



HARLEY HOUSE
CONSULTANTS INC



COMMUNICATIONS ISSUES

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Making Consultation and Engagement Efforts More Effective (Part 1)

Introduction

Whether it is for policy formulation; change management; program design; listening to employees, clients and other stakeholders; project management; or strategy development, effective and meaningful engagement and consultation is critical.

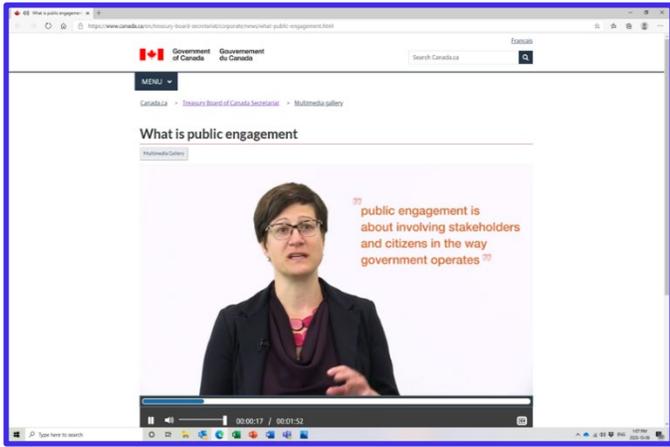
What the difference between consultation and engagement?

Public consultation is a regulatory process by which the public's input on matters affecting them is sought. Its main goals are in improving the efficiency, transparency and public involvement in large-scale projects or laws and policies. -> The Why

Public engagement is a term that has recently been used, particularly in the UK, to describe the involvement of specialists listening to, developing their understanding of, and interacting with, non-specialists. -> The How

Consultation and engagement are not about:

- Touching base with someone so you can check off a box to say you have consulted.
- Meeting with someone so that you can tell them what you are going to do.
- Asking someone for their opinion but failing to hear what they said or taking their opinion into consideration.



According to Laura Wesley, Executive Director, Consultation and Public Engagement, Privy Council Office, “public engagement is about involving stakeholders and citizens in the way government operates.” [\[Click here to watch the 2-minute video\]](#)

Digital engagement has changed the nature and scope of how we consult the public. The use of social media channels and online consultation tools has provided new ways for Canadians to participate in, learn about and interact with the Government of Canada. This shift offers expanding opportunities for engagement but also creates expectations that the

Government of Canada will engage more widely.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has further impacted how we engage with our stakeholders and partners. The Pandemic has presented us with both challenges and opportunities. Now that the in-person meetings are not possible, creative approaches are emerging that have the potential to enable more people, in a shorter timeframe, from more places across the country and around the world, to participate in ways and at times that work for them. However, this virtual engagement also poses its own set of challenges, particularly for those who cannot bridge the digital divide, or who are trying virtual technologies for the first time. The impact of fake news also needs to be taken into consideration as there is an avalanche of misinformation out there on subjects that we are consulting on.

The role of public engagement

Public engagement is an important part of the democratic process and allows the federal government to fulfill key responsibilities. It enables departments and agencies to:

- Foster information exchange and knowledge sharing to improve the understanding of issues and build relationships among interested and affected parties.
- Facilitate discussions between the government and partners, individuals, groups, and organizations, external to the Government of Canada, to provide opportunities to shape government policies and decisions.
- Consider the feedback and perspectives of individuals and groups in the development or assessment of government policies, programs, services, and regulatory initiatives to inform decisions.
- Enable informed decision-making that ultimately fulfills the mandates of government departments and agencies.

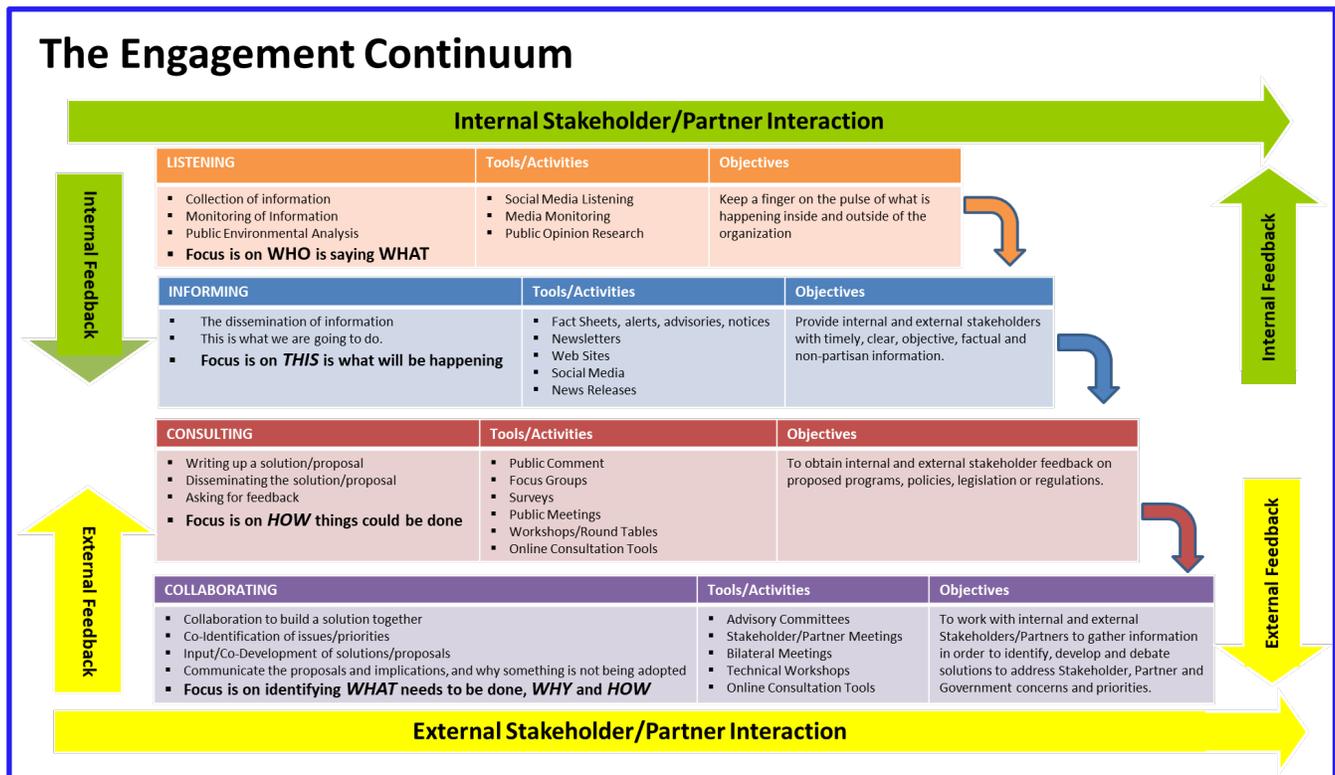
There are so many reasons for engaging and consulting, yet we do not do enough of it. And when we do consult and engage with our stakeholders and partners, we do not necessarily do it well. How can that be? Is there:

- A lack of understanding of what constitutes engagement
- A failure to clearly define roles and responsibilities.
- Limited documentation of policies and procedures.
- Inadequate training.

The Engagement Continuum

The answer is “Yes” to all the above. I believe adopting the engagement continuum is key to improving the effectiveness of consultation and engagement efforts in the federal government.

The Engagement Continuum



[\[Click here to watch a 2-minute video on the Engagement Continuum\]](#)

In this article I have attempted to frame the problem. In a subsequent [Communications Issues](#) article I will propose solutions for organizations to consider when managing their consultation and engagement efforts. In this next article I will discuss:

- The formation of an Engagement Centre of Expertise
- How to engage and consult
- Explore best practices such as Comprehensive Community Planning and Place-Based Approaches

(Dale Harley is the President of Harley House Consultants Inc., and a Certified Change Management Practitioner. He is also the author of "The 6 Relationships of Highly Effective Organizations")

At Harley House we provide our clients with actionable tools and support to help ensure the successful management of consultation and engagement efforts. Our solution is to transfer knowledge and skills so that organizations can more effectively manage their own communications and engagement efforts. We help organizations build understanding and capacity. We do not swoop in, drop a thick presentation deck on your desk and leave. We arm you with effective strategies, policies and procedures, customized tools, training, and coaching.

For more information about how to improve the effectiveness of your consultation and engagement efforts visit: www.harleyhouse.com, or contact:

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