

Public Policy in Canada

Public Policy Creation: How Does it Happen?

Government makes decisions, organizes itself to govern and recruits the people to carry out its decisions. Decisions can be made in a variety of ways and at different levels of government.

New government initiatives often start in the **public domain**. The process can follow these lines:

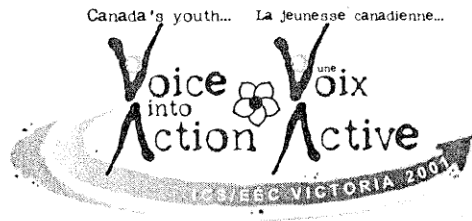
- Citizens want a new service or program, or are dissatisfied with the existing one, bringing about re-evaluation and change.
- The media can play a role in bringing matters to the attention of government, or constituents might take a matter directly to their MP.
- Sometimes change is brought about by the economy or an international event which requires a response (e.g. the arrival of 'human cargo' in ships on the west coast, Famine in Ethiopia, a farm crisis in the Prairies or the need for greater highway safety).

The steps which follow usually take place inside a government department, or several departments if the issue is 'horizontal', meaning that it impacts the responsibilities of more than one department.

The occurrence of horizontal issues are increasing and creating a shift within the public service toward greater collaboration among departments, pooling of resources and establishment of coordinating committees. A good example of this is water quality, which would involve Environment, Industry, Agriculture, Intergovernmental Affairs, Fisheries and Oceans, Health and Foreign Affairs; or international trade (which includes 23 federal departments and all the provinces).

Once a responsibility is identified the following process is carried out:

1. The problem is defined and analyzed. The analysis engages several new players; other departments who have an interest in the outcome, provincial players, citizen groups, the communications division, and regional offices and operations staff.



Public Policy in Canada

instructions given to the department as to how to act on the decision. If the proposal requires new or amended legislation, it is drafted and tabled by the Minister in the House.

Eventually a solution becomes a program, regulation or law, which is carried out, evaluated and eventually may require public input, in which case the process starts over again. This entire process may take a few days or a few years.

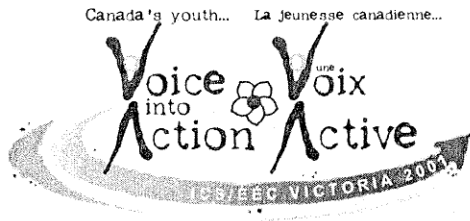
Along the way there are many influences on how and when decisions move ahead. They include:

- timing in the electoral cycle
- availability of resources
- public interest
- media attention
- MPs
- public polls
- the government's agenda
- stakeholders
- pressures
- analysis
- implications of moving ahead or not
- experience
- precedence (historical, jurisdictional, international)
- global pressures
- sunset clauses
- inventions and discoveries

Decision-Making

Decision-making powers are divided between the federal and provincial governments under the Constitution, but there are many overlapping interests.

Most federal departments have direct links with their counterparts in the provinces or with provincial departments with related interests. There are more than a thousand federal-provincial committees throughout the system. All this coordination and consultation goes on without any specific set of guidelines in the Constitution. Some argue that this flexibility is the strength of the Canadian federation.



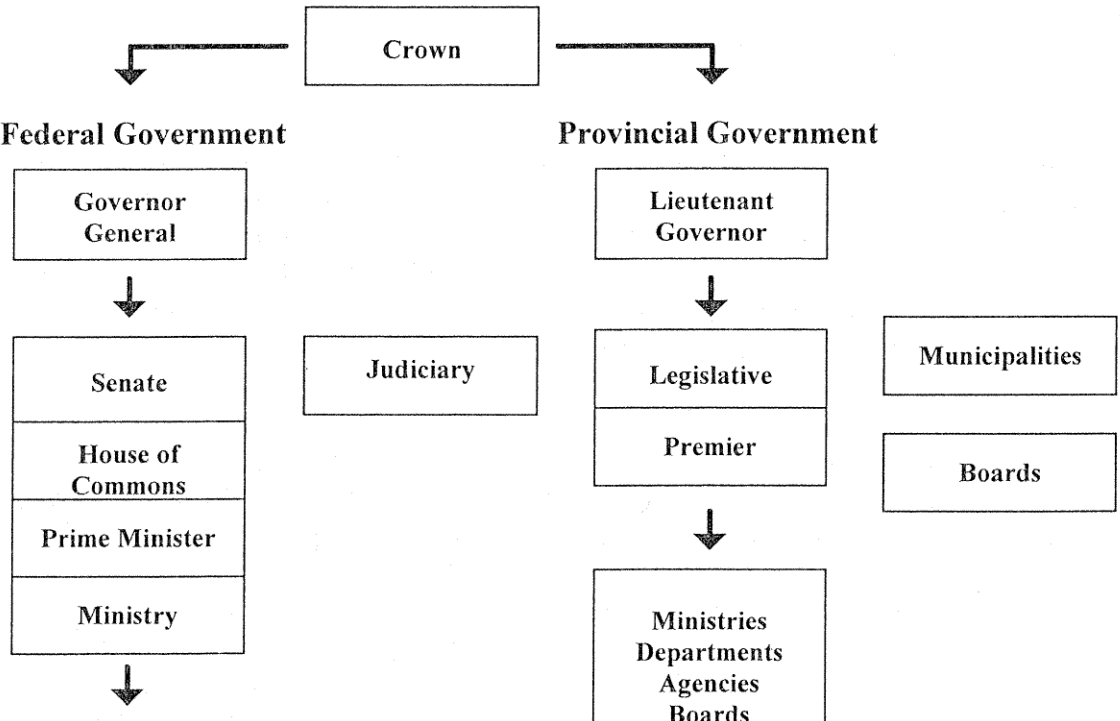
Public Policy in Canada

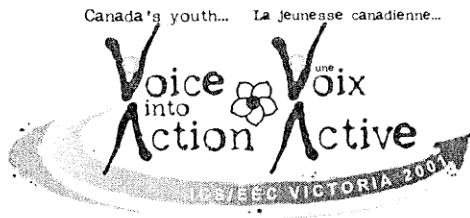
Understanding Public Policy in Canada

Canada's Government

Canada's form of government, the Westminster Model of Government, is named after the seat of the British Parliament at Westminster in London. Many Commonwealth countries have adopted this model, which has Members of Parliament elected by citizens and responsible to Parliament for their actions. In Canada, both federal and provincial governments follow this model, although it was originally designed for a country run by one national government.

The Canadian Government





Public Policy in Canada

Voice Into Action: Making Your Voice Heard

The traditional ways in which citizens are heard is through their vote in an election every four or five years, and through their contact with their own MP, who listens to citizens' concerns and ideas. But that is changing, as greater citizen involvement is becoming a wider expectation, for the following reasons:

- global reporting
- instant electronic communications
- public polling
- a better educated and more demanding public
- well-organized special interest groups
- an increased need to make tough choices

Citizen Engagement Opportunities

Royal Commissions:

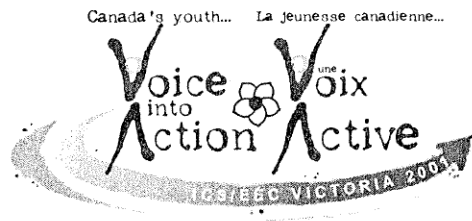
These are used to gather facts, sample public opinion, initiate or delay policies (they sometimes outlast the government that has set them up). Royal commissions have the power to conduct public hearings, call for papers and call witnesses. Individuals and groups are invited to make submissions to the Commission, which then reports to the Prime Minister and Cabinet. They can have a significant impact on government policy. A good example is the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples of 1996.

Task Forces:

These are used to gather information, generate ideas and sample public opinion. They place more emphasis on public hearings than on formal research. Normally shorter-lived than Royal Commissions, they can be used to mobilize support from the public.

Round Tables, Forums and Advisory Committees:

More informal, these can be one-time events or ongoing, and are used to establish a focal point for the exchange of views between officials and those with a stake in the subject. Round Tables and Forums are used for public education and



Public Policy in Canada

- municipal community association youth divisions.

Citizen Juries:

These bring together a small group of people, randomly selected from the population, to hear expert 'witnesses' on a particular issue and to issue recommendations to the press and public. The CBC engaged in such an activity over the federal budget.

Deliberative Polling:

These bring together a national random sample of citizens for two or three days to discuss a public issue. Participants are exposed to competing experts and politicians in plenary and small group discussions. At the end of the process, participants are polled in detail to determine whether or not, and how, their views have changed.

