



how to engage in civic dialogue

A Best Practices Guide for Business



Network for
Business Sustainability

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Prepared by NBS

how to engage in civic dialogue

A Best Practices Guide for Business

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Dear Reader,

Conversations about sustainability need to move into the larger population. Civic dialogue allows business to engage with citizens around sustainability issues and build the consensus necessary for appropriate and effective action.

In civic dialogues, people from all backgrounds come together to develop shared understanding around critical and often controversial issues. Businesses have traditionally played little role in such dialogues — but their involvement can help to mobilize sustainability.

This report identifies how civic dialogue differs from other forms of business outreach, and its unique ability to engage broad groups of people around undefined and challenging issues (pp. 9-10). The report shows the value of civic dialogue to business (p. 18) and provides a step-by-step guide to its implementation (Chapter 3).

Because the business role in civic dialogue has been little researched, this project is really breaking ground, and has created knowledge in a truly innovative way. Researcher Dr. Thomas Webler summarized the best academic and practical research available on civic engagement. He received some direction from practitioners: Debbie Baxter (LoyaltyOne), Paula Brand (Environment Canada), Karen Hamberg (Westport Innovations), Teresa Ko (Westport Innovations), Peter Murphy (Industry Canada) and Luc Robitaille (Holcim).

Dr. Webler presented the draft findings at a working session of leaders from the business, non-profit and academic communities in Toronto during Fall 2014. A day of vigorous discussion resulted in extensive feedback, which Dr. Webler incorporated in the final document. We thank participants at the session, particularly the other speakers: Stewart Chisholm (Evergreen), Dr. Ann Dale (Royal Roads University), Mary Pat MacKinnon (Hill & Knowlton) and Courtney Pratt (CivicAction).

This report is one of many available through NBS. Our priorities are set by our Leadership Council, a group of multi-sector organizations leading in sustainability whose names you will find at the end of this report. This group meets annually to identify the sustainability topics most salient to business. Identifying how businesses can support a national dialogue on sustainability was near the top of their list for 2013. The reports from all their past priorities are available freely on our website at <http://nbs.net/>.

I hope this report will help your organization engage in civil society dialogue around sustainability issues. Through sustainability dialogues, we can innovate, change norms and strengthen the connections within our society.



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Executive Summary

Civic dialogues are facilitated discussions that create understanding among diverse people. They can build broad-based consensus and commitment around issues that are complex and controversial. In multiple settings, they have achieved widespread change on complex issues. Civic dialogues have been used to set priorities for national-level agendas on issues such as energy (e.g. the Dutch [National Environmental Policy Plans](#)), and to address issues at regional and local levels (e.g. Canada's [Alberta Climate Dialogue](#)).

Businesses historically have not engaged in civic dialogue, and their involvement can maximize civic dialogue's impact.

This guide provides best practices for business engagement. It identifies:

- Civic dialogue's unique potential to promote sustainability, and when it is most useful
- How business participation in civic dialogue creates value for business and society
- Models and best practices for effective civic dialogues

Throughout the document, examples of civic dialogue in action identify lessons learned. The appendices provide a checklist to guide action today, along with additional resources to support the work.

A shorter executive briefing summarizes the case for business involvement in civic dialogue; it is available on the [NBS website](#).

Civic dialogues are an important tool for advancing stalled sustainability issues.

1. civic dialogues for sustainability: a new opportunity for business

Civic dialogue builds the shared understanding necessary for broader change. It can complement other forms of outreach, like stakeholder engagement and multi-sector partnerships, and has a vital role in moving issues toward sustainability.

Many models of civic dialogue exist.

Sustainability Decisions in a Democracy

Almost three decades after the United Nations' Brundtland Commission convincingly argued for a sustainable economy, the goal remains sadly distant. Western economies are strong, innovative and increasingly efficient, but population growth and increasing consumer wealth magnify the effects of consumption. Unsustainability contributes to many problems: climate change, resource depletion, species extinction, pollution, cultural harm, social conflict and public health epidemics.

Solving these problems nationally or globally requires broad social consensus on the nature of a sustainable society and how to bring it about. Without agreement

about change, we can expect political gridlock, inconsistent policies and public controversy — all things that make it difficult for business to operate.

Command and control, top-down decision-making by government cannot enable a transition to a sustainable society. Citizens have limited trust in government's ability to make wise decisions, and top-down decisions won't be relevant and effective in *every* local context.

Governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), especially foundations, have traditionally organized civic dialogues. However, governments are increasingly stepping back from driving engagement and social change, as they have fewer resources and are more polarized and less trusted. Businesses have historically played little role, but can make a major contribution (see Chapter 2).

Emergence of the Idea of Sustainable Development through Dialogue

The United Nations developed the concept of sustainable development and specified how it could be achieved through public dialogues. In 1987, the UN's Brundtland Commission published a groundbreaking report that introduced the idea of sustainable development. The Brundtland Report invited people to envision a modern society and growing economy within nature's limits.

The UN's **Rio Declaration**, adopted in 1992, specified the locally based stakeholder engagement processes needed to achieve sustainable development. It identified nine types of stakeholders that should be involved and stated that sustainability could emerge only from consensus achieved through dialogue among these diverse stakeholders. The Rio Declaration was also the origin of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development.

At the World Summit for Sustainable Development (The Earth Summit) of 2002 in Johannesburg, nations reemphasized their commitment to sustainable development, which they explicitly connected to the eradication of poverty.

What Civic Dialogue Achieves

Civic dialogues are public conversations about the common good and the kind of world we want for ourselves and our descendants. In civic dialogues on sustainability, people identify and define obstacles and opportunities for sustainability. These facilitated discussions bring members of society together to talk, learn and take action; anyone can participate, every voice is valued and all forms of knowledge are welcome.

The core of civic dialogue is the creation of mutual understanding: allowing individuals to better understand an issue and each other's perspectives. **A shared understanding is the basis for change.** Understanding supports innovative solutions, reduces outrage, increases trust and confidence, and provides a roadmap or public licence for moving forward.

Civic dialogues can achieve change that is fundamental, deep and broad. Because they are built around education and understanding, they produce thoughtful and innovative outputs. Because they are rooted in democratic processes, they have social licence and legitimacy. They use techniques that allow people to address controversial issues — such as sustainability — with less conflict. They can work at any scale, from the neighbourhood to the nation or the globe. Civic dialogues can be focused narrowly (e.g. green space in Toronto) or broadly (e.g. reducing consumption in Canada).

Throughout this report, boxes highlight the changes achieved through civic dialogue, from national policy plans to local development initiatives.

Civic Dialogue in Action: National Environmental Policy Plans (The Netherlands)

In the 1980s, the Netherlands chose to move away from command-and-control environmental regulation, preferring to set strategic environmental goals in the form of the National Environmental Policy Plan, or NEPP. The NEPP amounted to a national consensus on environmental objectives. The logic was that everyone in society — including business, government, NGOs and citizens — should be involved in setting national and regional environmental goals. Because everyone was involved in shaping the goals, everyone would also take responsibility to achieve those goals by adopting specific behaviours or policies.

The Netherlands' NEPP has been revised several times. During the first NEPP in 1989, five roundtables were set up with industry, NGOs, consumer organizations, employers' organizations and trade unions. Industrial partners included all major segments of the economy. Each roundtable set its own targets to meet the national objectives and developed its own policies for achieving those targets.

Once the national-level targets were in place and the five groups comprising the economy had consented, municipalities oversaw citizen engagement in realizing the policies. Local strategy development began in 1993, just one year after the UN conference that produced the Rio Declaration. The UN meeting influenced the Dutch process, as it emphasized substantive citizen engagement at the local level. In several cities, industry and citizens came together in government-sponsored dialogues to build a vision for key environmental goals.

Lessons learned: Plan carefully whom to involve in the dialogue. If a group is inappropriately excluded, amends are possible. The Dutch process adapted to the demand for greater public input without sacrificing earlier gains.

Source: Hofman, P. 1998. Public participation in environmental policy in the Netherlands. *TDR Quarterly Review*, 13(1): 25–30.

How Civic Dialogue Complements Other Forms of Engagement

Businesses already engage with society around sustainability, commonly through **stakeholder engagement** and **multi-sector partnerships (MSPs)**. In traditional stakeholder engagement, businesses interact with those affected by their operations. MSPs bring organizations from different sectors (e.g. businesses and NGOs) together to address common concerns.

Civic dialogue differs from these approaches, broadening the range of parties, issues, and outcomes. It can also be complementary to these other approaches, forming part of a sequence (described on pp. 11-12).

NEW PARTIES

Civic dialogue enables meaningful participation of ordinary citizens in issues relevant to all. In this way, they are grassroots democratic processes with potentially wide reach. (They may also involve experts and organizational representatives.) In contrast, stakeholder engagement usually refers to business reaching out to a specific community to address an aspect of operations that impacts them. MSPs convene only representatives of interest groups (e.g. NGOs and business).

NEW ISSUES

Traditional stakeholder engagement focuses on issues related to a specific company's effects on the community: e.g. impacts of a mining operation or factory closure. Civic dialogue looks at issues of wider interest and relevance to society, individuals and business. Issues addressed by past dialogues include biodiversity preservation, packaging and recycling, sustainable fisheries, energy policy and brownfields redevelopment.

Civic dialogue has a unique ability to grapple with issues that are controversial, with competing interests and values; and uncertain, with complex and difficult to predict outcomes. These issues require discussion, learning and agreement before action is possible; civic dialogue enables that agreement. MSPs, by contrast, pursue solutions to agreed-upon problems. (Most issues need some conversation to become defined: sometimes, this is very informal and gradual. For example, civic dialogue and MSPs are often confused because MSPs frequently begin with an informal dialogue to produce shared understanding of the problem and agreement for action.)

NEW OUTCOMES

Civic dialogue is one step removed from task-oriented problem solving. It results in understanding and recommendations for action, rather than immediate action steps. Participants are thus insulated from the pressure to form opinions on action and can more easily consider different perspectives on the problem. Participants are more receptive to hearing others' ideas, concerns, feelings and opinions. Being open to other perspectives is fundamental to innovation, and dialogue has often been shown to generate novel solutions.

Moving Issues to Solid State

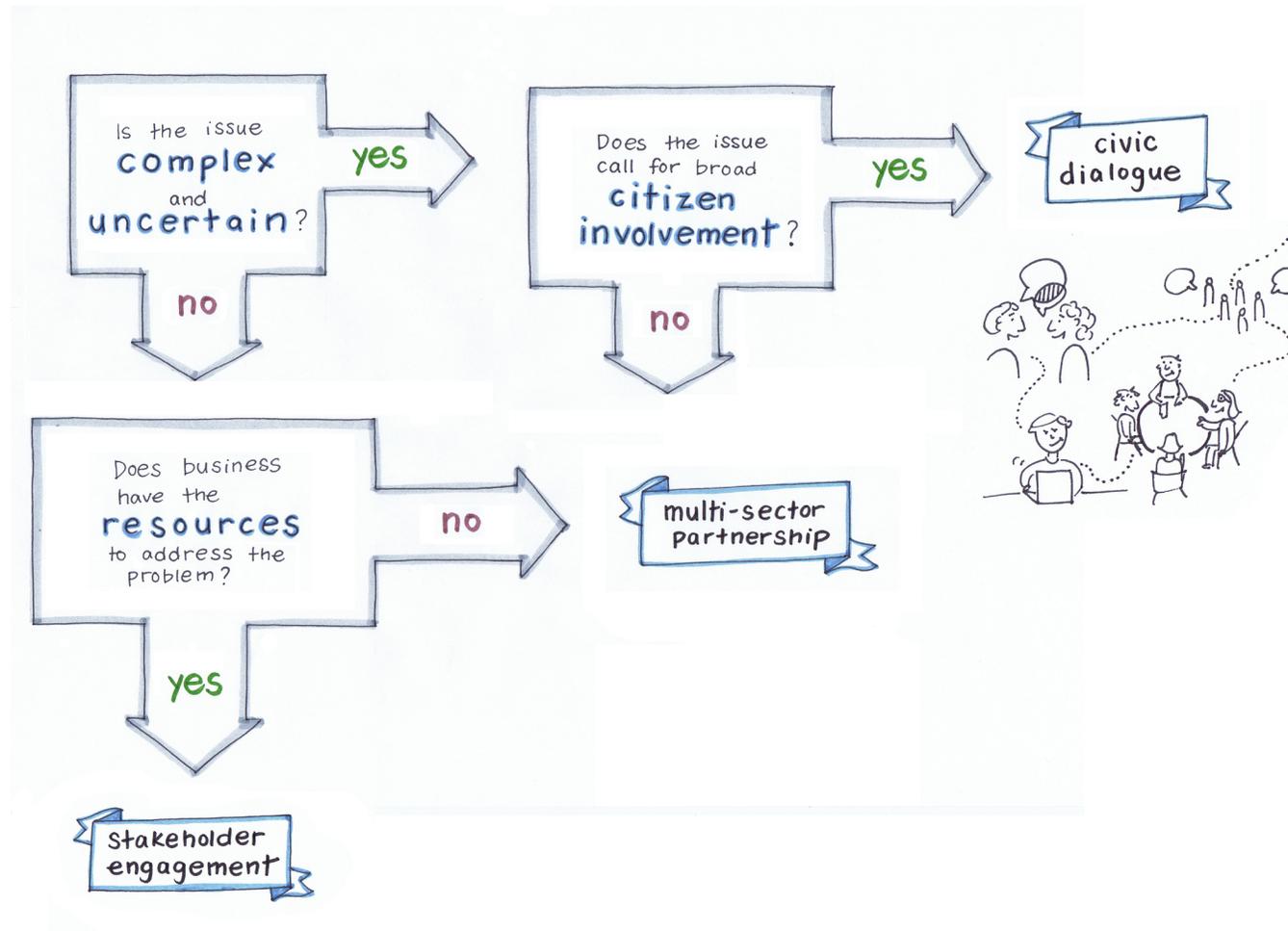
Issues that are undefined can be seen as a gas or vapour that lacks shape or form and cannot be grasped. Civic dialogue is a way to gather this vapour and compress it into a shape that has form and clarity. Once given definition, the issue can be addressed through action strategies such as multi-sector partnerships.

For more on multi-sector partnerships, see NBS's [new report](#) on such collaboration between organizations

Use Figure 1 to choose the right form of engagement for a given situation.

Figure 1

CHOOSING THE BEST FORM OF ENGAGEMENT FOR CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES



An Issue is Appropriate for Civic Dialogue if

- It is controversial, complex, and uncertain
- It demands broad citizen involvement

CIVIC DIALOGUE'S PLACE IN AN ISSUE'S EVOLUTION

Another way to think about civic dialogue's role is to recognize that we move through three stages in progressing toward sustainability: spreading awareness, reaching shared understanding and taking action (Cobb & Elder, 1972).

Stage 1: Awareness. People must have some familiarity with and interest in an issue before they will consider becoming more involved. If insufficient awareness exists, outreach education can inspire people with undeveloped interest to care.

Stage 2: Shared understanding. Civic dialogue builds mutual understanding by developing knowledge about the issue (education), promoting appreciation of others' perspectives (perspective taking) and facilitating respectful consideration (dialogue and deliberation).

"Perspective taking" helps dialogue be successful. Perspective taking is an exercise in empathy, where individuals come to understand why others think the way they do and how they justify their beliefs. Some call this the "moral imagination." Chapter 3 describes this process in detail.

Stage 3: Collective action. Shared understanding enables action, which can take many forms, including:

- **Multi-sector partnerships.** Organizations from different sectors act together on behalf of the collective interest: e.g. the Marine Stewardship Council.
- **Social movements.** Grassroots efforts create change through lobbying, organizing or education: e.g. the international grassroots movement for action on climate change.
- **Voluntary agreements.** Without legal commitments, parties agree to change their behaviours and possibly set up a self-regulation program: e.g. gas companies establish best practices for well completion.
- **Government action.** A legislative or regulatory decision-making process can gain direction and added legitimacy from civic dialogue. Examples include the Future of Health Care dialogue (p. 13) and the Nuclear Waste Management Organization process (p. 16).

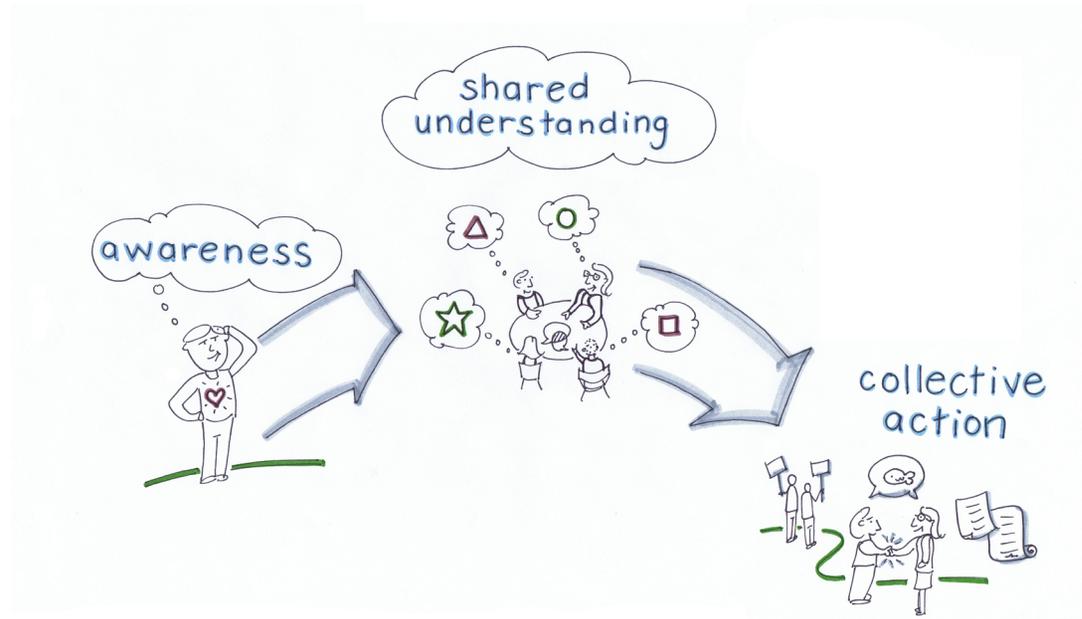
An Issue is Appropriate for Civic Dialogue if

- People are aware of the issue and interested in it
- People lack a shared understanding of the issue
- The issue needs collective action

Figure 2 shows civic dialogue's place in advancing an issue.

Figure 2

BUILDING SUSTAINABILITY: THE PLACE OF CIVIC DIALOGUE



Civic Dialogue in Action: Berger Inquiry/ Mackenzie Valley Pipeline (Canada)

In 1974, a pipeline was proposed to carry gas from the Beaufort Sea to markets in southern Canada and the United States. The federal government appointed Justice Thomas Berger to head a public inquiry into the pipeline's potential impacts on the peoples and environment of the North. The inquiry is renowned for its efforts to be inclusive. Berger met with First Nations people in the Northwest Territories and with Canadians along the proposed route. The process produced thousands of pages of reports. Berger advised the pipeline not be built, a recommendation accepted by the government.

Lesson learned: Civic dialogue that seeks input from all interested and affected parties requires an outreach strategy. To ensure accessibility, meetings may need to be held in multiple locations. Internet dialogues may help, but may not suffice. Justice Berger set a standard for treating all parties respectfully and conveying authentic interest in all points of view.

Common Models of Civic Dialogue

Civic dialogue can take many forms: there is no single “best way.” Dialogues vary in size, in organizers, in techniques used and in the emphasis on producing outputs. Most approaches use professional facilitators who help design, manage and evaluate the process.

We review three common types of civic dialogue and the complementary role of online tools. The “resources” section at the end of the document provides additional options.

TYPE 1: PUBLIC INQUIRIES AND ROYAL/PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSIONS

Description: Governments initiate inquiries and commissions to gather public opinion on particularly challenging or controversial decisions. Incorporating dialogue into these initiatives leads to more thoughtful opinions.

Business role: Businesses can participate in inquiries and commissions, but do not lead them.

Civic Dialogue in Action: Future of Health Care (Canada)

The Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada held 12 regional conversations to “learn how Canadians reconcile trade-offs inherent in sustaining the health care system.” Each dialogue had 40 citizen participants, randomly selected to provide a representative cross-section of the Canadian population. Participants were asked to consider different scenarios for health service reform developed by health care experts. They received relevant background and arguments for and against each scenario. In groups and a plenary session, they developed a vision of the health care system and worked through practical choices and trade-offs. “The cost of the dialogues was significant (\$1.3 million) but the results had a marked influence on the commission’s report released in November 2002 and on the debate that has ensued.”

Lesson learned: Regular citizens can contribute meaningfully on complex issues. “The abilities (and desire) of the general public to engage in this way should not be underestimated.... Participants in all the dialogues absorbed complicated information, learning from each other and the workbook, and applied this knowledge to make difficult choices.”

Source: Maxwell, J., Rosell, S., & Forest, P.-G. 2003. Giving citizens a voice in health care policy in Canada. *BMJ*, 326(7397): 1031–1033. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1125934/>

TYPE 2: OPEN PUBLIC CONVERSATIONS

Description: Anyone can initiate an open public conversation: government, business, NGOs, academia or private citizens. Like public inquiries, these are inclusive events, open to most who want to attend. Public conversations can accommodate tens or thousands of people, depending on the approach.

Business role: Business may lead, help plan or participate.

Models: Common types include:

- 21st Century Town Meetings. These events can involve thousands, organized at tables of 8 to 10. Each table has a facilitator, a public leader and a tool for electronic opinion gathering. (See photo below.)



<http://americaspeaks.org/resources/photos/>

- **Study Circles** and **National Issues Forums**. These techniques can engage neighbourhoods or small communities. Organizations such as **Everyday Democracy** prepare unbiased background resources to educate participants before the dialogue. These conversations may be linked to specific action plans.
- **Socrates Cafés**. These intimate discussions emphasize collaborative learning rather than consensus or cooperative action.
- **Appreciative Inquiry**. This technique — used with groups of any size — guides participants to focus on positive visions of change rather than problems and deficiencies. For instance, a **regional conversation** in the United States used this approach to design a community vision.

Civic Dialogue in Action: World Wide Views on Global Warming and Biodiversity (Global)

World Wide Views on Global Warming was a global civic dialogue, held shortly before the UN Copenhagen climate meeting in 2009. For one week, 4,000 people in 38 countries deliberated about climate change and expressed their opinions, which informed delegates' actions. World Wide Views on Biodiversity happened in 2012 with 3,000 citizens from 25 countries. The results were presented at the UN Convention on Biodiversity in India.

Lesson learned: Large international dialogues are possible through online communication.

Source: WWViews Alliance. N.d. World Wide Views
<http://www.wvviews.org/>

TYPE 3: SELECTIVE PARTICIPATION

Description: Instead of holding an open event, some civic dialogues choose participants based on their viewpoints, membership in a demographic group or other characteristics. This approach can more accurately represent society, but putting together a representative group requires expertise.

Business role: Business may lead, help plan or participate.

Models:

- **Deliberative Opinion Polls** are short-term workshops that usually occur over one or two weekends and involve dozens to hundreds of individuals. Dialogue is followed by opinion polling, with no pressure to reach consensus. The organizer and facilitator compose a final report and provide it to policy makers.
- **Consensus Conferences** and **Citizen Juries** expose a small group to intense learning and discussion over a short period, such as a weekend. Participants produce a written consensus statement, which is then usually presented to governmental officials. Past groups have addressed **consumption and the environment**, **genetically modified foods and human biomonitoring**. (A full listing of consensus conferences is available [here](#).)

Civic Dialogue in Action: National Vision (Canada)

“One weekend in June, 1991, a dozen Canadians met at a resort north of Toronto, under the auspices of Maclean’s, Canada’s leading newsweekly. They’d been scientifically chosen so that, together, they represented all the major sectors of public opinion in their deeply divided country. But despite their firmly held beliefs, each of them was interested in dialogue with people whose views differed from theirs. That dialogue was facilitated by ‘the guru of conflict resolution,’ Harvard University law professor Roger Fisher — co-author of the classic *Getting to Yes* — and two colleagues. Despite the fact that they’d never really listened to the viewpoints and experiences of others so unlike themselves and the tremendous time pressure (they had three days to develop a consensus vision for Canada), and despite being continuously watched by a camera crew from CTV television (who recorded the event for a special public-affairs program), these ordinary citizens succeeded in their mission. Their vision was published in four pages of fine print — part of the 39 pages Maclean’s devoted to describing their efforts (July 1, 1991 issue).”

Lesson learned: “When the human dimension is addressed well, when people really hear each other and learn about each other’s histories, lives, concerns and needs, all the other questions will be far easier to resolve.”

Source: Atlee, T. n.d. *Canadian adversaries take a break to dream*. The Co-Intelligence Institute. <http://www.co-intelligence.org/S-Canadaadvsariesdream.html>

CIVIC DIALOGUE ONLINE

More and more, civic dialogues are occurring online. New software enables almost any face-to-face dialogue activity to take place online. A [recent guide](#) can help organizers think strategically about how to use these online tools (Leighninger, 2011).

Popular online tools include [Granicus.com](#), [Mindmixer.com](#), [Urbaninteractivestudio.com](#), e-Dialogues at Royal Roads University, [Opentownhall.com](#) and [Openspaceworld.org](#).

Research has mixed findings on the effectiveness of online dialogues. A study comparing online and face-to-face participants in a dialogue found that the two groups learned the same amount, spent the same amount of time contributing and raised similar concerns, although they made different final recommendations (Hamlett, 2002). The online group was better at including minority views, and members felt more comfortable expressing themselves. Online communication also seemed to reduce interpersonal tensions.

However, research into online college courses has found strong dissatisfaction with the quality of dialogue in class. Satisfaction with online dialogue improved when students met face-to-face at least some of the time, which suggests that mixed modes of dialogue can be effective. Further research is needed.

Timeline

Dialogues can happen over a short and intense period of time, like a weekend, or on an extended timeline. For example:

- If processes are in place, it's possible for civic dialogues to respond quickly to an emerging event. Online platforms can enable a rapid but meaningful dialogue.
- Canada's Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) took [four years to achieve](#) a public understanding of waste disposal options. NWMO hosted meetings across the country to educate people about nuclear fuel wastes. The effort resulted in a "social licence" to deal with the waste.
- [Building understanding between different faiths](#) may take generations.

2. business's role in civic dialogue

Business is still assessing the opportunity of civic dialogue. We identify benefits and challenges to engagement.

The Business Case for Involvement

While civic dialogues have traditionally been led by government and NGOs, businesses can play an important role. This chapter identifies special considerations for businesses in civic dialogue: potential benefits to business and society, and challenges related to legitimacy.

Businesses can achieve broad sustainability goals by engaging in civic dialogue. Civic dialogues can also help business understand customers, build brand and market, and change the rules of the game.

1. **Understand customers:** Civic dialogue provides direct contact with public and customers. Managers learn about their customers' values and needs. Civic dialogue interactions are more open and meaningful than the artificial context of focus groups or customer surveys.
2. **Establish brand and expand market:** Societal beliefs affect the success of certain products. For example, public fear of genetically modified organisms can impede marketing of such food technology, while public support for sustainability makes it easy to market green products. Civic dialogue builds consensus, and participating companies can communicate their point of view.
3. **Change the rules of the game:** Businesses must understand regulatory and policy changes. Such changes are sometimes responses to changes in

social consensus. As a direct exchange among citizens, stakeholders and policy makers, civic dialogue allows business to make policy arguments directly to decision makers.

Dialogue Needed to Align Expectations: Total S.A. in Myanmar

With the United Nations Development Programme's support, the French company TOTAL S.A. began building a pipeline across Myanmar without first gaining popular support. The NGO community immediately criticized the company for empowering a repressive regime that practised slave labour. TOTAL S.A. argued it used its influence to promote fair wages, but heavy critique led to UNDP withdrawal.

Lesson learned: A civic dialogue with the international aid and development community would have helped clarify TOTAL S.A.'s intentions and might have established alternative ways of achieving the project. Civic dialogue can help companies understand how sustainability initiatives may be received by society; taking action without first engaging in dialogue invites critique.

Source: LaFrance, J., & Lehman, M. 2005. Corporate awakening: Why (some) corporations embrace public-private partnerships. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 14: 216–229.

Business Contributions to Civic Dialogue

Business offers unique and valuable contributions to civic dialogues to advance sustainability. These include:

1. **Funding, logistical and in-kind support (space, labour, technology).** Firms — even small ones — have resources unavailable to most civic dialogue participants. Civic dialogues require financial and human resources to assist with technology, logistics and facilitation.
2. **Expertise.** Businesses know about finance, regulations, marketing strategies, labour relations and technologies. They may have additional specific expertise: for example, chemists and hydrologists could aid discussions of groundwater contamination and engineers could inform discussions of transportation systems. Firms can also hire independent experts to conduct studies or organize information for the group.

More broadly, businesses understand firsthand how the economy can be made sustainable. They have experienced the repeated waves of social and technological transitions that redefine markets. Capitalism always reinvents itself, although historically many changes have been unplanned. Today's issues require that we learn from the past to design a more sustainable reinvention.

3. **Leadership in the private sector.** Thriving sustainability initiatives require private-sector assistance; supportive firms can inspire and influence other firms.
4. **Political support.** Political support helps any sustainability initiative. Elected officials and governments at all scales influence public opinion. Private firms can use connections with politicians and media to gain support for the initiatives that emerge from civic dialogue.

Business Legitimacy in Civic Dialogue

Leading a civic dialogue requires legitimacy — i.e. public confidence that the company is acting in the public interest. Companies whose products and brands are already linked to sustainability can readily play this role. Certain types of businesses are more likely than others to be seen as credible voices in a dialogue about sustainability: e.g. small businesses, family businesses, local businesses and businesses seen as benefiting the community.

Dialogues will also welcome companies that do not have an existing reputation for promoting sustainability, if they have the resources and the will to act. If a company's product and brand actually conflict with sustainability, participation can be much more controversial. Organizations with controversial public reputations will find it difficult to acquire legitimacy (and even an organization with high credibility can lose it quickly).

Participating in a dialogue, rather than leading one, requires less initial credibility. We discuss these issues more in the next chapter.

BUSINESS AS CITIZENS

Many argue that businesses have a responsibility to engage in societal issues as “corporate citizens.” It’s possible to speak of individuals and companies as citizens, with many parallel responsibilities. Citizenship responsibilities include obeying laws and customs (behaving ethically); giving back to the community through taxes and philanthropy; and participating in politics, whether by voting or lobbying. Another responsibility is shaping community and societal norms through public conversations about what the community values. Indeed, government is “of the people” when it embodies the people’s sense of shared identity.

To be true corporate citizens, corporations should participate in such dialogue. Business represents certain societal interests: e.g. employees’ interests in safe and secure livelihoods. When business does not participate in civic dialogue, an important societal perspective is missing, and missing perspectives lead to sub-optimal outcomes.

Dialogue Needed for Community Support: Lockheed Martin in the United States

Lockheed-Martin (LM) is a major military technologies company based in the United States, with a sister company in Canada. The company seeks to apply its engineering capacity to sustainability challenges. To promote such technology development, LM proposed assigning 30 engineers and substantial support resources to co-design and develop technologies with the City of Burlington, Vermont. The city would become a poster child and a marketing strategy for LM’s new line of business.

The Mayor signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the company without complete community support. Political opponents emphasized LM’s military business and successfully turned public opinion against the project. LM engineers thought they were generously contributing to the city and to sustainability, only to be attacked at public events. The Mayor’s party lost control of the City Council, and the MOU with LM was rescinded.

Lesson learned: Sustainability politics deserve careful attention. LM did not ensure that local politicians were building public support for the collaboration. LM was also vulnerable to attack because of its military arms division. Although the sustainability and military businesses were distinct, the public saw them as linked.

Source: City government official. Burlington, United States. Personal communication, June 27, 2013.

3. best practices for business engaging in civic dialogue

The remainder of this report provides detailed guidance on every step of effective engagement.

This section will guide you through involvement in civic dialogue.

We discuss:

- Different levels of involvement: leading, helping to plan or participating
- Steps of engagement: justifying, designing and implementing the dialogue
- Successful communication within dialogue

Choosing a Level of Involvement

Three roles exist in civic dialogue: leading, helping to plan and participating. Business could feasibly take on any of these roles, but each has considerations.

Leading involves responsibility for all aspects of the dialogue: framing its scope, inviting participants, distributing information, facilitating discussions and producing a summary report. Organizations choose to lead a civic dialogue — rather than just participate — because they want to ensure that the dialogue happens, and in a specific manner.

As discussed in the last chapter, leadership requires legitimacy: the public will only accept a civic dialogue as legitimate if they respect the leadership and see the dialogue as being free from manipulation.

Running a fair and open process is a feasible way for an organization to earn public trust and legitimacy, although trust accrues slowly. A fair process follows the principles detailed in this section: transparent intentions, openness to alternative views, commitment to getting the right information, willingness to defer to the group's will and commitment to the process.

Helping to plan (i.e. serving on the planning committee) is a simpler role for business. A planning committee will usually involve about a dozen organizations and will strive to include representation from all relevant sectors. Business involvement here is normal and expected. Involving all viewpoints in the planning can give a civic dialogue credibility because it is seen as well balanced.

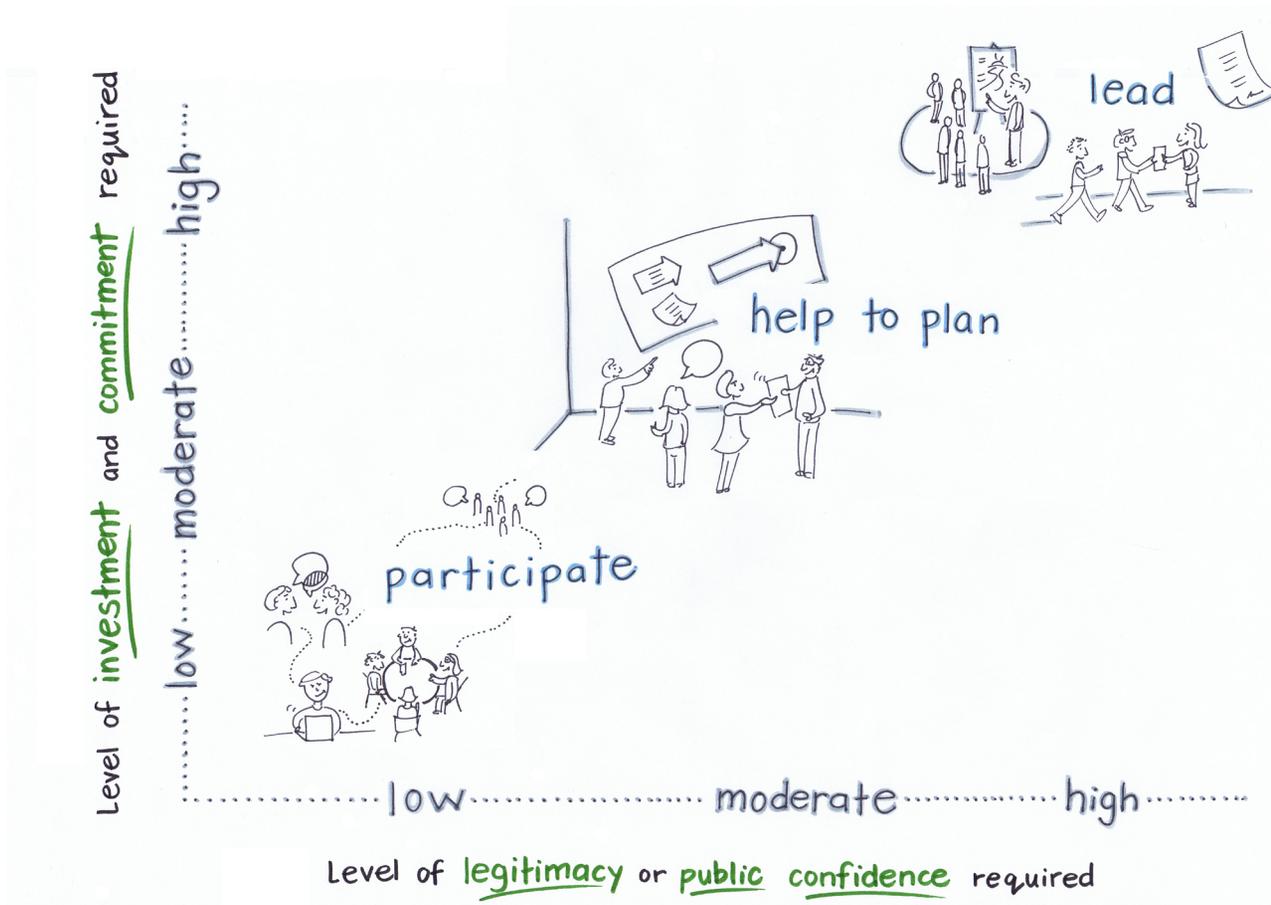
Serving on a planning committee has few risks and relatively large rewards. Your concerns are more likely to be represented in the dialogue design: e.g. the timetable and type of recommendations that emerge. The primary cost is the effort required (a commitment to planning also commits the organization to participating throughout the process).

Participating — engaging in the dialogue — imposes little risk and few costs. Participants can exit when they choose, although exiting may have some consequences.

Figure 3 shows these three roles by level of commitment and legitimacy required.

Figure 3

LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT IN CIVIC DIALOGUE



Steps of Engagement

Many models of civic dialogues are available (see Chapter 1). Here we review the steps involved in most dialogues: justifying, designing and implementing the dialogue; and communicating successfully within the dialogue. Some steps will be more important than others depending on your role (leading, helping to plan or participating). Table 1 presents the steps relevant to each role.

Table 1

CRITICAL STEPS FOR EACH BUSINESS ROLE

STEP	LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT		
	Leading	Helping to plan	Participating
1. Justify the dialogue	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓
2. Design and implement the dialogue	✓✓✓	✓✓	
3. Communicate successfully within the dialogue	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓

The number of ✓s indicates the level of importance and commitment

STEP 1: JUSTIFY THE DIALOGUE

Begin by clarifying the purpose of the civic dialogue, reaching agreement first within the company and then externally.

Figure 4

JUSTIFY THE DIALOGUE



a. Justifying the dialogue within the firm

Engaging in civic dialogue poses potential benefits and costs, detailed in Table 2. The best way to estimate these is through discussion among key staff. Case studies can also help to identify possible outcomes and their likelihood. University faculty can help explore past case studies or analyze a current situation; see [NBS Centres Community](#) for academic contacts.

Identifying possible benefits, costs and risks provides a foundation for justifying engagement in civic dialogue. Table 2 shows such considerations.

Table 2

BENEFITS AND COSTS OF INVOLVEMENT

	For Firm	For Society
Possible Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced public trust, reputation and brand Insight into customers Expanded/ new markets Innovation: e.g. reduced costs from material or process substitutions Access to decision makers Increased employee satisfaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resolution on controversial issues (changed public attitudes) Widespread public engagement in sustainability Increased collaboration
Possible Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff time Financial commitment Exposure to new rules and regulations Controversy; loss of public trust and reputation Alienation of shareholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If it goes poorly: reinforced negative public attitudes If it goes poorly: less likelihood that other businesses will participate in future sustainability dialogues Risk and costs shifted instead of reduced

Also consider:

- Is this civic dialogue consistent with the company's sustainability plans?
- Could the dialogue threaten core operations?
- What precautions are possible? (see sidebar)

Decide on the desirable level of commitment: e.g. how long a process you will support and what resources you will invest. In a dialogue, you don't want to end participation without warning, but stating limitations upfront is acceptable.

Handling Confidentiality and Proprietary Information

Participants often worry about confidentiality: that comments made during the process may reach the media and be interpreted out of context. To reduce this risk, invoke the [Chatham House Rule](#), which states that "participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed." This rule is designed to protect participants and to create a space for open exchange, although policing behaviour outside the process is impossible.

Ensure that organizers and participants understand the company's limitations in sharing proprietary information. But recognize that such withholding can be controversial: for example, the public may be interested in the ecological and health effects of a company's innovations. There are alternatives to the complete release of information.

b. Justify the dialogue to potential participants from outside the firm

Participants in civic dialogue from outside the firm will have their own reasons and goals for engagement. They will also compute the likely gains or losses differently.

The organizer must justify involvement to a broad scope of participants. Normally this will happen through informal conversations, where the organizer works with participants to reach consensus on the dialogue's purpose and goals. A mediator can help. Once agreement is reached, develop a consistent message.

A dialogue's framing affects whether participants are able to justify their engagement; even the name can be important (see next example).

Civic Dialogue in Action: Citizen's Panel on Energy and Climate Challenges (Canada)

The City of Edmonton, Alberta created a citizens' panel of 66 randomly selected citizens to discuss Edmonton's goals of sustainable energy and carbon neutrality. As input, the City commissioned a draft plan for energy transition. The process designers also prepared a Citizens' Handbook that described city energy use and policies. To ensure accuracy and avoid bias, the content was vetted by a diverse group of experts, including industry representatives. During six all-day meetings scheduled over three months, the panel heard from government, private business and university scientists. Meetings were closed to the media, but open to private-sector observers. In the end, the panel reached strong (90 per cent) agreement on some of the principles outlined in the draft plan; the government is reviewing their recommendations.

Lessons learned: Providing credible, non-biased and appropriate documentation and research on energy and climate change to Edmonton citizens was essential.

Issue framing (description) affects the nature and quality of the civic dialogue. This dialogue focused on the interdependence of energy and climate challenges. This framing resonated with the citizen panelists and made the dialogue more accessible than a single lens of climate change.

Source: Mary Pat MacKinnon, private communication; Alberta Climate Dialogue website <http://www.albertaclimatedialogue.ca>.

Justifying Dialogue: Tasks

- Clarify dialogue value and goals within the company
- Clarify other participants' goals
- Negotiate differences and reach consensus on focus and goals

STEP 2: DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT THE DIALOGUE

This stage provides the foundation for communication and understanding.

Figure 5

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT THE DIALOGUE



a. Engage participants (“Who”)

A successful dialogue recruits all relevant voices and perspectives. Dialogues may pursue inclusion by being open to all, or use scientific sampling to select a small set of people who represent society (p. 15). Online tools let civic dialogues invite participation from everyone in a city, province, territory or nation (p. 16). But people and groups who are already outspoken and engaged are the most common participants.

Be sure to include those parties who are most affected. To reach disadvantaged populations, it may be necessary to provide compensation for travel or time.

Regarding whom to send from the firm: sending a senior manager indicates the firm takes the dialogue seriously. Managers and technical staff often have especially valuable knowledge. One person may not sufficiently represent a firm; a team may be better. Sending a public relations specialist may be tempting, especially when a dialogue could become controversial, but other participants may view the firm as primarily wanting to pacify the public and protect itself.

Try to keep the same individual involved throughout the process; any transitions should be seamless. Participants should be authorized by the company. Reporting back regularly can help build company support for compromise.

b. Plan timetable (“When”)

Evaluate the political landscape before scheduling the dialogue. Consider upcoming “policy windows,” or opportunities for change, and plan the timetable to produce output at these times. For example, the World Wide Views on Climate Change project (p. 14) occurred just prior to a round of international climate change talks.

If they happen simultaneously with controversial political decisions, civic dialogues can become political issues. This can pose a risk to participating organizations. Organizers should pay attention to the timing of the civic dialogue relative to other political decisions. The future is always uncertain, but public relations departments can assess political implications, or an independent consultant can be hired to assess the political risk.

c. Determine dialogue location (“Where”)

“Where” relates to geographical scoping and meeting location. Dialogues sometimes focus on a specific geographical area: e.g. a dialogue about development plans in a valley. Determining the relevant geographical focus is part of defining the effort’s purpose.

Meeting location matters because space can represent power and may unintentionally send a message of exclusion. To be safe, most civic dialogues are held in public civic spaces, such as libraries, town halls, schools or public auditoriums. Internet-based tools permit virtual interaction (although not everyone has Internet access or feels comfortable interacting that way).

d. Plan the structure (“What”)

Be creative in design. There is no “right way” to conduct civic dialogue. Organizers can draw from many examples and resources (see Chapter 1 and “Resources” at end of report). The Puget Sound Georgia Basin Ecosystem Conference (p. 30) shows such innovation, where a traditional academic conference became an intensive civic dialogue.

Participants should help plan the structure, through both the overall process design and the agenda’s content and structure.

e. Resolve staffing and set rules for engagement

Dialogues need staff to handle logistics and a professional third party to facilitate.

An important role for facilitators is enforcing the “rules of engagement.” These rules should be clear and oriented toward ensuring that the process is fair and the conversation seeks to produce accurate knowledge. Deciding how to make decisions and move on is particularly important. Commonly accepted rules exist, and most trained facilitators employ them routinely.

f. Bring in the right information

Information is a vital input into dialogue, used to characterize the problem and the possible solutions. Staff can gather and distribute information, but participants and leaders will need to identify the information needed and the appropriate sources. Many sources — not just “experts” — are valuable.

For example:

- Local people have place-based and experience-based knowledge.
- Lay monitoring groups (e.g. watershed management councils) may have useful data.
- Companies can contribute experience-based knowledge and factual information about materials, industrial processes and ecological/health effects.
- Policy briefing documents can provide information about the range of possible policies or decisions.
- Commissioning new data may be necessary.

Avoid censoring or filtering out information. Instead, allow the dialogue participants to assess the reliability of information for themselves.

g. Adapt, but at the right time

Orchestrating a dialogue can be like navigating a boat through changing currents. Steer, but don’t change course with every event. Civic life is dynamic, and a distant news event may lead participants to view the dialogue differently.

Changes may be necessary to the participants, the timetable, the meeting location, the process design or the meeting agendas. You may also need to reconsider the dialogue itself when:

- the mission is no longer relevant;
- the political environment has shifted the costs and benefits or
- new information has made parts of the dialogue irrelevant.

Designing and Implementing Dialogue: Tasks

- Engage participants
- Plan a timetable
- Determine dialogue location
- Plan the structure: draft a process design document and agendas
- Hire staff to handle logistics and a facilitator to ensure dialogue is fair and effective
- Set rules for engagement
- Bring in the right information
- Be prepared to adapt

As a dialogue leader: Periodically, evaluate public and participant sentiments to help guide steering. Gather information either informally or formally (e.g. via questionnaires). Be transparent about the rationale for changes and share the information gathered.

As a participant: Recognize that ending participation without warning can destroy trust (National Research Council, 2008). State any limitations initially and inform other members of the group if you are contemplating an end to involvement.

Civic Dialogue in Action: Puget Sound Georgia Basin Ecosystem Conference (United States)

Pollution in Puget Sound, on the West Coast of North America, threatens the annual \$147 million fishing and shellfish industries, the \$9.5 billion tourism industry and health of the waters.

Environment Canada and Puget Sound Partnership (Washington State) hold a biennial conference on the ecosystem. Conference participants include scientists, tribal government officials, resource managers, community leaders, educators and students.

In 2009, the format was redesigned from an academic conference to an event that allowed for more dialogue. More than 50 per cent of the attendants spoke publicly at the conference. A “graphic facilitator” prepared large murals that visually captured the content of the plenary sessions. Field trips offered a different context for dialogue.

The conference was widely seen as a successful dialogue. It facilitated information sharing, development of new partnerships, and cross-national and cross-sectional dialogue.

Lesson learned: Be creative! Avoid becoming trapped in preconceived notions or historical traditions. Conferences need not follow traditional models. A graphic facilitator produces easily digestible output and can continue the conversation even after the formal event is ended.

Source: Puget Sound Georgia Basin Conference. 2009. Post-conference report on the planning, implementation, and impact of the 2009 Puget Sound Georgia Basin ecosystem conference. Accessed on 20 June 2013 from: <http://www.psp.wa.gov/downloads/documents/FINALConferenceReportApril92009.pdf>

STEP 3: COMMUNICATE SUCCESSFULLY WITHIN DIALOGUE

We close this chapter by focusing on communication, the core of civic dialogue. Communicating successfully can be challenging, especially around complex issues or among diverse people.

These recommendations draw on insights into human nature from scholars of public participation and public policymaking. We address fairness, effectiveness, the use of persuasion, common pitfalls and trust.

Figure 6

COMMUNICATE WITHIN DIALOGUE



a. Ensure the dialogue is fair

People often use fairness to evaluate civic dialogue. Fairness emerges from the idea that all citizens are equal. The notion of fairness appears in legal decision-making procedures such as public hearings, elections and legal process. Civic dialogue must provide fair opportunities for people to speak and shape group conclusions.

Equal treatment doesn't mean that everyone speaks for the exact same time, just that everyone has an adequate

opportunity to contribute. Participants have different resources, skills, experiences and interests; treating everyone with radical equality does not serve the interest of producing well-informed decisions. People who are more affected by a decision and those who have greater knowledge should speak more. However, scientists or professionals who presume that their knowledge is superior to citizens' "local knowledge" may be seen as arrogant.

All participants should have an opportunity to:

- access the dialogue, in person or online;
- shape the agenda: i.e. what is discussed, for how long and in what order;
- speak and listen; and
- influence group conclusions and decisions.

Good facilitators use techniques, such as a set of ground rules, to help ensure fairness (Kaner, 1996).

Fairness also involves the distribution of costs and benefits in society: e.g. the location of risky facilities in poor neighbourhoods. Past decisions can affect present dialogues because oppressed people may seek redress for past inequities.

b. Converse effectively: recognizing four kinds of talk

Dialogue involves four "kinds of talk," and each must be dealt with differently (Habermas, 1979).

- i. **Talk about words:** What was meant? Experts can clarify technical terms. But when participants speak different languages or come from different cultures, other words become confusing. "Cultural differences" also arise across ages, careers and organizations.

To be effective:

- Realize that others use words and concepts differently; seek to understand the intent underlying the words.
- Avoid jargon and provide translation when multiple languages are used.

- ii. **Talk about facts:** What is true? Scientific "facts" and evidence are familiar concepts. But other kinds of facts also exist. "Local knowledge," based on intimate familiarity with a place, is also a basis for facts: e.g. a farmer's knowledge of soils on a farm or First Nations people's knowledge of ecosystems. This "evidence" can be difficult to evaluate; it is also impractical to evaluate every factual claim. As a result, civic dialogues often assume local experts and scientific experts are competent sources of knowledge.

To be effective:

- Access both expert resources and local knowledge.
- Validate information when possible, and be open to multiple interpretations. Ensure that information supports factual claims.
- Sanction fraud or misrepresentation (National Research Council, 2008).
- Help to make people's assumptions transparent.

iii. **Talk about social norms:** What's appropriate? Civic dialogues also discuss what views and actions fit with society's guiding values and norms (e.g. when can eminent domain properly be invoked?). They raise questions about fairness, justice, morality, power and influence. These conversations can become heated because they involve people's core ideas of what is right and good. Such questions are the essence of politics and can be approached either through a lens of unity and consensus-building or through adversarial competition (as unfortunately often happens in government).

To be effective:

- Ensure that everyone is allowed to express an opinion. Set conversational rules that create a safe space without personal attacks.
- Social scientists can help by characterizing people's beliefs and values (e.g. value tree analysis). These tools can focus the conversation on productive topics.

iv. **Talk about sincerity:** Who is speaking genuinely?

Civic dialogue participants also assess each other's sincerity and authenticity. Are people expressing their "true" feelings, or strategically misrepresenting themselves? Discussing sincerity can seem like an attack; people feel criticized when they hear: "You don't mean that, you just want us to think that you feel that way." Sincerity must be discussed, however, because participants must know whether they can trust each other to follow through on commitments.

To be effective:

- Promote personal reflection.
- Ask for evidence of past behaviour and confirm the status of promises.
- Examine factors that could limit your own ability to fulfill promises. Be transparent and honest; some privacy or strategy is expected, but too much sacrifices legitimacy.

v. **Adopt complementary communication strategies.** Some strategies will enhance any communication.

To be effective:

- Listen respectfully (look people in the eye, repeat what you heard, incorporate their input when possible).
- Speak concisely and clearly (be aware of the time, express yourself efficiently and effectively).
- Speak about your own experiences and opinions, not those of others.

c. Persuade appropriately

In dialogue, we often seek to change others' beliefs, attitudes or preferences. Since antiquity, scholars have seen the skilled use of argumentation, or persuasion, as central to a healthy democracy (Gastil, 1993).

But persuasion has limits. Civic dialogue doesn't allow coercion: e.g. threats and bribes. Persuasive skill is a kind of power that can be used for good (e.g. to persuade people to support the collective good) or for bad (e.g. to persuade people to support a plan that harms them). Participants and the facilitator must police the use of persuasion.¹

Strong commitment and extensive expertise can both lead to inappropriate domination. Civic dialogues are not business operations and cannot be managed similarly. "Servant leadership" can be highly effective at achieving your outcomes while also building strong support and legitimacy (Greenleaf, 1970/1991). In servant leadership, leaders create conditions that enable others to function to their highest capacities.

To be effective:

- Pursue the collective good.
- Practise servant leadership.

¹ In contexts where democracy is fundamentally adversarial (such as in the US Congress, during elections or in public hearings), each person has the right and responsibility to argue as effectively as possible for his or her interests and then to "let the court of public opinion decide." But in a setting where democracy is primarily directed toward producing social consensus, persuasion ought to only be used to argue for one's sincere idea of the collective good. To paraphrase the German philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, "One should not argue for what is good for me, but only for what is good for all." In other words, it is not wrong to attempt to get others to see things the way you do provided that you sincerely believe that doing so is in the public good.

d. Avoid common pitfalls

Organizers may need to overcome two well-known problems: polarization and the bandwagon effect.

In polarization, people with moderate views who do not want to join a group opinion may adopt more extreme views as a kind of counterbalance. The danger: People are not speaking authentically and conflict artificially increases.

The bandwagon effect occurs when undecided participants go along with the majority without fully discussing their concerns. The danger: Important ideas may not receive adequate consideration. This effect is particularly dangerous for oppressed minority groups.

To avoid these problems:

- Ensure that arguments are supported with sound reasons and valid evidence.
- Build common ground on fundamental moral agreement.
- Make emotional appeals only to promote the public good.
- Use disagreements to focus analysis and promote learning.

Living with Stereotypes, Public Fears and Expectations

Some participants in civic dialogue may view business skeptically or critically, voicing complaints such as:

- *"Business is opposed to regulation."*
- *"Business will engage in greenwashing to win public legitimacy."*
- *"Companies only care about making a profit."*

Stereotypes set expectations. But they can also serve as a starting point for productive conversation. If businesses are attacked, they should not challenge their critics' credibility. Instead, civic dialogue practitioners recommend:

- Continuing the conversation
- Making consistent claims
- Avoiding personal criticisms
- Understanding critics' perspectives
- Finding ways to build common ground

e. Maintain trust

Trust is central to successful communication and relationships. It is an evaluation of the intention and predictability of future behaviours. Trust emerges from consistent behaviour and promises kept.

Trust is a valuable asset, difficult to gain and easy to lose (Slovic, 1993). Research shows that many activities earn trust, but each gain is small. In contrast, many single actions can rapidly eliminate trust.

To be effective:

- Ensure that people's expectations of you are accurate.
- Only make promises that you are prepared to keep.
- Be explicit about what you are promising and what you are not promising.
- Fulfill your commitments.

Communicating within Dialogue: Tasks

- Ensure the dialogue is fair
- Converse effectively: recognize 4 kinds of talk
- Persuade appropriately
- Avoid common pitfalls
- Maintain trust

4. conclusions

This paper identifies how forward-thinking businesses can be involved in powerful civic dialogues.

Civic dialogues about sustainability are broad conversations about how to achieve technological and social innovation in a way that lightens our dependence on non-renewable resources and reduces by-products discharged into the global biosphere.

In these conversations, people discuss their hopes and their fears. They make sense of changes that are coming and changes that are already here. And people mobilize to take actions that protect what they hold most dear and to improve their lives.

Historically, firms have played an understated role in civic dialogues. This paper shows ways business has successfully participated in civic dialogue in the past and provides frameworks to help businesses consider how they can organize or participate in civic dialogue in the future.

Participating in conversations with the public, other businesses, NGOs and government can build broad consensus for sustainability initiatives. The potential of civic dialogue to advance sustainability is just beginning to be realized.

This paper closes with a checklist for action and a list of additional resources, to assist you in civic dialogue.

Checklist for Action

This checklist briefly recaps the decisions and recommendations covered in this document.

1 Decide whether civic dialogue is the right form of public engagement							
<p>Civic dialogue is appropriate if</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The issue is controversial, complex and uncertain The issue demands broad citizen involvement <p>Civic dialogue is also appropriate if</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People are aware of the issue and interested in it People lack a shared understanding of the issue The issue needs collective action 							
2 Decide what level of involvement is best							
<p>Leading is appropriate when your company's:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal is to ensure that the dialogue happens, and in a specific way Level of legitimacy, or public confidence, is high Level of commitment to the process is high <p>Helping to plan is appropriate when your company's:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal is to influence the dialogue design, without overall responsibility Level of legitimacy is moderate or better Level of commitment to the process is moderate: i.e. planning and participating throughout the dialogue <p>Participating is appropriate when your company's:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal is to engage in dialogue, increasing mutual understanding Level of legitimacy is low or better Level of commitment to the process is low 							
3 Follow steps of engagement	Relevance of step (depending on your level of involvement)						
Step 1: Justify the dialogue	Relevant When:						
<p>Identify the costs and benefits for your organization. Review the list on p. 25 with your staff, and seek to identify the likelihood — and importance — of different outcomes.</p> <p>Clarify other participants' goals for the dialogue.</p> <p>Negotiate differences and reach consensus on focus and goals.</p>	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Leading</td> <td style="text-align: right; padding: 2px;">✓✓✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Helping to Plan</td> <td style="text-align: right; padding: 2px;">✓✓</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Participating</td> <td style="text-align: right; padding: 2px;">✓</td> </tr> </table>	Leading	✓✓✓	Helping to Plan	✓✓	Participating	✓
Leading	✓✓✓						
Helping to Plan	✓✓						
Participating	✓						

Step 2: Design and implement the dialogue	Relevant When:
<p>Recruit the right participants. Outside the firm, try to recruit all relevant voices and perspectives — especially those parties who are most affected. Such inclusion supports legitimacy and innovation. Decide also whether the event will be open or selective (p. 15). Select company representatives to the dialogue who have valuable knowledge and are strong communicators.</p> <p>Plan timetable. Evaluate the political landscape and time dialogue outputs for upcoming “policy windows” (opportunities for change). Consider whether a dialogue is likely to be enmeshed in controversy.</p> <p>Determine dialogue location: both the relevant geographical space and the meeting location (usually a public civic space).</p> <p>Plan the structure. Many formats exist (see pp. 13-16 and "Resources" on p. 41). Be creative: there is no “right way” to conduct dialogue.</p> <p>Hire staff to handle logistics and a facilitator to ensure dialogue is fair and effective. Establish rules of engagement.</p> <p>Bring in information about the problem and the possible solutions. Many sources can be valuable: e.g. local people can contribute valuable place-based and experience-based knowledge.</p> <p>Adapt, but at the right time. Don’t change course with every event, but recognize that change may be necessary: to participants, timetable and process. Gather input and be open about what’s happening.</p>	<p>Leading ✓✓✓ Helping to Plan ✓✓ Participating</p>
Step 3: Communicate successfully within dialogue (selections)	Relevant When:
<p>Ensure the dialogue is fair. All participants should have an opportunity to access the dialogue, shape the agenda, speak and listen, and influence decisions.</p> <p>Be effective in conversation (four "kinds of talk")</p> <p>Realize that others use words and concepts differently. Avoid jargon and provide translation if necessary. (Meaning)</p> <p>Get the right information by accessing diverse sources: expert resources and local knowledge. Validate information when possible. Share information widely. (Facts)</p> <p>Ensure that everyone is allowed to express an opinion. Set conversational rules that create a safe space without personal attacks. (Norms)</p> <p>Promote personal reflection. Assess others’ sincerity; be transparent and honest. (Sincerity)</p> <p>Persuade appropriately: Pursue the public good and practise servant leadership.</p> <p>Avoid polarization and the bandwagon effect: Support arguments, build on moral agreement, use emotional appeals only to support the public good and use disagreement to promote learning.</p> <p>Maintain trust: Ensure that people have accurate expectations of you, make only promises that you are prepared to keep, and fulfill your commitments.</p>	<p>Leading ✓✓✓ Helping to Plan ✓✓✓ Participating ✓✓✓</p>

The number of ✓s indicates the degree of relevance

Resources

ORGANIZATIONS AND WEBSITES SPECIALIZING IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD) is the best starting place for resources. NCDD maintains and regularly updates an excellent and exhaustive Resource Center webpage at <http://ncdd.org/rc/>. Highlights:

- A beginner's guide for dialogue and deliberation: <http://ncdd.org/rc/beginners-guide>
- A helpful guide to choosing a dialogue approach ("Engagement Streams"): http://www.ncdd.org/files/NCDD2010_Engagement_Streams.pdf
- A table summarizing 10 techniques for civic dialogues: http://ncdd.org/rc/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/AS_delib_methods_matrix.pdf

Canadian Community for Dialogue and Deliberation offers regional news and connections at <http://www.c2d2.ca>.

Viewpoint learning was founded by scholar Daniel Yankelovich. It focuses on holding dialogues among stakeholders on difficult issues to build trust and enable public decision making. Firms also use viewpoint learning internally to deal with challenging issues. <http://www.viewpointlearning.com/>

Canadian Policy Research Network's archived website reports the outputs of different citizen engagement processes, on topics from youth engagement to societal values. <http://www.cprn.org/theme.cfm?theme=109&l=en>

The Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University is the base for **deliberative opinion polling**, which was invented by scholar James Fishkin. <http://cdd.stanford.edu/>

The Jefferson Center is an initiative led by scholar and philanthropist Ned Crosby, who developed the **Citizen Jury** approach to public deliberation. The center supports the use of Citizen Juries worldwide. <http://jefferson-center.org/>

The Charrette Institute provides training and other resources to promote the use of **charrettes**, collaborative design efforts which seek to build cooperation and action rapidly among a community or stakeholder group. <http://www.charretteinstitute.org/>

The **National Issues Forum Institute** supports forums for community-scale public deliberation. The Kettering Foundation funds informational resources for the forums, which are designed to be non-partisan. <http://nifi.org/>

The **Public Conversations Project** facilitates dialogues about divisive issues. <http://www.publicconversations.org/>

A **certificate program** on Dialogue, Deliberation and Public Engagement began at Kansas State University in September 2013. <http://www.dce.k-state.edu/conf/dialogue/>

RESOURCES FOR ONLINE DIALOGUE

A useful guide is *Using online tools to engage — and be engaged by— the public*, by Matt Leighninger, published by the IBM Center for the Business of Government. <http://www.businessofgovernment.org/report/using-online-tools-engage-public>

e-Democracy.org is a non-profit that promotes online town halls and community issue forums. <http://forums.e-democracy.org/>

A recent Pew Charitable Trusts report assesses the effect of the Internet on civic engagement: *Civic engagement in the digital age*. <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Civic-Engagement.aspx>

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about the research

NBS's work on this topic was inspired by the NBS Leadership Council, which gathers annually to identify the top sustainability challenges for business. Dr. Thomas Webler wrote this detailed guide and an executive briefing: "Civic dialogues on sustainability: A business briefing." Both are available on the NBS website: <http://nbs.net/knowledge/civic-dialogue/>.

About the researcher: Dr. Thomas Webler is a research fellow at the Social and Environmental Research Institute (United States). Dr. Webler's research specializes in bringing local and expert knowledge together in collaborative, democratic ways to produce innovative solutions to problems of environmental management and risk decision-making. He has published extensively and served as the consultant to the US National Research Council committee that wrote the book *Understanding risk: Informing decisions in a democratic society*. He is also co-author of *Fairness and competence in citizen participation* (Kluwer Academic Press) and *Risk, uncertainty, and rationality* (Routledge).

Ms. Jennifer Shepherd ([Living Tapestries](#)) designed the **images** for the project.

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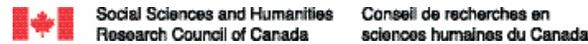
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We welcome feedback on the guide and on your experience with civic dialogue. Please share your impressions and stories with us. Post a comment on NBS's website or email us directly at info@nbs.net.

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A Canadian non-profit, the Network for Business Sustainability (NBS) produces authoritative resources on important sustainability issues with the goal of changing management practice. We unite thousands of researchers and professionals worldwide who believe passionately in research-based practice and practice-based research.

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