeting its objectives—from the perspective of the department or agency as well as from the perspective of participants. Evaluation also helps to ensure a positive atmosphere for future consultation projects and helps to improve consultation methods.

Elements to evaluate can include:
- Roles fulfilled (e.g., departmental personnel, consultants, moderators)
- Processes selected (e.g., research methodology, input forms)
- Materials (e.g., Issue Statement and Perspectives, fact sheets)
- Demographic information gathered (e.g., selection of participants, numbers, diversity, etc.)

It is also important to assess citizens' views on the process (e.g., Were their perspectives reflected in the feedback on the dialogue process? Did they feel assured that their voices would be heard? etc.)

A variety of means can be used to assess the dialogue process. The Demographic Information Form can include a question that assesses citizens' views on the discussion. This question can be tailor-made to provide all participants with an opportunity to comment more fully on one or all aspects of the dialogue.

Moderators can help with a more formal evaluation of the process, using some specific questions on the Moderator's Input Form.

The evaluation process should itself be documented, with a report provided to team members and managers, and available to all—including citizen participants—involved with the public dialogue process.

Time and costing for public dialogue

Because dialogue objectives, research methodology and scale can vary significantly from one public dialogue project to another, it is impossible to provide a "standard" cost estimate. However, it may be assumed that the cost of a national public dialogue consultation will be of the same order of magnitude as other national consultation methods (i.e., at least $250,000). This cost estimate covers only the direct expenses that a department would be required to fund such as consulting fees for the professional staff of the centre, as well as for the moderators and the logistical support staff. These fees would be billed to a client department on a time reporting basis. The cost estimate also includes a variety of other expenses such as travel and accommodation, rental of space in which to hold the dialogue sessions, printing and translation, fax and courier, etc. These expenses would be specifically accounted for during the project so that a client department would be provided with a total costing of the project, even though the costs of some of these items might be covered in a department's general administration budget (for example, long distance telephone).

A comprehensive budget would also reflect the level of effort that decision makers mobilize within the client organization. It would include the time of the department's staff involved in the various phases of the project.

Costing could be approached as a four-step process:
1. Consultation planning (internal to the client organization)
2. Testing of public dialogue materials
3. Implementing the public dialogues
4. Analysing and evaluating the public dialogue

The total elapsed time for the project is estimated at around 40 weeks from the point at which a client department has made the decision to undertake a public dialogue process on a specific issue, to dissemination of results to the participants. The time required to reach this decision point can vary from department to department depending on its level of knowledge and expertise with the public dialogue process and the speed and complexity with which a departmental decision-making process operates.

The following information can be used to guide early budget planning.

Planning and pre-testing

This initial phase is designed to clarify objectives, finalize the research plan, prepare and test materials, and determine the final scale of the dialogue exercise. Normally, outside assistance will be employed to develop the research plan and to design and pre-test materials. The final cost will depend on the level of in-house effort.

The length of time for internal agreement on the issue guide and completion of the final version is estimated to be a minimum of eight weeks.

The length of time for developing a moderator's guide with supporting materials and approving the final version in English and French is estimated to be a minimum of four weeks.

Implementation

The total cost of dialogue groups in the field will vary in direct proportion to the model of engagement selected (model selected below):

- Reliable results   25-50 groups
- Statistically valid results   100-150 groups
- Maximum involvement   unlimited

Implementation costs would relate to:
- Issue-related moderator training, participant selection and notification
- Dialogue group moderation (including reporting)
- Collection of the data generated through the dialogue sessions

The length of time to identify and confirm moderators, to brief them on the issues, and to implement a public dialogue for a 50 group scenario is estimated to be a minimum of 20 weeks.

Once all the input data sheets are returned, the direct cost of data analysis will depend on the complexity of the research methodology chosen and the degree to which the analysis is being conducted in-house.

Evaluation

Additional resources will need to be budgeted if an evaluation is to be done by outside consultants.

The length of time for analysing the results and evaluating the public dialogue process for a 50 group scenario is estimated to be a minimum of four weeks.

Additional time and resources must be considered for dissemination of the results and for feedback to citizens.

The Moderator's Guide

This section is a step-by-step guide for the moderator in preparing for a public dialogue session. (See Appendix 3 for a 1-pager called the **Moderator's Checklist**.)

Preparing for the public dialogue session*

Set a date and book a meeting place. Make sure the meeting space is readily accessible and that the group will not be disturbed for three hours. You may wish to arrange for refreshments to be available.

Confirm that people will attend by calling them or sending them a note. Two weeks before the dialogue is strongly recommended.

Photocopy and send the Citizen's Materials:
- The Agenda
- The Backgrounder
- The Issue Guide

You will need one set for each participant and three extra sets to bring to the session for people who may forget to bring theirs.

Add a copy of any relevant information about the sessions or government program.

Send a complete package of these discussion materials to each participant 10 days before the dialogue.

Make copies of the Citizen's Issue Summary Forms and Demographic Information Forms to distribute at the session.

Check the venue, making sure there are:
- Enough seating places and writing surfaces
- Equipment and services for people who have disabilities
- Washrooms
- Flip charts with extra pads of paper and markers available

Call participants to remind them of the meeting a day or so before.

* Other field staff may be engaged to handle the logistics and advance steps, using the Moderator for the actual facilitation of the public dialogue groups.

During the session

Introduction (about 30 minutes)

Welcome people. Introduce yourself, welcome everyone, mention that the session will run approximately three hours, that there will be a short break, where the washrooms are, where smoking is permitted.

Explain the agenda (See **Generic Opening Comments** on the next page for specific suggestions about what to say). In brief, describe:
- The purpose of the meeting and why participants have been asked for their input
- What will happen during the dialogue
- How input from participants will be recorded
- What will happen to the input after the dialogue
- The end product and how it will be used
- Future opportunities to be involved
- How participants will receive feedback

Remind people "You'll get your say, not necessarily your way."

Have participants briefly introduce themselves, and say something about their personal experience with this issue and why they are interested in it.

Generic opening comments

Describe the project

- This project was set up by [Name of Department/Agency].
- Dialogue groups give people an opportunity to learn and talk about an issue they care about.
- [Name of Department/Agency] wants to know what people think so they can take it into account as they make decisions that affect us all.
- [Name of Department/Agency] will use the information we provide to them in these ways [specify ways].
- All the information is anonymous.

Describe the process

- Other dialogues like this are taking place across Canada.
- Other Canadians are talking about important issues through dialogue groups like this one.
- A dialogue is a full and open discussion of an issue:
  "We won't always agree but nobody's view is right or wrong."
- Hold up the Citizen's Issue Guide:
  "We will talk about the viewpoints, one by one."
  "Some of the issues are tough!"
- "We will capture some of the key points on the flip chart."
- After the discussion, participants will have an opportunity to provide input on their discussion by completing a form.

Explain Indicators of Success

"We'll build Indicators of Success together. These are actions or achievements that would demonstrate to us and to our leaders that progress is being made on the issue. They let the government know what you would like to see happen and even on what basis you will hold it accountable."

Explain Next Steps

"We'll discuss any next steps that you might like to take on this issue as a result of our discussion today."

Complete Citizen's Issue Summary Forms and Demographic Information Forms

"We'll read [number] statements about this issue and you will decide if you agree or disagree with each." Participants will also complete, the **Demographic Information Form** to assist with the analysis phase.

Participant List for further information

Participants can add their names and addresses to a Participant List if they want to receive information in the future about the issue and find out what is happening with their input.

Summarize the five things to do

1. Talk about the issue.
2. Hear the participants' personal points of view on each of the perspectives.
3. Listen to everyone else's point of view.
4. Complete the input forms to capture the discussion.
5. Talk about what might be done as a result of the discussion.

Get started

Ask participants one at a time to describe their own experiences with the issue and why they are interested in the subject. If no one wants to begin, start the dialogue by recounting your own experience.

Conducting the dialogue (about 1.5 hours)

Work through the perspectives on the issue

If some people have not had a chance to read the Issue Guide, invite them to do so as the discussion continues.

If someone has forgotten to bring their copy, pass out another one. Then:

- Invite a participant to read aloud the Issue Statement—page XX of the Issue Guide.
- Work through each of the perspectives—use the suggested questions to help keep the dialogue going.
- Talk about positive, as well as negative, things about each aspect of the issue.

Allow up to 30 minutes to work through each of the perspectives on the issue.

Use the flip chart to capture key messages or comments. Record comments as closely as possible.

Tips to keep the dialogue on track

- Try not to stray from the issue. If people start talking about another issue, suggest taking it off-line or talking about it after the session.
- Try to involve all participants in the dialogue.
- Encourage people to talk from their own personal experiences and feelings.
- Respect everyone's point of view. "We won't all agree about everything but let's try to understand one another."
- Don't take sides.
- Use humour.

Remember that it is important to hear all points of view. To prevent personal attacks remind participants to "Attack the problem, not the person." Or have the participants set up ground rules for the discussion at the beginning of the session.

- Remind participants that they do not have to agree with each other.
- There are no right or wrong answers.
- "If you don't agree with that view, perhaps you can explain why."
- Reassure people that it is normal to be unsure about a choice.

If there is a disagreement about facts:

- Refer to the Fact Sheets in the Participant's Issue Guide to help keep the discussion on track
- Remind participants that it is more important to talk about their feelings and attitudes about the issues than to debate the facts. You might say "It's okay not to have all the answers. We don't have to be experts to have important things to say."

What can you say if . . .

. . . Someone becomes upset with a point of view?

"Even though you don't agree with that statement, can you see why some people would agree with it?"

. . . Someone insists that only one view is "right?"

"How would that choice affect other people?"
"Let's hear from someone who has a different point of view on this."
"Why do you feel so strongly about this?"

. . . Someone is having trouble expressing themselves?

"Can you tell a personal story to show us what you mean?"
"Can you tell us what you are thinking about?"

. . . Someone is holding back?

"You've been very quiet. What are you thinking about all this?"

. . . Someone has been talking a lot?

"You've been very clear about that. Let's make sure everyone has a chance to tell us what they think."

Capturing the content (approximately 30 minutes)

This is an important part of the session. The data gathered will be collated with input from other groups and be part of the information government managers will use to make decisions on the issue.

Have the group decide on Indicators of Success

A way to get participants to come up with Indicators of Success is to invite them to talk about their vision in five years time with regard to the issue. The suggestions should be as specific as possible.

Indicators of Success are actions or achievements that will show that our society has been successful in addressing the issue we have been discussing. These messages regarding citizens' expectations are for Departments/Ministers to note. They indicate what governments will be held accountable for by citizens.

Examples are:
- It would take three months rather than a year to get an appointment for surgery.
- Youth unemployment is down to 5%.

Suggested questions:
- "What do we want to see happening five years from now?"
- "Based on what we have discussed, what would we like to see happen on this issue in the future?"
- "Suppose we were able to do exactly what you suggest. How would we know that things were moving in the right direction? What would tell us five years from now that the changes we want were happening?"

Record Indicators on the flip chart. Once all the ideas are on the flip chart (three or four Indicators of Success are fine), have the group decide which are most important.

After the dialogue, transfer the information to the **Moderator's Input Form** provided.

Invite the group to decide on some Next Steps

Suggested questions:
- How can we use what we have learned in this dialogue?
- What have we talked about that we can take to others?
- Based on our discussion, what could you do next, either on your own or as a group?

Moderator might prompt people with ideas like:
- Get together again to plan activities
- Hold another dialogue group on a different topic
- Write letters to your mayor or another politician, or to your newspaper
- Get more involved in your community doing what, when, and with whom

Let people know that it is really up to them to act on these next steps and that you will send their comments to [Name of Department/Agency] so that they will know what the group might do.

Record participants' Next Steps on a flip chart. Three or four ideas are fine. Have them identify the most important.

After the session, transfer the information to the **Moderator's Input Form** provided.

Have participants complete the Citizen's Issue Summary Form

Now is the opportunity for each person in the group to tell [Name of Department/Agency] what they think about the issue. Suggested introduction to the form:

> We've talked a lot and had a lot of good ideas. Now we want to take those ideas and use them to say something to [Name of Department/Agency]

Give each participant a copy of the **Citizen's Issue Summary** and **Demographic Information Form**. Begin by reading aloud each of the statements on the Issue Summary Form and ask people to indicate on their form whether they strongly agree, somewhat agree, are undecided, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. Be ready for surprises! Some people may want extra time. Some may have questions.

Ask each participant to complete the Demographic Information Form

Suggested introduction to the form:

> Collecting this information is important for [Name of Department/Agency]. Individuals should answer only those questions they want to answer.

Remind participants that all personal information is kept totally confidential and private.

Collect all the forms.

Participant List

If participants want follow-up information about [Name of Department/Agency/Issue], they can add their names and addresses to a participant list.

Wrap-up

Thank everyone for taking part. The session is now over.

After the session (20 minutes)

Complete the Moderator's Input Form

Package the materials.

Things to send to [Name of Department/Agency]:

- **Flip chart notes** from the discussion of the three viewpoints on the issue
- **Citizen's Issue Summary and Demographic Information Forms**
- **Participant List of names and addresses**
- **Moderator's Input Form**
  - Group's **Indicators of Success** for five years from now
  - Group's **Next Steps**
  - Moderator's thoughts on the dialogue

Send this material back to [Name of Department/Agency] at the following address:

Name
Street Address
City, Province, Postal Code

Thank you!

Appendix 1: Sample Citizen's Agenda

Citizen's Agenda for a Dialogue Group
[Name of Department/Agency]
[Issue]

1. Before the dialogue - 20 minutes

- If you have not read the **Issue Guide**, you can do so as people arrive.
- The moderator will explain how the dialogue works.
- You will be invited to introduce yourself and talk about your personal experience with the subject.

2. The dialogue - 2 hours

- Participants will discuss three **viewpoints** on the **issue** and say what they think about each of them.
- The moderator will write down comments on a flip chart.
- You will be asked to think of **Indicators of Success**—things that your group wants to see happening five years from now.
- There will be a short discussion on what **Next Steps** your group might like to take on the issue.
- At the end of the dialogue, you will be asked to decide whether you agree or disagree with some statements on an **Issue Summary Form** and you will be invited to tell us about yourself on a **Demographic Information Form**. The information on these forms is anonymous.

3. The wrap-up

- If you want further information about the topic or the Department/Agency, leave us your name and address.

Welcome to [Name of Department/Agency/Issue] public dialogue!

I hope you will enjoy your dialogue. This is a chance for you to discuss an important issue—to look at some of the choices that we need to make, and to talk about them in-depth with other Canadians. It is a chance to have a say in shaping our country. You don't have to be an expert to know what you **want**. You don't have to be a great speaker to **say** what you want. And you don't have to be a powerful person to **be heard**.

Here at [Name of Department/Agency], we have a special interest in what you say. As a [qualities of agency], we want to know what people across Canada think. We use what you tell us [how]. It is only when politicians and others know what people in Canada really want that we can [...] Our work begins with you.

Thank you for taking part!

Person
Department/Agency

Appendix 2:
Sample Backgrounder on
Public Dialogue

You Are the Expert
On [insert name of issue]

Most of us want to be more involved in shaping the future of our society.

Day-to-day life is busy, leaving little time to think our way through the big issues. We don't think we have all the facts we need to tell people what we really want.

But, you don't need a lot of time to make a great contribution—just a few hours at a "dialogue group"—where you can have the satisfaction of talking with other people who care about the same things you do.

What is it?

It's not a debate, it's a *dialogue*.

Public dialogue brings people together in small groups to talk about issues that matter. Each group includes a moderator and eight to ten citizens.

It is **what** they talk about, **how** they talk about it, and **what is done with what they** say that makes public dialogue different.

Three things stand out in opinion polls taken in Canada over the past 15 years.

One, people want changes in the way governments run social programs like Employment Insurance or the health care system. **Two**, they want to be involved in making those changes. **Three**, they feel unable to make the changes they want.

The desire for change, the thirst to be involved, the feelings of alienation and frustration—these are some of the things that can be addressed by participating in a public dialogue group.

Source: *Exploring Canadian Values, A Synthesis Report*, Suzanne Peters, CPRN, 1995.

How people talk is a **dialogue**—everyone gets to have their say and everyone listens. The participants explore what others think and their own beliefs. They don't score debating points. They don't even have to come to conclusions about anything.

They **do** deal with some tough questions. How far should governments go in helping people? Do we believe in people looking after themselves? Can we afford everything we want?

People report that they like these dialogue groups. They find the discussions challenging and stimulating. They welcome the chance to say what they think and to learn from others. As one participant put it: "We have a responsibility as human beings in this country to take care of ourselves, to be educated, to be aware, and to contribute."

On a second level, public dialogue is a research tool. It's a way for policy makers and governments to find out what Canadians hold most dear.

Often, governments have to rely on opinion polls for this information. Polls are a quick and useful way to find out what people are thinking. They give us a "snapshot" of what people think about a specific issue at a given moment in time.

The problem is that public opinion can turn on a dime. Opinion polls are based on what people say about a topic when they **don't** have the time to learn about it and think about it.

You can't build important social programs—like the health care system, for example—based on opinions that people express in polls.

The basis of decisions on important questions has to be stronger. The decisions should take more into account what people really believe and what **values** they hold.

Who should participate?

Everyone! People from different regions, men and women, people just starting out in life, seniors, people with high incomes and people living on low incomes, people who live in cities or rural areas, people of different cultural backgrounds, Aboriginal people, and new Canadians.

Why do it?

Why does it matter that we think about and talk about our core values? It is only when politicians and other decision makers know what we really want that we can create decisions that make sense.

In fact, dialogue groups have been called a new form of democracy. That's because they give ordinary people a say in what their governments do—**you don't have to be an expert to know what you think** or what you want.

What do we really believe?

As it turns out, information about people's values is difficult to get. That's because most people find it hard to talk about their values. They may not have thought much about them, or even tried to put them into words. A dialogue group is a good way to find out, test out and talk out what we really think and want.

What happens after?

In a dialogue, people get all the information they need to have a good discussion about some tough choices our society faces, choices that will affect our future. They get the time to work through situations where people are likely to have different opinions.

At the end of the dialogue session, the discussion is summarized and people say what they would need to see five years from now to show that Canada is making progress toward the society they want.

[Name of Department/Agency] uses this information in its research and reports to [leaders in governments, ...]

This knowledge about the way Canadians think is included in [.........]

Your participation in a dialogue is powerful evidence that Canadians are serious about continuing to build our society.

Appendix 3:
Checklist for the Moderator

To prepare yourself for moderating a dialogue group on [Name of issue] read the Moderator's Guide as often as necessary for you to become comfortable with the format. As moderator, you have activities to do before, during and after the dialogue.

Each step is described in detail in the Moderator's Guide.

> **We can help**
> **If you are uncertain about any point in this Guide, call [Name of Department/ Agency and contact person] at 1-800 -**

Preparing to Moderate a Dialogue Group

❏ Read the *Moderator's Guide*.
❏ Book space.
❏ Arrange and confirm participants.
❏ Photocopy the *Agenda* and *Citizen's Issue Guide*. Send them, in advance, to participants.
❏ Photocopy for each participant the *Citizen's Issue Summary Form* and *Demographic Information Form*.

Conduct Dialogue

❏ Discuss each of the perspectives as outlined in the Moderator's Issue Guide.
❏ Use a flip chart to record the discussion.

Collect Data for [Department/Agency]

❏ Distribute forms   *Citizen's Issue Summary*
   and complete   *Demographic Information Form*
❏ Distribute   *Participant List*
❏ Collect completed forms
❏ Complete   *Moderator's Input Form*

Send data to the [Department/Agency]

❏ Send forms and flip chart notes to [Name of Department/Agency]

Appendix 4:
Frequently Asked Questions

This section identifies some of the questions that are often asked about public dialogue, and provides some answers.

A. Questions which citizens may have about public dialogue

Why should I participate?

There are a couple of reasons to participate in a dialogue group.

1. You can help to change things.
   We have a special interest in what you have to say. We want to know what people across Canada think about the important issues that face us. It is only when politicians and others know what citizens really want that better decisions can be made. [Name of Department/Agency] uses what you tell us in our work and shares it with others. The information may be used to prepare reports, make policy recommendations and provide information to departmental and elected officials. Public dialogue groups are one way we gather information. We also draw on other kinds of information, such as policy research, polls, and statistical material. We rely on public dialogue to enhance and complement this information.

2. Dialogue groups are enjoyable/satisfying/fun.
   People have told us that they like dialogue groups. They find the discussions challenging and stimulating. They report that they welcome the chance to say what they think and to learn from others.

Who is paying for this?

We [Name of Department/Agency] are. We have devoted a portion of our budget to finding out what people in Canada are thinking about this issue.

How long does the average dialogue take?

Most dialogue groups take two to three hours, depending on the number of participants and how much they have to say. The process gives people plenty of time to talk about different ideas and to deliberate fully on the issues. An important aspect of public dialogue is ensuring that every participant has an opportunity to say what they think, to reflect on what others are saying, and to share knowledge on the issue.

How many people are in a dialogue group?

Dialogue groups work best with eight to ten people. With more, it is easy for some participants to "take a backseat" and remain quiet. With fewer people, there are likely to be fewer different perspectives; this can limit the scope of the discussion.

Who participates? How are they selected?

The objective of public dialogue groups is to understand the range and intensity of public views expressed on an issue. The idea is to hear from as many people as possible, involving people of different ages, backgrounds, levels of education, etc. Public dialogue organizers aim to talk with people who reflect the diversity that characterizes Canada. They work with organizations such as the YMCA, the YWCA, United Way, neighbourhood associations, community groups and volunteers who help them reach people in their communities, so that a broad base of participants has engaged in the public dialogue process.

The organizer (Department/Agency) identifies the range of groups of people who are most likely to be directly affected by the issue. It is also important to ensure that the groups have equal access to the process. And, as discussion groups are implemented, the coordinator and the researcher monitor the diversity of the groups and their participants to ensure that the broadest base of participants has been engaged in the public dialogue process.

Where do the dialogue groups take place?

[Name of Department/Agency] is holding discussions in [add information about where, in the country (provinces, north, south, etc.), they take place, as well as where, in the community (kitchen tables, living rooms, community halls, boardrooms, church basements, etc.)]

What will the Department /Agency do with the information?

After the moderator returns participants' input from the discussion, the information from each dialogue group is analysed [add what resources might be engaged to do the analysis and report writing] and added to information from all dialogue groups to provide overall feedback on the issue. Results are passed on to [Name of Department/Agency] to identify what they will do. [Need some specific "for instance" activities.]

How will participants know what you're doing with the information?

Citizens who are interested in how their input is being used can ask for [examples: newsletters which will be sent to participants xx times over the next six months], visit our Web site at (Web address), which will provide ongoing tracking and analysis of dialogue groups on this issue, or call our toll-free number at (phone number).

How do you decide what questions to ask on the Citizen's Issue Summary Forms?

Questions are decided upon and worded in a particular way in order to best capture the differing points of view and values on the issue which emerge from good dialogue. They are designed to elicit thoughtful responses, rather than top of mind reactions. Questions are posed from different perspectives in order to ensure that all the nuances of participants' contributions form part of the subsequent data analysis.

What do you mean by indicators of success?

Indicators of success are actions or decisions that would show that progress was being made on the issue. Departments and Ministers could use this information to gauge citizens' expectations of how government may be held accountable.

Examples from recent public dialogue groups held on the health care system include:

- Evidence of cost containment
- Greater focus on preventive approaches
- Reduced delays and waiting lists
- Expanded coverage for more services
- Increased funding for alternative medicine
- Support more community-based care options
- Work toward creating a healthier environment

Why is demographic information relevant?

Age, gender, background, education, employment, where people go for most of their information on an issue—information about these things helps us to find out whether different groups of people in different regions of the country view the issues in similar or different ways. As well, this information tells us if we are accomplishing our goal of involving Canadians from all walks of life and backgrounds.

B. Questions which Departments/Agencies may have about citizen engagement and the value of public dialogue.

Why public dialogue?

The purpose of public dialogue is to help bring policy into better alignment with the values of citizens. There has been a dramatic shift over the past three decades from trust in governments to mistrust. At the same time, citizens are insisting on a stronger voice; they want more of a say in the decisions that affect their lives. Traditional forms of communication with elected officials and government agencies no longer seem to satisfy citizens' desire for involvement, whereas public dialogue can be both a satisfying process for participants, and a two-way communication tool with a concrete and tangible outcome.

Public dialogue is a structured process that allows citizens to discuss complex policy issues and to struggle with the inherent tensions and trade-offs. It can help citizens understand what policy makers must do, and it can help policy makers understand what concerns citizens. Often creative suggestions and solutions emerge.

What kinds of issues are suited to public dialogue?

Public dialogue is suited for complex and controversial issues, issues needing a sophisticated exploration of potential trade-offs, or deeper understanding of changing values before action plans are formulated, or when government needs citizen commitment to face a complex challenge. Ideally, public dialogue takes place early in the policy development process. Media-created snapshots and sound bites tend to polarize opinion, creating controversy in place of complexity. Policy making, however, often requires a creative synthesis of perspectives, rather than a choice between them. This demands a deeper understanding of core values for guidance, which, in turn, requires a process which provides time and space for deeper reflection and deliberation. Public dialogue can provide this time and space, and offer enriched material to inform policy making.

How is public dialogue different from a focus group or study circle?

Public dialogue strives to inform policy development and decision making with an expression of citizens' values. It emphasizes in-depth, reflective discussions where participants explore the tensions embedded in different views. The process respects all the views as it allows the underlying values to surface and common ground to emerge. Public dialogue does not force artificial choices but rather works toward finding a synthesis of a number of perspectives. Background information presents several diverse perspectives on an issue, lending a layer of complexity and struggle to the issue. The information collected is grounded in solid, social science research methodology. Finally, participants identify potential indicators of success and suggest areas where they would like to initiate changes, thereby locating themselves in potential outcomes.

Don't people have to know about the issue in order to talk about it?

To prepare for the dialogue group, citizens receive background information, often in the form of Fact Sheets, two or three pages of information about the issue. And most people have some personal experience related to the issue, which is what makes it relevant and important. At the same time, the most important policy issues depend on reconciling competing goals and values. Factual information and technical expertise is either secondary or can be readily provided.

How long does this process take from beginning to end?

A credible job can be done in about 40 weeks, from the time a department decides to undertake a public dialogue process to the completion of the analysis and interpretation of results. In general, it is estimated that planning the process and developing and pre-testing materials should take a minimum of 12 weeks; implementation of 50 public dialogue groups could take at least 20 weeks; analysis and interpretation could take a minimum of 4 weeks. Additional time must be considered for dissemination of results and for feedback to citizens.

Appendix 5:
Other tools for citizen engagement

Search conferences, citizen juries, deliberative polling, study circles and public dialogue are all key tools for citizen engagement. All five share the identifying characteristics of citizen engagement processes:

- They provide time and space for in-depth, deliberative discussions that encourage reflection and learning
- They focus on moral choices—not right or wrong answers
- They assume citizens will add value
- The process is supported by factual information
- They can be ongoing processes

Search Conferences

Search conferences were first used in the 1960s as a participatory, strategic planning and community development tool. Search conferences enable a large group to achieve a common vision, mission or mandate. According to Emery and Purser, "typically, twenty to thirty-five people from a community or organization work progressively for two to three days on planning tasks, primarily in large-group plenary sessions. They develop long-term strategic visions, achievable goals, and concrete action plans."[1]

Search conferences focus on developing a shared vision. The search process is characterized by unstructured dialogue and reflection among participants, providing opportunities for people's areas of interest and expertise to come together in new and creative ways. Outcomes of the conference are completely undetermined at the outset and might include: ideal futures, short and long range plans, mission statements, new programs, increased funding, partnerships, coalitions, innovative solutions, new leadership patterns and a high commitment to action.

Citizen Juries

Citizen juries bring together a small number of randomly selected citizens to form a jury with the task of rendering a decision on a particular issue, or producing recommendations to direct decision making. Jury members call forward expert witnesses and then deliberate for a period of time before arriving at their recommendations. The conclusions or recommendations the jury reaches are considered to represent what any member of the public would put forward if she or he had the time to investigate the issue in some depth.

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[1] Emery, Merrelyn and Purser, Ronald. *The Search Conference*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996. As quoted in O'Hara, Kathy. *Securing the Social Union*. (Study No. CPRN/02). Canadian Policy research Networks. Ottawa: 1998.

National Forum on Climate Change, 1994

In Canada, this technique was popularized in 1994 with the National Forum on Climate Change. The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy (NRTEE) brought together a citizen jury of 25 Canadians to create the National Forum on Climate Change. The NRTEE sought to ensure credibility of the process by having the jury composed of a stratified, random sample of Order of Canada recipients, thus differing significantly from the "ordinary citizen" approach of most citizen juries. The Forum met on February 16 and 17, March 9 and 10 and from April 5 to 7, 1994, in Ottawa. Its deliberations were open to the media and television audiences. The Forum was initially guided by a set of key questions and its overall purpose was to produce a declaration to assist Canadians by providing an objective and unbiased statement of the climate change challenge.

Deliberative Polling

Deliberative polling combines the opinion poll with policy conferences and workshops. A national random sample of citizens is brought together for a short period of time (usually two to three days, but can be as long as seven days) to discuss an issue. At the beginning of the process, participants' opinions are surveyed and participants are provided with materials that have been carefully prepared to present factual information in a non-biased way. Throughout the activity, participants have opportunities to ask questions of experts as well as elected representatives, and take part in plenary and small-group sessions.

At the conclusion of the process, participants are polled on their opinions again to determine how their opinions might have changed as a result of their involvement in the process. Like citizen juries, it is felt that these informed views represent "the considered judgements of the public," the views the entire country would come to if it had the same experience of behaving more like ideal citizens immersed in the issues for an extended period.[2]

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[2] Fishkin, James S. The Voice of the People: Public Opinion and Democracy. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

Assembly '96

O'Hara describes one of the first Canadian experiences with deliberative polling, Assembly '96.[3] In August 1996, Canada West Foundation, the Council for Canadian Unity, and the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council organized Assembly '96. A random sample of 97 young Canadians were brought together for seven days to discuss Canadian values, the economy, national unity, and representation and participation.

Participants began the assembly by completing a survey and then read workbooks on the issues and listened to some 18 experts. They then spent about half the 40 hours of the assembly in workshops, discussing the four issues. At the end they completed a second survey.

In the final survey, almost 80% of participants reported a change in their opinions. The summary report of Assembly '96 indicates that of that 80%, 65% said it was their attitudes towards national unity that had changed: support for some type of undefined special status for Quebec grew from under 10% to almost a third. Support for the more familiar "distinct society" also increased significantly from 34 to 74%.

Study Circles

Study circles bring together small groups of people to learn about, discuss, deliberate and develop options and preferences concerning a policy issue or set of issues. Study circles require participants to think through trade-offs and choices between a number of policy options and directions. Study circles are most effectively organized by an individual with experience and skills in adult learning, continuing education or community consultation processes, and facilitated by someone experienced in moderating group discussions and dealing with controversial subject material.

Before the study circle is convened, workbooks are sent to those participants who have been recruited or self-selected. Study circles then meet over a period of weeks or months and progress through three phases of a dialogue process: participants reflect on how an issue affects them individually, participants consider what others say about the issue and, finally, after dialogue and deliberation, actions or recommendations are identified.

Sterne describes study circles as "well-tested, practical and effective methods for adult learning and social change; it is small-group democracy in action–voluntary, informal and highly participatory."[4]

The Immigration Policy Review (1994) and the National Forum on Health (1995-1996) were two federal consultations of national scope that used study circles as a central part of the public involvement process. Each process was effective in building citizen capacity for deliberation and bringing the public and decision makers together over what are sometimes highly charged and complex issues.

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[3] Excerpt from O'Hara, Kathy. Securing the Social Union. (Study No. CPRN/02). Ottawa: Canadian Policy research Networks, 1998.'

[4] Sterne, Peter. *Public Consultation Guide: Changing the Relationship Between Government and Canadians.*(Management Practices No. 19). Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Management Development, 1997.

Immigration Policy Review, 1994

Early in 1994, a broad public consultation on immigration was launched. It involved bilateral consultation meetings, working groups, workshops, conferences and study circles. Study circles were one of the most important phases of the overall consultation and throughout the months of June and July, 58 study circles were held in six urban centres across Canada. The study circles were organized by Democracy Education Network, a non-profit, non-governmental organization. More than 1100 people participated in study circles. Though skeptical at first, people chose to participate because they believed the circles offered an opportunity to speak to the government and to be heard.[5]

The immigration consultation embodied a fundamental characteristic of all effective engagement processes: it engaged organizations and individuals in an iterative and educational process that left many participants with a greater capacity to analyse and make informed decisions about policy issues than they had upon entering the process. It also paved the way for discussion surrounding immigration policy.

National Forum on Health, 1995 - 1996

Between November 1995 and April 1996, study circles were held in 34 different communities. Interested individuals were asked to register in advance and commit to approximately nine hours of their time, usually over two to three sessions. A private firm was contracted to organize the consultation and work with local communities to set up the groups. By the end of the first phase, 71 groups had been expertly facilitated and 1300 Canadians involved.

In the end, the study circle process used during the Forum illustrated that Canadians are willing to commit a considerable amount of time to policy discussions that are of meaning and value to them. Further, the deliberative technique used in the study circles was successful in generating informed and constructive directions for policy change. Equally important is that participants felt ownership for the Forum's proposed directions and, as such, realized they had a role to play in implementing the directions and ensuring government took action.

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[5] Sterne, Peter. *Public Consultation Guide: Changing the Relationships Between Government and Canadians.*(Management Practices No. 19). Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Management Development, 1997.

Appendix Six:
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