



# TDSB COMMUNITY CONSULTATION PROCEDURE

DRAFT

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“The affairs of life embrace a multitude of interests, and those who reason in any one of them, without consulting the rest, is a visionary unsuitable to control the business of the world” -James Fenimore Cooper

## **Executive Summary**

### **What**

- The mandate of the group is to discuss and report on a policy and procedure regarding the definition and function of consultation.
- There are three levels of community input: informing, consulting, co-constructing.
- The procedure will identify the criteria that will dictate whether a policy would need to have parents informed, consulted or involved in the co-construction of specific initiatives.

### **Why**

- The Board is a public institution committed to open, inclusive processes.
- The Board regularly engages in consultation with various constituent communities.
- There are currently no consistent policies, procedures or definitions regarding consultation, i.e. how is it done, when is it done, and with whom.

### **How**

- Inform: provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives and/or solutions. Examples; fact sheets, web sites, media.
- Consult: To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or directions; the Board will keep the community informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input has influenced decisions. Examples: Public comments, focus groups, quadrant meetings, surveys, ward council meetings, meetings with advisory committees, and involvement of community groups.
- Co-Construct: To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternative solutions, and the identification of the preferred solution. The Board will look to the public for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate the public’s advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible. Examples: Meeting with Advisory Committees, Partnering with Community groups; ward council meetings; and Participatory Decision Making

### **Who**

- TDSB Board of Trustees
- TDSB Senior Team
- TDSB Advisory Committees
- Trustee Ward Councils
- TDSB School Councils
- TDSB Parent Community
- Local Community Agencies/Groups/Organizations
- Employee Groups
- Student Representatives

**When**

- Understand the key conditions for successful public involvement.
- Consult with all stakeholders to gather input for the 'Consultation Committee: Levels of Involvement' grid that will potentially become policy for the TDSB.

## What Is Consultation?

In the literature, consultation exists on a continuum of public involvement but only represents one level of involvement. The more recent literature identifies three levels of public involvement: public communication (informing), public consultation, and public participation (co-constructing). (Gauvin, Abelson, MacKinnon and Watling, 2006)

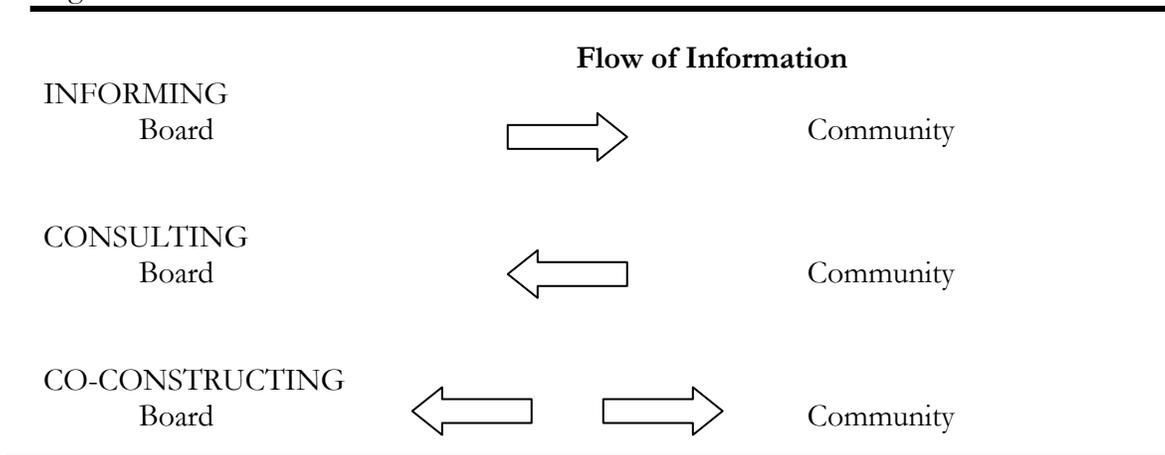
The TDSB engages in all three levels of public involvement, but it is currently being done on an ad-hoc basis. The purpose of this guide is to consult with stakeholders to create a clear, consistent process that will inform the TDSB when and how to inform, consult, or co-construct with the public.

In public communication or informing the community, information is disseminated from the Board to the public in a unidirectional manner with no public involvement. This method is used when the Board provides the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding problems, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.

In public consultation, the Board asks for public input on a specific policy issue. Prior to the public consultation, the Board can provide information to the public. However, the flow of information is mainly one-way during the consultation from the public to the Board. Public consultation is mainly used to elicit the “raw” opinions of the public.

In public participation or co-constructing the flow of information and interactions is bi-directional, that is, information is exchanged between members of the public and the Board. There is some degree of dialogue and deliberation in the process that takes place (usually in a group setting), which may involve representatives of both parties in different proportions (depending on the co-constructing method). The act of dialogue and deliberation helps to transform the raw opinions of both parties into informed and enlightened judgments.

Figure 1



(Adapted from source: Rowe and Frewer 2005)

# Why Does Consultation Matter?

## Goals

The goal of the Community Consultation Procedure is to create a clear and consistent policy so that affected stakeholders can have input into a particular decision.

## Benefits and Limitations

	<b>Informing</b>	<b>Consulting</b>	<b>Co-Constructing</b>
<b>Benefits</b>	<p>Can potentially reach the broad public</p> <p>Allows for technical and legal reviews</p> <p>Facilitates documentation of public involvement process</p> <p>Can be relatively less time-consuming than other public involvement methods</p>	<p>Some methods like public opinion polls provide input from individuals who would be unlikely to attend meetings and can provide input from cross-sections of the public</p> <p>Provides opportunity to test key messages prior to implementing program</p> <p>May work best for select target audience</p> <p>Useful to get the public's "raw opinions"</p> <p>Helps to measure peoples' values, needs and preferences</p>	<p>Promotes dialogue between government and the public</p> <p>Contributes to an informed, active and engaged community</p> <p>Promotes "common good" as a societal objective</p> <p>Small size of individual groups and their non-intimidating nature allows for innovative ideas and active participation</p> <p>Can renew public trust in democracy</p> <p>Helps to measure and clarify the basis of people's values, needs and preferences</p> <p>Helps decision-makers understand the social and ethical consequences of their decisions</p>
<b>Limitations</b>	<p>Only as good as the medium or distribution network</p> <p>Limited capability to communicate complicated concepts</p> <p>No guarantee materials will be read</p> <p>May not be written in clear and accessible language</p> <p>May be expensive</p> <p>May be difficult to generate neutral and complete briefing material</p> <p>Does not allow meaningful interactions between the public and the government (one-way flow of information)</p>	<p>Can require significant resources for organizers (e.g., public hearings)</p> <p>Does not allow for in- depth interactions between the public and the government (one-way flow of information or limited two-way)</p> <p>Not designed to facilitate group deliberation on challenging public issues</p>	<p>Elaborate process requiring significant resources and intensive time commitment for both participants and organizers</p> <p>Requires conditions that will effectively motivate peoples to invest time and effort in information- gathering and face-to-face discussion</p> <p>Greater risk of increasing cynicism if public cannot connect their contributions with decision outcomes</p>

Source: Gauvin, Abelson, MacKinnon, and Watling, 2006

## How Can Consultation Be Accomplished?

### Commonly Used Public Involvement Methods

Informing	Consulting	Co-Constructing
Advertisements	Public Meetings	Public Juries
Publication of Reports	Public Opinion Polls	Public Panels
Newspaper Inserts	Public Hearings	Consensus Conferences
Press Releases	Focus Groups	Scenario Workshops
News Conferences	Meeting with Stakeholders	Deliberative Polls
Websites	Advisory Committee	Public dialogues
Advisory Committee	Meetings	Advisory Committees
Meetings	Ward Council Meetings	Ward Council Meetings
Ward Council Meetings	Student Super Council	Student Super Council
Student Super Council	Meetings	Meetings
Meetings		Stakeholder groups

### Informing

With respect to public communication methods or informing the community, no single method can reach all the different “publics” that may have a stake in a policy issue and therefore it may be useful and necessary to use different methods. Although there is no public involvement per se in “informing” the public, good public communication is essential in all three levels of public participation as becoming informed is necessary in order to more actively participate.

### Consultation

The list of methods of “Consulting” focuses on the most conventional ways of consulting the public. For the TDSB these include quadrant meetings and special community meetings that will target communities that otherwise would not have access to participating or feel comfortable with participating in these kinds of discussion. Specific community agencies have offered their partnership with the TDSB to help bridge communication with these specific communities. These agencies include but are not limited to Social Planning Toronto, The United Way and Public Interest Toronto.

### Co-Constructing

This is one of the most innovative methods. There are many different methods used and they share a number of characteristics. These include:

- They are usually composed of small groups of 12-20 people representative of their community (deliberative polls and people’s dialogues can include many more participants, but the deliberations are usually conducted in small groups);
- There is one face-to-face meeting or a series of face-to-face meetings to deliberate on the issue
- Factual, objective and accessible information is prepared and communicated to support the participants’ deliberations;
- Experts or key witnesses may be involved to inform participants and answer their questions; and
- A set of recommendations are produced based on the participants’ deliberations.

# What Does Consultation Look Like?

## Consultation Committee: Levels of Involvement Grid (DRAFT)

Guiding Principles	To develop a policy that will outline our governing principles with regards to providing meaningful opportunities for community input, leading to greater insight and more informed Board decision-making. This policy will be aligned with our strategic direction, objectives, principles, procedures, be fiscally responsible, viable and focused on student success (including but not limited to academic, emotional, physical and social success).		
<b>Levels</b>	<b>Informing</b>	<b>Consulting</b>	<b>Co-Constructing</b>
<b>Definition</b>	The Board provides the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	The Board asks for public input on a specific policy or issue. Prior to the public consultation, the Board usually provides information to the public. However, the flow of information is mainly one-way during the consultation, from the public to the Board. Public consultation is mainly used to elicit the raw opinions of the Board.	The flow of information and interactions is multi-directional, that is, information is exchanged between members of the public and the Board. There is some degree of dialogue and deliberation in the process that takes place (usually in a group setting), which may involve representatives of both parties in different proportions (depending on the co-construction method) The act of dialogue and deliberation helps to transform the raw opinions of both parties into informed and enlightened judgments.
<b>Conditions of Use</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Factual information is needed to describe a policy, program or process</li> <li>-A decision has already been made (no decision is required)</li> <li>-The public needs to know the result of a process</li> <li>-There is no opportunity to influence the final outcome</li> <li>-There is need for acceptance of a proposal or decision before a decision may be made</li> <li>-An emergency or crisis requires immediate attention</li> <li>-Information is necessary to abate concerns or prepare for involvement</li> <li>-The issue is relatively simple</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-The purpose is primarily to listen and gather information</li> <li>- Policy decisions are still being shaped and discretion is required</li> <li>-There may not be a firm commitment to do anything with the views collected (we advise participants from the outset of this intention to manage expectations)</li> <li>- We need a two-way information exchange</li> <li>- Individuals and groups have an interest in the issue and will likely be affected by the outcome</li> <li>-There is an opportunity to influence the final outcome</li> <li>- We wish to encourage discussion among and with stakeholders</li> <li>- Input may shape policy directions/program delivery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-We need people to talk to each other regarding complex, value-laden issues</li> <li>-There is a capacity for people to shape policies and decisions that affect them</li> <li>- There is an opportunity for shared agenda setting and open time frames for deliberation on issues</li> <li>- Options generated together will be respected</li> </ul>
<b>Methods of Engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- multi-lingual dissemination of information (with translators where possible)</li> <li>- advertisements/newspaper inserts</li> <li>- publications of reports</li> <li>- press releases</li> <li>- news conferences</li> <li>- online: websites, email, social media</li> <li>- advisory committees</li> <li>- meetings</li> <li>- ward council meetings</li> <li>- student super council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- multi-lingual dissemination of information (with translators where possible)</li> <li>- public meetings</li> <li>- public opinion polls</li> <li>- public hearings</li> <li>- focus groups</li> <li>- stakeholder meetings</li> <li>- advisory committee meetings</li> <li>- ward council meetings</li> <li>- student super council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- multi-lingual dissemination of information (with translators where possible)</li> <li>- public juries</li> <li>- public panels</li> <li>- consensus conferences</li> <li>- scenario workshops</li> <li>- deliberative polls</li> <li>- public dialogues</li> <li>- advisory committees</li> <li>- ward council meetings</li> <li>- student super council</li> <li>- stakeholder meetings</li> </ul>

## Key Conditions for Successful Public Involvement

Significant resources are invested in any public involvement initiative. To ensure the best use of resources and to learn from past experience, it is important to embed evaluation into any public involvement exercise (Gauvin et al, 2006). However, evaluation is often not considered until the end of the process when it may be too late to properly capture key information. Planning for evaluation from the beginning enables better learning from the process as it is taking place (Sheedy, MacKinnon, Pitre & Watling, 2008).

Assuming proper planning for evaluation, on what basis should public involvement exercises be evaluated? According to 'Public Participation Methods: A Framework for Evaluation' developed by Rowe and Frewer (2000 and 2004). There are nine criteria that are vital to successful public consultation and participation processes, and should be used to guide the planning and evaluation of such exercises: These include:

1. **Representativeness:** The public participants should comprise a broad representative sample of the population of the affected public.
2. **Independence:** The participation process should be conducted in an independent unbiased manner.
3. **Early Involvement:** The public should be involved as early as possible in the process as soon as value judgments become salient.
4. **Influence:** The output of the procedure should have a genuine impact on policy.
5. **Transparency:** The process should be transparent so that the public can see what is going on and how decisions are being made.
6. **Resource Accessibility:** Public participants should have access to the appropriate resources to enable them to successfully contribute to the consultation process.
7. **Task Definition:** The nature and scope of the participation task should be clearly defined.
8. **Structured Decision-Making:** The participation exercise should use/provide appropriate mechanisms for structuring and displaying the decision-making process.
9. **Cost-effectiveness:** The procedure should in some sense be cost-effective.

## **Consultation Committee Proposed Timelines**

- May 2 - Introductory Committee Meeting
- May/June - Ward Council meetings  
- Student focus groups  
- Proposed Community meetings (Early June)  
- Proposed sites Agincourt C.I, C.W. Jefferys C.I., Lord Dufferin P.S.
- Late June - Draft policy presented to Consultation Committee for review
- Aug/Sept - Draft policy submitted to appropriate Board committee for review/approval
- Sept - Draft policy presented to full Board for review and approval  
- Proposed implementation for School year 2011-2012

## **Focus Group Questions**

1. One of the goals of the TDSB is to be purposeful, accountable and respectful. What does this look like to you in regards to a community consultation process?
2. Based on the Consultation Grid, how would you like to be consulted in each of the three consultation levels of involvement? Is there anything missing from the grid?
3. Based on the proposed timeline from the Consultation committee, do you feel that any key stakeholders have been left out? Do any other additions need to be made?

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