





## Preface

Isaiah Berlin, the 20th century political philosopher, once explained in a famous article entitled 'The Hedgehog and the Fox', that the world is divided into two types of thinkers. There are the hedgehogs, who have a single, big idea and tend to work out everything in terms of it. And then there are the foxes, who have many ideas, and tend to flit quickly and sometimes brilliantly from one to another.

It is also an apt metaphor for this, the final report of the Public Engagement Initiative. On first glance, this report may seem to be the work of a fox. It ranges over a wide swath of territory, including political theory, group psychology, cultural history and communications technologies. Looked at this way, the reader may feel free to pay close attention to the parts that interest him or her and skim through the rest.

But to read the report as a collection of ideas misses the underlying structure. It is not the work of a fox; rather, it is the work of a hedgehog because it is inspired by one basic idea: that none of us can achieve the big goals we set for ourselves without the help of others. Working together effectively is critical to success.

This is especially true in the pursuit of societal goals. Whether we are designing complex public policy or creating a sustainable and healthy community, the bottom line is this: we need to talk to each other, but, as the title of this report states, we need to do more than just talk. Governments, stakeholders, communities and citizens need to have a real dialogue where they listen, learn and then act, together.

Out of this basic idea, we have identified a basic problem, a basic solution and a basic means, or strategy, to implement our idea. This report is an exploration of those four steps.

We will discuss the basic idea – the need to encourage a dialogue between members of our society – in Part I – Origins and Context.

In Part II – Culture Change: A New Model of Engagement, we identify the basic problem, that of our dependency on government to solve society's big problems and government's reluctance to cede some of that responsibility to other groups. In this section we also set out our basic solution – a new model for public engagement that transfers to the public some of the ownership and responsibility for solving complex issues.

Part III – Starting the Dialogue: An Implementation Strategy outlines how governments can use public dialogue to encourage stakeholders, citizens and communities to play a new role in solving specific issues and achieving goals.

Finally, in Part IV – Themes and Conclusions, we explain how governments can use the lessons learned through the Public Engagement Initiative to develop a new relationship with citizens, and a new way of thinking about public engagement.

While the basic idea, problem, solution and means are simple enough to state, the environment in which governments are trying to work this out is not. First of all, there are many different voices in the public space, including stakeholders, opinion leaders, ordinary citizens, and other government officials. All have a role to play in public engagement.

Just as there are many different voices, there are also many different ways to carry out that dialogue. As we discovered, we do need different kinds of dialogues, depending on who is participating and why.

Currently, these distinctions are entangled in confusing ways. A satisfactory approach to public engagement must provide us with a reliable way of disentangling these threads.

This is why the discussion in this report must be wide-ranging. There is no way to avoid it. The first step to better engagement is to sort through all the pieces and put some much needed order into our thinking on the subject.

Thus, the report is, as one reader remarked, a toolkit. It has many different things inside and together they provide us with the instruments we need to get the job done. As such, it looks very much like the work of a fox.

But by keeping in mind the basic ideas set out in this preface, the reader should find that the discussion really follows quite a simple path to its destination. It is always about learning how to work together and, as such, is decidedly the work of a hedgehog.

Don Lenihan  
Provincial Advisor on Public Engagement  
April 2008



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Don Lenihan  
April 2008

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A New Model for Public Engagement**

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# An Introduction to the Public Engagement Initiative

In April 2007, Premier Shawn Graham announced the creation of the Public Engagement Initiative and gave it no less a mandate than to craft a new era of citizen engagement in the province of New Brunswick.

Over the past few years, a number of things have happened in New Brunswick that has prompted government officials and members of the public to re-evaluate their relationship and consider more effective means of communicating with each other.

Economic changes, particularly in New Brunswick's traditional resource sectors, have forced residents in some communities, such as Miramichi, to ask themselves hard questions about the future of their towns when the major employer leaves.

Demographic changes, such as a slowing birth rate, an aging population and the continued out-migration of young people, have business owners and managers wondering how to address a growing labour shortage. For example, the cities of Saint John, Moncton and Fredericton now have unemployment rates lower than Toronto or Montreal. That's good news for workers but poses a challenge for companies looking for employees. Meanwhile in government, officials must decide how to provide public services and manage public finances within the context of a changing population.

Finally, social changes, driven largely by digital technology, have altered how people communicate and interact with each other. When once our days were compartmentalized between the public space and the private space, those boundaries have now blurred. Web-based and wireless technologies allow us to communicate and access information when we want and how we want.

It is this final change in the way we communicate with each other that occupied our thoughts as we sought to determine how the Government of New Brunswick could more effectively engage provincial residents.

## The Purpose

To design a new model for public engagement in New Brunswick we needed to first understand the sometimes complex relationship between the people of New Brunswick and their government. We spent the year talking and listening to decision makers, opinion leaders and community-minded residents about the future of their province and the role they wanted to play in designing it.

Drawing heavily on the work of Crossing Boundaries, a 10-year national research and consultation project that examined public governance, the Public Engagement Initiative consulted with people in the following three ways.

1. We launched five community engagement pilot projects in the areas of skills development, wellness, climate change, community renewal and community development. The projects formed a robust cross-section of



people and opinions that helped us develop and test a new model of public engagement;


2. We held over a dozen workshops across the country, with over 300 public servants from all levels of government, each of whom provided comments and feedback on our model; and,
3. We met individually and in small groups with many other members of the public policy community both inside and outside New Brunswick, to explain our ideas and canvass their views and opinions on the model.<sup>1</sup>

Through these exercises we learned much about when, where and why public engagement is necessary and how it should be done. The essence of this learning can be distilled into eight basic points:

1. **The traditional view that government planning and policy-making should be the sole responsibility of government officials is too narrow and must change.** There is a role for the public in making choices, developing plans and taking action for the achievement of important social goals and government needs to sit down with the public and work it through.
2. **Government must learn to be a convener, facilitator, enabler and partner in the process.** This is a different role than the one it normally plays in traditional consultations.
3. **The public is not a monolith, but a complex entity made up of different subgroups,** including stakeholders, opinion leaders, ordinary citizens and communities, all of whom can and should be engaged for different purposes.
4. **If the public is a complex entity, so is public dialogue.** Different kinds of dialogues should be used for different tasks; and different subgroups are suited to different kinds of dialogue. At present, all these things get entangled in confused and confusing ways – sometimes intentionally. As a result, public dialogue is often far less ordered, coherent and disciplined than it could be.
5. **A more ordered, coherent and disciplined public dialogue is necessary if New Brunswickers are to meet the economic, social and environmental challenges they are facing.** Everyone has a role to play and we must work together. By adopting the right approach to public

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<sup>1</sup> The Public Engagement Initiative is based on a recent book entitled *Progressive Governance for Canadians: What You Need to Know*, by Don Lenihan, Tim Barber, Graham Fox and John Milloy, published by Crossing Boundaries and Canada 2020. The study contains the distilled learning from a 10-year, national research and consultation project on governance entitled *Crossing Boundaries*. It is available for download free-of-charge at [www.crossingboundaries.ca](http://www.crossingboundaries.ca)



engagement the government could help stakeholders, citizens and communities work together more effectively with government to achieve important societal goals, while also strengthening our democratic practices.

**6. To effectively develop public policy or community-wide goals in response to complex issues, governments and communities must move beyond the traditional four-year planning cycle.**

Community planning should be seen as a critical next step in the evolution of good government and governance. To accomplish this, communities must learn to:

- plan together to set long-term priorities and societal goals that balance their economic, social and environmental needs and interests;
- form practical plans to achieve these goals; and,
- work together to implement the plans and solve problems that arise along the way.

**7. Technology, and in particular web-based and wireless tools and applications, can help governments extend the scope and reach of public engagement.** Web-based and wireless tools enable us to transfer the dialogue from the face-to-face conversations to an online discussion. This is important because, in our model, people need time to think through the ideas. It is too costly and time consuming to keep bringing people together face-to-face for this kind of in-depth discussion. Web-based and wireless technologies are a welcome alternative.

**8. Public engagement requires strong leadership, but that leadership must come at least as much from the bottom-up as the top-down.** Without the right leadership the project will quickly stall and fail. We need leaders who are ready, willing and able to challenge the public to assume ownership of, and responsibility for, solving issues.

### **The Pilot Projects: A Brief Synopsis**

While all three sources of learning have made a crucial contribution to this report, the five pilot projects played a particularly important role. We used them to test various aspects of the model, including the use of new tools, such as web-based applications; new deliberative approaches to dialogue; and a variety of techniques aimed at ensuring that the dialogue connected with the people we were engaging.

In addition to community members, the following eight provincial departments participated:

- Business New Brunswick
- Energy
- Environment
- Social Development
- Intergovernmental Affairs
- Local Government
- Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour
- Wellness, Culture and Sport

The Executive Council Office and the Executive Policy Research Unit provided direction and support.

### **Skills Development: Reckoning with the New Economy**


Preparing and modernizing New Brunswick's workforce presents a major challenge. It will take research, planning, investment and commitment from governments, employers, educational and training institutions, labour unions and professional associations. It will also take high levels of coordination and collaboration between the players. The skills development project initiated what has evolved into an ongoing dialogue, beginning with **35 people drawn from government and provincial stakeholders**. Its purpose is to enable participants to work collaboratively as they evaluate the makeup of New Brunswick's labour force, and consider how to equip both existing and future workers with the education, skills and training they will require. The results of this initial dialogue will be presented in September 2008 at a Skills Development Summit, hosted by Premier Shawn Graham.

### **Wellness**

The wellness project is engaging **ordinary residents and community organization stakeholders** in a dialogue about their readiness to take a more active role in promoting wellness activities within their families and communities. The Select Committee on Wellness hosted three meetings each in Boiestown/Doaktown and in Bathurst over the course of the year. About **25 people participated in each community**. The goal was threefold: to promote a better understanding of wellness; to explain how wellness contributes to a community's development; and to gauge the readiness of individuals and communities to work with the provincial government to develop a community action plan to promote wellness.

### **The Climate Change Action Plan Initiative**

Premier Shawn Graham will lead the climate change project at a roundtable discussion in May 2008. The project will engage **15 opinion leaders** in a dialogue about the public's role in reducing greenhouse gases. This initiative follows through on a pledge made in the Government of New Brunswick's Climate Change Action Plan 2007-2012. Our aim is to determine if participants are willing to provide public leadership because, as opinion leaders, they



may be more influential than government in encouraging people to change entrenched attitudes and behaviours.

### **Imagining Miramichi 10 Years Out**

In 2007, Miramichi lost about 750 jobs when mills owned by forestry companies UPM-Kymmene and Weyerhaeuser closed. This had a devastating impact on the Miramichi region and in response, the Government of New Brunswick created the Miramichi Action Committee to help the community consider its options and develop a long-term plan. A smaller group, known as the long-term subcommittee and drawn from the action committee's members, oversaw the pilot project. It brought together **35 people from across the region** to discuss what role **ordinary residents** can play in a community's renewal. The group met four times in as many months with experts on the topics of globalization, new technologies, business development, demographic trends and environmental issues impacting the northeast region. They wanted to understand the issues and in particular, what, if anything, residents could do to help Miramichi adjust to its new reality. Among its initial goals, the committee sought to build a network of community leaders who, in turn, would launch an ongoing community dialogue and design a plan to engage the broader community.

### **Sustainable Communities in a Self-Sufficient Province: Planning Our Future Together**

We define sustainable communities as ones where stakeholders in business, social and environmental organizations move beyond a narrow view of their own interests to a broader, community-wide vision of development. Their shared commitment to long-term goals provides the basis for a genuine, ongoing dialogue that enables them to solve problems and plan together. For this pilot project we went to Saint John to consider how the region could build upon the strengths of a well-established cooperative effort between the communities of Grand Bay-Westfield, Quispamsis, Rothesay, Saint John and St. Martins. We worked with **35 stakeholders who are involved in existing community development initiatives**, most notably a multi-year project known as True Growth. Our aim was to consolidate the lessons learned during the development and implementation of True Growth and to recommend next steps to move the process forward. Using the Saint John experience as a template, the pilot project will make recommendations as to how to foster and support sustainable communities in other parts of the province.

### **The Target Audiences**

While this report draws freely on the five pilot projects for many purposes, including, illustration, best practices and lessons learned, it is not a report about the projects. Indeed, some are still underway as we write this. Each project group will release its own final report, produced by those who led it and/or the departments that sponsored it.

For the Public Engagement Initiative, these pilot projects acted as real world incubators to allow us to test the effectiveness of our public engagement model and make any necessary adjustments. This report reflects the lessons we learned while working on these projects.

With that in mind, this report will be of interest to the following groups:

- **The Government of New Brunswick:** It will be up to elected officials and public servants to decide whether to use the engagement processes we propose.
- **Decision Makers and Opinion Leaders:** This includes municipal governments, business leaders, civil society organization members, academics and journalists, all of whom should have a real interest in understanding the model and its potential impact on government and governance.
- **Community-minded Residents:** For those people who are wondering about the future of their communities and how they may be involved in planning for the future, we hope they will find new and empowering ways to forge that role for themselves within our model.
- **Other Jurisdictions:** Our hope is that other regions and provinces will be interested in our results and consider how the New Brunswick initiative, with its new model of public engagement, may work for them.

## **An Overview of the Final Report**

The final report is divided into four parts.

### **Part I – Origins and Context**

Societal goals, such as public education, health and wellness, business growth, labour force development, environmental stewardship, climate change and community development, are shaped by a variety of motives, beliefs and actions. Because of that, we believe the public has a part to play in developing both public policy and community-wide goals that reflect the community's culture and values. This includes considering the options, making choices, developing plans and taking action to achieve societal goals.

In Chapter 1, we describe the broader context in which our work has been carried out and explain the historical origins of the big ideas behind our model – the shift to results.



## **Part II – Culture Change: A New Model of Engagement**

For several generations, our political culture has been evolving in a different direction. The public has come to expect more of government, so much that they now tend to see it as the primary decision maker and problem solver in our society. In public debate, we talk as though government alone is responsible for the achievement of societal goals when, in fact, everyone has a role to play. Let's call this the dependency issue. It must be reversed. As it stands, however, government's way of engaging the public – what we call consultation – is actually aggravating the situation and feeding the dependency issue.

To change this, we must explore the philosophy behind the modern public engagement model. We do this by asking, and responding to five key questions:

- What is public engagement?
- When do we need dialogue?
- How does dialogue help us transfer ownership and responsibility?
- What kind of dialogue should we be having and with whom?
- What is government's role?

We answer these questions in Chapters 2 through 6. Together they explain the model, and the philosophy behind it. With these questions we will work our way through complex issues one step at a time. As we do, we will disentangle the component parts and tackle each separately. This is one of the strengths of the public engagement model.

By contrast, the traditional model of public consultation is a far more blunt instrument because it approaches every issue in the same way. While there is a role for traditional consultation, we believe its use has extended far beyond what it was originally intended to do. Modern governments need a more sophisticated approach that distinguishes between different engagement tasks.

The questions provide the frame for our new model, and as we will explain in Part IV, government officials and community members will be able to tailor the engagement process to their specific needs by asking and then answering each of these questions in turn.

### **Part III – Starting the Dialogue: An Implementation Strategy**

This section addresses a sixth, and final question: What does the engagement process look like? The solution is straightforward: government must transfer some of the ownership of and responsibility for solving complex issues and achieving societal goals back to the public – and the public must agree to take this on.

In Chapters 7 through 9 we draw on the initiative’s five pilot projects to explain how to design the kinds of processes needed to employ the model in different circumstances.

### **Part IV – Themes and Conclusions**

Public engagement is not just desirable; it is a condition of effective governance. Therefore government must change the way it relates to the public. It must engage residents in a way that leads to new roles and responsibilities, and a commitment to action. This section explains how to do that.

Together, these final three chapters detail our toolkit. Chapter 10 revisits our major themes, Chapter 11 present the key conclusions from our own engagement exercises and Chapter 12 details our recommendations.



# Part I Origins and Context

## Chapter 1: Setting the Context

### The Shift to Results

Today it is universally agreed that good government focuses on more than efficiency, transparency, accountability or fairness – though all of these matter greatly. It also focuses on effectiveness; that is, getting good results.

A couple of decades ago, a quiet revolution began in public administration: the so-called shift to results. Led mainly by management gurus from the United States and the United Kingdom, they argued that, while governments were collecting a lot of information on their programs and processes, they paid very little attention to the impact these initiatives had on the society around them. In other words, governments weren't tracking the outcomes, or results, of their actions.

The conclusion was as obvious as it was embarrassing. Without information on outcomes, a government couldn't really know how well its policies and programs were working. Take for example, a drinking and driving public information campaign. In the past, officials would design a campaign but would not track useful statistics, such as an increase in taxi usage or a reduction in reported drinking and driving incidents from local law enforcement and emergency services. In government, no one gathered this type of information.

Soon, that began to change and by the mid-1990s, many countries, including Canada, had begun monitoring the performance of government departments, programs and policies. Now, a strong emphasis is placed on clarifying goals and on using indicators to assess and measure progress. Information and communications technologies have been critically important because they have eased information gathering and analysis.

Although the shift to results is still very much a work in progress, it stands as one of the most important reforms of the last quarter century. Today it is universally agreed that good government focuses on more than efficiency, transparency, accountability or fairness – though all of these matter greatly. It also focuses on effectiveness; that is, getting good results. Without that, there would be little point in many of the things governments do.

However, what is much less well understood is this trend's impact on democracy. We are beginning to see that the shift to results not only changes how government works, but also how public dialogue and decision making work. **Effective government and governance requires a new role for the public in making choices, developing plans and taking action in order to achieve important societal goals.** This is edging us toward a new model of governance.

The Public Engagement Initiative explored where the trend is leading us and how we can strengthen it. Or, more accurately, it explored the fascinating and unexpected way that two great themes of contemporary public policy – more effective government and public engagement – now intersect.



Societal goals cut across many aspects of life in our society.

## Societal Goals and the Issue of Complexity

The public wants results. Indeed, unlike governments they have always been focused on outcomes. This is clear from the way they discuss issues that are important to them. They rarely talk about inputs and outputs, programs and processes, jurisdictional responsibilities, regulatory regimes or policy frameworks. That language reflects the highly specialized world of bureaucrats and policy advocates, not ordinary people.

What citizens care about are the goals they want to achieve together as a community, such as economic growth, low unemployment, a skilled workforce, safer streets, a healthier population, a tolerant society and clean air, land and water. From their viewpoint, programs and processes have no real value apart from their ability to contribute to goals like these. Everyday political discourse revolves around what such goals should be, along with broad outlines of how they should be achieved.

We call these **societal goals** because, as we shall see, they cut across many aspects of life in our society. Their achievement thus requires more than a focus on results and better information or new technologies. It requires a wide range of actors, such as governments, businesses, non-government organizations (NGOs), professional associations, post-secondary institutions, and the general public to align their actions around the goal.

For example, our skills development pilot project is about renewing New Brunswick's workforce to make it competitive in a global economy. Governments, business, labour unions, universities and colleges all have a role to play. No single party is in a position to achieve this. It is a societal goal that raises complex issues. Achieving it will take a collective effort. This is **the complexity issue**.


Citizens understand this kind of complexity. They know, based on their own experiences, that societal goals have many causes and that most of these causes are not under the immediate control of any one institution or group. Because of that, they understand that it is unrealistic to expect government to achieve these goals on its own.

This raises an important question. If public dialogue among ordinary citizens is largely focused on achieving societal goals, but these same people know a government cannot achieve these goals on their own, what precisely do they expect government to do?

## A New Role for Governments

Insofar as government policies and programs contribute to societal goals, it is safe to say citizens want government to use its powers and resources to the best of its ability. But increasingly citizens want something more from government. They want government to provide the kind of **leadership**

Addressing the impact global forces are having on individual jurisdictions such as New Brunswick, is the governance challenge of our times



required to get a whole community or province working together to achieve these goals. They want key players to align their actions in ways that combine to produce maximum effect.

New forces, from globalization and new technologies to shifting demographics and climate change, are intensifying the need for cooperation and alignment between community groups and players. Indeed, this lack of coordination and alignment is one of the biggest obstacles to real progress; addressing the impact these global forces are having on individual jurisdictions, such as New Brunswick, is the governance challenge of our times.

This places both government leadership and public engagement in a new light. Traditionally, when a government convenes stakeholders to talk, it is usually to get advice on what government should do on a specific issue. Only very recently have governments begun to reassess the purpose of public engagement and their role within it.

Rather than setting the agenda, citizens are increasingly looking to their governments to lead a conversation about what the agenda should be and how to achieve it. This is a very different role for government. Seeking advice and encouraging collaboration require very different discussions than the traditional public consultation model. Instead, government officials must be prepared to **convene, facilitate, enable and partner** with various groups and interests within a community to find consensus regarding societal goals and the accompanying public policies and programs. This lies at the heart of our new public engagement model.

### **Self-Sufficiency: Our *projet de société***

In 2006 Premier Shawn Graham launched a series of government-wide initiatives, all linked under the Self-Sufficiency title. Its purpose is to realign government programs, policies and services to help the Government of New Brunswick respond to a powerful mix of economic and demographic changes. Its core goal is to make New Brunswick self-sufficient by 2026, which, for the Government of New Brunswick, means that the strength of the provincial economy will meet or exceed the Canadian provincial average, thus eliminating the need for federal equalization payments. Currently, the equalization program accounts for about one-quarter of provincial revenue.<sup>2</sup> It is a formidable task but the reasons for setting it are compelling.

New Brunswick is losing its most important resource – its young people – at an alarming rate. At the same time, it has been unable to attract and retain immigrants and migrants from other parts of the country. Finally, the resource

The challenge self-sufficiency poses for New Brunswickers is nothing less than to unite around a realistic, long-term plan to renew the province.

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that New Brunswick, like all other provinces, would continue to receive federal funding for health and social programs as part of its unconditional funding even when the Self-Sufficiency goal is reached.

sector, traditionally a major employer, particularly in rural and northern New Brunswick, is in the midst of a difficult transition that will leave the province with fewer companies and jobs. However, the provincial economy has yet to replace those lost jobs and revenue with new investments and new companies in these affected areas.

However, self-sufficiency is about much more than promoting business or adopting new policies. It is an overarching goal for the whole province. It links other societal goals together, from increasing the population to renewing the economy; from promoting wellness and literacy to protecting wetlands and wildlife.

Indeed, the challenge self-sufficiency poses for New Brunswickers is nothing less than to unite around a realistic, long-term plan to renew the province. As such, it resembles what in French is called a *projet de société*, that is, a collective mission. Everyone has a role to play.

To achieve that level of change all members of society must take ownership of a part of the agenda and assume responsibility for ensuring it is met. For its part, government must provide the kind of leadership needed to create an environment where responsible planning, action and cooperation can occur at all levels of society – in families, businesses, organizations and communities. To do that, it must develop new skills – to convene, facilitate, enable and partner – in order to achieve our *projet de société*.

The Self-Sufficiency initiative is a clarion call for a new kind of collaboration, one that aligns the social, political and economic forces within New Brunswick. It is not just a collective mission for New Brunswickers; it is the logical response to the growing forces of complexity and change.


### Changing Government From Within

Governments, like societies, evolve and change over time.

The idea that government, whether governments in general, or the Government of New Brunswick in particular, should facilitate a society-wide conversation about the future direction of the province raises some hard questions about the role of government. We will explore the following three questions in this report.

#### 1. Is it practical to suggest that government suddenly take on a new role?

Yes. In fact, they have done so before. Consider the rise of the welfare state. Before the 1930s, government was seen as a protector, lawmaker, regulator and builder of infrastructure. It was not widely viewed as a provider, or promoter, of personal welfare. By the 1940s that attitude had changed, largely because Canada had gone through a major change with the rapid growth of cities and the emergence of a post-war industrial economy. Today the idea that government has a responsibility for our



personal welfare is widely accepted. Although people disagree on the extent of this responsibility, few think it should be abandoned altogether. Twenty years from now, people may well be debating government's role as a facilitator of social change in a similar way. The lesson here is that governments, like societies, evolve and change over time.

## **2. Are governments ready, willing and able to take on this new role?**

To answer that, we must consider four interrelated issues. First, it must be admitted that governments are not ready. Just as people must develop skills to work in the new economy, so must government officials develop skills to perform their new tasks in our model of public engagement. This report is a starting point to help the Government of New Brunswick get started.

Second, for the most part, government officials are oftentimes ambivalent about this new role. In this respect, public servants are like the rest of us when confronted with large-scale change. Some embrace it, but more often than not, others view the changes with doubt and suspicion, wondering what it will mean for them. For government officials who may also feel the pressure of public expectations, there is also a real worry that this new, collaborative role, will create unrealistic expectations, increase pressure on public finances or commit a government to a new set of goals that may distract it from other priorities. These are understandable concerns. However a properly managed engagement process will not open the floodgates to unsustainable or unrealistic demands. On the contrary, this model contains checks and balances that keep expectations, demands and commitments under control.

Third, there is doubt that politicians will loosen control of the political agenda. We believe that once politicians understand the new model, they will identify and accept their roles within it. Not only does the new model clarify and legitimize their leadership role, it strengthens their connection with the people and communities they represent.

Fourth, government officials fear opening up public policy development in the current media climate. Collaboration between governments, stakeholders, citizens and communities requires open-ended, public dialogue. But how will the media, with its 24-hour news cycle and short deadlines, cover the nuances of a public dialogue?

Will it simply encourage the kind of grandstanding from opponents that makes progress all but impossible? Can dialogue on sensitive issues really take place in era of citizen journalists, live blogging and multimedia news organizations?

Our view is that the sceptics have it backwards. Not only can we have a public dialogue on complex issues, in many cases, we must. A government obsessed with controlling every message can find itself in a vicious cycle. As the political arm moves to centralize control over all public sector communications, it ends up alienating a large swath of the population, thus creating tension and mistrust between people and their government. The only real alternative is for government to relax its grip on the process and encourage the public to assume a more engaged and articulate role. This in turn, places a new responsibility on the public to help define and control the key messages that shape public debate.

### **3. How does this new role fit with its traditional role of regulator, service provider and lawmaker?**

Governments have always worn many hats and will continue to do so. This new role does not replace the traditional roles, although some may be affected by it, perhaps very significantly.

#### **Public Engagement: A Systematic Approach**

To achieve real social change, the Government of New Brunswick must engage the public through real discussion and dialogue that leads to collaborative decision making and action.


**We recommend the Government of New Brunswick adopt a government-wide policy that ensures a more deliberative approach to public engagement.** The model we advocate has a high degree of flexibility, to allow each activity to be tailored to the needs of the participants.

It will be:

- able to resolve complex issues into simpler parts;
- more respectful of the interests that may be at stake in finding solutions; and,
- more mindful of the fact that stakeholders and citizens often have a role to play in making the solutions work.

At the same time, if the model is to be applied across government, it cannot be so complex that it requires years of study and high levels of expertise to master. An adequate model therefore must be:

- relatively simple to understand and apply;
- robust enough to truly realign public relationships, without tying the hands of government; and,
- flexible enough to accommodate very different circumstances.



There is one thing this model isn't: it is not meant to replace all forms of government and community consultation. It is an important addition to policy development, but it is not the sole means to design and manage policies and programs. There is still a role for the traditional consultation model; what we advocate is clearly identifying when to consult and when to engage. **Our model will help government officials decide which form of public dialogue is appropriate for various projects and tasks.**

New Brunswick's five pilot projects represent the first time a Canadian jurisdiction has used this new, collaborative model of public engagement. If adopted government-wide, it will be a model for others to follow. New Brunswick has been in this position before. In the 1980s, it was the first jurisdiction to introduce a new service delivery model, now known as Service New Brunswick. Its one-stop offices, located in central locations in communities throughout the province, and online services are a New Brunswick success story that has been adopted throughout Canada and in other parts of the world. We believe the public engagement model offers New Brunswick a chance to be a world leader in public discourse and public policy development.

# Part II Culture Change: A New Model of Engagement

## Chapter 2 What is Public Engagement?

The consultation model categorizes public opinion into winners and losers.

### The Consultation Model

If we are calling for a new model of public engagement, some people will reply that there are already many models out there, such as local town hall meetings, public hearings, government-moderated discussion forums and telephone surveys. But that list is deceiving. Each is merely a different tool within the same model, a model that is followed by most governments when seeking public input.

That model works something like this. A government panel is given the task of finding solutions to an issue. The public is invited to express their views. This can happen in all kinds of ways, from town hall meetings to online discussion forums. Once the submissions have been made, the panel reviews them, deliberates, reaches conclusions and makes recommendations to government, which then decides how it will respond.


This is **the consultation model**. It has served us well enough, however, in recent years it has been suspected of driving people and governments apart rather than bringing them together because it inevitably chooses one point-of-view over another. In short, it has the unfortunate effect of categorizing the views of the public into winners and losers.

Consider a consultation on tax reform. A small business owner may appear to advocate for a payroll tax cut, arguing that it will give businesses greater flexibility to reinvest or hire more workers. However, the next speaker may represent an anti-poverty organization who would advocate the exact opposite position, arguing that a reduction on tax revenue would risk cuts to social services. Both sides may present compelling arguments, but under the consultation model, they will each try to lessen the other's argument to gain influence with the panel members. It is in each of their interests to create a sense of urgency or even crisis around the issue, seek out studies or shocking statistics that support their positions and bring competing claims into disrepute.

The guiding principle is clear: the squeaky wheel gets the grease. This, in turn, creates distrust, tensions and rivalries between different groups in a community. The use of such tactics has intensified in recent years, especially around big public issues. In part, this is due to the influence of communications experts who advise organizations and individuals how to make their views heard. Consultants like these have learned that the process often rewards bad behaviour – especially on high profile issues. Exaggeration and grand-standing attract media attention, which puts pressure on government to respond.

Participants in the consultation model have also learned that the process rewards intransigence. Because each speaker's role is limited to stating their





view, there is little cost in holding firm to it, even in the face of conflicting evidence or counterclaims. Advocates know it is unlikely they will actually have to defend it. On the contrary, when journalists want a counter-argument, they turn to someone else. The two positions are then presented as equally viable possibilities.

From the media's perspective this looks like unbiased reporting. From the advocate's view, it is a reward for intransigence. As a result, advocates see little to gain in modifying their position in response to evidence or argument. Most have come to view their job as one of getting their message into the public space at every opportunity. They are not there to engage in genuine debate; they are there to broadcast a message.

There is yet another consequence of the model. Not only is it making real public debate all but impossible, it is undermining government's relationship with the public. In effect, the committee leading the consultation ends up with a shopping list of recommendations and positions, many of which are incompatible. So when it sits down in private to deliberate and make recommendations, someone always loses. Committee members know all too well that when they announce their decisions, many of those same advocates will open the curtain on Act II of their communications script and lash out at the committee for ignoring their demands.

Not surprisingly, committees are increasingly secretive about their rationale and defensive about their choices. This in turn, makes the public even more suspicious of the process and the advocates more strident in their criticism. The clear lesson is that, when it comes to controversial issues, our overdependence on traditional consultation isn't working very well for either the public or the government.

### **The Alternative is a Dialogue**

In assessing this situation, we must be careful not to confuse the symptoms with the cause. The problem is not just the communications consultants or the media. The real problem is the process. It creates a competition for influence that pits one interest against another. Consultation can set up a zero-sum game where one group wins only if another one loses. This encourages exaggeration, grandstanding and intransigence. It also doesn't allow participants to talk to each other. Rather, they talk at government, and then months later, government sends out its reply. Under this model, information and communication travels in one direction.

There is an alternative. Government does not always have to present itself as the impartial decision maker, especially when there is real controversy over the values and priorities at stake. In such cases, it may be far more helpful to engage in the process more as a facilitator. As such, its primary task would be to get the various stakeholders to begin engaging one another, rather than

The public engagement model allows information to travel back and forth, between participants



competing for influence. It is a model that allows information to travel back and forth, between participants.

Such a process would give participants a more substantive role. It recognizes the stake individuals have in the issue and in working to resolve it. By joining the process, participants would be actively involved in discussing options, recommending outcomes and then explaining the rationale. In this model, participants would listen to each other, consider the various perspectives, suggest compromises and then work together to propose shared goals, priorities and measures. It would also result in a more coherent set of options for government, instead of the usual shopping list of recommendations.

This is the approach we took in each of our five pilot projects. We did not set up a table at the front of community halls around the province and invite the public to come and advise us on what government should do to prepare New Brunswick's workforce for the future, revitalize the communities of the Miramichi, or promote wellness in towns and villages. Instead, we asked them to sit down with us and discuss what each of us – public servants, politicians, residents, academics, business leaders and community advocates – could do to resolve our major issues. We asked them how we could learn to work better together.

The difference between these two approaches, consultation versus dialogue, is simple, but powerful. Dialogue gives all the participants a sense of control over the process and its results. In exchange, it asks everyone to take ownership of the issue, along with some responsibility for its solution. This can have a dramatic change on the tone and dynamic of the whole process.

There is still a role for traditional consultation to play. Governments will and should continue to use it, particularly when considering new ideas or being responsive to a particular issue in the community. However, for complex issues, such as challenges brought about by economic and demographic change in New Brunswick, the public engagement model is better equipped to conciliate among various groups. To do that, we must be ready, willing and able to move from consultation to dialogue.

## Chapter 3

# When Do We Need Dialogue?

There are three basic ways dialogue can help us respond more effectively to complex issues. It can:

- Align various groups behind a common goal;
- Change public attitudes and behaviour; and,
- Make important choices about the future.

Let's look at each one in turn.

### Align Behind a Common Goal

All stakeholders must work together to set priorities, identify common strategies and allocate roles and responsibilities

One way to address complex issues is to align sometimes divergent interests behind a common goal. For instance, in the skills development pilot project, we observed that a common or societal goal, such as preparing New Brunswick's workforce for the future, will require the work of more than one group. All stakeholders – business, labour, education and governments – must work together to set priorities, identify common strategies and allocate roles and responsibilities. The same is true for other societal goals.

Consultation won't work in this example because the emphasis will be placed on what government can do, rather than what each group can do in concert with each other. The logic here is simple. If the stakeholders are an essential part of designing a solution, they will assume some ownership of, and responsibility for, that solution.

This is what the skills development process was designed to do. Everyone involved agreed that, first and foremost, they wanted this to become an ongoing dialogue between stakeholders and government to identify key issues, define strategies and create practical action plans that involve everyone, not just government.

### Change Attitudes and Behaviour

People normally applaud government's efforts to change public behaviour; the challenge is getting individuals to recognize their role in achieving the goal.

An ongoing dialogue between a government and people can also help to change public attitudes and behaviour. This was the thesis we explored through the wellness and climate change pilot projects.

People normally applaud government's efforts to change public behaviour; the challenge is getting individuals to recognize their role in achieving the goal. For instance, we might want to be environmentally responsible but that doesn't mean we're going to embrace composting. But if we want citizens to rise to this challenge, we must help them assume responsibility for their part in solving the issues.

That won't happen with the consultation model. In fact it does the exact opposite. By telling government what to do and then waiting for it to issue

a report, both government and participants reinforce the notion that only government can solve the problem.

Engaging citizens in a dialogue is required to reverse this way of thinking. The dialogue must include a practical discussion of everyone's roles and responsibilities and encourage the group to develop a plan of action that is achievable by each of the participants.

### **Make Important Choices About the Future**

Charting the future direction of a province or a community requires everyone to agree to sometimes make difficult choices. By how do you make that decision? This question is as old as democracy. There are at least three ways governments gauge public opinion on various issues. The most basic and direct, of course, is the vote. Parties put forward platforms at election time and the voters choose. The platform supposedly defines goals and priorities and, along with them, the government's mandate to pursue them.

The public also have ways to speak between elections by participating in various forms of public debate. Traditional venues include political parties, town hall meetings, rallies and demonstrations, the media, and, of course, government consultations. These might be called the second tier of the machinery of democracy. They also provide guidance for governments seeking to know what the people want.


Finally, over the last few decades, public opinion research has emerged as a powerful third tool for assessing what the public wants. Surveys, polls and other tools now exert enormous influence on democracies like our own. They are consulted daily on almost every issue imaginable.

Their ability to shed light on how people feel about issues of the day and to register approval and dissatisfaction provides an important check on decision makers. When that voice becomes unified and clear, it can be a powerful signal that government is either on the right track or out-of-step with what the public wants. Leaders rightly pay close attention to such signals and they are an important guide to good governance.

There is a growing tendency for government to turn to public opinion research to guide it in more complex tasks, such as setting investment priorities, developing policy frameworks or strategic planning. Exercises like these often set a government's course for the medium- to long-term. Understandably, governments want their choices to reflect what citizens think. Party platforms and public debate give some guidance, but in an increasingly complex and fast-changing world, they often fall short. Platforms are quickly overtaken by events and conventional forms of public debate often lead to fragmented and inconclusive results. Public opinion research therefore is becoming the

Our model takes next logical step beyond tracking the public's opinion about the future and asking them to start making some firm decisions and plans about it

As uncertainty and change increase, one way for communities to create stability and cohesiveness is to make choices together about the future, and realistic plans for achieving them



tool of choice to fill this gap. It is seen as a more rigorous, up-to-date and representative way of articulating the public voice.

But as governments move down this road, at least two things should be considered closely. One is the high cost and elite nature of the exercise. The second is that, while public opinion research is a fine tool for gauging what the public thinks at a given moment in time, it is not the only way to assess how people will think or act in the medium- to long-term, especially when things are volatile.

On the first point, if public opinion research is to be reliable, a couple of polls are hardly enough. Serious and substantial work on emerging trends can be very useful, but it is often very costly, which means many governments cannot afford to do quality research on very many fronts. Moreover, the methodology is grounded in highly technical knowledge that few decision makers will fully understand. This means the results of such research must be interpreted by a few experts, which, in turn, leaves decision makers in a poor position to evaluate or criticize the findings. In consequence, the results can be controversial and the process does little to enhance the transparency of important decisions.

On the second point, we should recognize that the public's views can and do change very quickly, say, as a result of changing circumstances, new information or strong leadership. Such changes can be abrupt and unexpected, so that even the best research may fail to detect or anticipate them.

Today this is truer than ever. The faster information and events move, the more volatile public opinion becomes. The more volatile it becomes, the less reliable polls and surveys are as a guide to future trends. This is not to say that governments are wrong to look to this kind of research for guidance on future trends. The point is rather that public opinion research is not the only, or even the best, way to plan for the future. There is another way of getting the public to speak their mind, one that can be more resilient to changing circumstances, more transparent, more democratic and less costly. Simply, it involves taking the next logical step beyond tracking the public's opinion about the future and asking them to start making some firm decisions and plans about it.

This step from opinion to decision is how we often deal with complex, long-term decisions at a personal level. Consider the task of choosing a career. When a son or daughter comes to us seeking advice on their future, we may begin by probing their views (opinions) on some key issues: What are their talents? What do they enjoy doing? What kind of job do they think will challenge and motivate them? What kind of lifestyle do they want for the future? What are their prospects for employment?


But the search for an answer to the career question doesn't end there. Dealing effectively with such a question requires more than just probing someone's views. Often, these views will not be clear or reliable enough to arrive at a single, satisfactory answer. Getting such an answer requires something else. It requires that the person make some choices from among a range of options. This process is one where real deliberation – weighing alternatives, considering values, making tradeoffs, and so on – concludes with an internal commitment to a specific path or goal.

Such a commitment moves the person beyond simply gathering and interpreting the available information. It reorders our goals and priorities in ways that, more often than not, cannot be divined from the information alone. It also provides a more secure foundation for future planning and action and helps ensure that the person will make the effort to stay the course when difficulties arise. Finally, making choices requires that we take yet another step – making a realistic plan to achieve them. This plan helps reinforce our commitment to the path or goal and gives us the guidance and direction needed to adjust to changing circumstances.

This same approach can and is being applied at the community level. As uncertainty and change increase, one way for communities to create stability and cohesiveness is to make choices together about the future, and realistic plans for achieving them. Such choices and plans must involve the whole community so everyone has a sense of ownership of the goals and a personal stake in making the plan work when problems arise or circumstances change.

Rather than gauging public opinion, government officials should engage members of the public in decision making. This is what the Sustainable Communities pilot project did. In 2003, the five communities that make up the Saint John region (Grand Bay-Westfield, Quispamsis, Rothesay, Saint John and St. Martins) came together to develop a regional development plan. The True Growth initiative brought together stakeholders from the business, social services, health, education, arts, environment and volunteer sectors to work together to consider their common interests and develop some common goals.

The Public Engagement Initiative began working with the Saint John group in 2007, following a series of industrial development announcements that could, if fulfilled, bring up to \$20 billion in investment to the region. That level of growth will bring about significant change to the makeup of the region, not all positive. While most everyone wants economic growth and development, there is a sober and realistic awareness that rapid economic growth can cause serious social and environmental problems. The dialogue, which at the time of writing was still ongoing, aimed to minimize these risks by engaging the whole community in defining a comprehensive plan for the future. The overarching



goal is to make the Saint John region a sustainable community, that is, one where economic, social and environmental needs are balanced.

The process has already progressed through a number of phases. For example, the City of Saint John engaged its citizens in a sustained discussion of the community's special values, its history and culture, its strengths and weaknesses. The result was Vision 2015, a community-inspired vision for the future. In addition, Business New Brunswick, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Irving Oil Limited together funded a consultant's report that examined how the region could prepare for the expected development. Known as the Benefits Blueprint, the final report, with 16 main recommendations, was released in March 2008.

This is an impressive display of a new kind of community dialogue and a new approach to community-building. Equally impressive is the willingness of businesses, social and environmental organizations, and local governments to work together to arrive at a plan that balances the needs of the whole community.

The powerful lesson here is that the right kind of dialogue – one that brings the whole community together – can lead to long-term decisions and commitments that clarify goals, values and priorities. This, in turn, makes the community more cohesive, innovative and resilient. It also strengthens its members' resolve to respond to unforeseen circumstances in ways that keep them working together to achieve their common goals.

# Chapter 4

## How does Dialogue Help us Transfer Ownership and Responsibility?

We all need to hear each others' point of view

These three stages require time to discuss, reflect and reach a consensus

### The Engagement Continuum

If we are to transfer ownership and responsibility of issues from government to citizens, stakeholders and communities, we must begin by distinguishing the three stages of the dialogue process.

**Stage I** opens the dialogue by asking participants to explain their views on an issue. This is the natural starting point for any real dialogue. We all need to hear each others' point of view. This gets differences of opinion on the table and lets us identify the issues we will need to work through in Stages II and III, if the process is to arrive at solutions that are acceptable to everyone.

**Stage II** takes us to the next step. Once positions are on the table, differences will appear. We deliberate and try to find common ground. Ideally, this culminates in decisions that bring the participants closer to a shared position.

**Stage III** shifts the focus again, this time to action. Once a decision is made, we must work together to develop an action plan and then implement it.

We call these three stages of the dialogue process the engagement continuum. It is represented as follows:




The engagement continuum puts the limitations of traditional consultation in stark relief. Although consultation is usually presented as an exercise in public engagement, we now see that it never takes the public beyond Stage I.

In comparison to how we live our lives, this often looks artificial, even bizarre. When people are trying to solve a problem within their family, in the workplace or with friends, the conversation doesn't stop once they have said what they think about the problem. No reasonable person expects to solve problems this way. On the contrary, once we have said what we think, we normally move to the next step – deliberation. Someone who can't or won't do this is usually regarded as socially inept. This is not said lightly. The point is that our sense of personal responsibility is intimately bound up with this kind of dialogue.

Consider the following. When people work through a problem they begin a process that, ideally, changes how they see things. It is not just a decision making process; it is also a learning exercise and a relationship-building experience. As the participants move from stating their views to comparing, analyzing and modifying them, they are led to reflect on their beliefs, goals and commitments and to engage one another in a discussion about them. This exposes everyone involved to new information and encourages them to





make tradeoffs or compromises in order to arrive at a shared view. As a result, their views and attitudes change – and they arrive at a decision, which is the culmination of Stage II.

Often, however, decision making is not enough, whether in civic or personal affairs. People must move to the next stage – action. For instance, if the issue is promoting wellness by reducing obesity in a family or a community, people need to do more than just talk about it (Stage I) or debate the merits of exercise (Stage II). They must actually get out and do it, too.

That’s Stage III – a plan of action. Here, people determine how they will implement the decisions they agreed upon in Stage II. For Stage III to work, participants must agree that the decisions made in Stage II are correct and they must be motivated enough to act.

These three stages require time to discuss, reflect and reach a consensus. This is vitally important because if participants feel rushed or are forced to skip a step, they will not reach their destination.

It is not enough for them just to say that a particular trade-off is fair or reasonable. They must commit to it in their own minds. They must make the trade-off. Otherwise they will not feel a sense of responsibility for the consequences that flow from it – it will not be part of their plan. Transferring ownership and responsibility is not just a political concept; it is a personal and collective psychological journey.





# Chapter 5

## What Kind of Dialogue Should We Be Having And With Whom?

### An Analogy from Management Studies

So far, we have distinguished between consultation and public dialogue; seen how public dialogue can help us deal with complexity through alignment, behavioural change and long-term decision making; and discussed how dialogue can help us transfer responsibility from government to the public.

But who, exactly, should be involved in these dialogues? The public, after all, is a complex entity made up of a number of subgroups. Should we throw the doors open and let anyone participate, as consultation processes often do? Or do we want to engage different groups for different purposes? If so, which ones would we engage and when? How do we decide? The field of management studies offers some answers.

A few decades ago, a new approach to corporate planning emerged. It was based on the idea that complex discussions around planning should be resolved into simpler tasks, including visioning exercises, strategic planning, and the development of logic models.<sup>3</sup> Each one contributes something different to the planning process and engages the participants in different kinds of dialogue. Also, in most organizations there is a division of labour around who participates in which exercises according to their special skills, experience and status. As a result, today this kind of planning is commonplace in the private and public sectors.


Despite the parallels, little has been done to apply these exercises to public engagement. Public engagement also needs to distinguish between different tasks that require different styles of dialogue and, as a general rule, different subgroups should be assigned the lead in different dialogues. The next section identifies these tasks and considers how we assign them.

### The Order of Public Dialogue

**Citizens and the Visioning Dialogue:** In the last chapter, we learned how the five communities in the Saint John region are engaged in a dialogue to develop a long-term plan for the region. In a similar vein, the Miramichi pilot project aims to get citizens thinking about what kind of community they want in 10 years and their role in reaching that goal. Both projects require a deep discussion about the community's values, its history and culture, its strengths and weaknesses, and an imaginative look into the future. This is similar to what the corporate model calls a visioning exercise.

Both the Saint John and Miramichi projects require a deep discussion about the community's values, its history and culture, its strengths and weaknesses, and an imaginative look into the future.

<sup>3</sup> Logic models contain a detailed analysis of how and why a particular approach is likely to achieve a goal. For an overview of what logic models are and how they work, see 'Everything You Wanted to Know About Logic Models But Were Afraid to Ask' by Connie C. Schmitz ([www.insites.org/documents/cognad.htm](http://www.insites.org/documents/cognad.htm)).



Citizens are well qualified to have such a discussion and to make such choices. As we saw in Chapter 1, the language of societal goals is natural to them. So is talk about values and priorities or the appreciation of their culture and history. Unlike that of bureaucrats and stakeholders, the language of the public is not very technical or specialized. They are not likely to cite many studies or argue for very long about the causal connections between means and ends. Nevertheless, they are perfectly able to make choices between competing possibilities or to make compromises and tradeoffs.

Moreover, in a democracy, citizens have the right to make such choices. If democracy is about anything, it is about letting people have a say in their future. They are thus not only the natural, but the rightful group for governments to engage in this type of exercise.

Finally, visioning need not be a grand, community-wide exercise. It refers more to the style of dialogue and reasoning, than the scale of the exercise. It can be focused and small, diffuse and sweeping, or anywhere in between. Governments can engage citizens in this kind of dialogue to find out what kind of park they want at the end of their street or what they want their province to look like in 20 years.

The skills development group needed to recognize and accommodate a variety of interests while, at the same time, coordinate activities around a shared goal.

**Stakeholders and the Means-Ends Dialogue:** The skills development project is an example of the kind of dialogue required to align a group of stakeholders around a specific goal. It is different from the visioning dialogue. In this pilot project, the group was trying to determine what they could do either individually or together to expand and modernize New Brunswick's labour force. In other words, they were looking for the means to an end. Accordingly, the style of dialogue was more analytical and technical than in the Saint John pilot project. The skills development group needed to recognize and accommodate a variety of interests while, at the same time, coordinate activities around a shared goal. This method of public engagement is akin to strategic planning or the logic model.

Individuals or organizations that have a professional interest in some sector or field of government activity, in other words, stakeholders, are most likely to use this model. They often have well-defined views on government policies and programs and can articulate what they want. These groups are usually well-organized, well-resourced and represented by professionals.

Participants are asked to explore their social relationships, take responsibility for their actions and then to motivate others to change their own behaviour.

**Citizens and the Action Dialogue:** This style of dialogue is quite different from visioning or means-ends analysis because its purpose is to motivate people to change their behaviour or attitudes. For example, the wellness project engaged citizens and community leaders in a dialogue based on the following questions:

- What is wellness? Why does it matter? How is it different from good health?
- Who is responsible for promoting wellness? What is the role of individuals, stakeholders, communities and government?
- What is the right plan for your community? What specific actions can each group take?


Opinion leaders  
enjoy a high level  
of public trust

These questions moved the wellness group through three stages in its dialogue, roughly corresponding to the three stages of the engagement continuum. First, the group was asked to separate wellness in their minds from the larger issue of health and instead, to consider its connection to other factors such as income, environment, education and working conditions – the so-called determinants of health. The second group of questions asked participants to assign responsibility for wellness promotion to three key groups, individuals, communities and the provincial government. The final set of questions challenged participants to develop an action plan that reflected the values and needs of their community. In this style of dialogue, participants are asked to explore their social relationships, take responsibility for their actions and then to motivate others to change their own behaviour.

**Opinion Leaders and the Community Leadership Dialogue:** Opinion leaders are a very special subgroup that governments rarely engage in an organized or sustained way. They may be teachers, religious leaders, artists, sports figures, journalists or simply a well-respected person from the community. These people enjoy a high level of public trust. They have earned this special status by demonstrating an exemplary concern for their community's well-being and an ability to provide leadership on how to promote it. This, in turn, is connected to their ability to connect with the public in a special way, such as from a pulpit, a sports field or from behind a microphone. As a result, they exert considerable influence over what ordinary people think and believe – often even in areas where they have little or no special expertise.

Governments should take note because opinion leaders have the ability to not only engage people in a conversation about important issues, they may also be able to sway opinions and encourage a change of behaviour and attitudes. The climate change pilot project is designed to tap into that community of influence. We will invite a high-profile group of New Brunswick's opinion leaders to attend a one-day climate change forum in May 2008. The goal is to enlist them to raise awareness about climate change within their communities.

At the forum we must be very careful to engage them in the right kind of dialogue. In particular, any suggestion that we are seeking to enlist them as spokespersons for the government, say, on its Action Plan on Climate Change



is likely only to drive them away. Opinion leaders have no special interest in working on the government's behalf and government officials should not seek to turn them into spokespeople for their agenda. Indeed, to suggest that they should misunderstands what is special about them. They are in a position of trust and both they and members of the community know they will only support something if they believe it is important for the community.

For that reason, our pilot project will determine why the issue is important for their communities. If they believe it is, we can move to the second question in the dialogue: As opinion leaders, what can they do to motivate the community to recognize and address the issue?

The answer to the second question will not come from government. It is not for government to decide. Opinion leaders already have their own ways of connecting with their communities. They will know best how to use their special relationship, say, as an artist, teacher, business leader or well-respected person, to connect with the public and encourage them to change their attitudes and behaviour. Government can offer to support and assist their efforts.

**The Community Dialogue:** The final subgroup we can engage in dialogue is community members. Throughout this study we refer to them as key players in public engagement processes. Their status as a full-fledged subgroup, however, is somewhat ambiguous.

On one hand, when we engage ordinary citizens, it is usually as members of some community. If governments are looking for help in achieving some goal or solving some problem, the citizens they will target are usually identified by their common interests – their membership in some community. Such a community may be geographical, such as a province, region or municipality; it may be cultural or linguistic, such as aboriginal people or francophones; or it may be a community-of-interest, such as people with disabilities, the homeless or seniors. So in this view, community is just another word for ordinary citizens.

On the other hand, community is also often a way of talking about the relationship between the subgroups: ordinary citizens, opinion leaders, stakeholders and even governments, especially municipal governments. A community dialogue of this sort usually involves all of them in a single, comprehensive dialogue.

As we will see in Part III, such dialogues are often highly desirable and a critical tool for public engagement. Governments must be careful to ensure this type of engagement doesn't slip back into simple consultation, a kind of free-for-all where everything happens in the same place at the same time. There should

When two goals are in tension, traditional consultation merely work to avoid real debate by polarizing the issue.

be a degree of separation between the different dialogues, while at the same time allowing them to connect with one another. Community dialogues are often a complex process with a number of sub-processes underway at once.<sup>4</sup>

### Putting the Ideas to Work

The consultation model is largely insensitive to the distinctions we have been drawing. As a result, these dialogues rarely get separated. On the contrary, they are usually run together in confused and confusing ways. Separating them more clearly would introduce some much needed order and discipline into many current debates. The recent discussion over how to manage New Brunswick's forests is a case in point.<sup>5</sup>

The scientific expertise exists to plan and manage forest growth in ways that could significantly increase their yield. From an industry point of view, this would be a good thing. It would increase site productivity, tax revenues for government and perhaps jobs.

On the other hand, changing the way the forests grow would affect the flora and fauna; it would be a fundamental change to the natural environment. Not surprisingly, many environmental organizations oppose changes like this. One reason is because they reduce biodiversity. Which is the right way to go?


An environmentalist might defend his or her view by saying: "New Brunswickers regard the biodiversity of their forests as a fundamental value." This is true, but what happens if he or she then goes on to add: "Changing the forests is therefore unacceptable."

<sup>4</sup> **Government(s) and the Dialogue between Officials:** Government also needs to think about its relationship with itself. Governments are complex creatures with many parts, including programs, sections, departments, agencies, and so on. Often they have as much difficulty coordinating with their own parts as with organizations outside themselves. Much of the problem has to do with the way these sections engage one another. It is not so different from how they engage the rest of the public. Officials from one section or department meet with those from another, listen to what they have to say, then go away and try to decide what, if anything, they should do to work together better. The flaw in this approach is well-known. Change is difficult. The process makes it too easy to do little or nothing, rather than make the effort to work together to align goals, regulations and programs across the silos. Until we establish better processes to drive collaboration, the silos will remain intact.

A similar story can be told about the relationship between governments. All three levels of government are often active in a particular area, sometimes along with stakeholders and citizens. Yet their ability to make real progress on collaboration, coordination, partnerships or joint initiatives is limited. Teams of officials meet in hotel rooms across the country, trying to agree on ways to harmonize standards and regulations, coordinate policy goals, ensure that new information infrastructure is interoperable, and so on. But, notwithstanding a few notable exceptions, governments remain remarkably resilient to real progress on intergovernmental alignment.

For some ideas on how the model developed here could be used to promote intra- and intergovernmental alignment, see *Progressive Governance for Canadians: What You Need to Know*, Chapter 6 and Chapter 9.

<sup>5</sup> Through the Public Engagement Initiative we considered a pilot project on this issue but, in the end, decided against it as we had already confirmed five projects and additional expert information that would have substantial impact on this process was still forthcoming at the time.



Or consider an industry spokesperson who might say that: “New Brunswickers have always relied on their forests as the basis of their prosperity. They understand the need to change with the times.” This too is true. But what happens if he then adds: “So we must do as we’ve always done and make the best use of the available technology and knowledge to ensure our future prosperity.”

On the one hand, both positions appeal to a basic goal that the community accepts. So, ordinary citizens are likely to feel something is right about them. On the other hand, each is presented in a way that suggests that there is only one right choice. This causes confusion.

Moreover, when stakeholders make these kinds of arguments, they usually follow up with a barrage of studies, jargon and expert testimony to give the impression that their argument is supported by strong evidence and is the result of careful study. After both sides, the public often don’t know what to think. They are committed to both goals but don’t know how to sift through all this information to make an informed decision.

The answer is that it supports neither. When two goals like these are in tension, no amount of expert testimony or studies will help us find the right balance and, in truth, merely work to avoid real debate by polarizing the issue. Balancing competing goals is not a technical exercise. It requires that we order our community priorities and values.

The right people to make such decisions are not experts, but the public. Many citizens may lack the expertise and skills to sift through studies, but that doesn’t mean they can’t balance goals and principles or set priorities. They can – and we should ask them to do just that. In a democracy, they are the experts on this kind of decision making.

### **What We’ve Learned So Far**

The principal lesson from our discussions over the last few sections is that public dialogue, like the public itself, is a complex thing. Engaging the public in a dialogue is not just a matter of posing an issue or topic for discussion. When we engage them, we must clearly state the task at hand and the process should place an emphasis on deliberation. Governments need to recognize that there are different types of dialogue, and each is naturally suited to a specific group or people. This level and depth of engagement, if done correctly, should carry great weight in a community and within government, simply because of the quality of the deliberations and discussions.



# Chapter 6

## What is Government's Role?

When government launches an engagement process, people usually attend

### Government as Convener

Government's unique powers, significant resources and special relationship to citizens give it special status as a convener. When it launches an engagement process, people usually attend. However, government's role here is to do more than convene; it must also decide what to talk about. In conventional consultations, this usually means asking a question. In our model, that is not enough.

Before the convener calls people to the table, he or she must be clear as to the group's task, the style of dialogue required and the scope of the conversation. This can be done by setting the terms of reference, an exercise that includes defining clear objectives, defining key terms, providing rules of engagement and by listing additional questions that may be discussed. We discuss this in greater detail in Part III.

### Government as Facilitator


A facilitator is the neutral voice in the room. That means he or she doesn't come to the discussion with a predetermined outcome. Rather, a facilitator must treat every participant's interests with equal concern and respect. Their primary role is to encourage, challenge, direct and clarify any questions participants may have about the process.

The facilitator helps participants understand the issues raised in relation to themselves, their organizations and their communities. He or she also encourages participants to recognize, articulate and accept their role in influencing change and their role in making it happen. Where compromises and commitments are called for, a key challenge for the facilitator is to ensure that participants treat each other's interests with respect, weigh evidence and arguments rationally, and share the burdens fairly. Sometimes participants will want to ignore key pieces of information or evidence, refuse to recognize the gaps or contradictions in their own positions or balk at sharing the burden of making compromises or sharing resources.

Finally, the facilitator must keep to the terms of reference so the dialogue is focused on the task at hand and the right style of dialogue. It is very easy to slip from one kind of dialogue to another, such as from a means-end discussion to a visioning one. While some movement back and forth is unavoidable, the facilitator must guard against letting one kind of dialogue turn into another.

In the end, facilitation is a complex skill that involves group psychology, democratic theory, public policy, good people skills, a willingness to experiment and lots of quick thinking. The facilitator must be an educator, a referee, a guide and a motivator.

Facilitation is a complex skill that involves group psychology, democratic theory, public policy, good people skills, a willingness to experiment and lots of quick thinking



Government officials must be willing to consider their unique authority in new and often experimental ways

### Government as Participant and Enabler

If government is the facilitator, it is often also a participant. In the skills development project, for example, several government departments were present at the table. In this capacity, the government was a stakeholder, albeit an important one. It brings special capacities to the table, including resources, expertise and its legislative and regulatory powers, which makes government officials important enablers in the development of innovative ideas. Government officials must be willing to consider their unique authority in new and often experimental ways to help find and support solutions within the group.

This does not mean that stakeholders can band together and demand that a department use its powers or resources however they see fit. The working assumption is that everyone has entered the process in good faith, that they have a real interest in finding ways to work together and that they are willing to make compromises and tradeoffs to find them. The discussion is really about the best means to achieve their common ends.

### Government as Partner

In this capacity, government must be willing to consider new kinds of collaborative organizational arrangements between it and businesses and community organizations, as a result of the decisions that have been made during the dialogue.<sup>6</sup>

Stakeholders, citizens and communities are skeptical of government's willingness to sit down at the table as a participant.

### Building Trust and Goodwill

These engagement processes depend heavily on trust and goodwill. To work well, all the players must be willing to speak their mind, listen to others and remain open to new ways of doing things that may be quite different from what they have done in the past. This is true whether the task is aligning programs, making choices about what citizens want to do together or promoting wellness in the community.

At the moment, stakeholders, citizens and communities are often sceptical about government's willingness to sit down at the table as a participant. Many suspect that, if government officials launch such a process, they have likely already made up their minds and are only looking to engineer agreement around the options. Collaboration turns out to mean "we want you to do it our way". In short, there is a general belief that whatever government may say about working together, it is not about to give up or share its decision making authority or sit down with citizens on an equal footing.

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<sup>6</sup> The idea of collaborative partnerships has been discussed in government for a couple of decades. It raises a range of questions, particularly around accountability relationships. These issues are discussed at length in *Progressive Governance for Canadians: What You Need to Know*.



For its part, government fears that if it sits down as one participant among others, it risks raising expectations that it cannot meet. It also fears that it may lose control of its own agenda and compromise its responsibility to the public.

Certainly there are doubts and concerns on both sides. However government must lead the way if it wants stakeholders to make an effort to align themselves around public policy objectives and community goals. Government can do this through its willingness to use its regulatory and legislative powers, and its resources as a service provider, in innovative ways. It could do this in a simple and uncompromising way when it frames the discussion by clearly stating that it is ready for an open dialogue with citizens and stakeholder groups that will lead to a plan of action. Once the process begins, government must let the dialogue unfold. There can be no backtracking. Everyone must learn to trust the process. In practice, a well-designed process has a number of checks and balances.

Consider that:


- as convener, government will choose the timing and framework of the discussion;
- as facilitator, it ensures the discussion is fair, reasonable and remains focused on the terms of reference;
- as a participant, it is free to say no to proposals put forward by others around the table; and,
- as a partner, it will negotiate written agreements setting out the roles and commitments of the proposed relationship.

Sometimes governments need to sit down with others as equals

### **Why Should Government Facilitate?**

Government may play a number of roles but two of them must be kept separate – the facilitator and the participant. All participants must have confidence that the facilitator will act even-handedly in the process. Community participants will distrust the process if they think government officials will collude with each other if one is the facilitator and others are participants.

Then why not create an NGO to specialize in this service? This is a fair question. Nothing we have said so far precludes someone else from doing the job. However, there is a powerful reason why government should commit to building this capacity internally.



Our model of engagement rests on the belief that sometimes governments need to sit down with others as equals. This is not how government is used to doing things; it is used to controlling the process. Asking it to collaborate with others is a major departure from what it knows. Overcoming the existing culture will not be easy.

A commitment to build the internal capacity to facilitate these processes would help drive cultural change. It would lead to some deep reflection on government's relationship with stakeholders, citizens and communities. Those charged with the task would have to work through the consequences of this new role for government and explain to their colleagues how it fits with traditional roles. They would also quickly realize that in order to play the role credibly, they would have to insist on their independence from other officials who might be participants.

Hopefully, these people would emerge as strong, articulate and independent advocates for engagement and collaboration. If government is to make real progress on public engagement, it needs to have this discussion internally. A new secretariat within the Executive Council Office or the Department of Human Resources, charged with spearheading the development of such processes and building the capacity for facilitation, could become a much needed champion for change inside government.



# Part III Starting the Dialogue: An Implementation Strategy

## Chapter 7: A Template for Engagement – The Skills Development Process

### A Quick Review

In Part I we set out the ideas behind our new model of public engagement and sketched its origins.

In Part II we worked through five questions, which allowed us to see why consultation alone fails to meet our needs today and why in many cases we need to move to dialogue.

That brings us to Part III. Here, in Chapters 7 through 9 we will answer a sixth and final question: What kinds of tools and processes do we need to implement the new model?

We will use our pilot projects, and in particular the skills development project, to explain our model. In designing these public engagement sessions, we worked with some conventional tools in ways that transform traditional consultation processes into dialogue processes. Our experience shows that we are moving in the right direction.


In Chapter 7 we redefine the conventional public engagement tools to support a dialogue process. Chapter 8 goes on to describe how these tools were used to forge what we call the deep structures of the dialogue process. Finally, in Chapter 9 we explain how we adapted the skills development template and then applied it to the other pilot projects.

### Defining the Issue: New Brunswick's Changing Workforce

The skills development pilot project was our first opportunity to test our public engagement model. Its purpose was to bring together stakeholders from government, industry, labour and educational institutions to discuss how they could work together to reposition New Brunswick's labour force in the wake of major economic changes.

For well over a century, New Brunswick's economy has been anchored by the resource sectors; forestry, fisheries, mining and agriculture. For the most part, the province has harvested these resources but has done little in the way of refining these commodities prior to export. This has made New Brunswick businesses vulnerable to shifts in commodity markets, and in particular the rise of a group of countries known as the Emerging Seven (the E7). Led by China and India, this group also includes Russia, Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico and Turkey. In less than a decade these countries have radically altered trade patterns by assuming a dominant role in the production of not only commodities such as

The ability of Canada and New Brunswick to attract and hold high-paying jobs will depend on whether the workforce contains the right mix of skills to compete with Europe and Asia



pulp, but also in the cheap production of manufactured goods. The impact of this has been acutely felt in Canada's forestry sector and New Brunswick has not been immune.

However, these emerging world economies are not the only trend leaving its mark on New Brunswick's labour force. Technology has forever altered the way in which we harvest primary resources. While this has improved productivity, it has also reduced the number of people required to work in the forests, on the oceans and in the fields of the province. Combined with the increased use of information and communication technologies in all business sectors, new modes of shipping and transportation and demographic shifts, New Brunswick's business and labour sectors have a lot of talk about.

The ability of countries such as Canada – and provinces such as New Brunswick – to attract and hold high-paying jobs will depend on whether the workforce contains the right mix of skills to compete with Europe and Asia. The purpose of the skills development pilot project was to tackle the issues around the renewal of the New Brunswick workforce.

### **The Framework of Questions**

Our work began with a small working group from the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour. Using four of our key questions as our guide, we set up the framework for the project.<sup>7</sup>

#### **Question 1:**

**Why do we need to engage in a dialogue?**

**To promote alignment among the key players.**

To prepare New Brunswick's workforce for the modern economy will take research, planning, investment and commitment from governments, employers, educational and training institutions, labour unions and professional associations. This will require high levels of coordination and collaboration between the players.

#### **Question 2:**

**What kind of engagement do we need?**

**The participants must make decisions and commit to an action plan.**

This is the third stage in the exercise referred to in Chapter 4 as the engagement continuum. As we stated earlier, dialogue and decision making are critical, but they are not enough. In the end we want all the

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<sup>7</sup> We can now reduce the first five questions to four. In Part II we posed Question 1 (What is public engagement?) mainly for purposes of exposition.

parties to take action by developing an action plan that will see them work together in new ways.

**Question 3:**

**Who are we engaging?**

**The stakeholder groups directly affected by changes to New Brunswick economy and workforce.**

The stakeholders will need to work together to define a common goal that respects each of their ends, interests and capacities – a means to an end.

**Question 4:**

**What is government’s role?**

**Government will be a participant in the dialogue.**

In addition to participating in the dialogue, the Government of New Brunswick also demonstrated its commitment to changing its relationship with stakeholder groups by agreeing to host the Skills Development Summit.

Once these questions were answered we turned to the final question: **What kinds of tools and processes do we need to implement the new model?**

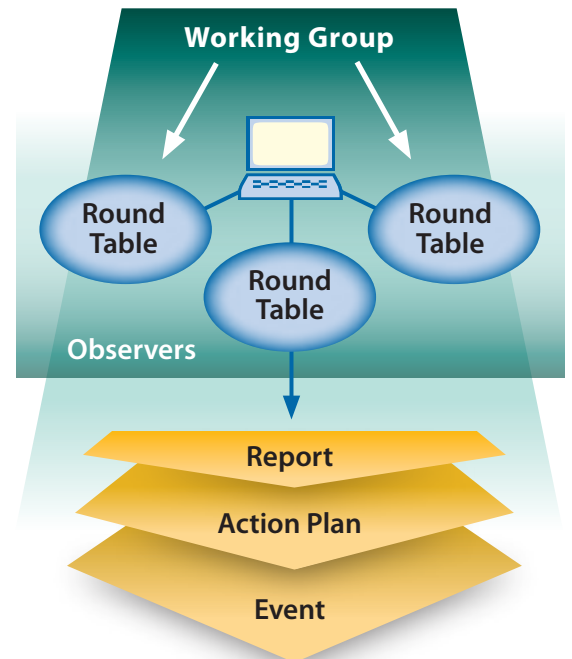
To answer that question, we sought to define the different parts of the public engagement process.


A key goal of this process should be to arrive at a view of the issues and a set of strategies and actions that governments and stakeholders could implement together.

**The Objective**

This starting point for this exercise was a request from the minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour for the department to organize a skills summit with stakeholder groups. Its purpose was to discuss New Brunswick’s future labour needs.

Summits are a traditional, high-level form of consultation. They normally bring together representatives from various groups to speak with senior political leaders about an important issue of the day. Information from these events is normally communicated through a communiqué or group statement that outlines the group’s key





recommendations to government. Oftentimes these documents are written in advance of the summit, by senior staff members who meet beforehand to negotiate the content of the document and the conversation.

Taking our cue from this, we decided that this process should culminate in two documents – a report and an action plan – that would be developed over six months by a team of stakeholders from the labour market. These documents would then be presented and discussed at the summit.

In a conventional consultation process, such documents likely would contain a list of recommendations to government. The process leading up to it would be viewed as an opportunity for stakeholders to give advice to government, which would then choose which recommendations to enact. We agreed that, if this process was to lead to real progress on alignment among the stakeholders, all this had to change.

At the first roundtable we spent several hours discussing with the participants how the process should work. They agreed that much of the responsibility for change lay in the hands of stakeholders, such as businesses, labour unions and community colleges. It was agreed that a key goal of this process should be to arrive at a view of the issues and a set of strategies and actions that governments and stakeholders could implement together. **Participants agreed that their basic strategy for making progress on the issues was to promote better coordination, collaboration and alignment.**

They also agreed on the need to launch an ongoing dialogue involving stakeholders and government. Participants recognized that such a dialogue was a critical condition of better alignment: if the parties are not talking to each other, there will be no common planning, no joint decisions, no aligning around common goals. While no one wanted talk for the sake of talk, **there was almost unanimous agreement that ongoing dialogue is necessary if government and stakeholders are to begin working together more effectively.**

Finally, participants agreed that a key objective of this process was that as the dialogue developed it would draw in stakeholders from across the policy field, eventually forming a wide network.

### **Redefining the Tools**

To achieve these goals we needed to modify key tools, such as reports and action plans. As we told the participants, while the components of the process may look ordinary – some roundtables followed by a report and an action plan – we would use each in new ways that would distinguish our process from traditional consultation.

**The Report:** Rather than being the end product, the participants agreed the report needed to be their opening statement about labour force issues in New Brunswick. **Its purpose was to frame and launch the dialogue.** The report does not claim to be complete or exhaustive in its treatment of the subject. It presents the work the group has done so far to identify and analyze issues, develop strategies to respond and set goals and priorities.

Participants regarded the report as an account of their discussions, and **its authorship is credited to the group.** It is not and should not be regarded as a group endorsement of one point of view. Within it, some issues remain unresolved and multiple viewpoints are expressed. It is a fair reflection of the discussions and a good basis for further discussion, planning and action.

**The report is addressed to multiple audiences.** First and foremost, it is addressed to the members of the group, as a record of their discussion and a point of departure for future discussion. But it also aims to engage other stakeholders who may share these interests but who were not able to participate in the process. The report is a tool for drawing them into the dialogue.

The report also speaks to the broader public policy and community development community, such as elected officials, public servants, journalists, academics, the business community, NGOs and think tanks. While most of these people are not likely to become participants in the dialogue, an issue as significant as the renewal of the workforce impacts on just about every other area of public policy and community development. Others will want to know what the dialogue is about and where it is going.


Finally, the report may be of interest to the general public. For example, it allows an unemployed mill worker from Miramichi, or a high school student who is considering a career path, to learn what leaders from the stakeholder community are thinking about the condition of the workforce and its future.

While our participants generally liked this approach to the report, it raised at least one concern for them. They had difficulty with the idea that it was not specifically addressed to someone in government, such as the minister. This is how reports from conventional consultation processes usually work. As result, government has a responsibility to respond. We will return to this issue in Chapter 8, in the section on accountability.

Neither government nor stakeholder representatives were very clear on how to collaborate with each other.

**The Action Plan:** With the report in hand to help guide the dialogue, the participants knew they needed to work towards a strategic plan. However, neither government nor stakeholder representatives were very clear on how to collaborate with each other, let alone how to develop a strategic plan based on collaboration. So we began with small, but meaningful steps, and agreed an action plan was the right tool to use. Small groups of stakeholders





(including government) decided to work together on specific problems. This model would achieve two things; it would move the group towards a solution for its labour force issues and it would help build a better working relationship amongst the participants. **The action plan is both a problem-solving and learning tool.**

**The Declaration:** When we began this process we had no plan to draft a declaration. The idea was proposed at one of our roundtables. Participants responded positively. They saw it as **a useful tool to give public expression to the group's commitment to continue the dialogue and to work together to solve issues.** The declaration will be a short document setting out some key principles, values and goals that define the kind of collaborative working relationship we are trying to build. The group has yet to decide exactly how the document will be used. Likely, we would invite all of those present at the summit to sign it.

**The Working Group:** There were seven members of the working group. Its main role was **to plan the process and get it started.** While we began with a small group from within government, we quickly invited some stakeholders to join it to ensure that we were hearing from people outside government as early as possible.

**The Participants:** We assembled a group of 35 representatives from a wide range of stakeholder groups. Over six months we used a combination of roundtable sessions, online discussions and telephone and face-to-face interviews **to identify key issues and develop strategies and plans to renew the workforce.**

The roundtables were very successful events that built a strong sense of camaraderie among members of the group.

**The Roundtables:** We argued in Part II of this report that a transfer of responsibility is an individual and collective psychological journey. Personal interaction is a very important part of making the process work well. If we want people to get out of consultation mode and to engage in real dialogue, it is important that they interact with others who are making the same journey. **The roundtables ensure there is face-to-face contact between participants.** This allows them to forge the bonds that help motivate them to work together and resolve differences that arise in the dialogue. The group originally planned on three such events but in the end there will be five. There is no right number here. A process like this needs enough face-to-face events to allow participants to develop a strong sense of common purpose and team spirit. In this sense, the roundtables were very successful events that built a strong sense of camaraderie among members of the group.

**The Online Discussion:** Face-to-face interaction, while essential, is not enough.

In order to take personal ownership of the process and its results, participants must weigh the options, consider alternatives and make decisions. This rarely



happens in a traditional roundtable discussion because there simply isn't enough time. Our process seeks to combine the social benefits of a roundtable process with **the time and opportunity for solitary reflection** that online discussions can provide. To achieve that balance, Service New Brunswick created a password-protected website that participants could access to continue the dialogue either by responding to moderator-posted questions or to comments made by others.

**The Summit:** The report, action plan and declaration will be presented to leaders from the various stakeholder groups and government at a skills summit in the fall of 2008. The event will bring together about 75 leaders from the field, including the participants in the project. This will be **an opportunity for all the parties to declare their commitment to the goal of building a new working relationship** that will enable them to address the challenge of adapting New Brunswick's labour force to the needs of the provincial economy. The declaration, report and action plan provide the foundation for the next phase of the process, which will be launched at the summit.



## Chapter 8

# Deep Structures of the Dialogue Process

The skills development process served not only as a major source of learning; it was a template for the other pilots. It was our first pilot project and a learning experience for us as much as for the participants. We needed to understand how to frame this new form of public engagement and how its construction differed from traditional consultation. We concluded there were four important distinctions in how each was structured. Those terms, which we refer to as **deep structures**, are: participation, dialogue, accountability and ownership.

People were invited as individuals with the knowledge and expertise needed to ensure an informed discussion.

### Participation

The working group met early on to discuss who should participate in the project. They agreed that, because this was a pilot project and a learning experience for both participants and the Public Engagement Initiative, it should not involve too many people. They settled on a target of 25 participants. As we were developing the list, however, the working group members began to worry that we were leaving out important stakeholders, while inviting others. They feared that those left out might be offended and critical of the process. As a result, our list began to balloon; it had reached nearly 50 people before we finally paused and took stock of the situation.

The problem was obvious. The selection process was being guided by the same principle as a consultation process. In this model, participants are spokespersons for their organization and its interests. If an organization does not get the chance to voice its views, its interests may be overlooked. By comparison, those who do get to speak look like they're getting privileged access. In order to be fair, government therefore must work to ensure that everyone has a reasonable chance to be heard.

This is not the basis of participation in the skills development process. People are not there to act as spokespersons for their organizations. Nor are they there to advise government on what they think it should do. Rather, we are trying to launch an informed dialogue on preparing the workforce for the future. The goal is not to hear everyone's views, but to **assemble the right collective intelligence around the table** to ensure that there are no large gaps in the discussion. This doesn't require that every stakeholder has a chance to speak.

Our working group was hesitant about this approach. Nevertheless, they recognized that, in order to have the kind of dialogue we wanted, the number of participants would have to be kept down; and that meant they would have to look at participation differently. They agreed that when we invited people to join us we would tell them their role was not to act as spokespersons for their organization or advocates for a viewpoint. Rather they had been invited as individuals with the knowledge and expertise needed to ensure an informed discussion. We underlined that this requires a very different view of the process and a person's role in it. It is part of a difficult culture change that is needed if collaboration is to work.

Some will say this approach is naïve. They will reply that stakeholders cannot be expected to stand apart from their partisan interests so what is the point in pretending otherwise? While no one can simply abandon their interests, people definitely can be more or less open to alternative views, evidence and argument. People are not always black-and-white in their thinking. On the contrary, as we saw in Part II, it is one of the very damaging consequences of our over-dependence on consultation that it is pushing public dialogue into black-and-white debates. Part of the task of a new approach based on dialogue is to reverse this trend by encouraging people to become more reflective and open to other ideas and perspectives.

Our experience was very encouraging. Participants were surprisingly willing to listen to one another and to respond thoughtfully to alternative views – the more so as they got to know and trust each other. When they occasionally lapsed into more self-interested viewpoints, we were able to remind them that they had agreed to participate not as advocates, but part of the collective intelligence needed to work through the issues. That helped refocus the discussion.

At the same time, we wanted to be realistic. We recognized that everyone in the group has particular interests – that is why we call them stakeholders. We also recognized that those stakeholders who were not invited to participate might feel ignored. On reflection, we found a way to strike a balance between our model of participation and traditional consultation. We asked each participant to contact their colleagues and counterparts in other organizations in their area and explain how the process was going to work, and what we were trying to achieve. We asked them to propose that they act as a link between these stakeholders and our process, keep them informed about our discussion, and offer to feed their ideas and comments into our discussion. We agreed that nothing discussed in the roundtables or online would be secret and that draft versions of the report and action plan could be shared with them. We originally even planned to set up an observer's deck on the online discussion (which is still represented on the diagram in the last section), though we had to abandon this for technical reasons.

When our participants approached their colleagues and explained the project and our plan, they received a high level of agreement. Throughout the process we had no complaints from the circle of stakeholders beyond our participants. Indeed, we heard reports that some of them were quite happy not to have to participate directly. It was one less demand on their time.

Web-based  
and wireless  
technologies expand  
the possibilities for  
real, sustained, in-  
depth dialogue.

### **Deliberation**

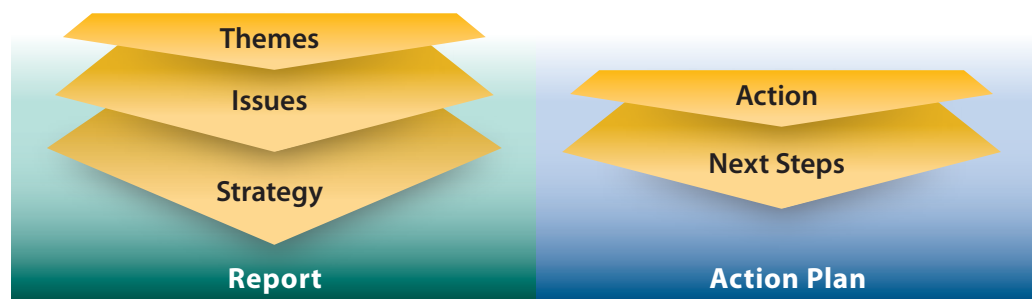
We have seen that in a process like this, dialogue and deliberation are the keys to transferring ownership and responsibility. Our planning group realized that if we wanted that transfer to happen, we had to ensure that each participant

would work through the decision making steps one at a time. We wanted to be sure they made the journey described at the end of Chapter 5. The dialogue process that produced the report and action plan was designed to help achieve this goal.

This is how it works:

- The report is organized around a number of **themes**, or headings, such as skills, information and recruitment and retention.
- Beneath each theme are listed a number of **issues**, which are discussed separately. For example, under the information theme there were three key issues: the need for better information sharing, the need to fill gaps in the information basis, the need to organize and standardize existing information.
- Each issue contains at least one **strategy**. A strategy is a broad plan for how to resolve the issue. In most cases, however, the strategy is too ambitious to implement at once. Under information, the strategy was to develop an electronic portal where information would be integrated and available to everyone – a single-window solution.
- Within each strategy **actions** and **next steps** are proposed. These are meant to be very manageable tasks that can be undertaken quickly so participants can make progress on implementing the strategy. These actions and next steps are also the contents of the action plan.

Each of our dialogues followed this pattern, starting with the identification of a high-level theme and progress through to very specific and practical actions. The first three steps provide the report's content, while the final two steps feed into the action plan.



Our plan was to carry out as much of this discussion as possible online. As the participants were working through the first three steps in the online dialogue, they were, in effect, writing the report. The facilitator's job was to edit the

text, get it into readable form and then post it online. The participants then provided further comment.

Once everyone was satisfied, that part of the text would be incorporated into the draft report and we moved on to the next round of deliberations, repeating the process, until we worked our way through the themes identified by the participants. When they were done deliberating, we also were done drafting the report.

As for the actions/next steps, this was designed to be a separate online discussion. Once each strategy had been proposed, the moderator would post four questions on the discussion forum for the participants to answer.

The questions were:


1. Is this strategy a viable solution to the issue over the long or medium term?
2. What specific steps can some of us take together now, to progress toward the solution?
3. Who is best positioned to carry out these tasks?
4. Is that person willing to do it?

When these questions had been answered for a particular issue/strategy, we put the results in the draft action plan, posted them online and moved on to the next issue. In this way, the action plan emerged through our discussions, in the same way as the report. The participants quite literally wrote the report and action plan simultaneously. At the same time, they took ownership of, and responsibility for, some part of the work.

If the idea of engaging the participants this way through an online dialogue was sound in principle, it turned out to be more difficult than we expected. For one thing, just getting the participants to show up online and post their comments was a considerable challenge. Many people were not used to these tools. In addition, organizing the dialogue online so the right material was accessible, well-organized and easy to engage was difficult. As people posted their comments, the task of reading through it all was often a confusing and time-consuming experience that likely discouraged participation.

While the dialogue provided us with very useful input for the report and action plan, we were not able to work through the issues as systematically as we hoped. As a result, we supplemented the online discussion with personal interviews to ensure that each participant was engaged in the dialogue and thinking through the issues.

Nevertheless, it would be a serious mistake to abandon the overall approach or conclude that it doesn't work, for at least three reasons. First, people are



increasingly Internet-literate, particularly young people. They will, and are, increasingly using discussion forums. We will all get better at it.

Second, if we want to have a real collaborative process, in-depth discussions of the issues are critical, especially around the action plan. People will not commit to doing things or take responsibility for part of the solutions unless they have time to think it through, test the ideas with relevant colleagues, and be sure that others are carrying their weight. It is too costly and time consuming to keep bringing people together face-to-face for this kind of in-depth discussion. Internet technologies are the obvious alternative. We must learn to use them.

Third, the tools we were using are text-based and, as such, not always user-friendly. Work is being done with new and more user-friendly web-based and wireless applications, such as streaming video. This provides far more sophisticated, user-friendly ways of organizing and presenting material and exchanging ideas. Governments should be experimenting with these applications.

Web-based and wireless technologies expand the possibilities for real, sustained, in-depth dialogue. It enables us to overcome the barriers of space and time that have separated us in the past. This increases the opportunities for new kinds of meaningful engagement. Notwithstanding the difficulties we encountered in our process, we remain optimistic about the use of these tools for the future and are firmly committed to experimenting with them.

### **Accountability**

Stakeholders will not agree to a plan that asks them to change their practices unless they believe others are also willing to do their part.

In traditional consultation the minister launches a process in which he or she asks the public to provide opinions and advice on an issue. These views are usually consolidated in a report, along with recommendations, to which the minister is expected to reply. The minister is accountable to the participants through his or her response to the report.

In the skills development project, accountability was among our participants' biggest concerns. Because the report is not specifically addressed to the minister, they worried that no one would have to respond to it and it might be ignored. Some even argued that failing to speak directly to the minister through the pages of the report meant we had already lost any real accountability.

These concerns reflect a failure to fully appreciate the nature of a collaborative process and the role of the report. This process had to go beyond the traditional model of accountability for reasons that were admitted and endorsed by most, if not all, the participants at one time or another.

In brief, the renewal of the workforce is a societal goal that cannot be achieved by government alone. To make real progress on it, first, we need the right

people at the table, and, second, we need them to be genuinely committed to finding ways to work together to achieve the goal. But stakeholders will not agree to a plan that asks them to change their practices unless they believe: (a) it is effective; (b) it treats their interests fairly; and (c) others are also willing to do their part. The best way to arrive at such a plan is to bring them together and give them a say in developing it.

Our process was designed to do that. It allowed a diverse group of stakeholders to work together toward the development of a plan that they all supported. The plan was then laid out in a report. But if the plan is to engage everyone, obviously the report cannot be addressed to government alone. It must be addressed to all the participants. Otherwise we lose the collaborative element, which is why we undertook the process in the first place.

Now, none of this means we have lost any accountability. On the contrary, we have gained a whole new level of it. When a stakeholder (including government) agrees to participate in such a process, he or she enters into a special relationship with the other participants. Collaboration requires commitment, trust, and a willingness to explore new avenues for solutions to common problems, which, in turn, implies new responsibilities. First and foremost, it implies a responsibility to engage in open and ongoing dialogue with the other participants, to share ideas and information, and to look for new ways to work together to respond to issues.

Our report is not addressed to the minister because it is not a piece of advice to the minister. It is an expression of the group's commitment to begin a dialogue that will become the foundation of a new relationship. It is a public record of what the participants have said to each other and decided to do together, including those government departments that participated. While each of the participants (including government departments) still must account to their own organizations in the usual way, **this new relationship also makes them accountable to each other through their commitment to solve common issues and achieve common goals.** The action plan takes this a step further by committing individuals or organizations to specific tasks, for which they are then accountable to the group.

We should note that the commitments made so far are not terribly onerous. This is a first step in a new direction. It was enough to ask the participants to commit to launch an ongoing dialogue, produce a report on the issues and take some first steps toward real collaboration in an action plan. As a next step, a working group will likely be struck at the summit to move the process into a new phase. The participants will reconvene at various points to continue the dialogue and monitor progress. As the dialogue advances we expect the relationship to become more complex and more structured. New commitments and new responsibilities will emerge. Ideally, the report





will evolve into a full-blown strategic plan in which all the participants have a significant role.

As for the minister, because his department is a member of the group – indeed, it convened the process at his request – he too shares in this new accountability and the accompanying responsibilities, but in the same way as all the other members. Seen in this light, an invitation from the minister to participate in such a process is very different from a request for advice on what government should do to solve a problem. It is an invitation to work together to build a network, or community-of-practice, that will lead to new forms of collaboration, learning and innovation. Far from weakening accountability, this process strengthens it by extending it to a whole group of stakeholders. It lays the foundation for real collaboration and, as such, is a critical step forward in the development of more effective governance.

In the 2002 report to the House of Commons, the Auditor General of Canada proposed a similar view of accountability. In chapter nine of the report, *Modernizing Accountability in the Public Sector*, the Auditor General defines accountability as “a relationship based on obligations to demonstrate, review, and take responsibility for performance, both the results achieved in light of agreed expectations and the means used.”<sup>8</sup> She goes on to say such partnerships require a new level of accountability based on “accountability among partners” or “reciprocal accountability.” She says departments must remain accountable to Parliament; but, in addition, she recognizes there is a mutual responsibility to work towards the success of collaborative initiatives by ensuring the partners are accountable to each other, and “to the arrangement’s joint coordinating body.”<sup>9</sup>

### Ownership

While our participants fully supported the idea of a collaborative process, they had a hard time accepting this view of accountability. Indeed, during our fourth roundtable they seemed close to rejecting it. We had been reviewing the group’s comments on the draft report when a participant suddenly informed us that he was not clear what the process was supposed to achieve. After several months of discussion, he declared, we still had not defined the issue we were trying to solve. That, he concluded, is where the process should have started.

The comment landed like a bolt of lightning. Only moments before the group seemed at ease with the process and upbeat about the report. But the charge that we had failed to define the problem we were trying to solve plunged us into a tense debate over what, exactly, that problem was. Some thought it was a looming skills shortage. Others denied that there was a shortage at all. In

People can and often do disagree on how to define key issues in a debate, yet still agree on how to respond to a wider range of important issues that need to be addressed.

<sup>8</sup> Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2002, page 5

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., page 15



their view, there was a failure to match existing skills with opportunities. Still others thought the issue was about wages.

We struggled to find the common thread. But as the clock ticked away, it was increasingly clear that there was no single, defining problem they could all agree upon. Indeed, we seemed to be spiralling back down into the kind of narrow, self-interested debate we had worked so hard to escape. "It's as though everyone has just retreated back into their own issues and viewpoints," lamented one participant.

With time running out, we had to bring the discussion to a head. A moment of truth had arrived and the group had to make a choice. We reminded participants of their past declarations that a dialogue like this was essential for real progress on labour market issues. Had they now changed their minds? Did the process convince them that this approach was somehow wrong-headed? Did they want to abandon it?


As we pushed for answers, calm settled in. One by one, they told us that, no, they were not wrong about the importance they had attached to dialogue. Indeed, several of them offered that it was precisely the dialogue that made this process so different from all the others and that made them want to come back. They believed we were making real progress and they did not want to lose what they had gained.

Nevertheless, there was a nagging fear that those beyond our group would not understand all this talk about "dialogue" and "collaboration." Perhaps it would sound woolly or be seen as just "more talk." Would they accuse us of having wasted our time? Would they think we had accomplished anything by this process?

These fears began to spill over into the debate on accountability. Some argued that if the report were addressed directly to the minister and contained strong recommendations, no one would question whether the dialogue was worthwhile. Attention would not be on our process but on the minister's willingness to take our advice.

As should be clear from our discussion in the last section, however, such a retreat into conventional consultation would really be abandonment of our commitment to collaboration. This too had to be confronted head-on. So we put the question to the participants: Did they think we needed a major change in the approach? Were we off course? Did they want to return to a more conventional kind of consultation process and report?

Once again they rallied. No, they said, they did not want to change course. They were not about to give up their newly acquired role as idea makers and agents of change. If they were nervous that the report was not directly addressed to the minister, they liked the idea that it spoke to all stakeholders



and that the action plan assigned duties to others beyond government. Nor did they want to abandon our basic premise for this process, namely, that it was genuinely collaborative. With one exception, everyone agreed that we must stay the course.

At least two key lessons can be drawn from this remarkable exchange. First, the charge that we did not clearly define the problem we were trying to solve may be true, but in a process like this that is sometimes a good – or at least a necessary – thing. As we saw, people in the group have different views about how the key problem should be defined. Nevertheless, that didn't prevent them from making real progress on a range of important issues.

In fact, people can and often do disagree on how to define key issues in a debate, yet still agree on how to respond to a wide range of important issues that need to be addressed. If this were not true, the effort to get a diverse group of stakeholders to collaborate probably wouldn't get off the ground. With a group as diverse as ours, deep differences are often only inches below the surface. We must be careful not to expose them. The trick in making the process work is to remain focused on the points of convergence, rather than divergence. Eventually, the participants may work their way to a discussion of key issues where they disagree deeply, but if that is to result in progress rather than division, the process can't be rushed. A lot of work and consensus-building usually needs to happen first. In effect, the strategy is to start with the things we agree upon, then back into the hard issues, a little at a time.

Still, some ground should be conceded here. If we needed to steer clear of debate over how to define the key issue, we could have provided better terms of reference for the project as a whole. In hindsight, we should have engaged the minister more fully in the opening stages of the process and worked with him to define some clearer goals and guidelines for the process. This would have provided participants with a clearer signal as to what the minister was expecting from the process, which, in turn, would have helped dispel the nagging fear that they were freelancing and that government's willingness to support the process could disappear at any moment.<sup>10</sup>

A second lesson concerns accountability; or, more specifically, the personal, psychological journey that each of us must make – the real culture change we must go through – as we come to terms with the new responsibility for, and ownership of, the process and issues that comes with dialogue and collaboration.

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<sup>10</sup> We did manage to recover some middle ground on this. At the fourth roundtable we agreed that the report could highlight two or three key issues that had significant implications for government. If we could strengthen them, they could speak directly to the minister and he could be asked to reply to them at the summit. This would give government a high profile in the report without abandoning the commitment to collaboration.

The moment of truth in our fourth roundtable can be seen as a critical moment in that journey. It resembles a kind of cathartic moment that is common in new relationships. In the initial stages of such a relationship personal commitments are usually weak, so the costs and risks of being involved are low. As the relationship evolves, however, there is more at stake. The parties begin to realize that to keep things moving forward, they must make deeper and more explicit commitments. At some point, this can become daunting – even frightening. As a result, a party may suddenly feel that the commitments and risks are too great and they begin to back away.

However, such a retreat is often short-lived and followed by reengagement. Once a step back has been taken, the party begins to see things clearly again. The person realizes that the growing responsibilities are matched by growing benefits. He or she thinks about how much has already been invested in the relationship, the things and people it involves, and the new opportunities it brings. This culminates in a resurgence of interest and often a powerful desire to reengage and to forge ahead with vigour and enthusiasm.

This is one way of viewing what happened at our fourth roundtable. Collectively, the group may have been coming to terms with the fact that each of them now really did own the process – and was responsible for it. They were accountable. For some, that realization was discomforting. The initial reflex was to step back. But when the moment of truth came – when the question was put to them whether they wanted in or out, all but one of the participants stood firm and agreed to move forward. In doing that, they seemed to be reasserting their ownership of the process, and their accountability for it, this time more fully, more consciously and more completely. As they did, the mood in the room took another sudden shift. People were enthusiastic, optimistic and energized. They left the roundtable on a high note, signalling their readiness to get on with the next phase of the project.

## Chapter 9

# Using the Framework and Template for Other Dialogue Processes

This chapter concludes our discussion of the skills development pilot project with a brief overview of how we combined that template with our framework of questions from Part II to develop the Miramichi and wellness pilot projects.

We chose these pilots because we wanted to test different aspects of the new model of public engagement. In particular, we wanted to engage different subgroups and explore different kinds of dialogue. In addition, because all three pilots are dialogue processes, the tools we developed for the skills development process were applicable to them. The following sketches should help readers see how the framework and template can be applied to other dialogue processes.

### Miramichi and the Visioning Dialogue with Citizens

#### The Issue

The Miramichi Action Committee was formed to help the community take the situation in hand.

In 2007, Miramichi lost about 750 jobs when mills owned by forestry companies UPM-Kymmene and Weyerhaeuser closed. This had a devastating impact on the Miramichi region and, as the news rolled in, community leaders discussed how to respond. One strategy was to put pressure on provincial and federal governments to find a solution. For example, the community could petition government to take action to save the mills by providing tax breaks or a subsidy that would offset operating costs or possibly attract a new buyer.

Other community members saw this approach as a dead end or at best a stop-gap; they argued a lasting solution required real change. The alternative, they concluded, was to engage in some serious reflection, research and long-term planning to see what prospects there were for developing a realistic plan for renewal over the next 10 years. At the same time, any effort to produce such a plan needed to involve the whole community. People needed to see themselves in it and feel they had a role to play in achieving it.

The Miramichi Action Committee was formed to help the community take the situation in hand. At the urging of the provincial government, however, its mandate also includes a commitment to engage community members in some long-term thinking. The long-term subcommittee was struck to lead this initiative and became a pilot project for the Public Engagement Initiative.

Using the template we developed during the skills development project, we first set out to answer our key questions.

#### **Question 1: Why do we need to engage in a dialogue?**

To get Miramichi residents to make long-term choices about the city's future.

The Miramichi process aimed to get citizens to think about what kind of community they want 10 years from now and discuss their role in helping to build it.

**Question 2: What kind of engagement do we need?**

**The participants must design a strategy based on the dialogue.**

This is the second stage in the exercise referred to in Chapter 4 as the engagement continuum. The main task is for residents to deliberate and make choices about the future. An action plan isn't necessary at this stage.

**Question 3: Who are we engaging?**

**Miramichi residents who are interested in developing a long-term plan for their city.**


A vision sets the overarching framework in which other dialogues take place. It is the North Star toward which a whole community is supposed to steer, whether as citizens, stakeholders or political leaders. In a democracy, the task of developing a vision belongs to ordinary citizens or community members. So, even though some of the participants in our process were members of the business community or other stakeholder groups, insofar as they participated in this discussion, they did so as citizens.

The Miramichi project included comments that were grounded in rich historical experiences that define the people of the region in ways that are unique and distinctive.

As for the kind of dialogue, we saw in Part II that **to create a community vision, participants must make choices that embody key values, principles, priorities and directions for the community as a whole.** To do this well, the contents of a vision must be robust enough to guide subgroups on how to make plans for the future and unite the community behind it.

For example, suppose the business community wants to undertake a branding exercise for the Miramichi. If the discussion involves only members of the business community, there is a high risk it will fail. Successful branding initiatives enlist the entire community in the project by making them spokespeople and ambassadors for the community's brand. When a local taxi driver picks up a businessman from out of town at the airport, we want him to talk about the community to this visitor in ways that emphasize and reinforce the brand. That is what makes it stick and work. But this will happen only if the brand genuinely reflects what the members of the community feel and believe about their community. They must identify with it. They must see it as an authentic expression of their community.

The lesson is that if the business community wants to brand the community as a whole, their dialogue should be guided by a vision of the community



that has emerged from a real dialogue with its citizens. When this happens, the two – brand and vision – will complement and reinforce one another. As a result, citizens will see themselves in the brand and will be inclined to accept it, identify with it and promote it.

The Miramichi project aimed to help a group of citizens understand how a visioning exercises works, why it is important and what their role is in producing a vision. To achieve this, we brought together about 35 people from across the region to discuss their role in community renewal. In our sessions, the exchanges between participants produced some interesting examples of statements that might well appear in an eventual vision statement for the community. For example, participants said they wanted to:

- maintain their rural lifestyle and traditional family values;
- ensure sustainable forestry management and planning in the region, in partnership with the forestry industry, to ensure that the regional forest is healthy and strong for future ventures; and,
- build on their cultural heritage, which is already known internationally and which attracts tourists who want to learn more about the cultural harmony. They noted that an initiative undertaken by the Metepenagiag First Nation was a successful case of building on their heritage, and wondered how they could do the same with their Irish and Acadian heritage.

All three statements embody legitimate goals and/or principles that might be included in a vision statement for the future of the Miramichi region. They are grounded in rich historical experiences that define the people of the region in ways that are unique and distinctive. They are robust enough to provide guidance to governments and other stakeholders as to how they should plan for the future, without preventing businesses, politicians, community organizations and other community groups from making innovative choices about the future.

#### **Question 4: What is government's role?**

##### **Government will be a partner.**

The Government of New Brunswick will work with the communities of the region in new and flexible way to provide support for their action plans.

#### **The Process**

We did not have the resources, capacity or time to engage the whole community in a full-fledged visioning exercise for this project. Nor did we think they were ready for one. Some spade work needed to be done first so we kept our goals modest. We saw this process as a preliminary step toward such a

Our process  
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about awareness-  
raising than  
visioning

dialogue. We wanted to prepare the way and test the community's readiness to participate in such an exercise.

The goal was to get some people in the community thinking about what such a process might be like and why they would want to have one. We wanted to begin building a network of community members who would be ready, willing and able to help lead a community-wide process in the near future, should one be launched. Our process was really more about awareness-raising than visioning.

The group met four times over as many months to hear from, and question, recognized experts on what role ordinary community members can play in the renewal of a community. They discussed their role in a wide range of areas, such as a branding exercise, a wellness campaign, reversing the out-migration of young people, repatriating those who have left and, of course, creating a community plan and vision.

### **The Report**

This dialogue formed the basis of what will be a 15- to 20-page report, which will draw on the expert presentations and the dialogue among the participants. It will provide a framework for the kind of process and discussion that will be needed if Miramichi holds a community-based visioning exercise. The report will provide residents, governments and other interested parties with a document that explains in clear, accessible language why such a process is needed, how it might work, and some of the issues for discussion. The report will be a primer for such a process. Finally, we expect the report will recommend the launch of such a process in the near future.

### **Other Tools**

This engagement process had a relatively simple structure. Ideally, we would have used other tools, such as an Internet dialogue, to promote a more in-depth discussion of the issues, but we agreed that at this stage we would keep it simple, given our limited resources, capacity and timelines. If a more robust process follows, hopefully it will include an innovative use of other tools, online applications and face-to-face interaction between community members.


Wellness is not just about our physical health, it is about our lifestyle, and everyone has a role to play: governments, communities, businesses, civil society, and, of course, citizens

## **Wellness and the Action Dialogue with Citizens**

### **The Issue**

Traditional thinking about health care focuses on the role experts play, and in particular doctors, in curing illness. Over the last two decades there has been a major shift away from simply curing illness to promoting wellness. There is a huge body of knowledge on the impact factors such as income and social status, social education, employment and working conditions, coping skills, gender, and culture – the so-called determinants of health. Wellness is the outcome, or result, of a combination of these determinants working together.





A decision to promote wellness not only commits governments to a proactive view of health, but a holistic view of how the goal will be achieved. They must look at the health system as reaching beyond hospitals, clinics and drug stores to include schools, movie theatres, workplaces, industrial parks and bicycle paths. For example, schools and mass media are possible tools to educate citizens about nutrition, the workplace should be explored as a likely source of stress, a regulated natural environment may prevent the development of some diseases in a population and parks and recreational facilities are a good place to promote as places to enjoy outdoor exercise.

In this view, wellness is not just about our physical health, it is about our lifestyle. Everyone has role to play: governments, communities, businesses, civil society, and, of course, citizens. A key challenge for government is to get individuals and community organizations working together to change traditional attitudes about health care and get people to adopt a lifestyle that promotes wellness. This was our starting point when we used our framework of questions to design the Wellness pilot project.

**Question 1: Why do we need to engage in a dialogue?**

**To change attitudes and behaviour in order to promote wellness in the population.**

**Question 2: What kind of engagement do we need?**

**The participants were to design a wellness action plan.**

This is the third stage in the exercise referred to in Chapter 4 as the engagement continuum. Participants were to take action by developing a wellness action plan that they would promote within their families and their communities.

**Question 3: Who are we engaging?**

**Community members.**

The dialogue was designed to move through three basic stages, based on the following questions:

- What is wellness, why does it matter and how is it different from good health?
- Who is responsible for promoting wellness, i.e., what is the role of individuals, stakeholders, communities and government?
- What is the right plan for your community and what specific actions can each group take?
- If we improve wellness in New Brunswick communities, what will we see?



The first stage of the dialogue focused community members on a view of wellness as more than a health issue. The goal was to get them to see it as a building block of prosperous, sustainable communities. This, in turn, raised the second question of how responsibility for promoting wellness should be shared between the community, its members and the provincial government. Finally, in the third stage of discussion we explored the prospects for getting community members to develop an action plan that would reflect the particular circumstances of their community.

We also engaged **community organizations** and encouraged them to provide community leadership around wellness. The dialogue involved them in a discussion of the role they should play to provide the right leadership, help to organize and mobilize the community and interact with government.

**Question 4: What is government’s role?**

**Government will be a participant and a partner.**

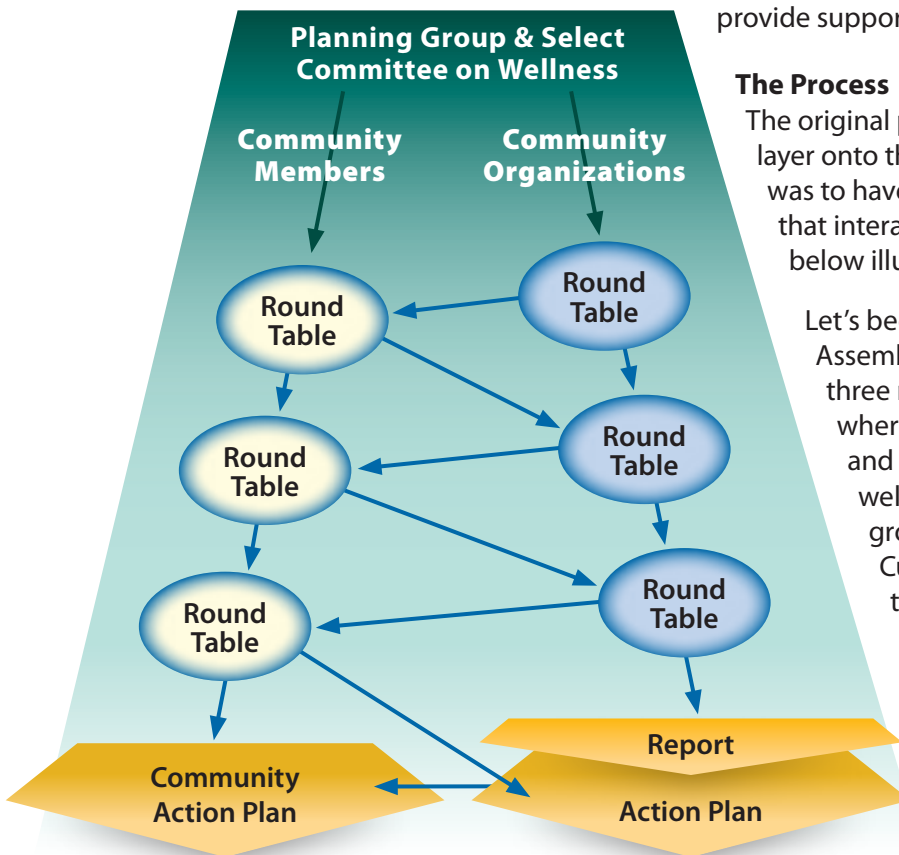
The Government of New Brunswick must be prepared to work with these communities to allow greater choice in the use of resources and to provide support for action plans.


**The Process**

The original plan for this process added a whole new layer onto the skills development template. The idea was to have two processes underway simultaneously that interacted with one another. The diagram below illustrates this.

Let’s begin with the bottom level. The Legislative Assembly’s Select Committee on Wellness hosted three meetings in each of two communities, where it engaged a group of about 25 citizens and community leaders in a dialogue on wellness. The process began with a planning group from the Department of Wellness, Culture and Sport, which consulted with the Chair of the Select Committee.

The roundtables included facilitated discussions to help the participants work through these questions. At these sessions the elected officials were scattered around the room, sitting at tables with small groups of citizens. They participated on the same terms as other participants. The goal was to





promote a genuine dialogue in which the community considered how it could promote wellness among its members. The legislative committee chair was there to explain how it could – and could not – help them realize their goals.

This format is very different from the usual consultations held by such committees. These events were not opportunities for the community to propose ideas to the legislative committee. Rather the events explored the community's own needs, resources and options. There were moments when local people – especially from community organizations – were tempted to view the events as an opportunity to make a pitch to the dozen or so MLAs sitting in their midst. But by-and-large they remained focused on the questions we posed and the issues that raised for them.

In the end, the process didn't generate a real action plan. There wasn't time. It was meant to raise awareness in the community and explore the prospects for a more robust process in the future, which would involve a larger number of people and end with the creation of an action plan.

The process at the top of the diagram was supposed to run at the same time as the community process and interact with it – a technique we call **stacking**. The plan was to involve the community organizations in a separate dialogue focused on their role in providing leadership, helping to organize and mobilize the community and interacting with government. At the same time, some of the participants from this process were to participate in roundtables with community members, ensuring the two processes interacted. In this way, the community organizations would have developed an even closer relationship with the citizens and their action plans would have dovetailed and complemented those from the roundtable process. Unfortunately, in the end, we did not launch this second process because of pressures around capacity and time.

### **The Community Dialogue: Ordering Public Debate**

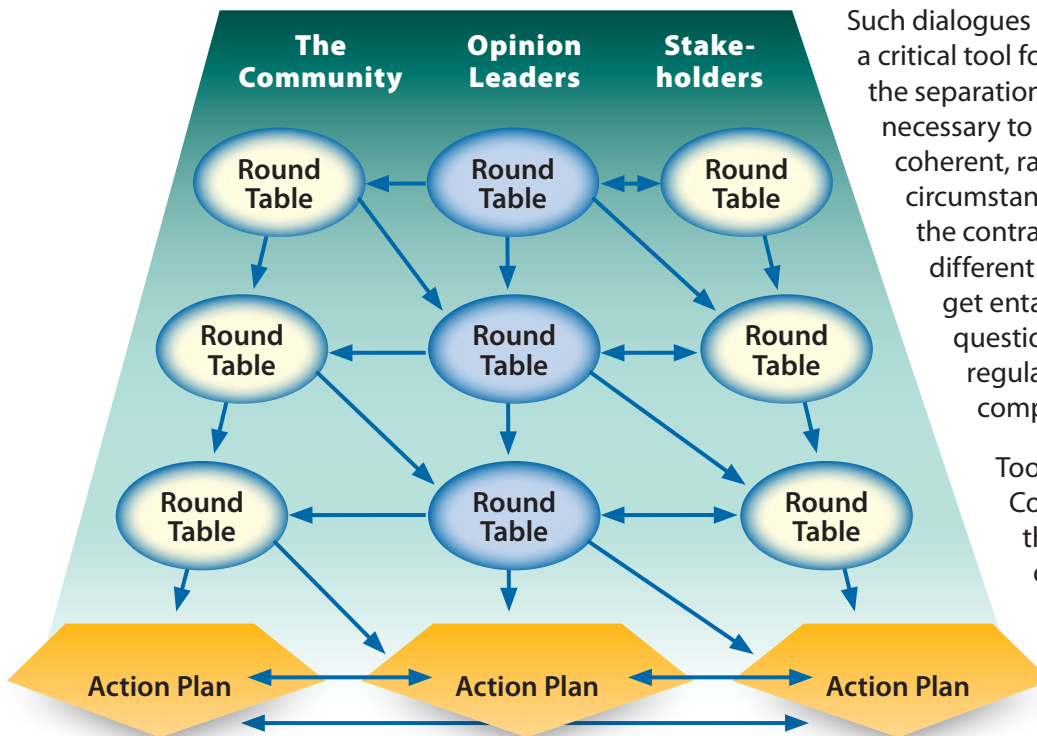
Throughout this report, we refer to communities as though they are a distinct subgroup in the public engagement process. This is a bit misleading. Communities are complex organisms made up of ordinary citizens, opinion leaders, stakeholders and even governments, especially municipal governments. A community dialogue involves all or a number of them in a single process in which several dialogues occur simultaneously and interact in ways that allow them to influence one another. Community dialogues may contain discussions around long-term planning, changing behaviour, influencing others and means-ends planning, sometimes all at the same time.

However, the difference between a community dialogue and normal public debate is the dialogues are separated, different subgroups participate in different ones, and there is a weighting of the overall influence of the process. In a community dialogue, citizens are called upon to set the broad terms for

Community dialogues may contain discussions around long-term planning, changing behaviour, influencing others and means-ends planning, sometimes all at the same time.

discussion among other stakeholders within the process. The point of having a community dialogue is to bring greater order and coherence to the public dialogue around a subject.

We did not undertake a dialogue of this sort, but it is important to outline here as it is the logical next step for the model. The diagram below illustrates how a community dialogue would work.



Such dialogues are highly desirable and a critical tool for public engagement. If the separation of tasks and dialogues is necessary to keep public debate ordered, coherent, rational and clear, in normal circumstances that rarely happens. On the contrary, as we saw in Chapter 5, different tasks and dialogues often get entangled. In particular, visioning questions and means-ends questions regularly get mixed together in complicated and confusing ways.


Too often this is intentional. Consider the decade of debate that Canadians have had over whether there should be greater private sector participation in the delivery of health care services. Opponents say this will create a two-tiered system

that undermines the Canadian model of health care. The problem with this argument is that it runs two different dialogues together. One is about the vision of health care that Canadians support. The other is about the best means to achieve that end.

Most Canadians probably agree that “the Canadian model” means everyone should have access to basic services (universality) and that governments will pay the costs associated with that (single payer). Let’s assume for a minute that this is the basis of the Canadian vision.<sup>11</sup>

If so, it is a fallacy to move from there to the conclusion that private sector delivery would compromise this vision by creating a two-tiered system. It may, or, it may not. It depends on the particular model of private sector delivery that is proposed.

<sup>11</sup> Perhaps Canadians would reject this, which is fine. But we would need to have a discussion with them to find out whether there is an alternative that they can agree upon.



Of course, those who argue that a private sector role undermines the Canadian model cannot afford to separate the question of the vision from the question of the best means to the end. Once they do, the fallacy in their argument is obvious. So they do what they can to keep these two discussions confused and entangled. Citizens are left feeling confused and uncertain.

As we saw at the end of Chapter 5, we could use what we call community dialogues to disentangle vision dialogues from means-ends dialogues. This would give citizens greater confidence in their ability to participate in and lead the visioning part of such a dialogue, and it would make their collective voice more articulate, reflective, clear and confident in the process. This, in turn, would introduce a new kind of discipline into public debate. Stakeholders would find very quickly that they had little choice but to confine themselves to their rightful role, that of debating the best means to the end that citizens have chosen for the community.

# Part IV Themes and Conclusions

## Chapter 10

### Governance – Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

In developing and testing the model of public engagement in this report we held more than a dozen workshops across the country, involving over 300 public servants, elected officials and others. Most participants agreed that the model implies fundamental changes in how governments work. Some of these changes will be more difficult to make than others, most notably changes to the traditional government planning cycle.

At present, political parties fight election campaigns on a set of promises to the public – a platform – which politicians are expected to fulfill if elected. If they win, the platform defines their mandate and becomes the basis of the government's agenda, usually until the next election. Political leaders thus tend to plan from election to election and government officials take their cue from the party platform.

Participants worried the new model doesn't fit the normal four-year timeline of governments. The more open-ended dialogue processes take time to complete and real measurable progress on societal goals can take years. Will politicians buy into this, they wondered?

This is a critical question. Without strong political leadership our proposed model won't get far. So what should we say to political leaders, elected officials and party members who ask why they should adapt the existing process to accommodate it?


#### The Campaign Platform Model

As a planning model, the campaign platform emerged when the world was a simpler, slower place. Events were more predictable and trends more stable. Issues had clearer boundaries. In those days, it made good sense to ask political parties to set out a list of the things they wanted to achieve as a government.

Today, things are different. Issues often spread out across multiple policy fields as far as the eye can see. Change and complexity are the norm. While parties certainly still owe citizens a clear account of what they will do if elected, treating complex issues as though they were amenable to simple solutions with clear timelines is likely only to disappoint.

Consider an issue like wait times for health care services. Citizens are concerned about wait times and reducing them is now a priority for many governments. But even so, it would be a mistake for a provincial government simply to promise to fix the problem, if elected, as though all it takes is the commitment to act. This implies that they have more control over the health system than they do. It doesn't work that way because the issues around

Public debate, especially in campaigns, often treats complex issues as though the real problem is a lack of strong leadership.



health care delivery are far more complex. Government ministers and officials would quickly find that they need the support and participation of other stakeholders, such as hospital administrators, doctors, nurses and other health care workers.

By contrast, a decision, say, to upgrade a highway can be comparatively simple. Such a decision is determined based on the resources a government has at its disposal. Senior government officials can normally plan and then initiate this type of project with little public consultation or engagement, even when there is opposition.

The general lesson is that politicians and political parties shouldn't make campaign promises they can't achieve on their own. Nevertheless, the political culture still puts pressure on them to do exactly this. Public debate, especially in campaigns, often treats complex issues as though the real problem is a lack of strong leadership.

This is not to say that political parties are wrong to focus on complex issues, such as wait times. On the contrary, elected officials, and by extension, the public sector, have key roles to play in resolving complex issues and it is these roles that the public expects them to play. The real question is what is the best way for political parties and politicians to do that?

### Two Kinds of Leadership

At its most basic level, the answer is obvious: leadership. Where complexity and change are at issue, elected and party officials should focus on their ability to provide the kind of leadership needed to deal effectively with them. They can do this by shifting the emphasis off specific promises with short timelines and onto making real progress on broader, societal goals. This, in turn, gives them, once in government, the flexibility to adjust to events and circumstances as they unfold.

Leadership, of course, is a common theme in most modern political campaigns, but are political parties offering the right kind of leadership? Are they truly giving people what they want? Pollsters and strategists tell us repeatedly that in the public's mind leadership is about making decisive choices on tough issues and then having the strength and commitment to implement those choices. This is the conventional model of leadership.

There are some good points to be made about this form of leadership. Certainly, no one wants a leader who vacillates or appears weak. However, to make real progress on complex goals, such as a skilled workforce, safer streets, a healthier population, a tolerant society, or clean air, land and water, governments need stakeholders and citizens to assume some of the responsibilities.

Leadership, of course, is a common theme in most modern political campaigns, but are political parties offering the right kind of leadership?

The conventional model evolved in a world that did not contemplate this role for the public. Rather, in this model, a political party runs for election on the strength of its platform and, if elected, the leadership believes that victory means voters have given them a mandate to use the power of political office to enact it. A strong leader does just that, instructing the public service and the Cabinet to design the government's agenda based on that election platform.

The approach is well suited to some tasks, such as adjusting personal or corporate income tax or introducing new legislation on accountability. But when the task is to get people working together to solve complex issues, it falls short. We need a different kind of leadership, one that encourages collaboration amongst a variety of players. This requires that each player adjust how they view their role in the development of public policy and community goals. To do that, leaders must initiate a genuine society-wide dialogue on what the public's priorities are and how the public intends to become part of the process to address those priorities. This is the new model we propose for public engagement.

In this model, leadership is defined as a person's ability to:

- bring people into the discussion;
- help them think through the issues fairly and reasonably;
- show confidence in the capacity of people to find solutions to the issues; and,
- encourage them to take on some of the responsibility for implementing those solutions.

In such a dialogue, key decisions are not made by the leader (and his or her advisors) and then simply announced to the public. Rather, decisions are arrived at, as we have described, through an open and public process. This gives the public a meaningful role in crafting the solution and some real ownership of it.


When the public is divided, whatever decision government makes, someone is going to disagree because they will feel like they lost the argument.

The public does not view this model as the work of a vacillating, unfocused or weak leader. On the contrary, they recognize it for what it is – an example of a very modern form of leadership. In comparison, the conventional model of leadership doesn't cede or share authority. It centralizes and concentrates it, often aggressively. Increasingly, this is damaging the relationship between people and governments.

### **Complexity, Consultation and Conventional Leadership: A Toxic Mix**

Government officials would probably argue that they regularly communicate with the public. Indeed, most governments won't make a move on major issues without conducting some form of public consultation. It is a familiar





model and, as we illustrated in Chapter 2, advocates and political adversaries have become very skilled at using it for a different purpose, namely, to polarize debate. When this happens, it can become all but impossible for a government to make and implement a decision, however decisive or tough the leader wishes to be.

When the public is divided, whatever decision government makes, someone is going to disagree because they will feel like they lost the argument. Normally, this group of people will try to pressure a government to reverse or amend its decision. For governments and their leaders, this is a nightmare scenario. It puts them between the proverbial rock and a hard place. They are damned if they do, and damned if they don't. Ironically, what may have begun as a serious effort to be strong, clear and decisive leaves them looking weak, unsure and defensive – exactly the opposite of the image the conventional model is supposed to convey.

This occurs because the combination of a complex issue, the traditional consultation process and conventional leadership can be a toxic mix, because it is easy for any of the players to manipulate it, take control of the agenda and turn it into a debilitating confrontation. This is a familiar scenario in today's political arena and it only seems to be getting worse.

To prevent it, we must move beyond that traditional form of consultation. Governments must give the public some real influence and control over the outcome. Which means government officials must rethink their role as more of a facilitator and less of a decision-maker. In turn, this will make it difficult for adversaries to attack, because they will have to attack everyone involved in the process, including stakeholders and members of the public. That isn't likely to be a palatable strategy.

In short, strong leadership means different things in different circumstances. Conventional leadership is appropriate in some instances, but in today's world, we need a more nuanced and flexible approach.

### **The Sustainable Communities Movement**

A good example of such an approach can be found in the new and growing movement around the development of sustainable communities. Building such a community requires a fundamental change in how public debate, decision making and planning are conducted within a community. It requires governments, communities, stakeholders and citizens to plan and work together in new ways, based on a shared commitment to societal goals.

The fifth pilot project in the Public Engagement Initiative is entitled Sustainable Communities in a Self-Sufficient Province: Planning Our Future Together. It is a case study of how this kind of community-led, long-term planning around societal goals is already changing some communities in New Brunswick.

In 2008, the five municipalities in the Saint John region began a community development initiative known as True Growth Out of it has developed a series of community dialogues aimed at making the region a sustainable community.



In 2003, the five municipalities in the Saint John region – Grand Bay-Westfield, Quispamsis, Rothesay, Saint John and St. Martins – began a community development initiative known as True Growth. Out of it has developed a series of community dialogues aimed at making the region a sustainable community. The Public Engagement Initiative engaged a group of 35 individuals who are closely involved in these initiatives in a reflective examination of what they have learned so far from the experience. Through a series of three roundtable discussions and an online dialogue we explored six key questions:

- What makes communities sustainable?
- How do traditional and sustainable communities differ?
- What is required to build a sustainable community?
- What role do members of the community play in building a sustainable community?
- What is the role of the provincial government in creating sustainable communities? What is the role of municipal government?
- How would sustainable communities contribute to self-sufficiency?

The findings from this process have been incorporated into a final report that will not only stimulate and inform further discussion, but provide recommendations for how to foster and support sustainable communities and encourage broader understanding and awareness of their place in the province's future. To see where this may lead, it is worth exploring the concept a little further.


### **What is a Sustainable Community?**

While traditional communities tend to see their economic, social and environmental interests as competitive and separate, sustainable communities see them as complementary and interdependent.

Let's begin with a description of what it could be. It has safe neighbourhoods, affordable housing, and efficient approaches to energy use and transportation. It takes appropriate steps to conserve natural resources and valuable agricultural lands. Its economy is vibrant, promotes local goods and services and welcomes to new residents. At the same time, it participates with confidence in the modern economy, based on its special strengths. It encourages population growth, but does so in ways that are consistent with the carrying capacity of its resources and environment.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a sustainable community is open to and adept at managing complexity and change. It recognizes that its long-term viability as a community requires that its members:

1. plan together to set long-term priorities and societal goals that balance their economic, social and environmental needs and interests;
2. form practical plans to achieve these goals; and,

- 
3. work together to implement the plans and solve problems that arise along the way.

**A key difference between sustainable and traditional communities lies in this special capacity for long-term planning.** While traditional communities tend to see their economic, social and environmental interests as competitive and separate, sustainable communities see them as complementary and interdependent.

Consider the challenge of building a skilled workforce, for example, to support the transformation of Saint John into a thriving energy hub. This requires more than just building new training institutions. It requires building a liveable community.

Today, highly skilled people are in demand and very mobile. When they accept a job, the community they will live in is often as important as the rate of pay. They expect quality social services like education and health care; they want clean air and water; they look for accessible recreational facilities, such as parks, for their children, and they want access to cultural spaces, such as concert venues, theatre and galleries. Together, these things make people feel at home in their community.

A business leader who sees social and environmental goals like these as someone else's concern – as simply a cost to business, to be avoided or minimized – fails to see the bigger picture. Achieving these goals is an investment in a business's future, a way to be assured of a healthy, happy workforce and long-term success. By the same token, some advocates for environmental protection or social programs view major economic development as a threat to their goals, one to be resisted or opposed. They must realize that poverty is one of the biggest obstacles to social and sustainable development.

Sustainable communities are ones where stakeholders have moved beyond a narrow, short-sighted view of their interests and see community development more holistically. Rather than focusing on winning or losing, these people realize that to succeed in the long-term, they need each other. They must work together. A shared commitment to long-term goals provides the basis for building the kind of cooperation and trust needed to succeed.

This kind of mutual understanding and shared commitment is a form of social maturity. Like the transition from adolescence to adulthood, getting there takes learning, reflection, experimentation and debate. Also like that transition, it can be helped along – facilitated – by the right kind of support and encouragement; by the right kind of engagement process.

A community dialogue encourages different subgroups within the community to look beyond their narrow, conventional interests and to begin to see the community holistically.

## The Community Dialogue

The task of building a sustainable community begins with a community dialogue that aims to develop a vision and a plan that puts the community on a long-term path to its goal. Through it, members of a community explore and discuss their shared history and values; key relationships, such as those with government or between traditional sectors and interests within the community; the use of land and resources; the consequences of planning options; the viability of traditional industries and different ways of life that have sustained them in the past.

The dialogue helps the community recognize and address long-standing issues, such as conflicts between different groups. It also helps them identify their strengths and articulate their goals so they can begin to develop a community plan.

Finally, it encourages different subgroups within the community to look beyond their narrow, conventional interests and to begin to see the community holistically. As they do, they realize that everyone has a role to play in a sustainable community. Moreover, when these roles are balanced and integrated, they begin to complement and reinforce one another, strengthening the whole community.


In our analysis of the Miramichi project, we concluded that a successful branding exercise by the business community should be anchored in the community's vision. When it is, the business community finds that the citizens automatically assume a role as ambassadors for the business community and spokespeople for its brand.

A community dialogue allows residents to develop a vision for their collective future and a long-term plan that is shared by the whole community. It unites community members around shared goals and assigns tasks and responsibilities to them. This builds the kind of unity-of-purpose and sense of shared commitment and ownership needed to work together effectively to develop and implement the long-term plan.

## Towards Self-Sufficiency

Communities that embark on this path need the right kind of relationship with their provincial government. They will need the political and legal flexibility to make and implement important decisions on a wide range of economic, social, environmental and cultural issues. They will also need the right kind of financial supports. At the same time, a community's vision for the future and its plan to get there must be consistent with the economic, social, environmental and cultural goals of the larger community in which it is embedded, namely, the province. In short, the right balance must be struck between local and provincial goals and plans; and it must also be struck between conventional

The Self-Sufficiency initiative creates a timely opportunity to launch a province-wide initiative on sustainable communities



and collaborative leadership from the province. The Self-Sufficiency initiative creates a timely opportunity to launch a province-wide initiative on sustainable communities.

As a campaign commitment, Self-Sufficiency has at least three distinctive features. First, it is a long-term commitment – 20 years – so it extends well beyond the usual four-year horizon of campaign platforms. Second, it is comprehensive in scope. It is not just a commitment to reform a particular area, such as health or education. It is a commitment to renew the province. Third, Premier Graham has made self-sufficiency the centerpiece of his mandate.

From a political viewpoint, the combination of these three things is potentially transformational. If the government follows through on the full implications, it will fundamentally change the way New Brunswick is governed.

First, as we argued in Part I, for the government to realize this goal it not only needs the support of communities, stakeholders and citizens; it needs them to take ownership of and responsibility for their part in making it happen. This requires a new relationship with the public.

Second, delivering on a 20-year commitment requires a new planning horizon for the public service. In effect, the project is about much more than promoting business or adopting new policies. It is about wellness, skills development, environmental protection, immigration, and much more. To meet the challenges, the public service must develop an integrated plan for long-term change, rather than working within the usual four-year horizon that a political mandate sets.

Third, if the government wants the initiative to succeed, it must provide the right kind of leadership. Otherwise neither the public nor the public service will be able to fulfill the role and tasks that the goal imposes on them. In brief, the government must be ready, willing and able to work with them in a new way – as facilitator, enabler and partner.

Finally, an election will come along within the usual timelines. But the government will have to defend its record differently, and will be judged differently, from governments in the past. It will be judged on the basis of its success in developing and setting in motion a credible plan to move the province toward self-sufficiency. Such a plan must have milestones and some of those milestones can, and should, be aligned with the usual four-year cycle of elections. In this way, its success at long-term planning and meeting milestones could become the basis for future election campaigns.


In sum, **the commitment to self-sufficiency is poised to catapult the government out of the old four-year planning cycle and into a new, long-term cycle.** This would be a major and welcome innovation on how government and politics work. If governments and political parties are going

to deal effectively with complexity and change, both need to take a similar step – planning and organizing for the long-term, based on collaborative processes that involve communities, stakeholders and citizens.

A provincial strategy for building sustainable communities could be a powerful aid. Communities create deep bonds between and among residents. A community plan could be a powerful force for motivating people to work together on a range of tasks, from wellness and skills training to community-building and environmental protection.

**The Government of New Brunswick could lead the way by developing a community-building strategy to help achieve its goal of self-sufficiency.** It could be the foundation on which to build a cohesive, integrated and sustainable network of communities across the province – and thus achieve self-sufficiency. With the right approach and leadership, there is no obvious reason that it could not be done.





## Chapter 11: Conclusions

As we wrote at the start of this report, the Public Engagement Initiative sought to address a single, basic problem: that of our dependency on government to solve all of society's problems and government's reluctance to cede some of that responsibility to other groups.

First, we have argued that two major trends in modern government are converging – effectiveness and civic engagement.

**Public engagement is desirable not just for democratic reasons; in a complex world it is a condition of effective governance.**

Second, the challenge for governments is to move the public beyond what we referred to as the dependency issue, that is, the tendency to look on government as the primary decision maker and problem solver. The old days when government planning and policy-making were the sole responsibility of government officials are gone. Today, there is a role for the public in making choices, developing plans and taking action for the achievement of important societal goals. To do that, government must assume a new role as more of a facilitator and less of a decision maker.

**Governments must move beyond conventional consultation and engage the public in a genuine dialogue that involves decision making, planning and action.**

Third, we have seen that the public is a complex entity, and so is public dialogue. It is not enough simply to launch a dialogue process. Government needs to know what kind of dialogue to use, who to engage and what the process should look like.

**Government needs an engagement model that resolves complex situations into their constituent parts and assigns the right kind of dialogue to the right subgroups.**

Our pilot projects tested new ways to meet these three conditions. There is every reason to be optimistic about the prospects here. Government officials in our projects developed skills to design and execute public engagement processes. At the same time, public participants became familiar and comfortable with their new role in governance. Web-based tools played an important role in helping develop this new, collaborative relationship. Over time, governments will be able to engage large numbers of people across a province or the country in genuinely deliberative dialogues.

**Technology, and in particular web-based tools and applications can help governments extend the scope and reach of public engagement.**

But new tools and processes are not enough to ensure a bright future. There is a final condition that must be met: strong leadership. Without the right

leadership the project will quickly stall and fail. We need leaders who are ready, willing and able to challenge the public to assume ownership of and responsibility for solving issues. Such a leader's strength and skill lies in his or her ability to bring people into the discussion, to help them think through the issues fairly and reasonably, to show confidence in their capacity to find their own solutions to the issues, and to encourage them to take on some of the responsibility for implementing those solutions.

**Public engagement requires strong leadership, but that leadership must come at least as much from the bottom-up as the top-down.**

Without the right leadership the project will quickly stall and fail. We need leaders who are ready, willing and able to challenge the public to assume ownership of and responsibility for solving issues.

### **A Final Thought**

We are at an important moment in the evolution of modern democracy. Today, our world is defined by complexity and change. As a result, the old system of governance is breaking down. We must renew it.

There are really only two options. Either we move in the direction of deepening and renewing our commitment to democracy through a new relationship between government and the public. Or, we move in the direction of more centralized and controlling government, weakening, if not undermining, democracy in the process.

To prevent the latter from happening, we must strengthen the public voice. In a democracy, the most powerful voice belongs to the people. The stronger and clearer it is, the harder for leaders to resist it – or to control it. Public engagement could produce greater clarity, order, coherence and authority in that voice. Ideally, this will take us beyond the narrow, confrontational politics of the 20th century and toward a new, more deliberative, form of democracy.

There is much work to be done. Governments must build the necessary tools and processes. They must work together with citizens, communities and stakeholders to change the political culture. And, as citizens, we must choose and support the right kinds of leaders.

***We know what we need to do.***

***It's time to get started.***



## Chapter 12

# Recommendations

This final chapter contains our recommendations to the Government of New Brunswick. It set out a realistic plan for the government to build upon the work begun with the Public Engagement Initiative and position the province as a national and, indeed, global leader on public engagement.

**Ongoing Leadership from the Premier:** Through his support for the Public Engagement Initiative, Premier Shawn Graham demonstrated his understanding of the changing needs of our society, and of government's responsibility to respond with new approaches to governance and leadership.

- 1. Premier Graham should build on the work of the Public Engagement Initiative by positioning himself, and the Government, as a provincial, national and international leader in public engagement. The Premier can be a spokesperson for the view that public engagement is not a partisan issue, but a necessary next step in the evolution of modern democratic government and governance.**

**A New Policy on Public Engagement:** There is no single answer to the question as to how government should engage the public. Governments need different approaches for different tasks. The first step is to distinguish between different tasks. The framework of questions in this report does so in a systematic way. It helps government officials decide when to move from consultation to dialogue, what kind of dialogue to use, who to engage, and what the process should look like. This constitutes a significant step in the evolution of engagement planning. The approach should become the basis of a new policy on public engagement for the Government of New Brunswick.

- 2. The Government of New Brunswick should adopt a new policy that all government departments must design public engagement processes following an examination and assessment of the circumstances, based on the questions identified in this report.**

**Transition to the New Model:** Learning, capacity-building, the development of new guidelines and practices, and culture-change – all are needed to ensure success. The new model will need to be phased in, to allow time for the adjustment within the civil service.

- 3. The Deputy Ministers Committee on Transforming Relationships should be tasked with overseeing implementation of the new policy and these recommendations. A key task of the Committee will be to identify opportunities where the new approach can be used. The goal will be to ensure a quick and effective transition to the new model, while ensuring time for the government and the public to adjust.**

**Building Capacity:** The new model of public engagement proposes a new role for government as a convener, facilitator, participant and enabler, and partner. Fulfilling this role will require significant changes on at least three levels:

- new skills, tools, processes and capacity must be built;
- there must be discussion, research, experimentation and learning to support the new roles; and,
- these roles require a real culture change around government's relationship with stakeholders, citizens and communities.

To ensure that these changes take place in a timely fashion, there must be a strong, articulate and independent champion inside government with a mandate to lead change and speak for the government's commitment to engagement and collaboration.

**4. At a minimum, one high-profile, large-scale project should be launched within six months of this report's release. Its purpose will be to demonstrate the effectiveness of the model and the government's commitment to it. Possible topics include wellness and/or a revitalization of the relationship between government and the voluntary and not-for-profit sectors.**

**Training and Education for Public Officials:** While this report provides direction and advice on how to use the new model, it was not possible to anticipate all the questions of public servants or elected officials who will be seeking to understand what the new model means for them and how they can begin to apply it. Further education and training opportunities will be needed.

- 5. Within six months, the Office of Human Resources should develop and offer a training course for public servants to help them master the fundamentals of the model and provide practical instruction and guidance on how it is to be used.**
- 6. A similar training course should be considered for elected officials to help them understand the fundamentals of the model and provide instruction and guidance on how it may be used to strengthen their roles in committees, in leading community engagement processes in their ridings and other relevant tasks.**

**A Public Engagement Roundtable:** The model of public engagement in this report will bring about a fundamental change in the relationship between government, on the one hand, and citizens, stakeholders and communities, on the other. But the new relationship is a two-way street. If government is expected to be more flexible, open and collaborative in making decisions and plans, stakeholders, communities and citizens must take on new responsibilities to help solve problems and achieve goals. One will not work without the other. To ensure that everyone is doing their part, there should be a mechanism for ongoing dialogue between the parties.

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- 7. The Deputy Ministers Committee on Transforming Relationships should establish the Public Engagement Roundtable, involving elected officials, senior public servants and individuals from the private and not-for-profit sectors to meet twice yearly to review the progress of all parties on realigning the governance relationship in the province.**
  - 8. The Government of New Brunswick should position itself as a champion for the creation of a Canada-wide community-of-practice on public engagement and should be actively seeking opportunities to promote this idea.**

# Appendix

## The Pilot Projects of the Public Engagement Initiative

The five pilot projects of the Public Engagement Initiative were:

- Skills Development: Reckoning with the New Economy
- The Wellness Project
- The Climate Change Action Plan Initiative
- The Miramichi Action Committee
- Sustainable Communities in a Self-Sufficient Province: Planning our Future Together

In addition to community members, the following eight provincial departments participated:

- Business New Brunswick
- Energy
- Environment
- Social Development
- Intergovernmental Affairs
- Local Government
- Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour
- Wellness, Culture and Sport

The Executive Council Office and the Executive Policy Research Unit provided direction and support.

## Skills Development: Reckoning with the New Economy

### The Purpose

To tackle the issues around the renewal of the New Brunswick workforce.


### The Participants

Representatives from government departments and stakeholder groups directly effected by changes to New Brunswick economy and workforce.

### The Issue

The skills development pilot project was our first opportunity to test our public engagement model. Its purpose was to bring together stakeholders from government, industry, labour and educational institutions to discuss how they could work together to reposition New Brunswick's labour force in the wake of major economic changes.

For well over a century, New Brunswick's economy has been anchored by the resource sectors; forestry, fisheries, mining and agriculture. For the most part, the province has harvested these resources but has done little in the way of refining these commodities prior to export. This has made New Brunswick businesses vulnerable to shifts in commodity markets, and in particular the rise of a group of countries known as the Emerging Seven (the E7). Led by China



and India, this group also includes Russia, Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico and Turkey. In less than a decade these countries have radically altered trade patterns by assuming a dominant role in the production of not only commodities, such as pulp, but also in the cheap production of manufactured goods. The impact of this has been acutely felt in Canada's forestry sector and New Brunswick has not been immune.

However, these emerging world economies are not the only trend leaving its mark on New Brunswick's labour force. Technology has forever altered the way in which we harvest primary resources. While this has improved productivity, it has also reduced the number of people required to work in the forests, on the oceans and in the fields of the province. Combined with the increased use of information and communication technologies in all business sectors, new modes of shipping and transportation and demographic shifts, New Brunswick's business and labour sectors have a lot of talk about.

The ability of countries such as Canada – and provinces such as New Brunswick – to attract and hold high-paying jobs will depend on whether our workforce contains the right mix of skills to compete with Europe and Asia. The purpose of the skills development pilot project was to tackle the issues around the renewal of the New Brunswick workforce.

### **The Goal**

Preparing New Brunswick's workforce to succeed in this environment is a major challenge for the future. It will take research, planning, investment and commitment from governments, employers, educational and training institutions, labour unions and professional associations. It will also take high levels of coordination and collaboration between these players. To succeed, we must target emerging industries and sectors where new skills will be needed, identify the skills that we are well positioned to provide, and develop programs to prepare the workforce. Everyone must work together.

### **The Project**

The skills development project was a first step in this direction. Its overarching goal was to launch an ongoing dialogue to allow government and stakeholders to begin working together more effectively to prepare the workforce for the future.

We assembled a group of 35 representatives from a wide range of stakeholder groups. Over six months we used a combination of roundtable sessions, telephone and face-to-face interviews, and online discussions to engage the group in a dialogue around the identification of key issues and the development of strategies and plans to renew the workforce.

The process resulted in the publication of two documents: a report and an action plan. The report provided a longer-term view of the transformation of

the workforce. It identified strategic directions and issues for the future. It is the starting point for an ongoing dialogue between all of the parties.

By contrast, the action plan is more practical, immediate and focused. It is like a down-payment on the ideas and issues in the report. It sets out a list of practical tasks that stakeholders can start working on immediately. At the same time, the plan is a practical way for the stakeholders to start learning how to collaborate with one another more effectively.

Finally, the report and the plan will be presented to leaders from the various stakeholder groups and government at a skills summit in the spring of 2008. This will be an opportunity for all of the parties to declare their commitment to the goal of building a new working relationship to help them address the challenge of transforming the workforce for the 21st century.

## **The Wellness Project**

### **Who are we engaging?**


**Ordinary citizens and stakeholders from community organizations** on issues related to wellness in order to assess their readiness to play a more active role in promoting wellness individually and within their families and communities.

### **The Issue**

Traditional thinking about health care focuses on the role experts play, and in particular doctors, in curing illness. Over the last two decades there has been a major shift away from simply curing illness to promoting wellness. There is a huge body of knowledge on the impact factors such as income and social status, social education, employment and working conditions, coping skills, gender, and culture – the so-called determinants of health. Wellness is the outcome, or result, of a combination of these determinants working together.

A decision to promote wellness not only commits governments to a proactive view of health, but a holistic view of how the goal will be achieved. They must look at the health system as reaching beyond hospitals, clinics and drug stores to include schools, movie theatres, workplaces, industrial parks and bicycle paths. For example, schools and mass media are possible tools to educate citizens about nutrition, the workplace should be explored as a likely source of stress, a regulated natural environment may prevent the development of some diseases in a population and parks and recreational facilities are a good place to promote as places to enjoy outdoor exercise.

In this view, wellness is not just about our physical health, it is about our lifestyle. Everyone has role to play: governments, communities, businesses, civil society, and, of course, citizens. A key challenge for government is to get individuals and community organizations working together to change traditional attitudes about health care and get people to adopt a lifestyle that



promotes wellness. This was our starting point when we used our framework of questions to design the wellness pilot project.

### **The Goal**

The wellness project will engage the public in a dialogue aimed at promoting better understanding of wellness and the contribution it makes to successful communities; and to test the readiness of individuals and communities to work together with government to change traditional attitudes and behaviour.

### **The Project**

The Legislative Assembly's Select Committee on Wellness hosted three meetings in each of two communities, where it engaged a group of about 25 citizens and community leaders in a dialogue on wellness. The dialogue was designed to move through three basic stages, based on the following questions:

- What is wellness, why does it matter and how is it different from good health?
- Who is responsible for promoting wellness, i.e., what is the role of individuals, stakeholders, communities and government?
- What is the right plan for your community and what specific actions can each group take?
- If we improve wellness in New Brunswick communities, what will we see?

The first stage of the dialogue focused community members on a view of wellness as more than a health issue. The goal was to get them to see it as a building block of prosperous, sustainable communities. This, in turn, raised the second question of how responsibility for promoting wellness should be shared between the community, its members and the provincial government. Finally, in the third stage of discussion we explored the prospects for getting community members to develop an action plan that would reflect the particular circumstances of their community.

## **The Climate Change Action Plan Initiative**

### **Who are we engaging?**

Premier Shawn Graham will lead the climate change project by engaging 15 **opinion leaders** in a dialogue on the public's role in reducing greenhouse gases. This was one of the initiatives listed in the Climate Change Action Plan 2007-2012, which outlines how governments, communities, industries and individuals can address climate change. Our aim is to determine if participants are willing to provide public leadership because, as opinion leaders, they may be more influential than government in encouraging people to change entrenched attitudes and behaviour.



### **The Issue**

Climate change is among the most urgent problems facing our governments. Greenhouse gases are accumulating in the atmosphere and raising the earth's overall temperature. The impact on established weather patterns could be catastrophic, leading to droughts in some places, more severe and frequent storms in others, and rising sea levels that could flood coastal areas. If such developments are to be avoided or at least minimized, governments must act to reduce the release of greenhouse gases.

In its Climate Change Action Plan, the Government of New Brunswick has set a direction and specific objectives. It addresses both reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and adaptation to the effects of climate change. New Brunswick is an energy intensive province with a heavy natural resources processing industrial base. Over 40 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions come from electricity generation and 17 per cent from industrial processing.

While a large proportion of these emissions are the result of manufacturing export products, there remains a substantial proportion that is affected by New Brunswick consumers. About 25 per cent of emissions come from the transportation sector, the bulk personal vehicles and about 60 per cent of electricity use is non-industrial, again the bulk of that residential.

### **The Goal**

The government's Action Plan called on citizens to do their part by changing their habits, say, by choosing more efficient appliances and automobiles and weatherizing our homes. The challenge now is to get citizens to engage in the plan. This project will test the willingness of a group of opinion leaders to use their influence with the public to take action.

### **The Project**

Opinion leaders are a very special subgroup that governments rarely engage in an organized or sustained way. They may be teachers, religious leaders, artists, sports figures, journalists or simply a well-respected person from the community. These people enjoy a high level public trust. They have earned this special status by demonstrating an exemplary concern for their community's well-being and an ability to provide leadership on how to promote it.

The climate change pilot project is designed to tap into that that community of influence. We are inviting a high-profile group of New Brunswick's opinion leaders to attend a one-day climate change forum in May 2008. The goal is to enlist them to raise awareness within their communities.



## **The Miramichi Action Committee: Imagining Miramichi 10 Years Out**

### **Who are we engaging?**

This project aims at building a **network of community leaders** who will be responsible for launching and ongoing dialogue around long-term development in the Miramichi region, forging a plan to begin making it happen, and moving it forward

### **The Issue**

In 2007, Miramichi lost about 750 jobs when mills owned by forestry companies UPM-Kymmene and Weyerhaeuser closed. This had a devastating impact on the Miramichi region and as the news rolled in, community leaders discussed how to respond. One strategy was to put pressure on provincial and federal governments to find a solution. For example, the community could petition government to take action to save the mills by providing tax breaks or a subsidy that would offset operating costs or possibly attract a new buyer.

Other community members saw this approach as a dead end or at best a stop-gap; they argued a lasting solution required real change. The alternative, they concluded, was to engage in some serious reflection, research and long-term planning to see what prospects there were for developing a realistic plan for renewal over the next 10 years. At the same time, any effort to produce such a plan needed to involve the whole community. People needed to see themselves in it and feel they had a role to play in achieving it.

### **The Goal**

The Miramichi Action Committee was formed to help the community take the situation in hand. At the urging of the provincial government, however, its mandate also includes a commitment to engage community members in some long-term thinking. The long-term subcommittee was struck to lead this initiative and became a pilot project for the Public Engagement Initiative. The Miramichi project aimed to help a group of citizens understand how a visioning exercises works, why it is important and what their role is in producing a vision. To achieve this, we brought together about 35 people from across the region to discuss their role in community renewal.

### **The Project**

The group met four times over as many months to hear from, and question, recognized experts on what role ordinary community members can play in the renewal of a community. They discussed their role in a wide range of areas, such as a branding exercise, a wellness campaign, reversing the out-migration of young people, repatriating those who have left and, of course, creating a community plan and vision. The goal was to get some people in the community thinking about what such a process might be like and why they would want to have one. We wanted to begin building a network of community members who would be ready, willing and able to help lead a community-wide process

in the near future, should one be launched. Our process was really more about awareness-raising than visioning.

This dialogue formed the basis of what will be a 15- to 20-page report, which draws on the expert presentations and the dialogue among the participants. It will provide a framework for the kind of process and discussion that will be needed if Miramichi holds a community-based visioning exercise. The report will provide residents, governments and other interested parties with a document that explains in clear, accessible language why such a process is needed, how it might work, and some of the issues for discussion. The report will be a primer for such a process. Finally, we expect the report will recommend the launch of such a process in the near future.

## **Sustainable Communities in a Self-Sufficient Province: Planning Our Future Together**

### **Who are we engaging?**

This case study involves some **35 stakeholders** in a dialogue aimed at consolidating the lessons learned so far from a community-led initiative to begin transforming five communities in the greater Saint John region into sustainable communities.


### **The Issue**

Let's begin with a description of what a sustainable community could be. It has safe neighbourhoods, affordable housing, and efficient approaches to energy use and transportation. It takes appropriate steps to conserve natural resources and valuable agricultural lands. Its economy is vibrant, promotes local goods and services and welcomes to new residents. At the same time, it participates with confidence in the modern economy, based on its special strengths. It encourages population growth, but does so in ways that are consistent with the carrying capacity of its resources and environment.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a sustainable community is open to and adept at managing complexity and change. It recognizes that its long-term viability as a community requires that its members:

1. plan together to set long-term priorities and societal goals that balance their economic, social and environmental needs and interests;
2. form practical plans to achieve these goals; and,
3. work together to implement the plans and solve problems that arise along the way.

**A key difference between sustainable and traditional communities lies in this special capacity for long-term planning.** While traditional communities tend to see their economic, social and environmental interests as competitive



and separate, sustainable communities see them as complementary and interdependent.

Sustainable communities are ones where stakeholders have moved beyond a narrow, short-sighted view of their interests and see community development more holistically. Rather than focusing on winning or losing, these people realize that to succeed in the long-term, they need each other. They must work together. A shared commitment to long-term goals provides the basis for building the kind of cooperation and trust needed to succeed.

This kind of mutual understanding and shared commitment is a form of social maturity. Like the transition from adolescence to adulthood, getting there takes learning, reflection, experimentation and debate. Also like that transition, it can be helped along – facilitated – by the right kind of support and encouragement; by the right kind of engagement process.

### **The Goal**

In 2003, the five municipalities in the Saint John region – Grand Bay-Westfield, Quispamsis, Rothesay, Saint John and St. Martins – began a community development initiative known as True Growth. Out of it has developed a series of community dialogues aimed at making the region a sustainable community.

### **The Project**

The Public Engagement Initiative engaged a group of 35 individuals who are closely involved in these initiatives in a reflective examination of what they have learned so far from the experience. Through a series of three roundtable discussions and an online dialogue we explored six key questions:

- What makes communities sustainable?
- How do traditional and sustainable communities differ?
- What is required to build a sustainable community?
- What role do members of the community play in building a sustainable community?
- What is the role of the provincial government in creating sustainable communities? What is the role of municipal government?
- How would sustainable communities contribute to self-sufficiency?

The findings from this process have been incorporated into a final report that will not only stimulate and inform further discussion, but provide recommendations for how to foster and support sustainable communities and encourage broader understanding and awareness of their place in the province's future. To see where this may lead, it is worth exploring the concept a little further.

