

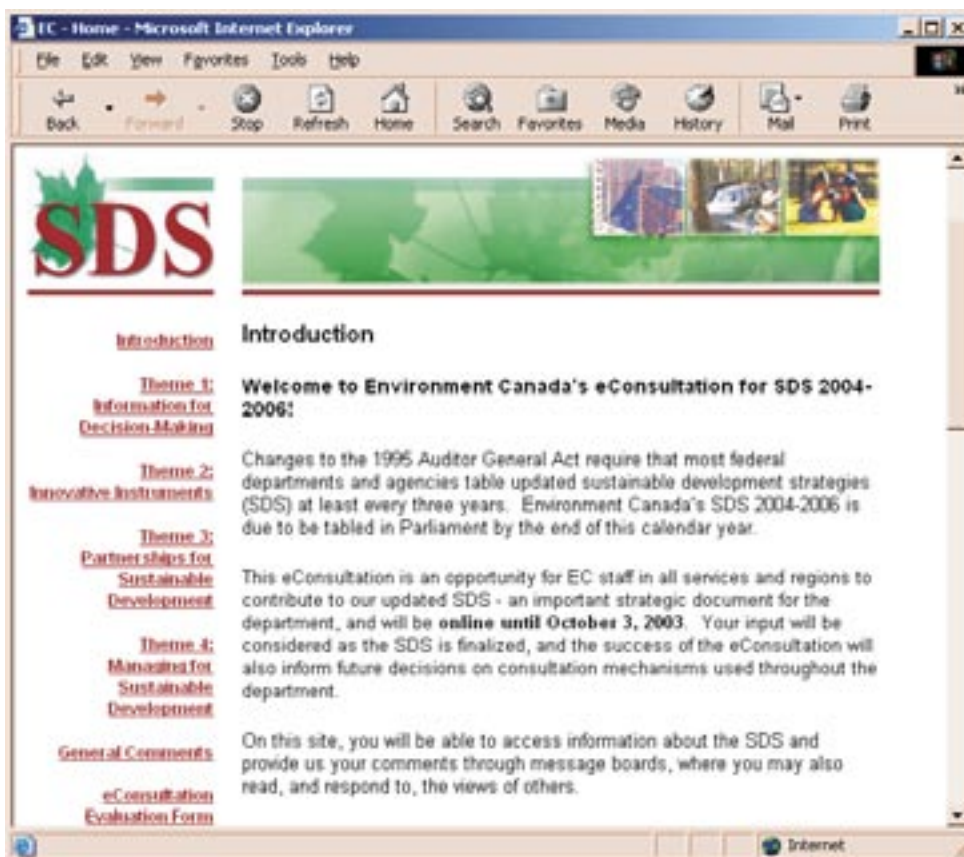
INTERNAL CORPORATE CONSULTATION

Using Public Consultation Techniques and Tools to Improve Corporate Decisions

For most government organizations, the act of consulting Canadians on policies and programs has become a central tenet of effective decision making. While the practice of consulting members of the public is well defined, few government or private organizations routinely consult their employees on a broad corporate-wide basis. Thus, corporations have greater opportunities to harness one of their greatest assets: the ideas, skills and experience of their employees.

Hardy Stevenson and Associates Limited have assisted several public and private corporations with their internal consultation programs. Our experience includes consulting several thousand employees about how to best relocate them to a new head office. For another firm, we used the 'delphi' consensus-building technique to help employees across several departments identify significant risks associated with a difficult corporate liability.

Last fall, using the **eConsultation Solutions** online consultation software that we developed jointly with NTS Internet Solutions, we assisted Environment Canada to mobilize departmental staff in preparing an update of the department's Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS). Sarah Kyle, a policy analyst within Environment Canada's Sustainable Development Policy and Partnerships Branch, used the **eConsultation Solutions** software to create a web site to solicit input on priorities for the strategy. To do so, Sarah set up and managed a series of online message boards. Participants submitted their opinions and engaged in a virtual dialogue over a one-month period. By the end of the eConsultation session, Sarah and her co-workers collated over



40 pages of employee feedback that was taken into consideration as the strategy was completed.

As Kyle explains, "I really appreciated how user friendly the software was, and how it allowed people around the department to contribute to the SDS when it was most convenient for them. It also enabled departmental staff located in other parts of the country to be involved".

Compared to *public* consultation, effective *employee* consultation programs require more emphasis on the following:

First, internal consultation requires considerable effort to encourage

employees to "get involved". To help increase awareness of its internal consultation, Environment Canada used e-mail broadcast and e-mail update tools, as well as posting information about the eConsultation and a link to the eConsultation site on the department's internal web site. Employees participated in the consultation, through online surveys and message boards, and also sent feedback on the draft SDS over e-mail.

Second, internal consultation requires more preparation time. Public consultation plans normally involve careful thinking about who you wish to

(Continued on last page)

Motivating Rural Landowners to Engage in Afforestation

Afforestation of rural lands is one action that the Government of Canada hopes to use to help meet its targets of reducing greenhouse gas emissions through carbon sequestration as part of the Kyoto Protocol. Yet, in Ontario, past surveys of rural landowners indicate that many do not intend to plant trees on their property in the foreseeable future. Thus, programs that wish to promote afforestation need to consider what motivates rural landowners to plant trees on their land.

In 2003, Hardy Stevenson and Associates Limited completed two afforestation surveys as part of the Feasibility Assessment of Afforestation for Carbon Sequestration (FAACS) project for the Canadian Forest Service (CFS) and the Eastern Ontario Model Forest: one for landowners in South-Western and South-Central Ontario, and another for landowners in Eastern Ontario. The telephone survey of 375 landowners having over 10 acres of land was intended to gauge interest in a potential program on tree planting for rural landowners. We also asked respondents about current and anticipated tree planting activities, and the types and sizes of their land holdings.

The findings of these surveys indicate that Ontario's rural farm population is not a homogeneous group. While many landowners have owned their farms for at least a generation, only 3 in 10 respondents in South-Central and South-Western Ontario identified themselves as primarily farmers, and even fewer

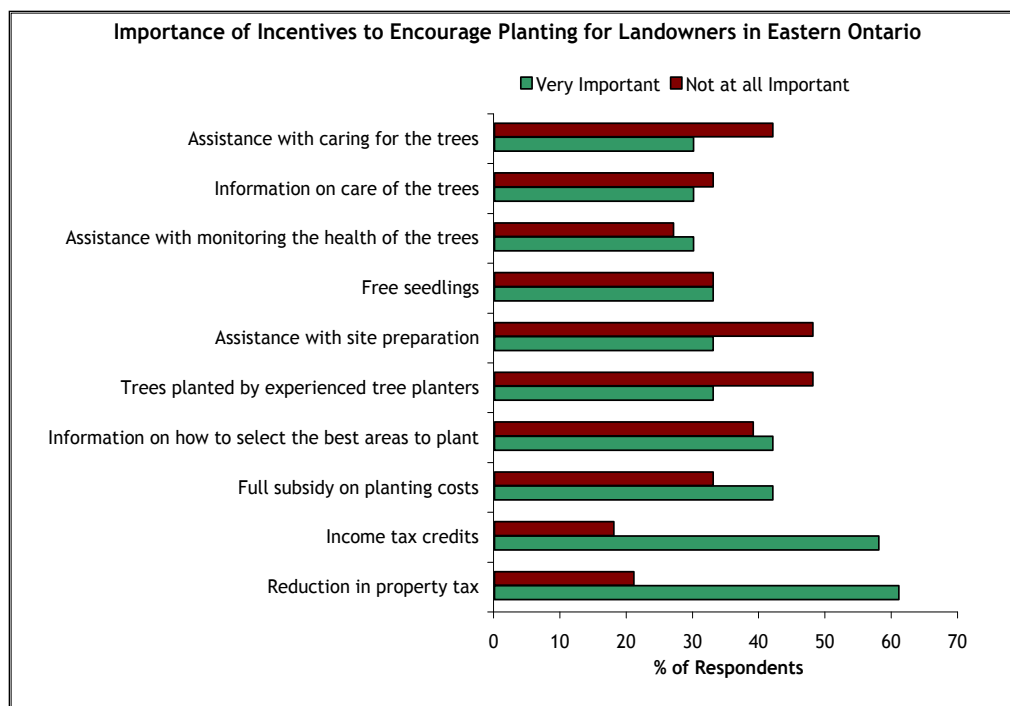
respondents in Eastern Ontario (2 in 10) identified themselves as such. Instead, many are newer landowners who have off-farm jobs or are early retirees and do not rely on their land for income. About 90 percent already have some wooded areas on their property and if they are planting more trees now, it is for aesthetic or environmental reasons.

While there is a high degree of environmental awareness and civic

minded landowners are more interested in participating in a planting program than those who are less involved in their community.

What are the most promising program elements? One of the goals of our survey was to better understand how to motivate rural landowners to participate in a tree planting program and what form the program should take. Financial incentives, such as the ability to choose

income tax credits, a reduction in property tax, free seedlings, and subsidies on planting costs to encourage participation in large scale tree planting programs, were very important to most respondents. Incentives would particularly motivate landowners who are already thinking of planting in the future.



mindedness among rural landowners, most respondents had not planted trees in the past because of the time involved, because they already had enough trees, or because the land was being used for other purposes. However, nearly 75% of respondents with land left open were interested in programs that would promote tree planting.

Who needs to be involved? The findings suggest that afforestation efforts should focus on rural landowners with smaller land holdings. Newer landowners, and landowners who plan to plant in the future, are also likely to be interested in a pilot tree planting program. Community-

Two-thirds of respondents expressed some interest in selling carbon credits, which are credits issued based on net carbon sequestration or emission reductions, once such a domestic offset trading system has been established. The idea of leasing land for others to use as a tree plantation was seen to be undesirable for 75% of the respondents. In terms of who is trusted to deliver a planting program, woodlot / forestry associations and Conservation Authorities scored highest.



Construction Projects: A Strategy for Avoiding Community Complaints

Constructing new roads, electricity plants, or water/ waste water infrastructure may be disruptive to local communities. Noise and dust are but a few of the common problems resulting from a construction project. In areas where there are few neighbouring residents or businesses, the impact of these problems can seem quite muted. Yet, even in highly populated areas, it is possible to complete a construction projects in a way that mitigates or minimizes those impacts.

While many construction projects are completed with few community complaints about noise, dust, or disruption, some generate significant community complaints - often directed toward local politicians. Some projects are so extensive that some degree of community disruption is expected. In these situations, a process for resolving complaints is also expected.

When Hardy Stevenson and Associates Limited staff are asked to assist construction teams with complaints resolution, we begin by suggesting a different approach to community relations. Our experience from working on over 50 construction projects has demonstrated that the number of community complaints drops considerably when the construction team practises *complaints avoidance* instead of *complaints resolution*.



A greater awareness of common problems, such as trucks idling in front of homes early in the morning or construction signage left on the side of the road, can minimize negative effects for the community. Avoiding problems before

they occur, rather than trying to resolve them once they are already of concern to the community, allows construction to proceed in a more efficient and cost-effective manner.

An effective community relations program during a project construction involves six core actions:

1) Managing Expectations

Effective community relations begins with “managing expectations”. Local residents may not have an accurate image of what the specific construction project will look. Before construction begins the project team should present a clear image of the extent of construction through site signage, one-on-one meetings, newsletters, and photographs.

2) Having a Presence in the Community

Being proactive and “having a presence in the community” is equally important. The community and the construction crew both need someone who they can turn to if a problem arises. A key member of the project management team or a Community Relations Officer (CRO) should act as a link between the community and the construction team and recommend solutions to construction managers. For larger projects, having a CRO on site can also help to build and maintain positive relations with the community.

3) Communicating Internally

From labourer to project engineer, all team members need to understand the need for excellent community relations. This can be achieved by internal team capacity building, contract obligations, or on-site newsletters.

4) Anticipating Problems in Advance

The team should strive to “look for problems” before they are pointed out by the community. Someone on the



construction team should have a sensitive eye for potential community-based problems and a good ability to listen. Ideally, this person should identify areas of possible oversight and discuss these at construction team meetings as a means of minimizing community disruption.

5) Keeping the Community Updated

“Keeping the community updated” about the project through various methods of communications such as media releases, newsletters, a project web site, or a site bulletin board creates room for involvement of the community in a project and often results in cooperation.

6) Maximizing Community Benefits

Often overlooked are the benefits that construction projects can bring to the community. Individual construction crews can play an important role in maximizing those benefits. This can range from sponsoring a local sports team to establishing a program where local suppliers offer services and materials to construction materials purchasers.

In Conclusion ...

The key element of a successful community relations program is that the community remembers the project for the benefits that it brought to the community, rather than the impacts that resulted from construction.

WHEN POLITICIANS FACILITATE MEETINGS

Tips for Maximizing Community Dialogue

Having facilitated over 350 community meetings, workshops and public information sessions across Canada, Hardy Stevenson and Associates Limited's team of facilitators and mediators have faced many challenges when trying to engage Canadians in meaningful dialogue. Our greatest supporters in these situations are politicians, who share our goal of hearing a range of perspectives in a constructive and pluralistic environment.

While both professions share similar goals when meeting with the public, there are significant differences in approach. Facilitators have the ability to be neutral and, at least psychologically, to maintain detachment from angry comments and emotional crowds; this is much more difficult for politicians. In contrast, politicians chairing meetings are not necessarily neutral and may be expected to state their opinion, which may be different than that of staff and the public.

On some occasions, a meeting will occur without the assistance of a facilitator. In these situations, the following tips used by facilitators will help political representatives to maximize community dialogue:

First, **prepare** for and plan your meeting. While time is always tight for politicians, setting aside a few moments to answer the

following questions will yield excellent results: Who will be at the meeting? What do I expect them to say? Do staff have something to present? Will there be others there who may have different ideas? Are there opportunities to bridge conflicting views? How can I help the group move on after issues have been raised?

Second, **establish** and seek buy-in on a few ground rules. Ground rules are a set of community-based norms of 'good behaviour'. It is important to state the norms explicitly. It is particularly important to ask for agreement on the ground rules as the formal part of the meeting begins. As facilitators, we wait for a response and then confirm that everyone agrees. Ground rules can include: 1) treat everyone with respect (particularly staff and politicians), 2) listen carefully to all points of view, even if you disagree, 3) raise your hand to ask a question, 4) turn off cell phones and pagers. If the meeting gets off track, having previous agreement on ground rules helps to legitimize bringing people back to when everyone was in agreement. It also helps to encourage individuals who may be "out of line" to rethink their behaviour.

Third, **observe** and respect community group dynamics. As facilitators, we

understand that meetings have an ebb and flow. Sociologists can plot the steps leading to a community's willingness to enter into dialogue on the basis of common stages of group behaviour and development. These four stages are: forming, storming, norming and reforming.

In the forming stage, members of the community want answers to some very simple questions: Why did the staff and/or politicians invite me and my neighbours to the meeting? What are we here to do? In the storming stage, people may be upset, strongly inquisitive, or not yet ready to work as a group on a specific task. The norming stage is the constructive part of a meeting where people are participating in dialogue. "I now know what role I and others are supposed to play." The reforming stage is the positive and creative stage of group process. Facilitators and politicians are most successful when they recognize and understand what phase the group is in, and help the group move through the phases at a comfortable pace.

With residents increasingly wanting to become involved in local governance, these tips will be very helpful for politicians when chairing a community meeting.



Sir John A. Macdonald at a meeting in Toronto on the "National Policy" of protective tariffs. © National Archives of Canada

Beyond the Public Information Centre: Citizens Juries and Deliberative Dialogue

The Public Information Centre, or PIC, is the linchpin of many legislated public consultation programs. Also known as a drop-in centre or open house, a PIC provides members of the public with the opportunity to learn about a project or policy in an informal, friendly setting.

Yet despite its ubiquity, the PIC has some fundamental weaknesses as a consultation technique. While PICs allow members of

the public to talk directly with the project team, they promote minimal interaction and dialogue between attendees. PICs also require attendees to read a considerable amount of (typically technical) information, making any learning about the project a challenge. PICs can also be quite adversarial, especially if there is a formal presentation and Question and Answer period following the open house.

Other consultation processes provide a greater degree of interaction and dialogue among participants. Citizens juries and deliberative dialogue are just two of a range of techniques that encourage participants to delve deeply into the issues related to the project and to make informed choices about the best solution. In a **citizens jury** (a technique developed by the Jefferson Center in the US), randomly selected citizens deliberate for several days on a policy or project of public interest. Like the jury in a legal trial, jurors hear from a variety of expert witnesses and present their recommendations to the public to conclude the moderated hearings.

A **deliberative dialogue** also involves small group discussions surrounding a public policy or project. During the one-day dialogue, participants discuss a series of scenarios related to the policy or project and seek to understand the benefits and trade-offs that each scenario entails. The purpose of the dialogue is not necessarily to select a preferred solution, but rather to learn about the range of perspectives related to the issue. Depending on the scope of the issue, the number of discussion groups can range from 25 to over 100.

Although these techniques require a greater commitment from participants, the likelihood of obtaining buy-in to a solution is considerably higher, as participants have greater influence on the solution chosen.



The scene from a typical PIC

(Continued from page 1)

consult and how to solicit their views. In the workforce setting, this step is much more important. Participating employees will want to understand the purpose of the consultation and how their input will be used before getting involved. Being well prepared also means considering all the contingencies, as your co-workers will remember whether the consultation has been a success for years to come.

Third, the public consultation principle of “providing feedback” is of utmost importance in an internal environment. Employees need to know what was done with the comments they provided. They will want to feel that the time they dedicated was worthwhile, especially after setting other priorities aside to assist you with your project. If done properly, the consultation will help to build employees’ trust in the process. This trust will be invaluable the next time you ask for the opinions of your fellow employees.

Finally, more attention has to be given to considering employee opinions that are unexpected or are outside the norm. A corporation is not a democracy and the goal is not necessarily consensus. What you are typically looking for are the great ideas. The employee asking the uncomfortable questions may be the company President or the Deputy Minister a decade from now. Sometimes, employees are uncomfortable sharing “different” ideas in a group environment because of what they expect their co-workers to think, but would provide those suggestions in an online environment where they can remain anonymous.

Getting the internal consultation process ‘right’ delivers excellent benefits: strong employee morale, team building, great ideas, and identification of issues far enough in advance that they can be addressed.



About The Company

Hardy Stevenson and Associates was formed in 1990. The firm specializes in:

- ♦ Social Impact Assessment
- ♦ Environmental Planning
- ♦ Land Use Planning
- ♦ Public Consultation
- ♦ Facilitation / Mediation
- ♦ Management Consulting
- ♦ Communications
- ♦ Engineering Services

Mailing Address

364 Davenport Road
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5R 1K6

Phone 416-944-8444
Toll-free 1-877-267-7794
Fax 416-944-0900

E-mail hsa@hardystevenson.com
Web www.hardystevenson.com