



Capital Regional District Public Participation Framework

Overview

Over the past few months, a Staff Cross Departmental Committee has been exploring how to improve the CRD's public participation with and for the communities and residents we serve. Through the discussions, the Committee identified challenges ranging from the wider community not understanding who and what the CRD is and what services we provide, to a lack of consistent application of public participation processes among departments and finally, a strong reliance on external consultants. There were also many common points of interest among Committee members, the most obvious was the agreement that staff need to do a better job engaging the residents of the Capital Regional District in our decision making processes – and the need to do this collectively.

There was a clear understanding and linkage that effective public participation is increasingly seen as an integral part of a strong governance framework.

What is public participation?

In order for this Framework to truly be effective, it is important to begin from a common point of understanding of exactly what public participation is. Globally, public participation is when an organization reaches outside of itself to seek the involvement of others in its decision-making process. Generally, participants in these processes are those who are most likely to be affected by the matter under consideration. Organizations have come to embrace public participation processes as a means for strengthening trust and confidence in the decision-making process.

There is a recognized continuum of public involvement denoted within the term public participation, from simply sharing information about a pending decision (informing) through to creating a partnership arrangement, one based on mutual trust, and a willingness to agree on a course of action together.

For elected and government officials, public participation is commonly seen as a mechanism to support transparency and accountability. It is more than giving information and receiving feedback — it is a deliberate commitment that government makes to its public and stakeholder groups to listen and to be influenced within expressed limits.

The CRD's Public Participation Framework consists of the following components:

- 1. CRD Board's Commitment to Public Participation**
- 2. CRD's Spectrum of Public Participation**
- 3. CRD's 8 Principles for the Practice of Public Participation**
- 4. Working Co operatively with the CRD's Municipalities and Electoral Areas**
- 5. First Nations Engagement and the CRD**
- 6. Roles and Responsibilities in CRD Public Participation Process**
- 7. CRD Staff Resource Handbook: (for internal use)**

- Chapter 1: Overview of Public Participation
- Chapter 2: Key Steps Required for Successful Public Participation Processes
- Chapter 3: Definitions of Common Terms Used
- Chapter 4: Working with the CRD's Municipalities
- Chapter 5: Better Understanding First Nations Engagement
- Chapter 6: Techniques, Methods and Recommended Applications
- Chapter 7: Conducting Effective Evaluations
- Chapter 8: Learning through CRD Experiences
- Chapter 9: Various Templates

Component 1: CRD Board's Commitment to Public Participation

A common practice for many orders of governments across Canada is to have a publicly stated overarching commitment to public participation. As the CRD Public Participation Framework is unrolled for all, the adoption of the following statement at the CRD Board level is recommended:

The Capital Regional District is committed to undertaking public participation processes in the development and delivery of public policies, programs, legislation and services.

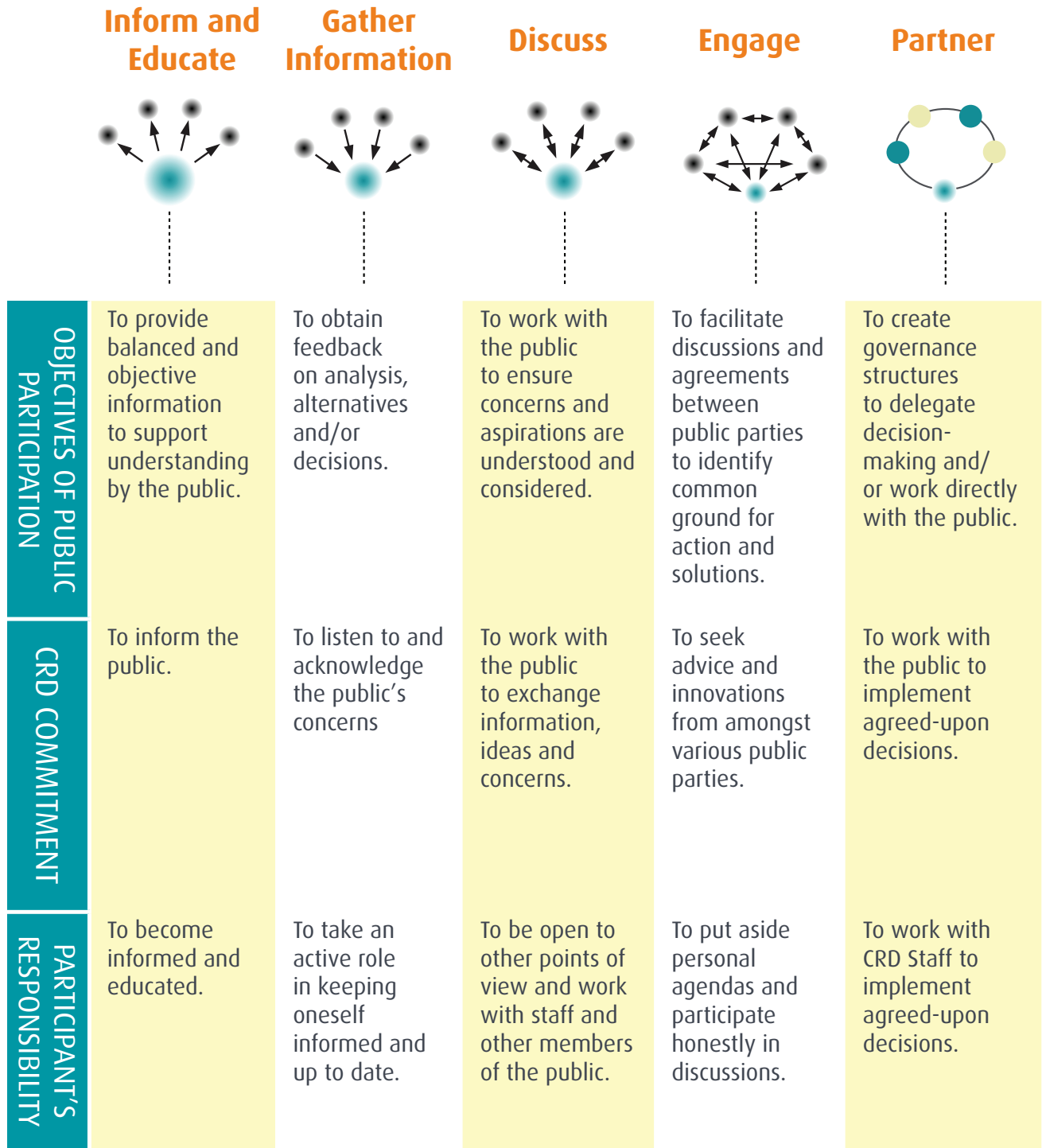
The Capital Regional District is also committed to promoting a consultative culture across all departments and divisions.

Component 2: CRD's Spectrum of Public Participation

As with any continuum of public participation, the key goal is to align the project scope, process and techniques within the CRD governance of decisions. In many public participation experiences, the process may incorporate a flow within the Spectrum. Clearly understanding where in the Spectrum any given decision can be made will undoubtedly result in the building of wide spread public trust.

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CRD Public Participation Spectrum



Source: Auditor General of British Columbia 2009 (CRD modified version)
 Report 11: Public Participation: Principles and Best Practices for British Columbia

Component 3: CRD's 8 Guiding Principles For The Practice of Public Participation

The key underpinning concept of having a set of principles is to build a culture and value of public participation within the CRD; principles that can qualify or characterize processes while allowing flexibility in the approaches.

- 1. Active Citizenship** The CRD acknowledges the benefits, as an organization and in civil society, for active citizens' involvement in CRD's public participation and decision making processes.
- 2. Commitment** Leadership and strong commitment to information, consultation and engagement in active participation is needed at all levels – from CRD Directors, senior managers and staff.
- 3. Clarity** Objectives for, and limits to, information, consultation and active participation will be well defined from the outset. The respective roles and responsibilities of citizens (in providing input) and the CRD (in making decisions for which we are accountable) must be clear to all.
- 4. Time** Public consultation and active participation will be undertaken as early in the decision making process as possible, to allow for a greater range of solutions to emerge and to raise the chances of successful implementation.
- 5. Objectivity** Information will be objective, complete and accessible. All citizens will have equal treatment when exercising their rights of access to information and participation.
- 6. Resources** Adequate financial, human and technical resources are required if public information, consultation and active participation in policy making are to be effective. CRD staff will be supported through guidance and training and the provision of adequate resources.
- 7. Coordination** Initiatives will be coordinated across the CRD to enhance knowledge management, ensure policy coherence, avoid duplication and reduce the risk of 'consultation fatigue' among staff and citizens.
- 8. Evaluation** In order to increase the CRD's organizational capacity and success; evaluations of public participation processes will be incorporated into every process.

Component 4: Working Cooperatively With The CRD'S Municipalities And Electoral Areas

There is a strong recognition and understanding of the value of working with member municipalities and electoral areas when public participation process occurs in their communities. For staff, understanding what role and expectation there is to inform, involve or even partner with the municipality at the beginning planning stage plays an important part, if not a key element in building trust and ensuring successful results. The CRD commits to proactively communicate with municipalities and electoral areas when public participation processes are planned as well, assess the degree of cooperation and collaboration required based on the initiative.

Component 5: First Nations Engagement And The CRD

Consultation and engagement with First Nations is different than public consultation because it is driven by the law, not just good public policy. The Canadian courts have emphasized that the federal and provincial governments must consult with First Nations when making decisions that may affect aboriginal and treaty rights and accommodate those rights where appropriate. Aboriginal and treaty rights are also protected under the Constitution of Canada.

It is important to keep in mind that the CRD cannot assume responsibility for the legal obligations to consult now imposed on the senior governments. It can, however, be delegated procedural steps such as gathering information on First Nations interests. It is also important to recognize that First Nations and the CRD are neighbours so it makes sense to work with First Nations in a meaningful way to seek their input, to apply their input to avoid future problems and to seek opportunities to work together whenever working on a project that may affect their interests or provide opportunities to build a stronger relationship.

Component 6: Roles And Responsibilities In CRD Public Participation Processes

Board and Committees

The CRD Board is ultimately responsible to all the citizens of the Capital Regional District and therefore, acts in the best interests of the region as a whole.

During its review and decision-making process, the Board and Committees have an obligation to recognize the efforts and activities that have preceded its deliberations. Directors should have regard for the public involvement processes that have been completed in support of projects.

CRD Staff

Staff responsible for the design and implementation of public participation processes have an obligation to ensure that the Guiding Principles are the backbone of their processes. In addition to the responsibilities established by the Guiding Principles, staff have a responsibility to:

1. pursue public involvement with a spirit that recognizes the value it adds to projects;
2. in all public involvement activities, work towards fostering long-term relationships based on respect and trust;
3. encourage positive working partnerships;
4. take-up the challenge to draw out the silent majority, the voiceless and the disempowered;
5. ensure that decisions and recommendations reflect the needs and desires of the entire community; and
6. ensure that no participant or group is marginalized or ignored.

Corporate Communications

Corporate Communications is responsible for ensuring CRD public participation processes are carried out with confidence, knowledge and integrity. In addition, Corporate Communication will: maintain the Staff Resource Handbook; support departments who require resources and guidance; serve as a coordinating body; assist with the provision and coordination of training and host bi annual Staff Forums.

All Participants

The public is also accountable to the process and the accomplishment of the project goals. All participants have a responsibility to:

1. focus on the real issues and not on the furthering of personal agendas;
2. balance personal concerns with the needs of the community as a whole;
3. have realistic expectations;
4. participate openly, honestly and constructively, offering ideas, suggestions, alternatives, etc.;
5. listen carefully and completely;
6. identify their concerns and issues early in the process;
7. provide their names and contact information if they want direct feedback;
8. make every effort to work within the project schedule; if this is not possible then this should be discussed with staff as soon as possible. Participants must also recognize that process schedules may be constrained by external factors (e.g. broader project schedules or legislative requirements);
9. recognize that there is no single voice that is more important than all others, and that there are diverse opinions to be considered;
10. work within the process in an integrated and cooperative manner;
11. accept some responsibility for keeping themselves aware of current issues; when possible, participants should also make others aware of project activities and solicit their input; and
12. recognize that the measure of the success of the process is the fullness of public involvement and the quality of the outcome.

Component 7: CRD Staff Resource Handbook (For Internal Use)

A Resource Handbook will assist staff who are responsible for designing and implementing public participation processes and ensure a high degree of consistency in applications across the CRD. For example, the general public will have the same experiences when different departments conduct public participation processes. The following chapters are included in the Resource Handbook and it will become the touchstone for future training sessions and bi annual Staff Forums.

CRD Staff's Resource Handbook:

- Chapter 1: Overview of Public Participation
- Chapter 2: Key Steps Required for Successful Public Participation Processes
- Chapter 3: Definitions of Common Terms Used
- Chapter 4: Working with the CRD's Member Municipalities and Electoral Area
- Chapter 5: First Nations Engagement
- Chapter 6: Techniques, Methods and Recommended Applications
- Chapter 7: Conducting Effective Evaluations
- Chapter 8: Learning through CRD Experiences
- Chapter 9: Various Templates