

Shift Your Thinking Presentation Notes  
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*Presenters:*

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**IN BRITISH COLUMBIA PRACTITIONERS SHARED THAT:**

- **Good public participation** does result in better decisions. As practitioners we need to communicate success stories.
- **Meaningful engagement happens when we meet people where they are**, and are genuinely interested in their concerns and questions. It means that expectations are clear from the outset, and there is transparency to the process.
- **Meaningfulness** doesn't mean that everyone gets what they wanted, but that there are genuine efforts to hear and understand everyone's perspective.
- **Engagement Mindset** behind why we engage must shift from solving a problem or stakeholders are the problem to genuinely believing that we need to engage to make better decisions while treating stakeholders like partners
- **Competition for stakeholder attention:** While on the one hand, communities are demanding a greater voice in decisions which affect their lives and built environments, there is a corresponding participation fatigue, as more and more issues demand their attention. - how to deal with P2 burnout in communities facing a lot of industrial development and multiple engagement processes by industry often occurring concurrently. Piecemeal approach (Hearing that this is because consultation being led by companies rather than BC gov't) rather than industry wide coordinated approach to consultations from pipelines to LNG.
- **Engaging vulnerable or at-risk populations-** ensuring that all voices can be heard- not just the loudest, the most wealthy, or the most tech-savvy voices is critical to our practice
- **Beyond Box Checking:** While government bodies acknowledgement that moving beyond statutory regulations is necessary there is still a lot of box checking. As P2 is being increasingly normalized and expected environmental assessment process and engagement by industry (e.g. oil and gas, mining companies, etc) the process at times slips into box checking
- **Complex consultation creates barriers:** Regulatory processes (quasi-judicial in nature, formalized hearings) seem to dominate in the natural resources and First Nations engagement realms, as a result of legislation. This presents lots of barriers to the 'everyman' wishing to take part. Health, urban design, community development engagement generally has more latitude for creative, flexible processes.
- **Emerging P2 trend in British Columbia:** Increased need for, and expectations around, meaningful indigenous engagement in resource management type decisions. Indigenous Engagement is shifting government expectations and evolving relative to developments in Aboriginal and consultation law. In engaging Indigenous and rural communities in the Environmental Assessment process one of the key questions is how to reimagine the typical town hall/community meeting to be less formulaic and more creative
- **Online engagement** platforms seem to be **increasing** making it difficult to differentiate

## FOUNDATIONS TRAINING IS REINFORCING THE VALUES OF MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

Practitioners also shared that:

- Many processes need to more effectively communicate how participant input was used and how it influences decision/outcome
- Ensuring input is integrated into planning process
- Meaningful engagement is where decision points are clear and people can see their input reflected
- It makes economic sense- for example, when communities are involved in decision-making from the start of a project, they are far less likely to oppose the progress of the project, nor insist on expensive changes, resulting in fewer project delays and re-design work.
- People deserve a say in the communities where they live!
- We should care because people want to be involved and want to be heard. They are invested and should be heard
- P2 is important because you get a better result in the end with different perspectives
- We should care because we live in a democratic country
- We care because the public today are super savvy and well educated and have the right to be involved in the decision making process
- Be specific – what are you consulting on?

## YET, WE ALSO HEARD THAT ORGANIZATIONS, PRACTITIONERS AND LEADERS NEED TO SHIFT THEIR THINKING

- Some responses provided insights into organizational systems that need to shift.
- The institutional systems of problem solving and decision-making are based on outdated **mental models that focus on reducing risk through unilateral control**. These are blocking meaningful engagement
- **DAD approaches** – Design, Announce, Defend are still prevalent in many planning and project scenarios
- Government bodies acknowledge that moving beyond statutory regulations is necessary but there is still a lot of box checking
- We need to do a better job of helping communities understand what is involved in good engagement- what to expect, how to take part in ways that are useful and constructive.

## IN MONTREAL AT THE CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS ALSO SHARED

- Participation is sometimes limited or inhibited because of structures such as closed committees closed or private interest group meetings
- Regulators mindsets including public participation:
  - Takes a lot of time
  - Not enough hands
  - Budget constraints
  - Strategically choose projects
  - Won't work anyway attitude
  - Bad past experience
- Influencers mindsets including
  - Walks in with a judgment
  - Influences proponents to consider other things not up for discussion
  - Pre-empted participation
  - Long time since being asked to participate
  - They are valuable
- Indigenous communities are different
  - Are we building capacity
  - What can we do to make the problem go away – common rhetoric
  - Indecision in process design
  - Want to know what is out there and have a choice who to engage and on what
- Implications - How do we shift mindsets
  - Engage subject matter expert internally
  - What is the influencer – why engage
  - Be clear what is open for influence
  - Set expectations
  - Can't formulate the answer first
  - Education prior to engagement
  - Making proponents move out of their comfort zones
- What can we as practitioners do differently
  - Are we asking where citizens are interested in being engaged?
  - Are we making a commitment to engage communities on issues not only on our agendas
  - We have direct influence as practitioners
  - We need to be aware of our own perspective as an influencer
  - Organizations change – we need to be more explicit and skirt less
  - There is a problem with lack of ongoing collaboration – we need to push for this as good practice