Policy

Public engagement policy in context

context

Policy is sometimes considered to be an umbrella term for guidelines, rules, regulations, laws, principles, framework, standards. But regardless of what you call it, *policy guides our actions* . It dictates what is done, how it's done, and for whom (or to whom) it is done.

The content of this section of the toolkit aims to highlight the importance of having a public engagement policy for your organization. It provides general questions, a sample policy, and accompanying category-based questions as tools to support organizations interested in developing a public engagement policy that best suits their specific needs and values.

Develop an organizational public engagement policy

good practices

Organizational policies are most relevant, realizable and meaningful when they are made explicit in a document that is consulted regularly, with all efforts monitored and evaluated regularly. An effective policy can be put into good practice when enabled by leaders with specific responsibility for the governance, management, and implementation of systems, structures, programs, projects and activities.

The process of developing an organizational public engagement policy can be very useful to board members, executive directors, policy directors, public engagement coordinators, global educators, youth engagement workers, and anyone else who is looking to strengthen their public engagement programming and is looking for tools and resources to help them do so.

What a public engagement policy can do:

- Ensure organizational values and beliefs are reflected in activities and events;
- Establish the guidelines or ground rules of your organization's public engagement work;
- Articulate the principles that guide your actions to promote transformational public engagement; and
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities for work being done in your organization

(Adapted from "Rural Communities Impacting Policy–A Workbook," 2005).

Why public engagement policy is important:

- It guides and strengthens understanding of the role of public engagement within your organization;
- It encourages consistent good practice in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting of public engagement efforts undertaken by your organization;
- It clarifies the financial and human resource decisions related to public engagement;
- It can mitigate risk related to public engagement efforts;
- It provides your Board of Directors, employees, interns, volunteers, independent consultants, members, partners, and funders with a framework for action that supports them with the job they need to do;
- It fosters efficiency by providing one thought-out decision that can be applied to many similar cases;
- Current policies do not address public engagement activities and do not enforce good public engagement practices;
- Policy can be used as a tool for public engagement quality improvements; and
- Without policy and procedures guiding public engagement work, conflict and confusion can result.

(Includes items adapted from Health Communication Unit of the Centre for Health Promotion, University of Toronto, 2004, and from Paul Bullen, Management Alternatives for Public Services .)

Sample public engagement policy: OCIC

tools

This sample public engagement policy is provided as a tool to support international cooperation organizations engaged in, or interested in developing, an organizational policy that suits their needs and values.

Ontario Council for International Cooperation
Sample Public Engagement Policy
Approved by the Board of Directors – 2013

1. Preamble

The Ontario Council for International Cooperation (OCIC) is a community of Ontario-based international cooperation and global education organizations and individual associates working globally for social justice. The OCIC vision, mission, mandate, development principles and strategic directions guide all activities of the Council. Mindfulness of the spirit and letter of these core directives is central to the integrity of OCIC, as is compliance with the Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC) Code of Ethics.

The OCIC Public Engagement Policy is a living document, reviewed and revised by the Programs Committee on a periodic basis. All changes must be approved by the Board of Directors.

2. Definitions

Within this policy, "public engagement" is defined as "the practice of inspiring, supporting and challenging people and groups in dynamic cycles of learning, reflection and action on global issues. Public engagement is a transformative process which works toward more equitable social, economic, environmental and political structures."

3. Purpose

OCIC's Public Engagement Policy is meant:

- to guide and strengthen understanding of the role of public engagement to the Council;
- to encourage consistent good practice in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting of public engagement efforts undertaken by the Council;
- to inform overarching financial and human resource decisions related to public engagement;
- to mitigate risk related to the public engagement efforts of the Council; and
- to encourage transparency and accountability for OCIC's public engagement efforts to its stakeholders, including but not limited to its Board of Directors, employees, interns, volunteers, independent consultants, members, partners, funders, and the Canadian public.

4. Statement of Philosophy and Core Beliefs

OCIC understands that effectively engaging Canadians in the fight against global poverty, structural violence, environmental degradation and a range of other international issues is of fundamental importance in the search for sustainable solutions to the challenges faced by humanity.

OCIC supports the use of "global citizenship" as an umbrella concept for the range of public engagement activities being carried out by civil society organizations (CSOs). Global citizenship suggests the development of citizens who have the knowledge and capabilities to be actively involved in the world. Foundational knowledge of global citizenship includes understanding:

- that we share a common humanity with all others;
- that diversity is essential for life;
- that citizens have rights and responsibilities;
- that there are local and global implications of such citizenship;
- that we have agency and therefore power to make positive change; and
- the importance of multiple perspectives, and the ability to reflect critically on a diverse range of views and information.

Good public engagement is a key contributor to democratic citizenship and to the wider social justice commitments that millions of Canadians continue to enact in communities across the country. Through our collective efforts CSOs aspire to build an engaged public that understands that another world is possible, and that works towards achieving this. Global citizenship remains a powerful path toward democratic, inclusive citizenship by people committed to justice for the poor and marginalized throughout the world.

Within OCIC public engagement programs, projects and activities, we believe in working to amplify the voices of the most marginalized, and in utilizing inclusive, cooperative and participatory processes that are accessible and accountable to all. We also believe that organizations, institutions, governments and others in leadership roles must make room for youth, in particular, to participate, not only as fundraisers for or beneficiaries of public engagement initiatives, but as global citizens with a stake in building sustainable societies.

5. Core Standards of Good Practice

The diversity of our population, ethnically, socially, culturally, religiously and linguistically across our varied geographies, necessitates multiple approaches to engage Canadians effectively. Public engagement efforts need to take these factors into account to ensure a broad spectrum of Canadians are engaged in the fight to reduce global poverty. Irrespective of the approach taken, all public engagement activities should:

- Raise awareness of global issues and offer models toward social justice;

- Enable change by helping individuals and groups understand that their choices and actions can have a positive impact on our world; and
- Encourage action by providing individuals or groups with the tools and resources they need to become active global citizens.

While the approaches to public engagement are multiple, the specific efforts of the Council should meet the following standards of good practice:

- *Clear and Measurable Purpose:* Clarity of purpose, target audience(s) and indicators for understanding impact, including those related to the gender dimensions of public engagement, should be established early in planning processes
- *Relevance:* Public engagement efforts should be pertinent and of interest to target participants. This is particularly important when reaching out to new and non-traditional audiences.
- *Diverse Participation and Partnership:* Canadians from a variety of sectors and locations (such as youth, the education sector, Diaspora groups, the women's movement, the media and the private sector) should be considered as possible participants and partners.
- *Community Building:* Good public engagement is participatory and community-driven, and helps to build a sense of community
- *Collaborative Ownership through Participatory Planning:* Key stakeholders, including youth and other populations commonly under-represented in decision making processes, should be involved in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public engagement activities whenever possible.
- *Evaluative and Reflective:* Measures of impact and change, and mechanisms to reflect should be incorporated into public engagement activity design from the outset, so that success is gauged, lessons learned documented, and necessary adaptations incorporated into future activities.
- *Knowledge & Understanding that Promotes Critical Thinking:* Good PE increases knowledge and understanding of global issues, and encourages critical thinking.
- *Innovative, Creative and Universal Design:* The use of non-traditional means of engagement (such as new media, simulations, art, and popular education), and accessibility of methodologies, materials, physical space and venues should be considered and appropriate efforts taken to engage populations previously excluded from public engagement efforts.
- *Multiple Approaches:* Given the diversity of experience, education, levels of engagement and learning styles of possible participants, multiple approaches to public engagement should be considered.
- *Accuracy:* Messaging within public engagement efforts should be accurate and should not reinforce harmful stereotypes or mask the complexity of issues.
- *Motivation & Inspiration that Empowers Informed Action:* Good public engagement builds from individuals' experience and provides clear messages, tools and steps to implement positive change.
- *Sustainable Behavioural Changes:* Good public engagement catalyzes changes in the behaviour and long-term lifestyle actions of individuals.
- *Policy Change:* Good public engagement that incorporates a political element translates into sound public policy that advances systemic change.
- *Sustained and Long-Term:* Public engagement activities are built over time, and learning is gleaned through experience and evaluation. Better results can be achieved through a strategy for engaging Canadians that is developed with multi-year timeframes.

6. Linkages to Other Policies

The OCIC Public Engagement Policy is one of several organizational policies that guide governance and operations of the Council and links most closely with the OCIC Anti-Oppression, Inclusion, Finance and Financial Controls, and Personnel Policies.

7. Authority & Procedures

- The Board of Directors is ultimately responsible for the public engagement efforts of the Council.
- The Executive Director is responsible for the overall management of the public engagement efforts of the Council.
- Employees, interns, volunteers and independent consultants are responsible for managing and/or coordinating specific public engagement programs, projects or activities and their related expenses within approved parameters, reporting to the Executive Director on any significant variances, and the reasons for these variances.

The Board of Directors shall:

- Provide adequate orientation to all Directors to enable the fulfillment of their oversight role.
- Review Executive Director summary reports on public engagement results at quarterly Board meetings.

The Executive Director shall:

- Report to the Board of Directors on public engagement results at quarterly Board meetings.
- Adequately insure public engagement efforts of the Council against liability losses to the organization, its Board Directors, or employees of the organization.
- Ensure appropriate financial and human resources are mobilized to implement the public engagement efforts of the Council.
- Ensure the adequate orientation of all employees, interns, volunteers, independent consultants and members actively engaged in implementing the public engagement efforts of the Council to its Public Engagement Policy.
- Provide overarching direction and support to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting of all public engagement efforts of the Council.

Employees, interns, volunteers, independent consultants and members actively engaged in implementing the public engagement efforts of the Council shall:

- Report to the Executive Director or their designated representative on public engagement results at regular intervals, as pre-determined or requested.
- Adhere to the spirit and letter of the OCIC Public Engagement Policy in all related efforts undertaken in the name of the Council.
- Avoid actions that would expose the Council, its Board of Directors or its employees to claims of liability.
- Protect intellectual property, information and files from unauthorized access, tampering, loss, or significant damage.

Reflection questions for drafting a public engagement strategy

tools

*The following series of questions will help you prepare and think through the key issues and questions involved in developing a public engagement policy. Before you start to develop an organizational public engagement policy, discuss and respond to the following questions, which were developed to help think through the **why** and **how** of your organization benefitting from having a public engagement policy.*

Getting Started
To begin, ask yourself the following general policy questions:

1. What is the policy, and what is the background behind the policy?
2. What is this policy trying to achieve?
3. On what values is the policy based?
4. What processes will be used in developing the policy?
5. Who will be consulted in the process of developing the policy?
6. Who is the legitimate authority making the policy?
7. Who will benefit from the policy (in theory)?
8. Who will be disadvantaged by the policy (in theory)?
9. How will the policy be implemented? How will it be evaluated?
10. How will the relevant people find out about the policy?

Adapting Sample Public Engagement Policy Questions

Use the following questions to adapt the sample public engagement policy to reflect your organization's administrative structure, needs, and values. Each section of questions corresponds to a subsection within the sample policy. Look at your organization's policy templates to see if there is any overlap in the different sections. The new public engagement policy should have a consistent format to your other organizational policies.

1. Preamble

- What guides your organization's overall duties, responsibilities and obligations?
- How does this policy comply with other organizational policies, codes, strategic directions, priorities etc.?
- What approval process is required to change to this policy?

2. Definitions

- Is there an existing definition of public engagement in your organization? Is it satisfactory?
- Do you agree with ICN's definition? Why or why not?
- How does your definition compare with other definitions? What are the differences? What is missing?
- Do you call your work "public engagement"? What else do you call it? (ie: if you undertake advocacy, fundraising, communications or educational work, do any or all of these areas fall within your definition of "public engagement"? If so, should your definition include these other terms?
- Is there alignment on your definition of public engagement across arms or departments of your organization?

3. Purpose

- What purposes will this policy serve, within your organization?
- What operational practices are already in place that may inform or be included within your policy?
- How would your organization benefit from having a public engagement policy? Why does your organization need one?
- Is there vertical alignment within your organization (between levels of staff, management and Board) on the importance of public engagement?
- Does your organization have a "theory of change"? Who are your target audiences for public engagement work?

4. Statement of Philosophy and Core Beliefs

- Does your organization endorse or comply with specific principles or good practices (such as the Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness, the CCIC Code of Ethics, or the ICN Core Standards of Good Practice in Public Engagement)?
- How does your organization show commitment to your core values? How do these commitments influence your public engagement work?
- How do your organization's core values and/or principles affect your public engagement work?

5. Core Standards of Good Practice

1) What is the relationship between public engagement, advocacy, fundraising, communications or education, within your organization?

- What are the good principles of public engagement at your organization?
- How are resources for public engagement made available? How often?
- Do you have strategies to overcome challenges?

2) How is public engagement interwoven into key organizational documents? (I.e. budgets, strategic plan etc.)

- Does your organization have a theory of change? Does it support the ICN's Public Engagement Theory of Change?
- What is the extent to which different departments are engaged in public engagement?
- How will stakeholders in your organization be involved in developing, or be informed of a public engagement policy?
- Has a specific approach to public engagement been developed?
- Who are your key audiences or target groups? Why?

6. Linkage to Other Policies

- What policies exist at your organization that intersect with this policy?
- Does one of these policies take precedence over others, or is one overarching?

7. Authorities & Procedures

- What organizational guidelines or procedures inform your public engagement programs, projects or activities (i.e. working with vulnerable populations, inclusion etc.)
- How often are public engagement programs, projects or activities monitored, evaluated and reported on? At what intervals do you evaluate effectiveness of your public engagement work?
- Within your organization, what is the role of your Board of Directors, management, volunteers, others?
- Are there any unique aspects of your public engagement work that increase certain types of risk or add others (typical risks)
- How does your organization plan for and manage risks within your public engagement work?
- If you have identified risks, how do you mitigate them?
- What aspects of your approach to public engagement are guidelines, rather than policy?
- How often and on what basis will you assess implementation of this policy?
- Who is responsible for internal public engagement education?
- How is public engagement work documented and shared?

Drafting a volunteer policy for public engagement

case studies

Sandra Kiviaho, *the Advisor of Policy & Organizational Development at the Canadian Hunger Foundation, offers an insider's perspective on some opportunities, challenges and tips for developing an organizational policy that can support and strengthen public engagement activities.*

Public engagement often requires volunteers to support its various outreach activities. Organizations may find it valuable to create a volunteer policy to help clearly articulate the expectation of the organization to volunteers and the expectations of the volunteers to the organization. This will help the organization protect itself as it conducts various types of public engagement outreach, and volunteers will appreciate understanding how they are perceived by the organization and what they can clearly expect in their roles of volunteers.

To develop a volunteer policy, first you need someone who is willing to spearhead the initiative. This person could be a volunteer coordinator, public engagement staff or a human resource person. They would need to develop a case for organizational support for the policy (i.e. showcasing why it is important for the policy and perhaps how it would resolve possible challenges), and seek senior management approval.

Once approved, they may wish to conduct research by seeing the types of volunteer policies other organizations have to support their public engagement work. They may also research online, for example for templates at Volunteer Canada. It is also important to speak with staff who utilize volunteers to find out how volunteers are contributing and their roles and responsibilities. By doing this they will find out what aspects will need to be governed by the policy.

They will then need to draft the policy for the needs of the organization and then share it for feedback with staff and ideally volunteers. A revised version would then be presented to senior management and eventually brought forward to the organization's

board for approval as per the organization's policy practices.

Some of the main challenges facing the development of a volunteer policy for public engagement activities are securing initial approval to move the process forward, finding the time to draft the policy, and finding willing participants to comment and edit throughout the process. Sometimes the length of time the process entails can be a challenge to keep people's interest. Some ideas to overcoming the challenges are to build a strong case for support as to why it is important to have the policy in place, find a small group of interested people to support the process, continually follow up and commit to regular time slots to work on the policy to keep the process moving forward. Helping people to understand the benefits and to feel appreciated in their contributions will also be useful.

Additional resources for public engagement policy development

resources

Example organizational policies:
Anti-oppression Policy
OCIC's Anti-oppression Policy

Other resources
Food for thought? A Workbook on Food Security & Influencing Policy
Nova Scotia Nutrition Council and the Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre, Dalhousie University June 2005
This workbook provides a number of sections focused on developing and influencing personal, organizational, and public policy. They provide a number of policy in action examples focus on food security. There are a number of very useful activities and tools that are easily adapted to any topic.

Guide for Policy Development
Office of the Auditor General Manitoba, January 2003
Designed as a "how to" guide for policy analysts and those in leadership or management positions whose responsibilities include policy development. This complete guide provides practical suggestions on how to handle the more challenging aspects of policy development.