

## Local Government Certificate Programs Dalhousie University

### **Citizen Engagement and Consultation**

#### **1. Description of the course**

Academics and practitioners have been discussing, defining and debating democracy since the times of Aristotle and Plato. And even after 2,000 years of discussion, the final words have not yet spoken. In particular there are differences of opinion about the value of participation in a democracy. The vision that was dominant in the 1980s and 1990s was that democracy is simply a means of choosing who will govern—a choice between competing elites, as one political scientist phrased it—and that citizens were needed only to cast a vote.

The idea of citizen engagement and consultation is by no means new to local governments. Indeed, municipalities have long been in the forefront of citizen participation in Canada, initiating a variety of innovative approaches and enjoying many successes over the past 30 years. If citizen participation has been around for so long, however, why are we still trying to figure out what works? How can engagement and consultation be made most effective? This course will address these questions.

#### **2. Learning objectives**

- Discuss why citizen engagement and consultation are of benefit to government administrators
- Explain the positive and negative elements of citizen participation
- Discuss the context and history of citizen participation in local government in Canada
- Explain why citizen engagement is important for local government and why it is back on the agenda
- Demonstrate how the idea of citizen engagement fits with theories of representative democracy and deliberative democracy
- Locate citizen engagement in the policy/planning process
- Describe ways in which governments communicate with citizens
- Discuss traditional and new methods of consulting with citizens
- Explain the role of citizen engagement in the policy development process
- Outline the legislative framework for citizen participation in the municipal planning process
- Explain the challenges recent changes to the municipal government environment have created for citizen engagement and consultation
- Describe how citizen engagement can be initiated and by whom
- Explain some of the ways participation has been conceptualized
- Discuss some of the considerations that are involved in designing an effective engagement

process

- Discuss the importance of evaluating an engagement process and the different methods of evaluation
- Identify and describe four consultative designs
- Outline appropriate methods to use for each of the four consultative designs
- Assess the benefits of, and options for, involving citizens in planning an engagement
- Assess the impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs), and the Internet in particular, on the philosophy and organization of government
- Discuss the implications for citizen engagement of the change from a Fordist to an ICT paradigm
- Identify and assess the major stages of e-government
- Discuss the major factors that inhibit citizen participation in politics
- Explain how ICTs might improve democratic participation and contribute to the development of strong democracy
- Explain how ICTs and e-government/e-democracy have not yet lived up to their promise in terms of increased citizen engagement
- Outline the evolution of public or civic journalism and its potential to advance citizen engagement
- Identify, explain and assess the democratic implications of the changing media landscape
- Address the media needs and interests of some key communities of interest
- Illustrate how the media can work for you

### 3. Organization of the Course

**Module 1** “Citizen Engagement and Democracy” This module begins by examining why local government administrators and politicians would want to engage citizens. It then discusses the history and theoretical framework of citizen engagement in local government, and explores why engagement is back on the governmental agenda. It also examines two visions of democracy and how citizen involvement fits into these visions.

**Module 2** “Communication and Legislation,” looks at the importance of good communication in an engagement or consultation exercise. It examines the ways in which governments communicate with citizens, and discuss the ways in which citizens can communicate with governments in the policy-development process.

**Module 3** “Challenges in Designing Effective and Democratic Citizen Engagement,” discusses how to create opportunity for engagement and how to design the engagement processes to be effective. It also outlines different typologies. It ends by outlining the most important elements of an engagement design—defining the objectives clearly, deciding who to invite and evaluating the process so that lessons can be learned from each experience.

**Module** “Practising Effective and Democratic Citizen Engagement and Consultation,” discusses design templates. The objectives of these templates differ, and the objectives will play a major role in the activity selected to engage citizens. The four objectives associated with these templates are communication, listening, participation and empowerment. This module provides a brief discussion of a wide variety of activities associated with these design templates.

**Module 5** “E-Government and E-Democracy,” examines information and communication technologies and new and exciting technology-based ways to engage citizens. The module examines how new technologies have changed the structures of organizations and the view of how government should be organized and deliver public services. The module assesses whether the promise of these new technologies has been attained, and concludes that although it is *possible* to use technology to enhance democracy, this has not yet occurred.

#### 4. Text and/or readings used

##### Required Readings

Katherine A. Graham and Susan D. Phillips, “Making Public Participation More Effective: Issues for Local Government,” in K.A. Graham and S.D. Phillips (eds), *Citizen Engagement: Lessons in Participation from Local Government* (Toronto, ON: Institute of Public Administration of Canada, 1998), pp. 1-18.

Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Chapter 1, “Democracy and Justice,” pp. 16-26.

Francis Abele, Katherine Graham, Alex Ker, Antonia Maioni and Susan Phillips, *Talking with Canadians: Citizen Engagement and the Social Union*. (Ottawa: The Canadian Council on Social Development, 1998), “Part II: Reviewing the Canadian Experience with Citizen Engagement,” pp. 14-27.

Katherine Graham, et al., *Urban Governance in Canada* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Canada, 1998), “Chapter 6: Interest Groups and Public Participation.”

Matthew Mendelsohn and John McLean, “Getting Engaged: Strengthening SUFA through Citizen Engagement,” in Thomas McIntosh (ed.), *Building the Social Union: Perspectives, Directions and Challenges* (Regina, Saskatchewan: Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy, 2002).

Also available at: <http://qsilver.queensu.ca/~mattmen/papers/sippengage.doc>

Desmond M. Connor, “Public Information/Relations/Participation?” *Constructive Citizen Participation*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (March 1995), pp. 213-216.

Susan D. Phillips and Katherine A. Graham, *Citizen Engagement: Lessons in Public Participation from Local Government* (Toronto, ON: Institute of Public Administration of Canada, 1998), Chapter 11, “Conclusion: From Public Participation to Citizen Engagement,” pp. 223-240.

Alfred Tat-Kei Ho, “Reinventing Local Government and the E-Government Initiative,” *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 62, No. 4 (July-August 2002), pp. 434–444.

M. Jae Moon, “The evolution of e-government among municipalities: rhetoric or reality?” *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 62, No. 4 (July-August 2002), pp. 424–433.

Matthew Hale, Juliet Musso and Christopher Weare, "Developing Digital Democracy: Evidence from Californian Municipal Web Pages," in Barry N. Hague and Brian D. Loader (eds), *Digital Democracy: Discourse and Decision Making in the Information Age* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 96–107.

Sharon Docter and William H. Dutton, "The First Amendment Online: Santa Monica's Public Electronic Network," in Roza Tsagarousianou, Damian Tambini and Cathy Bryan (eds), *Cyberdemocracy: Technology, Cities and Civic Networks* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 125–152.

Jay Rosen, *What Are Journalists For?* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), Chapter 9, "What was Public Journalism," pp. 262-280, and Chapter 10, "Conclusion: What are Journalists For?" pp. 281-300.