Blueprint 2020: Changing Demographics, Participation, and the Smart Use of Technology

A useful adjunct is
http://thepublicservant.ca/what-students-think-of-blueprint-2020/

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http://www.ipac.ca/blueprint2020-Winners#top5
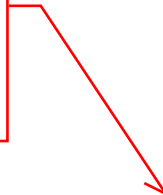
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Executive Summary

Canada's population is aging, and research shows that seniors use the internet and modern technologies less than younger populations. This results in a digital divide in Canada, with seniors left in the dark. To ensure seniors are able to adequately participate in dialogue with the Canadian Public Service moving forward, organizations will need to utilize universal technologies when engaging and consulting this group. This will lead to increased participation, and result in improved policy outcomes overall.

Introduction

Aging in the Canadian population is one of the main drivers of the Blueprint 2020 vision; it is why change must occur. The Canadian Public Service (CPS) has increased the use of modern technologies to better communicate with Canadians and ensure citizens' voices are heard in order to provide them with appropriate services. However, statistics show that age is one of the main contributors to a Canadian digital divide, ostracizing many seniors from online and technologically advanced forms of citizen participation. Modern technologies, such as the internet, have already changed the way the government communicates to citizens, replacing universal technologies which are available to everyone, such as community meetings and mail. If Canada really wants to make sure that all seniors are heard moving forward, then a commitment to the current mixed-methods approach to consultation and engagement should be promoted, protected, and actively practiced.

Background

Blueprint 2020 aims to find innovative ways of improving the Canadian Public Service, and outlines a number of factors that are creating the pressure that drives this desire for change. One of the main drivers outlined is the changing demographics of Canada.[1] In 2013, just over 13% of Canadians were seniors, defined as those 65 or older.[2] Projections show that by 2020, this ratio will grow to 18%, and continue to grow, up to 25% in the mid 2030s, and even higher after that.[3] This represents a significant demographic shift, albeit in the long term. This is not a grey tsunami, but more of a glacier.[4] In short, seniors will comprise an increasingly larger proportion of the adult population than they do today or ever have in the past.

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[1] Government of Canada. 2014. "Blueprint 2020." Accessed October 22, 2014.
[2] Statistics Canada. 2014. "Distribution of the total population by age group, observed (1921 to 2013) and projected (2014 to 2063) according to the low-growth (L) scenario, medium-growth (M1) and high-growth (H) scenarios, Canada." Accessed November 11, 2014.
[3] Ibid.
[4] University of Manitoba Evidence Network. 2011. "ElderlyCosts: Don't Blame the Elderly for Increasing Health Care Costs." Accessed November 10, 2014.

Destination 2020 responds to this trend by incorporating more "modern technology for a modern workplace."[5] This includes adopting new technologies into the workplace, many of which incorporate internet and online services. One of the main objectives of this strategy is to help the CPS connect with Canadians by improving communication and allowing citizens to express their views about current services or the services they desire. The Department of Justice breaks this view of public participation down into engagement and consultation:

- Citizen engagement is framed as focusing on principles and getting public feedback at the early stages of policy design.[6]
- Citizen consultation is more in depth, and seeks to get more detailed opinions from people directly affected by a proposed or current policy.[7]

Both are important, and in most cases, a mixture of both practices is employed in public participation initiatives.

Today, the use of technology is hailed as a breakthrough in regards to how the CPS provides information back to Canadians. Blueprint 2020 clearly points out that Canadians value information and the CPS is responding by making everything available "at Canadians' fingertips".[8] This has already become quite popular. For example, Health Canada's official website provides links to official Twitter and Facebook pages, and offers multiple ways to receive email alerts and other computer alerts with drug recall information.[9]

Utilization has been widespread among departments, with Destination 2020 proudly reporting that "44 organizations have committed to enhancing their use of web tools such as social media to improve service to Canadians".[10] Today's citizens have access to more information than ever before, and the CPS is actively improving its online presence to better communicate to Canadians. However, an inherent flaw with this strategy rests with the challenge of providing balanced access. Communication is a two-way street, and it is dangerous if both inflows and outflows to citizens are predominantly internet-reliant.

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[5] Government of Canada. 2014."Destination 2020." Accessed October 22, 2014.
[6] Department of Justice. 2013. "Policy Statement and Guidelines for Public Participation." Accessed November 18, 2014.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Government of Canada. 2014."Blueprint 2020."
[9] Health Canada. 2014. Homepage.
[10] Government of Canada. 2014. "Destination 2020."

The Problem

The phrase "digital divide," is something most Canadians likely do not pay much attention to, and probably consider an issue of years past. This term, according to Pippa Norris, refers to the difference in the kinds of information and communication technologies to which different people have access.[11]

In 2009, over 80% of Canadian adults were online.[12] A recent Canadian study, however, found that as age increased, internet use drastically decreased, and concluded that along with other factors, mainly income, age accounts for the very real digital divide in Canada. [13,14] These researchers agree with the results of multiple studies indicating that without access to the Internet, individuals are marginalized and unable to compete in the technically advanced world.[15] Barth and Veit take this a step further and argue that governments have become overly focused on digitizing information and making an online presence. [16] These researchers say that governments' heavy focus on online technology essentially excludes those who are not online, and precludes citizens from fully embracing the participation process.

The concern is that the government is becoming increasingly internet-reliant in communicating *to* a population that cannot use the technology in commensurate measure. However, the CPS is focused on using the internet and other modern technologies to "better" communicate to Canadians. This is demonstrated by an increased web presence, which disseminates information. In regards to public participation (getting information *from* Canadians, as opposed to *to* Canadians), however, universal methods, such as phone surveys, are still employed. Ensuring that citizen participation continues to include seniors requires a measured response to the fact that seniors do use technology differently. The CPS must accept that if Canada really wants to engage seniors, the adoption of an alternate strategy of ensuring participation, reliant less on purely internet based methods, and leveraging more universal means, including but not limited to landline telephone surveys, public meetings, mail surveys, and in person interviews, is essential.

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[11] Pippa Norris. 2001."Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide." (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

[12] Michael Haight, Anabel Quan-Haase, and Bradley A. Corbett."Revisiting the digital divide in Canada: the impact of demographic factors on access to the internet, level of online activity, and social networking site usage." *Information, Communication & Society* 17, No. 4 (2014).

[13] Haight, Quan-Haase, and Corbett 2014.

[14] Mary K. Allen. 2013. "Consumption of Culture by Older Canadians on the Internet." *Statistics Canada,* Accessed November 18, 2014.

[15] Haight, Quan-Haase, and Corbett 2014.

[16] Martin Barth and Daniel J. Veit, 2011."How Digital Divide affects Public E-Services: The Role of Migration Background." Paper presented at the meeting of Wirtschaftinformatik, Zurich.

Proposal

The Canadian Public Service should maintain its current mixed-methods approach to citizen participation in order to ensure that seniors are adequately engaged and consulted on policies. While the trend of disseminating information has become largely the domain of the internet, Don Lenihan argues that when talking about engagement, "real progress requires public participation".[17] Real public participation means carefully targeted, mixed-method, qualitative and quantitative approaches that ensure all citizens are heard.

The CPS currently uses a number of approaches to engage citizens; some of the more popular tools include telephone interviews, mail surveys, email surveys, focus groups, and public meetings.[18] It is well accepted within the CPS that using more than one means of engagement (mixed-method) is preferable, as this increases the response rate.[19] For example, it is preferable to employ both an email and telephone version of a survey. This facilitates participation for those on both sides of the digital divide.

It certainly appears that availability of new technology is overshadowing considerations related to suitability and user adoption. Perhaps, the CPS is responding with too much enthusiasm. Internet based communication does reach more people and can get more opinions back to decision makers, typically, at a lower cost than traditionally-used universal methods of public participation.[20] However, the demarcation line of who is, and who is not included in the process is drawn along the digital divide, leaving a disproportionate number of seniors disengaged. Statistics, such as time spent on pages, number of comments posted on social media pages, and the number of pages looked at on a website are being measured and reported as proof of engagement.[21] The fact is, however, that this priority ignores those without access to the internet creating what is at best, a "false positive".

This is not a new phenomenon, as all new technologies evince varying degrees and rates of adoption. Everett Rogers' "Diffusion of Innovations" demonstrates that when new technologies are made available, there are always innovators who quickly adopt the technology, followed by the early adopters, and an

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[17] Don Lenihan. "Rescuing Policy: The case for public engagement." (Ottawa: Public Policy Forum): 40.

[18] Public Works and Government Services Canada. 2013."Improving Respondent Cooperation for Telephone Surveys." Accessed November 18, 2014.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Yunliang Meng and Jacek Malczewski. "Web PPGIS-Usability and Public Engagement: A Case Study in Canmore, Alberta, Canada." *Journal of the Urban & Regional Information Systems Association* 22, No. 1 (2010).

early and late majority.[22] At the end of the adoption cycle are "laggards, " who, for various reasons, such as age, income, or simple desire, do not adopt the technologies (or adopt them very late). [23] In this case, Canada's seniors make up a disproportionately large portion of the laggards, and their voice is being marginalized as a result.

In other countries, such as New Zealand, the movement towards electronic participation has already yielded disappointing results.[24] Surveys from that country showed that e-government was actually unable to widen participation or increase "genuine policy consultation," and recommended "targeted cost-cutting," in new communication methods.[25] This suggests that instead of constantly investing in new technologies, financially strained governments should treat funding of electronic participation as any other expenditure, and consider lowering funding when favorable outcomes are not realized.

The serious risk for policy makers is that as the share of Canadian seniors grows, and many are left out of the participation process, downstream issues will mount. Studies show that participation is not only important from a social responsibility perspective, but actually helps improve results of proposed policies, reduces future conflict, aids in legitimizing decisions, and makes implementation of policies significantly easier.[26, 27] As well, public participation serves as an early warning sign, exposing potentially serious flaws or oversights in proposed policies.[28]

Though it may appear counter intuitive, the CPS should actively proliferate the use of universal methods of engagement in order to create essential balance in respect to market reach. These can include landline telephone surveys, mail-in surveys, public meetings, focus groups, citizen assemblies, and other methods that have been sidelined in the past decade.[29] This will not be an easy task, especially in times of government cutbacks and the active promotion of new technologies as a low-cost means of communication. For example, a single focus group can cost anywhere from $1500 to over $7000.[30] The word "cost," in fact, appears over 150

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[22] Everett M. Rogers. 2003. "Diffusion of Innovations, 5th edition." (New York City: Simon and Schuster).

[23] Rogers 2003.

[24] J. Norman Baldwin, Robin Gauld, and Shaun Goldfinch. "What Public Servants Really Think of E-Government." *Public Management Review* 14, No. 1 (2012).

[25] Baldwin, Gauld, and Goldfinch 2012, 119.

[26] Anahita A.N. Jami, and Philip R. Walsh. "The Role of Public Participation in identifying stakeholder synergies in wind power project development: the case study of Ontario, Canada." *Renewable Energy* 68 (August) (2014).

[27] Archon Fung. "Varieties of Participation in Complex Governance." *Public Administration Review* 66 (Special Issue: Collaborative Public Management, December) (2006).

[28] Jami and Walsh 2014.

[29] Department of Justice 2013.

[30] Health Canada. 2013. "2012-2013 Departmental Performance Report." Accessed November 18, 2014.

times in Health Canada's "policy toolkit for public involvement in decision making". [31] To convince this department, for example, that the value, or effectiveness, of a series of public meetings is worth the increased cost could prove difficult.

Measuring Improvement

To ensure the CPS sees the value in potentially more expensive forms of non-digital participation, there would have to be measurable outcomes that could be reported. One of the main goals of participation is to improve the results of proposed policies and make implementation easier, while reducing conflict. [32] Measuring seniors' assessment of a policy after implementation, using universal technologies (ie. In person interviews, mail, telephone, etc.), would provide the CPS valuable and more representative feedback. This would certainly allow the CPS to better understand and respond to the citizens they serve. By using a mixed-methods participation model, including both innovative and universal communication technologies, the organization performing the study would be able to engage a broader universe of citizens, including seniors.

It is essential that costs be measured or related to the value delivered from the client perspective. By ensuring that citizens, especially seniors, on both sides of the digital divide can share their views, the CPS would be able to ensure policies more effectively respond to the needs of all citizens. This information could be used to show taxpayers and others who question costs the value of a life-cycle costing approach versus a single-event costing approach.[33] This means that while the initial cost of getting essential data from seniors may be higher, providing policies that are more effective and successful as a result of incorporating feedback from the community would lead to future savings through more efficient and generally better policies.

On a "cost per response" level, modern technologies may allow for greater access to more people at a lower cost. However, cost should also be assessed in terms of useable responses and the cost of one useable response.[34] An American study, for example, found that because mail surveys had a response rate of six times that of online surveys, the cost per usable response was actually lower than the online survey.[35] While this information is American, the idea that what appears to be an increased cost may in fact lead to decreased costs can easily be translated to

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[31] Health Canada. 2000. "Health Canada Policy Toolkit for Public Involvement in Decision Making." Accessed November 18, 2014.

[32] Jami and Walsh 2014.

[33] Sieglinde K. Fuller, and Stephen R. Petersen. 1996. "Life Cycle Costing Manual: for the federal energy management program," *US Department of Commerce.* Washington: Government of United States.

[34] Robert M. Resnick. 2012. "Comparison of Postal and Online Services: Cost, Speed, Response Rates and Reliability," *Education Market Research Report.*

[35] Ibid.

Canada. For the CPS to say it is paying significant sums of money and not getting responses from Canadians does not help the image of the public service or help in getting more Canadians participating. Paying and getting results will.

Surveys using more universally accessible technology could also be used to ask seniors of their preferred methods of participation - do they prefer telephone surveys, public meetings, mail surveys, and so on. This would demonstrate acknowledgement of the existence, and severity, of the digital divide for many seniors, recognizing that the latest technologies make little difference in their patterns of participation. This will also help recognize changes in the use of technology, and ensure the CPS continues to use universally available means of communication. This is not a static problem, and as the glacier that is aging moves along, the CPS will constantly have to re-evaluate and re-assess the situation to ensure people are still participating effectively.

Conclusion

Canada is aging, and while modern technologies are emerging to help the Canadian Public Service better communicate with Canadians, a digital divide exists in Canada, marginalizing the voices of many citizens, mainly seniors. Canada's current mixed-methods approach to public participation is well suited to target citizens on both sides of the digital divide to provide the feedback needed to ensure that policies are executed effectively, efficiently, and with minimal conflict. This approach to facilitating participation should be maintained, even with the internet and other technologies taking over much of the communications sphere. However, it must be carefully monitored and adjusted to effectively shift in parallel with audience media preferences, capabilities, and access. Alignment of the methodology of communications to audience capabilities is a critical dimension in developing policy and retaining process relevance.

The Canadian Public Service must measure changes in the levels of participation of seniors over time and the benefits of their inclusion in policy decisions. A model premised on a balance between universal and technologically advanced modes of participation can enhance the process for a large portion of the population. This will result in benefits for citizens, policy developers, those implementing policies, and all stakeholders. Moving forward, the CPS must embrace the notion that "smart use of technology" does not necessarily mean incorporating more technology; it means harnessing the use of modern technology only where it is beneficial, and utilizing other, universal, means where it is not.[36]

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[36] Government of Canada. 2014."Blueprint 2020."

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