



CANADA

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mechanisms in Fiscal Matters



Public participation at the federal level in Canada occurs in most aspects of budget processes from formulation to oversight. Approaches range from one-off consultations on specific issues or bills to more institutionalized approaches for regular engagement.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

CIVIL SOCIETY PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS

Annual budget cycle: Executive budget preparation.

OBJECTIVE



- Receive the public's feedback, ideas, and proposals on the budget.
- Initiated by the Department of Finance.

MECHANISM

- Use of multiple avenues, including social media, to inform Canadians on the online pre-budget consultations.
- Citizens respond to the questions asked by the Department of Finance through online surveys with proposals.
- Usually launched annually (in November) for a Budget that is tabled in February of the following year.

RESULTS

No follow-up of the results of these surveys and impact assessments were found.

It is unclear how submissions are analyzed. They are collected late in the budget process and it is unclear how substantial their impact is on the budget. None of the data gathered during the campaign is published online, but can be requested under the Access to Information Act.

The questions made through the annual "on-line" pre budget consultations are linked to communications of the government's agenda.

No effort is made to engage marginalized or underrepresented groups in the process.

There is no complaint mechanism.

SURVEY OF PRIVATE SECTOR ECONOMIC FORECASTS

Annual budget cycle: New policy initiatives on revenue and spending.

OBJECTIVE



Derive the Department of Finance's fiscal forecast based on private sector economic forecasts on key headline numbers.

MECHANISM

- The Minister of Finance and officials meet with a select group of economists to exchange ideas about the economic outlook.
- The meetings are private, with some post-meeting media coverage.
- The economic forecast survey is published.

RESULTS

The survey and the meetings are a method of "contracting out" the function of economic forecasting to the private sector.

HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE OF FINANCE PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATION EXERCISE

Annual budget cycle: Pre-budget consultations and exercises.

OBJECTIVE



- Create an opportunity for Parliament to evaluate the effectiveness of government policy.
- Add quality and legitimacy to the budget process as the most visible part of Parliament's involvement in the pre-budget process.

MECHANISM

- The Standing Committee on Finance issues a press release to announce the start of pre-budget consultations.
- Anyone can submit written suggestions online, and hearings are held in multiple cities. The Committee releases a broad statement inviting Canadians to express their opinion about the upcoming budget, with specific themes outlined.
- The Committee receives witness testimony and issues a report with recommendations in priority themes.
- An annual public report is drafted highlighting recommendations tied to the consultation exercise.

RESULTS

There aren't enough efforts to include marginalized groups.

The executive has no obligation to take measures recommended by the Finance Committee through the public consultation process.

All submissions are published online, and a report summarizes witness testimony and the Committee's recommendations.

During the 2014 pre-budget exercise, the Committee received witness testimony from more than

100 people and groups, and more than 400 online submissions.

The 2014 report contains 47 recommendations in 6 priority themes (as defined by the Committee).

IN-PERSON ROUNDTABLES WITH CIVIL SOCIETY



Annual budget cycle: New policy initiatives on revenue and spending.

OBJECTIVE



Receive the public's opinion on government spending, fiscal policies and new initiatives.

MECHANISM

- A series of roundtables is hosted by the Minister of Finance and other cabinet members across the country and open to all, prefaced with government communications.
- The number of attendees is usually set low (around 50 people).
- There is no formal follow-up, or record of what is said or of the number of attendees.
- Members from opposition parties are not formally invited, but may participate.

RESULTS

Eight meetings were scheduled between November 27, 2014 and January 15, 2015. Lack of formal follow-up, limited number of attendees and lack of record may limit the effectiveness of the mechanism.

No effort is undertaken to engage marginalized or underrepresented groups.

CONSULTATION ON SPECIFIC ISSUES AND/OR BILLS



Annual budget cycle: Planning and implementation of public investment projects.

OBJECTIVE



Consult with the public on specific issues and/or bills.

MECHANISM

- Consultations are open to all (experts and non-experts).
- Citizens enter their ideas through formal hearings, letters, in-person meetings or online submissions, but the government is not required to provide any feedback.
- Information on consultations is available to the public.

RESULTS

In 2014, the Department of Finance launched

12

consultation exercises.

While it is now normal practice to consult generally on new bills, there is no published analysis on the impact.

LEGISLATURE

HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE OF FINANCE AND OTHER COMMITTEES - STUDIES (INCLUDING BILLS, ESTIMATES ET AL)



Annual budget cycle: Pre-budget consultations and exercises.

OBJECTIVE



Improve the scrutiny of spending bills.

MECHANISM

- In each financial cycle, the Finance Committee and standing committees for other departments undertake studies for bills and estimates.
- For each study a list of meetings, reports, witnesses is made available.
- Briefs provided by witnesses are available to the public online.
- Minutes and videos of the meetings are available online. Web-based information indicates that meetings took place and reports were tabled, but there is no record of discussion or use of witnesses from the public.

RESULTS

During the 41st Parliament, 2nd session (October 16, 2013 to August 2, 2015 present), the Finance Committee prepared

11 studies with budget policy implications, in addition to the 2013 and 2014 pre-budget exercises.

Scrutiny is minimal and little time is spent reviewing plans with Ministers and public servants. There is no complaint mechanism.

Spending approvals are often provided to the departments with little or no public participation. While meetings took place and reports were tabled, there is no record of discussion or use of input from the public.

AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA, an Officer of Parliament that carries out legislative audits of government programs and activities.



Annual budget cycle: Auditing and review.

OBJECTIVE



Civil society consultation on the approach to audit.

MECHANISM

- The Office of the Auditor General (OAG) conducts financial and performance audits and special examinations of the federal government and three territories.
- It also conducts periodic reviews of external organizations with input from external experts on performance audits.
- The OAG makes available to Canadians a Petitions Catalogue for environmental matters (open to groups and individuals).
- There is no published policy on public participation.

RESULTS

According to the Auditor General's 2014 Fall Report, the OAG engages citizens in the approach to audit in only 1 of 7 audits.

There is no information on the number of people that were consulted.

As evidenced by a 2008 survey by the Auditor General of British Columbia, public participation is increasingly viewed as an instrument of good governance.

SUPREME AUDIT INSTITUTION

COMMISSIONER OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



Annual budget cycle: Auditing and review.

OBJECTIVE



The Auditor General's responsibilities on environmental matters increased with the creation of the position of Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development in 1995 (Amendment to the Auditor General Act).

MECHANISM

- The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development releases a Fall Report to Parliament, which contains audits, environmental petitions, and in-person meetings with officials.
- On behalf of the Auditor General, the Commissioner manages the environmental petition process and monitors responses of federal ministers.
- The petitions (366 as of December 20, 2014) contain contact information, summary, specific requests and official response status. Once a petition is received, it is forwarded to the appropriate minister(s), which must respond to it. The full text of petitions is available in the Petitions Catalogue.

RESULTS

The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development released a Fall Report to Parliament in 2014, with five audits and a chapter summarizing environmental petitions.

In only 1 of 6 audits did the Commissioner interact with people other than officials.

While it is relatively easy to submit an environmental petition, the specific departments tasked with resolving these petitions are not provided with the resources to manage the process.

TREASURY BOARD OF CANADA SECRETARIAT (TBCS)



Annual budget cycle: Auditing and review.

OBJECTIVE



- Provide stakeholder input to evaluation planning and processes.
- Collect and analyze evidence on the outcomes of programs.

MECHANISM

- The TBCS provides evaluations of the financial management functions of federal executive departments.
- The TBCS has a duty to consult major stakeholders. The Standard on Evaluation for the Government of Canada says that "(E)valuations incorporate sufficient and appropriate consultations, including with major stakeholders."
- The head of evaluation directs the committees in charge of consulting major stakeholders on evaluation projects from the different government departments.
- The mechanisms used to provide input are: peer review, advisory, or steering committee groups.

RESULTS

Public participation is used to inform program evaluations.

Different techniques were employed, such as surveys, focus groups & interviews.

Some evaluations recommended building better relationships with stakeholders.

Four out of five

Evaluations released by Health Canada in 2014 included public consultations.

A few evaluations highlighted issues with low response rates to surveys.



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