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Consultation with Regional Rural and Isolated People and
their Communities

Consultation Document 2nd Edition

A 'living document' about consulting regional, rural and
isolated people, written by the people, for the people.

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DEFINITIONS

"CONSULTATION" AND "NEGOTIATION"

con.sult *v.t.* **1** To ask advice or information of. **2** To have regard to, as interest or duty; consider. **3** *Obs.* To contrive or devise. - *v.i.* **4** To ask advice. **5** To compare views; take counsel: with. [*<L* *consutare*, freq. of *consulere* seek advice] Synonyms: confer, deliberate . Confer suggests the interchange of counsel, advice, or information; *consult* indicates almost exclusively the receiving of it. A man *confers* with his associates, *consults* a physician or a dictionary.

ne.go.ti.ate *v. .at.ed, at.ing* *v.i.* **1** To treat or bargain with others in order to reach an agreement. - *v.t.* **2** To procure, arrange or conclude by mutual discussion: to *negotiate* an agreement. **3** To transfer for a value received; sell; assign, as a note or bond. **4.** To surmount , cross or cope with (some obstacle) See synonyms under TRANSACT. [*<L* *negotiatu*s, pp. of *negotiar*i trade *< negotium* business]

RECOMMENDED CONSULTATIVE AND NEGOTIATION PROCESS.

1. Initial recognition that a problem exists
2. Survey to establish:
 - a. that a problem really does exist.
 - b. that the perceived problem is the real problem.
 - c. what are the range of effects the problem causes?
 - d. that those affected want the problem to be solved.
 - e. what are the consequences of not solving the problem?
 - f. that the problem, in its present form, is able to be solved.
 - g. that there are possible resources available to solve the problem.
 - h. who is best able or available to solve the problem?
 - i. what processes might be most appropriately used in solving the problem?
2. Formulate a “preferred process” to solve the problem and identify and locate any possible or available resources.
3. Refer outcome/s of the survey, the preferred processes to be used and the possible resources available, to recipients/participants and/or communities for their consideration, modification and approval.
4. Gather and/or organise resources.
5. Implement negotiated strategies and agreed actions to solve the problem.
6. Periodically review any short term, emergent outcomes to test progress where required or requested, and advise participants/communities of any such outcomes and progress.
7. Advise participants regularly of the progress in solving the problem and negotiate any needed or desirable changes, especially where the activity covers a protracted period.

CONSULTING THE PEOPLE

The use of consultation is mentioned in many, government departments' guidelines, as it is in numerous private and other agencies' descriptions, as being their preferred process of operation when communicating with rural and isolated people and their communities.

It is usually stated that the effective delivery of extension and other services to people and their communities is dependent on the use of a satisfactory consultative process thus enabling the accurate articulation of the needs of people and their communities to be precisely conveyed and met.

Such statements could be taken to include and guarantee a self-imposed set of standards for measuring the effectiveness of the consultative process. There appears to exist a serious question as to how often this process is conscientiously followed and just how often any "self-imposed" standards are substantially realised.

It is quite apparent to regional, rural and isolated people and their communities, that the consultative process, as it is practised by many government departments and other agencies, leaves a great deal to be desired.

First, rural people who merely by virtue of their location are 'isolated' have stated that they are unhappy with the methods government officers and other agents use to transact their business, when consulting with and within their community.

Consultation is quite often viewed by the regional, rural and isolated communities as merely "superficially involving" community representatives, rather than giving representatives final control over the outcomes and processes concerned. At best, current consultation is often seen as a process which offers a few limited choices within a predetermined and prescribed framework.

At its' worst, it is regarded as a conspiratorial process designed to facilitate agreement to plans and outcomes already made or decided on their behalf.

LIMITATIONS OF CONSULTATION

Some of the fundamental limitations of the consultation processes are:

1. failure of governmental officers and other agencies to accept that "consultation" should involve "negotiation".
2. failure of governmental or agency officers to consult broadly enough within a community to take into account the structural and cultural nature of the community or the various factional views within that community.
3. the ad hoc nature of visits by different departments and agencies and the frequent and burgeoning demands placed on individuals and/or communities to enter into a consultative process. This is compounded further by insufficient notice of impending visits being given, duplication of processes and times that do not consider or accommodate the consultee needs and time frames.
4. The 'one size fits all' nature of such consultations leaves many unheard opinions and responses that are not considered by decision makers. Consultation needs to be tailored in a culturally appropriate manner to elicit information, ownership and cooperation.
5. agendas are being disclosed after the commencement of a meeting and without sufficient notice or opportunity for input into the Agenda. Participants are required to appraise and provide constructive evaluation of proposals immediately. Frustration and ill-conceived acceptance is quite often the outcome, with rejection of the proposal not being unusual when time for reflection has occurred.
6. lack of training or a commitment to gaining a substantial understanding of the culture and specific aspects of regional, rural and isolated needs on the part of departmental or agency personnel.
7. The predetermination of solutions by those personnel allegedly conducting consultations can lead to poor quality outcomes for all bar, the select few. Such *faux* consultations routinely ignore cultural and demographic determinants and issues.

8. poor acceptance on the part of governments, agencies and personnel, of the variation of manifestations and effects of a similar problem. When this is examined against differing demographic and geographic conditions, the resultant need to formulate differing solutions to problems to cater for this variation is often denied for the expediency of one simple, even if it is a substantially inappropriate, solution.
9. suspicion that sensitive or confidential information might be transferred between departments and/or businesses, to the detriment of the consultee.
10. poor communications on the part of government departments and agencies by a lack of understanding of the real issues and the implications and impacts of particular decisions on part, or all of the community.
- 11. a perceived reluctance or sometimes, even a lack of ethics seems to exist against completely exposing the entire agenda of a government department, agency and of their officers, when approaching individuals or the community for consultative purposes.**
12. Concern exists that some government departments, agencies or their officers have their own agendas set prior to approaching a community and as a result hear only what they wish or want to hear, expect that their plans and inappropriate procedures and outcomes should be accepted and ratified by the community, resulting in lack of ownership and poor long term results.
13. no attempt to forecast detrimental long term effects of the possible social dislocation, the erosion of quality of life and other such intangibles, is conscientiously endeavoured.



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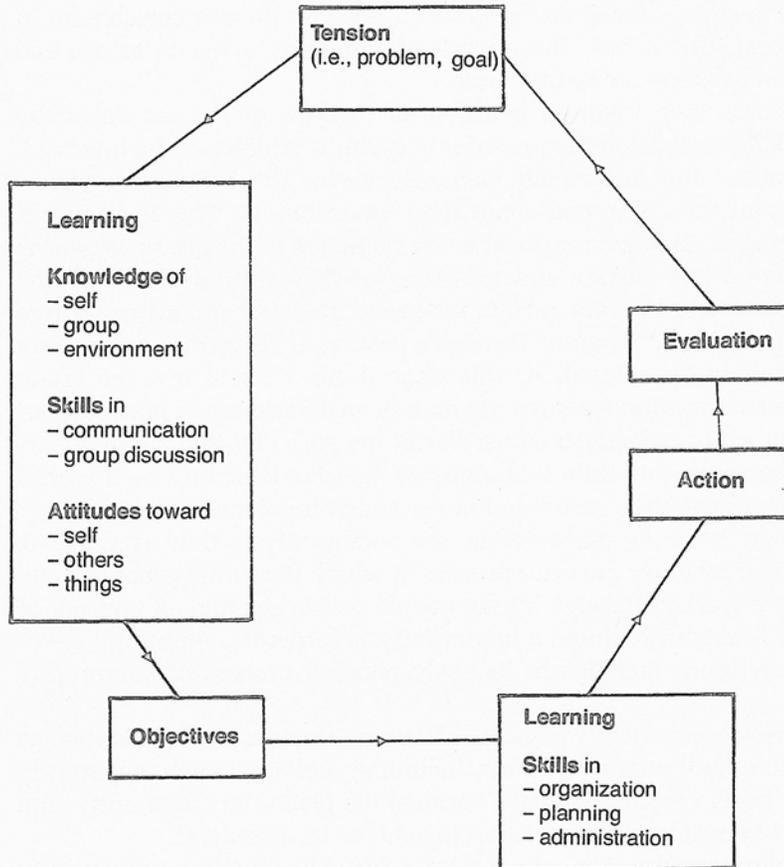


FIGURE 4 Model of the community development process

“Community Development – Learning and Action”

Model of the community development process

Figure 4 : P 36

Hayden Roberts

University of Toronto Press 1979

Reprinted 1982

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GUIDELINES FOR CHANGE

The purpose of consultation lacks clear and concise guidelines.

It is not only a matter of clarifying the consultative area.

There is a distinct need to change the emphasis in the consultative process from one of listening to, and advising the community, to a process where regional, rural and isolated people and their communities have the final say in deciding the processes and outcomes of any action forthcoming from the entire procedure.

The aim of consultation for regional, rural and isolated people must be able to identify, assess, prioritise, control and decide policy and programs which directly affect their lives.

The complete and extensive involvement of regional, rural and isolated people in the entire process must become a requirement, not an option.

A community's involvement must pervade the whole process and be the most significant aspect in determining the final procedures and outcomes to be ultimately effective and relevant.

It is ONLY through "***consultation and negotiation***" that regional, rural and isolated people will be able to significantly impact on the final outcomes of any program in which they participate and subsequently, the agreed and genuine needs can be met.



APPENDIX 1: DETAILS OF RECOMMENDED CONSULTATIVE PROCESS

1. Initial recognition that a problem exists.

1.1 A problem may arise or be identified in many ways

- a. from within the community itself.
- b. from government, a government department, agency or one of their officers.
- c. or as simply as the perception of an individual that all is not well or a present situation could possibly be improved.

1.2 The perceived problem may arise as a personal, a community, a national, or, even as an international concern and may be in any domain, that is, being of an individual nature, or ascending to where it might affect the population at large.

2. Survey to establish:

- a. that a problem really does exist.
- b. that the perceived problem is the real problem.
- c. that those affected want the problem to be solved.
- d. that the problem is able to be solved.
- e. that there are possible resources available to solve the problem.
- f. who is best able or available to solve the problem and
- g. what processes might be most appropriately used in solving the problem.

- 2.1 The first "real" stage of the consultative process, is to establish if the perceived problem, does in fact exist. "What is a problem to one is not a problem to another" must remain, at all times, at the conscious thinking level. The confirmation that a perceived problem exists, might be ascertained by a quick, simple survey across a reasonably wide cross section of a community to establish the validity of the perception.
- 2.2 During this first stage, it also important to restate the perceived problem in as many ways as possible, to establish the full extent and impact of the problem on the community. It is important that problems be traced back to their origin, so that effective processes and solutions might be developed. Restatements will also assist in reducing the perceived problem to elements that are more easily understood and thus more easily solved.
- 2.3 The consultative process would normally not proceed beyond the survey point where it is ascertained that those affected by the problem do not wish to solve the problem, or to have it solved for them.
- 2.4 Identification of resources that might be utilised in the process of solving the problem could be made during this stage, including:
 - a. who is best able to develop, control and facilitate the various aspects of the process.
 - b. what funding is needed, if any, and where such funding might be forthcoming when required.
 - c. what physical resources, both existing and able to be acquired, can be directed to solving the problem.
- 2.5 Identification of facilitators, consultants or other personnel required to ably design and execute the preferred process to be used in solving the problem.
- 3. Formulate a preferred process to solve the problem and identify and locate any possible or available resources.**
 - 3.1 The "preferred process" and/or "terms of reference" should be kept as simple and effective as possible and all stages negotiated with those persons or communities involved.
 - 3.2 In the formulation of the "preferred process", it is important that a balance is maintained between the financial cost and the quality of the process.
 - 3.3 Approach facilitators and consultants *et al* to ascertain their availability to participate in the problem solving process, should they be required.
 - 3.4 Establish what funding, to assist with the problem solving process might be available, from whom it might be forthcoming, and what conditions are attached to its' utilisation.

4. Refer outcome/s of the survey, the preferred processes to be used and the possible resources available, to recipients/participants and/or communities for their consideration, modification and approval.

4.1 Refer the final processes, its' operation, procedures and envisaged outcomes to those individuals and/or communities for whom the process has been designed.

4.2 Advise individuals and the community of the cost to participate in the process and any resources being directed to the individual, or community, as sponsorship.

4.3 Carry out any necessary fine tuning and modifications, to any aspect of the process, so as to allow ownership of the complete process by the individuals/community for whom it has been designed.

5. Gather and/or organise resources

5.1 Finalise submissions for funding where appropriate, confirm facilitators, consultants and facilities and confirm dates and venues with participants.

5.2 Ensure that all resources are applied appropriately and as envisaged by those supplying those resources. Confirm delivery dates and delivery points with resource providers.

6. Implement negotiated strategies and agreed actions to solve problem.

6.1 Proceed with problem solving activities and use those processes as negotiated and agreed with the individual/community.

6.2 During the implementation of activities ensure that the agreed qualities of the process, the instruction and the outcomes are being continually achieved.

6.3 Ensure that the necessary data is recorded to allow the final review/assessment to be accurately presented.

7. Periodically review any short term, emergent outcomes to test progress where required or requested and advise participants/communities of any such outcomes and progress.

7.1. This step is important where any doubt exist to whether the process will achieve intermediate objectives as, the process, progresses. This may allow modifications to be made to better achieve the agreed outcomes.

7.2. Any change or modification should be implemented only with the approval of those participating.

8. Advise participants regularly of the progress in solving the problem and negotiate any needed or desirable changes, especially where the activity covers a protracted period.

8.1 This step is as at 7.1 and 7.2, with the change in emphasis onto that of periodic reporting and fine tuning where an activity may proceed over an extended period.

9. Conduct and document a final review/assessment when the activity is complete and advise all involved of the outcomes.

9.1 The final review/assessment document must be an objective report to individuals, participants, community and resource providers, setting out, in a clear and concise manner, the final correlation between the pre-activity “agreed outcomes” that, were in fact, achieved and also those that were not achieved.

9.2 The report should, if at possible, reflect the degree of commitment shown by the community in achieving the outcomes. The report should enhance the community’s chances to secure future resources for community initiatives or problem solving.

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