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Institute for Research and Development on Inclusion and Society
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The Disability Community's Engagement in Public Policy Processes: Concepts, Models, and Lessons for Enhancing Citizen-Centred Governance

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“It is time to put citizen engagement in a new light and to explore how it can be undertaken to foster citizen-centred government that speaks to the full concept of citizenship.” (Graham and Phillips, 1997: 267)

I. Introduction

The ultimate aim of this paper is to develop a better understanding of how the disability community can engage more effectively among themselves and with governments so as to move public policy issues and reform agendas forward.

The paper’s focus is on the participation of disability organizations and associations, and the disability policy community as a whole, in public policy processes in Canada. This is a somewhat different approach than found in much of the literature on citizen engagement, which tends to concentrate on individual citizens or on the internal features of specific organizations (Phillips with Orsini, 2001; Coleman and Skogstad, 1990). In contrast, the prime focus here is on inter-organizational relationships within the disability community and between this community and governments.

The central purpose of this paper is to identify actual and potential models (that is, participatory and consultative mechanisms, structures and practices) of engagement both among, and between, disability organizations and associations, and government members, legislators, judges and public servants in relation to policy processes. Another purpose is to clarify what is meant by such terms as the disability community, citizen engagement, and capacity.

The rest of the paper is organized in the following way:

- Part II examines the meaning of the disability community by exploring its boundaries and composition, and by highlighting four ways it can be understood analytically and practically. This allows us to make some observations about the organizational nature of the disability community and Canada’s disability state.
- Part III presents definitions of the concept of citizen engagement, distinguishing it from more traditional notions of public consultation. This part then discusses the purposes of engagement and the intended benefits for citizens and for governments.
- Part IV examines several models of engagement of the disability community in public policy processes at the federal, provincial/territorial, parliamentary, and intergovernmental arenas of

Canadian government. My intention is not to evaluate the merits of each; rather it is to describe what the Canadian state is, and to present the range of models that have been used in the disability field over the past few decades in Canada, and others that could be used in the future.

- Part V draws some conclusions and identifies some lessons about mutually successful engagement. Disability and democracy both have to do with diversity. Therefore, to advance the agenda of full citizenship for persons with disabilities, a number of models need careful consideration and possible adoption by the disability community and governments in Canada. The idea of engagement implies there is a pledge to a participatory relationship, with respect to shared and overlapping interests, that is arranged beforehand in order to attract and hold the involvement of individuals and community groups.

II. The Disability Community in Canada: Who Are We?

From an organizational perspective, who actually is in the disability community? What is the breadth and composition of this community in Canada? These may seem basic questions, yet they can quickly become contested and complicated, raising a number of choices about the boundaries and membership of the community.

The Abilities Foundation lists over 5,000 disability-specific organizations in the voluntary sector in Canada. Certainly, most people would agree that these are at the core of the community. This includes a variety of self-help groups, service providers and advocacy organizations. Beyond these, however, a host of questions arise. What of the informal social support networks of families, friends and helpful neighbours? What of private for-profit sector organizations that provide supports to persons with disabilities or fundraising assistance to disability-related societies? What about professional, medical, research, and rehabilitation organizations? What about generic community service agencies or public policy think tanks that may serve persons with disabilities among others in their clientele? And are government officials and political institutions included or not?

The boundaries of the disability community, then, are not always clear or agreed upon. Nor do those boundaries remain fixed. The community has likely expanded a great deal over the last few decades and, in more recent years, has struggled with the impact of public sector downsizing. There does come a point where the need to have actual consultations and partnerships takes over and decisions about distribution lists and invitations must be made.

In the Canadian literature, “the disability community” is rarely defined in an explicit manner in relation to the above questions. The tendency in documents is to (a) *exclude* government officials and agencies, legislatures, the courts, the professions, business firms, and the mass media; (b) *include* individuals and families, formal disability-specific organizations involved in self-help, service provision, and advocacy, and associations and coalitions representing these interests; and (c) *differentiate* this community from others within the voluntary sector in Canada, such as those for women, Aboriginal peoples, and seniors.

Consider, for example, the federal government’s recent report, *Advancing the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities* (Canada, 2002). The report makes repeated reference to “the disability community,” from which several features can be noted. One is that all 3.6 million Canadians with disabilities constitute the disability community. A second is that the community comprises “a wide variety of disability organizations” in which persons with disabilities may be members. The report makes mention of provincial and national disability associations, veterans’ organizations, and non-governmental organizations involved in international development. Interestingly, separate references are made to

Aboriginal persons with disabilities, and their representatives, which raise the question of the relation of Aboriginal disability organizations to the larger disability community in Canada. The disability community is also described as an important partner, with governments, organized labour, business and others, in working together and addressing disability issues

The overall image of the disability community, from this report, is a system of organized interests and associations outside of the Canadian state, relatively segmented and specialized, although linked to other policy communities and social movements.

A. Toward a Broader Understanding of the Disability Community

To better understand policy engagement, the disability community can be described in four ways, as shown in Box 1.

Box 1 Analytical Views of the Disability Community

- ❑ As a sector of diverse organizations with varying functions, perspectives and capacities.
- ❑ As a new social movement.
- ❑ As a constitutional category of citizens with rights-based identities.
- ❑ As a policy community of interest groups.

The practical reason for presenting these four viewpoints is that each captures some important features of the contemporary disability community in Canada. Moreover, each viewpoint offers a particular perspective on disability: in turn, as a range of needs for daily living that require supports and services; as a basis for celebrating difference and diversity and thus creating positive images; as a ground for entitlements and substantive equality rights; and as a focus for policy dialogue and political participation.

1. As a Sector of Diverse Organizations

The disability community entails far more than policy development and political advocacy activities. Indeed, probably most organizations in this community are concerned mainly with the provision of services and the acquisition of funds, staff, volunteers and other resources for running their operations. Most as well are locally based, non-profit agencies that receive funding and service contracts from governments (Bach, 2002). Thus, the disability community – as distinguished from the disability policy community –

includes individuals, groups and organizations that are primarily or wholly engaged as care givers, service providers or brokers, referral agents, consumers, and fund raisers. As a custom, they do not directly or regularly participate in public policy and political processes. Rather than policy instigators, they are policy takers, working on the edges of public policy processes. This seems especially the case for specific-disability service groups run on behalf of people with disabilities. Lobbying is usually not held to be a part of their mission. Any activism and social change is low-key and non-political, pursued through public education and role models (Boyce, et al, 2001:56).

In addition to mandate and mission, diversity in the disability community is apparent in many other ways (Canadian Centre on Disability Studies, 2002). One profound difference, implied in the above discussion, concerns the particular disability perspective embraced by specific organizations. An organization may be working in accordance with a perspective on disablement that gives more or less emphasis to biomedical factors, economic and labour market concerns, environmental barriers to integration, or a human rights and equality approach.

With respect to their capacity, disability organizations vary in the sources and amounts of their funding, numbers of paid staff and reliance on volunteers. They vary in terms of the size, continuity and nature of membership base – whether they are an organization of individuals with disabilities or of family members or of professionals or an organization of other organizations. Disability groups certainly vary with regard to their organizational history, general stability and internal complexity. With respect to scope, organizations divide between having a single disability focus and a multiple or cross-disability focus. With respect to scale, there are local, regional, provincial or territorial, national and international organizations.

2. As a New Social Movement

In writings, the disability community is commonly identified as an example of a new social movement (De Jong, 1979; Drieger, 1989; Fagan and Lee, 1997). New social movements (NSMs) are a form of collective action, organized around diversity to promote social identifies, that originated in the 1960s in a number of countries. (They are called new in contrast to the older social movements initiated by trade unions and working class groups, organized to resist or restructure capitalism.) Besides people with disabilities, other examples of NSMs are those representing women, environmentalists, and visible minorities. These formations are based in felt grievances of shared discrimination, oppression and exclusion. For this reason, they seek to challenge the traditional authority of professionals and other experts, and related language, roles and images of their group. In turn, they aim to enable disadvantaged individuals and groups to express their own voice in order to create new forms of public recognition and acceptance. NSMs transcend local places and individual jurisdictions as well as social and economic classes. A NSM contains people from a diverse range of backgrounds resulting in a decentralized network of

organizations and a “pluralism of ideas and values” held by the members (Larana, Johnston, and Gusfield, 1995).

The disability community in Canada exhibits several characteristics of a NSM. These include: claiming a self-defined identity in place of that previously dominant in society; questioning traditional state practices and professional controls; promoting an agenda of human rights and self-determination; challenging a purely bio-medical perspective on disability and promoting a socio-political model with a focus on the interaction between individuals and the larger environment; holding a strong interest in social reform and achieving greater influence in public services and programs generally.

3. As a Constitutional Category of Citizens

The placing of “physical and mental disability” in section 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in 1982 “has ensured that disablement and persons with disabilities are recognized politically” (Cameron and Valentine, 2001:35). More than that, including disability in the *Charter* means that people with disabilities are recognized in the most fundamental law of the land, the constitution, as a protected class of persons with a guarantee of equality rights. Disability is a socio-political status and persons with disabilities are now a constitutional category by virtue of their explicit recognition in the *Charter*. To define and enforce these fundamental rights and freedoms, such as mobility and equality, litigation has become an important strategy of individuals with disabilities and organizations representing their interests. This has raised the profile of the Canadian judiciary in the disability field and the wider social policy domain.

Inclusion in the *Charter* has given weight to a pan-Canadian vision on disability issues, along with a general orientation, by many disability groups at least, to federal leadership and national standards in policy, and to the ideal of full citizenship as the ultimate goal for reforms. As Sherri Torjman (2001: 194) has noted, “Ever since the heady days of Canada’s new constitution and the introduction of a Charter of Rights and Freedoms which guaranteed the protection of disability rights, the disability community has regarded Ottawa as the champion of its issues.”

The disability community is not indifferent to Canadian federalism. Many disability organizations have a federated structure with provincial chapters as well as a national office. For nearly 25 years now, disability associations, as a *Charter* group, have spoken out on constitutional reform ideas (Boyce et al, 2001; Cairns, 1995). At the same time, disability organizations have directed attention to provincial and territorial governments (as well as urban and local governments) in removing barriers to participation for persons with disabilities in order to advance accessibility, equity, self-determination, and inclusion. The rights-based identity of people with disabilities is prominently linked to the *Canadian Charter* but that identity is also substantially linked to the human

rights codes and related laws of the federal government and, for so many areas of everyday life, of the provinces and territories.

4. As a Policy Community of Interest Groups

The disability policy community is a segment of the larger disability community of diverse organizations. The disability policy community comprises representatives of groups and associations, who interact with governments and wider public sector officials and organizations, with the aim of shaping policy in this field and more generally across public policy.

All the interest groups regularly active in this field can be thought of as the disability policy community. These groups represent, in a formal way, certain interests of their membership. They formulate and present their ideas, experiences and claims to one or more of governments, cabinet ministers, administrative officials, legislators, tribunals and courts. Like interests groups in general, disability organizations seek to exercise influence over public policy (strategies, plans, legislation, regulations, budgets, decisions), through such vehicles as consultation, mobilization, litigation, and deliberation, rather than to actually exercise public authority.

In a wider sense, the disability policy community can be thought of as including individuals and groups with a potential involvement in the field, based on an indirect interest with disability issues. Participation by these groups is episodic, triggered perhaps by a certain issue in a given context. One meaning of building the capacity of the disability community, therefore, is to explore how to strategically incorporate more of these potential and peripheral participants into the core of the community.

Within the disability policy community in Canada are a series of associations. On behalf of a cluster of interest groups and service agencies, associations may represent a particular disability, a distinct client group, a specific provincial or regional area, or a functional activity such as legal advocacy. In addition, there are a number of umbrella associations, usually at the national level, that aim to comprehensively represent the relevant interests of that group.

B. The Organizational Nature of the Disability Community and Canada's Disability State

Looking at the disability community in these ways – as a sector of diverse organizations, as a new social movement, as a constitutional category of citizens, and as a policy community of interest groups – shows that the community is both extensively organized and significantly differentiated by perspectives and structures. The disability policy field also contains various policy networks, the structural bridge between the disability community and the disability state.

Canada's disability state, as I use the term, refers to the legislative, executive, judicial, and administrative agencies that have a direct involvement in disability issues and with the disability community. Along with specific organizations and officials, the disability state includes the macro-institutions of parliamentary government, federalism, the inherent right of Aboriginal self-government, and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Policy networks are specific organizational relations between (i) government and other state institutions and (ii) community agencies and actors. These networks form around particular issue areas, reform processes, and/or disabilities, jurisdictions, and policy instruments of importance to the community and the state. School testing, inclusive childcare, disability income benefits, accessible transportation, and labour market programs are illustrations of particular policy networks.

The idea of *community* implies a level of shared norms or common understanding among nearly all members. In the context of public policy, this shared understanding relates to the substance of policy (the proper role of governments, and the vision, principles and goals) and the process (structures, tactics and conduct) by which groups should engage with governments over these substantive issues. Experience in Canada strongly suggests that the disability community and governments have only had a national and intergovernmental policy focus for a decade. And even then, it is a partial and still contested vision. Both the community and the state contain various perspectives on disablement, some of which are in sharp tension with one another (Bickenbach, 1993). Not surprisingly then, the level of shared norms is still forming within this policy field.

The disability community also contains a multitude of organizations and several associations with specialized spheres of activity and responsibility. In principle, the benefits of differentiation for policy engagement are that it provides the organizational means for expressing a diversity of specific interests, and for providing specialized information on particular experiences across the country. By comparison, the disability community is not as equally integrated with one or two macro associations that span the entire community, coordinating the

diversity of groups and broadly representing all the key interests. A potential drawback to this high level of organizational differentiation is that, on its own, it limits the capacity of the community to interact, to formulate strategies for the whole community, or to plan the actions of members in public policy processes (Coleman and Skogstad, 1990:16-21).

At the same time the community is highly differentiated, “the state presents itself to the disabled citizen as a complex set of institutions” (Cameron and Valentine, 2001:23). At the federal level of government alone, over 30 agencies, departments and commissions have disability-related programs and services (Canada, 2002). Behind this complexity is an array of programs and diverse eligibility rules that raise concerns about equity, access, coordination, accountability and portability. Thus, to be more effective in disability policy engagement, the community and the state need to place more emphasis on integrative structures both within their respective sectors and between them.

III. Engagement and Citizen-Centred Governance

Citizen engagement, as a concept, has emerged in recent years to signify a new kind of participation by individuals and civil society organizations in public affairs, and a new kind of partnership between societal groups and governments. Citizen engagement is closely related to, and informed by, the concepts of public participation, partnerships, networking, mobilization and coalition building, and empowerment. At this stage in the young history of the concept, citizen engagement is more a democratic vision, in Canada as well as other countries, than a regular and specific set of legal or administrative arrangements.

Box 2 provides a selection of quotations to illustrate the language of citizen engagement, and something of the thinking behind the concept. All emphasize that engagement is a relationship or partnership between the state and civil society. It is often an inter-organizational relationship and intergovernmental one, as well as an exchange of ideas and information. It is also a power relationship, where some influence over policy development is shared more with citizens than would otherwise be the case, enabling groups to contribute to the decisions that directly affect them (Kerngahan, 1993).

Box 2
Engagement of Citizens in Policy Processes:
A Selection of Definitions

Maxwell (1997:1)	“Engagement: Citizens are asked to reflect on choices/tradeoffs which involve conflicts in values or difficult resource allocation decisions. Best used in situations where shared frameworks do not exist, and where major policy shifts are needed. Many techniques proposed, some are being used, but none yet proven.”
Wyman et al (1999:3)	“The term “citizen engagement” refers to the processes where governments have taken the initiative to involve citizens in policy development and the clarification of values, principles and desired outcomes.”
Mendelsohn (2000)	“Citizen engagement exercises tend to feature a prominent role for elites, including public servants and experts. Elected representatives may also be at the heart of the process. [It is] not just a “snapshot” of opinion at a given point in time: engagement is deliberative, interactive, and on-going, much like government decision-making.”
Pinto (2000:2)	“Citizen engagement is a term used to describe the renewed relationship Canadians wish to have with government. The term’s scope extends beyond the traditional notions of consultation, to encompass any activity that draws the public into a closer relationship with government.”
OECD (2001:2)	“Active participation: a relation based on partnership with government, in which citizens actively engage in the policy-making process. It acknowledges a role for citizens in proposing policy options and shaping policy dialogue – although the responsibility for the final decision or policy formulation rests with government.”
Policy Research Initiative (2002)	“Citizen engagement is about enriching the relationship between governments and citizens. It involves a mutual learning process and ultimately leads to more effective policy development.”
Phillips with Orsini (2002:3)	“Citizen engagement refers to a particular type of involvement characterized by interactive and iterative processes of deliberation among citizens (and sometimes organizations), and between citizens and government officials.”

A near universal point made in this literature is that citizen engagement in policy processes is not the same thing as the more familiar concepts and methods of public participation or consultation (Maxwell, 1997; Mendelsohn, 2000; OECD, 2001; Pinto, 2000; Yankelovich, 1998).

What Phillips and Orsini (2002:3) call “the standard template of public consultation” refers, they say, to: government control of the agenda and who is invited; a flow of information largely one-way; and a process of public participation that is episodic and short-lived. “The perspective and even the language of public consultation is state-centred, implying that the primary motivation is to obtain information from citizens or to inform citizens about pending government action.”

Engagement is a more ambitious notion of the role of the public in policy making and governance. Yankelovich (1998:1) reasons that: “The new “citizen engagement” would encourage citizens directly and make provision for significant changes in policy. For issues as important to the lives of Canadian citizens as children, education, health and welfare, it is almost inconceivable that with genuine citizen engagement the government’s policy formulations would remain unchanged.” Maxwell (1997) provides a useful summary that compares the traditional model of participation/consultation with the intentions of the engagement model. See Box 3.

Box 3
Contrasting Traditional Participation/Consultation Models
And Citizen Engagement Models

Traditional models	Engagement models
Encourage venting, advocacy	Encourage reflection, learning, choices
Treat interest groups one by one, creates a platform for them	Require interest groups to a) Listen to citizens b) Interact with other interests
Encourage a “me-first” dynamic	Permit focus on common ground
Focus on technical choices	Focus on moral choices
Seek validation of government’s choices	Assume citizens will add value and that new options will emerge
Tend to control process, focus on process, not outcome	Encourage new ideas through an open-ended process
Impose rigid deadlines	Take considerable time

Source: Maxwell (1997:3).

If traditional forms of public participation and consultation are state-centred, then engagement aims to be citizen-centred. According to Graham and Phillips (1997), citizen-centred government stands for three elements. First, government practices “encourage on an ongoing basis the exercise of full citizenship and its attendant responsibilities” as well as rights. Second, there is “mutual respect and attentiveness to the respective roles of government and its citizens” by cultivating working relationships between citizens and their organizations and public officials. Third, governments give recognition to both individuals and collectivities, that is, collective citizen identities, as mattering in democratic politics and policy making.

A citizen-centred government would engage citizens through various measures of public participation. Graham and Phillips (1997:259) define public participation to entail “practices, such as public hearings, public meetings and open houses, that involve government officials coming face to face with citizens and engaging them in dialogue, ostensibly before policies and priorities are set.” I would extend this definition to include other phases of the policy process, such as policy design, program implementation, and program monitoring and evaluation. This engagement would also involve government politicians, legislators, judges and others in the public sector.

A. Why Engagement? Purposes and Benefits

Citizen engagement is about ends as well as means. Besides being a process of activities, exercises, and procedures, citizen engagement is an outcome, an intended set of achievements and results. Getting involved with citizen engagement rests on some objectives and expectations. What motivates community organizations to engage in policy development partnerships? The purposes of disability organizations in making links with governments, legislators, bureaucrats, and judges are presented in Box 4.

Box 4
Purposes of Disability Organizations in Engaging with Governments

Target Audience	Purposes or Aims of Engagement
Politicians (Cabinet ministers, government leaders, opposition party leaders, Members of Parliament, Members of Legislative Assemblies, legislative committees, municipal leaders, councilors, school trustees and committees)	Reframe issues for politicians Provide information about the disability community Raise the profile of disability issues in debates Alert politicians to potential consequences if people with disabilities were disadvantaged by policy Obtain amendments to proposed legislation Directly influence the way politicians vote on particular legislation
Bureaucrats (At all levels of government and forms of public governance)	Provide information to relevant staff Influence internal governmental discussions on the disability perspective Obtain, in a timely manner, “non-confidential information, which might otherwise not become public”
Government Committees (E.g., advisory councils)	Represent a disability group or the community more generally by conveying information and a perspective Offer comment on policy proposals or reviews and on administrative activities Make connections with bureaucrats, politicians and other stakeholders Learn about the policy process and a given issue area
Judicial Forums (Courts and human rights tribunals)	Clarify and interpret constitutional rights and freedoms Interpret human rights and civil liberties Achieve reasonable accommodation by employers and service providers Obtain protection from and redress for unfair discrimination Improve the way the law works for persons with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups in Canada

Source: Based on and expanded from Boyce et al (2001:133-34) and Prince (2001a).

There are multiple purposes, then, from the perspective of disability advocates and organizations, in connecting with governments, legislators, bureaucrats, judges and human rights commissioners. These purposes can apply at all levels and parts of the Canadian public sector. Each target audience helps to address a different combination of aims for disability groups. Overall, these aims are quite comprehensive and ambitious to realize, even for a well-resourced national association. They are listed here to illustrate the range of motivations of the disability community for participating in policy processes.

No doubt, achieving just some of these aims would take a considerable investment in time, research, and commitment toward generating relevant information, forming contacts, building relations of trust and support, and establishing credibility and a political/public policy profile. To assist in these

tasks, disability organizations also forge linkages with professional associations, consultants, members of the media, and other advocacy organizations. The overall objective in all these forms of engagement is to maximize the influence of persons with disabilities and their organizations on public thinking and action as well as policy officials, processes and decisions.

Behind these purposes are intended results, the hoped for benefits of engagement. Numerous benefits are identified in the literature. Different articles or reports place emphasis on different benefits, and the authors are not always explicit on who benefits from such engagement. The literature also places insufficient emphasis on the mutual benefits of engagement shared between community groups and governments. In other words, it is not always clear if a given benefit of engagement relates to government or to the community participating or to both.

It is important to be aware of this anticipated distribution of benefits. It can help clarify the expectations of all the different parties entering into a citizen engagement process. To the extent that such clarification is reached, a shared understanding of what engagement can and cannot do, separately and jointly, for the participants is more likely to occur. A clearer appreciation of the distribution of benefits from engagement may help to recruit, retain and motivate the next generation of leaders in disability organizations and associations. It may also show to governments what the advantages are for policy making, administration and the democratic community.

The benefits to government (politicians and public servants), from involvement in citizen engagement processes, are readily identified from various sources (Boyce et al, 2001; Canadian Centre on Disability Studies, 2002; Kernaghan, 1993; Mendelsohn, 2000; OECD, 2001; Phillips with Orsini, 2002; Pinto, 2000). These benefits include the following:

- ❑ Acquire policy-relevant information, ideas, and knowledge for understanding the environment, making decisions and evaluating performance;
- ❑ Dispel myths about an issue, policy or program and build bridges into the community;
- ❑ Improve the quality, responsiveness and effectiveness of decisions and services;
- ❑ Improve the efficiency in service provision and delivery;
- ❑ Enhance the credibility and legitimacy of public organizations, policy decisions and programs;

-
- ❑ Strengthen public trust or confidence in government, legislatures and other public institutions;
 - ❑ Complement the limited resources and capacities of public sector agencies;
 - ❑ Expand community resources and social capital; and,
 - ❑ Support active citizenship and building a vital democratic society.

Likewise, for individuals and community organizations, citizen engagement in policy processes can include the following benefits:

- ❑ Promote the social inclusion of people traditionally left out of political life and public policy and administrative processes;
- ❑ Generate, share and publicize knowledge, experiences, ideas and insights within the community and with governments and other sectors in society;
- ❑ Advance the policy reform agenda of improving access, removing barriers and addressing needs for supports and adequate income;
- ❑ Challenge and transform existing stereotypes, labels and outmoded ideas concerning people with disabilities;
- ❑ Promote greater public and political awareness of disability issues and the experiences of Canadians with disabilities;
- ❑ Achieve an enhanced level of empowerment and self-worth through greater voice and input into policy development and evaluation processes;
- ❑ Foster a fuller sense of citizenship of individuals with disabilities;
- ❑ Build civic capacity at the level of the organization, association, coalition or overall community; and,
- ❑ Realize greater transparency and accountability of policy planning, priority setting and decision processes.

These two lists reveal several commonalities, reflecting the interdependence of governments and citizens in a democratic society. As Phillips and Orsini (2002: 30) have observed, “in a model of governance that is more embedded in civil society, governments more than ever need a strong and vibrant civil society as both a governing partner and an independent source of social capital and citizenship promotion.”

It is in the interest of both governments and the community to engage in meaningful policy development exercises. It may help avoid costly corrections to policies and programs in later stages of implementation because of inadequate input at earlier stages by the community. Beyond that, for both government and community, effective civic engagement holds the promise of addressing pressing social needs, advancing inclusion, and enhancing the effectiveness and accountability of programs. In short, effective policy engagement can support 'doing the right thing' as well as 'doing the thing right.'

IV. Models of Engagement in the Disability Sector

We now turn to survey several models of engagement. The models represent major methods to engage in policy-related relations. These relationships occur at three levels: within the disability community, between this community and other communities, and between the disability community and the Canadian state. The Canadian state is conceptualized as a diverse collection of branches (legislative, executive, judicial, administrative) and levels (federal, provincial/territorial, First Nation, local) of governance linked in various ways through a web of intergovernmental relations. The main avenues of policy engagement are listed in Box 5.

Box 5 Models of Disability Community – Canadian State Engagement

1. Intra-community, those within the disability community;
2. Cross-sector, those involving disability groups working with organizations in associations in other parts of the voluntary or the private sector;
3. Community-political executive connections;
4. Community-legislative interactions;
5. Community-judiciary relations, when disability organizations use the courts and quasi-judicial tribunals;
6. Community-public service engagement between disability representatives and public servants; and,
7. Community engagement within intergovernmental structures and processes.

A. Intra-Community Engagement

This type of engagement involves disability organizations working in partnerships, and forming alliances and coalitions with other organizations in the disability community. It consists of such efforts as:

- Gathering information about disability support needs, issues and practices;
- Undertaking or sponsoring research, social audits, needs assessments, and community consultations;

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- ❑ Meeting with affiliates and locals to share information, to obtain input, and to develop positions on policy issues and set priorities;
 - ❑ Meeting and organizing with other disability organizations and associations to apply for joint funding or to advocate for a certain reform;
 - ❑ Forming and/or joining partnerships and coalitions among organizations within the disability community.

Transaction costs are associated with this series of activities – costs in time, budgets and staff in forging and managing such relations. For disability agencies with very limited resources and a mandate that is for service provision, these activities also represent considerable opportunity costs. Resources devoted to engagement undertakings are at the expense of being able to pursue other programming and service delivery work; hence, the need for collaboration among groups in the disability community.

Five examples of internal engagement are briefly discussed here: holding community roundtables, community profiling, formulating a national strategy, developing a specific policy proposal, and producing election campaign statements.

1. Holding Community Roundtables

At community roundtables, which can be held at a local, provincial or national level, disability organizations come together to share their perspectives on needs, positive policy trends, and challenges on a given topic, such as disability supports, or perhaps a bundle of issues concerning a larger agenda. Such events can involve an environmental scan, in which the current context as well as the climate for policy development is surveyed across groups, issues and jurisdictions, possibly with an identification of priority issues, desire outcomes, and themes for further work. These events may only last a day or so, but can be invaluable occasions for bringing together representatives of organizations that may interact infrequently. Information and insights can be shared, building the morale, social capital, and knowledge base of individuals, specific agencies and the overall community.

2. Community Profiling

For many of the research and information tasks involved in an environmental scan, Hawtin, Hughes and Percy-Smith (1994:5) use the term ‘community profiling.’ They define community profiling as: “A *comprehensive* description of the *needs* of a population that is defined, or defines itself, as a *community*, and the resources that exist within that community, carried out with the *active involvement of the community* itself, for the purpose of developing an *action plan* or other means of improving the quality of life in the community.”

Along with assessing needs, a community profile seeks to demonstrate the impact of various public policies and programs on a community.

3. Formulating a Comprehensive Plan

Another type of intra-community engagement is when groups come together to formulate a comprehensive vision and action plan. A case in point is *A National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities: The Community Definition* (Council of Canadians with Disabilities, 1999), a document produced in November 1999 and endorsed by a coalition of 13 national disability-related organizations.¹ This effort was stimulated by a sense within the disability community that, despite the identification of disability issues as a priority by First Minters in 1996 and the release of the *In Unison* vision paper by governments in 1998, governments still were approaching disability issues in a piecemeal and uncoordinated fashion, “favouring “disability initiatives” and “special projects” which do not have sufficient scope or depth to achieve the equality promised in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.” National organizations representing persons with disabilities had also been shown a federal strategy paper on disability, in draft form, in January 1999. The making of *A National Strategy* was therefore done to present “a united voice” by the community to government decision makers, “a comprehensive plan to advance the equality rights of persons with disabilities via a systematic plan of barrier review and removal.”

The comprehensive scope of the community’s paper is apparent in its inclusion of Aboriginal peoples with disabilities (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities), children with disabilities and their families, and seniors with disabilities, thus complementing the typical emphasis in policy papers on the working-age population. *A National Strategy* also touched on roles and responsibilities within the cabinet, the legislative branch, and the public service bureaucracy. In the paper, the coalition of national disability organizations made numerous specific and concrete recommendations, directed at various federal government departments and agencies, but intended also for the careful consideration of the provinces and territories, and by municipal and other local governments, in consultation with persons with disabilities and their organizations. This document was designed to prompt governments to not only take further action on disability issues, but also act in a far more coordinated manner, informed by an “access and inclusions lens,” and in close consultation with the disability community.

¹ The following organizations endorsed this document: Council of Canadians with Disabilities, Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres, Canadian Association for Community Living, Canadian Paraplegic Association, Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Canadian Hard of Hearing Association, Aboriginal Reference Group on Disabilities, Neil Squire Foundation, Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and work, DisAbled Women’s Network, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, and National Educational Association of Disabled Students.

4. Developing Specific Policy Proposals

A variation of the above process is where a number of disability organizations work in concert to produce a specific proposal for reform in policy. The development of a framework for a national disability supports plan is one such example. For at least four years, disability groups have been creating a “map” for a national disability supports plan. Over this time, the proposal has been revised, reflecting the input from disability community organizations, though the basic framework of the proposal has remained consistent through the drafts. Input and support for the plan has come from advocacy associations of persons with disabilities, parent organizations, and service providers (Roeher, 2001:1; Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres, 2002:1).

Again, the community’s intent is to motivate governments into sustained and collaborative substantial action. The proposal “calls for a comprehensive, coordinated, inter-sectoral, multi-jurisdictional government initiative to invest in disability supports in a way that begins to deliver on the commitments they made in *In Unison* to advancing the full citizenship of people with disabilities in Canada. The aim here is not to present detailed policy recommendations. Rather the purpose is to provide a common framework for governments and the disability community to move the disability supports agenda forward in a concerted and strategic manner. The proposal reflects findings of many years of consultation in the disability sector and many years of policy research.” From that consultation and research has come an agreed upon set of values, principles and desired characteristics for a national disability supports plan. In addition, the paper states that the directions for reform set out “fit well within the commitments made to joint social policy development by both levels of government, and to real dialogue and collaboration with the community and voluntary sectors” (Roeher, 2001:1)

5. Producing Election Campaign Statements

One more example of this model of engagement is when, around general elections, disability organizations issue a statement to political candidates and parties on the shared principles of the disability community and positions on issues (Roeher, 1997). This is a device that can raise the profile of the disability community as a significant constituency of voters, raise the awareness of parties and candidates, and help assess the positions of candidates and parties on issues important to the disability community. This technique could also be done in cooperation with other social movements and parts of the voluntary sector.

B. Cross-Sector Engagement

This approach has to do with disability organizations and associations, working with organizations and associations in the larger voluntary sector and perhaps other sectors through coalitions and networking. Three types of

coalitions may be identified: virtual, ad hoc, and permanent coalitions. Their features and functions are outlined in Box 6.

Box 6
Coalition Building by Disability Groups

Type	Features	Functions
Virtual	Communication networks Loose affiliation No formal structure	Exchange information and ideas on shared interests Learn from others Build contacts/alliances
Ad Hoc	Specific issue or purpose Time-limited Loose structure Either within the disability sector or across sectors	Rally support Increase numbers Share information Present a broad and united front Gain political attention
Permanent	Broad area of concerns and issues Ongoing activities Formal structure with some staff to coordinate activities of mutual interest	Raise numbers and profile Generate and exchange information and ideas Establish legitimacy and authority with political system Build solidarity across groups

Source: Based on Boyce et al (2001:135-36).

In a given policy sector, any combination of these three types of coalition building might be present at a certain point or over a period of time. I would hypothesize that, in the past, ad hoc coalitions tended to be the most common type; that is now complemented by web-based forms of coalitions and, to a degree, by permanent alliances forged between the disability community and, for example, the human rights movement. On the basis of a mutuality of interest, the foundation of support for disability-related issues has broadened and that support has somewhat been structured (Roehrer, 1997:168).

There can be little doubt that coalitions and networks are important resources for policy engagement, especially for marginalized groups such as people with disabilities. As communications capabilities have improved, coalition building and networking in the disability community have grown in number and effectiveness. The Canadian Abilities Foundation, for instance, provides extensive information and resource materials, and hosts chats on their website, EnableLink, in a range of issues. Full transcripts of their monthly chats are posted and made available.

Until the 1990s, there was little success in or inclination toward coalition building between disability groups and other social movements, such as Aboriginal or women's groups. In part it was because of a concern that such alliances might overshadow disability issues (Boyce, et al, 2001:62 and 130). Other factors were at play. DisAbled Women's Network (DAWN) Canada, a national feminist cross-disability organization, "was founded in response to the frustration women with disabilities felt because of the inaccessibility of the

women's movement, and the indifference to women's issues from the disability community" (Roeher, 1997:166).

In cross-sector engagement, there may be competing advocacy coalitions in a given policy sector – two or more coalitions of various actors and groups who hold contending beliefs, priorities and strategies about disability policy. While the nature of policy networks vary by issue, time and place, the policy analysis literature suggests there tends to be two advocacy coalitions or more in a given policy field. An example is the clash between the Ad Hoc Coalition of Service Providers and the Ontario Advocacy Coalition over proposed provincial advocacy and guardianship legislation in the early 1990s. The two coalitions differed in many ways: their goals, membership base, funding, organizational structures, tactics, and perspectives on disability (Boyce et al, 2001). A lesson from this case is that coalition building may not mitigate political conflict, at least in the short run.

Coalitions can be a competitive as well as a cooperative affair. Such competition is to be expected, particularly when prevailing views of experts and professionals are being challenged. Over a decade or longer, this is how basic policy philosophies are debated, reviewed, and gradually altered. An enduring change in policy beliefs about disability "is more likely when there exists a prestigious forum that forces professionals from all sides to participate" (Pal, 1997:207).

Whereas these first two models are society-centred approaches to policy engagement, highlighting activities and relations of organizations in the voluntary sector and civil society, the rest of the models to be examined are state-centred, focusing on Canada's formal political institutions of government, parliament, the judiciary, and inter-governmental relations.

C. Community-Political Executive Engagement

Involved here are relations between one or more disability organizations and a particular government leader, minister, city mayor, and their political staff. To be sure, this can be a strategy for building relationships with members of the governing elite. Four types of engagement with political executives can be noted, namely, episodic activities, cyclic process, temporary advisory structures, and permanent public bodies.

1. Episodic Activities

Episodic links between the disability community and cabinet ministers take place around specific reform processes, ranging from constitutional matters to legislation and regulations. These often represent classic lobbying and advocacy efforts, and perhaps consultation exercises. These activities may not qualify as engagement under the definition presented in the literature, but they

are important connections for any group that wishes to influence the shape and direction of public policy.

2. Cyclic Processes

In some regularly recurring policy processes, the participation of disability organizations is both expected by the community and accepted by government. A notable example is the annual pre-budget consultation process held by the Finance Minister at the federal government level. A common refrain in budget speeches is that such changes reflect a process of ongoing consultations with representatives of organizations for Canadians with disabilities. Following on the 1996 report of Federal Task Force on Disability Issues (discussed further presently), recommendations on tax reforms were introduced in the 1997 and 1998 federal budgets. After the February 1999 budget, however, eight national disability organizations, in a letter to the Prime Minister, criticized the federal government for lack of substantial action in implementing many of the recommendations of the Task Force report (Anderssen, 1999). Since then, several disability-related tax initiatives have been additionally introduced, most notably the Child Disability Benefit announced in the 2003 federal budget.

3. Temporary Advisory Structures

An example of a temporary advisory body on disability issues connected to ministers is the Technical Advisory Committee on Tax Measures for Persons with Disabilities, announced in the February 2003 federal budget. This advisory group had an 18-month time frame in which to advise the Ministers of Finance and Revenue on the administrative and eligibility criteria for the Disability Tax Credit and other tax measures affecting Canadians with disabilities. Intended to be independent of the government, the Technical Advisory Committee had 12 members that included several members of organizations representing persons with disabilities, some tax law specialists, medical practitioners, and social policy experts (Finance Canada, 2003).²

4. Permanent Public Bodies

Ongoing formal linkages between the disability community and political executives in Canada exist with cabinet ministers designated as responsible for disability issues and with advisory bodies on disability issues that are attached to the premier's office. Typically, in jurisdictions where a minister is designated as responsible for disability – for example, Canada, Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan - there is an office for disability offices located within that particular minister's department or ministry.

² The website can be found at <http://www.disabilitytax.ca/>. Adobe Acrobat and text versions of the Committee's full report are available at <http://www.disabilitytax.ca/main-e.html>.

In Alberta, Saskatchewan, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, responsibility for disability issues is located in public bodies with a statutory foundation, which are attached to the legislative assembly or the premier's office (Prince, 2001a: 37). This affords these bodies profile and stability in their role. The law establishing the Disabled Persons Commission in Nova Scotia also specifies the formation of a coordinating committee of cabinet. British Columbia had a premier's advisory council for persons with disabilities from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, although it lacked a legislative base.

Both temporary advisory committee and statutory councils sit outside the regular public service bureaucracy, and can potentially serve several functions for governments and the disability community. These include: to provide representation of particular groups and expertise on the organization; to consult the public by holding hearings; to collect information and conduct or sponsor research on an issue; to evaluate policies, programs and administrative systems; and, to publicly offer advice and perhaps recommendations on a range of issues to a minister or cabinet committee.

D. Community-Legislative Engagement

This domain of engagement includes relations between disability groups and parliamentary committee(s) and individuals MPs, MLA/MNAs, municipal councillors.

1. Parliamentary Committees: A Place for Disability Consultants and Witnesses

Since the early 1980s, an important space for engagement by disability groups and issues has been parliamentary committees. A special committee of the House of Commons on the constitution, in effect in 1980-81, provided the first significant involvement of disability advocates and certain groups as parties to constitutional reform, providing the opportunity to alter the language in the *Canadian Charter*. In the same time period, the special parliamentary committee that produced the important *Obstacles* report had hired a staff member of the Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped (COPOH), to serve as a consultant to the committee. This enabled the consultant, based usually in Winnipeg, to gather information on the political landscape in Ottawa and on key policy issues, and relay that knowledge to COPOH.

In Ottawa, first this special parliamentary committee, then a standing House of Commons Committee on Human Rights and the Status of Disabled Persons, and more recently a Sub-Committee of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, have served as vehicles for involving and consulting with disability groups, and as useful catalysts for change. Through their reports, these legislative bodies promote the equality of rights of persons with disabilities;

highlight the costs of inaction; monitor and assess government initiatives; recommend legislative and regulatory reviews and reforms to the tax system as it affects persons with disabilities. In all this, legislative bodies draw political and public attention to the needs of Canadians with disabilities; and, contribute to the conceptual and programmatic expression of a new disability policy paradigm. The disability community values parliamentary committees as a place to voice their concerns and to bridge the gap in access to other parts of the government and political system (Torjman, 2001:167).

2. A National Parliamentary Forum with Experts

A variant of community-legislature engagement was a national parliamentary forum on the status of persons with disabilities, held in 1988. Co-hosted by the Speaker of the House of Commons and the then Standing Committee on the Status of Disabled Persons, the forum was a one-day event on the concept of “independence within the community.” More than 100 people participated, including Speakers and elected members from federal and provincial legislatures along with elected municipal leaders and Human Rights Commissioners. Participants discussed the testimony of 13 expert witnesses from all parts of Canada on three themes, namely, participation, accessibility, and awareness. The forum resulted in a published report, that contained no specific recommendations for policy, and appears to have been a singular event with no follow-up (Canada, 1988).

3. A Task Force with Community Observers

Another variant was the federal Task Force on Disability Issues, appointed in June 1996 by the ministers of Finance, Human Resources Development, and Revenue. Their mandate was to define and to make recommendations regarding the appropriate role of the federal government as it relates to Canadians with disabilities. The Task Force was chaired by MP Andy Scott and included three other members of parliament. The Office for Disability Issues within HRDC provided support to the Task Force.

Representatives of about 20 national disability organizations participated in the work of the Task Force in a variety of ways. The representatives formed a Reference Group that identified issues and refined research themes, and had observers present at all the public meetings of the Task Force. Specifically, three representatives from these organizations were selected by their colleagues to act as observers of the Task Force meetings. These community representatives undoubtedly provided the Task Force a rich knowledge of, and deep commitment to disability issues. They accompanied the Task Force in community meetings held across the country. Experts commissioned to do research collaborated with a working group of representatives of the national organizations. In 15 forums the Task Force held across the country, some 2,000 people participated, most of who

were people with disabilities.³ They released their final report, *Equal Citizenship for Canadians with Disabilities: The Will to Act*, in October of the same year (Canada, 1996).

4. E-consultations: engaging citizens online

A recent use of e-consultation is by the House of Commons Sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. The Sub-Committee held an online consultation on the Canada Pension Plan Disability program from December 2002 to March 2003. As this consultation concerned the review of an existing program, it illustrates online engagement at the evaluation stage of the policy process.

Featuring a dedicated web site, this online engagement provided information on the issues of CPP disability, included an exercise in the form of an issue poll, and invited feedback from all interested citizens (Sub-Committee, 2003). Over the four months (which originally had been for three months and then extended another month) there were more than 15,000 visitors to the web site and over 1,400 people completed a survey and sent their comments. This represents a significant level of public participation, most likely extending opportunities to people who otherwise would not have participated with a parliamentary committee.

This e-consultation complemented more conventional techniques of public engagement used by the Sub-Committee, such as inviting briefs, hearing witnesses and, in this case, holding a roundtable with experts and consumers. A summary of the key points arising from that roundtable was later posted on the Sub-Committee's web site (Sub-Committee, 2002). This mixed approach has the benefit of joining newer information technologies with more traditional consultative tools used by parliamentarians, thus supporting rather than threatening the role of elected representatives. It would be both interesting and helpful if parliamentarians reviewed this exercise, and similar ones⁴, to see what lessons can be found. As an international organization points out in a recent policy report: "Online citizen engagement in policy-making is new and examples of good practice are rare. Hence the imperative for building on the experience of others and the need for further comparative work on this emerging issue" (OECD, 2003:6).

³ The national organizations, local groups and individuals that participated in the consultation processes of the Task Force are listed in the final report, *Equal Citizenship* (Canada, 1996: 101-13).

⁴ Other examples of the use of the Internet by governments in engaging Canadians with disabilities include the Persons with Disabilities Online site for the Government of Canada (www.pwd-online.ca) and the Disability WebLinks site (www.disabilityweblinks.ca) that supplies information about federal, provincial and territorial programs of interest to persons with disabilities.

E. Community-Judiciary Engagement

This form of engagement, especially over the past 20 years or so, often entails using the court system in advancing disability issues and rights. From the 1940s into the 1970s, provinces took the lead in developing human rights codes and commissions, and by the 1980s all codes listed disability as one of the prohibited grounds of discrimination. It is a mistake then, to call the judicial activism of the last two decades with the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* an “Americanization” of tactics used the disability community in Canada. Disability advocates and organizations have looked to judicial forums and tribunals for a considerable period.

Disability organizations resort to the courts and human rights tribunals as a means to enforce reasonable accommodation in such areas as transportation and employment; to require governments to provide services and supports under existing public programs; and to end discrimination on the basis of mental or physical disabilities (Cameron and Valentine, 2001:35; Prince, 2001a).

Even with the constitutional entrenchment of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in the early 1980s, provincial codes remain uniquely significant with their wider scope of application, extending beyond governmental activity to include private activities such as advertising, accommodation, business generally, contracts, employment, family law and transportation services. Thus, the *Charter* supplements but will never supplant the role of provincial and the federal human rights laws for advancing the rights of persons with disabilities. The *Charter* has encouraged the use of a rights-talk in politics and policy-making and the pursuit of equality litigation. As well, it has expanded the judicial review powers and likely the judicial activism proclivities of Canadian judges. Charter decisions on disability issues are contributing to the creation of national standards enforceable by the courts.

The Courts Challenges Program of Canada, in effect from the late 1970s to 1992 and then reinstated again in 1994, intends to clarify constitutional rights and freedoms, and to enable minority language groups and equality-seeking groups and individuals (particularly those mentioned in section 15 of the *Charter*) to pursue their legal and constitutional rights through the courts. With respect to equality rights, the Program funds only cases that involve a challenge to a federal law, policy or practice, that raise equality arguments, and that are test cases dealing with a problem or raising an argument not already decided by the courts. Such test cases have the potential to end discrimination or improve the way the law works for disadvantaged Canadians. People with disabilities are eligible for funding, as individuals or as groups, as a *party* directly affected by a case or as an *intervener* who wishes to raise constitutional arguments not raised by others in a case. Since 1994, disability issues have been a prominent feature of the equality rights applications and the case funding decisions (Prince, 2001a: 184).

As a form of engagement by Canada's disability community, results of litigation for rights and against discrimination are mixed. In cases involving a range of institutions as diverse as a local school board, the federal correctional services, and provincial health care services, the Supreme Court of Canada has held that employers have a duty, under section 15, to make reasonable accommodations to the needs of a person with a mental or physical disability. The accommodations, however, may often be narrowly interpreted and only slowly implemented by governments.

F. Community-Public Service Engagement

In this model, disability groups and advocates engage with public servants, such as offices for disability offices, advisory committees, program managers and service providers.

1. Engagement with Federal Public Service Organizations

Given the large size and complexity of the public sector in Canada, one way to examine this is to outline briefly selected forms that engagement has taken between the disability community and federal public service organizations. These include the following:

- Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) works in partnership with the Royal Canadian Legion, as well as other veterans' organizations, on needs such as housing support for veterans with service-related disabilities. VAC also offers an advocacy service to departmental clients when they apply for benefits or are appealing unfavourable decisions about eligibility.
- HRDC officials consulted with representatives from a number of disability organizations, including Aboriginal groups, about the accountability and reporting framework (key result areas, outcomes and indicators) presented in *Advancing the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities* (Canada, 2002).
- The Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy (AHRDS) devolves from HRDC to Aboriginal groups across the country, through 79 five-year agreements, labour market program design, funding and delivery responsibilities. Under these agreements, Aboriginal agencies administer a small, specific allocation for disability programming (\$3 million in total each year) financed from the Opportunities Fund (Canada, 2002:37-8).
- Statistics Canada developed the 2001 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) in consultation with HRDC, social scientists, and persons with disabilities. The name of the survey and a number of the questions directly reflected the wishes of the disability community to

strengthen the knowledge base on issues and to shift the underlying thinking of practitioners and researchers from an individualized-medical concept of disability to a social-environmental perspective.

- With changes in the *National Transportation Act* in 1988 and 1992, issues of accessibility for persons with disabilities are embedded in the mandate and activities of the Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA). The CTA investigates and seeks to resolve complaints from persons with disabilities who have problems using transportation modes under federal jurisdiction. On a more systemic level, the CTA also conducts industry surveys, as well as formulates and enforces regulations and codes of practice for transportation accessibility (Canadian Transportation Agency, 2002). In addition, the agency provides advice and information to raise public awareness and assist Canadians with disabilities on traveling. The CTA has an Accessibility Advisory Committee that helps it develop regulations, codes of practice and industry guidelines. The Advisory Committee has 35 members. Just over half (19) are representatives from the community of persons with disabilities. Other representatives are from the transportation industry (7), Transport Canada (5) and other federal government agencies or provinces (4). The disability representatives come from a cross-section of single and cross-disability, and service provision and advocacy groups.

- The National Librarian of Canadian established a Council on Access to Information for Print-disabled Canadians in February 2001. The Council has two core purposes. The first is to provide advice, identify funding requirements, monitor progress and make recommendations to the National Librarian regarding the implementation of *Fulfilling the Promise: The Report of the task Force on Access to Information for Print-Disabled Canadians*. The second purpose is to identify and recommend to the National Librarian opportunities for the Council (or its designated spokespersons) to connect, inform and facilitate the work of the Federal Disability Agenda (National Library of Canada, 2003). The Council has 12 members, a chair and 11 other members who come from alternate format producers, education institutions, public libraries, publishers, and consumers and consumer groups. The Council is also assisted by five policy advisors, four of whom are from federal government departments, to make sure links are made with the Federal Disability Agenda, and the other is from the CNIB. The Council meets twice a year in person with other meetings by other formats if needed. The Council is supported by a secretariat provided by the National Library. Listservs have been created to encourage discussion and exchange.

2. Provincial Activities

Within provincial jurisdictions, too, consultations between government departments and organizations of and for persons with disabilities take place on a fairly regular basis on various topics. In British Columbia, members of groups representing person with disabilities took part in consultations with the provincial ministry, over a two- year period, on developing the disabilities benefits program that came into effect in April 1997. In Manitoba, Nova Scotia and other jurisdictions, consultations have been underway with service providers and members of the disability community on the harmonization of benefits and services to persons with disabilities, among other matters.

Some provinces, specifically, Alberta, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, have had advisory councils attached to their respective governments since the 1980s; other provinces, such as Saskatchewan, Quebec and Manitoba have offices on disability issues located within their public service bureaucracies; and, still other provinces and the territories have never created such bodies. In Ontario, with the passage of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act in 2005 a provincial Accessibility Standards Advisory Council was formed.

These federal and provincial examples reveal an assortment of practices and approaches to engagement. Some cases are relatively new, while others are longstanding; some are one-time and fairly specific, while others are more general and ongoing; a few are far more structured and officially mandated than many others; and they can focus on different stages of the policy process, from offering ideas and comments, to advising on evaluation designs, through monitoring the progress of activities, to overseeing the actual delivery of services and programs on the ground.

G. Community-Intergovernmental Engagement

In disability policy making, collaborative federalism is broadening participation beyond ministers, senior bureaucrats and program specialists to include organizations of, and for people with disabilities, plus legislators, social policy consultants and other service provider agencies. It is also establishing new lines and strengthening old lines of accountability to legislatures and other stakeholders (Prince, 2001b). Even so, most disability organizations feel “they have little direct access” to federal-provincial-territorial (FPT) working groups and are concerned they will be left out of these intergovernmental forums “or at best consulted after the fact.” They wonder too “how they can relate to, let alone influence, this process” (Torjman, 2001:163 and 193).

To illustrate the opportunities and challenges, I will review three cases of disability community engagement with intergovernmental processes spanning the last decade.

1. Creating a Collective Vision: Mainstream '92

Ministers responsible for Social Services agreed to pursue creating a federal-provincial-territorial vision of principles and objectives, as part of an intergovernmental review of services affecting people with disabilities. This resulted in the *Pathway to Integration, Final Report* (Canada, 1993). Called “Mainstream 1992,” the aim of this process was to develop a collective strategic framework, which explored the full integration of Canadians with disabilities in the mainstream of Canadian society. A related goal was to explore if governments and the disability community could agree upon a vision and statement of principles.

A consultation process was established, which ran for two years, to explore creating such a shared strategic framework. More specifically, the consultation considered current practices and possible strategic directions in the social services, employment programs, community independent living, income security, and disability related supports. Several techniques of engagement were used: holding focus groups across the country; receiving briefs from national associations and organizations that work with or represent people with disabilities; meetings between the organizing committee of the review and individuals with disabilities, policy experts, and representatives of advocacy and consumer organizations; and commissioning research studies on various disability issues.

Alexander (2001:29) neatly summarizes the interplay between governmental and community perspectives in this process:

The development of a strategic framework required the creation of an agreed upon vision statement, a statement of principles and a series of strategic directions. The Mainstream 92 report points to the fact that from the outset there was disagreement between government and the participants from disability groups on the vision statement. The government came to the Mainstream 92 process with a vision statement that was based on the “Open House” concept that emphasized the “importance of people with disabilities being able to participate fully in the mainstream of Canada.” Participants from disability groups brought with them a detailed *Equality and Citizenship Rights* paradigm that they had developed through the consultation process. Their vision was based on the belief “that people with disabilities have the *right* to participate fully in their communities on equal terms as other Canadians.” Further it stressed that accommodation is required to ensure that people with disabilities have equity in relation to opportunities and outcomes. The Federal Government’s statement was limited to stressing the importance of participation. While both vision statements were published in the Mainstream 92 report, the Federal Government’s “Open House” vision was adopted as the Mainstream 92 vision statement.

A similar process of parallel presentations of statements of principles took place, although in this case the principles eventually agreed to and published in the mainstream 92 report reflected more of a mix of the government and disability community perspectives (Alexander, 2001:30). The Mainstream 92 exercise was an essential effort at establishing relations and exploring ways of

working together. A more consensual vision and shared approach to disability issues, between the community and governments, would come with the Scott Task Force in 1996 and the *In Unison* document in 1998.

2. Reviewing the Canada Pension Plan, 1995-96

The process for reforming the Canada Pension Plan, including the Disability program component, over the 1995-96 period, involved an intergovernmental public consultation process. This process offered access points, through presentations and written submissions, for persons with disabilities, their advocates, numerous national and provincial disability organizations. In addition to joint federal-provincial/territorial (FPT) consultations held across the country, the Ontario government conducted its own consultations on the future of the CPP, using two MPPs to visit 10 communities throughout the province. The FPT consultation held a special disability forum near the end of the hearings process, conducted as a “town hall” meeting with audience participation. At this forum were several health and life insurance companies, some provincial workers’ compensation board representatives, and a handful of national disability organizations.

A number of democratic deficits, however, were evident in the CPP review process. The consultation paper contained not one proposal for improving benefits. Virtually no information was included on the impact of proposed cuts overall or by gender; and many groups felt that ample time had not been set aside for all interested parties to participate in the hearings. The eventual changes made to the CPP in 1997-98 also included the elimination of the CPP Advisory Board. For Canadians with disabilities, the process was largely unsatisfactory as several aspects of the disability program were restrained or cutback. Arguably, though, their participation in these processes, joined by the voices of organized labour and social policy groups, limited the degree to which the CPP in general, and the disability benefit in particular, was reduced (Prince, 2001c).

3. Producing the *In Unison* Report, 1998

In 1998, federal and provincial and territorial governments (except Quebec) agreed to a new approach to disability issues in Canada, expressed in the *In Unison* document. The vision declared that persons with disabilities ought to participate as full citizens in all aspects of Canadian society. To do so, would require further action by all segments of society, including governments, in three areas or building blocks: disability supports, employment, and income security. In developing the *In Unison* policy vision, the nine provincial and two territorial ministers responsible for social services asked their officials to share the draft document with stakeholders from the disability community.

Torjman (2001:193), who served as a consultant to this exercise, describes the process and, from her experience, raises the issues of when and how often should intergovernmental discussions be shared with a policy community:

The federal-provincial working group on disability set up a reference group to keep consumers informed of the discussions and to receive their input on an ongoing basis. Questions arose around the *In Unison* document and the most appropriate stage for sharing the contents of this vision paper prior to its public release. Ideally, consultation should have taken place at a very early stage to test out the proposals before the document went to various governments for approval.

However, officials on the federal-provincial working group were concerned that disability groups would be informed of the possible policy options in the vision paper before they had an opportunity to brief their ministers – let alone obtain agreement from them on the proposed directions. The consultations were eventually held, but at a relatively later stage in the process.

In July 1998, three *In Unison* discussions were held to seek the views of key stakeholders on future policy directions in the disability area. Approximately 35 stakeholders representing the disability field participated in each of two national sessions. The participants included disability advocates, service providers, researchers, policy makers and government officials. A third session was held specifically on Aboriginal disability issues, at which provinces and territories were observers. Following this stage, and some further discussions among the governments, the social service ministers released the *In Unison report* in October 1998. This report, in which governments agreed to continue consultations with the disability community, and a sequel report in 2000 even more so, reflected comments and ideas by representatives from the disability community (Canada, 1998 and 2000). One of the contributions of the disability community has been to stress the vital importance of disability supports, co-operative intergovernmental relations, and the necessity to jointly establish measurable and transparent indicators of results.

V. Lessons: Principles And Possibilities for Effective Engagement

Disability and democracy both entail diversity. As this paper has shown, there is no one conception of the disability community or of citizen engagement. I have identified seven approaches to citizen engagement. Each is appropriate and necessary given a number of realities: the assorted needs and perspectives of disability groups and agencies, the widely varied capacities of disability groups, the complexity and dispersed authority of the Canadian state, and the wide assortment of pressing issues facing people with disabilities.

These seven models of engagement can be grouped under three distinct, though related strategies for making links, building capacity and participating in making policy. These strategies can be called *bonding*, *broadening*, and *bridging*. I present these as a way to bring order to a complex and often confusing world of politics and governance as well as to help clarify the nature of engagement work so that individual groups and larger associations and coalitions might reflect on their current practices and possible plans.

The strategy of *bonding* relates primarily to the first model of forms of engagement within the disability community. The aim here is to strengthen connections among organizations within the disability community, rather than have them operating in isolation from one another or in tension (Roehrer, 1997:10).

The strategy of *broadening* relates to the second model of engagement and seeks to expand and deepen the links with other social movements and equality-seeking groups in Canadian society, by forming and joining coalitions.

The strategy of *bridging* relates to the other five models of community – state engagement. The objective here is to establish and enhance access to, and participation in various stages of the policy process situated in various institutional arenas of the Canadian state. Through influencing policy development and service delivery, the community's long-term aims are to improve the access, portability and responsiveness of benefits and services, and to increase consumer control over the provision of supports.

Engagement, therefore, implies many things. See Box 7 for a selection of the aims and activities of citizen engagement in policy processes.

Box 7
Engagement Means Many Things

Attending lots of meetings!

Interacting with elected representatives, their staff, and with administrative officials.

Building on policy advocacy to embrace policy participation.

Documenting experiences, sharing stories, and doing research.

Using the Internet to not just find or provide information, but also to offer online networking, participation and dialogue.

Opening access to policy networks by enabling groups to enter the disability community and participate in policy processes on a fairly regular basis.

Building alliances, coalitions and partnerships with other organizations and across sectors.

Sharing control of agenda setting processes.

Increasing the interdependence between community agencies and state agencies by forming regular patterns of interchange for policy development and implementation.

Clarifying and perhaps codifying the “rules of the game” in the policy community.

Limiting governments’ autonomy but augmenting their ability to proceed with a shared agenda and vision on disability issues.

Creating a more appropriate balance between service provision and self-determination.

Finding a better fit between political jurisdictions and personal requirements.

What are the requirements for an enhanced and more effective engagement between the disability community and governments? In a study on disability policy and federalism, I noted some of the additional steps toward democratizing this policy sector that need to happen.

The trust that exists between groups and governments is often at a personal level that needs to be consolidated, possibly even formalized in various ways. Community groups need to consult more amongst themselves more regularly, to build solidarity and establish common positions on issues. The administrative and policy capacity of groups need to be looked at more carefully by governments so that the opportunities for consultation and engagement are not burdensome to

groups. Where they exist, legislative committees with responsibility for disability issues need to continue serving as a political space for this sector. Where they do not exist, they should be established (Prince, 2001c: 817).

The primary conclusion of a recent study on the disability community's capacity adds that: "organizations require additional human and financial resources to effectively carry out their mandates and to undertake ongoing research to find solutions to issues raised by the disability community. Support is also needed to assist disability associations to form viable partnerships and to consult among themselves and with governments to advance the disability agenda within Canada" (Canadian Centre on Disability Studies, 2002). To improve community capacity and engagement, this study recommended that governments hire more people with disabilities within the public service; consult on an ongoing basis with the disability community before taking action; and, increase the level of financing to groups and amend the form of funding from year-to-year to multi-year funding.

In addition to human and financial resources, knowledge is highly relevant to capacity, especially in relation to engagement. This entails the capacity to (a) undertake research, and manage and disseminate complex information, (b) know of the significant policy processes, structures and actors, and (c) convey the community's experiences in language that politicians and government officials can understand, accept and use. This ability to recognize the value of new information, assimilate it, and then apply it, has been called "absorptive capacity" (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990). To readily take in such information requires a certain level of prior related knowledge of issues in a given field, certain analytical skills of course, and, quite importantly, a shared discourse for communicating. In citizen engagement, information is meant to flow in two directions, between a community and the state.

The study by Abele and her associates (1998) on Canadian experience with citizen engagement pertains well to our question. From their review, they distilled six key lessons:

1. Governments must make a serious commitment to the process of citizen engagement. This includes not making decisions until the conclusion of the process, and taking discussions with citizens thoroughly into account.
2. Good information and the capacity to use the information are essential. Citizen participants must have the opportunity to learn – as well as vent – during the deliberative process.
3. The method of citizen of engagement should be tailored to the goal and the phase of policymaking in question. It is not necessary, and sometimes not desirable, for the process to focus only on general and "front-end" tasks, such as values clarification. Citizen participation can also make

hard choices and assess outcomes if appropriate means are made available.

4. Experience to date demonstrates that Canadians are able to initiate and complete their own processes of engagement, without direct involvement of governments.
5. Some distinctive regional processes have evolved that have created useful traditions and important expectations of knowledge and influence.
6. Citizen engagement processes should be sufficiently flexible to evolve and be responsive to new issues, concerns or constituencies that arise in the process.

Various factors can enhance the degree of influence of a group or association or whole community on governments. Kernaghan (1993:65 and 74) identifies several factors, to which I have added others, as facilitating community influence in policy partnerships. These are:

- If the partnership or engagement process is formalized. If so, it is more likely to be maintained.
- If the recommendations are made public.
- If the policy issue is of broad public interest.
- If government has a real commitment to consensus decision-making.
- If the non-governmental partners have credibility, both with governments and the community.
- If early successes, such as focusing on specific concrete tasks, help build trust and momentum, and can sustain commitment.
- If expectations among those engaged are reasonably comparable. That is, if they rest on shared or, at a minimum, compatible values, vision and vocabulary.
- If participants on all sides are accountable to their members.

Both lists provide a useful inventory of issues that need to be addressed as new engagements are developed in the disability sector. The lists by Abele and Kernaghan also can serve as assessment tools to evaluate exiting engagement processes and to identify ways in which they might be improved. "Ultimately," as Abele et al (1998) conclude, "citizen engagement involves a greater sharing of power over the process of policymaking."

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