

**ENHANCING WORKING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ENVIRONMENT CANADA
and
ENVIRONMENTAL NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS**

WORKSHOP

MARCH 21, 2003

**(hosted by the Canadian Environmental Network (CEN),
sponsored by Environment Canada)**

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This workshop was the first of its kind and was successful in initiating a meaningful and open dialogue among staff of Environment Canada (EC) and members of Canada's environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS). Overall, the workshop was highly constructive and mutually enlightening, generating many useful suggestions and fostering a healthier relationship between EC and ENGOS.

Workshop Goals

- ◆ Create a forum of discussion between EC and ENGOS in order to learn from each other
- ◆ Identify challenges in public consultations
- ◆ Recommend ways for EC to enhance the involvement / input of ENGOS in the areas of federal policy, program development, and decision-making processes
- ◆ Provide consistent methodologies to increase effectiveness in consulting with ENGOS
- ◆ Develop a follow-up process between EC and ENGOS

Workshop Structure

The day-long workshop began with a welcoming introduction from Assistant Deputy Minister Diane Carroll and explanatory introductions to its process and goals by Ann Dostaler of EC and Brigitte Gagné of CEN, followed by a presentation of the history and new governance structure of the CEN by Steve Rison, Chair of the CEN Transitional Board of Directors.

The day included:

- ◆ presentation of priorities for EC
- ◆ mapping of the consultation process from the perspective of EC and from CEN
- ◆ identification of challenges
- ◆ breakout groups – constructing a successful public consultation
- ◆ vetting solutions
- ◆ presentations on consultations experiences – successful and less successful
- ◆ development of a follow-up process

Summary of Challenges

The following list is a synthesis of the challenges and barriers identified to meaningful ENGO participation in federal and international consultation, programs and delegations (see Appendix 1 for detailed comments):

1. Unequal influence and representation among stakeholders – under-representation of ENGOs
2. Lack of funds for full ENGO participation from beginning to end of the process
3. Lack of early engagement of ENGOs in process design (terms of reference)
4. Lack of charitable status for many ENGOs leads to restriction of resources
5. Insufficient notice of upcoming consultations resulting in inadequate preparation
6. Systemic language barriers preventing the full participation of francophones
7. Frustration with the outcomes of consultations, results of efforts unknown or unavailable to public
8. Participation of interested parties restricted by highly technical nature of consultations

Summary of Proposed Solutions

The following list is a synthesis of proposed solutions to the challenges identified above (see Appendix II for detailed comments):

1. Develop a common and consistent consultation process across government departments
2. Ensure ENGO involvement from the beginning (development of the terms of reference) to the end of the process
3. Develop a process that ensures equal influence and representation among the stakeholders
4. Pressure higher levels of government to provide sufficient funding for full ENGO participation
5. Establish an effective and methodical process of communicating consultations outcomes to ENGOs and general public
6. Establish protocols for bilingual consultation process (i.e. simultaneous release of documents in both official languages, simultaneous interpretation at consultation)
7. Provide better preparation for ENGO delegates (clearly identify expected results of the consultation, history of the process, terms of reference, list of experts and sufficient background information)
8. Build alliances (formal and informal) between and among ENGOs, government and industry

Appendix 1

Specific Comments about Challenges

1. Both EC and ENGOs share frustration in getting their agenda on the agenda of other departments and agencies
2. Other constituencies (i.e. industry) have better established (and non-transparent) access to EC departments than ENGOs
3. To compensate for our lack of resources and influence compared to industry, we rely on good process for the purpose of fairness. This is why we are so insistent on process and access to other ministries.
4. It often appears that there are no results from the consultation processes (hence, one must question if limited ENGO time and resources might be better spent on other means of action)
5. There is a general disenchantment with government – a questioning of fair process
6. Reports from consultations are not adequately communicated to the public
7. Means of financial support for meaningful participation of ENGOs is inadequate
8. Reimbursement can be a major issue (*sometimes it takes 6 months to be reimbursed*)
9. Sometimes, huge documents requiring printing are sent to delegates only days before a consultation (paper and printer resources can be scarce at the home of a volunteer)
10. There are often enormous inconsistencies among consultation processes
11. Clear guidance on what is expected in report deliverables is often not forthcoming
12. The huge amount of collective material being presented to ENGOs for comment from the various consultations is overwhelming
13. The limits of science must be recognized – we need to move policy forward in absence of the certainty of science
14. Translations of consultation prep documents are often late
15. There is a severe lack of funds for ENGO preparation
16. Environmentalists are outnumbered by industry at consultations on average 10-1
17. Need common ground rules at EC and CEN for deliverables

18. Information gaps (i.e. specific people with answers) are not provided in preparation
19. Delegates don't have time or resources to write up report after consultations
20. Representation of francophones is restricted systemically
21. Jargon is often prohibitive to the participation of all interested groups
22. Commitment to ENGO participation from government needs to be long-term
23. Consultations reports need to be available to general public
24. Lack of charitable status for many ENGOs leads to restriction of resources, barrier to participation
25. All contacts with corporate sector need to be disclosed
26. EC needs to keep in mind that delegates volunteer their time
27. Inviting only ONE ENGO to a consultation isolates that ONE person
28. Difficult sometimes to identify an appropriate ENGO on very specific consultations
29. Balanced and impartial facilitation is needed at consultations
30. Amount of money available to EC to conduct the consultation is often very limited
31. The limited focus of consultations disallows the consideration of contributing circumstances (the bigger picture)
32. Use of volunteer sector initiative in competition for funding allows other NGOs to compete for the same money
33. We are restricted by the limits imposed by current political realities (i.e. our southern neighbour, NAFTA)
34. The level of knowledge requested for participation in some consultations is imposing to many groups

Appendix II

Specific Recommendations

1. To affect the agendas of other ministries, we should take advantage of the fact that they MUST consult on their sustainable development strategy
2. To address the expense, alternatives to face-to-face meeting consultations should be creatively explored (i.e. web-based, teleconference, videoconference)
3. Means for augmenting and maintaining the administrative base of ENGOs should be considered (i.e. assistance with charitable status)
4. Establish a process that ensures that francophones can participate from beginning to end
5. Ensure that consultation goals and process to be used are clear from beginning to end
6. Documents should be provided to clearly outline background, science, and consultation goals
7. There needs to be a process of evaluation and follow-up (that engages participants)
8. It is important to select qualified ENGO reps from qualified organizations
9. EC needs to be aware of the services offered by ENGOs and by CEN
10. Active recruitment of ENGOs to CEN should be encouraged by EC
11. CEN should be involved in the development of departmental consultation processes
12. The building of relations and trust among EC staff and members of ENGOs should continue to be pursued
13. Alliance building among our institutions should be pursued
14. ENGOs can support EC and other gov't depts. in bringing programmes to the public
15. CEN should review the priority plans submitted to Cabinet
16. CEN should develop a consultations training module for new (and existing) ENGO participants
17. Obstacles need to be disclosed early on (i.e. political objection, provincial-federal jurisdiction)
18. Trust must be built through honest and open disclosure of positions, constraints

19. ENGOs should be engaged with EC in consultation planning (i.e. facilitation, agenda development)
20. We should strive for long-term, consistent engagement of specific ENGOs on a file
21. The Canadian Standards Association “Guide to Participation” should be consulted for ideas to assist the development of our consultations process
22. Youth should be engaged from pre-consultation (i.e. research) to the end
23. Government should use ENGOs as allies
24. Government should use ENGOs to identify ‘red flags’ early in the consultative process
25. Consider a different style of meeting (i.e. sensitive to the differences of participants; circle format; avoid agenda cramming; participatory)
26. For optimum preparation and engagement of ENGOs, EC Risk Assessors should contact CEN at the preliminary draft assessment phase
27. CEN should monitor CEPA website regularly and report news to members
28. Provide list of EC experts early in the process
29. There should be no impediments (i.e. charges) to access information
30. Ensure outcomes of a consultation process are received by ENGOs at the same time as other stakeholders
31. Establish informal semi-annual Gov’t / ENGO discussions about upcoming issues
32. Establish relationships with industry stakeholders