

Decision Making and Investment Planning



Public Consultation for Infrastructure Renewal

This document is the ninth in a series of best practices that transform complex and technical material into non-technical principles and guidelines for decision making. For titles of other best practices in this and other series, please refer to <www.infraguide.ca>.

National Guide to Sustainable Municipal Infrastructure



NRC · CNRC **FCM** Canada
Federation of Canadian Municipalities
Fédération canadienne des municipalités

Public Consultation for Infrastructure Renewal

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INTRODUCTION

InfraGuide® – Innovations and Best Practices

Why Canada Needs InfraGuide®

Canadian municipalities spend \$12 to \$15 billion annually on infrastructure but it never seems to be enough. Existing infrastructure is ageing while demand grows for more and better roads, and improved water and sewer systems responding both to higher standards of safety, health and environmental protection as well as population growth. The solution is to change the way we plan, design and manage infrastructure. Only by doing so can municipalities meet new demands within a fiscally responsible and environmentally sustainable framework, while preserving our quality of life.

This is what the National Guide to Sustainable Municipal Infrastructure (InfraGuide) seeks to accomplish.

In 2001, the federal government, through its Infrastructure Canada Program (IC) and the National Research Council (NRC), joined forces with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) to create the National Guide to Sustainable Municipal Infrastructure (InfraGuide). InfraGuide is both a new, national network of people and a growing collection of published best practice documents for use by decision makers and technical personnel in the public and private sectors. Based on Canadian experience and research, the reports set out the best practices to support sustainable municipal infrastructure decisions and actions in six key areas: decision making and investment planning, potable water, storm and wastewater, municipal roads and sidewalks, environmental protocols, and transit. The best practices are available on-line and in hard copy.

A Knowledge Network of Excellence

InfraGuide's creation is made possible through \$12.5 million from Infrastructure Canada, in-kind contributions from various facets of the industry, technical resources, the collaborative effort of municipal practitioners, researchers and other experts, and a host of volunteers throughout the country. By gathering and synthesizing the best



Canadian experience and knowledge, InfraGuide helps municipalities get the maximum return on every dollar they spend on infrastructure—while being

mindful of the social and environmental implications of their decisions.

Volunteer technical committees and working groups—with the assistance of consultants and other stakeholders—are responsible for the research and publication of the best practices. This is a system of shared knowledge, shared responsibility and shared benefits. We urge you to become a part of the InfraGuide Network of Excellence. Whether you are a municipal plant operator, a planner or a municipal councillor, your input is critical to the quality of our work.

Please join us.

Contact InfraGuide toll-free at **1-866-330-3350** or visit our Web site at www.infraguide.ca for more information. We look forward to working with you.

Introduction

InfraGuide® –
Innovations and
Best Practices

The InfraGuide® Best Practices Focus



Decision Making and Investment Planning

Current funding levels are insufficient to meet infrastructure needs. The net effect is that infrastructure is deteriorating rapidly. Elected officials and senior municipal administrators need a framework for articulating the value of infrastructure planning and maintenance, while balancing social, environmental and economic factors. Decision-making and investment planning best practices transform complex and technical material into non-technical principles and guidelines for decision making, and facilitate the realization of adequate funding over the life cycle of the infrastructure. Examples include protocols for determining costs and benefits associated with desired levels of service; and strategic benchmarks, indicators or reference points for investment policy and planning decisions.



Potable Water

Potable water best practices address various approaches to enhance a municipality's or water utility's ability to manage drinking water delivery in a way that ensures public health and safety at best value and on a sustainable basis. Issues such as water accountability, water use and loss, deterioration and inspection of distribution systems, renewal planning and technologies for rehabilitation of potable water systems and water quality in the distribution systems are examined.



Environmental Protocols

Environmental protocols focus on the interaction of natural systems and their effects on human quality of life in relation to municipal infrastructure delivery. Environmental elements and systems include land (including flora), water, air (including noise and light) and soil. Example practices include how to factor in environmental considerations in establishing the desired level of municipal infrastructure service; and definition of local environmental conditions, challenges and opportunities with respect to municipal infrastructure.



Storm and Wastewater

Ageing buried infrastructure, diminishing financial resources, stricter legislation for effluents, increasing public awareness of environmental impacts due to wastewater and contaminated stormwater are challenges that municipalities have to deal with. Storm and wastewater best practices deal with buried linear infrastructure as well as end of pipe treatment and management issues. Examples include ways to control and reduce inflow and infiltration; how to secure relevant and consistent data sets; how to inspect and assess condition and performance of collections systems; treatment plant optimization; and management of biosolids.



Transit

Urbanization places pressure on an eroding, ageing infrastructure, and raises concerns about declining air and water quality. Transit systems contribute to reducing traffic gridlock and improving road safety. Transit best practices address the need to improve supply, influence demand and make operational improvements with the least environmental impact, while meeting social and business needs.



Municipal Roads and Sidewalks

Sound decision making and preventive maintenance are essential to managing municipal pavement infrastructure cost effectively. Municipal roads and sidewalks best practices address two priorities: front-end planning and decision making to identify and manage pavement infrastructures as a component of the infrastructure system; and a preventive approach to slow the deterioration of existing roadways. Example topics include timely preventative maintenance of municipal roads; construction and rehabilitation of utility boxes; and progressive improvement of asphalt and concrete pavement repair practices.

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Our infrastructure is ageing rapidly. Almost 60 percent of the \$1.6 trillion network of roads, bridges, sewers and water mains—and other components—is more than 50 years old. Some 30 percent is more than 80 years old and nearing the end of its service life. Add to the need to repair or replace it, the other pressures on municipalities—more people needing more service, new higher standards for environmental protection and other more stringent regulations, and the need to apply new and better technology—and not surprisingly, municipalities are feeling the squeeze.

In most cases, current funding levels are insufficient to meet infrastructure needs. Municipal infrastructure tends to be taken for granted, so much so that the fundamental role it plays relative to both our standard and quality of life is marginalized. Infrastructure competes with corporate priorities such as police, fire, social services, parks, recreation and libraries which often tend to receive higher priority for funding. The net effect of this situation is a chronic deficiency in capital budgets for infrastructure to the point that infrastructure, both current and new, is rapidly deteriorating.

There is an immediate need today for municipalities to find solutions for addressing municipal infrastructure development issues (planning, design, construction, management, assessment, maintenance and rehabilitation). Many municipalities, both large and small, do not have the expertise and best practices required to make the appropriate necessary investments in their infrastructure.

This best practice focuses on an increasingly important, but often overlooked component of any infrastructure project—public consultation. Citizens are more sophisticated and educated today and expect to be consulted when public policy is both determined and developed. This is nowhere more relevant than with public policy related to municipal infrastructure. As such, public consultation should be perceived

as a constant and ongoing method of soliciting and promoting communication, input and a general interface between municipalities and the public. This best practice provides practical tools and approaches to develop and implement public consultation processes in small, medium and large municipalities.

There are many methods of public consultation and communication, from legislative requirements to those of a more discretionary character. However, rather than simplifying this range, the varied nature of municipalities serves to complicate the choice of method. Like the methods themselves, municipalities and the issues they deal with are unique. Therefore, a “one-size-fits-all” approach to public consultation and communication is neither possible nor ideal. A consolidated inventory of public consultation and communication methods and approaches is required.

Before initiating any public consultation exercise, municipalities and their elected officials need to give some thought to the following questions. What level of participation should our municipality seek? What is the best way of reaching the public? What are the benefits? This best practice sets out to answer these questions and provide a framework for moving forward with successful public consultation. It also provides practical tools and activities that can be used to solicit feedback from communities and interest groups to build support for infrastructure renewal.

Interviews with municipal staff across Canada and a review of national and international literature on public consultation highlighted many similarities between successful public consultation processes.

The most common observation for successful consultation is that it doesn’t just happen—it should be researched and planned to effectively engage the public. However, before any municipality can reach out to the public, it

should understand what it wishes to accomplish. In other words, the municipality should have a clear understanding of what its infrastructure needs are and how it wishes to proceed. Asset management and renewal options should be reviewed so that the municipality has a better understanding of what needs to be done. More information about this subject can be found in the best practice *Coordinating Infrastructure Works*, which can be accessed from the InfraGuide web site at www.infraguide.ca.

Once infrastructure needs are understood, municipalities can begin the first steps in consultation—researching community needs and developing a consultation plan. Depending on the size of the municipality, a number of tools exist. Municipalities can undertake environmental scans of their community by interviewing residents to measure support for infrastructure renewal and consultation expectations. A deliberative approach using one-on-one interviews with opinion leaders and residents will quickly identify community expectations for consultation and will also provide valuable feedback on the level of understanding as it relates to infrastructure. An alternative approach is to undertake visioning exercises, focus group sessions and public opinion surveys to measure public support for infrastructure renewal.

Regardless of what type of research is completed, the result will be a clearer idea of residents' needs, concerns and expectations. Internally, consultation will assist elected officials and municipal staff to make informed decisions based on input and feedback from the groups most affected by a project or initiative—in short, better public policy. By carrying out this preliminary work, municipalities are reaching out to the community in a way that will encourage participation, build trust, forge alliances and create a positive climate for allocating funds for infrastructure renewal. For infrastructure renewal to take place,

the public and the municipality need to come together to first understand the problem and then develop solutions together. That is what effective consultation is all about!

Following the research component, municipalities should develop a consultation plan which becomes the blueprint for all consultation activities and includes consultation objectives, recommended tools and activities as well as evaluation mechanisms.

In each consultation plan, a series of activities will be recommended. In most situations, these activities will include, but not be limited to:

- Public Advisory Committees (PACs)
- Public Information Sessions
- Public Open Houses
- Expert Panels
- Kitchen Table Meetings
- Media Relations
- Information Booths
- Infrastructure Visits and Tours.

This best practice has been written for both technical and non-technical municipal staff and elected officials. For anyone embarking on a consultation exercise, it provides a comprehensive description of the methods of participation and the levels of effort required for success. This will be very helpful when convincing municipal leaders that consultation is more than just talking to people and may, in many cases, be the difference between obtaining public support and failure. This best practice also contains references and links to public consultation organizations around the world to provide readers with additional tools and recommendations.

1. General

1.1 Introduction

This is one of a number of best practices being developed under the auspices of the National Guide to Sustainable Municipal Infrastructure (InfraGuide).

Municipalities that have succeeded in building support for needed infrastructure renewal and ultimately rejuvenated or constructed new infrastructure all share one characteristic—early public engagement. This, more than any other aspect of public consultation, is the key to public support for infrastructure renewal. Municipalities that engage their residents in a dialogue around infrastructure renewal early are more likely to get support for these public expenditures. To this end, this best practice focuses on four key components of any public consultation process:

- Research and community visioning to build public support for infrastructure renewal.
- Developing practical tools for public consultation with communities.
- Undertaking public consultation activities to engage the community in a healthy and productive dialogue.
- Evaluating the results to understand what worked best and to improve the consultation process for future infrastructure renewal.

These steps will provide the key components for any public consultation process. The best practices found in each step will be evaluated to show where and when they are most useful and also whether the methodology will work in all municipalities—big and small. By evaluating each activity and tool in this way, municipal leaders will be able to use this best practice as a guide for public consultation, building their own plan using techniques that will work in their particular town or city.

Although the best practices are adapted, wherever possible, to reflect varying municipal needs, they remain guidelines based on the collective judgments of peer experts.

Discretion must be exercised in applying these guidelines to account for specific local conditions (e.g., geographic location, municipality size, climatic conditions).

1.2 Purpose and Scope

This best practice has been developed to provide a roadmap for municipalities wishing to embark on a public consultation process to build understanding about, and support for, required infrastructure renewal. In developing this best practice, interviews were conducted with municipal staff across Canada to review public consultation approaches and to examine which processes were successful in building public support. In addition to the interviews, a literature review was carried out to identify tools and activities that have been used successfully elsewhere.

Some of the municipalities surveyed indicated that a lack of communication on the need for infrastructure renewal made it difficult to obtain both council and public support for major infrastructure expenditures. At the same time, municipalities that had undertaken an asset management audit and clearly articulated the need for expenditures were most likely to receive approvals for infrastructure renewal.

Municipalities have realized the added value in public consultation through many of the tools and activities outlined in this best practice, which has been prepared to provide approaches, tools and activities to a range of municipalities. Before embarking on any public consultation process, municipal decision-makers should also review relevant provincial legislation and environmental regulations to ensure that all consultation requirements are being satisfied.

Municipal Acts across Canada outline public consultation requirements for many local activities including re-zonings, by-laws, planning and financial considerations.

1. General

1.1 Introduction

1.2 Purpose and Scope

Municipalities that engage their residents in a dialogue around infrastructure renewal early are more likely to get support for these public expenditures.

1. General

- 1.2 Purpose and Scope
- 1.3 How to Use this Document
- 1.4 Glossary of Terms

Since many infrastructure renewal projects require provincial environmental assessments and in some cases federal assessments, relevant legislation should be reviewed to make sure your municipality complies with all relevant legislation.

While some Acts are more specific in what is required, they should be viewed as an indication of a minimum required level of consultation. In most cases, the recommendations contained in this best practice exceed the requirements of provincial and territorial legislation.

Since many infrastructure renewal projects require provincial environmental assessments and in some cases federal assessments, relevant legislation should be reviewed to make sure your municipality complies with all relevant legislation.

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency is an excellent source of information on both federal and provincial environmental assessment legislation. Visit its Web site at: <http://www.ceaa-acee.gc.ca/>.

1.3 How to Use this Document

The contents of this document should be applied with a clear understanding and appreciation that the practices and methodologies therein contained are intended to provide guidance towards the achievement of best practice. The methodologies and practices should not be construed in and of themselves as definitive best practices.

1.3.1 General

This section provides a description of the issues surrounding the topic of this best practice, including an overview of the key concepts.

1.3.2 Rationale

This section provides justification for this best practice and describes benefits that can be achieved.

1.3.3 Methodology

This section describes a theoretical framework underlying this best practice.

1.3.4 Implementation

This section describes how to implement this best practice.

1.3.5 Evaluation

This section describes measures to evaluate the success of the new process or technique.

1.4 Glossary of Terms

Best Practices — State-of-the-art methodologies and technologies for municipal infrastructure planning, design, construction, management, assessment, maintenance and rehabilitation that consider local economic, environmental and social factors.

Comment Sheet — A one-page sheet used at Public Open Houses and other activities containing a number of questions. The simplest tool for obtaining feedback on issues.

Consultation Fatigue — A situation that can develop in municipalities where too many consultation processes have been undertaken. Consultation fatigue may make public meetings difficult because residents may be reluctant to attend.

Consultation Plan — A plan designed to engage the public in a dialogue around a specific issue. Includes sections dealing with activities, tools, messaging and evaluation criteria.

Electronic Comment Sheet — An on-line version of a comment sheet. It is most effective when used with a project or consultation Web page.

Environmental Protocol — A set of considerations governing the impact of municipal infrastructure on the environment.

Environmental Scan — A series of interviews with residents, businesses, stakeholders, and environmental groups to understand public opinion, identify community issues and assist in the development of a consultation plan.

Focus Group — A small group of residents who are paid to attend a session facilitated by a professional research firm. Sessions are used to measure public support and develop strategies for success in public policy initiatives.

Hotline — A telephone line set up exclusively for public consultation. The line is usually linked to an automatic voice-mail system where residents can leave messages or request information. This phone number should appear on all written consultation material.

Infrastructure — For the purpose of this project, the term infrastructure refers to sustainable infrastructure related to the following scope—roads and sidewalks, potable water, wastewater and stormwater.

Internet Connectivity — The number of residents in a community that are connected to the Internet. Connections can be dial-up, cable, high speed or wireless. To use the Internet for public consultation, a significant percentage of residents should have high-speed connections.

Municipality — A legally incorporated or duly authorized association of inhabitants of limited area for local governmental or other public purposes.

Municipal Roads and Sidewalks — Any public highway, road, street, avenue, lane, alley, driveway, parkway, walkway or place, owned, maintained and under the control of the regional municipality.

Potable Water — Water that is safe and aesthetic for drinking and cooking.

Public Advisory Committee (PAC) — This committee is made up of local residents and acts as a sounding board for infrastructure projects, providing feedback and opinions on infrastructure alternatives.

Public Opinion Surveys — Telephone surveys undertaken by a research firm to measure public opinion on a series of issues. Generally very accurate but they can be expensive.

Stakeholder — An individual of interest. Can be an opinion leader, community organizer or anyone involved in municipal issues.

Stormwater — Water that is collected as runoff from rainfall. Separate collection facilities and piping are often designed to prevent stormwater from overloading sanitary wastewater collection systems.

Sustainable Infrastructure — Means that today's decisions on the provision of municipal infrastructure must protect and enhance the quality of life for the near future using measures of economic, environmental and social factors.

Technical Committee — A multidisciplinary group of up to 10 members mandated to generally develop best practices. There is one technical committee per area—environmental protocols, potable water, decision-making and investment planning, storm and wastewater, municipal roads and sidewalks.

Visioning — An exercise that brings community stakeholders together with a facilitator to discuss and develop solutions to specific issues or future concerns. Often carried out early in public policy initiatives to develop a consensus among stakeholders.

Wastewater — The used water and water-carried solids from a community that flow to a treatment plant. Storm water, surface water, and groundwater infiltration may also be included in the wastewater that enters a wastewater treatment plant.

Web sites — Internet-based sites dedicated to the consultation process. The Web site can be used to host consultation material, infrastructure background material and electronic comment sheets. Websites are excellent consultation tools where municipal Internet connectivity is high.

Working Group — A multidisciplinary group of up to 10 members, created by a Technical Committee, responsible for focused technical work related to best practices development.

2. Rationale

2.1 Background

Canada's municipal infrastructure is in need of major repairs and upgrades after years of financial neglect. Reductions in federal and provincial transfers over the past 15 years have left Canadian municipalities with massive problems in local infrastructure. It is estimated that the infrastructure deficit today is around \$57 billion and could rise to \$110 billion by the year 2007.² In Canada today, there are few municipalities that do not need infrastructure improvements.

Although the various levels of government are committed to this renewal, municipal taxpayers will undoubtedly also be required to participate in this investment. This is why it is very important that municipalities explain this need and involve community stakeholders in the discussion. Without reaching out to taxpayers early in the consultation process, municipalities run the risk of sustained opposition to necessary infrastructure investment. This opposition can result in delays or termination of infrastructure renewal projects even when it can be shown that the work is required.

To engage the public in a dialogue on infrastructure renewal, public consultation should involve four distinct components:

- Step One — researching public opinion and needs;
- Step Two — developing appropriate tools for consultation;
- Step Three — implementing the proper consultation activities; and
- Step Four — evaluating what worked, what did not work, and why.

2.1.1 Guiding Principles of Consultation

An effective consultation process should also adhere to the following guiding principles as prepared by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

1. Commitment

Leadership and strong commitment to information as well as active participation in policy-making is required at all levels, including elected officials, senior managers and public officials.

2. Rights

Citizens' rights to access information, provide feedback, be consulted and actively participate in policy-making must be firmly grounded in law or policy. Government obligations to respond to citizens when exercising their rights must also be clearly stated. Independent institutions dedicated to maintaining these rights, or their equivalent, are essential.

3. Clarity

Objectives for, and limits to, information, consultation and active participation during policy-making should be well defined from the outset. The respective roles and responsibilities of citizens (in providing input) and government (in making decisions for which they are accountable) must be made clear to all participants.

4. Time

Public consultation and active participation should be undertaken as early in the policy process as possible to allow a greater range of policy solutions to emerge and to increase the chances of successful implementation. Adequate time must be available for consultation and participation to be effective. Information is needed at all stages of the policy cycle.

2. Rationale

2.1 Background

Public consultation and active participation should be undertaken as early in the policy process as possible to allow a greater range of policy solutions to emerge and to increase the chances of successful implementation.

² Civil Infrastructure Systems Technology Road Map 2003–2013. A National Consensus on Preserving Canadian Community Lifelines.

2. Rationale

2.1 Background

2.2 Benefits

For staff and elected officials, public consultation should be viewed as a necessary and beneficial planning activity for most infrastructure renewal projects.

5. Objectivity

Information provided by government during policy-making should be complete, objective and accessible. All citizens should have equal treatment when exercising their rights of access to information and participation.

6. Resources

Adequate financial, human and technical resources are needed for public information, consultation and active participation in policy-making to be effective. Government officials must have access to appropriate skills, guidance and training as well as an organizational culture that supports their efforts.

7. Coordination

Initiatives to inform, request feedback from, and consult citizens should be coordinated across government units to enhance the management of knowledge, to ensure policy coherence, to avoid duplication and to reduce the risk of “consultation fatigue” among citizens and civil society organizations. Coordination efforts should not reduce the capacity of government to ensure innovation and flexibility.

8. Accountability

Governments have an obligation to account for the use they make of the input citizens provide through feedback, public consultation and active participation. Measures to ensure that the policy-making process is open, transparent and amenable to external scrutiny and review are crucial to increasing government accountability.

9. Evaluation

Governments need the tools, information and capacity to evaluate their performance in providing information, conducting consultation and engaging citizens, so as to adapt to new requirements and changing conditions for policy-making.

10. Active Citizenship

Governments benefit from active citizens and a dynamic civil society, and can take concrete actions to facilitate access to information and participation, raise awareness, strengthen citizens’ civic education and skills, as well as to support capacity-building among civil society organizations (OECD 2001 Citizens as Partners).

2.2 Benefits

The case studies (**Appendix A**) reviewed for this best practice highlight the benefits of effective public consultation. These include building public understanding for the need for infrastructure renewal and public support for renewal, and for creating a consensus for municipal infrastructure renewal. Without these three critical objectives, it is difficult to obtain the necessary support and funding for improvements.

For staff and elected officials, public consultation should be viewed as a necessary and beneficial planning activity for most infrastructure renewal projects.

Reaching out to the public through a public consultation process is necessary to obtain public support for infrastructure renewal. The exercise can be inspiring and beneficial—done properly, consultation can validate the vision of municipal councils and staff. It can also result in better public policy when community feedback results in a better infrastructure solution. However, if the community is not approached properly or special interests are allowed to unduly influence the consultation process, municipalities run the risk of alienating the community or having their infrastructure projects rejected. The key to success is advance planning and research.

When municipalities follow the steps outlined in this best practice, the chances of succeeding are higher than if a municipality embarks on a renewal project without first communicating the need to the taxpaying public. **Infrastructure renewal is expensive and the public has a right to understand and participate in the process.**

3. Methodology

This best practice is divided into three sections. The first section examines the initial steps necessary for a successful public consultation and involves the preliminary work required to understand community needs and engage the public in a dialogue on infrastructure renewal. The second section examines the various consultation tools available to municipalities and how these tools can be used. The final section looks at consultation activities available to municipalities and the level of effort they require. A section on evaluation mechanisms follows the best practices.

Each section contains a description of the approach, how and where it can be used, the objectives of the practice and the level of effort required. As part of this best practice each activity and tool is evaluated for its applicability to small (fewer than 20 000), medium (20 000–100 000) and large (more than 100 000) municipalities.

4. Implementation

4.1 Step One: Researching and Understanding Your Community

Public opinion can be volatile and before a municipality embarks on a public consultation process, it should have a clear idea of public opinion, public expectations for consultation and what objections there may be to infrastructure renewal. Going forward with a public consultation process without first investigating the public “mood” is short-sighted and fraught with pitfalls. Without the benefit of this research, municipal staff and elected officials can walk into the first open house unaware of community concerns and objections and find the whole infrastructure project endangered by community opposition.

Municipal staff can also use research to convince elected officials that the consultation process is necessary and effective in obtaining public support for infrastructure renewal.

Proper investigation into community concerns allows municipalities to design appropriate consultation processes and to prepare messaging to alleviate concerns early on in the process. No consultation process should be embarked upon before municipalities have had the opportunity to investigate community issues, understand public sentiment and develop the tools to explain the benefits of a particular infrastructure renewal project.

There are a number of useful techniques to investigate and better understand community opinion. The following best practices can be consulted for valuable insight into what residents and stakeholders think about infrastructure renewal and how best to present options for renewal. Each activity is described and a level of effort applied.

A low level of effort means the activity can be handled with minimum effort. Medium effort means significant staff time will be required. High level of effort means significant staff time will be required even if using outside consultants.

4.1.1 Environmental Scans

An environmental scan is a fact-finding exercise that allows municipalities to gain valuable insight into what kinds of consultation activities will work and what expectations for public consultation already exist in the community. It will also provide valuable understanding into how stakeholders perceive the need for infrastructure projects. **A critical element in any infrastructure initiative is community support. This support is necessary since residents will ultimately pay for the infrastructure project through their property and business taxes or user fees.**

At the same time, community engagement is necessary to reach a consensus in the community that a particular infrastructure initiative is needed and that it is financially viable. As part of the environment scan, community newspapers, newsletters and previous local project files can also be reviewed.

To ensure that a consultation plan is built upon an understanding of the specific needs of the community, interviews with 20–30 key stakeholders, including residents, businesses, community groups, municipal staff, elected officials and landowners in the municipality should be undertaken during the environmental scan. It would also be important to review community newspapers, previous local project files, etc. This process will identify potential community concerns and expectations about public consultation that can be dealt with through the planned consultation activities.

4. Implementation

- 4.1 Step One:
 - Researching and Understanding Your Community

Going forward with a public consultation process without first investigating the public “mood” is short-sighted and fraught with pitfalls.

4. Implementation

4.1 Step One: Researching and Understanding Your Community

By being proactive and gaining a better understanding of public sentiment, municipal leaders can promote infrastructure projects more effectively and productively.

In addition to identifying concerns, the environmental scan is also an excellent way to reach appropriate community representatives who may wish to serve on a Public Advisory Committee (PAC).

This approach was used by Utilities Kingston to build support for upgrading the City of Kingston's waste treatment plant. By reaching out to community leaders and building support for infrastructure improvement, Utilities Kingston engaged the local community who, in turn, became the strongest proponents of the project. The environmental scan identified potential opposition to the project and also identified key messaging and community support used to promote the project and its environmental benefits. Based on the environmental scan, a consultation plan was developed, helping to steer the project successfully through the class environmental assessment update process.

Since the environmental scan is used to obtain objective feedback from the community, it should always be carried out before any meetings take place to discuss the infrastructure project. **The environmental scan should be one of the first tasks in any infrastructure project.**

Environmental scans are appropriate in small, medium and large municipalities and require a high level of effort.

4.1.2 Focus Groups and Public Opinion Surveys

Focus groups and public opinion surveys are useful for obtaining qualitative and quantitative research. Focus groups are an excellent way of learning more about residents' views as they pertain to a host of potential infrastructure projects. Through these group meetings, key messages can be validated and approaches to infrastructure renewal can be tested, allowing for a better understanding of the types of objections likely to arise at a public meeting. **The effective use of focus groups can greatly enhance the success of public policy initiatives.** By being proactive and gaining a better understanding

of public sentiment, municipal leaders can promote infrastructure projects more effectively and productively.

Focus groups involve the use of residents, usually selected by a research firm, who are paid for their participation. These individuals agree to spend an evening discussing infrastructure issues with a facilitator in a controlled setting. Focus groups normally have eight to twelve participants. A report is prepared following the session outlining the key findings, objections and recommendations on how to proceed with the infrastructure project. This type of research is known as qualitative research since it is deliberative in its approach and involves a small number of residents. Although very useful, this type of research is not statistically valid.

Public opinion surveys involve research firms that call a large number of local residents and pose a series of questions concerning a particular issue. These surveys are designed to measure support and opposition to issues and to solicit views on how public policy should be implemented. Such surveys are considered quantitative research since they involve a large number of interviews with less deliberation and are statistically valid.

Focus groups and opinion surveys are often used to validate the findings of public consultation processes. They can also be used to reinforce the rationale for municipalities to move forward with infrastructure initiatives.

In Ottawa, focus groups and a public opinion survey were used to build support among residents and city councillors for an enhanced recycling program involving organics. Many residents were initially skeptical about the advantages of increased recycling. However, the research showed that when the advantages were explained—primarily the extended life of the city landfill—residents were in favour of an organics program. The research helped to craft messages and build the case for increasing recycling. The report was approved by city council, although delayed because of budgetary issues.

Focus groups and public opinion surveys, however, can be expensive and may not be appropriate or acceptable in smaller municipalities where opinion may be against the use of such costly consultation methods. Consequently, focus groups and public opinion surveys are more appropriate in medium and large municipalities, and require a low level of effort.

4.1.3 Visioning Exercises

Infrastructure projects are expensive and often disruptive. This is especially true if the project involves major renovations or repairs to existing infrastructure. Given the public's lack of appetite for tax and/or rate increases and the impact some infrastructure projects can have on the community, it is clear that a strong case should be developed for infrastructure expenditures before the project is discussed at council.

Community visioning can be used to begin a dialogue with residents and to have the community begin to understand the need for these expenditures. Visioning can take place over a period of months in larger municipalities or can be done in one session in smaller centres.

Visioning sessions are usually all-day events and are often organized on weekends to allow for better participation by residents. A professional facilitator usually chairs sessions to ensure objectivity. Key stakeholders and organizations are invited to participate and are provided with background information prior to the facilitated session. The sessions are not open to the general public.

The first phase of the visioning session is an education process by municipal staff on the infrastructure issue along with engineering alternatives. This first phase is important since it provides the terms of reference for the rest of the day and places the infrastructure issue in context. Following the presentation, the facilitator presents a series of questions for discussion by smaller groups. Once this issue identification and presentation session is finished, participants are divided into smaller

groups where they review the options available and develop solutions to the infrastructure issue.

Once each group has reached a consensus on the proper approach, the larger group is reconvened and each group presents their report. Notes are taken throughout the day and comments from each group are displayed. The facilitator then summarizes the findings by outlining the similarity of presentations as well as presenting any alternative views.

A final report outlining the views of the group is prepared by the facilitator and can be used to build public support for infrastructure renewal. The visioning process sets the stage for further consultation exercises that are needed to develop a community-based solution to infrastructure projects. Since discussion should take place before decisions are made concerning the infrastructure project, visioning sessions should take place early in the municipal decision-making process. The visioning should also occur before consultation activities such as open houses are organized.

Visioning exercises can be organized in small, medium and large municipalities but because of the necessary time commitment smaller municipalities with a rural base may have difficulty attracting sufficient participation, particularly during busy agricultural periods. As such, smaller municipalities should schedule visioning sessions in the winter or other off-peak periods. These activities normally require a high level of effort.

4.2 Step Two: Developing Consultation Tools for Successful Engagement

Once the municipality has completed the research phase and understands residents' views on infrastructure and renewal, it is now ready to begin developing the tools necessary for effective public consultation. The following best practices are provided as a general guide for infrastructure renewal. Municipalities, however, may choose tools based on their required level of effort.

4. Implementation

- 4.1 Step One:
Researching and
Understanding Your
Community
- 4.2 Step Two:
Developing
Consultation Tools
for Successful
Engagement

Community visioning can be used to begin a dialogue with residents and to have the community begin to understand the need for these expenditures.

4. Implementation

4.2 Step Two: Developing Consultation Tools for Successful Engagement

A plan that is developed with the benefit of an environmental scan can highlight the balance between community concerns and the benefits of infrastructure improvements.

4.2.1 Consultation Plans

A consultation plan is used to engage the public in a dialogue with the goal of obtaining public support for infrastructure projects. A plan that is developed with the benefit of an environmental scan can highlight the balance between community concerns and the benefits of infrastructure improvements. As such, the consultation plan provides a blueprint for all consultation activities before and during any infrastructure project.

The key components of a consultation plan are:

Situation Analysis — An overview of the internal and external consultation challenges facing the municipality with respect to the larger public interest, construction and environmental concerns.

Key Goals and Objectives — A list of goals and objectives used to evaluate the effectiveness of the consultation plan.

Key Stakeholders — An identification of all stakeholders and their consultation needs including but not limited to, residents, community leaders, business owners, environmental groups, landowners and government officials.

Key Messages — The development of key consultation messages based on the plan for each identified target audience. These messages will be repeated with each consultation tool to reinforce the objectives set out in the plan.

Consultation/Communications Activities — Recommended tactics and activities to build community support and understanding for infrastructure projects. These activities may include, but are not limited to, open houses, calls for submissions, media conferences, community meetings, kitchen meetings, pro-active media relations and the use of municipal Web pages.

Critical Path — A schedule outlining key milestones, dates and recommended consultation and communications activities to implement the plan.

Evaluation Mechanisms — Activities used to evaluate the effectiveness of the final consultation plan through surveys, feedback and so on.

The consultation plan should always be developed before any public meetings take place to discuss the infrastructure project.

Consultation plans are appropriate in small, medium and large municipalities and require a high level of effort—the work load can be reduce by hiring outside consultants.

4.2.2 Project Web Sites

The Internet can play a significant role in many municipalities. To be effective, the municipality should have a high level of connectivity. In other words, a large number of residents should have access to dial-up or high-speed Internet. High-speed connectivity is preferred since large documents are an important part of any infrastructure project and these may be difficult to download with a dial-up connection. If a municipality does not have a significant level of high-speed connectivity, project Web sites will not be effective.

Infrastructure project Web sites are excellent for providing information to a large group of residents in a timely and cost-effective manner. Stakeholders and interested residents can easily upload background information, graphs, photos and reports to the site for review. By providing this type of information to residents, Web sites can be an important tool for public consultation. This is especially true when Web sites are used for obtaining feedback from the community through electronic comment sheets (discussed later in this section) and when they are used to promote the project and engage the public in an ongoing dialogue. When Web sites are part of a consultation process, the Web address should always be included in all communication with the community.

Project Web sites are appropriate in medium and large municipalities—as long as the municipality has a high level of connectivity—and require a medium level of effort.

4.2.3 Regular and Electronic Mailings

Regular contact with the community is necessary for successful public consultation.

Residents need to be kept up to date on infrastructure decisions and the consultation process. Depending on the level of connectivity, either regular or electronic mailings can be used to encourage ongoing participation of the community. Flyers in newspapers and municipal publications can also be used to promote public consultation. As with Web sites, if connectivity is not high, municipalities should focus on regular mailings to keep residents apprised of developments.

Mailings can be used to communicate consultation information to a wide and diverse audience. Electronic mailing lists can provide timely and extensive information to interested stakeholders and can—through the use of electronic comment sheets—be used to obtain immediate feedback during consultation exercises.

In smaller municipalities, it may be more appropriate to mail packages to each household. In larger municipalities, mailings should be directed only to stakeholders and other interested organizations to control costs.

Mailings are appropriate in small, medium and large municipalities and require a medium level of effort. Electronic mailings are appropriate in medium and large municipalities where Internet connectivity is high.

4.2.4 Comment Sheets (Regular and Electronic)

Comment sheets are the most basic tool in public consultation and probably the most effective. When included as part of an open house process, comment sheets can be an efficient way of measuring public support and obtaining valuable feedback on any infrastructure project. Most comment sheets are one page in length and ask a series of questions specific to the infrastructure project.

Electronic comment sheets can be used to obtain feedback on a wide range of issues quickly and effectively. When combined with other communications tools such as newsletters, residents can be directed to a project Web site where they can complete and return an electronic comment sheet. In municipalities where connectivity is high, this tool can be extremely useful.

Following each consultation activity, comment sheets should be summarized, provided to the all participating municipal departments and consultants for review and become part of the public record for the project.

Comment sheets are appropriate in small, medium and large municipalities and require a low level of effort.

4.2.5 Newsletters and Fact Sheets

Newsletters can provide information to the public in a timely manner and can be mailed or distributed at open houses. However, cost becomes a factor if large numbers are required. In addition to newsletters, fact sheets can also be used to communicate technical information when written in plain language. These can also be mailed to stakeholders and distributed at open houses or other public meetings. **Regardless of what tools are used, municipalities should remember to convey information in plain, simple language.**

Newsletters and fact sheets are appropriate in small, medium and large municipalities and require a low level of effort.

4.2.6 Infrastructure Hotlines

At the beginning of the consultation process, the hotline number should be displayed on all project material and at each consultation activity.

Hotlines can be an effective tool in obtaining public feedback on infrastructure issues and can be a good way of relaying information to residents who have no Internet access may not be connected to the Internet.

4. Implementation

- 4.2 Step Two:
 - Developing Consultation Tools for Successful Engagement

Residents need to be kept up to date on infrastructure decisions and the consultation process. Depending on the level of connectivity, either regular or electronic mailings can be used to encourage ongoing participation of the community.

4. Implementation

- 4.2 Step Two:
 - Developing Consultation Tools for Successful Engagement
- 4.3 Step Three:
 - Consultation Activities

Once the municipality has completed its research phase, has gained an understanding of residents' views on infrastructure, and has developed its consultation tools, it is now ready to begin organizing the activities necessary for public consultation.

At the beginning of the consultation process, the hotline number should be displayed on all project material and at each consultation activity. In most cases, the hotline should be connected to an automated answering service allowing residents to leave comments, ask questions and provide call back information. The hotline should be checked regularly and all calls should be returned. Calls and responses should be recorded to measure the effectiveness of the consultation process.

Infrastructure hotlines are appropriate in small, medium and large municipalities and typically require a low level of effort, depending on the public response and use.

4.2.7 Information Repositories

Repositories are particularly beneficial when the municipality does not have a high level of Internet connectivity.

Local libraries and community centres can be used to provide information on projects and infrastructure initiatives. Provide background reports, meeting minutes and project information can be housed at such municipal buildings for residents to review at their convenience.

They will keep the consultation process open and transparent by providing easy access to information to every resident regardless of their technical understanding of computers and the Internet.

Information repositories are appropriate in small, medium and large municipalities and require a low level of effort.

4.3 Step Three: Consultation Activities

Once the municipality has completed its research phase, has gained an understanding of residents' views on infrastructure, and has developed its consultation tools, it is now ready to begin organizing the activities necessary for public consultation. The following best practices are provided as a general guide for infrastructure renewal. Municipalities may choose the most appropriate activities, often based on the level of effort required.

4.3.1 Calls for Submissions

Calls for submissions can be used in various forms where "consultation fatigue" may render public meetings ineffective.

Residents and businesses are asked—through advertising in local newspapers—to develop submissions on a particular issue. In some cases, the municipality may pose a number of questions in order to direct the type of response desired. Residents are asked to keep submissions to a maximum of five pages. Submissions are summarized and then become part of the official record of the consultation process.

Calls for submissions are appropriate in small, medium and large municipalities and typically require a low level of effort depending on response rates.

4.3.2 Public Advisory Committees

Public Advisory Committees (PACs) can be used to ensure that residents are engaged in infrastructure projects through the participation of community opinion leaders and representatives. **PACs act as sounding-boards for infrastructure projects and provide feedback and opinions on infrastructure alternatives. As such, they are critical to the success of any large infrastructure project.**

These committees are generally made up of local residents adjacent to an infrastructure project as well as a few additional members selected from the municipality at large. Business groups should also be represented on PACs.

Selection of PAC members can be accomplished through an expression of interest for members through local newspapers or through appointment by the municipality. Since the PAC should be seen as impartial and objective, the selection process should be open and transparent.

The number of PAC members required for an effective committee can range from five to fifteen depending on the size of the infrastructure project and of the municipality.

The PAC should work closely with municipal staff and project consultants to ensure that community interests and concerns are addressed prior to approval of an infrastructure project.

The role of a PAC is advisory, and includes:

- supplying feedback on the municipal consultation process, reviewing and providing comments on the public consultation reports following open houses, and acting as a steering committee for public consultation activities; and
- working with the municipality and engineering consultants to review the recommended approach for infrastructure renewal, and providing community feedback on the recommended course of action.

Given the need for ongoing community feedback, the PAC should meet before each major consultation activity to validate the findings, recommendations and approach to infrastructure renewal. PAC meeting minutes should become part of the public record.

Since PACs are valuable in building support for infrastructure projects, they should be established early in the planning process. PACs should be set up before, or immediately following, the first public open house as this is often the last opportunity to solicit membership.

PACs are appropriate in small, medium and large municipalities and require a medium level of effort.

4.3.3 Public Information Centres

Successful consultation processes should educate as well as inform the public. One of the best methods of doing this is organizing a public information centre (PIC). These sessions should be welcoming and non-threatening and should be held at times that are convenient for the public. For business groups, sessions may be held over the lunch hour; for residents and community associations, centres should be available in the evening. Since many people take holidays during July and August, summer PICs should be avoided whenever possible.

PICs should be advertised in local newspapers and community newspapers so as to encourage a good cross-section of the community to attend.

Information is usually displayed throughout the room. At each information area, municipal staff and engineering consultants are available to answer questions.

There is no formal presentation at a public information centre, allowing for a more casual exchange of ideas and feedback (through comment sheets). Community centres, schools, churches and libraries are excellent venues for this type of activity.

Following each meeting, comment sheets are reviewed and a report prepared that outlines residents' feedback. Municipal staff and consultants then review this report and, where appropriate, comments are incorporated into infrastructure alternatives.

Since PIC meetings are public events, they cannot be organized until the municipality has initiated a public consultation process for a particular infrastructure project. They are useful for any size of municipality and are effective in building community support. Since there is no formal presentation, these types of activities are less likely to be interrupted by special interest groups or groups opposed to infrastructure spending.

Although PIC meetings are useful, the public may expect a more formal presentation before endorsing a large infrastructure project. As such, using PICs is more likely to be beneficial at the beginning of the consultation process. Closer to the end of the consultation process, a more formal public open house, with presentations and question and answer segments may be more appropriate.

PIC meetings will work effectively in small, medium and large municipalities and require a high level of effort.

4. Implementation

4.3 Step Three: Consultation Activities

PICs should be advertised in local newspapers and community newspapers so as to encourage a good cross-section of the community to attend.

4. Implementation

4.3 Step Three: Consultation Activities

An open house is particularly effective when a considerable amount of information needs to be communicated to the public or where the infrastructure project is of a highly technical nature and requires explanation.

4.3.4 Public Open Houses

As stated above, successful consultation processes should educate as well as inform the public. One of the best methods of accomplishing this, when there is a great deal of material to cover, is a public open house (POH). As with PIC meetings, these open houses should be welcoming and non-threatening to the public and should therefore be held at convenient times. Since open houses last at least three hours and involve a presentation, meetings should be held in the evening, but not on Fridays and weekends, and should be advertised in local and community newspapers. Since many people take holidays during July and August, summer open houses should be avoided whenever possible.

Open houses provide information on boards placed throughout the room. At each information area, municipal staff and engineering consultants are available to answer questions. The primary difference between an open house and a public information centre is that an open house is more formal and includes a presentation, question and answer session, and recorded notes that are part of the public record. If more than 50 people are expected, a sound system is advisable with a microphone for the facilitator and a floor microphone for the question and answer session.

Generally, an open house will allow for at least one hour of informal discussion between residents, municipal staff and consultants in a fashion similar to an information session. Following such sessions, residents who wish to leave or are not interested in hearing presentations, can complete their comment sheets before departing. Other residents, who wish to remain for the presentation, can later question staff and consultants.

The agenda for a typical open house would be:

6:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.	Information Session
7:45 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.	Presentation
8:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.	Questions and Answers
9:00 p.m.	Adjournment

An open house is particularly effective when a considerable amount of information needs to be communicated to the public or where the infrastructure project is of a highly technical nature and requires explanation.

A competent individual should chair the open house to keep the meeting on time and ensure that no particular group or individual dominates it. Controlling an open house is easier if the ground rules are explained before presentations begin. These rules should include:

1. Questioners should wait until the presentation is completed.
2. Questioners must wait until recognized by the chair.
3. Questions should be kept brief—a maximum of five minutes.
4. Questioners may pose only one follow-up question to ensure that as many people participate as possible.

Following the question and answer session, attendees should be requested to fill out comment sheets and submit them for review. A report outlining the open house, feedback and comments received should be developed and reviewed by the municipality to incorporate public feedback into the infrastructure project.

POHs will work effectively in small, medium and large municipalities and require a high level of effort.

4.3.5 Stakeholder and Kitchen Table Meetings

These events provide an excellent opportunity for municipal staff and residents to meet in an informal and non-confrontational setting. This often results in a free exchange of ideas and views, is an excellent method of obtaining feedback and builds partnerships early in the consultation process.

Stakeholder and kitchen meetings are a viable alternative to larger open houses. These smaller meetings, organized at the request of local residents, can often result in far better feedback. They are usually less formal with municipal staff and local residents gathering at a community centre or similar facility.

Kitchen table meetings usually take place in a resident's home adjacent to a planned or anticipated infrastructure project site. These meetings are informal and are usually organized by a local community association or individual.

Since both activities are deliberative, they work to reach a consensus through reasonable discussion involving a common issue. Meetings are rarely confrontational since they involve fewer residents.

These small and informal meetings should begin shortly after a consultation process begins and should continue throughout the consultation phase and the actual infrastructure renewal phase. This ongoing activity will help to maintain public engagement and keep residents up to date on developments. Stakeholder and kitchen table meetings also lessen the probability of unexpected objections that can occur at open houses, thereby allowing for a more democratic, and ideally, successful consultation process.

Stakeholder and kitchen table meetings are appropriate in small, medium and large municipalities but often work better in smaller municipalities where interaction with neighbours is more frequent. These meetings require a low level of effort.

4.3.6 Infrastructure Visits and Tours

Visits and tours of existing infrastructure facilities afford the opportunity to educate and inform residents of the importance of maintaining infrastructure and may also demonstrate strong evidence for the need to invest in improvements.

These types of activities are better organized at an early stage in the consultation process in order to build public support for municipal infrastructure expenditures. Visits and tours should be publicized on radio and in local newspapers to attract the public. By allowing the media to participate, the municipality also has a better chance of promoting the initiative to a larger audience.

When organizing an infrastructure tour, the municipality should be careful to select examples that illustrate the need for infrastructure renewal as well as the benefits to taxpayers. For instance, make the link between basement flooding and outdated sewer systems that need to be replaced. By building the case for infrastructure renewal, the public can become champions for renewal because the case for expenditure has been provided in a timely and objective fashion.

Infrastructure tours and visits will be effective in small, medium and large municipalities and require a medium level of effort.

4.3.7 Information Booths at Community Events

One of the best ways of obtaining feedback from residents is to go where they are rather than waiting for them to attend a special meeting. By participating in community events such as fairs and festivals, municipalities can distribute material to the public and provide opportunities for residents to ask questions of municipal staff. In smaller municipalities, fairs and community events are particularly effective for this type of activity. Shopping Malls in municipalities offer similar opportunities.

Information booths will be effective in small, medium and large municipalities and require a high level of effort.

4. Implementation

- 4.3 Step Three:
 - Consultation
 - Activities

Visits and tours of existing infrastructure facilities afford the opportunity to educate and inform residents of the importance of maintaining infrastructure and may also demonstrate strong evidence for the need to invest in improvements.

4. Implementation

4.3 Step Three:
Consultation
Activities

4.4 Step Four:
Evaluation

Media relations campaigns should focus on promoting municipal initiatives through such tools as media advisories, press releases and public service announcements (PSAs).

4.3.8 Media Relations

Media relations is a highly specialized activity that must be carefully and strategically planned to produce the best results and balanced media coverage. By being proactive, such activities can gain the media's respect, if not necessarily their support. In this way, the media can become a valuable source of information about public consultation activities.

Media relations campaigns should focus on promoting municipal initiatives through such tools as media advisories, press releases and public service announcements (PSAs).

Media relations are effective in small, medium and large municipalities and require a medium to high level of effort. (*See also Appendix B: Media Training.*)

4.4 Step Four: Evaluation

There are a number of methods that can be used to evaluate the success of public consultation exercises. These methods can provide timely feedback on the value of particular activities and offer suggestions on how to make future consultation exercises more effective.

4.4.1 Questionnaires

As part of a comment sheet, municipalities can insert a number of questions concerning the consultation activity itself. Simple questions such as those listed below can help measure the success of each activity:

- Was the time of this open house convenient?
- Was the location convenient?
- Were your questions answered?
- How did you hear about tonight's public open house?

4.4.2 Visits to the Web Site

Track the visits to the infrastructure Web site

Once a project Web site has been established, track the visits to the site during the public consultation process. If the process is engaging the public, more people will be driven to the site by notices, newsletters and consultation activities.

4.4.3 Completed Comment Sheets

Track the number of completed comment sheets

During any public consultation exercise, comment sheets are a convenient and easy way to measure the success of your consultation activities. If the number of comments increases during the process, you are successfully engaging the public.

4.4.4 Attendance Numbers

Attendance at information centres and public open houses

As your public consultation process is implemented, information centres and public open houses will be your most visible consultation activities. If the process is successful at engaging the public, attendance at each session should be constant or should increase. Diminishing numbers would indicate that the public is losing interest and needs to be re-engaged.

4.4.5 Media Content Analysis

Media coverage of your public consultation process can provide useful evaluation material. By reviewing the messaging found in media coverage—whether daily or community newspapers, radio or television—the success of your consultation efforts will be evident. For this evaluation tool to be successful, the analysis should be thorough and objective. Organizations often hire communications firms to carry out media content analysis.

Appendix A: Best Practice Case Studies

A. Best Practice Case Studies

A.1 Large Municipalities

A.1 Large Municipalities

A.1.1 City of Edmonton, Alberta

Best Practice: *Office of Infrastructure*

Contacts: Konrad Siu, P. Eng, Director of Infrastructure Planning, Office of Infrastructure, and Romana Kabalin, Communications Business Partner

The City of Edmonton faced expanding demands for infrastructure in new areas and upgrades and replacement in older neighbourhoods.

With shrinking funds and stiff opposition to spending money, the City needed to identify its infrastructure priorities and address its growing funding gap—the shortfall between the projected cost of infrastructure projects and the dollars available to pay for those projects. The first step was to develop an infrastructure strategy to address the funding gap and state of the City's \$19 billion inventory of infrastructure assets, and to establish the Office of Infrastructure to implement the strategy. Also key was changing attitudes and perceptions towards infrastructure spending, so that audiences would begin to think of infrastructure as an investment, rather than expenditure.

In an effort to develop public awareness, support and advocacy for infrastructure issues, the City embarked on a comprehensive communications and public consultation strategy. This included an internal and external communications program, and the formation of an Infrastructure Technical Advisory Committee (ITAC). This group of technical stakeholders and opinion leaders with expertise in infrastructure design, development and management represented a broad cross-section of professional organizations, business associations and community groups. The ITAC's mandate was to provide community-based input and to help shape and implement the City's infrastructure strategy.

Thanks to an infrastructure strategy, stakeholder input and increased public awareness and understanding of infrastructure challenges, Edmonton is currently recognized as one of Canada's leading municipalities in the implementation of advanced infrastructure management techniques. This proactive approach to managing the City's growing municipal pressures, has allowed Edmonton to make significant strides to better manage its infrastructure assets and minimize its infrastructure funding gap. Some examples include:

- A corporate infrastructure asset management approach consisting of a detailed infrastructure inventory that captures the value and state of the City's infrastructure and its long-term investment needs.
- Effective infrastructure management tools such as life cycle analysis and risk assessment to identify priority areas and optimize investment decisions.
- Innovative revenue partnerships involving developers and home builders to support new developments. This includes a sanitary sewer strategy fund for the construction of major sanitary sewers and arterial assessment fees for future construction of arterial roads.
- The approval of a self-financing user pay land drainage utility which is independent of property taxes.
- Amendments to the City's debt management fiscal policy in 2002, which led to tax-supported borrowing of up to \$50 million per year over five years, to fund large-scale, high-priority capital projects.

Edmonton also continues to provide leadership by sharing its knowledge and expertise on infrastructure issues with municipalities nationally and in the United States. Working with experts through the National Guide to Sustainable Municipal Infrastructure,

A. Best Practice Case Studies

A.1 Large Municipalities

the National Research Council of Canada and others, City staff are developing strategic alliances and continuing to monitor and adopt best practices for the management of municipal infrastructure.

For more information on the City of Edmonton's infrastructure strategy and ongoing initiatives, visit www.edmonton.ca/infrastructure.

A.1.2 City of London, Ontario

Best Practice: *Sewer Task Force*

Contacts: John Lucas, P Eng, Project Manager

For almost 30 years several areas within the City of London faced chronic basement flooding during heavy spring and summer rainstorms.

Technical problems were varied and included downspouts being attached to drains by homeowners, improperly graded lots and a municipal infrastructure that was aging and under designed for the massive growth that had taken place in both residential and commercial properties.

For many years, Council would not fund the initiatives required to upgrade the system and educate the public about their responsibility to handle water management on their own properties. After three floods and the likelihood of legal action, Council formed a Task Force that was given a special mandate and budget. Chaired by two members of Council, with staff reporting to the Committee, it took swift action to pinpoint not only pressure points but also solutions. At the same time, federal-provincial cost-sharing programs for infrastructure were up and running.

Council empowered the Task Force to fast track long-standing engineering solutions as well as an extensive communication plan.

While the technical research and financial plans were under way, communication staff designed a stand-alone Web site to educate and inform the public. As well, brochures were inserted in utility bills directing homeowners to a new sump pump program that received special funding from the Municipality.

These activities, combined with public meetings, gave the Task Force the profile and credibility to get things done.

In record time—two years—it cleared 30 years of water management problems. The project cost more than \$10 million in capital expenses, but because the project had special status and wide community support, Council did not have to engage in normal ward politics.

Several heavy rains have occurred since the project was completed and flooding and sewage backups have not ensued.

This project went smoothly because City Council concluded that it had no choice—either educate the public and spend the money or pay even more in legal bills for ignoring issues surrounding public health. Too often, however, it takes a crisis to provide the push needed for solid backing for an infrastructure project.

Another key to the program's success was having politicians act as Task Force Chairs. This was critical because the reports that required Council or upper-level approval were presented primarily by elected officials.

A.1.3 Ville de Laval , Service de l'Ingenierie, Quebec

Best Practice: *Public Consultation Champion*

Contacts: Philippe Guilbeault, Public Consultation Officer and Luc Lahaie, Assistant Director, Infrastructures

Laval is one of Quebec's largest cities with a population of 350 000, located on the outskirts of Montréal on Rivière des Prairies.

The interview was conducted with Philippe Guilbeault, Public Consultation Officer, and Assistant Director, Infrastructures Luc Lahaie.

Elected officials who deal with the public on a personal level largely carry out public consultation. Mr. Guilbeault works solely with Engineering Services where increased taxation is needed to build and maintain roads, sewers and other infrastructure.

The laws in Quebec provide the City with significant powers to impose a tax for new infrastructure works benefiting households regardless of the result of the public consultation process.

The law is one thing but human nature is another. Mr. Guilbeault is the human face that helps take some of the bitterness away from higher taxes.

A current process involves a semi-rural area that is not connected to the main sewer. The houses discharge untreated waste directly into Rivière des Prairies.

The interception and treatment of wastewater headed for Rivière des Prairies is part of a regional initiative and has substantially improved water quality in the Montréal area.

Mr. Guilbeault provides daily information on a one-to-one basis with residents who have questions and issues.

Each household in this working class neighbourhood is being required to pay \$20 000 to bring sewers to their homes.

Common complaints are that people feel they are not being treated fairly because they already pay taxes. It is Mr. Guilbeault's job to inform them that taxes pay for ongoing services. Permanent work (capital work) has to be paid for by those who directly benefit.

Mr. Guilbeault does not follow a specific process. "Most times when we sell a (project) we do whatever has to be done—more letters, more phone calls."

The key to Mr. Guilbeault's success is his accessibility and willingness to take responsibility. "I'm in charge. My phone number is in the public domain. I answer to citizens. I do not have voice mail. The calls go to me directly."

The sewer project and others have been able to move ahead on that basis. Laval uses a system of priorities on roads and local roads that require upgrading and each electoral district receives its share.

Priorities are established on the basis of level of service. Statistics are kept on the condition of all roads and water pipes and each is assigned a "performance quote." Council and the Executive Committee always accept this performance quote.

A.1.4 City of Winnipeg, Manitoba

Best Practice: *Provencher Bridge Project*

Contact: Bob McDonald, Information Officer

Through an extensive public consultation initiative led by a skilled, experienced professional, the City of Winnipeg successfully completed a \$75 million bridge project that not only linked two geographically separated communities, but also helped to build a figurative bridge between these philosophically divided communities.

St. Boniface is a French-language residential community (and formerly a separate city) linked to Winnipeg's English-speaking business sector by the Provencher Bridge near the forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers. Built in 1917, the bridge was deteriorating but its age also meant it had historical and emotional ties in the community.

In 1986, St. Boniface residents were told this bridge would have to be replaced. There was no public consultation and City administrators basically handed the decision to them. However, the Provencher Project did not proceed as planned because it was bumped by a project that proved more urgent—the Norwood Bridge Project. The lack of consultation on the Provencher project ignited bad feelings in the community even though it did not proceed. A simmering mistrust and animosity between English speaking and French speaking people came to the surface.

Additional experience gained from the Norwood Public Advisory Committee (PAC) served to reinforce the City's assertion that it would have to consult with the community early in the process to regain trust and ensure a smooth process.

A. Best Practice Case Studies

A.1 Large Municipalities

A. Best Practice Case Studies

A.1 Large Municipalities

A.2 Medium-Sized Municipalities

When the City asked the people on the Norwood PAC what they learned from the process, the response was to get the public involved earlier and to have nothing predetermined.

On a scale of one to five, Bob McDonald summed the success of this consultation plan as a five; or in one word, “fabulous.” The process won the 2001 ICMA award for public consultation, (International) US–Canada. “Everyone involved saw the opportunities to do more than just build a bridge.”

The process went a long way toward narrowing the rift between English speaking and French speaking people.

The consultation started in January 1998 and ended in May that year. Instead of one bridge, two bridges opened: in late summer/fall 2003 for vehicles with a standard-use sidewalk; and a separate pedestrian bridge on January 1, 2004. The major goal was to reach consensus but the PAC eventually achieved unanimity after solving one problem that proved to be a turning point in the process. One PAC member wanted to save the original bridge and went to the media.

After some negative initial press coverage, Winnipeg City staff and the consultant met with the editorial board of the newspaper to discuss the article. They didn’t challenge the article line by line but attempted to paint a clearer picture of the process and the successes. While the negative reporting didn’t stop immediately, it did eventually and more balanced articles resulted. News releases were issued during milestones and the communication officer made a proactive decision to hold an organized media tour to get everyone up to speed on the bridge’s development.

The process in the public consultation involved:

- an environmental scan;
- identification of key sectors that need to provide input;
- creation of a PAC with a diverse community-based membership;
- proactive media relations;
- advertising, multi-media materials, surveys; and
- public meetings.

A.2 Medium-Sized Municipalities

A.2.1 Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island

Best Practice: Charlottetown Aquatic and Rink Facility

Contact: George Trainer, City Councillor

This \$22 million aquatic/ice rink project was a major initiative for the Charlottetown, which has a regional population of about 45 000.

The facility includes a 25 metre competitive pool and wading pool with water slide and seating for 800. It also is home to two NHL-size ice surfaces. One arena seats 1 200, the second seats 280. The 4 000-square-foot Seniors Active Living Centre is also located here.

The process took over six years and involved federal and provincial funding and also saw a partnership between three municipalities and the university.

Over the six years there was a great deal of public consultation through public meetings and with partners from hockey associations, swimming clubs and educators. Those public meetings left funders, users and the community with the sense that every consideration had been made and careful thought and planning went into the project before a shovel hit the ground.

Members of Charlottetown Council, led by Mayor George MacDonald, worked to keep the message positive. They strove to maintain a positive awareness through media stories and by quickly handling opposition from some members who feared that the municipality would not operate the centre once it was up and running.

A number of public meetings, stakeholder meetings and potential partnership meetings drove the consultation process, which left individuals and special interest groups with the feeling that they had been heard.

The bulk of the consultation and drive to success was borne by the Mayor and Council. Some minor community concern about who would manage the facility following its construction, was overcome through a series of public and private meetings. Except for some minor community concern about who would manage the facility following its construction, the bulk of the consultation and drive to success was borne by the Mayor and Council.

Solidarity on Council, coupled with a deep understanding of how the facility would be used and who in the community would use it, proved to be key ingredients for success.

This project demonstrates that when the majority of a community and their elected officials understand the need, a project can move ahead smoothly.

Development of a Web site, public meetings and word of mouth drove the process. Maintaining a positive media presence also deterred many detractors.

Key audiences were easy to identify. User groups are well-organized hockey and swimming groups as well as the Municipality. The nature of the facility made this task simple, but continuous communication and consultation with stakeholders was the true secret of the project's success.

A.3 Small Municipalities

A.3.1 Municipality of Bayham, Ontario (Near St. Thomas)

Best Practice: *Sanitary Sewer System/Worst Practice: Water Pipeline*

Contact: Kyle Kruger, Administrator

Major water and sewer infrastructure projects in the Municipality of Bayham in Southwestern Ontario provide examples of both best and worst practices in public consultation.

Bayham, with a population of about 6 200, is a mix of farmland and villages. Like many rural Canada communities, its population is "small c" conservative when it comes to public spending.

The public health unit uncovered high nitrate levels in wells in the community and a larger study by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment (MOE) confirmed that the problem was both widespread and had health impacts on the population, especially young children and pregnant women.

Bayham Council identified two projects to correct the problem. One was a sanitary sewer system to replace septic systems in the villages of Straffordville and Eden. The septic systems were old and leaking and were major contributors to nitrate levels in well water.

A second project was a pipeline that would connect the municipal drinking water systems in Straffordville and Eden to the Lake Erie water supply system, a pipeline that runs from Lake Erie to London and provides drinking water to many communities in the area.

The cost of the sanitary sewer project was estimated at \$19 million. The water pipeline was projected at \$12 million.

Bayham applied for government support for both projects through a provincial-federal infrastructure funding program, OSTAR (Ontario Small Town and Rural Development).

A. Best Practice Case Studies

A.2 Medium-Sized Municipalities

A.3 Small Municipalities

A. Best Practice Case Studies

A.3 Small Municipalities

Simultaneously, the Municipality held several public meetings and gained public support for the initiatives.

Funding was approved but for only the sewer portion—80 percent of the estimated \$19 million. Bayham Administrator Kyle Kruger said that OSTAR's rationale at the time was that if leaking septic systems were corrected, the quality of well water would improve over time.

The sewer project went ahead and over the next couple of years the Municipality applied again for government funding for the drinking water project. This time Bayham was successful in getting the tentative approval for an \$8 million grant from government toward the estimated \$12 million project.

Kruger said that Council was disappointed that the funding was to be only two-thirds of the project cost rather than the 80 percent provided for the sewer project.

In the meantime, ratepayers were just beginning to feel the financial impact from the sewer project on their tax bills—an additional \$7 000 per household. The pipeline project would add a similar amount to taxes in Straffordville and Eden—\$7 000 to \$9 000 to be paid over 10 years.

When word of the second project got out, feedback was not good.

"They said they couldn't afford it, that they didn't want the project. They were just getting their tax bills for the sewers and they didn't feel they wanted the expense."

Kruger said it didn't help that local ratepayers were also being asked to pay an even higher portion of the total project, 33 percent compared to 20 percent for the sanitary sewer project. Kruger said no public consultation process was initiated for the pipeline project because it never got that far.

Public reaction was so negative that Council decided to circulate a questionnaire to all households that would be affected by the pipeline project before proceeding. The overwhelming reaction was "No." Just under 70 percent of households responded and 80 percent rejected the second project as being too costly.

The topic is so controversial that no one on Council or the administration wanted to touch it, and for all intents and purposes, the project is dead. In Kruger's opinion, it cannot be revived in the foreseeable future.

A.3.2 Municipality of Central Elgin, St. Thomas, Ontario

Best Practice: *Long-Term Tax Increase to Support Infrastructure Spending*

Contact: Lloyd Perrin, Director of Physical Services

As a small municipality, Central Elgin (formerly villages of Belmont, Port Stanley and Yarmouth Township) with a population of 12 860 has been extraordinarily aggressive and successful in presenting its infrastructure needs to the public.

It is accomplishing this primarily by building a solid case to justify ongoing tax increases. The foundation pieces were: a facilities audit encompassing existing buildings and their lifecycle costs (two arenas, four fire halls, library, medical centre, concession stands in parks); and a roads needs study.

The Municipality used the information to develop a 20 year master finance plan for capital project upgrades to create a basis to compare all projects.

The idea originated at a joint Council-Senior Administration brainstorming session. Senior staff stated that it was imperative to find a way to fund needed capital projects and Council bought into the plan. This followed a template that the Municipality had used earlier for major upgrades to the water system with economist Gary Scandlan from CN Watson Consultants.

The public consultation process for the tax increase included mailings in tax notices and three open houses. The Municipality also set up a booth at Community Night in one of its villages, where local scouts, community groups and minor sports teams sign up participants. Perrin said Council likes to go to the people rather than having them come to a public meeting. They also reach more people—in this case 450 attended Community Night. Perrin doesn't like public meetings because he feels they tend to create confrontation.

The Municipality intends to go to two more venues to explain the program.

The audit adopted by Council calls for a 3.46 percent tax increase each year to pay for capital projects. The message to ratepayers is that assessment growth will pay for the Municipality's growth in operations but tax increases are needed to pay for capital projects.

A.3.3 Thompson, Manitoba

Best Practice: *Stakeholder/Funding Relations, Thompson Regional Community Centre*

Contact: Dennis Fenske, Director of Personnel and Community Development

The project was designed to create a sustainable multi-faceted destination point and community facility that would meet current and future needs of the residents of Thompson, Manitoba and surrounding area (population: 13 800 plus 65 000 trading area). The Centre encompasses a common retail area, daycare, meeting rooms, food services, private physiotherapy clinic, field house (indoor track) and two existing arenas. The revised plan now includes space for the local public library. The final projected cost is \$13.5 million and should be completed in three to five years.

A total of 5 600 surveys were distributed and the Municipality felt the 13 percent response rate was a valid return to set priorities for the facility's services.

Tendering originally took place in the summer of 2004, but bids came in higher than expected, about \$22 million rather than the original \$17.5 million estimate. Phase one of construction was deferred until spring 2005 in the hope of attracting winter bids that were more in line with initial projections.

A core group of four to five people has been part of the Community Centre ad hoc committee since day one. An additional 20–30 have come and gone.

To select members, the Municipality sought people who were successful in other community activities. In essence, Thompson chose people for their credibility, background and expertise in order to get a warmer reception.

The public is kept informed through news reports of the ad hoc committee's activities presented to Council. News releases are sent regularly to the local newspaper, which publishes three times a week, and to the local radio station and cable TV outlet.

The Municipality's public relations committee, composed of staff and volunteers, is responsible for publicizing the various projects and activities through open forums and open houses. Information about the Regional Community Centre was included at September's "Leisure Mart" at the local arena, which was attended by 3 000–4 000 people.

Key to the project's success was a solid business case and early contact with the Canada Manitoba Infrastructure Program. A previous bid 10 years earlier lacked clear community and municipal support. This time Council had pre-committed \$6 million, which provided instant credibility, and leverage for additional money.

A. Best Practice Case Studies

A.3 Small Municipalities

A.4 Mixed-Sized Municipalities

A. Best Practice Case Studies

A.4 Mixed-Sized Municipalities

Secured funding is as follows:

- a) \$1.25 million, Canada–Manitoba (federal/provincial)
- b) an additional \$500 000, Manitoba
- c) \$6 million, municipal debenture
- d) \$60 000, Province's *Community Places* program (secured by moving the library to the facility)
- e) \$500 000 committed from the corporate sector

This represents \$8 310 000 of the \$13.5 million target.

The shortfall is to be paid through a community fundraising program.

A.4 Mixed-Sized Municipalities

A.4.1 Province of New Brunswick

Best Practice: *Fredericton–Moncton Highway Project*

Contact: Dave Garner, Project Manager (1998-2001)

The construction of a four-lane, 195 kilometre highway connecting Fredericton and Moncton was incredibly significant for the province of New Brunswick for a variety of reasons. Most important, perhaps, was that a public works project of similar size or scope had never been attempted before in New Brunswick and rarely outside of North America. It was by far the largest public-private partnership ever undertaken in the Province. In addition, the project represented a considerable amount of public money, the total cost of constructing the highway was \$629.9 million. For these reasons, a substantial amount of public interest was generated. The highway was completed in October 2001, six months ahead of schedule.

Dave Garner, Project Manager between 1998 and 2001, noted that consultation with the construction industry was key to winning public support for the project. The scale of the project and the fact that nothing similar had ever been done in New Brunswick created concern and even resistance within the Province's construction industry, which was worried that larger, out-of-province companies would win the business.

Through this consultation process, the project and the construction industry devised a strategy which ensured that 90 percent of the workforce, which peaked at over 1 400, were from New Brunswick. Over the course of the four years of construction, more than 400 New Brunswick companies were either directly employed or indirectly benefited from the project.

This process greatly aided in getting the construction industry on board and their support for the project was an important factor in achieving the project's broad public support. The promise of a highway built by New Brunswickers for New Brunswickers rallied the construction industry, which in turn, generated public support.

Mr. Garner noted that a series of public meetings held in various small villages, towns and municipalities, often in local recreational halls, promoted the benefits of the highway and served to inform the public of the employment benefits the highway would bring.

A full-time communications manager was hired to facilitate much of the information packaging and dissemination. The media was used extensively to communicate information about detours and traffic changes, which were significant throughout the course of the project. Advertisements were placed in local newspapers throughout the province, in addition to local radio and television spots.

The key to the success of this project's consultation strategy was identifying the construction industry as a key stakeholder and creating a win-win proposition for the industry.

A.4.2 Ontario Clean Water Agency (OCWA) Southwestern Ontario

Best/Worst Practice: *OCWA Lake Huron Pipeline Twinning*

**Contact: Maureen Looby, M. Eng., P. Eng,
Manager Public Works and Engineering**

The residents of Southwestern Ontario rely on the Huron pipeline as their primary source of drinking water. The original pipeline was constructed in the 1960s. With increased demand and the potential for catastrophic failure by 1997—the pipeline had ruptured twice in the past—the three areas in the existing pipeline prone to breakdowns had to be twinned.

The 1960 pipeline project mixed subsoils with topsoil and disrupted farm business along the 100 kilometre route through some of the richest farmland in Canada. Even with rigid new guidelines for soil management and environmental controls, winning public support was challenging given the suspicious predisposition of Landowners.

The project proceeded as an engineering challenge with no clear communication plan in place beyond traditional public meetings. The landowners' communication plan was far more sophisticated. Past grievances brought the landowners together and their activities were largely organized by one landowner and a lawyer skilled in influencing the media.

The landowners immediately won over the media and were able to pitch their demand for greater compensation almost exclusively. During the height of the protest, the landowners had front page coverage on consecutive days when farmers placed their bodies in front of heavy trenching machinery to delay construction and win headlines.

Meanwhile, elected officials began to panic and saw a dramatic increase in compensation as the only answer to getting the project completed in the same construction season.

When the protest brought the project to a halt, OCWA hired outside consultants. The consultants immediately met with local media and provided detailed information about the differences in technology and soil handling. The media came to the conclusion that there was nothing wrong with the package offered and refused to cover the farmers' publicity stunts.

The consultants also worked with local politicians and bureaucrats to keep on course and not bow to media pressure. The consultant acted proactively and held a series of meetings with decision-makers in all local media that resulted in a shift to neutral and then to positive reporting on the benefits of the project to public health.

The farmers' original anger had been stirred by reminders of past misdeeds—land that hadn't been properly rehabilitated after the original pipeline was installed across their land decades earlier. By this time, many of the farmers realized the deal was good for them and good for the local communities. The public relations consultants communicated to moderate farmers to make their voices heard.

Between the media's refusal to cover farmers' publicity stunts and the majority of farmers now speaking up, the small group of agitators soon went silent. Within three weeks of their trench protest, all landowners signed agreements for the twinned pipeline to proceed.

This case study demonstrates that it is imperative to have a stakeholder's consultation and communication strategy in place before a project is unveiled to the public. The farmer's protest would never have started if sufficient explanation of the compensation plan was provided early to both the farmers and the media.

It also clearly shows that in contentious issues—such as a decades-old feud—a communication specialist should be part of the senior decision-makers before and throughout the planning, construction and bringing on line of any major capital

A. Best Practice Case Studies

A.4 Mixed-Sized
Municipalities

A. Best Practice Case Studies

A.4 Mixed-Sized Municipalities

undertaking.

Public meetings were part of the original plan. These turned into speech-filled emotional events where engineering consultants and construction firms lost control to a coached opposition. It also gave opponents a platform in front of the media. Following a new plan, the public meetings were information open houses with display boards, handouts and individual contact with project managers, interested politicians, neighbours and landowners, preventing public displays and speeches.

A.4.3 United States Environmental Protection Agency

Best Practice: *Responding to Community Concerns, Hudson River Cleanup: The Hudson River PCBs SuperFund Site Community Involvement Plan*

Contact: Cindy Cook, Principal with Adamant Accord

From approximately 1947 to 1977, General Electric Company released large amounts of PCBs from its plants into the Hudson River. Roughly a 40-mile stretch of the Hudson River was contaminated, adversely affecting communities that used and were close to the river. Significantly, the communities affected were diverse in terms of their socio-economic situations and cultural, linguistic and ethnic make-up.

In 2002, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) decided to dredge approximately 2.65 million cubic yards of the PCB-contaminated stretch of the Hudson River in the most significant effort to de-contaminate the river to date.

The large scale of the project and the diversity of the communities persuaded the EPA to involve the affected communities in a consultation process. The EPA published the Hudson River PCBs SuperFund Site Community Involvement Plan in 2003, which detailed the variety of public consultation methods employed in this process.

The EPA used a long list of information-gathering tools in the process, including:

- extensive stakeholder interviews by professional facilitators to gather information regarding community members' informational needs. This information served as background in the development of EPA's Community Involvement Plan;
- an "Ask EPA program" where individuals were invited to submit questions and/or comments;
- a Mail List to communicate project information particularly to those who do not use the Internet and who are unavailable for public forums. Names came from sign-up sheets at public information sessions and community organizations;
- stakeholder group interaction, including meetings with stakeholder groups on their home turf; and
- telephone or print surveys.

The EPA used a number of methods to deliver the message, including:

- establishment of a project specific field office, to make project staff and information readily accessible to community members;
- fact sheets;
- Web site;
- information repositories, e.g. public sites such as libraries, universities or government offices where documents are available for review; and
- e-mail listservs to quickly disseminate information to a range of interested and affected parties.

The EPA also employed a variety of techniques to reach affected communities, including:

- displays at community events;
- community poster to describe the project and notes where to access further information;
- environmental justice activities for communities that may have language and cultural barriers, e.g., producing documents in languages other than English and working with community organizations which serve such groups;

- project site visits and tours;
- school/education awareness; and
- toll-free hotline.

Other tools used to encourage involvement were:

- Technical Assistant Grants (TAGs) and other grants to qualified individuals who have been affected in order to hire a technical advisor to explain the project and aid in articulating the community's concerns.
- A professionally facilitated Community Advisory Group (CAG) composed of individuals chosen to represent diverse and affected interests and groups to encourage routine communication between community and EPA.

Cindy Cook, the principal with Adamant Accord Inc., noted that, community members felt that their relationship with EPA, which historically had been quite adversarial, was significantly improved when EPA established a field office and hired facilitators to listen to and summarize community concerns. The creation of a Community Advisory Group has also helped improve communication between EPA and the many stakeholders.

A. Best Practice Case Studies

A.4 Mixed-Sized Municipalities

Appendix B: Media Training

B. Media Training

B.1 Dealing with the News Media

B.1 Dealing with the News Media

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B.1.1 Change and the Media

Economics/Technology

Like many industries, the news media has been enormously affected by global economies and technology. News flows from all parts of the world instantaneously. People are less interested in their neighbourhood than in stories from China and other parts of the world that affect their jobs and investments. The emphasis on local news has been downgraded as a result.

Downsizing

Greater media competition for advertising dollars has led to declining budgets and that has led to massive cutbacks in the number of editors and reporters at newspapers as well as at radio and TV stations. The casualty has been thoughtful in-depth reporting. Local stories are typically just "he said...she said" reports plastered on the front page with little or no weight given to the facts.

Stories about public infrastructure are fact-based and therefore difficult to present strongly compared to policing and fire protection which carry strong emotional messages.

Approaching the Media

Get to know the media. Everyone in the media has a different job. You don't go to the City Manager to sign up for a recreation program yet people who know the Publisher or Station Manager want them to deal with a story. Deal with the writer and do it proactively. Reporters want to talk to you and will readily agree to meet if it involves a newsworthy story or will lead to a story. The only times a reporter will refuse to talk is if he or she is on deadline or your approach is unclear.

The rule in the media is the first story sets the stage and all others are follow-ups on the initial thesis. It is extremely rare that a story will make an about-face. When the news starts out badly, the best you can hope for is the story to die.

B.1.2 Media Time Cycles

Yearly News Cycle

If you want to create news, there are times of the year when it's easier. It is not difficult to recognize these slow news periods because there is very little real news content. Late summer is one of the most opportune times to make a big splash. It's also a time when reporters and editors aren't busy so they can take time to go to lunch. Mid-September until mid-November is the most competitive time to get publicity or to get an editor's attention. Trade and specialty publications also have unique cycles when they publish and some may have lead times that require presentation as much as four months or more ahead of publication. Television and radio also have specific cycles. For instance, some TV talk shows shut down over the summer. TV and radio shows frequently change their focus and timelines. Radio stations often change formats and therefore their approach to news. It's always best to check with the target medium to figure out its yearly cycle.

Weekly News Cycle

Mondays and Tuesdays are busy times for most local news organizations. Do not try to get a complex message through on these days. Thursdays and Fridays typically hold the best opportunities. If you have arranged it with the news media in advance, a Sunday announcement can receive huge publicity. While these are the general cycles for local media, you should check to see if they apply to media in your area.

B. Media Training

B.1 Dealing with the News Media

Daily News Cycle

Each news medium has its own daily cycle. Generally speaking, newspapers operate from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. While reporters are on the job after 5 p.m. they are usually slotted into specific jobs or are on standby for major breaking news. A news conference held after 5 p.m. will not be covered. Radio starts early—6 a.m. If you are willing to be interviewed at 6:30 a.m., your story will almost always get covered if it has any news merit. Television operates on much the same timetable as newspapers. One word of caution. Do not call radio and television stations between 11 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. The noon newscast is one of the key newscasts of the day. Everyone at the station involved in news is busy creating and directing the noon broadcast.

How to Create News

One shoe does NOT fit all. One news release will not explain your story effectively to different media. The media doesn't care about your story. The media cares that its story—which may contain your story—sells to its audience. To get effective coverage from different media, you must either produce a series of news releases with different angles to suit the focus of each media or personally explain the appropriate story angle to the reporter.

Know the Media

Much of the above deals with knowing the media. How do you find these things out? Easy—just ask. Many people take a reporter out and use the entire time filling the reporter's ears with what they want to say. There's an old saying that people have two ears and one mouth and they should make use of them in the same proportion. Listen twice as much as you speak. Find out what the deadlines are, what the media's audience is, how to get a story into the media and so on.

Answer One Simple Question for All Audiences: What's in it for me?

This question basically asks: Why would a reader be compelled to read your story? If your story can accomplish this, there is a good chance that it will appear and appear the way you want. Ignore the angle of interest to the reader and at best the reporter won't print your story. At worst, he/she will create an angle of interest that goes against what you are trying to accomplish.

Be honest about your story's appeal. You may think that a storm sewer is important but it's a big bore to the rest of the population unless you explain the benefits in a very, very simple way.

One of the best ways to simplify the benefits is to relate the story to a real person. For example, "Jim Smith, like a lot of people in East City, gets anxious whenever there's a major rainfall. He's hoping that if a major storm sewer project goes ahead, his days of flooded basements will be a thing of the past."

Even if you can't write anything like this, you could suggest it to the newspaper reporter and provide names and numbers of people who have indicated that they are willing to tell such a story.

B.1.3 Understanding News Media

The media isn't what you think it is. It is not a public service organization. It is a business seeking a profit. It makes a profit by having an appealing product that sells. Dull stories do not sell. Exciting, controversial stories do. Public infrastructure is generally a dull story unless you can project the benefits to people into the storyline as in the item above.

Think of the Media as a Manufacturer

What else can I do to get the story in print or on the air? Think of the media as a car manufacturer and your story as the equivalent of an auto part that you are selling to the manufacturer (media).

What must a supplier do to make that part attractive to the manufacturer?

1. The Part Must Fit the Product
2. The Part Must Improve the Product
3. The Part Must Arrive Just In Time
4. The Part Must Be the Right Price

The Part Must Fit the Product

Is the story you are selling appropriate to the buyer? Has this buyer (editor/reporter) ever published a story like this before? Are you going to the publisher or the sports editor because you know them? Public infrastructure belongs to the city hall reporter or someone who writes about such things. Those are the key people to approach and win over. Infrastructure is an interesting topic if the reporter can get insight into its benefits and/or the potential for disaster if infrastructure doesn't keep pace with its municipality.

The Part Must Improve the Product

Basically the story has to be interesting—interesting enough to sell newspapers, get more TV viewers or radio listeners. If it's boring or lacks significant insight, it will not be acceptable to the media just as an inferior tire would not be installed by an auto maker.

The Part Must Arrive Just In Time

Media do not want yesterday's news. The fresher, the better. It's imperative your story gets to the media in a comprehensive and understandable way before those in opposition get to the media. It's also important that you deliver the news when the media needs it or at least has time to handle it. (See Media Time Cycles above.)

The Part Must Be the Right Price

For a story to get into the media, it takes a lot of research. You can do the work and make it easy for the reporter. If you leave all the work to the media, the story will take a full day or two or three to research and write. If that's the case, it becomes an expensive story, perhaps too expensive and the story is never printed. As a parts supplier you lose the business.

A worse scenario is if the reporter finds your opponent is willing to provide an alternate storyline that's quicker and easier and less work.

The News Conference

This should be used sparingly and only to announce major news or to handle an ongoing crisis. The purpose of a news conference is to demonstrate leadership and exercise control. The people holding the news conference are now the designated spokespersons or leaders. Once you hold a news conference and set yourself up as the go-to-person, you must ensure that you are accessible at all times or your leadership position will quickly erode.

Why hold a news conference?

- To exercise control
- To answer all questions
- To open a channel of communication
- To demonstrate leadership

Media Relationships

If you do not like the media, the media will not like you. If you distrust the media, the media will distrust you. If you are miserly with information, you breed distrust. If you rarely speak to the media, you are guaranteed that your project will be viewed in a bad light. But if you have a good relationship, you will get the benefit of the doubt.

B.1.4 How to Handle a Crisis

Be prepared with:

- a prearranged, accessible spokesperson and backup person who can be reached 24-7;
- an approved information kit/Web site; and
- a list of phone numbers for key personnel including home phone and cell numbers (the spokesperson should not give these numbers to the reporter but have them handy so that he or she can arrange to get information from key personnel or set up interviews with these individuals).

B. Media Training

B.1 Dealing with the News Media

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What to say to the reporter:

- a big mistake is to let the reporter lead the entire time;
- find out as much as possible about the reporter and the medium such as:
 - What's the reporter's deadline?
 - How much does he or she know about the department/project?
 - What does the reporter think tomorrow's headline will say?

Be a resource to the reporter:

- tell the reporter point blank you are a resource but are not to be quoted;
- release an approved information kit normally available during good times;
- refer reporters to a Web site to gather factual information;
- aggressively pursue spokespersons on behalf of reporters;
- insist on timely news conferences or news releases by your organization;
- always be truthful;
- you are under no obligation to divulge sensitive information. Be aware of what you absolutely cannot say and tell the reporter you can't talk about that area;
- NEVER EVER SAY: "No comment." Even prisoners of war release their name, rank, and serial number. You can release basic information that has been pre-approved for all purposes; and
- Never speculate. Be aware that reporters will try to get you to speculate. Your response should be: "I do not know that information." If the reporter then says: "But what do you think?" simply answer, "I am not aware of all the facts and I am not prepared to speculate."

B.1.5 Lessons from Walkerton

- Delays are deadly. If you do not release some information, news organizations will be forced to find or create their own story, which will be far worse than any flub you may commit.
- Be organized. Predict what can go wrong and create a news kit and get it approved in a non-crisis situation so you have it if a crisis occurs.
- Shorten the life cycle of a crisis by telling the bad news as soon as possible.
- Do not try to spin a story. Tell the truth with as much of an explanation as possible.
- Perceived cover-ups can be worse than the crime.
- Take control—news conference, spokesperson, regular (daily or more frequent) updates.
- Leave no room for speculation.

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Documents

The following documents were used in the preparation of this best practice:

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Needham, Catherine, 2002. *Consultation: a Cure for Local Government*, Hansard Society of Parliamentary Government.

London, Scott, 1995. *Teledemocracy vs. Deliberative Democracy: A Comparative Look at Two Models of Public Talk*. <www.iog.ca>

Other Documents of Interest

The following Web sites provide additional information and may be of interest to readers:

International Association of Public Participation

<www.iap2.org>

U.K. Government

<www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulations/consultation/code.htm>

Institute on Governance

<www.iog.ca>