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ABSTRACT

          In Canada and elsewhere, the shift from more horizontal
models of governance and toward a more organized, diverse, and empowered
civil society has sparked renewed interest in citizen involvement. The
various dimensions of citizen involvement in policy processes are as follows:
(1) mobilizing interest; (2) claims making; (3) knowledge acquisition; (4)
spanning and bridging; (5) convening and deliberating; (6) community capacity
building; (7) analysis and synthesis; and (8) transparency and feedback.
These dimensions play various roles in the following stages of the policy
process: (1) problem identification; (1) priority setting; (3) policy
formation and design; (4) passage of policy instruments; (5) implementation;
and (6) evaluation. An analysis of the adequacy of Canada's existing
political institutions in providing for the dimensions of citizen involvement
in each of these stages reveals that those institutions are not assuming as
effective a part in citizen involvement as they might. Possible types of
reforms to address this problem are as follows: (1) improving existing
institutions and processes and developing institutionalized mechanisms for
funding citizen involvement; (2) creating a new institution for citizen
engagement, such as a civic forum; (3) changing culture within government;
and (4) investing in civil society, including by promoting strong
associational networks and supporting capacity building in voluntary
organizations. (Contains 100 references.) (MN)

Family Network
Réseau de la famille

CPRN Discussion Paper

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Mapping the Links:
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Foreword

When CPRN asked a representative sample of Canadian citizens what matters for their quality of life, they named nine different policy domains, from health care to safe communities.[1] The domain that was at the top of the priority list was their *political rights*. Why, then, do so many studies also find that citizens are ambivalent, some would say apathetic, about their possibilities for being involved in the parliamentary system and in decisions that affect their lives?

There is a growing literature and much debate about the need to reform Canada's political institutions. It is, of course, important to ensure that legislatures are representative, that elections are fair and efficient, and that political parties play their roles effectively. Enhancing the legitimacy of these institutions would undoubtedly encourage more citizens to exercise their vote and to participate in the political process.

But there is another dimension to the question – that is, whether and how today's citizens, who are much more educated and independent minded than earlier generations, could be more directly involved in the policy process, as individuals and as members of civil society organizations. Exploring and promoting new forms of citizen involvement occupies everyone from public servants and Members of Parliament to advocacy and community groups and ordinary citizens across the country.

CPRN asked Susan Phillips to explore this complicated matter by examining more fully how citizens are and might be involved in policy processes. With the assistance of Michal Orsini, she chose to map the links among eight dimensions of citizen involvement, three key political institutions, and six stages of the policy process. In doing so, the authors look first at the adequacy of existing institutions, including parliamentary committees, elected representatives, and political parties. Arguing that multiple routes for representation and participation remain one of the strengths of liberal democracy, they then make a number of suggestions for reform to improve existing institutions, to strengthen the capacity of governments and civil society organizations to engage on policy issues, and to create new processes or institutions to support a stronger role for citizens at the appropriate times in the policy process.

On behalf of CPRN, I wish to thank the authors for their thoughtful review of the possibilities, as well as the group of experts who read the paper and provided their advice at a half-day workshop held February 11, 2002. Thanks also go to Jane Jenson, Director of the Family Network and Karen Jackson, former Director of Public Involvement for their guidance for the project.

Judith Maxwell
April 2002

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[1] Canadian Policy Research Networks, *Indicators of Quality of Life in Canada: A Citizens' Prototype*, Summary of Results of Public Dialogue Sessions and Prototype of National Indicators, Quality of Life Indicators Project, April 2001.

Executive Summary

How to involve citizens in policy making is at the core of discussions over modernizing governance and building a stronger civil society. The renewed interest in citizen involvement is not a passing fad, but stems from shifts toward more horizontal models of governance and toward a more organized, diverse and empowered civil society. In addition, advances in communication technologies have created new potential for how citizens might be involved.

While there is no shortage of talk about the need to reduce the democratic deficit and involve citizens in policy processes, there is seemingly little in the way of genuine progress at the federal level in Canada. Part of the problem is conceptual. Both citizen involvement and policy processes tend to be conceived of as one dimensional, so it is difficult to pinpoint which institutions are failing in what aspects of citizen involvement, or to consider multiple, complementary paths for involvement.

This paper seeks to develop a fuller understanding of the multidimensional nature of citizen involvement and to assess the adequacy of contemporary practices of citizen involvement in Canada. We do this by mapping the links between eight dimensions of citizen involvement, three key political institutions, and six stages of the policy process. For each stage of policy, we assess the adequacy of existing political institutions in providing for the dimensions of citizen involvement important to that stage. Based on this assessment, the paper explores, in a practical way, how Canada's institutions might be reformed to enhance citizen involvement.

The focus of the paper is on the involvement of individual Canadians in policy processes. Nonetheless, we also demonstrate that the participation of civil society organizations is a vital, complementary process.

It is evident from this analysis that Canada's primary institutions are not assuming as effective a part in citizen involvement as they might. In particular, political parties, Members of Parliament and parliamentary committees play an unnecessarily weak role in involving citizens. The intergovernmental machinery, while increasingly important as a player, is as closed as ever to non-governmental actors. Although the public service has undertaken considerable public consultation, the consistency and manner in which this is done varies enormously across departments. In addition, current efforts at informal relationship building are being hindered by high levels of mobility within the federal public service. This forces interpersonal connections to be constantly re-established and trust rebuilt. On major policy issues, the standard template of public consultation is deployed, complete with all the problems that have come to be associated with it – government controls the agenda and who is invited; information flows in one direction; and the process is episodic and *ad hoc*. In sum, there is a need for significant reform to produce more effective means of engaging citizens.

Multiple routes for representation and participation are and will remain one of the strengths of liberal democracy. No single reform or institution will create a magic formula that satisfies the current demands for citizen involvement.

Four types of reform are recommended. The first is for improving existing institutions and processes, and developing institutionalized mechanisms for funding citizen involvement. However, tinkering with existing institutions may not be radical enough to bring about sustained interaction between governments and citizens. The second type of reform is to create a new institution for citizen engagement, such as a civic forum. Its visibility could be just the kind of signal required from the political centre of government to departments and to citizens to show that there is genuine interest in realizing more effective engagement at all stages of policy making. Third, a change in culture within government is also vital to ensure that citizen involvement comes to be seen as an integral part of policy processes. The final reform is an investment in civil society. This includes the promotion of strong associational networks and the support of capacity building in voluntary organizations, which themselves serve as sites of citizen involvement.

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I. Introduction

The challenge to involve citizens in policy processes is a central theme in discussions about modernizing governance. Talk about involving citizens and reducing the democratic deficit seems to be everywhere. For example, the *Social Union Framework Agreement* (SUFA), negotiated between the federal government, nine provinces and the territories in 1999, made explicit commitments – for the first time in an intergovernmental agreement – to provide "effective mechanisms for Canadians to participate in developing social priorities and reviewing outcomes" (SUFA, 1999: Section 3).[1] A major five-year initiative of the federal government to improve its relationship with the voluntary sector allocates almost one-third of its $95 million budget to helping departments improve the ways in which they interact with civil society organizations in policy and program development. The mandate of the Privy Council Office, the agency at the heart of federal governmental machinery, includes responsibility for enhancing the capacity of the public service to effectively engage Canadians. A large polling firm regularly measures the "influence gap," meaning the discrepancy between the extent to which citizens want to have an influence on public policy and the degree to which Canadian governments provide such opportunities.

Enthusiasm for the idea that citizens could and should be involved in policy processes is not new. The public participation movement in urban planning that began in the late 1960s marked a watershed in making concerted efforts to open insular, expert-based, rational planning processes to citizens and civil society organizations (Filion, 1999; Stroick, 1998). Sherry Arnstein's classic article on the ladder of citizen participation that condemned token approaches to involvement was published in 1969. The Berger Inquiry on the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline, often hailed as a major innovation in creating a new kind of public space for hearing from individual citizens and particularly from marginalized peoples, took place almost 30 years ago (see Patten, 2001).

After more than a generation of experimentation with a variety of means of consulting with and involving the public, interest in citizen participation has recently taken on renewed prominence in Canadian political discourse. Although the criticisms made by Arnstein (1969) still have relevance, and the innovative potential raised by the Berger Inquiry has never been fully realized, the current interest in citizen involvement is not just playing catch-up with old criticisms and unmet potential. Rather, it is a response to fundamental shifts in ways of governing and in the character of civil society. Both seek to embed governance practices in civil society to a fuller extent.

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[1] Commonly referred to as the *Social Union Framework Agreement* or SUFA, the agreement is actually called *A Framework to Improve the Social Union for Canadians* (SUFA, 1999).

One result of this renewed interest is a conscious shift in language, from *citizen involvement* or *citizen participation* to *citizen engagement*. Although new language has been coined and talk about it is extensive, this does not imply that either governments or citizens have a clear understanding of what citizen involvement means in the current context, how to do it, or what the consequences might be. The overarching purpose of this paper, then, is to generate some clarity and order in conversations about citizen involvement.

We begin by recognizing that the participation of citizens in policy processes may have multiple objectives. These include providing an opportunity for citizens to make policy demands, allowing governments to obtain social knowledge based on the experience of individuals and communities, or contributing to community development (see O'Hara, with Cox, 1998: Chapter 6). Therefore, the first goal of this paper is to develop a fuller understanding of the multidimensional nature of citizen involvement, as well as the reasons for current attention to it.

The policy processes in which citizens are involved are not all the same and, consequently, the forms of involvement used may differ across policy stages. The reasons and mechanisms for involving citizens at the stage of identifying policy problems, for instance, may be quite different from those at the later stages of policy design or implementation. So, too, do different political institutions have greater responsibilities at some stages of the policy process than at others. Our second goal, then, is to link the various *dimensions of citizen involvement* to the *stages of the policy process*, and to assess whether existing institutions adequately provide for the involvement of citizens.

Liberal democracies have always provided multiple routes to representation and the potential for political influence by citizens. Recognizing that governing at the beginning of the 21st century may present new challenges for effective citizen involvement in policy processes, our third goal is to explore, in a practical way, how Canada's institutions might be reformed to enhance citizen involvement. Can more effective means of involving citizens be accommodated by relatively minor adjustments to existing political institutions, or are dramatic changes to parties, Parliament and the public service required? If new institutions and mechanisms are needed, how might they link with existing forms of democratic representation and means of producing knowledge in policy processes?

The focus of the paper is on individual Canadians' involvement in policy processes. However, we also demonstrate that the participation of civil society organizations is a vital, complementary process. Indeed, one of the best ways to enhance the participation of individuals is through the creation of strong associational networks.

II. The Language and Lineage of Citizen Involvement

Naming – On Clarifying Concepts

How citizens are involved in policy processes can be differentiated in one key way – whether government initiates opportunities for participation and convenes citizens, or whether citizens are the initiators. Participation by citizens or civil society organizations that is wholly uninvited is usually referred to as *advocacy*, and is welcomed to varying degrees depending on the actors involved, the issue at hand, and the tactics chosen. In addition to advocacy, it has become increasingly popular for citizens or non-governmental organizations such as think tanks to host processes by which citizens can come together to discuss public policy, and to which government representatives might be invited.[2]

More significant for purposes of this paper are the occasions for citizen involvement, outside of elections, that are organized, convened and paid for by government.[3] These government-convened processes have become known at the federal level in Canada as *public consultation* exercises. The perspective and even the language of public consultation is state centred, implying that the primary motivation is to obtain information from citizens or to inform citizens about pending government action. As a process, public consultation is generally episodic in nature, that is, it is focussed on a particular issue and framed as a specific event or series of events that occur in a relatively short time period. The primary characteristic of public consultation, however, is that government maintains control over the agenda, the invitees, and the decisions about how information obtained will be used in decision-making. As we will see, current practices of public consultation have come to be seen by many citizens as problematic – indeed, as a means of limiting rather than encouraging democratic participation – due to the degree of control exercised by government.

In recent years, a new term, *citizen engagement*, has entered the lexicon of ways to describe how citizens might be involved in policy processes. It is a self-conscious term and the shift in language is both intentional and meaningful. First, it is meant to be less state centred by embodying both government- and citizen-convened involvement processes. More importantly, it emphasizes the importance of genuine two-way dialogue among citizens, and between citizens and governments. Citizen engagement refers to a particular type of involvement characterized by interactive and iterative processes of deliberation among citizens (and sometimes organizations), and between citizens and government officials. Its purpose is to contribute in meaningful ways to specific public policy decisions in a transparent and accountable manner (Graham and Phillips, 1998; Abele, *et al.*, 1998; Mendelsohn and McLean, 2000).[4]

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[2] Examples include the public dialogue project hosted by Canadian Policy Research Networks on The Society We Want and the "assured listening" that is part of the Romanow Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada.

[3] Involvement in a wide range of democratic practices such as voting, being a member of a political party, or joining an advocacy group is often referred to as *civic participation*.

[4] It is interesting to note that while *public* is interchangeable with *citizen* when used to modify "involvement" or "participation," it is unacceptable when applied to "engagement." The reason is that *engagement* necessarily implies the participation of individuals who are exercising their rights and responsibilities *as citizens*.

Citizen engagement would thus exclude many instances of public consultation because the latter does not produce a genuine dialogue, nor does it give citizens much real influence over policy outcomes. There is some debate about whether citizen engagement is limited to participation by individual citizens. A number of recent works have been careful to suggest that while individuals may be the focus of such engagement, representatives of organizations are not necessarily excluded from the process (Abele, *et al.*, 1998).

It is evident that the choice of language in this area can be sensitive and, indeed, often confusing. Although the focus of this paper is on government-convened forms of participation, we will use the more generic and neutral term *citizen involvement* or, equally, *citizen participation* to describe policy-related participation outside of electoral processes.[5] The intent in doing so is to avoid conjuring up a particular method or technique of participation and also to avoid the presumption of government control. One of the questions that we will be exploring in later sections of this paper is whether we need to move to more deliberative forms of citizen engagement and, if so, how this might be accomplished. Until we get to this question, however, we will use the language of citizen involvement.

Explaining the Renewed Interest in Citizen Involvement

What lies behind the renewed interest in citizen involvement? Rather than being a passing fad, such interest reflects certain fundamental changes in the nature of governing and in civil society, which began in the 1990s and are still unfolding. A number of these changes are summarized below, first for governance, then for civil society.

From Government to Governance

The governing process has been altered in significant ways by two broad but related trends. One is the shift from a top-down model of government to horizontal governance, which is the process of governing by public policy networks including public, private and voluntary sector actors (Lemieux, 2000; Jenson, 2001). Whereas a traditional top-down approach emphasizes control and uniformity, horizontal governance recognizes that governments alone may not have the capacity, knowledge or legitimacy to solve complex public policy problems in a diverse society. Therefore, it emphasizes collaboration and coordination. The second trend is the emergence of the philosophy of New Public Management.

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[5] In the late 1970s, such forms of involvement were often referred to as "citizen participation," this being the language used for the same concept in urban planning and environmental policy, where some of the greatest strides in methods for involving the public were being made. The language of *participation* was also made popular by the concept of "maximum feasible participation" that had been embedded in President Johnson's Great Society Programs. For a history of this period in the United States, see Sirianni and Friedland (2001). The techniques of citizen involvement are not discussed in depth in this paper as they have been addressed in detail elsewhere. See, for example, Wyman, Shulman, and Ham (2000); Vander Ploeg, McCormick, and Elton (1997); and Abele, *et al.* (1998).

The essence of New Public Management is to encourage governments to *steer* not *row*, meaning that they should set basic priorities and policy directions, but that the actual delivery of services might be better done by the private or voluntary sectors. New Public Management has sparked alternative forms of service delivery such as contracting out, partnerships, privatization, the creation of arm's length special operating agencies, and so on (see Aucoin, 1995; Barzelay, 2001; and Tupper, 2001). New Public Management also favours pushing more program decision-making from the centre of government to front-line bureaucrats. The preference for smaller government inherent in New Public Management means that most Canadian governments, even in times of budget surpluses, are choosing to stick to their core business, while leaving the rest to non-governmental actors.

The implications of these changes for governments' relationships with citizens and civil society are significant. A smaller public service, shrunk in a relatively short period of time, has led to a significant loss of policy capacity and institutional memory (Savoie, 1999b; Bradford, 1999). One consequence of contracting out and other new forms of service delivery is that the knowledge acquired through direct service delivery is lost to the public sector. Governments increasingly must rely on the input of both *expert* and *experiential* knowledge from voluntary organizations and citizens to supplement their limited in-house capacity.

At the same time, vacancies in the public service caused mainly by retirements have increased opportunities for advancement, with the result that internal mobility is very high (see Canadian Heritage and Public Service Commission, 2000). Such high levels of mobility are impairing the informal relationship building upon which much of the communication between government and civil society has traditionally depended. This occurred when public servants called upon key individuals or organizational representatives in a community for information and advice, and were available and receptive to hear their concerns. With public servants regularly on the move, there is little time to build the trust that is the glue of such relationships. This is happening not only at the individual level but also at the institutional level. The federal government's regional offices, which had once been important sources of ground intelligence and relationship building with local communities, have become more centre-directed over the last decade (Jenson and Phillips, 1996).

A third shift in governing that has provoked increased interest in citizen involvement is the massive push for increased accountability, which is manifest both through requirements for outcome measurement and through an explosion of auditing of third-party contracts and contribution agreements. In theory, such accountability provides a greater role for citizens as watchdogs. The reality is quite different, however. As Power (1997: 13) observes, the "audit explosion" that has gripped many liberal democracies is far from contributing to transparency and democracy. "Many audit reports communicate little more than the fact that an audit has been done and the reader is left to decode specialized and cautious expressions of opinion." SUFA is a prime example of the gap between the goals and reality of a greater role for citizens in accountability regimes (see Phillips, 2001). It required all governments to report publicly on outcome measures and to provide opportunities for citizens to participate in reviewing outcomes (Lazar, 2000: 109). SUFA's three-year life saw varying degrees of compliance with the reporting requirements, but very little in the way of systematic opportunities for citizen involvement in the review process.

Changes in Civil Society

The organization of civil society and the structure of social and political relations within it also condition the level of interest in and capacity of citizens to be involved in meaningful ways in both traditional democratic processes and new forms of governance. The convergence of several long-term trends in civil society has contributed to the renewed interest in citizen involvement. A basic factor is rising education levels. It is well established that participation in civic affairs increases in direct measure to education levels and is particularly influenced by levels of post-secondary education (Hall, 1999; Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, *et al.*, 1999).

Public opinion polls show that Canadians have a strong interest in participating in policy processes and that they want to see more of their values reflected in government. The Rethinking Citizen Engagement survey conducted by Ekos Research reports that the general public perceives, much more strongly than do decision-makers, a need to engage citizens in public policy issues (see Graves, 1999).[6] The paradox is that, while Canadian citizens still believe government has a role in improving their lives, they have declining levels of trust and confidence in it. Such decline is evident in many other countries (Putnam, Pharr, and Dalton, 2000). Canadians' level of trust in government is currently no lower than in most other advanced democracies, but as Graves (1999: 40) argues, the rate of decline in levels of trust in Canada may have been more precipitous (see also Nevitte, 2000: S84).[7] Restoration of the public's trust and confidence in government became a major preoccupation of senior public servants in Ottawa in the late 1990s (Potter, 2000: 115-116) and a driving force behind rethinking the effectiveness with which governments involve citizens in policy.

Ethnocultural and other forms of diversity have also enhanced interest in citizen involvement because they make the realities of political exclusion more palpable. Traditional representative democracy, which is based on majoritarian principles, excludes minorities, and the greater the divergence of minority groups from the preferences of the majority, the greater the exclusion. As Anne Phillips argues, demands for the political inclusion of marginalized groups constitute a major reframing of democratic equality. She suggests "the separation between 'who' and 'what' is to be represented, and the subordination of the first to the second is very much up for question" (Phillips, 1995: 5). In her view, the *politics of ideas* is being challenged by an alternative *politics of presence*, which stresses the significance of who is making representation. The Canadian diversity model, as noted by Jenson and Papillon (2000: 17), attaches cultural rights to individuals, not to groups. When this Canadian approach to diversity meets the politics of presence, the result is an increased interest in direct participation by individuals who are representing themselves.

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[6] This is evident in how decision-makers compared to the public at large when responding to the statement: "The Government of Canada must place much more emphasis on consulting citizens." Only 66 percent of decision-makers indicated agreement, while 87 percent of the general public agreed (Graves, 1999: 50).

[7] There is some disagreement over whether lack of trust should be seen as a serious problem for democracy. Warren (1999: 348) notes that declining forms of trust in government "may indicate that citizens are becoming more sophisticated about judging government officials, and often find them untrustworthy."

It should be noted that Canada is not only a diverse society in cultural terms, but geographically as well, which is played out largely in the context of urban life (Graham and Phillips, with Maslove, 1998). In spite of the economic and cultural significance of our cities, few issues are dealt with as explicitly *urban* issues. There is, however, an emerging concern by the federal government that avoidance of urban issues means that federal programs will be ineffective. As Andrew (2001: 105) notes, "the problem is that this federal concern is right – they do not understand urban issues, they do not understand how local communities operate and, therefore, are not able to support community action effectively." The recognition of the urban fact is prompting both federal and provincial governments to involve urban community leaders and citizens in more direct dialogue about policy issues affecting the major cities.

Finally, civil society is becoming more organized, as reflected both in numbers of associations and their changing character. The number of voluntary and advocacy organizations has risen steadily over the past 30 years to a current total of roughly 175,000 (Hall and Banting, 2000: 11). A more subtle change has been in their character, that is, in how organizations interpret their roles and responsibilities. In particular, voluntary organizations, even traditional service organizations, are becoming more politicized as they take on more responsibilities downloaded from governments. They are interested not only in delivering services but in having a say in the policies and funding decisions that determine their capacity to function effectively.

Affecting both civil society and the nature of governing are the changes brought by technology.[8] Communications technologies now afford opportunities for fast, direct communication between almost any citizen and elected officials and public servants. There is a considerable range of opinion on the nature of the impact that technology is having on citizen involvement and on democracy more broadly. At one extreme are claims that technology is fundamentally transforming representative democracy as we know it (see Tapscott, 1999). "People who have grown up with the information society will no longer accept the ossified procedures of representative democracy, the reliance upon hierarchies and authoritative decision-making structures. Instead, they will insist on networks, interactivity, responsiveness and open discussion" (Alexander, 2001; Thomas, 2000: 85). Such communication poses real dilemmas for government, however. One problem is that "government" cannot type. While the technology permits individual government officials to respond directly to citizens, the rules of accountability and the determination of what constitutes a formal response constrain the use of technology. In general, the consensus seems to be that the impact of technology has been more limited than expected (Thomas, 2000; MacIvor, 1996) but that future change may be enormous and not entirely predictable.[9]

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[8] Of course, *technology* is a diverse set of varied information and communication technologies that include the Internet and Web-enabled applications, and which have vastly expanded the ability of both governments and civil society organizations to gather information and communicate about themselves. Applications include e-mail for direct interpersonal communication; multi-media kiosks for improved customer service; new and sophisticated polling, telemarketing, and direct mail technologies; video-conferencing to allow multiple parties at a distance to participate in real time discussions; and "televoting" to facilitate electronic referenda and voting by a mass membership in political parties or other organizations.

[9] In her study of the use of "televoting" in political parties, MacIvor (1996) suggests that the practice has actually reduced membership participation in the selection of party leaders, as turnout rates for televoting within parties

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The result of these broad changes in governance and in civil society is to generate renewed interest in citizen involvement and, specifically, to create a movement for initiating a particular kind of involvement that has come to be known as citizen engagement. The shift in language is not mere rhetoric. Rather, it reflects a desire to establish ongoing interaction between governments and citizens that not only informs policy but builds more capable citizens and stronger communities. As we think about engaging citizens in an ongoing dialogue, we are compelled to think about the multidimensional nature of the citizen involvement process. In the next section, we explore these various dimensions.

Eight Key Dimensions of Citizen Involvement

One obvious reason to involve citizens in policy processes is to advance the goal of producing *better policy*. By providing mechanisms through which citizens and their organizations can make claims for certain policy outcomes and through which information about public values, preferences, and priorities can be transferred, the resulting policy is more likely to achieve its intended objectives and be perceived as legitimate. In addition to bringing new and more varied forms of knowledge to policy processes, the value of active civic participation for fostering *more responsible citizenship* has been claimed by quite different schools of thought, ranging from the liberal to the communitarian (Kymlicka and Norman, 1995: 292-300; Jenson and Papillon, 2000: 36-39). Their point of convergence is that, through participation, citizens learn and practise the skills of citizenship – becoming more informed about issues, debating positions, and making compromises, for example.

While those who promote citizen involvement have generally justified it on one of these two grounds, it is important to recognize that citizen involvement is not an either/or dichotomy – *either* about better policy information gathering *or* about citizenship (Cooke, 2000). Nor is it limited to these two possible outcomes. Citizen involvement is also argued to contribute to building *stronger communities* and a more vibrant civil society. This perspective has both long-standing and recent roots. The older school of thought focussed on community development and can be traced back to Saul Alinsky's advocacy of community empowerment in the 1930s and 1940s (Alinsky, 1969), and the idea of the state as social animator that was popular in Canada in the 1960s and 1970s.[10] In the 1990s, planning for community development gave way to concerns over the lack of public trust in government. In this context, interest in citizen participation was sometimes seen as a means of building social capital – the horizontal networks produced by voluntary action that generate trust for fellow citizens and for government (Putnam, 2000). Although the former implies a considerably more significant role for the state than the latter, the ultimate goal of both is to contribute to a revived pluralism and more vibrant civil society by encouraging participation (Phillips, 1995: 151; Schlosberg, 1998: 605; Young, 2000: 132).

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dropped from 49 to 20 percent. The reason, she speculates, points to the importance of direct interpersonal contact. Without the excitement of gathering with others on the convention floor, people did not bother to vote.

[10] The idea of using the state as a social animator for community development led the federal government to create the Company of Young Canadians in the mid-1960s, in which young people were sent into disadvantaged communities in order to identify local needs, develop indigenous leadership skills, and promote community empowerment. Although it had brief popularity at the federal level, the notion found greater resonance at the regional level, particularly as part of the Antigonish movement, and was sustained for a longer period in Quebec.

Recognition of the multiple benefits of citizen involvement means that the process should also be conceived as being multifaceted. Different dimensions of citizen involvement contribute in various ways to the combined benefits of producing better policy, more responsible citizenship, and stronger communities. Eight key dimensions of citizen involvement are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Eight Dimensions of Citizen Involvement in Policy Processes

Dimension	Description
Mobilizing Interest	Creates a public space for debate on an issue, potentially igniting or increasing interest in the issue and encouraging citizens with a latent but not yet active concern to develop positions and acquire information.
Claims Making	Allows individuals and organizations to express their existing claims, positions, and values on public policy issues. Citizens may have such claims represented indirectly by advocacy organizations, and thus feel no need to participate personally, or they may make their own representation.
Knowledge Acquisition	Shares knowledge that may be either *expert*, obtained through analytical study, or *experiential*, based on personal experience (for example, what it is like to live in a particular neighbourhood or to be the victim of violence).
Spanning and Bridging	Taps into a breadth of knowledge and facilitates participation across a broad span of society. The breadth that comes from convening and hearing from different networks of citizens and communities may also enable the parties to better learn from each other and to cultivate allies (and, possibly, to better identify opponents as well).[11] There may be a tradeoff, however, between acquiring breadth and depth of participation.
Convening and Deliberating	Enables direct participation in a dialogue among equals. Allows individuals to exercise citizenship skills and form horizontal bonds of affiliation.[12]
Community Capacity Building	Enables the creation of social capital, the emergence of leaders and, through collective action, helps communities attract financial, human and technical resources that may last long after the issue at hand has been resolved or faded.
Analysis and Synthesis	Analyzes and reports the results of citizen involvement in a manner that can be of direct use in policy-making.
Transparency and Feedback	Demonstrates how public input was used and whether it made a difference to actual decisions.[13]

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[11] Putnam (2000: 22-24) makes an important distinction between bonding (exclusive) social capital and bridging (inclusive) social capital. While *bonding social capital* (such as church-based women's groups or country clubs) bolsters a narrower social and political identity, *bridging social capital* (such as the civil rights movement and other social movements) generates broader identities and reciprocity.

[12] Participation, not mere representation, is what supports arguments in favour of the value of citizen involvement in building social capital and contributing to citizenship.

[13] Given the reality of difference in the diverse society that is contemporary Canada, it is naïve for any citizen to believe that expressing one's preferences to government will result in the desired outcomes. It is realistic, however, to be told how citizen input informed policy and why decisions were made as they were.

These eight dimensions describe a multifaceted process, but they may not all be equally important or realized in any particular instance of citizen involvement in public policy. If a community is already highly mobilized and relatively cohesive around a local issue, for example, making claims and imparting a deep slice of social knowledge may be the most important dimensions for both citizens and governments. Not only does the saliency of various dimensions of citizen involvement differ across policy *issues*, it varies by the *stage of the policy process* as well. There is no reason to think that why and how citizens are engaged at the front end of the policy-making process (when defining the nature of policy problems and sorting out political priorities) should be the same as at later stages (when figuring out how to implement a program, for example). Just as it would be naïve to regard citizen involvement as a one-dimensional process, it would also be simplistic to regard the policy process as a black box. Indeed, effective citizen involvement is likely to require different approaches and emphasize some dimensions over others at different stages of policy processes. We turn now to that analysis.

III. Assessing Current Practices of Citizen Involvement in Policy Processes

If we are to move beyond platitudes about involving citizens in policy processes, we not only need a deeper understanding of the nature of citizen involvement but also of the policy processes and the political institutions that shape them. Policy-making almost never moves in a strictly linear fashion, from recognition that there is a problem to some manner of resolution. Particular political institutions naturally dominate certain stages of policy-making and are more appropriate to some of the dimensions of citizen involvement than to others. In this section, we present a conceptual framework for understanding policy processes and give an overview of the role of various political institutions in them in the Canadian context.

Three Kinds of Political Institutions

A parliamentary system of government shapes and constrains policy processes in particular ways, generally affording greater opportunities than other democratic systems for the party in power to implement its ideas (Weaver and Rockman, 1993). Within these general parameters, the specific roles and relationships among political institutions take shape in somewhat different ways in different parliamentary systems and at different times. The relationships among institutions are key in determining not only how policy processes unfold, but how knowledge is acquired and used and thus what influence citizen involvement may have.

Knowledge itself is not a uniform commodity, however. Rather, there is an important distinction between technical or *expert* knowledge (often acquired through third party data collection and analysis) and *experiential* or social knowledge (acquired by individuals through personal experience). Both are legitimate and useful inputs into public policy, but there is often a fundamental conflict as to which should be given greater weight, when, and to determine what. This may also create a certain tension between political institutions, some of which are inherently better than others at acquiring and using different types of knowledge. This theme of knowledge acquisition will flow through our brief overview of three categories of institutions at the federal level — parties and Parliament, the public service, and independent or non-governmental actors (i.e., public inquiries, civil society organizations, and the media).

Parties and Parliament

In theory, the primary role of political parties in any democratic system is to organize, aggregate, harmonize and articulate interests. They should therefore be central actors in hearing from and engaging citizens. Similarly, by virtue of their connection and accessibility to local communities, Members of Parliament (MPs) should also be well placed to take a lead in identifying emerging issues. In spite of how effective they might be, political parties and MPs are, in practice, inadequate vehicles for involving and responding to citizens in the identification of new policy problems, due to both structural and cultural impediments.

With the rise of populism, led initially by the Reform Party, parliamentarians appeared to step into the spotlight after many years as bit players. Populism stresses the importance of one-on-one relationships between MPs and citizens so as to give more power to citizens to direct the actions of their elected delegates. Town hall meetings, citizen-based initiatives, and recall are important instruments in this regard. Beyond these notions drawn from populist ideas, public opinion polling finds that citizens still call their MPs with concerns and corner them for discussions at community events.[14] Acquiring experiential knowledge from their constituents is precisely what MPs are good at and what has been their traditional source of authority. They seldom engage in serious debate with citizens if it means contradicting their party's position, however, for fear of the imposition of sanctions or the withholding of rewards, and because the environment of most parties does not encourage individualism (Massicotte, 1999: 169).

The impediment for MPs in serving as effective agents of citizen involvement lies not in their ability to *hear from citizens*, but in *conveying those views* to caucus and Cabinet Ministers in a way that attracts attention and precipitates action. Back-bench MPs report that when working in caucus, they are rarely able to convince the governing party to launch new initiatives, and even less successful in persuading it to change its declared course of intended action (Savoie, 1999a: 591; see also Thomas, 1996).

In theory, parliamentary committees enable MPs to amass both expert and experiential forms of knowledge from citizens, but are often sources of frustration for MPs (Massicotte, 1999: 169). Many of the recommendations for committee reform proposed by the McGrath Committee of the 1980s are as relevant today as they were then, including the need for greater independence of committee chairs, larger research budgets to enhance policy capacity and, most importantly, an attitude change on the part of House leadership that would make it more tolerant of dissent.

The Chrétien government, for example, has been resistant to changing parliamentary rules. Consequently, committees continue to work according to adversarial principles and are dominated by partisan politics. They are focused on hearing from *technical* witnesses who address the specifics of bills, rather than from *political* witnesses who might debate principles. In addition, committees lack the respect of many senior bureaucrats, who actively "gate-keep" information. Finally, the work of parliamentary committees is routinely ignored by the media.

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[14] Polls show that two-thirds of Canadians regard individual communication with MPs as a valued channel of involvement (Government of Canada, 2000).

In general, political parties have also been criticized for being exclusionary and for limiting, not expanding, political discourse. Instead of serving as sites of open discussion, they constrain it for a number of reasons including the very nature of brokerage politics, which emphasizes the pursuit of short-term political objectives. Other constraints include the media's focus on the personalities of party leaders rather than on substantive issues; regionalization, which fragments the national agenda and inhibits the party membership from dealing with issues of country-wide significance; and the fact that parties are "thin" institutions, which atrophy between elections (Baier and Bakvis, 2001; Meisel, 1992; Carty, Cross, and Young, 2000; Whitaker, 2001).

The 1991 report of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing diagnosed these problems (RCERPF, 1991; Dobrowolsky and Jenson 1993: 49).[15] Although the parties have not embraced the kind of fundamental reform suggested by the Commission, they have tinkered with their internal democratic practices. In particular, they have begun using communication technologies to facilitate electronic voting, and to make direct fundraising and membership appeals to voters in targeted ways. However, Carty, Cross, and Young suggest the result is inimical to the intent. Instead of making parties more democratic, the technologies are shaping them into increasingly private institutions dominated by professionals rather than by citizens. The concern is that "as this type of political communication proliferates, the national public character of electoral debate will give way to a series of highly focussed, private conversations among voters, interest groups, and politicians" (Carty, Cross, and Young, 2001: 35).

The Public Service

If neither the party system nor parliamentarians are fully effective vehicles for citizen involvement, the public service can be an important alternative route. The public service excels at amassing or developing technical or expert knowledge. Until the mid-1990s, there were also institutionalized mechanisms for hearing directly from citizens and civil society organizations through regional offices, which, by virtue of being situated outside of Ottawa, are accessible to Canadians at large. Prior to restructuring in the mid-1990s, many regional offices of federal departments – especially the Department of the Secretary of State and the Federal Economic Development Coordinators – functioned as Ottawa's ear to the grassroots, building relationships with and hearing from local organizations and community leaders. Following restructuring, the mandate of regional offices shifted the direction of the relationship to enable communities to hear *from government* (Jenson and Phillips, 1996: 120-123). Since then, public consultation exercises have been used in a more *ad hoc* manner to hear *from citizens*, with varying degrees of enthusiasm and creativity across different departments.

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[15] Dobrowolsky and Jenson (1993) argue that the Royal Commission's extensive list of remedies for democratizing the parties went largely unheeded because the parties are not prepared to be dislodged from their brokerage traditions, and the Commission failed to gain the support of the interest groups, social movements and voluntary organizations that constitute the complementary routes of representation.

The explosion of auditing that was encouraged by New Public Management accelerated dramatically in the aftermath of the scandal in the department of Human Resource Development Canada in 2000 (in which departmental officials were accused of mismanagement of program funds). This has profoundly changed how the federal public service interacts with civil society organizations, by imposing a highly rigid regime of detailed reporting requirements. To a large degree, the role of program officers has been refocused, away from assisting community organizations in program delivery to watching over them to ensure proper financial management of government funds. While good at obtaining financial information, it appears that considerable program information and policy feedback is being lost due to this regime. In an atmosphere that tolerates little margin for error or risk, voluntary organizations are unlikely to come forward to program officers to discuss difficulties they or their users are experiencing.

At the same time, government is increasingly reluctant to share information with citizens, especially sensitive information, even when pressed to do so by applications for disclosure made under the *Access to Information Act* (Roberts, 2001; 2000). Indeed, public servants are reported to be leery of committing sensitive information to paper at all, for fear that it might be accessed and used in a way that embarrasses a Minister (Savoie, 1999a: 643). In short, the public service is becoming less of a two-way conduit of communication for problems and concerns, particularly at the early stages of policy processes, and more of a direct blockage to information flow.

Independent or Non-governmental Actors

As noted earlier, not all citizen involvement is initiated or convened by government. Independent Royal Commissions and other public inquiries, civil society organizations, and the media all have important functions in connecting citizens to policy processes.

Public Inquiries: Public inquiries have long been a staple of our political system, and are a means of framing and grappling with large or "wicked" policy problems that are not easily resolved.[16] Commissions of inquiry are important sites for policy learning, but they have also been instrumental in generating public debate on controversial matters that are not amenable to quick-fix policy solutions, such as the ethics of new reproductive technologies or the future of Aboriginal Peoples (see Jenson, 1994). A former commissioner, Justice Thomas Berger noted that inquiries not only have "expanded the vocabulary of politics," they have "added to the furniture that we now expect to find in Canada's storefront of ideas" (Berger, 1978, quoted in a 1991 speech). Although many inquiries have followed traditional means of fact-finding and quasi-judicial proceedings with regard to witness testimony, others including the Berger Inquiry have been in the vanguard of thinking about how to engage citizens in a meaningful dialogue. As Patten (2001: 235) observes, the Berger Inquiry "legitimized the practice of using state resources to fund disadvantaged voices that would not otherwise be heard."

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[16] Traditionally, inquiries have been either *fact-finding* or *policy-making* in nature. Often, however, the distinction between the two goals is blurred, as demonstrated by the Commission of Inquiry on the Blood System in Canada. It was formally assigned the task of getting to the bottom of the contamination of the country's blood system, but was also pivotal in revamping that system (Orsini, forthcoming).

By their very nature of being special events, public inquiries can do much to set the tone and raise the bar for practices of citizen involvement elsewhere in government, as the Berger Inquiry did. They cannot be counted on, however, to be regularized and ongoing routes for citizen involvement.

Civil Society Organizations: Civil society organizations often do not wait for MPs, program officers, or other parts of government to invite them to consult in order to convey their concerns about policy problems or make claims about how to fix them. Rather, they initiate their own advocacy in an attempt to influence policy. Advocacy can take many forms, including working on the inside through quiet persuasion (by hiring professional lobbyists or meeting directly with public servants, for example) or working on the outside (for example, by writing to MPs and Ministers or undertaking various forms of protest). The distinction between working on the inside or on the outside is somewhat artificial because, in reality, most successful advocacy campaigns led by citizens and their organizations do both. They make use of conventional insider strategies as well as publicly visible outsider ones (Dobrowolsky, 2000; Katzenstein, 1999).[17]

The greatest limitation on advocacy as a means of citizen involvement relates to equality of access (see Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, 1999). Significant inequality exists between advocacy by business and advocacy by voluntary organizations that are registered as charities. This is created by regulations under the *Income Tax Act*, which limit the amount of time and resources that the latter can devote to advocacy initiatives to no more than 10 percent of their total financial, human and physical resources. Known as the "10 percent rule," this severe restriction on advocacy by registered charities has created an unfair disadvantage for the voluntary sector relative to the private sector in being heard by government (Drache, with Boyle, 1998; Phillips, forthcoming; Pross and Webb, forthcoming).

Even within civil society, there is a measure of inequality in who gets heard through advocacy channels. In most instances, activists are not likely to be broadly representative of society (Fiorina, 1999). The reason is that advocacy takes organization and resources. Moreover, for a citizen acting as an *individual*, it is often hard to find a voice as an advocate. The way to enhance representation and equality of participation in advocacy is not to decry voluntary organizations by branding them "special interests," as politicians and journalists have done for the past decade. Instead, it is to build stronger associational networks of organizations with active memberships and democratic practices so citizens who wish to raise a public policy problem can more effectively undertake collective action.

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[17] While not limiting legal advocacy activity by either business or civil society organizations, the *Lobbyists' Registration Act* makes it more transparent by requiring the registration of third-party and paid in-house lobbyists, activities that are to be conducted, and the names of coalition members and supporters of "grassroots" campaigns.

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The Media: The mass media have created little doubt that they could play a significant part in mobilizing interest, transmitting knowledge, and promoting informed debate at various stages of policy-making. The actual role of the media in doing so is widely debated, however. The predominant view is that the media, particularly television, tend to trivialize political discourse, and contribute to a lack of public trust and to apathy (see Bok, 2001: 71; Putnam, 1995; 2000).[18] The media's negative effects on citizen involvement result, in large part, from the fact that reporting thrives on conflict and presents polarized versions of events in order to generate interesting stories.[19] A minority view stresses the positive role of the media in sustaining and promoting citizen participation (Norris, 2000b: 223), providing counter-evidence that demonstrates positive correlations between attention to the media, including television watching, and political knowledge.

Whether one views the media's role as positive or negative in promoting citizen involvement, it is apparent that few see the media as simply a neutral messenger that can stand apart from the reform process. What the media choose to cover, and how, and the investment that they are prepared to make in promoting real learning is a central issue for institutional reform aimed at increasing citizen involvement.

Six Stages of the Policy Process

Policy processes consist of several distinct stages. Although conceptualizing stages may be a useful heuristic, it should also be noted that this approach risks overstating the simplicity and linear nature of the process. As some analysts have found, policy processes may very well start with solutions and then find the problems to which they can be attached (Cohen, March, and Olsen, 1972). Nevertheless, for analytical purposes, we will focus on six policy stages, each of which presents somewhat different challenges for citizen involvement (see also Brooks, 1998; Pal, 1998; and Patten, 2001). These stages are:

1. *Problem Identification*, which begins the process with the initial identification, definition, and framing of a policy problem

2. *Priority Setting*, which gets the issue on the political agenda as a priority to be addressed among competing issues

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[18] Putnam (1995; 2000) argues that watching all forms of television programming reduces engagement in civic affairs. The "media malaise" perspective also makes the case that, of all forms of coverage of politics and current affairs, television is the most extreme in presenting conflict and negative news, and reducing substance to small, meaningless bites.

[19] In a more favourable view of the media, recent work on political communication presents data to suggest that use of the news media is positively associated with a wide range of indicators of political trust, knowledge and mobilization. As Norris (2000a: 17) observes, "the public is not simply responding passively to the political communications being presented to them, as in a naïve stimulus-response model; instead, they are critically and actively sifting, discarding, and interpreting the available information."

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3. *Policy Formulation and Design*, which establishes policy goals, develops various options, and selects preferred policy instruments for addressing the problem

4. *Passage of the Policy Instruments*, which enacts necessary legislation, regulations, funding, and other means required to implement the policy

5. *Implementation*, which activates the policy by delivering services, programs or funding to users, either by governments directly or by agents from the voluntary or private sectors, and

6. *Evaluation*, which measures and reviews whether the intended goals of the policy were achieved, whether unintended consequences occurred, and whether the process itself was effective, with a view to being able to fine tune or redesign policies as needed.

As Table 2 illustrates, different dimensions of citizen involvement and different political institutions come into play at each of these six policy stages.

Table 2
Dimensions of Citizen Involvement and Political Institutions at Each Stage of Policy

Policy Stage	Most Important Citizen Involvement Dimensions	Relevant Political Institutions
Problem Identification	Mobilizing Interest Spanning and Bridging Claims Making Knowledge Acquisition Convening and Deliberating Community Capacity Building	Cabinet Parliament Parties Public service Public inquiries Civil society organizations Intergovernmental machinery Media
Priority Setting	Claims Making Spanning and Bridging	Prime Minister Central Agencies (Privy Council Office and Prime Minister's Office) Cabinet Parties
Policy Formulation and Design	Claims Making Knowledge Acquisition Spanning and Bridging Convening and Deliberating Analysis and Synthesis	Cabinet Public service Intergovernmental machinery
Passage of the Policy Instruments	Claims Making Spanning and Bridging Transparency and Feedback	Cabinet Parliament Public service (especially central agencies) Media
Implementation	Knowledge Acquisition Community Capacity Building	Public service Civil society organizations
Evaluation	Knowledge Acquisition Transparency and Feedback	Public service Intergovernmental machinery Civil society organizations

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To say that new expectations in civil society and about governance have created an interest in and a need for more extensive citizen involvement does not necessarily imply that existing institutions must be reinvented from the ground up. Multiple routes for representation and participation are and will remain one of the strengths of liberal democracy. No single reform or new institution will be a magic formula that satisfies the current demands for citizen involvement. Moreover, although subject to a certain degree of inertia and path dependence, political institutions are flexible and adaptable too.

Before looking to the creation of new institutions or structures for citizen engagement, we need to consider how well existing ones are performing, and whether they can be modified and adapted to better accommodate the involvement of citizens in the various stages of policy processes. In this section, we explore the adequacy of Canadian political institutions in handling citizen involvement. For each of the six stages of policy, we ask, to what extent do existing institutions and processes adequately facilitate the participation of citizens?

Problem Identification

The first phase of the policy process sounds relatively straightforward – identify the nature of the problem to be solved. It almost inevitably ends up being complex, however, involving a struggle over the nature of the problem and how it is to be framed and named. What is a "problem" for some may be an advantage for others. For example, current patterns of income polarization clearly benefit some people, while making poverty a problem for many. How an issue is framed also brings out institutional interests as well, because its framing largely determines the level of government and the department that will end up dealing with the issue. For instance, is genetically modified food to be defined as an agricultural issue or a health matter?

At this opening stage, the most important aspects of citizen involvement are to mobilize interest that a problem exists in the first place and that effort should be expended to fix it; to ensure that a broad range of citizens and communities have an opportunity to weigh in on the issue, so that not only the most vocal and well organized have a say; to enable representation and claims to be made; and to promote knowledge acquisition by governments so that they can genuinely appreciate how specific social and economic programs are affecting particular communities. An often overlooked dimension is capacity building, which enables communities to mobilize the resources required to put the concerns raised by citizens into the policy hopper without waiting for government to act.

Problem identification entails, in simple terms, having an ear to the ground. Yet, the institutions that should be well suited to this task – parties, MPs, parliamentary committees, and the public service – all have significantly diminished capacities for listening. Parties are unduly thin institutions, which are lacking in policy capacity and atrophy between elections. MPs are not engaged in extensive policy discussions with constituents and, even when they hear of new policy problems, often have trouble in getting caucus to pay attention to them. Parliamentary committees lack research capacity, remain dominated by House leadership and partisan politics, and lack credibility with the senior management of the public service.

So where does this leave citizen involvement in the problem identification stage of policy-making? Other than opportunities for advocates to make claims, providing they are well organized and well resourced, there are few spaces for individual citizens to identify and articulate policy problems. Even the impact of advocates is limited to those with personal or organizational resources, and with access to those who set priorities, which leads us to the second stage in the policy process.

Priority Setting

Once a problem has been identified and defined as being a problem, it may still be a challenge to get it on the political agenda as a matter worthy of government attention. Competition with other issues and among political actors is often felt most acutely at this stage. In a general way, elections serve as a means for a political party to set a broad policy direction and, especially since the invention of policy books, to make specific commitments for action over the life of a government. In practice, the ability of elections to facilitate meaningful debate is severely curtailed by the problems inherent in political parties in Canada and by the difficulty of discussing complex policy issues in a combative environment or as a media "sound bite."

The real agenda setting is therefore done by Cabinet or, more specifically, by the Prime Minister and a small group of advisors. Over the postwar period, the drift in power from Parliament to Cabinet made the latter the dominant institution for agenda setting (Franks, 1987). In recent years, there has been a further concentration of power focussed on the Prime Minister personally and on a small cadre of advisors in the Prime Minister's Office, the Privy Council Office, and Finance, a system that Savoie (1999a) refers to as "court government." The Prime Minister and this small circle control the important levers of power and policy instruments, and often make major spending decisions without first consulting Cabinet.[20] They are, in other words, well beyond the reach of involvement by citizens.

The increasing significance of intergovernmental relations in establishing social policy priorities for the federal government, and the particular form of closed-door ministerial meetings it takes, reinforces this concentration of power. Under SUFA, the federal and provincial/territorial governments (except Quebec) agreed to involve citizens to a greater extent in the development of social priorities (see Phillips, 2001). At the end of its three-year life, however, there was little evidence that either level of government had done so or is about to do so in any meaningful way. The reason is quite simple. Priority setting is an inherently political process. The priorities that are pursued largely define the character of a government and influence its willingness and capacity to negotiate in the intergovernmental context. Although their governments may regularly conduct public opinion polls to determine "top-of-mind" issues, First Ministers are not going to willingly compromise their capacity to bargain effectively amongst themselves. Thus, in spite of SUFA, they remain reluctant to give away or share priority setting, whether with citizens or their elected colleagues.

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[20] Savoie (1999a: 656-659) gives many examples, including spending on the Y2K problem, the Millennium Fund, and the Canada Foundation for Innovation.

Given this centralization of power and the political nature of priority setting, citizen involvement at this stage of the policy process is virtually nonexistent, and there are no signs that this situation will change. Yet, from the citizen's perspective, how certain issues come to dominate the agenda at the expense of others is a critical aspect of the policy process.

Policy Formulation and Design

It is in the process of developing various design options for programs that governments have had the most experience with involving citizens. Four dimensions of citizen involvement are especially important at this stage – acquiring deep slices of experiential and technical knowledge; being inclusive of who is heard; convening and deliberating; and analyzing and synthesizing the knowledge obtained from citizens so as to inform decision-making.

The dominant institution in developing and assessing alternatives in design is the public service. As a matter of course in most major policy decisions, federal government departments will undertake a round of public consultation. Over the years, a common consultation template has been developed. It consists of the preparation and circulation of a background document; a series of meetings or focus groups in at least one major centre per province, to which "stakeholders" are invited; prepared questions and answers for bureaucrats; a 1-800 number and Web site to permit submission of comments; and a workbook to allow citizens to respond to specific questions. Frequently, the number of participants rather than the depth of their knowledge is of paramount concern because Ministers like to say that a large number of people participated, no matter how superficial that participation may have been. Departments may also host smaller sessions or roundtables of between three and 25 people, sometimes in a multi-stakeholder format involving representatives of different constituencies (Status of Women Canada, 1997).

The shortcomings of this approach to consultation have been widely noted, including by the federal government itself, which recognized that it has not been sufficiently inclusive or kept up with technology, nor has it integrated consultation into policy decision-making in an effective manner (Government of Canada, 2000). Public consultation normally occurs quite late in policy processes, once problems have been defined in concrete terms and a preferred policy option has been developed. Reaction to these is being sought. By the time a consultation is concluded, there is usually considerable pressure to move decision-making along, so there is seldom enough time for an in-depth analysis of the knowledge acquired or the opportunity to go back to citizens to discuss particular matters further. In general, then, such practices greatly limit the ability of consultation to inform public policy or to satisfy the other dimensions of citizen involvement.

Passage of the Policy Instruments

This stage first moves the process back to the central agencies and Ministers, where Memoranda to Cabinet and Treasury Board funding submissions are processed in a manner closed to public view or participation. It then offers an opportunity for participation as legislation, regulations, budget estimates, or other policy instruments are debated in the House of Commons and its committees. It is also at this stage that the media are likely to be most interested in the policy process, prompting a more broadly based reaction from citizens. The transparency of the citizen involvement process becomes a particularly important dimension as citizens who participated in or observed the process at earlier stages query how their inputs are being used to arrive at actual decisions.

As spaces for citizen involvement, parliamentary committees have significant drawbacks because they operate in fixed time frames, normally meet in Ottawa, and are quite formal. They are more accessible to well-recognized groups that have the resources to send representatives to Ottawa, but often freeze out the unorganized and low-income segments of society (Franks, 1987). Given that committee membership is allocated along party lines and the Canadian party system relies on party discipline, decisions made by committees often reflect partisan interests more than what was stated during the hearing process. Committee restructuring has been a central part of numerous proposals for parliamentary reform made over the past two decades. In recent years, committees have been opened up considerably, creating a stronger role for MPs. Given structural impediments, however, such reform has not provided a way to effectively use parliamentary committees as conduits into the policy process for citizens.

Implementation

The nature of policy implementation and the issues it raises for citizen involvement depend to a large degree on who is responsible for program delivery and via what means. At this stage, the key institution is the public service, but it is not alone. In new forms of governance, a variety of non-governmental organizations from both the private and voluntary sectors are also likely to be involved in implementation. The primary possibility for citizen involvement at this stage is to provide feedback on the actual delivery of services and, where difficulties exist, on how to fix them.

The devolution of service delivery to the voluntary and private sectors, spurred on by New Public Management and fiscal restraint, has created a new set of challenges for implementation. An expanding contracting regime that uses voluntary organizations has brought citizens more directly into the policy implementation process – as volunteers, staff, and members of voluntary organizations. Yet, governments rarely have the institutionalized means to acquire the advice of these citizen experts. Moreover, there is mounting evidence that voluntary organizations involved in public service contracting, either alone or in partnerships, curtail their advocacy activities for fear of jeopardizing their contracts or other funding (Alexander, 1999: 460-461; Pross and Webb, forthcoming). If their main point of invited contact is with the officials who oversee their contracts, voluntary organizations are likely to be quite cautious about speaking frankly about any problems they are experiencing in the realm of service delivery.

The other major gap in devolved forms of implementation is community capacity building. As self-governing democratic bodies, voluntary organizations are themselves important sites for involving citizens in dialogue about community needs. Yet, the competitive contracting process seldom takes into account the *value* of internal democracy (that is, of building and maintaining a membership and connections with local communities) or its *costs*, which are borne by non-profit organizations. When contracts are awarded primarily on the basis of price, voluntary organizations that support democratic infrastructure often lose out to for-profit firms that do not. Over time, the knowledge that is filtered through voluntary organizations is being lost to government, and the community capacity building that is undertaken by these organizations is being undermined.[21]

Evaluation

The essence of evaluation is to determine what was achieved, both as intended and unintended consequences, to explain why, and to use this information to assess the design of programs and polices. Evaluation is also intended to enable better systems of management, governance, and control to be put in place if necessary. Public policy evaluation has changed in two important ways over the past decade. First, New Public Management has put a greater emphasis on evaluation and, in particular, on the measurement of *outcomes* or results achieved, not just of *inputs* (resources used) or *outputs* (activities undertaken). Second, there has been a movement in the evaluation field in recent years to recognize the value of evaluation as a participatory process in which multiple stakeholders are actively engaged, not merely in providing information but also in generating the content and form of the evaluation process (Mathie and Greene, 1997; Whitmore, 1991; Jackson, 1998). An important question, then, is can participatory evaluation and outcome-based performance measurement co-exist?

The federal government institutions involved in evaluation have a cautious history of involving citizens. Parliament, through its committee system, regularly assesses public spending and reviews the effectiveness of specific programs. However, the public service is the most important player – via the Treasury Board Secretariat, which sets overall guidelines; through departments, which conduct evaluations; and in the Office of the Auditor General, which acts as an independent watchdog. Both Parliament and the public service treat evaluation as a technical process of information gathering led by experts.

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[21] Already, we are starting to see government departments replace these community-based connections with directly appointed citizen advisory bodies. A good example is in the area of Corrections, where for-profit firms have assumed a bigger market share in the delivery of release services (for example, halfway houses and monitoring programs), often displacing the John Howard and Elizabeth Fry Societies, among others. In order to recapture stronger linkages with communities, Correctional Services Canada has established a series of citizen advisory bodies. The concern raised by voluntary organizations is that these citizen bodies are appointed and mandated by the Department, and they may have few real connections with the staff and volunteers of civil society organizations that are working in the justice system. Other unintended negative consequences of competitive contracting include a likelihood that voluntary organizations end up subsidizing the cost of service provision from their own charitable funds if contract pricing is set too low (Morris, 1999: iv); a serious exodus of knowledge workers from small to large non-profits, and then to for-profit firms; and the threat of loss of the public service character of voluntary organizations through increased marketization (Alexander, 1999).

There is some movement, however, toward using performance-based measurement as a means of promoting citizen involvement. The attempt to develop performance-based indicators was seen by some in the public service as a vehicle for engaging Parliament and the public in values-based conversations. However, such engagement remains more rhetoric than reality. Moreover, although citizen involvement in reviewing outcome-based measurement may sound appealing, a measure of realism is required. Outcome measurement is enormously complex and the ability of citizens, as individuals, to be effectively involved in it will require assistance, both from governments and the voluntary organizations that provide many of the services in question.

An Overview of the Existing Mix

The analysis to this point has focussed separately on each of the stages of the policy process. When we stand back to look at the entire process, what picture of citizen involvement emerges? By far, the bulk of opportunities for public involvement arise at the policy design stage, mainly through moments of invited consultation conducted by the public service. The point at which policy instruments are being enacted by Parliament provides an additional occasion for representation and claims making at committee hearings. By contrast, few options are available and little attention has been paid to citizen involvement at the problem identification stage, a critical point when frames of meaning are established, which subsequently determine the choice of policy instruments and the institutions for delivery. Nor is there much space for direct citizen involvement in the implementation or evaluation stages, even though voluntary organizations are increasingly responsible for contracted out program delivery.

The asymmetrical deployment of citizen involvement across different stages of the policy process means that some of its dimensions are more effectively accommodated than are others. Current practices are relatively good at facilitating *claims making* and *knowledge acquisition*, albeit the latter in a limited fashion. Although there are multiple sites through which claims can be made, this alone cannot assure a broad representation of the diversity of civil society, for two important reasons. One is that the routes for advocacy tend to be more accessible to well-organized groups that have the resources to lead campaigns. Second, the space for voluntary organizations appears to be constricting as organizations that are reliant on project funding and government contracts censure themselves to ensure that they are not placing either their funding or their charitable status at risk by making unwelcome claims.

The asymmetry of deployment and access means that simply thinking of representation as a marketplace, in which those with concerns or new ideas will come forward to be heard, is not a substitute for more proactive forms of citizen involvement, where the goal is to acquire both a breadth and depth of knowledge. By the government's own admission, the way in which it conducts public consultation does not succeed in tapping into a diverse spectrum of civil society actors (Government of Canada, 2000). Moreover, because this process of knowledge acquisition usually takes the form of a one-way flow of information – of citizens expressing their views at public meetings, for instance – there is not much interactive, sustained dialogue. Thus, citizen involvement does little to encourage the exercise of the skills of citizenship that comes with participation in deliberation and debate.

In addition, although knowledge may be acquired, it is not well integrated into decision-making processes. The reports of "what was said" at public consultations often consist of a series of quotes that do not offer solid analysis of the extent or diversity of views held by the public. Even the quotes sometimes appear sanitized of the more emotional and passionate interjections. Yet, if senior public servants, MPs or Ministers do not personally take part in the consultations, they are totally dependent on these reports for their own learning.

The dimension of *transparency and feedback* is also poorly satisfied because participants are seldom told how and why decisions were made. This may well serve to increase mistrust in government, if citizens feel that they did their part but have no idea whether the government bothered to listen. Finally, the *community capacity building* dimension that figured quite prominently in the early days of citizen involvement has been almost totally ignored in recent years at the national level.[22]

Our review of contemporary citizen involvement also reveals that political institutions are not being used as effectively as they might be. Political parties play an unnecessarily weak role in engaging citizens, and MPs and Parliament tend to be underused. The intergovernmental machinery, while increasingly important as a player, is as closed as ever to non-governmental actors. Although the public service has taken an active part in involving citizens, particularly at the policy design stage, the consistency and manner in which this is done varies enormously across departments. Current efforts at relationship building are hindered by increased mobility within the federal public service, which forces interpersonal connections to be constantly re-established and trust to be rebuilt. It is also the case that most of these efforts are focussed on engaging the organized parts of constituencies, not individual citizens.

On major policy issues, the standard template of public consultation is deployed, with all of the problems that have come to be associated with it. Government controls the agenda and determines who is invited, information flows in one direction, and the process is episodic and *ad hoc*. To be fair, there is experimentation with other approaches in a few departments but, overall, innovation is inhibited and leadership for change on a government-wide basis lacking. In sum, there is a need for both institutional and procedural reform to produce more effective means of involving citizens if the federal government is going to work effectively in a more collaborative manner and if it is to respond appropriately to a more mobilized, empowered civil society.

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[22] The importance of capacity building in the voluntary sector has been widely recognized in recent years. It was discussed explicitly in the national Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector, a review led by the voluntary sector that reported in 1999 (PAGVS, 1999), as well as by a joint government/voluntary sector process that reported later that year (Government of Canada/Voluntary Sector, 1999). The Voluntary Sector Initiative directs a substantial portion of its funding to capacity building and has established a Joint Table process with the voluntary sector to determine how to allocate these funds.

IV. Initiating Reform and Improving the Mix

How might existing institutions and processes be reformed to provide better citizen involvement, and what kinds of new vehicles for citizen involvement could be developed? We will argue in this section that reforms must include a mix or combination of the better use of existing institutions and processes, the creation of new institutions and mechanisms, cultural change, and investment in civil society. The first challenge, then, is how to make better use of existing institutions at each stage of the policy process.

Improvements to Existing Institutions

An important starting point for improving citizen involvement involves shoring up two key democratic institutions – the party system and Parliament. As Whitaker (2001: 22) observes about the democratic deficit, political parties in their current state are both part of the problem and part of the solution. "Parties have been largely denuded of their old legitimacy, incapacitated in filling their traditional roles, and held up to public ridicule and scorn. But no new and better institutions have been invented to replace them." Suggestions for repairs made over the past two decades remain valid today, including making parties "thicker" institutions that function between elections; providing them with greater in-house policy capacity; and creating more opportunities for members to participate, both electronically and directly. All of these changes would open more channels for citizen involvement at key points of policy processes. We should not be naïve in the prospects for achieving party reform, however, given the length of time it has been on the agenda without being realized.

Increased opportunities for policy discussions between MPs and citizens, and more receptive caucuses that enable this information to travel through the appropriate democratic channels, would make the role of elected officials more effective and ensure that citizens' voices are heard in central institutions, where problem identification and priority setting occur. Reforms to parliamentary committees would equip them with greater research and policy capacity, and provide greater independence from House leadership, enabling them to serve as venues for more interactive discussion, rather than the perfunctory in-and-out presentation of pre-existing positions or claims. As Rosell (1999: 97) argues, parliamentary committees could "move beyond simply inviting fixed briefs from different parties and experiment with an approach that would involve framing the issues, convening the parties, encouraging them to deal directly with each other, and then facilitating their dialogue." Again this would give space to parties and to MPs who represent them at the early – and in many ways most important stages – of policy processes.

The public consultation processes led by the public service could also be significantly improved to make them more inclusive, deliberative, transparent, and connected to policy decision-making. More extensive use of technology such as video conferencing, Internet discussions, and interactive Web sites could make policy discussions more accessible and inclusive. Technology is not a panacea, however, nor is it an exact substitute for direct one-on-one participation.

Restoring the role of hearing from local communities for regional offices of the public service could further enhance the federal government's receptiveness and responsiveness to citizens. The public service could also do more to respect and support democratic processes within community organizations by taking into account the value and cost of democratic practices when issuing contracts. It might also directly invest in community capacity building by providing support for skill development, technology, membership building, and stronger governance.

How the public service would fund opportunities for citizen involvement is a key issue. It is not just finding enough money among competing demands, but making structural changes to how such funding gets allocated in the first place. In most line departments, the big money lies in either programs or communications. Yet, consultation falls outside of traditional communication budgets and must normally be done before programs are designed, so is not eligible for program based support. Therefore, it is difficult to find adequate funding for citizen involvement activities, especially in early stages of policy development. If cultural change is to occur that recognizes the value of citizen involvement, dealing with the institutionalization of funding and funding mechanisms is essential.

Finally, encouraging the media to play a more constructive role in civic affairs is an important enabling reform. One route would be to encourage "civic journalism," which is a movement (or more accurately, a few sporadic lurches) that has emerged in recent years whose goal is to make the promotion of public deliberation part of journalists' role (Dzur, 2000: 4). Civic journalism is premised on the belief that mainstream journalism has become obsessed with the horse race of the political process and its personalities, to the detriment of discussion of substantive policy issues (Institute on Governance, 2000). It departs from traditional reporting practices by "advocating public listening in newsgathering, the production of purposeful news, and by encouraging public debate" (Dzur, 2000: 4).[23] Although largely an American phenomenon, taking place in certain US cities and led mainly by local newspapers and broadcasters, small elements of civic journalism can be found in Canada as well (Institute on Governance, 2000). Resistance comes mainly from managing editors who must justify the costs associated with this approach, and from journalists who hold an ingrained belief in detachment from the story and its participants, and are concerned that this kind of personal involvement might compromise their professional integrity.

A number of institutional reforms have been discussed in this section. Table 3 summarizes how citizen involvement could be enhanced through the reform of existing institutions.

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[23] Rosen, Merritt, and Austin (1997: 40) present a five-step model of how civic or public journalism should work. The first stage involves viewing consumers of journalism as active citizens. Beyond this are public listening; deliberation; framing stories, which should make journalists aware of the power they wield; and, finally, public engagement.

Table 3

Enhancing Citizen Involvement by Reforming Existing Institutions

Institution	Type of Reform	Most Improves the Following Policy Stages	Most Improves the Following Dimensions of Citizen Involvement
Political Parties	Continue the process of democratizing political parties and enhancing their policy capacity	Problem Identification Policy Design Evaluation	Mobilizing Interest Claims Making Knowledge Acquisition Spanning and Bridging Convening and Deliberating
Members of Parliament	Enable MPs to better connect with citizens by hosting public events, having adequate research budgets, and providing more effective roles for MPs in Parliamentary Committees and caucus	Problem Identification Policy Design Passage of the Policy Instruments	Mobilizing Interest Claims Making Knowledge Acquisition Spanning and Bridging Convening and Deliberating Transparency and Feedback
Parliamentary Committees	Reform Parliamentary Committees and their processes to facilitate better dialogue between MPs and citizens	Policy Design Passage of the Policy Instruments Evaluation	Claims Making Knowledge Acquisition Spanning and Bridging Analysis and Synthesis Transparency and Feedback
Public Service	Reconnect front-line bureaucrats to citizens by making relationship building part of the job description, establishing time to spend on it, and encouraging a greater degree of job stability	Problem Identification Implementation Evaluation	Knowledge Acquisition Capacity Building
Media	Encourage forms of civic journalism	Problem Identification Policy Design Evaluation	Mobilizing Interest Spanning and Bridging Analysis and Synthesis Transparency and Feedback

New Institutions and New Mechanisms

Tinkering with existing institutions is unlikely to be radical enough to bring about sustained interaction between governments and citizens, and to encourage participation in ways that truly enhance citizenship. For example, creating new mechanisms may be the only way to break the stranglehold of the public consultation model that has dominated the public service's efforts to involve citizens in policy design and to prompt other forms of innovation.

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The visibility of a new institution for citizen engagement could be just the kind of signal required from the political centre of government to the departments and to citizens to show that there is genuine interest in realizing more effective engagement at all stages of policy-making. A civic forum is one such vehicle. There are various international examples that provide models for how such a forum might operate. Each has a somewhat different way of linking to parliamentarians and public servants, and of promoting inclusiveness. One advantage of the civic forum model is that it vests greater control and responsibility for involvement in civil society and reduces government's control over it. A forum might lead its own discussions or collaborate with government departments to hold broadly-based sessions around particular policy issues on their behalf, as the Civic Forum in Scotland has undertaken to do.

Not all new mechanisms require such formalized structures, however. Experiments in technique or process can also help break out of the existing "consultation" formula and begin a process of rethinking citizen involvement in a manner that would be more interactive. Such experiments might include citizen summits, roundtables, or citizen panels and juries, all of which offer flexible, short-term venues for deliberative participation.[24] These mechanisms could be useful to Parliament, parties, central agencies, and the public service, not only in the problem identification, priority setting, and policy design stages, but in implementation as well. In the case of the latter, by encouraging open, ongoing discussion with service providers, public servants would be better able to fine tune programs and policies on a regular basis.

The use of referenda to assess public views on major issues is drawing renewed attention, although we see its use as being quite specialized. Mendelsohn and Parkin (2001: 32) make a strong case that if appropriate regulations are in place, the use of referenda at the national level in Canada could "make legislation on important questions more sensitive to and representative of the views of the public." Although strong supporters of this approach, they are not insensitive to the significant limitations of referenda. Timing, wording of the question, and how campaign spending is or is not controlled can all influence the results in important ways (Graham and Phillips, with Maslove, 1998: 115).[25]

Referenda are also limited by how extensively they can be used. A question on the ballot is well suited to vetoing proposals, but not well adopted to choosing among complex policy options, as the Charlottetown Accord so aptly demonstrated. As well, referenda are expensive exercises and, clearly, not all major national policy issues can be brought to a referendum. Therefore, the number that can appear on a ballot without overburdening the voter or the public purse is small, relative to the number of issues that legislatures need to solve (Bok, 2001: 210-11).[26]

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[24] For a discussion of the *methods* of deliberative democracy, see Fishkin and Luskin (1999); Smith and Wales (2000); Vander Ploeg, McCormick and Elton (1997); and Weeks (2000). For a discussion of *theory*, see Bohman (1996); Cohen (1997); and Dryzek (2000).

[25] Although policy learning by citizens has been shown to occur with a Canadian referendum, this learning was quite limited and had virtually no impact on perceptions of low political efficacy (Mendelsohn and Cutler, 2000: 698).

[26] A distinctly Canadian problem is that referenda are not equally popular in all parts of the country. For example, as reported in the *Canadian Election Study*, Quebecers are least enthusiastic about holding regular referenda (Massicotte, 1999: 181).

All of this suggests that if referenda are to contribute to policy learning by government and to citizenship development by individuals, they need to be supported and prefaced by deliberative mechanisms. Even then, they would be one small piece of a more expansive undertaking designed to enhance citizen involvement.

We have also disregarded two other popularly discussed reforms as, respectively, inadequate and improbable. Although the major reform to the electoral system advanced by many – a shift to proportional representation – might better balance elected representation in the House of Commons with voter preferences, it would have little impact on directly facilitating greater citizen involvement. Thus, it is inadequate. Nor is power about to be decentralized from the Prime Minister in the near future, a proposed reform that has to be deemed improbable.

A number of new institutions and new mechanisms for citizen involvement have been discussed in this section. Table 4 summarizes how citizen involvement could be enhanced through such reforms.

Table 4

Enhancing Citizen Involvement by Creating New Institutions and New Mechanisms

Institution	Type of Reform	Most Improves the Following Policy Stages	Most Improves the Following Dimensions of Citizen Involvement
Public Service Intergovernmental Machinery MPs and Parliament Parties	Create new mechanisms to hear from a broad representation of service providers *and* citizens at large. Civic forums, such as those in Scotland or the City of London, are one way alter the dominant Canadian public consultation model used to involve citizens. Regional or national summits, citizen juries and panels, and deliberative polling are other innovative reforms that could be undertaken.	Problem Identification Priority Setting Policy Design Implementation Evaluation	Claims Making Knowledge Acquisition Spanning and Bridging Convening and Deliberating Capacity Building
MPs and Parliament Parties Public Service	Experiment with referenda, coupled with deliberative mechanisms	Passage of the Policy Instruments	Spanning and Bridging Convening and Deliberating

Culture Change

The possible reforms discussed in previous sections go beyond technique – they involve a change in culture. As long as public involvement is seen as an afterthought and lacks adequate time and resources, it will not become an integral part of policy processes. Nor will it improve either policy outcomes or citizenship. If new techniques, technologies or institutions are to facilitate more deliberative forms of citizen involvement, senior and front-line managers, as well as elected officials, must come to value citizen involvement as a central component of governance. This means that citizen involvement has to be viewed not only as a means of information gathering, but as a way to expand the boundaries of citizenship in a diverse society, enhance the skills of citizenship, and invest in community capacity building.

A shift towards a culture that is more appreciative of citizen engagement needs to be supported by resources, allocation of adequate time, and ease of access to information. It needs to be led from the top by Ministers and their deputies, and by the political centre, as the federal government's own policy statement on citizen engagement acknowledges (Government of Canada, 2000). Expanded access to information is a critical prerequisite. Open, deliberative forms of involvement will not be regarded as legitimate if there is a perception that government is withholding information or stalling citizens' requests for access to information. Table 5 summarizes how citizen involvement can be enhanced by culture change.

Table 5

Enhancing Citizen Involvement by Culture Change

Institution	Type of Reform	Most Improves the Following Policy Stages	Most Improves the Following Dimensions of Citizen Involvement
Public Service Cabinet	Senior management and Ministers work to change attitudes about the value of citizen engagement; budget adequate time in policy processes; promote innovative consultation techniques; and provide feedback to citizens	Problem Identification Priority Setting Policy Design Implementation Evaluation	Knowledge Acquisition Spanning and Deliberating Analysis and Synthesis Transparency and Feedback
Public Service Parliament	Ease access to information	Problem Identification Policy Design Evaluation	Knowledge Acquisition Analysis and Synthesis

Investment in Civil Society

The final reform proposed is an investment in civil society. In creating a vibrant democracy based on multiple connections between citizens and governments, voluntary associations play an important role. Citizen involvement in a "thick democracy" scenario (Barber, 1984) entails not only connecting governments to individual citizens and to voluntary associations, but linking citizens to government *through* voluntary associations.

Several factors contribute to strong associational networks: good internal democratic practices and attention to building participatory memberships and involving users; the development of strong connections among organizations working at the local, provincial and federal levels; creating strong policy and research capacity within organizations; and relaxing the rules on advocacy so that charitable organizations are not afraid to speak out on policy issues for fear of losing their funding (Pross and Webb, forthcoming). Strong networks and associations can be promoted by assisting with capacity building and encouraging voluntary organizations to build and maintain strong memberships, and recognizing that there is a cost to managing internal democracy when voluntary organizations are competing against for-profit firms for contracts.

Such capacity building may seem like a secondary or even tertiary means of promoting citizen involvement. However, in a model of governance that is more embedded in civil society, governments more than ever need a strong and vibrant civil society as both a governing partner and an independent source of social capital and citizenship promotion. Table 6 summarizes how citizen involvement can be enhanced by an investment in civil society.

Table 6
Enhancing Citizen Involvement by Investing in Civil Society

Institution	Type of Reform	Most Improves the Following Policy Stages	Most Improves the Following Dimensions of Citizen Involvement
Public Service Cabinet	Strengthen associational networks by providing multi-year funding, assistance with skills development, and ongoing dialogue	Problem Identification Priority Setting Policy Design Implementation Evaluation	Mobilizing Interest Claims Making Knowledge Acquisition Spanning and Deliberating Capacity Building
Public Service	Recognize the cost and the value of democratic practices in voluntary organizations that are seeking contracts	Implementation	Capacity Building
Public Service Parliament	Expand the scope for advocacy by eliminating the "10 percent rule" for charities and by changing attitudes	Problem Identification Priority Setting Policy Design	Claims Making Spanning and Deliberating Capacity Building

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V. Conclusion – Eliminating Myths and Advancing Reform

Emerging forms of governance and a more empowered civil society have created an interest in and a need to rethink how citizens are involved in policy processes. The shift from talking about *public consultation* to *citizen engagement* reflects an interest in creating more interactive forms of participation that lead to policy learning and promote the development of citizenship skills and community capacity. Considerable reform is necessary, we argue, to achieve this goal. Although the objective of encouraging more effective citizen involvement is widely lauded, it meets with considerable resistance once the idea moves from rhetoric to reform. A key challenge in advancing reform is to eliminate the myths surrounding citizen involvement.

Perhaps the most well entrenched myth is that if public servants take on a greater role in involving citizens, it will come at the expense of the role of MPs. In part, this concern stems from an underlying tension over competition for knowledge acquisition. Parliamentarians have long been the primary source of *experiential* knowledge from citizens, while the public service has had a near monopoly over *expert* knowledge. As the public service increasingly moves into becoming a source of experiential knowledge through an expanded role in citizen involvement, MPs are likely to feel displaced. This is not the inevitable outcome, however, for several reasons.

First, MPs could link with opportunities for citizen involvement led by the public service by participating in them directly. From a public policy perspective, the product of citizen involvement is policy learning, not decision taking. The knowledge emanating from citizens is by no means necessarily consensual in nature, and there is usually a need to balance expert with experiential knowledge in decision-making. This task still falls primarily to legislators. In addition, greater opportunities for involvement undertaken by the public service could also strengthen and expand the role of MPs, because such opportunities can create more knowledgeable citizens with higher expectations of how government should deal with them. Heightened expectations are likely to increase demands for contact with parliamentarians and, through greater contact, this could strengthen MPs' claims to legitimacy relative to the public service and the executive.

It is also a false dichotomy to assume that public involvement has to be about *either* involving individuals *or* involving organizations, and that one happens at a cost to the other. Throughout this Discussion Paper, we have revealed that the two play a complementary role. In a vibrant democracy, voluntary organizations are themselves spaces for the exercise of citizenship and conduits for connecting citizens to government. Effective citizen involvement not only promotes the direct participation of individuals in policy processes, it also encourages the development of strong associational networks with active, democratic memberships. These serve as intermediary sites of deliberation and as vehicles for collective action that link citizens to policy processes.

When Canada was first constructing its own citizenship regime in the 1940s, the importance of voluntary organizations as vehicles for promoting citizenship was explicitly recognized (Jenson and Phillips, 1996; Pal, 1995). During the individualization that the customer revolution advanced by New Public Management and populism precipitated, the value of organizations as democratic intermediaries was undermined. As we again rethink the relationship of government to citizens as part of a trend toward horizontal governance, the valued role of civil society organizations in promoting citizenship needs to be reconstituted.

In an enthusiasm for involving citizens, it might be assumed that every public policy issue should be subject to citizen involvement. This is neither practical nor useful. On many issues, government has little policy room in which to maneuver or has a strong commitment to a particular course of action from which it is not about to deviate. If it were to give the illusion that space for influence exists by asking citizens what they think, but then completely ignoring their input, the main effect would simply be to increase public cynicism. Civil society organizations and citizens are already facing consultation overload and make their own distinctions between *consultation* and *meaningful consultation* in which it seems worthwhile to invest their limited resources by participating. Yet, if departments unilaterally decide that a policy issue is not of interest to citizens or that their input is of no value to government and prematurely foreclose on involvement, they also damage their relationship with the public. The challenge for the central agency machinery will be to help departments develop and communicate appropriate guidelines regarding when citizen involvement is required and valuable, and when it is not.

The approach that we have taken is to understand both citizen involvement and the policy process as multidimensional. Ultimately, although all of the dimensions we have described are important to creating a sustained, legitimate and effective approach to citizen involvement, some are more important at certain stages of policy-making than at others. Similarly, particular institutions are more capable of providing access and facilitating effective involvement at some stages of the policy process than at others. Expanding citizen involvement at one stage of policy processes, using a specific route or institution, does not necessarily cut out other institutions and players at other stages. What should be clear is that the effective involvement of citizens in policy processes involves a mix of institutions, processes and reforms. No one technique, nor technology, nor a single new institution is a panacea. Both old and new are needed. As Canadians, we are therefore challenged to identify the best mix, one that will enhance both governance and citizenship, and reduce the democratic deficit.

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