Public Engagement Trends in Southwestern Ontario's Municipalities

MPA Research Report

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Executive Summary

This research project explores two major issues. The first issue relates to what topics municipalities are utilizing public engagement for most often and the reasons behind those decisions. The second involves an exploration of the tools that municipalities are using to engage the public more often than others and the associated rationales behind those decisions.

The methodology for the research project involved an online questionnaire that was sent to 108 municipal Chief Administrators in Southwestern Ontario. Twenty-five responses were received from a variety of rural, small urban and urban municipalities with varying population sizes.

The researcher crafted two hypotheses at the outset of this project based on the literature reviewed. For the first hypothesis the researcher posited that if legislation mandates the use of public engagement for certain issues or topics, then municipalities will use public engagement more often for those mandated issues or topics. The second hypothesis stated that if municipalities have resource constraints, then they would be more likely to utilize traditional tools most often for public engagement.

A review of the literature reveals that the benefits available from public engagement processes can be divided into three general categories: a) community building; b) citizen-government relations; and c) local problem-solving (Barnes and Mann 2010, 19). Community building benefits seek to empower citizens and build stronger civic associations in the community. The benefits associated with the citizen-government relations' category create a more educated citizenry and administration, create a more cooperative public and also a greater level of trust between citizens and government. And finally the benefits in the local problem-solving category include fostering better decision-making and breaking gridlock in political decision-making. These benefits can be viewed along a spectrum with the benefits falling under the community building category as less traditional in their aims and goals for participation than

those associated with citizen-government relations, which are less traditional in their aims and goals for participation than those of local problem-solving.

When analyzing some portions of the data from the questionnaire, the researcher chose to explore it through the lenses of the various benefits categories that are commonly associated with public engagement in order to determine what benefits municipalities in Southwestern Ontario were gaining from their public engagement processes, either consciously or subconsciously.

The research data shows that the respondent municipalities are using public engagement regularly for legislated topics, as hypothesized by the researcher. However, the respondent municipalities are also using public engagement processes with some frequency for some non-legislated topics. The research findings reveal a number of common reasons to explain why respondent municipalities are using public engagement for legislated topics. These include a) legislation that requires them to do so; b) the potential for large impacts on the community; c) the issues are contentious; and d) providing awareness and information to keep citizens up to date on the issue(s). The findings also outline a common set of reasons that explain why respondent municipalities are using public engagement for non-legislated topics. These include a) political support for the engagement; b) an annual engagement exercise; c) the fact that the public has a lot at stake in the subject areas and as a result has a greater interest in the topic; d) support from managers for engagement processes; and e) the topics include a major project that spans various departments that is taking place, or set to take place, in the municipality.

In relation to the second hypothesis, the research data supports the proposition that time and resource constraints are driving factors as to why certain tools are utilized more often than others. However, the research data also reveals that a number of other factors serve to influence the tools that are used most frequently by municipalities. These include a) familiarity with the tool; b) tradition; c) cost of the tool; d) ability to reach many people; e) legislative requirements; f) simplicity and ease of implementation; and g) lack of interest.

The findings of the study reveal some interesting insights about the aims of the respondent municipalities in relation to the benefits obtained from their public engagement processes. The data shows that community building is not a priority of municipalities in Southwestern Ontario. Some municipalities identified that they are using public engagement for the benefits associated with the citizen-government relations category (primarily for 'building trust between citizens and government'), but they also identified a strong indication that they are using public engagement to obtain the benefits associated with local problem-solving category (for better decision-making). Overall, the research findings suggest that municipalities are utilizing public engagement primarily to obtain the benefits associated with local problem-solving.

It is apparent from the data that the respondent municipalities perceive the more traditional tools of public engagement to be most effective for public engagement and the more innovative tools of public engagement as least effective. It is also clear that even where innovative tools of public engagement are perceived by municipalities as effective that these tools are being used for more traditional means with more traditional benefits being the goals for their use.

The research findings regarding the practices of municipalities in relation to the tools they use for public engagement show a strong propensity on the part of the respondent municipalities to lean towards using traditional tools that primarily generate one-way dialogue and support the benefits of local problem-solving as opposed to those which foster two-way dialogue and the benefits of community building or citizen-government relations. Respondents identified the public meeting as the most utilized tool for public engagement. The findings regarding the use of tools of public engagement in the respondent municipalities illustrate that some municipalities are utilizing tools because of reasons other than the benefits that can be realized from them in relation to public engagement. It is clear that some municipalities seem to be able to identify the benefits and disadvantages of the various tools in perception, but then what

tools are used in practice appears to boil down to a set of factors – legislation that mandates public engagement be carried out in a specific way, familiarity of administration and the public with the tool, tradition, cost effectiveness, ease of implementation – that affect which tools will be utilized most often by municipalities.

The research findings also reveal a desire of about half the respondents to use public engagement processes more frequently than they currently do, citing resource (time and staffing) and fiscal constraints, lack of familiarity with new tools, lack of interest, lack of Council support and established traditions, protocols and procedures in their respective municipalities as factors that prevented them from doing so. The researcher also explored staffing and its impacts on public engagement processes and found that dedicated staffing in the respondent municipalities did not seem to have any significant impact on the perceptions or practices of the municipalities that had this staffing component.

There are clear policy implications of the research findings of this study. The first relates to the topics for which municipalities are utilizing public engagement. Using public engagement processes more frequently on legislated topics than non-legislated ones causes municipalities to lose valuable opportunities to solicit input from the public on a wider variety of other topics that are not mandated to include public engagement processes. As a result, these municipalities and the communities that they serve could be missing out on the full range of benefits that public engagement is capable of providing.

In relation to the tools available for public engagement, the perceptions and practices of the respondent municipalities favouring traditional tools over innovative ones and the benefits associated with local problem-solving has the potential to have serious repercussions in that municipalities may be wasting resources on engaging the public in an ineffective, traditional manner. Another troubling trend that presents itself in the research data is that some municipalities are utilizing innovative tools of public engagement, but they are using them to obtain the benefits of local problem-solving as opposed to the full range of benefits that they are

capable of providing. Additionally, a problem presents itself in relation to the ability of some municipalities to identify the benefits and disadvantages of the various tools in perception but a certain set of factors, and not the benefits derived by municipalities from specific tools, determining the tools that will be used more frequently in practice. These issues could lead to the loss of valuable opportunities for municipalities to obtain important input from the public on a range of issues, which could serve to provide a greater range of benefits to the municipality and community that it serves.

The goal of the researcher for this study was to look at the reasons behind the topics and tools that municipalities in Southwestern Ontario were using more often than others for public engagement. This was done with the aim of forming recommendations for municipalities on how to expand the range of topics and tools that they use for public engagement to ensure that they are reaping the full spectrum of available benefits of such engagement. The study concludes with a number of recommendations generated from the research data with the intent of assisting municipalities in expanding and improving upon their current public engagement activities. These recommendations can support municipalities in deriving a greater number of benefits associated with citizen-government relations and community building, in addition to local problem-solving, from their public engagement processes. Alternatively, if municipalities do not wish, or are unable, to expand upon their current public engagement activities, this research report and the accompanying recommendations should serve to inform municipalities on what is available to them and what the spectrum of benefits entails so that they may have all the information when making decisions regarding their public engagement activities. Additionally, a number of recommendations were also formed for the purpose of guiding future research efforts in this area of study.

Recommendations for Municipalities

1. RECOMMENDATION: In order to help expand the range of topics for which municipalities use public engagement it is recommended that municipalities incorporate into their municipal procedures and protocols some or all of the characteristics found to be common to the topics that are not mandated to use public engagement in Ontario but for which some municipalities are currently utilizing public engagement:

> a)   implement public engagement processes in a topic area as part of an annual routine;
>
> b)   foster and encourage political support for public engagement;
>
> c)   foster and encourage managerial support for public engagement;
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> d)   foster and encourage an interest in the issue slated for engagement in the public by making information more readily available to ensure that they are aware of the issues and how much they have at stake in any particular matter; and
>
> e)   ensure all major projects and projects-based activities that span various departments utilize public engagement processes.

2. RECOMMENDATION: Provide education for administration, Council and citizens on the ways in which innovative tools, particularly social media, can be utilized to create authentic two-way dialogue between administration and citizens.

3. RECOMMENDATION: Provide education for administration, Council and citizens on the mechanics and benefits associated with all the tools, both traditional and innovative, available for public engagement processes.

4. RECOMMENDATION: Provide training on the newer, more innovative tools of public engagement to increase staff, Council members' and the public's knowledge and familiarity with them.

5. RECOMMENDATION: Ensure that innovative tools are more like traditional tools by keeping their cost low, making them simple and easy to implement, encouraging greater familiarity with them and emphasizing their ability to reach many people.

6. RECOMMENDATION: Ensure greater access to internet and technology in more rural or remote communities so that more innovative tools are available to municipalities in those locales.

7. RECOMMENDATION: Ensure that adequate resources (time and monetary) are dedicated to public engagement.

6. RECOMMENDATION: Lobby the Ontario legislature to enact legislation that would mandate the use of more innovative tools of public engagement.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. RECOMMENDATION: Though this study did not explore the reasoning behind why municipalities would be 'not likely' to engage the public on certain issues or topics, this would be an interesting and helpful avenue of research to pursue in the future.

2. RECOMMENDATION: Further research is recommended into how Council's support for public engagement affects the way in which it is utilized in a municipality.

3. RECOMMENDATION: Municipalities, especially smaller ones with fewer resources, should carefully consider whether they wish to dedicate staff specifically public engagement. More research is needed in the area of the effects of staffing for public engagement.

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Introduction

There are two major issues that this research project aims to explore. The first pertains to what topics municipalities are utilizing public engagement for most often and the reasons behind these decisions. The second involves an exploration of the tools that municipalities are using to engage the public more often than others and the associated rationales behind those decisions.

In relation to the topics that municipalities are utilizing public engagement for, it is interesting to note that land use and development, zoning and environmental matters have been identified in the literature as some of the issues that municipalities are using public engagement for most frequently. These are also topics for which legislation mandates the use of public engagement in Ontario. This research project aims to explore this phenomenon further in relation to Southwestern Ontario to see if municipalities in this region exhibit patterns of public engagement more frequently in areas that mirror the legislated requirements of Ontario.

An examination of the tools that municipalities are utilizing in the public engagement processes they carry out identifies that several 'traditional' tools are used most often, with the public meeting as the tool used most frequently. This research project aims to explore this phenomenon further in relation to Southwestern Ontario to see what tools municipalities in this region are using most frequently for public engagement and to determine the reasons for these choices.

The reasoning behind exploring the rationales behind the choices of municipalities regarding the topics and tools they use to engage the public is to further explore the general perceptions and practices of local governments in relation to public engagement with the hopes of encouraging an expanded use of engagement in order to obtain the benefits associated with community building and enhanced citizen-government relations as opposed to those associated with merely local problem-solving.

Literature Review

A review of the literature on the phenomenon of public engagement reveals that a dramatic shift in thought regarding the relationship between citizens and government has taken place. Scholars have begun to fashion theories positioning citizens as owners, partners or collaborators with government as opposed to clients or customers of government (Denhardt and Denhardt 2000, 549; Kathi and Cooper 2005, 565; Morse 2012, 80; Osborne et al. 2012, 145).

This new outlook on the role of citizens in relation to their governments has also caused a transformation in the processes of government surrounding public engagement. It has been well-documented that public involvement is increasing and expanding at all levels of government (Alcantara et al. 2012, 117; Burke 2007, 424; Barnes and Mann 2010, 1). Governments are making regular attempts to solicit public input for inclusion in government decisions (Smith 2010, 1). Citizens are also being asked for more than recommendations in that they are also being involved in the "design [of] the consultation process itself" (Alcantara et al. 2012, 117). On the whole, public involvement in governance processes is becoming central to the way in which government views itself (Morse 2012, 82).

Before examining the proposed explanations for these shifts in thought, one must first define the concept of 'public engagement'. The literature utilizes many interchangeable terms for this concept that include 'public involvement', 'public participation', 'democratic participation' and 'citizen participation'. Regardless of the term used to describe it, public engagement, in the literature, entails proactive efforts on the part of government to allow the public the opportunity and the ability to be directly involved in all stages of the decision-making process for public policy (King et al. 1998, 319; Lowndes et al. 2001, 206; Wagenaar 2007, 20). A central tenet of authentic public engagement involves "collaborative, communicative interactions between citizens and administrators" (Morse 2012, 80; Halifax Regional Municipality 2008, 3; Kathi and Cooper 2005, 561) and it is clear from the literature that information flow must be two-directional as opposed to a simple one way flow (Morse 2012, 81).

The explanations for the shifts in thought regarding the relationship between citizens and government have also been explored in the literature. One reason that has been identified for these shifts is the increasingly complex world within which we live that involves an intricate network of policy actors who are constantly interacting with one another (Wagenaar 2007, 18 and 23-25; Bovaird 2007, 846). This new system within which governments must operate has caused 'wicked problems' to emerge that are more long term in quality, less technical and more value-based in nature, with greater interrelation to other problems in causal chains (Burke 2007, 426; Carcasson 2013, 9, Irwin and Seasons 2012, 59). These 'wicked problems' seem to have "only temporary and imperfect solutions" (King et al. 1998, 319). It is the complex world and the difficult nature of solving 'wicked problems' that makes input from a variety of stakeholders crucial in attempting to craft the difficult solutions required. Thus, explaining the increase in the use of public engagement in recent times.

Another explanation as to why the emphasis on public engagement in government has emerged is the loss of faith and trust in government on the part of the public and the growing desire for accountability that has occurred (King et al. 1998, 319; Kathi and Cooper 2005, 560; Carcasson 2013, 9). When municipal administrators are unresponsive to the needs of citizens, citizens become frustrated and feel disempowered and alienated from their government (Kathi and Cooper 2005, 560). This 'experiential disconnect' between their desires and the people who are responsible for carrying out those desires leads to a lack of confidence and trust in administration (Kathi and Cooper 2005, 560). The advent of the internet has also allowed for a greater amount of information to be available to citizens in today's world. This has provided citizens with access to a greater number of media sources and coverage of various scandals and examples of government mismanagement. These media sources often provide harsh critiques of government on a regular, ongoing basis and have been identified as a potential contributor to the decreased trust in government on the part of citizens (Williams 1998, 724 and 725).

One must also examine why governments have chosen to pursue public engagement. There are many benefits that have been identified in the literature and in practice. The benefits can be divided into three general categories: a) community building; b) citizen-government relations; and c) local problem-solving (Barnes and Mann 2010, 19). These three areas of benefits will be revisited in the questionnaire, Research Findings and Recommendations of this report.

The first set of benefits relates to community building and the benefits are less traditional in their aims and goals for participation as their primary focus is on citizens (Barnes and Mann 2010, 19; Halifax Regional Municipality 2008, 3; Denhardt and Denhardt 2000, 552). These include the empowerment of all citizens, both advantaged and disadvantaged, (Irvin and Stansbury 2004, 57; Lowndes et al. 2001, 211; King et al. 1998, 324; Smith 2010, 247; Baker et al. 2005, 490) and the building of stronger civic associations in the community (Campbell 2005, 639; Smith 2010, 246-247).

The second set of benefits pertains to citizen-government relations (Barnes and Mann 2010, 19). The first of these benefits includes a more educated citizenry and administration (Irvin and Stansbury 2004, 56; King et al. 1998, 324-325; Smith 2010, 247). A second benefit that falls under this general heading involves the creation of a more cooperative public, which is important and necessary for the success of government initiatives (Irvin and Stansbury 2004, 56; Burke 2007, 424). A third benefit found under this general category is the creation of improved relations between citizens and government that involve a greater level of trust (Barnes and Mann 2010, 19; Campbell 2005, 639; King et al. 1998, 325; Kathi and Cooper 2005, 560; Denhardt and Denhardt 2000, 553). These benefits are not as forward-thinking and citizen-focused as the first set are, but are less traditional than the third set of benefits as they tend to focus on a blend of benefits to both citizen and government.

The third set of benefits that have been identified as positive outcomes of public engagement relates to local problem-solving, reflecting the more traditional aims and goals of public engagement as these benefits are more internal to government itself and position

government as the leader in decision-making and policy formulation (Barnes and Mann 2010, 19). The literature has shown that public engagement results in better decision making in that government decisions were better informed when linked to participation exercises (Baker et al. 2005, 490; Fung 2006, 66; Irvin and Stansbury 2004, 56; Lowndes et al. 2001, 211; Barnes and Mann 2010, 19; King et al. 1998, 319; Kathi and Cooper 2005, 559). The more informed decisions have then resulted in the promotion of efficiency and effectiveness that has led to service improvements (Lowndes et al. 2001, 211; Kathi and Cooper 2005, 559) Public engagement also aids in the provision of more democratic and effective government in that it is able to help break grid lock in traditional decision making procedures (Irvin and Stansbury 2004, 55 & 57).

In addition to benefits, public engagement also has its disadvantages and pitfalls. Literature and practice have identified several drawbacks to public engagement. The first of these is that it is costly for governments to utilize public engagement mechanisms (Irvin and Stansbury 2004, 58; Lowndes et al. 2007, 211 and 212). In times of economic hardship, as seen in recent years, it is difficult for governments to justify spending money on seeking public input as opposed to putting that money into concrete programs and services that governments offer (Lowndes et al. 2001, 211-212). Public engagement is also costly in terms of time consumption for administrations (Irvin and Stansbury 2004, 58; Wagenaar 2007, 29; Lowndes et al. 2001, 212; Wang and Bryer 2012, 181). It requires much time and effort to organize public engagement events as well as analyze the data that is gathered through these mechanisms. It also requires a greater amount of time to involve the public in the dialogue on certain issues because it requires that administration first educate the citizenry on the issue to be discussed before any meaningful discussion can occur (Irvin and Stansbury 2004, 57).

A further disadvantage of public engagement is that it has the potential to backfire and increase public dissatisfaction instead of increasing public satisfaction (Irvin and Stansbury 2004, 59; Lowndes et al. 2001, 212). If the expectations of the public are poorly managed, left

unfulfilled and merely 'taken under advisement' by administration with no intention of implementation, then this could lead to resentment and hostility on the part of the public (Irvin and Stansbury 2004, 59; Lowndes et al. 2001, 212).

Scholars and administrators have also commented on public complacency as being a central problem to employing successful public engagement strategies (Irvin and Stansbury 2004, 58; Wagenaar 2007, 29; Barnes and Mann 2010, 16-17). The fact that citizens have been described by scholars and municipal officials as apathetic and uninterested in participating in government processes (Wagenaar 2007, 29; Barnes and Mann 2010, 16) has been used in some circumstances as justification of the limited use of public participation. In addition to this, public engagement has been criticized as being unrepresentative of the public in that a small group of vocal citizens are able to be the ones who are most involved in the engagement processes, while disadvantaged citizens may be excluded (Irvin and Stansbury 2004, 58 chart and 59; Lowndes et al. 2001, 213). Scholars and administrators have also questioned the ability of citizens to become involved in public engagement processes in that they are unsure of whether citizens have the necessary technical and educational abilities as well as the time available to properly engage (Campbell 2005, 643-644).

Despite the disadvantages and drawbacks that have been identified, it is becoming clear that the debate around public engagement is not whether citizens should be involved, but rather what is the best way to accommodate the public's involvement in government processes (Irvin and Stansbury 2004, 56; Morse 2012, 81).

The bulk of the literature discussing public engagement focuses on the details of the processes involved with public participation (i.e. how, who, where and when) and how those processes can be improved upon as opposed to studying the reasons behind the use of public engagement (Campbell and Marshall 2000, 323). The literature does not explore why municipalities choose to engage the public and instead seems to view public engagement as "a

'taken-for-granted' part of government, [for which] explanation [is] no longer necessary" (Campbell and Marshall 2000, 329).

In particular the literature does not examine the rationales behind why public engagement is used for some issues more than others. However, it does identify some of the issues that municipalities are utilizing public engagement for most frequently in different areas of the world. Several studies have identified zoning, land use/development and budget matters as areas that frequently use public engagement (Baker 2005, 493; Barnes and Mann 2010, 8). In one study, these three issues were identified as making up 72.5% of all public hearings in the study population (Baker 2005, 493). Additionally, in a comprehensive study of American municipalities zoning/land use, downtown development, budgets, public safety, youth development/youth issues and infrastructure bond issuance were identified by over 50% of the elected officials surveyed as topics that their municipalities were 'very likely' or 'likely' to use for public engagement (Barnes and Mann 2010, 8).

Other research has identified public safety, public health and the environment as issues, for which public engagement has been utilized with some consistency due to the fact that the decisions and actions citizens take in their communities are the main contributors to collective success on these issues (Smith 2005, 249; Bourgon 2010, 203). In the United Kingdom, research has revealed that citizens were most likely to participate in 'issues that mattered' such as the environment, crime, housing and health, indicating that municipal governments are choosing to engage the public on these particular issues, perhaps more than other issues as a result (Baker 2005, 495). Roads, streets, parking and water and utility issues have also been noted as topics that municipalities have used public engagement for, albeit to a lesser extent than those mentioned thus far (Baker 2005, 493). In general, the literature has suggested that topics with less need for expertise on the part of the public have been more amenable to public engagement (Irvin and Standbury 2004, 62; Lowndes 2001, 213).

Recent research involving municipalities in Ontario, the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States has also suggested that legislated mandates may drive community engagement efforts (Chuong et al. 2012, 4). The comprehensive study of American municipalities mentioned earlier revealed that 15% of the municipalities surveyed reported that their municipality did only what was required of it under legislation (Barnes and Mann 2011, 58). Though it appears that no comprehensive studies have been completed in Canada pertaining to the percentage of municipalities that carry out public engagement only in the areas required under legislation, this is an important area of consideration.

In Ontario, there are several pieces of provincial legislation that mandate the use of public engagement by municipalities for certain issues. The *Planning Act* mandates public consultation in relation to several actions including the preparation or amendment of a municipality's Official Plan (ss.17(15), 17(16), 17(19.3), 17(20 and 21), 22(1), 22(2), 22(3), 26), the creation of or amendment of a municipality's zoning bylaws (s.34), minor variances in the municipality (s.44), division of land in the municipality by will (s.50) and consents (s.53). The *Development Charges Act* requires a public meeting to be held before any development charges bylaw is passed (s.12). The *Environmental Assessment Act* (*EAA*) mandates notice of terms of reference and the provision of information regarding where and when the public may inspect the terms of reference in addition to providing comments (s.6). In addition, the *EAA* requires that the public be able to inspect the environmental assessment and provide comments on it (s.6.3 and 6.4) as well as being allowed the opportunity to inspect the completed review and provide comments on it (s.7.1 and 7.2). Finally, the preparation of a class environmental assessment under the *EAA* must also contain a description of the process to be used to consult with the public and affected persons for a proposed undertaking (s.14).

The *Municipal Act* requires public consultation to be carried out in relation to any proposal to restructure a municipality geographically (s.173). The *Municipal Act* also mandates that before passing any bylaw pertaining to the composition of Council, a municipality is required

to give notice to the public and hold at least one public meeting (ss. 218 and 219). The *Municipal Elections Act* also requires a municipality to hold at least one public meeting to consider a proposed bylaw or question to be submitted to the electors (s.8.1).

The foregoing review of provincial legislation identifies land use and development, zoning, certain environmental matters, geographic restructuring of municipalities, the passing of certain municipal bylaws and submitting questions to electors as issues that legally require some form of public engagement on the part of Ontario municipalities. It is interesting to note that land use and development, zoning and environmental matters have also been identified in the literature as some of the issues that municipalities are using public engagement for most frequently.

Another area where the literature fails to adequately examine the rationales behind public engagement processes relates to why certain tools are used more frequently for public engagement than others. Though the literature fails to provide sufficient explanations regarding the reasoning behind the popularity of some tools over others (explanations from the literature to be discussed in further detail below), it does identify a number of different mechanisms for public engagement that are available to governments in addition to which of those tools are being utilized most often by municipalities.

The literature has recognized two broad categories into which the mechanisms of public engagement fall; traditional and innovative. The mechanisms associated with traditional public engagement include the public meeting, question and answer sessions, citizen advisory committees and public surveys (King et al. 1998, 323; Lowndes et al. 2001, 210; Sutcliffe 2008, 61). The innovative category of public participation mechanisms includes interactive online forums, social media, focus groups, visioning sessions, consensus conferences, citizens' juries and deliberative polls (Barnes and Mann 2011, 58; Lowndes et al. 2001, 210; Smith 2010, 249-250; Sutcliffe 2008, 61). Traditional mechanisms tend to be 'top-down,' one-way communication forms of consultation "whereby council sets the agenda for the consultation exercise and its main objective is often simply to inform the public of its plans," (Sutcliffe 2008, 61; Innes and Booher

2004, 423) whereas innovative forms of engagement promote more of a 'bottom-up' approach where consultation involves two-way dialogue (Sutcliffe 2008, 61; Carcasson 2013, 12). The ability of innovative mechanisms to create spaces for a two-way dialogue where the content of the discussion is not as heavily prescribed as it is in the spaces created by more traditional mechanisms, allows all participants a greater opportunity to mould and influence the discussion itself and the outcomes that result from the decision making process as opposed to simply reacting to the plans or decisions that have already been made by council (Smith 2010, 248; Sutcliffe 2008, 61; Innes and Booher 2004, 423). Innovative methods also tend to allow for engagement earlier in the process, which permits participants to "be a part of framing the problem itself and discovering potential treatments, rather than simply supporting or opposing a specific solution" (Carcasson 2013, 11).

Though all mechanisms of participation are on the rise (Lowndes et al. 2001, 210), the literature has illustrated that traditional means of public engagement are used most frequently by municipal governments in various countries, with the traditional public participation meeting as the mechanism used most often (Baker et al. 2005, 491; Lowndes 2001, 208; Alcantara 2012, 122). A study of local governments in the United Kingdom showed that four-fifths of authorities held public meetings during the study's one year period (Lowndes et al. 2001, 207). A study of local governments in the United States found that "67% of officials [in the US] reported that their city regularly uses...town hall meetings" (Barnes and Mann 2011, 58). A further study of twelve municipalities in Ontario showed that only two municipalities made special efforts above and beyond holding public meetings and posting informational materials online to engage the public on the matter being studied (Alcantara 2012, 122). Upon a review of the literature and research data in this area it appears that "the culture of public bureaucracies, as one arena, is not typically supportive of intensive forms of public participation but rely instead on standard information exchange approaches, such as the public hearing" (Wang and Bryer 2012, 179).

This trend is troubling in that traditional mechanisms for gathering input from the public

(i.e. public hearings, question and answer sessions, citizen advisory committees and surveys) are seen as deficient and outdated for the activity of successfully engaging citizens (Bovaird 2007, 846; Smith 2010, 248; Innes and Booher 2004, 419). These tools are considered outdated when one looks at the way in which policy making and service delivery in the public sector have become "the negotiated outcome of many interacting policy systems [and] not simply the preserve of policy planners and top decision makers" (Bovaird 2007, 846). These mechanisms are seen as deficient in that they may elicit information from the public but the process used to do so is not carried out in a manner that encourages an authentic two-way dialogue and discussion between administrators and citizens that results in a collective decision on the best course of action (Smith 2010, 248). Instead, these traditional mechanisms serve to solicit input from the public on decisions that the government or administration has crafted primarily on its own. Further, when these methods are legally required of municipalities they run the risk of becoming "nothing more than rituals designed to satisfy legal requirements" (Innes and Booher 2004, 419).

The public hearing has been identified as the most ineffectual technique in that it has been shown that participation through traditional public meetings often has little effect on the substance of government politics (King et al. 1998, 317, 323; Smith 2010, 248). The fact that the public meeting is such a popular mechanism for public engagement and its relative ineffectiveness in the creation of successful public engagement leads one to contemplate the reasons behind its popularity.

As stated earlier, the empirical research literature on government-citizen engagement is thin and lacking (Barnes and Mann 2010, 1). Where this empirical research does exist it is more preoccupied with what should occur in municipal governments, examining the problems that exist with public engagement and how to improve public engagement through the use of better techniques and "relatively weaker when it comes to exploring what is actually going on and assessing governmental participants' motivations, knowledge levels and rationales" (Barnes and Mann 2010, 1; Innes and Booher 2004, 420). It is this focus on process and procedure that has

allowed scholars and decision makers to evade the more difficult questions of substance and assume that any difficulties with public engagement lie in the fact that municipalities are not using the methods correctly (Campbell and Marshall 2000, 337; Innes and Booher 2004, 420).

The extent of the literature's exploration of the areas or topics that governments are using for public engagement more often than others focuses primarily on identifying the issues or topics used most often. The literature has failed to delve very deeply into an exploration of the reasons behind why these issues or topics are being used by governments to engage the public more often than others in that the reasons suggested for this are few and far between. One reason that has been put forth is that law mandates that some issues utilize public engagement (Wang and Bryer, 196). Another rationale offered in the literature is that some issues may be difficult for communities to deal with and thus, Councils prefer to avoid dealing with them in a public manner (Barnes and Mann 2010, 9). Another reason put forth in the literature is that public engagement is not the proper role of government and is better suited to be led by a civic or non-profit organization in the community (Barnes and Mann 2010, 9). A final reason offered in the literature is that some municipalities simply rarely deal with certain issues (Barnes and Mann 2010, 9). It is the hope of the researcher that this research project will help add to the limited scope of the current literature that exists in this area through exploring the issue in Southwestern Ontario.

The literature has also provided limited explanations as to why some public engagement tools are more popular than others. One explanation that has been offered in the literature for the popularity of traditional public engagement mechanisms is administrations' lack of resources and time (Alcantara et al. 2012, 131). Studies have shown that "higher levels of involvement often require longer timelines and have higher financial costs" (City of Waterloo, 12). Many local governments already have procedures and protocols in place for traditional public engagement mechanisms, such as public meetings, and have for quite some time, as public meetings are mandatory under provincial law in Ontario for the issues noted above. This may make them cheaper and faster to use in that new processes do not have to be developed. Another explanation

is that traditional methods have been in place for much longer than innovative methods and the institutional support garnered during that time period has served to equate public engagement with traditional methods, like the public hearing and comment procedures (Innes and Booher 2004, 430-431). Other than these explanations, however, there appears to be a gap in the literature regarding why traditional methods, including the public hearing, are the mechanisms that are employed most often by municipalities. This research project aims to help fill this gap in the literature by exploring this issue further in Southwestern Ontario.

Hypotheses

A. If legislation mandates the use of public engagement for certain issues or topics, then municipalities will use public engagement more often for those mandated issues or topics.

B. If municipalities have resource constraints, then they will be more likely to utilize traditional tools most often for public engagement.

Methodology

The design for this project was cross-sectional in that it gathered data on all applicable variables at one point in time (O'Sullivan et al. 2008, 27). The study utilized a questionnaire to collect this data. The questionnaire is attached as Appendix A. The cross-sectional design allowed the researcher to determine what the current practices of municipalities in Southwestern Ontario are regarding the topics being covered and methods being used for public engagement.

The questionnaire utilized a combination of closed and open ended questions to identify a) the general perception of the municipality on the issue of public engagement; b) what issues the municipality is using public engagement for most often; c) what methods of public engagement the municipality is using most often; and d) the reasons behind the answers to (b) and (c) above.

The online survey included an email with a cover letter that indicated the significance of the study and the value of the participant's involvement. The cover letter highlighted that participation was voluntary and indicated 20 minutes as an approximate time that the survey

should take the participants to complete. The researcher also assured participants that they would not be identified in the reporting of results of the study. Additionally, the Department of Political Science Research Ethnics Committee at Western University approved the cover letter and questionnaire content.

The questionnaire was distributed via an online survey service (Interceptum) to the sample population of 108 Chief Administrators of municipalities located in Southwestern Ontario. A listing of the municipalities that were contacted to participate in the study is attached as Appendix B. Southwestern Ontario was chosen as the area of focus for this study in that the researcher lives London, Ontario and therefore, has a particular interest in this area of the province. Chief Administrators were chosen as the primary contact person for the municipalities surveyed in that it was assumed by the researcher that they would be have the greatest knowledge of the operations within their municipality pertaining to public engagement or that they would be able to direct the researcher to the most appropriate contact within the organization. The contact list for the sample population was generated through an internet search involving each municipality's website. The researcher acknowledges that in municipal government there are also Council members that affect the public engagement processes that are carried out. The scope of this research project has chosen to focus on the administration of municipalities in Southwestern Ontario as opposed to the elected officials, but recognizes that this is an important area that should be explored further in future research.

The use of a questionnaire provided the researcher with a cost and time effective method for gathering the information required to complete the study. The findings of the research will have greater validity for application to the larger area of Southwestern Ontario as a result of the geographic, cultural and political similarities that the municipalities that respond to the questionnaire all share. In addition, surveying the municipalities for the same time period will also serve to strengthen the validity of the findings.

<u>Research Findings</u>

The researcher received 25 responses from the initial 108 invitations to the questionnaire that were sent out. This represents a 23% response rate. The responses that were received represent an excellent variety of rural and urban municipalities with varying population sizes. There were 8 urban municipalities, 5 small urban municipalities and 12 rural municipalities with populations ranging from 180 to 375, 000 residents. This diverse range of municipalities will serve to bolster the strength of the findings that are generated from the data of this study.

General Support of Respondent Municipalities for Public Engagement

The researcher included two questions in the questionnaire with the intent of determining the organizational cultures in the municipalities surveyed in relation to their support of public engagement. The first of these was Question 2, which asked for the respondents' views on whether they thought public engagement was a valuable tool for municipal government. The data indicated that 18 of the 25 respondents, or 72%, stated that they 'strongly agreed' that public engagement is a valuable tool for municipal government. There were 7 respondents that 'agreed' it was a valuable tool and no neutral or negative answers given by any of the respondents.

The answers provided to this question suggest that all of the respondent municipalities have cultures that are supportive of public engagement. Alternatively, the answers provided by the respondents could reflect an acknowledgement on the part of government of the debate surrounding public engagement discussed earlier in the literature review focusing on what the best way to accommodate the public's involvement in government processes is as opposed to whether they should be involved in the first place (Irvin and Stansbury 2004, 56; Morse 2012, 81). Whether governments want to engage the public or not, they are being faced with having to do so at some level because of the demand for it by the public and the responses to this question could be seen as illustrating a recognition of this phenomenon.

The second question included in the questionnaire with the intent of determining the organizational cultures in the municipalities surveyed in relation to their support of public

engagement was Question 5. This question asked the respondents to identify which of the listed items they perceived as disadvantages of public engagement. The first three disadvantages listed in the question ('costly in terms of monetary terms to governments,' 'costly in terms of time consumption to governments' and 'has potential to create citizen dissatisfaction if citizen input is ignored') were included in that they reflect choices indicative of an organization that views public engagement as failing because of something internal to the organization. The last three disadvantages listed in the question ('public is apathetic and does not participate,' 'public engagement is not representative of all citizens' views' and 'citizens do not have the proper skills to participate in a meaningful manner') all reflect answers that would illustrate a viewpoint of an organization that public engagement fails because of the public who is taking part in the process and not the organization that is conducting the outreach activity.

'Public engagement not being representative of all citizens' views' was the disadvantage identified by the most respondents with 64%. 'Public engagement having the potential to create dissatisfaction if citizen input is ignored' was the next most popular choice of disadvantage with 44%. Forty percent of respondents identified the 'public as being apathetic and not caring' as a disadvantage. Forty percent claimed that 'costs in time to governments' were a disadvantage, whereas 32% sited 'costs in terms of money to governments.' Finally, 24% identified 'other' as a disadvantage with a few respondents replying that there were no disadvantages of public engagement.

It is clear that the three disadvantages most identified by the respondents all suggest that public engagement's disadvantages stem from the public and not the organization. The disadvantages identified as 4th and 5th highest by respondents suggest that public engagement's disadvantages stem from a lack of government resources. These findings tend to indicate a prevalence of less supportive cultures of public engagement in the study population due to a lack of confidence in the public with whom they are engaging. It would be expected that cultures that are more supportive of public engagement would tend to identify the disadvantages more closely

associated with the organization's failings as opposed to the public's as they would be the cultures that would view the public as being up to the task of engaging in a meaningful way.

Overall, the results from these questions are inconclusive as to whether or not the municipalities of the study population have cultures that are generally supportive or unsupportive of public engagement. Question 2 suggests that all respondent municipalities surveyed have a high level of support for public engagement activities whereas Question 5 seems to propose that many of the respondent municipalities have less supportive cultures of public engagement due to the lack of confidence in the public with whom they are engaging that their answers show.

Topics of Public Engagement

The questionnaire included a number of questions that measure the perceptions and practices of municipalities in Southwestern Ontario regarding the topics for which they are using public engagement. It also sought out the rationales behind the decisions to utilize public engagement for certain topics more than others.

Question 6 served to measure the likeliness of municipalities to engage the public on various topics. It listed a number of topics and asked the respondents to classify their level of likeliness for public engagement regarding each.

Table 1 *– Likeliness of Respondents to Engage the Public on Various Topics*

| Topic	Responses
Development Charges By-Laws	Very likely: 15 Likely: 5 Not likely: 3 Not applicable: 2
Downtown Revitalization	Very likely: 16 Likely: 6 Not likely: 0 Not applicable: 3
Budgets	Very likely: 12 Likely: 9 Not likely: 3 Not applicable: 1
Public Safety	Very likely: 5 Likely: 13 Not likely: 5 Not applicable: 2
Immigrant Integration and/or Race Relations	Very likely: 4 Likely: 4 Not likely: 5 Not applicable: 12

Water and Utility Issues	Very likely: 8 Likely: 7 Not likely: 6 Not applicable: 4
Matters under the Ontario *Environmental Assessment Act*	Very likely: 6 Likely: 12 Not likely: 5 Not applicable: 2
Environmental Issues Other than under the *Environmental Assessment Act*	Very likely: 5 Likely: 13 Not likely: 5 Not applicable: 2
Youth/Youth Development	Very likely: 6 Likely: 13 Not likely: 2 Not applicable: 4
Regional or Inter-municipal Issues	Very likely: 4 Likely: 10 Not likely: 8 Not applicable: 3
Investment in Low Income Areas	Very likely: 2 Likely: 12 Not likely: 4 Not applicable: 7
Location of Social Services Facilities	Very likely: 4 Likely: 9 Not likely: 2 Not applicable: 10
Health Issues	Very likely: 5 Likely: 12 Not likely: 3 Not applicable: 5
Animal Issues	Very likely: 2 Likely: 14 Not likely: 6 Not applicable: 3
Land Use Planning and Zoning Changes	Very likely: 20 Likely: 4 Not likely: 0 Not applicable: 1
Parks and Recreation	Very likely: 15 Likely: 7 Not likely: 0 Not applicable: 3
Other	Very likely: 4 Likely: 4 Not likely: 1 Not applicable: 16

As can be seen in *Table 1* above, the top five topics identified by the respondents as 'very likely' for public engagement were 1) 'land use and zoning changes' (80%); 2) downtown revitalization (64%); 3) development charges by-laws (60%); 4) parks and recreation (60%); and 5) budgets (48%). It is worth noting that two out of the top three issues identified by the respondent municipalities are legislated in Ontario to include some type of public engagement.

Table 1 also shows the topics identified by the respondents as 'likely' for public engagement. It is interesting to note that of the top five 'likely' topics, only one requires public engagement under Ontario legislation.

The first question that explored the practices of municipalities in Southwestern Ontario was Question 7. This question asked the respondents to identify the top three topics for which their municipality had utilized public engagement during the most recent Council term.

Figure 1 – *Topics of Public Engagement in Respondent Municipalities*
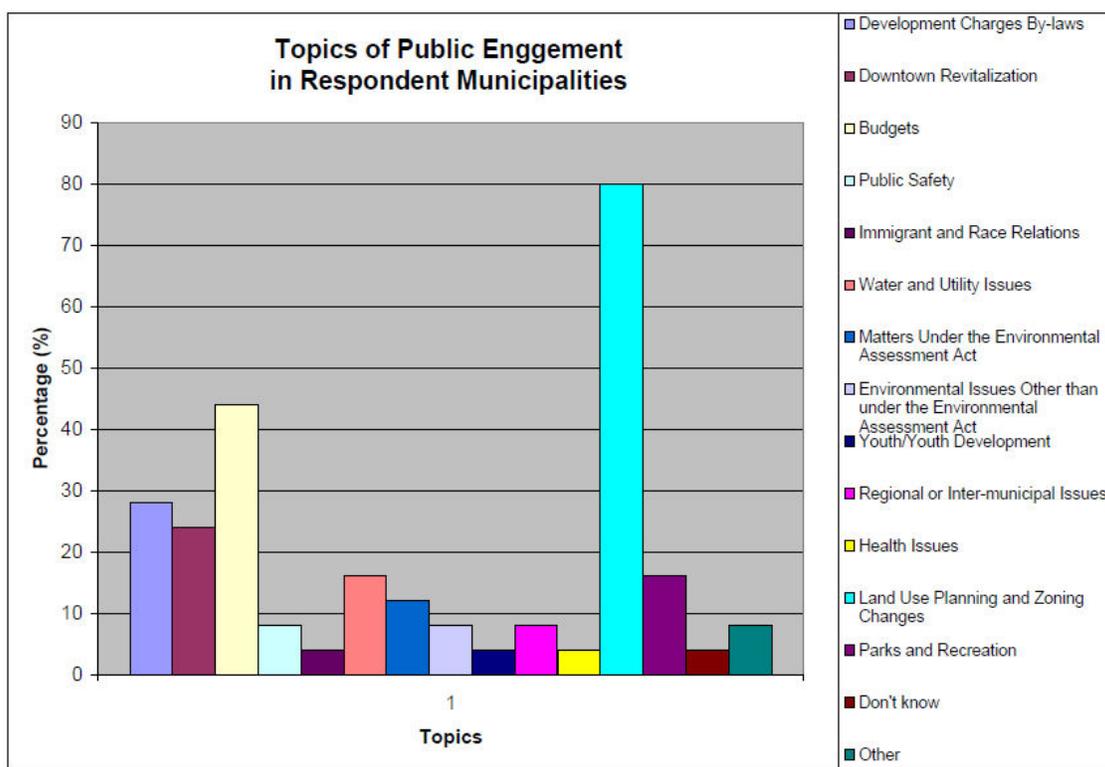
*Please note that if no responses were received for a particular selection provided to the respondents in the questions asked, then that selection is not included in the graphs in Figures 2-8.

The graph in *Figure 1* shows that 'land use and zoning changes' is by far the subject area that the respondents utilize public engagement for most often, with 80% identifying this topic. The next closest topic was budgets, identified by 44% of respondents as one of their top three issues for which public engagement is utilized, followed by development charges (28%) and downtown revitalization (24%), both with substantially less popularity. The remainder of the topics had between 0-16% of respondents identifying them as one of their top three topics for

which public engagement was utilized during the most recent Council term. Additionally a very broad range of 'other' topics were identified by various municipalities with no discernable pattern, including 'strategic planning,' 'wind turbines,' 'Council size' and 'storage of recreational vehicles in driveways' among others. It is clear from the results of this question that there are certain topics in the study population that municipalities are choosing to use public engagement processes for more for than others.

Looking to the reasons behind why some topics seem to be spurring greater public engagement activity than others, the findings from Question 8 are insightful. As stated in the literature review, there are several topics in Ontario for which public engagement is mandated under legislation; planning (various land use and zoning changes), development charges by-laws, environmental assessments and various municipal by-laws. It is interesting to note that 'land use and zoning changes' and development charges by-laws are two of the top three topics used most often by respondent municipalities in the past Council term and also have legislative requirements for engagement.

The answers provided to Question 8 reveal that 12 of the 20 respondents identifying 'land use and zoning changes' as one of their top three for which public engagement was utilized during the most recent Council term cited the fact that public engagement is legislated for issues in this topic area as the driving factor behind its popularity for engagement. The majority of respondents that identified development charges by-laws as a topic that had elicited greater public engagement than other topics during the past Council term also noted that the popularity of the use of public engagement processes for this issue was due in large part to the legislative requirements in place in Ontario. Rationales provided by the other respondents for the use of public engagement for these topics more often than others included the impacts and effects on the community and landowners, providing awareness and information to citizens as a means of keeping them up to date on various issues and that public engagement was necessary for this topic

area because of the highly contentious nature of the issues involved and the criticism/concern that was being expressed to the municipality by the public.

Budgets and downtown revitalization are also topics that seemed to garner much public engagement on the part of the respondent municipalities during the past Council term, but are not mandated by legislation in Ontario to do so. The rationales provided in Question 8 provide some insight into this incidence. Multiple respondents identified that their budgeting processes included an annual engagement exercise. Respondents also cited the fact that there is greater public interest in the topic as a result of the "major financial impacts on the public" of budgets as a contributing factor to why this topic is utilized for public engagement more often than others. Other respondents cited educating the public on municipal issues and gauging public interest and opinion as factors that affected their decision to utilize public engagement more for this topic than for others. One respondent stated that Council's strong support of engagement in the budgeting process was the driving factor behind its use in their municipality.

Another topic that does not require public engagement under Ontario legislation but was relatively popular in its use of it by respondent municipalities in the past Council term is downtown revitalization. Respondents cited a greater interest on the part of citizens in addition to an expression of criticism/concern from the public stemming from the fact that they have more at stake in the matter as contributing factors for engaging the public on this topic more than others. Other respondents cited political concern about the issue as an important reason behind the use of public engagement for it.

Two other topics that do not have legislated requirements for public engagement in Ontario that had some popularity with respondent municipalities included water and utility issues and parks and recreation. It is interesting to note that those municipalities utilizing public engagement processes for water and utility issues more often than other topics also noted the financial impacts on the public as a driving factor behind the use of public engagement for this topic. Additionally, these respondents cited educating the public on municipal issues and gauging

public opinion as reasons behind the popularity of utilizing public engagement for these issues. One respondent stated that a major dam revitalization project set to take place in the municipality was what had driven the increased public engagement activity in this area, with another respondent citing 'major projects' across departments as items that used public engagement more frequently than other items.

There was one respondent that noted that their municipality had annual engagement exercises for the topic of parks and recreation. Another respondent noted that this area garnered greater public interest and "received the most input from the community" and this was a major reason for utilizing public engagement more often for this topic area than others.

Though not connected to any particular topic, one administrator identified some departments within their municipality that utilized public engagement to a greater extent than others as having "managers that [saw the] value in engaging stakeholders in their decision making." This is an important factor that would apply to all topic areas and something to be conscious of when thinking of ways to increase or improve public engagement processes in local government.

The perceptions outlined in Question 7 and the rationales provided in Question 8 show that the respondent municipalities are supportive of and using public engagement regularly for legislated topics, as hypothesized by the researcher. However, the respondent municipalities are also supportive of and using public engagement processes with some frequency for some non-legislated topics, albeit to a lesser degree than legislated ones. The research findings reveal a number of common reasons to explain why respondent municipalities are using public engagement for legislated topics. These include a) legislation that requires them to do so; b) the potential for large impacts on the community; c) the issues are contentious; and d) providing awareness and information to keep citizens up to date on the issue(s). The findings also outline a common set of reasons that outline why respondent municipalities are using public engagement for non-legislated topics. These include a) political support for the engagement; b) an annual

engagement exercise; c) the fact that the public has a lot at stake in the subject areas and as a result has a greater interest in the topic; d) support from managers for engagement processes; and e) the topics include a major project that spans various departments that is taking place, or set to take place, in the municipality.

*Perceptions vs. Practice*s

It is interesting to note that 92% of respondents identified their top three topics of public engagement in the most recent Council term as topics for which they were 'very likely' or 'likely' to utilize public engagement processes. This shows an awareness on the part of municipalities of what topics are utilizing public engagement more often than others.

Tools and Benefits of Public Engagement

It is clear from the literature and practice in various levels of government that public engagement is capable of producing numerous benefits. As discussed earlier in the literature review portion of this research paper the benefits can be divided into three general categories: a) community building; b) citizen-government relations; and c) local problem-solving (Barnes and Mann 2010, 19). As stated earlier, community building benefits seek to empower citizens and build stronger civic associations in the community. The benefits associated with the citizen-government relations' category create a more educated citizenry and administration, create a more cooperative public and also a greater level of trust between citizens and government. And finally the benefits in the local problem-solving category include fostering better decision-making and breaking gridlock in political decision-making. These benefits can be viewed along a spectrum with the benefits falling under the community building category as less traditional in their aims and goals for participation than those associated with citizen-government relations, which are less traditional in their aims and goals for participation than those of local problem-solving.

When analyzing some portions of the data from the questionnaire, the researcher chose to explore it through the lenses of the various benefits categories that are commonly associated with

public engagement in order to determine what benefits municipalities in Southwestern Ontario were gaining from their public engagement processes, either consciously or subconsciously. The following sections analyze the research data from each of the three benefit category perspectives, linking the more innovative tools of public engagement to the benefits associated with the categories of community building and citizen-government relations.

Community Building

The benefits associated with community building were not reflected as a primary concern of municipalities in the data that was generated from the questionnaire. This set of benefits will be briefly discussed in the citizen-government relations and local problem-solving sections below. The overall lack of using public engagement in general or specific tools of public engagement that would promote this set of benefits shown by the research data illustrates that this set of benefits may not be as important to municipalities as some other more traditional aims and goals of public engagement.

Citizen-Government Relations

There is some data that suggests that municipalities are utilizing public engagement in order to realize some of the benefits associated with the citizen-government relations' category. Questions 3 and 4 sought to determine why respondent municipalities are using public engagement. The answers to these questions link directly to the benefits associated with each category of benefits discussed above. These questions allowed the researcher to identify where each respondent municipality fell in relation to its view of engagement on the spectrum of benefits.

*Figure 2* – *Benefits of Public Engagement as Identified by Respondents*
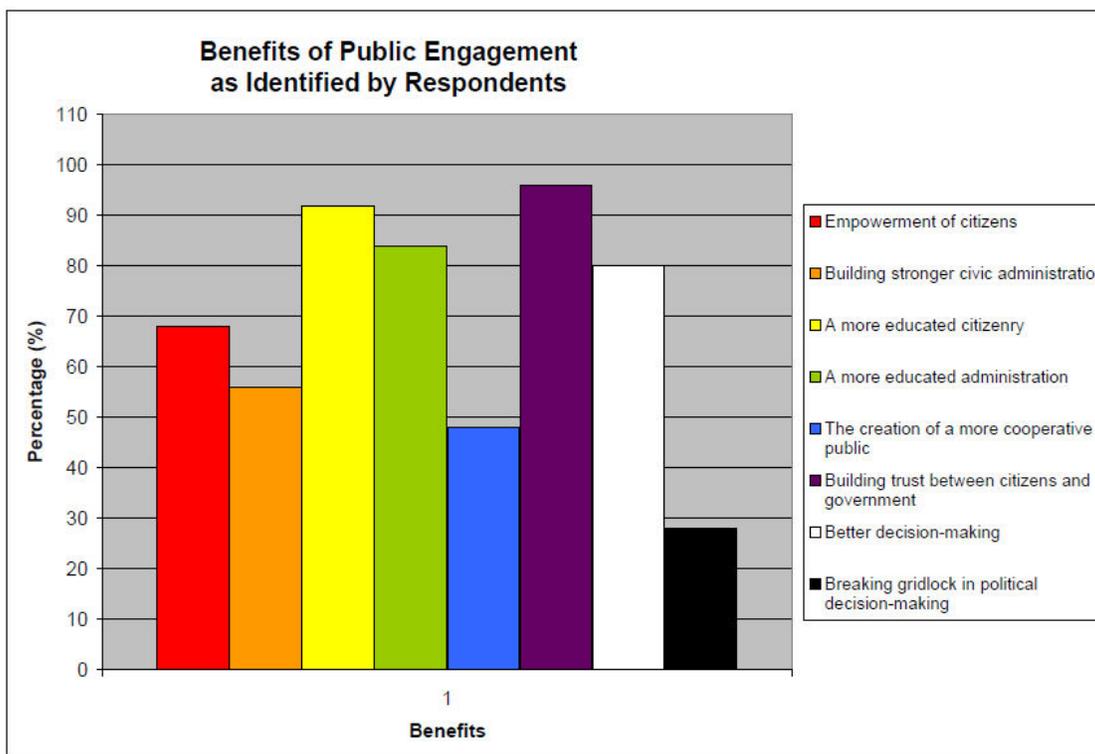
The results illustrated in the graph in *Figure 2* show that 96% of the respondents identified that 'building trust between citizens and government' as a reason to engage the public. This was followed closely by 92% of the respondents identifying 'a more educated citizenry' and 84% identifying 'a more educated administration' as reasons to engage the public. Eighty percent of respondents acknowledged that 'better decision-making' was a reason to utilize public engagement. Sixty-eight percent thought that 'empowerment of citizens' was grounds to use public engagement.

It is interesting to note that the top three rationales identified by the respondents show a strong pattern of municipalities utilizing public engagement for the purpose of improving citizen-government relations. There was, however, also a large number of respondents who identified 'better decision-making' as a reason that their municipality uses public engagement, reflecting the more traditional set of benefits related to local problem-solving. And to a lesser extent, some respondents identified 'empowerment of citizens' as an important reason why they engage the

public. This suggests that community building is also a priority, though to a much lesser extent than citizen-government relations and local problem-solving.

Figure 3 – *Most Important Benefits of Public Engagement as Identified by Respondents*
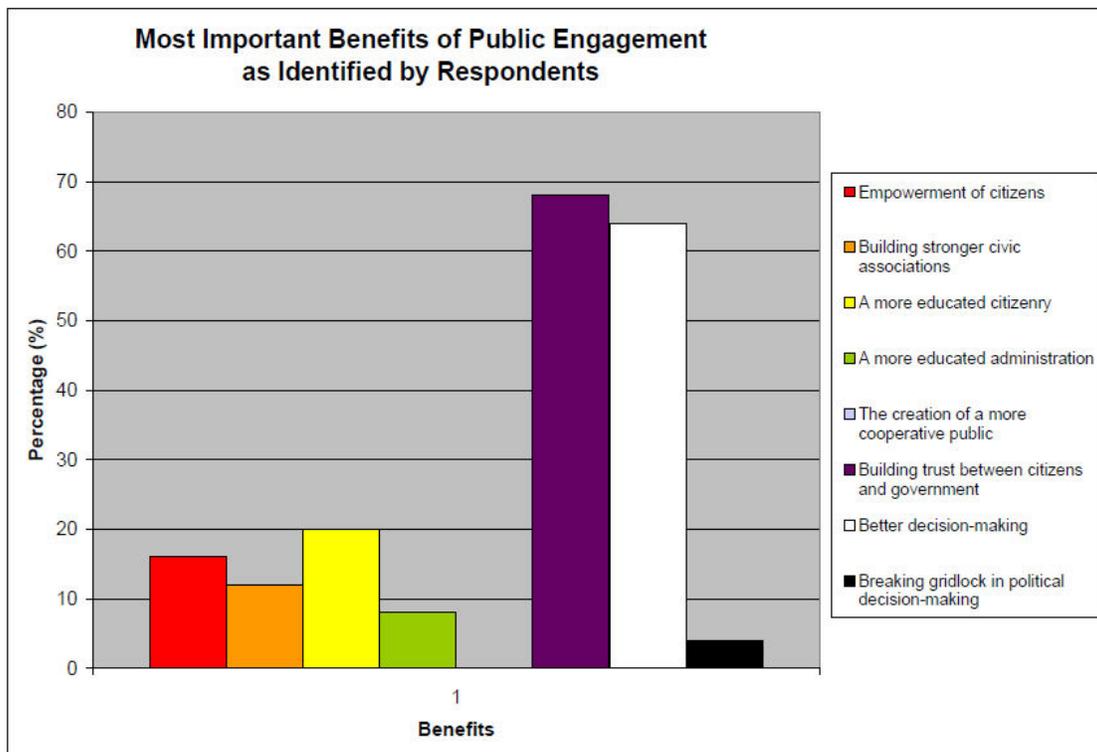
When looking at Question 4, which asked the respondents to identify the most important reasons for utilizing public engagement, the graph in *Figure 3* shows that 68% cited 'building trust between citizens and government,' 64% cited 'better decision-making' and 20% noted creating 'a more educated citizenry.' The research data from this question clearly shows that the reason identified as most important for utilizing public engagement was building trust between citizens and government. This serves to reinforce the findings from Question 3 regarding reasons why municipalities utilize public engagement. Again, this illustrates the emphasis that the respondents place on using public engagement for improving citizen-government relations, albeit with a much narrower scope. The respondents identified all of the citizen-government relations benefits in their broad reasoning for using public engagement in Question 3 whereas their

responses to which reasons were most important in Question 4 clearly demonstrate that building trust is the priority of all the citizen-government relations category benefits.

The second most important reason identified by the respondents shows strong support for better decision-making, which links public engagement to the benefits of local problem-solving in the municipalities surveyed. It is also clear that the benefits of community building were recognized as priorities for utilizing public engagement significantly less frequently than those who identified building trust and better decision-making.

Local Problem Solving

There were several questions producing data that clearly identified local problem-solving as the driving force behind municipalities' understanding and use of public engagement. The next section will examine these findings in detail.

The first question included in the questionnaire asked the respondents to identify what public engagement meant to them. This question was particularly revealing in that it showed that most respondent municipalities' understanding of public engagement centred around engaging the public in order to foster better decision-making. There were only three municipalities that stated that they saw empowerment as an important guiding principle and some municipalities' responses illustrated that they are beginning to recognize the value of two-way dialogue and the relationships that it can build. However, the majority of respondent municipalities' answers to this question demonstrate a strong focus on public engagement as a mechanism for improving decision-making.

There were a number of questions included in the questionnaire with the intent of measuring the respondents' perception of the various tools available for public engagement. Questions 10 and 11 asked respondents to identify what they thought were the most effective tools for engaging the public and to provide reasons for the selections they made.

Figure 4 – *Most Effective Tools of Public Engagement as Identified by Respondents*
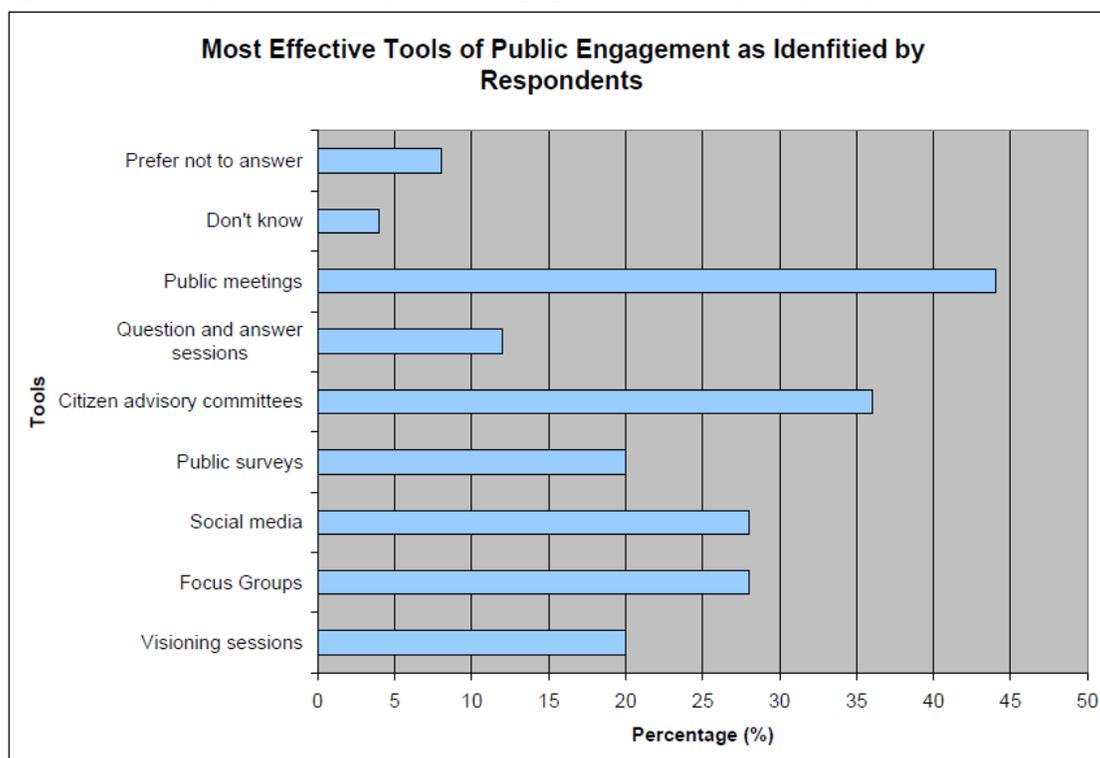
It is clear from the graph in *Figure 4* that all traditional tools of public engagement were identified by at least some of the respondents in Question 10 as most effective, whereas only 3 of the 7 innovative tools were identified. Attention should also be drawn to the fact that none of the respondents chose consensus conferences, citizens' juries, deliberative polls or interactive online forums.

The public meeting, a traditional tool of engagement, was the tool cited by the most respondents as the most effective with 44% of respondents choosing this option. Respondents named this as an effective tool because of its manageability as an engagement exercise, the opportunity it provides to supply information or explain any misconceptions or misinformation and its reputation as a 'traditional' tool of engagement. One respondent stated that "members of the public want to see options and are not interested in participating in the creation of those options," illustrating a very traditional approach to public engagement where the administration is responsible for crafting the options and the public is involved further on in the decision-making

process in order to provide feedback and comments on those options. Overall, the rationales provided by the respondents who chose the public meeting as one of the most effective tools of engagement show support for traditional, one-way dialogue where citizens are only asked to comment on the options crafted by administration and presented to citizens.

Citizen advisory committees were the second most cited effective tool by respondents with 36% of them selecting this option. Again, this shows that many respondents perceive another traditional tool of engagement as one of the most effective. Respondents stated that the reasoning behind choosing this tool involved such things as its citizen-driven nature, its fit with local community culture, its ability to allow communication from committees to other community members, its ability to educate citizens before engagement and to provide information for decisions as well as the way in which it brings in specific skill sets of citizens to assist Council in decision-making. Though some of these comments suggest a focus on the benefits associated with community building (by empowering citizens) and strengthening civic associations (through education of citizens and communication that occurs from advisory committees to other community members), the majority of the rationales provided seem to be primarily focused on using this tool as a support to local problem-solving.

Though the top two most effective tools identified by the respondents were traditional tools, innovative tools were also identified. Focus groups and social media, both identified by 28% of respondents, were the next highest chosen tools in relation to being perceived as most effective for public engagement by respondents. Respondent municipalities stated that focus groups were an effective tool due to their ability to allow citizens to choose whether to participate, the focused and small amount of time for people to commit, their ability to permit people to listen and offer comment, their ability to ensure adequate representation from various demographics of the population and also to gain expertise from opinion leaders in the community. The way in which the respondent municipalities described the reasons they think focus groups are one of the most effective tools for public engagement suggests that focus groups are beneficial to

municipalities in relation to making better decisions (i.e. ensuring adequate representation and gaining expertise from opinion leaders in the community). The comments also reflect more of a one-way dialogue – "permit people to listen and offer comment" – as opposed to a two-way dialogue that the citizen-government relations and community building benefits entail. The comments also suggest that focus groups are a good mechanism for getting people to participate and this may be why municipalities think that they are most effective.

In relation to social media, 28% of respondents choosing it as one of the most effective tools suggests that there is some traction in municipalities for using tools that encourage more of a two-way dialogue and as a result have greater capability to create the benefits associated with enhanced citizen-government relations and community building. Respondent municipalities commented that they viewed social media as an effective engagement tool because it is efficient in delivering a message to a certain portion of the population, it is able to capture a great deal of input and is mainstream in today's world. These comments tend to suggest that municipalities view this tool as effective because it is able to deliver a message and/or obtain specific information for the municipality and this suggests that some municipalities are not using social media for a two-way dialogue, but rather simply to inform the public of a specific issue or obtain information from the public in the traditional one-way manner reflective of the benefits of local problem-solving. Therefore, while it is encouraging to see that more municipalities are beginning to view social media as an effective tool for public engagement in that it "attracts a wider demographic, increases exposure, is more heavily used [and people are] more likely to participate," it seems as though the way that municipalities are utilizing this tool is more in line with supporting the benefits of local problem-solving as opposed to improving citizen-government relations or fostering community building.

There were some municipalities that did recognize the value of social media in relation to the benefits that could be achieved in the areas of citizen-government relations and community building. Respondents stated that social media is "fast, very inclusive and responsive" and

provides an "opportunity for interested citizens to participate in the decision making process prior to a decision being made." Both of these comments illustrate a recognition of the inclusive nature of this tool and the way in which it is able to incorporate citizens into the decision-making process in a two-way dialogue at various points and not just towards the end as some of the more traditional tools do.

The remainder of the tools identified by the respondents as most effective for engagement ranged in popularity from 8-20% and included public surveys (20%), visioning sessions (20%), question and answer sessions (12%) and 'other' (8%). Public surveys were cited as an effective tool due to their familiar nature, the focused and small amount of time for people to commit and their ability to ensure adequate representation of various demographics. Ultimately, public surveys represent another traditional tool that supports the benefits of local problem-solving in that they ask the public what it thinks of options crafted by municipalities.

One comment provided regarding visioning sessions suggested that smaller communities like this tool and have had success with it for garnering participation. This may be an area where further research is needed in relation to smaller municipalities and visioning sessions to determine this tool's effectiveness for engagement in that particular environment.

The comments that supported the identification of question and answer sessions as one of the most effective tools of public engagement focused on local problem-solving in that they illustrate that municipalities are using these as "opportunities to explain any misconceptions or misinformation" and not as arenas for authentic two-way dialogue. Finally, it should be noted that two respondents stated that the effectiveness of the tool would depend on the issue, project engagement goals and complexity of the project.

It is clear from the graph in *Figure 4* and the accompanying reasons outlined above that municipalities perceive the more traditional tools of public engagement, such as the public meeting and citizen advisory committees, to be most effective for public engagement. These tools then link back to the local problem-solving set of benefits of public engagement as opposed to

citizen-government relations or community building. It is also clear that where more innovative tools of public engagement are perceived by municipalities as effective that these tools are being used for more traditional means with more traditional benefits being the goals for their use.

Respondents were asked in Questions 12 and 13 about what they perceived as the least effective tools for engagement and their reasoning behind the selections made. The graph in *Figure 5* shows that the top two tools identified as least effective were citizens' juries and deliberative polls, both of which are classified as innovative tools. The graph also shows that all innovative tools were mentioned as ineffective with the exception of focus groups. It is important to note that one respondent stated that "it depends on what the topic is at hand…All of the methods listed could be useful in certain circumstances." This is an important comment to keep in mind because context is a central element in the development of any public engagement strategy.

Figure 5 – *Least Effective Tools as Identified by Respondents*
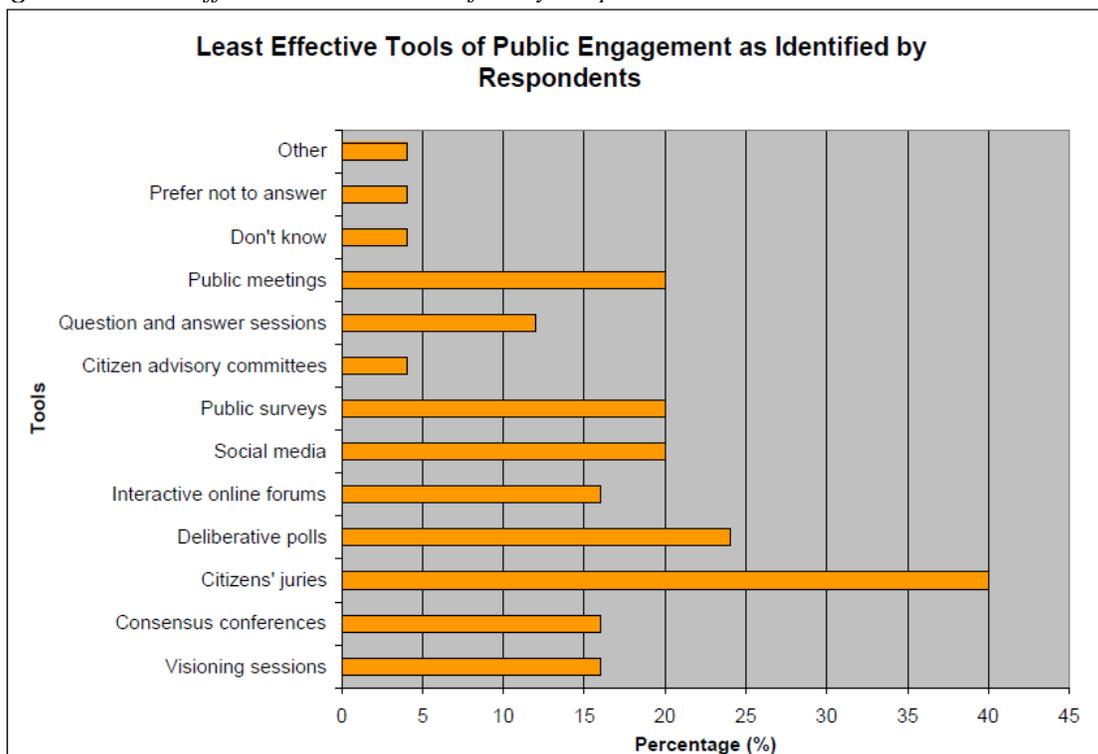
The specific reasons for some of the least effective tools identified the most by respondents reveal some interesting insights. Forty percent of respondents indicated that they

perceived citizens' juries as one of the least effective tools for engagement. The reasons cited for this included their inability to engage a large enough sector of the population, the lack of desire on the part of the public to participate in this type of engagement, the lack of familiarity with the tool, lack of time and the fact that residents don't understand the process.

Twenty-four percent of respondent municipalities identified deliberative polls as one of the most ineffective tools for engagement citing unreliable results, low level of interest from the public, the inability to reach a broad enough spectrum of the public and the inability to create an interactive dialogue as the reasons behind this choice. However, the fact that some respondents stated that this tool is not able to create an interactive dialogue seems to suggest that they may not understand what exactly this tool entails in that interactive dialogue is a cornerstone of the deliberative polling process.

There were some municipalities that identified the public meeting and public survey as most ineffective (20% each), but less so than citizens' juries and deliberative polls. The reasons cited for the ineffectiveness of public surveys included the potential for skewed or unreliable results and that many residents often ignore them. Not one respondent mentioned the relative inability of public meetings to foster authentic two-way communication. Instead, most focused on the way in which some participants dominate the meeting over others as the major weakness of this tool. It is encouraging that some municipalities are recognizing that public meetings are not representative of a silent majority who may not attend, but rather more of an angry minority at times. However, it does not appear that many municipalities recognize the public meeting as an ineffective tool for public engagement in that only 20% of respondents for this survey acknowledged this.

Social media was identified by 20% of respondents as one of the least effective tools in perception. The reasons cited by the respondents for this choice include limited access of more rural communities (to internet and social media) and the limited perspective that is garnered from the public via this tool. Additionally, one municipality stated that this tool allowed for "few

opportunities to provide context and complete information for decision-making," leading one to question how municipalities are using social media as providing context and complete information would seem to be a major strength of this tool for engagement purposes. This comment suggests a different understanding of social media and the opportunities that its capabilities present for municipalities.

The data from Questions 12 and 13 suggests that municipalities are viewing innovative tools as generally less effective than traditional tools, implying that municipalities are more focused on the benefits associated with local problem-solving in that these are the benefits associated with the more traditional tools.

Respondents were asked in Question 14 to identify what tools they had used in practice in their municipalities in the most recent Council term. The graph in *Figure 6* shows that all the tools that were given as choices in the questionnaire, with the exception of citizens' juries, were identified by municipalities as being used in the past Council term. The top 5 tools identified by respondents for their use in the past Council term were public meetings (96%), public surveys (68%), citizen advisory committees (60%), social media (60%) and focus groups (60%). It is apparent from the data that innovative tools, with the exception of focus groups and social media, were used much less frequently than the top 5 and much less frequently than all of the traditional tools. This serves to illustrate a propensity on the part of the respondent municipalities to lean towards using traditional tools that primarily generate one-way dialogue and support the benefits of local problem-solving as opposed to those which foster two-way dialogue and the benefits of community building or citizen-government relations.

Additionally, the respondents were asked in Questions 15 and 16 of the questionnaire to identify the two tools that their municipality had used with the greatest frequency during the past Council term and the reasons behind why those tools were used more often than others.

Figure 6 – *Tools Used by Respondents in the Most Recent Council Term*
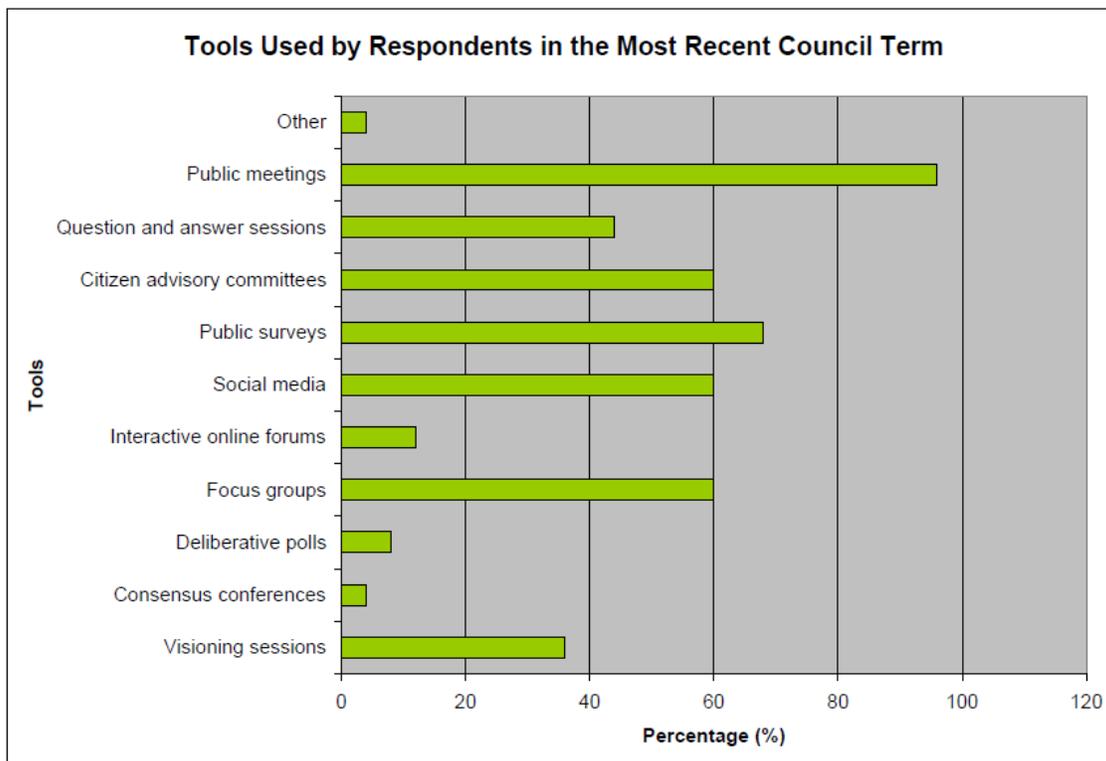
Figure 7 – *Tools Utilized Most Frequently by Respondents in the Most Recent Council Term*
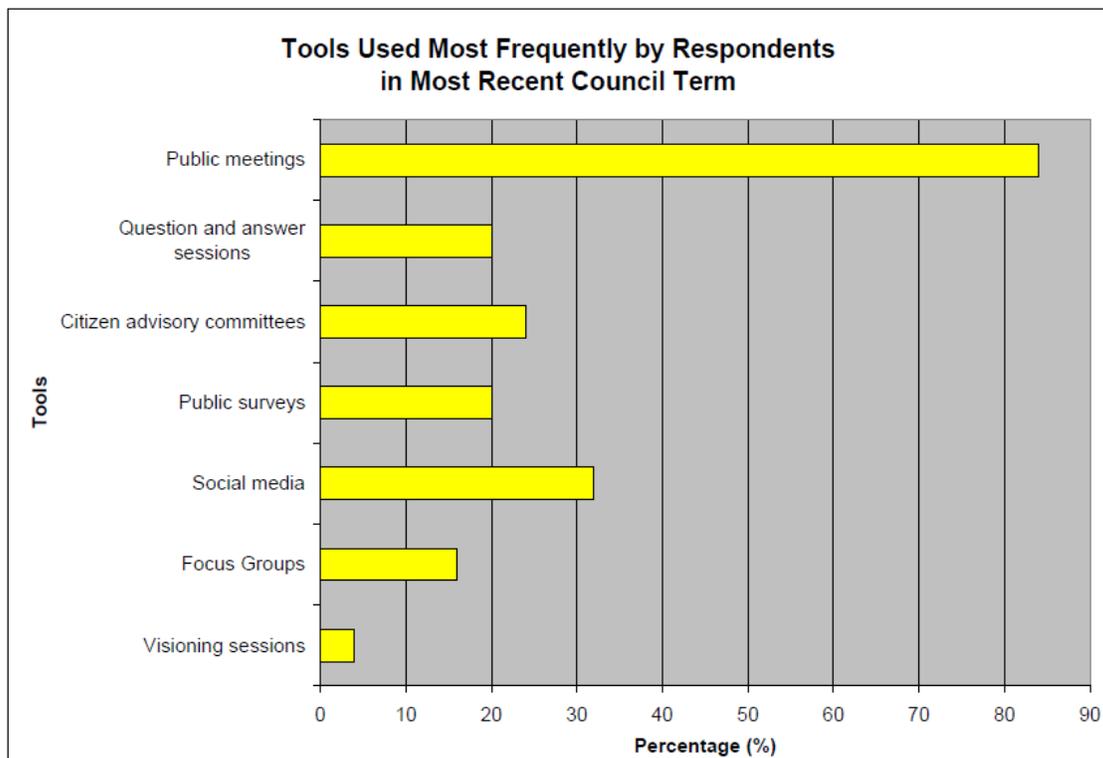
The popularity of the traditional tools of public engagement is immediately apparent from the graph set out in *Figure 7*. Four of the top five tools identified by respondents as most utilized in the most recent Council term were traditional tools of public engagement (public meetings, citizen advisory committees, question and answer sessions and public surveys). Taking a more detailed look at the reasons provided for the frequent use of each of the tools identified will help determine what makes these tools so popular.

Public meetings were identified by 84% of respondents as one of their top two most frequently used tools for public engagement in the most recent Council term. Public meetings were identified by a large number of respondents as a traditional, familiar and simple tool for public engagement. Respondents also commented that this tool was well-known to both staff and the community and that there was a community "expectation that sessions such as these [would] be held." These reasons serve to support the explanation provided in the literature positing that traditional methods have been in place for much longer than innovative methods and the institutional support garnered during that time period has served to equate public engagement with traditional methods (Innes and Booher 2004, 430-431).

Many respondents cited the low cost or cost effectiveness of public meetings as a driving force behind their frequent use which, again, supports the explanation provided in the literature that many local governments already have procedures and protocols in place for traditional public engagement mechanisms, and have for quite some time, which may make them cheaper and faster to use in that new processes do not have to be developed.

Multiple respondents stated that public meetings are mandated by legislation and this was a major contributing factor to their frequent use. Additionally, despite evidence in the literature review to the contrary, some respondents are of the view that public meetings are able to provide valid, reliable input in addition to being able to provide a space for the exchange of ideas and that is why they choose to utilize this tool more often than others for engagement activities.

The next highest ranked tool for the past Council term was an innovative tool, social media (32%). Multiple respondents commented that social media was a simple tool for dispensing information and receiving input that was easily implemented and these were reasons why it was used more often than other tools in their municipality. These comments seem to suggest the use of social media is able to foster two-way dialogue capable of creating the benefits associated with citizen-government relations and/or community building. However, it appears from the comments provided by the respondent municipalities that simplicity and ease of implementation are the major driving factors to this tool's popularity, neither of which connect to any of the benefits or disadvantages associated with the various tools of engagement.

Citizen advisory committees were the next most chosen tool with 24% of respondents stating that it was one of their top two tools used for engagement in the past Council term. The reasons cited for its popular use included its familiarity, the high level of attendance that it is able to garner, the expertise that it is able to provide to Council for decision-making and its ability to reach a variety of people.

Twenty percent of respondents selected question and answer sessions as one of their top two most utilized tools during the past Council term. These municipalities stated that familiarity, low cost and legislated requirements drove the popularity of this particular tool. Twenty percent of respondents also selected public surveys as one of their top two utilized tools, citing familiarity and the ability to reach many people as the reasons behind its frequent use.

Focus groups are another innovative tool that was selected by 16% of respondents as one of their top two utilized tools in the most recent Council term. Those that selected this tool cited accessibility, reliability of input and the depth of demographic and geographic representation provided as reasons for this tool's popularity.

It must be noted that none of the respondents chose consensus conferences, citizens' juries, deliberative polls or interactive online forums, all of which are innovative tools. This illustrates that the tools that are able to produce the two-way dialogue necessary for fostering the

benefits associated with citizen-government relations and community building are not being used by municipalities in practice, with the exception of social media and focus groups, which are used less than other traditional tools. Overall it appears that a certain set of factors, and not the benefits derived by municipalities from specific tools, are driving the tools that are being used more frequently in practice. These factors include a) familiarity; b) low cost; c) ability to reach many people; d) legislative requirements; and e) simplicity and ease of implementation.

The next question included in the questionnaire asked respondent municipalities whether they desired to use more tools of public engagement and if so, what were the reasons that they did not use a wider array of tools. The research data indicated that 44% of respondents expressed a desire to use more tools for public engagement than they currently use and 40% of respondents stated that they did not. Many respondents stated that resource (time and staffing) and fiscal constraints were major obstacles preventing them from using a wider variety of tools for public engagement in their municipalities. Other respondents stated that their lack of familiarity with the newer, more innovative tools prevented them from using those tools. It was noted by other respondents that a 'lack of interest' represented a barrier to their municipality using a wider array of tools, though they did not specify whether this lack of interest was on the part of the public, staff or Council. One municipality stated that public engagement is "not on the radar of Councillors in small rural communities" and this was the reason that more tools of engagement were not used. However, this may be true in municipalities of all sizes and is worth noting for future research. Finally, one respondent stated that using more tools "has not been the way things [had been] done in the past," indicating that established traditions, protocols and procedures do have an impact on the engagement processes employed by municipalities.

Perceptions vs. Practices

Obtaining the data from the respondent municipalities regarding what they perceived as the most effective and least effective tools in addition to the most utilized tools in their respective municipalities in the most recent Council term allowed the researcher to measure the extent to

which the respondents' perceptions of public engagement tools and their use of them in practice were in alignment. The data seems to suggest that there is substantial alignment between perception and practice in the respondent municipalities.

Twenty-four percent of respondents identified both of the 'most effective tools' in perception as the tools that they used most often in the past Council term. Additionally, 44% of respondents identified one of their most used tools as one of the 'most effective tools,' with most of these being the identification of the public meeting as a most effective tool, and then it being the tool used most often during the last Council term. There were two respondents that identified social media as an effective tool and as one of the most used and two that identified public surveys as an effective tool and as one of the most used. It is interesting to note that in 28% of the respondents who identified one of their most used tools as one of the 'most effective tools,' an innovative tool was identified as one of the most effective, but then was not identified as being utilized most often in the last Council term and rather replaced by a traditional tool. It is important to examine the causes of these municipalities choosing a traditional tool more often over an innovative one that they believe to be more effective. Looking back to the reasons cited above for the more frequent use of traditional tools it is clear that several driving factors outside of a tool's effectiveness determined which tools were ultimately used by these municipalities (e.g. legislation, familiarity with tool of staff and the public, tradition, cost effectiveness, ease of implementation, attendance was good).

Finally, in 24% of respondent municipalities neither of the two 'most effective tools' identified were the same as the ones used most often in the past Council term. And within this set of respondent municipalities, there were 16% that identified public meetings as one of the two least effective tools and then went on to recognize that the public meeting was one of the most used tools in their municipality in the most recent Council term. Again, this is troubling in that respondents are recognizing that some traditional tools, like the public meeting, are ineffective and yet they continue to use them with great frequency. It appears that factors such as the tool's

familiarity, low cost, requirements under legislation and ability to focus on the target audience are driving the use of traditional tools in these municipalities as opposed to their effectiveness or the benefits that they provide.

Again, these findings illustrate that some municipalities are utilizing tools because of reasons other than the benefits that can be realized from them in relation to public engagement. It is clear that some municipalities seem to be able to identify the benefits and disadvantages of the various tools in perception, but then what tools are used in practice appears to boil down to a set of factors – legislation that mandates public engagement, familiarity of administration and the public with the tool, tradition, cost effectiveness, ease of implementation – that affect which tools will be utilized most often by municipalities.

Staffing and Public Engagement

Question 18 was included in the questionnaire to determine which municipalities had staff dedicated specifically to public engagement. The intent of this question was to gauge general support for public engagement and how resource support for it related to where an organization was positioned on the spectrum of benefits. The data showed that 20% of respondents indicated that they have staff dedicated to public engagement while 80% do not.

The reason most cited for not having staff specifically dedicated to public engagement was the small size of a municipality. In these municipalities, it appears that "all staff carry differing levels of responsibility for public engagement [and] it is a daily requirement of all." Four of the five municipalities that indicated that they did have staff dedicated to public engagement had populations of over 100, 000, supporting the notion that size most likely does have an impact on the resources available for staffing for public engagement. In the municipalities that stated that they did have staff dedicated to public engagement, positions such as Supervisor of Community Engagement, Community Engagement Coordinator and Customer Service Representative and departments such as Communications, Clerk's Office and Community Services were identified.

Upon examining the complete set of data generated by the questionnaire of each of the municipalities that indicated that they had staff specifically dedicated to public engagement it does not appear that they were any more supportive of public engagement, any more likely to use public engagement for a broader range of topics or any more likely to use more innovative tools than those without staff dedicated to public engagement.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

The research findings make it clear that virtually all municipalities in the study population of Southwestern Ontario are engaging in public engagement to some extent. The data shows that many municipalities are engaging the public more often on topics that require public engagement to occur under provincial legislation. The implication of this is it causes municipalities to lose valuable opportunities to solicit input from the public on a wider variety of other topics that are not mandated to include public engagement processes. As a result, these municipalities and the communities that they serve could be missing out on the full range of benefits that public engagement is capable of providing.

In relation to the tools available for public engagement, the perceptions and practices of the respondent municipalities show that traditional tools are favoured over innovative tools and the benefits associated with local problem-solving are a priority for municipalities. The research data shows that some municipalities still view traditional tools, such as the public meeting, as most effective, though research has strongly suggested otherwise. This has the potential to have serious repercussions in that municipalities may be wasting resources on engaging the public in an ineffective manner. Another troubling trend that presents itself in the research data is that some municipalities are utilizing innovative tools of public engagement, but they are using them to obtain the benefits of local problem-solving as opposed to the full range of benefits that they are capable of providing. The research data also showed that some municipalities are able to identify the benefits and disadvantages of the various tools in perception. However, what tools are used in practice appears to revert back to a consideration of a certain set of factors, and not the benefits

derived by municipalities from specific tools, which then serve to determine the tools that are being used more frequently in practice. These factors include a) familiarity with the tool; b) low cost; c) ability to reach many people; d) legislative requirements; and e) simplicity and ease of implementation. The policy implications of these findings are a potential loss of valuable opportunities for municipalities to obtain important input from the public on a range of issues, which could serve to provide a greater range of benefits to the municipality and community that it serves.

The intent of this research study was to determine what topics and tools municipalities in Southwestern Ontario were using more often than others for public engagement and to explore the reasons as to why some topics and tools were being used more frequently than others. The goal of the researcher was to examine the reasons behind these phenomena so that recommendations could be formed and presented to municipalities on how to expand the range of topics and tools that they use for public engagement to ensure that they are reaping the full spectrum of available benefits of such engagement. Alternatively, if municipalities do not wish, or are unable, to expand upon their current public engagement activities, this research report and the accompanying recommendations should serve to inform municipalities on what is available to them and what the spectrum of benefits entails so that they may have all the information when making decisions regarding their public engagement activities. Additionally, a number of recommendations were also formed for the purpose of guiding future research efforts in this area of study.

The following recommendations have been generated using the research data. The first set of recommendations involves assisting municipalities in expanding and improving upon their current public engagement activities. These recommendations can support municipalities in deriving a greater number of benefits associated with citizen-government relations and community building, in addition to local problem-solving, from their public engagement processes. The second set of recommendations serves as a guide for future research efforts.

Recommendations for Municipalities

1. RECOMMENDATION: In order to help expand the range of topics for which municipalities use public engagement it is recommended that municipalities incorporate some or all of the characteristics found to be common to the topics that are not mandated to use public engagement in Ontario but for which some municipalities are currently utilizing public engagement into their municipal procedures and protocols:

   f) implement public engagement processes in a topic area as part of an annual routine;

   g) foster and encourage political support for public engagement;

   h) foster and encourage managerial support for public engagement;

   i) foster and encourage an interest in the issue slated for engagement in the public by making information more readily available to ensure that they are aware of the issues and how much they have at stake in any particular matter; and

   j) ensure all major projects and projects-based activities that span various departments utilize public engagement processes.

2. RECOMMENDATION: Provide education for administration, Council and citizens on the ways in which innovative tools, particularly social media, can be utilized to create authentic two-way dialogue with their citizens.

3. RECOMMENDATION: Provide education for administration, Council and citizens on the mechanics and benefits associated with all the tools, both traditional and innovative, available for public engagement processes.

4. RECOMMENDATION: Provide training on the newer, more innovative tools of public engagement to increase staff, Council members' and the public's knowledge and familiarity with them.

5. RECOMMENDATION: Ensure that innovative tools are more like traditional tools by keeping their cost low, making them simple and easy to implement, encouraging greater familiarity with them and emphasizing their ability to reach many people.

6. RECOMMENDATION: Ensure greater access to internet and technology in more rural or remote communities so that more innovative tools are available to the municipalities in those locales.

7. RECOMMENDATION: Ensure that adequate resources (time and monetary) are dedicated to public engagement.

6. RECOMMENDATION: Lobby the Ontario legislature to enact legislation that would mandate the use of more innovative tools of public engagement.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. RECOMMENDATION: Though this study did not explore the reasoning behind why municipalities would be 'not likely' to engage the public on certain issues or topics, this would be an interesting and helpful avenue of research to pursue in the future.

2. RECOMMENDATION: Further research is recommended into how Council's support for public engagement affects the way in which it is utilized in a municipality.

3. RECOMMENDATION: Municipalities, especially smaller ones with fewer resources, should carefully consider whether they wish to dedicate staff specifically public engagement. More research is needed in the area of the effects of staffing for public engagement.

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Questionnaire for Municipal Chief Administrators

Please answer all of the following questions:

1. Please briefly identify what public engagement means to you:

2. What is your view of the following statement:

    Public engagement is a valuable tool for municipal government.

    [ ] Strongly disagree
    [ ] Disagree
    [ ] Neither agree or disagree
    [ ] Agree
    [ ] Strongly agree
    [ ] Don't know
    [ ] Prefer not to answer

3. Why does your municipality utilize public engagement? (please select all of the options from the following list that apply)

    [ ] Empowerment of citizens
    [ ] Building stronger civic associations in your community
    [ ] A more educated citizenry
    [ ] A more educated administration
    [ ] The creation of a more cooperative public
    [ ] Building trust between citizens and government
    [ ] Better decision-making
    [ ] Breaking gridlock in political decision-making
    [ ] Not applicable
    [ ] Don't know
    [ ] Prefer not to answer
    [ ] Other (please specify in the space provided)

4. Of the reasons outlined in question 3, which two (2) does your municipality consider most important? (please **select two (2) options** from the list below)

       [ ] Empowerment of citizens
       [ ] Building stronger civic associations in your community
       [ ] A more educated citizenry
       [ ] A more educated administration
       [ ] The creation of a more cooperative public
       [ ] Building trust between citizens and government
       [ ] Better decision-making
       [ ] Breaking gridlock in political decision-making
       [ ] Not applicable
       [ ] Don't know
       [ ] Prefer not to answer
       [ ] Other (please specify in the space provided)

5. What does your municipality perceive as the disadvantages (if any) of public engagement? (please select all of the options from the following list that your municipality perceives as disadvantages)

       [ ] Costly in monetary terms to governments
       [ ] Costly in time consumption terms to governments
       [ ] Has potential to create citizen dissatisfaction if citizen input is ignored
       [ ] Public is apathetic and does not participate
       [ ] Public engagement is not representative of all citizens' views
       [ ] Citizens do not have the proper skills to participate in a meaningful manner
       [ ] Don't know
       [ ] Prefer not to answer
       [ ] Other (please specify in the space provided)

6. For each topic listed below, please indicate how likely your municipality is to set up some sort of deliberative process to engage the public in addressing the issue:

a) Development Charges By-laws
       [ ] Very Likely [ ] Likely   [ ] Not Likely   [ ] N/A

b) Downtown Revitalization
       [ ] Very Likely [ ] Likely   [ ] Not Likely   [ ] N/A

c) Budgets
       [ ] Very Likely [ ] Likely   [ ] Not Likely   [ ] N/A

d) Public Safety
        [ ] Very Likely [ ] Likely   [ ] Not Likely   [ ] N/A

e) Immigrant Integration and/or Race Relations
        [ ] Very Likely [ ] Likely   [ ] Not Likely   [ ] N/A

f) Water and Utility Issues
        [ ] Very Likely [ ] Likely   [ ] Not Likely   [ ] N/A

g) Matters under the Ontario *Environmental Assessment Act*
        [ ] Very Likely [ ] Likely   [ ] Not Likely   [ ] N/A

h) Environmental Issues Other than under the *Environmental Assessment Act*
        [ ] Very Likely [ ] Likely   [ ] Not Likely   [ ] N/A

i) Youth/Youth Development
        [ ] Very Likely [ ] Likely   [ ] Not Likely   [ ] N/A

j) Regional or Inter-municipal Issues
        [ ] Very Likely [ ] Likely   [ ] Not Likely   [ ] N/A

k) Investment in Low Income Areas
        [ ] Very Likely [ ] Likely   [ ] Not Likely   [ ] N/A

l) Location of Social Services Facilities
        [ ] Very Likely [ ] Likely   [ ] Not Likely   [ ] N/A

m) Health Issues
        [ ] Very Likely [ ] Likely   [ ] Not Likely   [ ] N/A

n) Animal Issues
        [ ] Very Likely [ ] Likely   [ ] Not Likely   [ ] N/A

o) Land Use Planning and Zoning Changes
        [ ] Very Likely [ ] Likely   [ ] Not Likely   [ ] N/A

p) Parks and Recreation
        [ ] Very Likely [ ] Likely   [ ] Not Likely   [ ] N/A

q) Other (please specify in the space provided): _____
        [ ] Very Likely [ ] Likely   [ ] Not Likely   [ ] N/A

7. During **this Council term**, for which topic or issue has your municipality most frequently set up a deliberative process to engage the public? (please **select three (3) options** from the list below):

    a) Development Charges By-laws
    b) Downtown Revitalization
    c) Budgets
    d) Public Safety
    e) Immigrant Integration and/or Race Relations
    f) Water and Utility Issues
    g) Matters under the Ontario *Environmental Assessment Act*
    h) Environmental Issues Other than under the *Environmental Assessment Act*
    i) Youth/Youth Development
    j) Regional or Inter-municipal Issues
    k) Investment in Low Income Areas
    l) Location of Social Services Facilities
    m) Health Issues
    n) Animal Issues
    o) Land Use Planning and Zoning Changes
    p) Parks and Recreation
    q) Don't know
    r) Prefer not to answer
    s) Other (please specify in the space provided)

8. What were the reasons that prompted your municipality to utilize public engagement more often in the areas you identified in question 7 above than other areas:

9. Does your municipality want to utilize public engagement more frequently?

        [ ] Yes – if yes, outline these reasons in the space provided.
        [ ] No
        [ ] Don't know
        [ ] Prefer not to answer

Reasons that your municipality does not utilize public engagement as frequently as it would like:

10. In your opinion, which of the following mechanisms are **most effective** for engaging the public? (please **select two (2) options** from the list below).

        [ ] Visioning sessions
        [ ] Consensus conferences
        [ ] Citizens' juries
        [ ] Deliberative polls
        [ ] Focus groups
        [ ] Interactive online forums
        [ ] Social media
        [ ] Public surveys
        [ ] Citizen advisory committees
        [ ] Question and answer sessions
        [ ] Public meetings
        [ ] Don't know
        [ ] Prefer not to answer
        [ ] Other (please specify in the space provided)

11. Why do you think that the two (2) options chosen in question 10 are most effective for engaging the public?

12. In your opinion, which of the following tools are **least effective** for engaging the public? (please **select two (2) options** from the list below).

        [ ] Visioning sessions
        [ ] Consensus conferences
        [ ] Citizens' juries
        [ ] Deliberative polls
        [ ] Focus groups
        [ ] Interactive online forums
        [ ] Social media
        [ ] Public surveys
        [ ] Citizen advisory committees
        [ ] Question and answer sessions
        [ ] Public meetings
        [ ] Don't know
        [ ] Prefer not to answer
        [ ] Other (please specify in the space provided)

13. Why do you think that the two (2) options chosen in question 12 above are **least effective** for engaging the public?

14. Which of the following public engagement tools has your municipality utilized in this Council term? (please select all that apply)

        [ ] Visioning sessions
        [ ] Consensus conferences
        [ ] Citizens' juries
        [ ] Deliberative polls
        [ ] Focus groups
        [ ] Interactive online forums
        [ ] Social media
        [ ] Public surveys
        [ ] Citizen advisory committees
        [ ] Question and answer sessions
        [ ] Public meetings

[ ] Don't know
[ ] Prefer not to answer
[ ] Other (please specify in the space provided)

15. Please indicate the **two (2) tools** from the following list that your municipality has used **most frequently** in this Council term:

[ ] Visioning sessions
[ ] Consensus conferences
[ ] Citizens' juries
[ ] Deliberative polls
[ ] Focus groups
[ ] Interactive online forums
[ ] Social media
[ ] Public surveys
[ ] Citizen advisory committees
[ ] Question and answer sessions
[ ] Public meeting
[ ] Don't know
[ ] Prefer not to answer
[ ] Other (please specify in the space provided)

16. What were the reasons that prompted your municipality to utilize the tools you identified in question 15 more often than other tools?

17. Are there reasons that your municipality has for not using more tools of public engagement?

[ ] Yes – If yes, please elaborate on these reasons in the space provided below.
[ ] No
[ ] Don't know
[ ] Prefer not to answer

Reasons that your municipality has for not using more tools of public engagement:

18. Does your municipality have staff dedicated specifically to public engagement?

[ ] Yes - If yes, please provide the title(s) of the person(s) responsible for these duties in the space provided;

[ ] No
[ ] Prefer not to answer

19. What is the total population of the municipality for which you act as Administrator?

_____

20. Please classify your municipality.

[ ] Urban
[ ] Small Urban
[ ] Rural
[ ] Prefer not to answer

Thank you for your responses and your time.

Appendix B
Municipalities Contacted to Participate in Research Study

Bruce County	Huron County	Oxford County
Municipality of Arran Elderslie	Municipality of Bluewater	City of Woodstock
Municipality of Brockton	Municipality of Central Huron	Town of Ingersoll
Municipality of Kincardine	Municipality of Huron East	Town of Tillsonburg
Municipality of Northern Bruce Peninsula	Municipality of Morris-Turnberry	Township of Blandford Blenheim
Municipality of South Bruce	Municipality of South Huron	Township of East Zorra-Tavistock
Town of Saugeen Shores	Town of Goderich	Township of Norwich
Town of South Bruce Peninsula	Township of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh	Township of South-West Oxford
Township of Huron-Kinloss	Township of Howick	Township of Zorra
	Township of North Huron	
Elgin County		Perth County
City of St. Thomas	Lambton County	City of Stratford
Municipality of Bayham	City of Sarnia	Municipality of North Perth
Municipality of Central Elgin	Municipality of Lambton Shores	Town of St. Mary's
Municipality of Dutton/Dunwich	Town of Petrolia	Township of Perth East
Municipality of West Elgin	Municipality of Brooke-Alvinston	Township of Perth South
Town of Aylmer	Township of Dawn-Euphemia	Municipality of West Perth
Township of Malahide	Township of Enniskillen	
Township of Southwold	Township of Plympton-Wyoming	Wellington County
	Township of St. Clair	City of Guelph
Essex County	Township of Warwick	Town of Erin
City of Windsor	Village of Oil Springs	Town of Minto
Municipality of Leamington	Village of Point Edward	Township of Centre Wellington
Town of Amherstburg		Township of Guelph-Eramosa
Town of Essex	Middlesex County	Township of Mapleton
Town of Kingsville	City of London	Township of Puslinch
	Municipality of North Middlesex	Township of Wellington North
Town of Lakeshore	Municipality of Southwest Middlesex	
Town of LaSalle	Municipality of Thames Centre	Waterloo Region
Town of Tecumseh	Township of Adelaide Metcalfe	City of Cambridge
Township of Pelee	Township of Lucan Biddulph	City of Kitchener
	Township of Middlesex Centre	City of Waterloo
Grey County	Township of Strathroy-Caradoc	Township of North Dumfries
City of Owen Sound	Village of Newbury	Township of Wellesley
Town of The Blue Mountains		Township of Wilmot
Town of Hanover		Township of Woolwich
Municipality of Meaford		
Township of Chatsworth		Brant County
Township of Georgian Bluffs		Norfolk County
Municipality of Grey Highlands		Haldimand County
Township of Southgate		Chatham-Kent
Municipality of West Grey		Brantford