

Reflections: Examining best practices in public engagement BCCIC Membership Meeting, June 17th 2008

“How can there be Peace without people understanding each other and how can this be if they don’t know each other?” Lester B Pearson.

Joyce Brinkerhoff from Global Citizens Kelowna referred to this quote to highlight her organizations best practices of public engagement at the BC Council for International Cooperation’s membership meeting on Tuesday 17th, June 2008. Twenty three individual and organizational members attended to network, share ideas and discuss best practices together. The afternoon event started with a lunch and tour of the ‘Bridges That Unite’ exhibition, hosted by the Aga Khan Foundation at the Roundhouse Community Centre.

Four panelists, Barb Kruger from Partners for Prosperity, Anita Mark from Results Canada, Lynn Thornton from VIDEA and Joyce Brinkerhoff from Kelowna Global Citizens presented their organizations best practices and tools in public engagement. A dynamic and interesting discussion followed raising numerous thought provoking questions; what is public engagement and who is it for? How do we celebrate and track our work and successes? Others noted that “public engagement is a role to play, it is not enough just to turn up at events, but people somehow need to become physically involved”. The event ended with Gregory Spira’s presentation on ‘Chaicuriri through the lens: envisioning community development through photovoice’. His work demonstrates a growing need to use different mediums, working with cameras, to help a community document their lives and issues. As a follow-up to the meeting, we contacted our wonderful panelists and asked them to expand their thoughts on the four questions of the day. We look forward to organizing more membership meetings both in Vancouver and around the province! Stay tuned!

Best Practices in Public Engagement By Joyce Binkerhoff with Global Citizen Kelowna

1. Please highlight your organization’s work in public engagement.

Global Citizen Kelowna is all about public engagement! It is an annual festival to raise community awareness of the diversity of humanitarian organizations located in the Central Okanagan. We, like Lester Pearson, believe that we can accomplish far more by understanding and knowing one another – utilizing each other’s strengths to the greatest degree and supporting each others weaknesses. Furthermore, we gain the ability to then tell others about who we know and what they do that we don’t! The focus is on promotion of the cause of humanity and not duplication of services or competition for support. The Global Citizen Kelowna committee is made up of members from several local NGO’s who, for the past 4 years, have coordinated a number of independent events all taking place during the same week and/or leading up to that week. The events work together for efficiency, momentum, promotion and cost sharing – in effect ‘creating a bigger bang for the buck’. The intention is not to raise one organization’s profile over another but to draw attention to the variety and scope of the various organizations and especially to promote the great need for truly ‘global citizens’. Individuals are inspired to action and are then able to ‘get into action’ where they feel a natural fit. The importance is not who gets the ‘credit’, but more importantly, that people get involved and that the MDG’s are reached!

2. Please share one example of a best practice.

Working together removes 'prejudice' or people avoiding getting involved because there are 'so many groups' and they all are 'after my money' enables broad-based business and government sponsorship as it is not 'favoritism' to a particular group media can create 'a buzz' leading up to and following each event with feature articles leverage of each group's contacts and resources to enable greater impact (i.e. bringing in a big-name speaker).

3. Please describe a couple of key tools you use to track qualitative impact from your public engagement.

Tracking the number of volunteers involved in Global Citizen activities and events, media coverage, willingness for sponsors to re-commit their sponsorship and the interest and excitement among Global Citizen committee members.

4. What are the trends you see in public engagement?

There is a growing trend in people wanting to be more personally involved in humanitarian activities – especially in groups. i.e. family members wanting to help out in an orphanage, a school class wanting to go build houses, People want 'on-ramps' to get involved. Once they see the need – they want an easy and effective way of getting involved and one that fits with their degree of comfort, passion and time available. People are weary of the barrage of needs and many are skeptical of the authenticity of some of the promotions. Accountability is a value embraced by all groups promoted during Global Citizen Kelowna activities. The public assumes that you are just promoting your 'cause' and it is exactly the same as the one they heard about last week. They are afraid of duplication of services and therefore need to be shown the differences between various projects. (not 'better' but 'different focus' and therefore a better fit for an individual's particular passion. i.e some are drawn to health issues, others to education.

Best Practices in Public Engagement By Anita Mark with RESULTS Canada,

1. Please highlight your organization's work in public engagement.

MP visits to Africa: In 2006 CIDA's TB spending was in jeopardy. After getting wind of the pending cuts, RESULTS Canada led a successful, 4-person multiparty MP delegation to Kenya where we worked with our ACTION colleagues on the ground there to coordinate site visits to clinics and home visits to meet TB patients in Nairobi's slums. Included were Alexi McDonough (NDP), John McKay (Liberal) who as a result of his work is presenting at the RESULTS International Conference in Washington DC speaking on Canada's Better Aid Bill (he was largely responsible for it passing). And he joined RESULTS! This past November, RESULTS Canada took two Canadian MPs, Dr. Ruby Dhalla (Liberal) and Lee Richardson (Conservative), to Cape Town, South Africa to learn about the devastating effects TB and TB-HIV co-infection are having on people and health care systems in South Africa and around the world. The trip also coincided with the Union World Conference on Lung Health which both Mr. Richardson and Dr. Dhalla attended. Lee Richardson is now a monthly financial supporter of RESULTS.

2. Please share one example of a best practice..

RESULTS organizes monthly 'Education & Action' meetings where we learn about global poverty issues from researched Action Sheets lead to learning and "results". At these meetings we have discussions, write to MPs and the media. These meetings and subsequent actions are a very effective form of engaging the public.

3. Please describe a couple of key tools you use to track qualitative impact from your public engagement.

We track our media publications (Letters to the Editor, Op Eds, and Editorials) - we had over 400 pieces published in 2007. We know the media pieces that get published influence government foreign policy. Also our volunteers meet in person with MPs in Ottawa and at home, presenting issues of importance that generate tangible outcomes.

4. What are the trends you see in public engagement?

- ✓ Online trends – e.g. Make Poverty History, Engineers Without Borders (EWB), Fair Trade, AVAAZ (The World in Action), etc
- ✓ Philanthropy trends – Bill Gates, Warren Buffet etc
- ✓ Celebrities endorsing social causes
- ✓ Business marketing strategies supporting and endorsing causes e.g. The Gap's Red Campaign
- ✓ Programs in schools