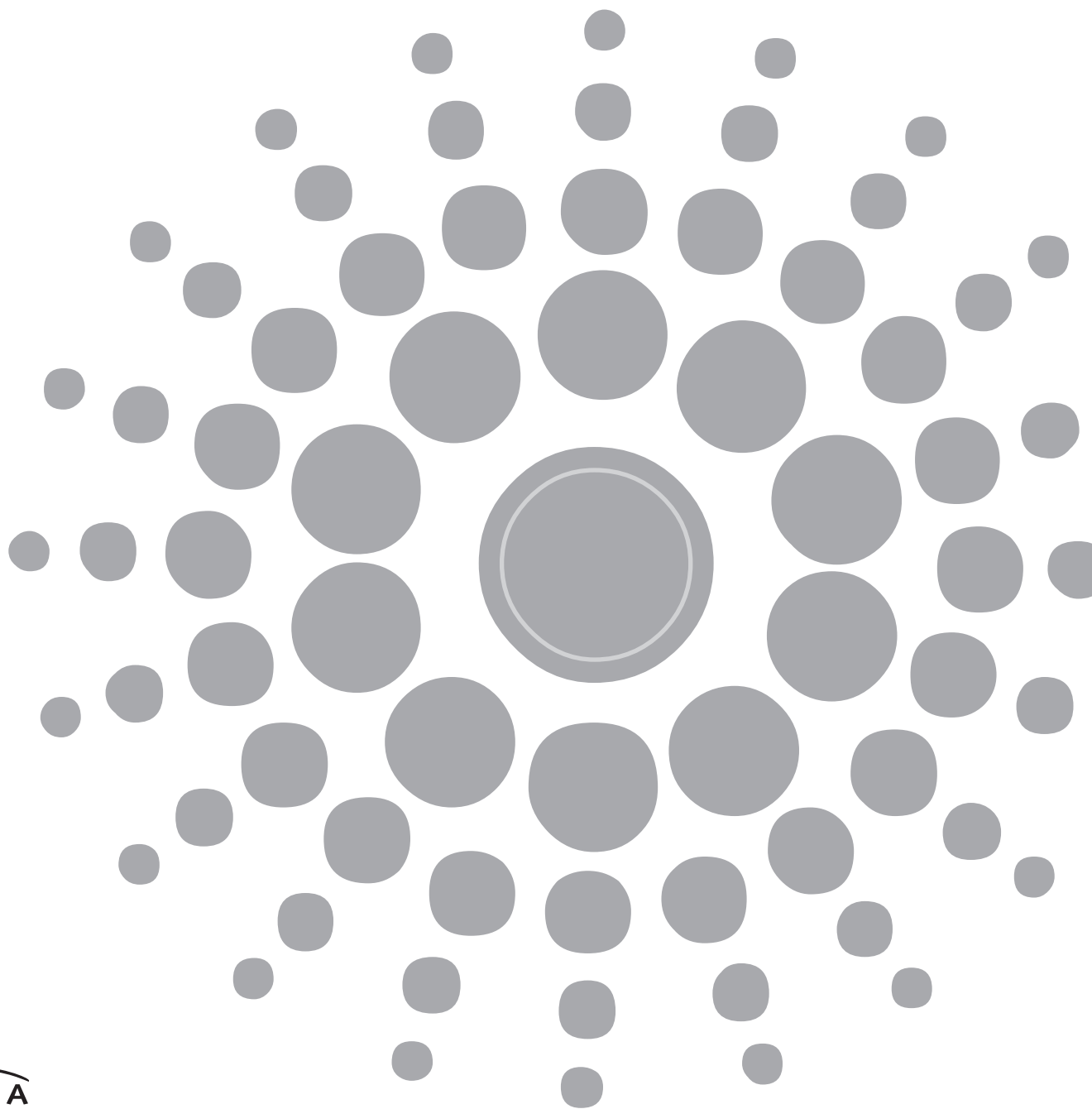


A Guide to  
**Face-to-Face Public Engagement**  
for School Boards



# Table of contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>2</b>
--------------------------	----------

## **Key steps**

Before the engagement session.....	2
------------------------------------	---

At the engagement session.....	6
--------------------------------	---

After the engagement session.....	7
-----------------------------------	---

<b>Public engagement checklist.....</b>	<b>8</b>
---	----------

## **Templates**

Appendix A: Public engagement plan template.....	10
--	----

Appendix B: Sample invitation letter.....	11
---	----

Appendix B: Sample notice.....	12
--------------------------------	----

Appendix C: Backgrounder on education cuts.....	13
---	----

Appendix D: Sample agenda.....	14
--------------------------------	----

Appendix E: Sample evaluation form.....	15
---	----

Appendix F: Sample thank you letter.....	16
--	----

## **Format**

Appendix G: Format – Focus group.....	17
---------------------------------------	----

Appendix H: Format – Town hall meetings.....	19
--	----

Appendix I: Format – World Café.....	21
--------------------------------------	----

Appendix J: Format – Community forum.....	23
---	----

**For more information contact ASBA Communications at 1.780.482.7311.**



## **Introduction**

Cuts to education funding mean school boards will be facing difficult decisions in the months ahead. Through effective public engagement school boards can be confident the choices they make are what local stakeholders want. Public engagement is an excellent way to marshal support for your board's decisions.

This guide has been prepared especially for school boards who have not done a local public engagement exercise before. It also speaks specifically to engaging stakeholder groups on the topic of potential education cuts.

It is recommended that school boards consult with their school councils and discuss how they may be able to assist in gathering public input regarding cuts to education.

## **Key steps**

### *Before the engagement session*

#### **Step 1 Make a plan**

Every effective public engagement exercise starts with a plan. The plan sets out who you are engaging and what you hope to achieve by doing so, the consultation approach you will take, the tasks that need to be done, who in your organization will do what and when they will do it.

*Appendix A has a public engagement plan template.*

#### **Step 2 Make arrangements**

These are the basics like setting the date, time and place. When making arrangements, be sensitive to the needs of the people you are inviting. Make it as convenient and attractive as possible. Choose a location suitable for the invitees that is easy to access. Providing food is always a good incentive.

For example, consider holding a working session over breakfast or lunch for businesspeople. For seniors, consider meeting in the seniors centre. For a session focused on parents or the community at large, an early evening session with food and childcare will increase the likelihood of a good turnout.

If your jurisdiction is large, you may need to hold two or three identical sessions in different towns to overcome transportation and time obstacles.

#### **Step 3 Determine the questions**

Before dealing with a question, give session participants enough background information so that everyone has the same level of understanding or set of facts. The set of questions should be brief and easy to work through in the time allotted. This will help participants feel they had a suitable amount of time for input.

Put each question on a separate piece of paper so there is lots of space for people to write their comments. Suggested questions are:



**Background**

Currently, our school board uses the following principles to guide budget decisions:

- Principle 1
- Principle 2
- Principle 3
- And so on.....

**Core Question 1**

Do you agree that these principles should be followed as we enter a year of having to make significant cuts? If no, what would you change, add or subtract? What principles are most important to you?

**Background**

This year, the provincial government clawed back \$\_\_\_ from our reserves. We are estimating that the 2010/2011 cuts to public education announced by the provincial government may result in our school board receiving \_\_\_% or \$\_\_\_ less next year. In addition to Grade 1 to 12 instruction that we are required by law to provide, our school board offers the following education services and programs:

- Kindergarten
- Special education
- Registered Apprenticeship Program
- French Immersion
- Extracurricular sports programs
- And so on....

**Core Question 2**

Of the services and programs we offer, what should be protected? What services or programs do you feel we could live without? Why?

**Background**

Our school board has implemented a number of new or innovative programs over the years to address the changing needs of students and the community in general. (Name some here) Finding enough resources though to meet demand is always a challenge.

**Core Question 3**

Going forward, what areas do you feel our school board needs to focus on to meet the needs of local students and communities?

---

**Media involvement**

While inviting the media to an engagement session reflects your willingness to be open and transparent, people may be reluctant to share their thoughts openly if they think their comments may be printed or broadcast. There is also a risk that the media might only report the opinions of one or two dominant participants, thereby misrepresenting collective input.

If the media are invited, stress they are being invited as observers unless you specifically want them to participate. For example, you might invite the publisher of the local newspaper to attend and want him or her to participate in the discussion as a member of the business community.

If media are present, always mention it in the opening remarks so participants are aware.

---



## Step 4

### Invite participants

Your plan will determine who you are trying to engage. For discussions on education cuts, it is important to look beyond school councils and consult with at least one other segment of the population to get a community viewpoint. School councils may be able to help with this.

The easiest approach is to open an engagement session to everyone but an untargeted invitation usually does not result in a good turnout or effective consultation. It is usually best to think about the types of people you want to have input from and invite them as directly as possible. Some examples of participant groups are:

- Parents with children in your schools
- Students in your schools
- Staff
- Taxpayers without children in your schools
- Businesspeople
- Seniors
- People in organizations you have working relationships with (municipalities, health and social service agencies, etc)

If the group of people are easy to identify (parents in a school, local businesspeople), preparing and sending a direct invitation is best as it can be personalized and is likely to generate more participation. If the target group of people is broad (people without children in school), prepare and distribute a general notice. With a general notice, consider using the media to help get the message out.

Even with a 'by invitation' approach, try and reach out to people that you normally don't communicate with. For example, invite all businesspeople who belong to the local chamber of commerce rather than just those businesses involved in your schools' work experience or RAP programs. It will draw valuable voices to your consultation that you otherwise would not hear.

Send the invitation or notice out at least three weeks before the session. Send a reminder out a week before the event. Send those who RSVP they will be attending a reminder of the date, time and location, an agenda and any background information you will present at the meeting (if ready).

*Appendix B has a template for both an invitation letter and a general notice.*

## Step 5

### Set the agenda

The agenda will be determined by the method of consultation you are using but these are basic elements every agenda should have:

#### 1. *Welcome and Introductions*

The Master of Ceremonies/Main Facilitator brings the meeting to order and introduces the presenters, facilitators and any other people involved in putting on the session. Any dignitaries in the crowd, such as your school board trustees, local MLA or mayors or reeves should be recognized at this time.

Explain the purpose and elements of the session and deal with any housekeeping items (e.g. turn off cellphones or turn them to silent, location of bathrooms, etc.). Note the desire to have participants fill out a session evaluation before they leave and emphasize your school board's commitment to keep people informed after the session is over.



## 2. Presentation

Regardless of the consultation format, some time up front should be taken to provide background on the announced education cuts and the potential impact on your school jurisdiction. The presentation should be as brief as possible to maximize the time participants have for discussion and input. If possible, send a backgrounder out to participants in advance. Allow for participants to ask clarifying questions before launching into your group discussion.

*Appendix C has a sample backgrounder on education cuts and its potential impact on a local school board.*

## 3. Group discussion

This is the section of the agenda where the core questions are dealt with and should represent the bulk of your time with participants. How this portion of the session is managed is dictated by the engagement format you choose. Types of public engagement formats are noted in the ASBA document *Best Practices in Public Engagement*. ([http://www.asba.ab.ca/files/pdf/best\\_practices\\_public\\_engagement.pdf](http://www.asba.ab.ca/files/pdf/best_practices_public_engagement.pdf)). The ASBA has created four examples of engagement formats: focus group, town hall, community forum or world café.

*See Appendices G - J.*

## 4. Closing

Thank participants and have them fill out a session evaluation form before they leave. Remind them of your commitment to provide a session summary report and to keep them informed as you make decisions on how to manage education cuts.

Before closing the session, participants should be given an opportunity to ask any questions or make any final comments. This usually doesn't occur if the session has been well run (participants usually feel they had an opportunity for input and were heard). Invite participants to speak individually to board members and staff after the session is over.

*Appendix D has a sample agenda.*

---

### Keeping participants informed

Feedback to participants should include two components:

- A. Prepare a short summary (1-3 pages) of 'what people said' at the session and send that to participants. Preparing a summary as opposed to providing just raw notes enables you to highlight where there was consensus, majority opinion or significant differences of opinion. In addition to sending it to participants, trustees and senior staff, consider posting the summary on your website.
  - B. Let participants know what your school board did with the information. In the case of education cuts, communicate directly with them what decisions your school board eventually makes.
-



## Step 6 Prepare session supports

Regardless of the format, the things you will need at the consultation session are:

- Sign-in sheet. This is important if you are to provide participants with follow-up information.
- Name tags. These do not have to be pre-printed.
- Signage. Signage at the front door confirms they are in the right place. Directional signage inside the building helps people from getting lost.
- Food and refreshments. Providing food doesn't necessarily mean breakfast, dinner or lunch but refreshments should always be accompanied by some food element (i.e. cookies, muffins, donuts, etc.)
- Sound. Unless it is a small consultation like a focus group, you should have a sound system with multiple microphones available so everyone including those asking questions can be heard.
- Audio/visual equipment. This is not mandatory but most presentations are helped by using slides or other visual aids.
- Handouts. Handouts should be brief, concise and easy to understand. At the very least, participants should get a backgrounder on education cuts and the potential impact on your school jurisdiction. They should also get a copy of any Powerpoint presentation.
- Session evaluation form. This is for participants to fill out and should be done anonymously to encourage honest responses.

*A sample evaluation form can be found at Appendix E.*

**Note:** It is strongly recommended that, at the consultation session, you have a technician or someone experienced with the sound and A/V equipment you are using. This way, any technical glitches can be resolved quickly and you can focus on other things.

## Step 7 Do a dry run

A dry run of the session will help uncover any details you or the people helping you to organize or facilitate the event may have forgotten. To be effective, the presenter(s) should go through the presentation(s) as they would on the day itself so any errors or omissions in content or formatting can be changed. Handouts should also be reviewed by the group for the same reasons.

*At the engagement session*

## Step 8 Manage the day

By the day of the consultation everything should be in place. Arrive early though to put up signage, test equipment, make any adjustments to the room layout, set out sign-in sheets and handout materials, and provide any last minute instruction to presenters/facilitators.



If the media are in attendance, greet them and remind them they have been invited to observe not participate. Make sure to announce the presence of media to participants in the opening remarks. Tell media that the board chair or another trustee will be available to speak to them after the session is over or at a break. (If the media are not in attendance, it is good media relations to have the board chair call after the session with a brief description of what occurred).

People's time is valuable. Respect that by starting and ending the session on time. At the end of the session, have someone at the door thanking people for attending and to collect the evaluation forms.

### *After the engagement session*

#### **Step 9 Debrief**

After the session, take a little time with presenters, facilitators and others involved in the organization of the consultation to debrief and review what worked well and what didn't. Use it as a learning opportunity. Ideally, a summary of the participants' evaluations should be distributed before holding a debrief.

#### **Step 10 Send a thank you**

Send participants a short note expressing your school board's appreciation for their interest and input. If a summary of the session input is ready, send it along with the note of thanks. To ensure timeliness, it is suggested the note be sent no later than two weeks after the session occurs.

*A sample thank you note can be found at Appendix F.*

#### **Step 11 Stay in touch**

Follow through on your commitment to keep people informed. Let participants know what you did with the input they provided. In the case of education cuts, communicate directly with them what decisions your school board makes. One way to do this is to send an e-mail or letter highlighting what programs or services will be affected.

## Public engagement checklist

### Before the engagement session

- |   | Target Date | Done |
|---|-------------|------|
| <p><b>Step 1</b>    <b>Make a plan.</b> Set objectives, identify desired participants, determine subject/issues to be discussed, choose a consultation method, set out roles and responsibilities and provide a timetable.</p>  |             |      |
| <p><b>Step 2</b>    <b>Make arrangements.</b> Set date, time and place.</p>   |             |      |
| <p><b>Step 3</b>    <b>Determine the questions.</b></p>   |             |      |
| <p><b>Step 4</b>    <b>Invite participants.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine which group or groups of people to invite; if it is by invitation or open to all. If by invitation, create a list.</li> <li>• Write the invitation or notice and send invitation (or post the notice if open to all) three weeks before the session.</li> <li>• Determine if you wish to have the media there. If so, send a direct invitation.</li> <li>• Send a reminder out one week before the session.</li> </ul> |             |      |
| <p><b>Step 5</b>    <b>Set the agenda.</b> Confirm presenters/facilitators and logistical supports.</p>   |             |      |
| <p><b>Step 6</b>    <b>Prepare session supports:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sign-in sheet</li> <li>• Name tags</li> <li>• Signage</li> <li>• Food and refreshments</li> <li>• Sound</li> <li>• Audio/visual</li> <li>• Handouts</li> <li>• Participant evaluation form</li> </ul> <p>Send those who will be attending an agenda, backgrounder and confirmation of date, time and place.</p>   |             |      |
| <p><b>Step 7</b>    <b>Do a dry run.</b> Go through the presentation and review plans with presenters, facilitators and logistical support.</p>   |             |      |

## Public engagement checklist (cont')

### *At the engagement session*

**Step 8 Manage the day.**

- Arrive early and put up signage. Check the room layout and food, set out handout materials, and test sound and audio/visual equipment.
- Greet participants at the door, provide an agenda and handouts including the session evaluation sheet, have them sign-in and issue name tags.
- If media have been invited and are there, remind them they are observers; ensure their needs are met.
- Start and end on time.
- Collect evaluation forms.

### *After the engagement session*

**Step 9 Debrief.** If possible do so with the evaluation summary in hand.

**Step 10 Send a thank you.** Send the session input summary along if ready.

**Step 11 Stay in touch.** Let participants know your board decisions regarding budget and the impact on services and programs.

Target Date	Done





## Appendix B: Sample invitation letter

Dear (name),

The (jurisdiction name) School Board wants your opinion. We'd like to invite you to participate in a consultation session on (day), (date) at (time) in (location).

The session will last about (xx hours). The session will be informal and involve a group discussion. We are seeking your thoughts, opinions and concerns about the impact of potential cuts to education to our school jurisdiction. The cuts may be severe and have a substantial impact on local programs and services.

You are being invited because you are a vital part of our (type of group, such as business, parent, senior, employee, etc.) community. Your input will guide the board of trustees in its budget decisions for 2010-2011. We hope you can attend. Please RSVP by (date) to (name) by calling (phone number) or by email (email address).

Also, please let us know if you have any special needs for the meeting. Thank you for considering this opportunity and we look forward to seeing you.

Sincerely,

(name), Board Chair

(jurisdiction name) School Board



## **Appendix B: Sample notice**

*(for newsletter, poster, website, advertisement)*

### **Your Input is Important!**

Come to (location) on (day), (date) to share your thoughts, opinions and concerns about the impact of potential cuts to education on (jurisdiction name) School Board. The cuts may be severe and have a substantial impact on local programs and services.

The session starts at (time), will last about (xx hours) and involve a group discussion. Your input will guide the board of trustees in its budget decisions for 2010-2011. We hope you can attend.

For more information or to RSVP contact (name) at (phone number) or by email (email address).

(name), Board Chair

(jurisdiction name) School Board



## Appendix C: Backgrounder on education cuts

### **Impact of Cuts to Education Funding on (jurisdiction name) School Board**

Initial research by the Alberta School Boards Association shows that school boards absorbed a \$56 million claw back in funding for 2009/2010. In addition, there is a real possibility Alberta Education will ask school boards to reduce their budgets by \$344 million in order to help the provincial government reach its target reduction of \$2 billion next year. For (jurisdiction name) school board this means losing \$\_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_% of our total budget in 2010-2011. We lost \$\_\_\_ this year with the claw back of a portion of our reserves.

#### *Some examples of impact*

Here are three examples of what the impact of funding cuts could be on students, staff, and administration.

**If the funding cuts were spread evenly across all school board programs** (classroom instruction, plant operations and maintenance, student transportation, board and system administration, and external services) the result would likely be:

- Larger student/staff ratios
- Fewer teachers and teaching assistants and general supports for students
- Fewer courses and options for students
- Fewer library, clerical, and other assistants to help students and operate schools.

**If other programs including instructional support took more of the cutbacks than classroom instruction** this would likely lead to:

- Larger staff cuts in non-instruction areas including teacher assistants, librarians, janitors, secretaries and other support staff.
- Fewer bus routes, longer ride times for students and increased bus fees
- Less regular and preventative maintenance on buildings and grounds.

**If the funding cuts were applied to all school board programs except classroom instruction** this might result in:

- Major staff cuts in non-instruction areas including teacher assistants, librarians, janitors, secretaries and other support staff. There would be few supports for students outside of the classroom.
- Severe impacts on the bussing of students
- Little preventative maintenance on buildings and grounds and reduced repair and replacement of equipment.



## Appendix D: Sample agenda

(your jurisdiction) School Board

### **Cuts to Education Consultation Session Agenda**

Date, time, place

6:30 pm	Registration, food and refreshment
7:00 pm	Welcome, introductions, review of session
7:10 pm	Presentation
7:30 pm	Group discussion on core questions <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Should school board principles for guiding budget decisions change?</li><li>2. Services or programs – what should not be touched? What can we live without?</li><li>3. Going forward, what do we need to focus on to meet the needs of local students and communities?</li></ol>
8:45 pm	Final comments or questions, session evaluation
9:00 pm	Session ends

*Please note: Child care is available.*

# Appendix E: Sample evaluation form

(your jurisdiction) School Board

## Cuts to Education Consultation Session Evaluation

Date, time, place

Please take a few moments to respond to the following questions. Your feedback will help us assess the value of this session for you. Please rate the following aspects of the session by circling the most appropriate number or response.

	Very poor				Very good
1. Session format	1	2	3	4	5
2. Background material/handouts	1	2	3	4	5
3. Presentation	1	2	3	4	5
4. Group discussion	1	2	3	4	5
5. Opportunity to provide input	1	2	3	4	5
6. Meeting environment (location, sound, refreshments)	1	2	3	4	5
7. Personal value	1	2	3	4	5

8. Did this session meet your expectations?    Yes    No

9. What did you like best about the session?

.....

.....

.....

.....

10. Suggestions for improvement/other comments:

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for your input!



## Appendix F: Sample thank you letter

Dear (name),

On behalf of (jurisdiction name) School Board, I want to thank you for taking the time on (date) to provide us with your thoughts, opinions and concerns about the impact of potential cuts to education to our school jurisdiction.

We received very valuable input from all participants and will use it to help guide our decision-making in the weeks ahead. A summary of the session input is attached.

I will be in touch again to let you know of our budget decisions and how that will affect local programs and services. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact our main office at (phone number) or by email (email address) if you have any additional comments or questions regarding cuts to education.

Thank you again for participating in our (name of session, i.e. town hall, focus group, etc.)

Sincerely,

(name), Board Chair

(jurisdiction name) School Board



## **Appendix G: Format – Focus groups**

Focus groups are the easiest and quickest way to get input about how a school board should respond to funding cuts to education. They are easy to organize and typically it takes only three weeks to plan and hold one or more groups. On the topic of education cuts, focus groups are effective ways of soliciting – and delving in the reasons behind – opinion and ideas about core questions like:

“What programs and services should be protected? or

“What can we live without?”

### **What is a focus group?**

Focus groups are carefully-planned discussions involving a small number of people in a non-threatening environment. Focus groups are an excellent way of assessing reactions to proposals or options, or to dig deeper into the reasons for a particular viewpoint that a survey or other research has revealed.

This format allows for dialogue between participants that often spurs ideas or crystallizes thinking so the reasons behind an opinion or perspective can be better understood. Focus groups are qualitative not quantitative research.

Recognizing the views of a focus group are not statistically valid and cannot be considered the views of the entire community, school boards can use this process to inform its decision-making.

### **Why hold a focus group?**


A school board can quickly and easily get a broad cross-section of opinion and perspectives by holding one or more focus groups. Focus groups provide a solid understanding of why certain views and perceptions are held by a stakeholder group or groups that can be harder to gain using other public engagement exercises.

Other advantages of focus groups are:

- They are easy to organize.
- You can explore issues with a cross section of the community in a short period of time.
- They can be used to determine attitudes, opinions and awareness, and/or the reasons for them and/or how they might be changed.
- It allows for group dynamics in identifying priority needs or issue resolution.

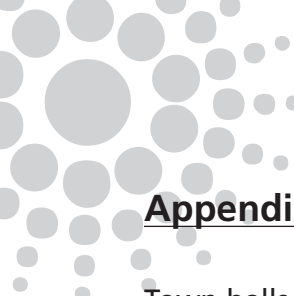
### **Key characteristics of a focus group**

- Each group is limited to 8-12 people to encourage good discussion and group interaction.
- A cross-section of people are invited (i.e. age, gender, occupation, background, etc.) to ensure diverse points of view.
- Sessions are 90 minutes to two hours long.
- By using a group moderator with no connection to the school jurisdiction participants are encouraged to speak freely.
- Trustees or staff are not be engaged in the conversation with participants. If present, trustees or staff simply listen and observe.

- 
- The moderator has a discussion guide prepared. This serves as a prompt and ensures that all important issues/questions are discussed while allowing for any interesting or important views to be explored whenever they are raised. As appropriate, participants are asked to prioritize or indicate preferences so a consensus if any can be more easily determined.
  - A report is written but normally only the executive summary is provided to focus group participants.
  - Media are not invited.

### **Logistical details**

- Invite enough people to guarantee that 12 will show up. Twelve people who say they will come usually results in the appearance of at least eight. Holding a focus group of less than eight people is not recommended.
- Use a comfortable room with a round or rectangular table that allows all participants to see each other.
- Include food and refreshments to help participants relax.
- Seat observers away from the table to discourage any dialogue with participants. As an alternative to observing, audiotape the session so trustees and staff can listen after the fact.
- Often, participants are paid a honorarium to offset any expenses and encourage attendance.



## **Appendix H: Format – Town hall meetings**

Town halls come in all shapes and sizes but generally are a more thorough and complete way of getting input from stakeholders on cuts to education because it can accommodate more people and it enables consensus-building/prioritization. However, it requires more organization, resources and time to put together than focus groups – about 4-6 weeks.

Hosting a “Town Hall Meeting on Cuts to Education” requires careful planning if it is to provide meaningful input for decision makers. Fortunately, Red Deer Public Schools has extensive resources that they are willing to share with other school boards. Contact Bruce Buruma, Director of Community Relations at bburuma@rdpsd.ab.ca or 403-342-3708. He will be presenting November 16 and 18 via video conference through the ASBA.

### **What is a town hall?**

When you first think of a Town Hall Meeting, you might picture trustees and administrators seated at tables at the front of a school gymnasium. Facing them are rows of chairs filled with individuals who may have a passing interest in the topic, or a personal agenda, or an axe to grind. A microphone waits for them to share their ideas on how things should be done, the media is present - this could be a long evening! It doesn't have to be that way.

In Red Deer, Town Hall Meetings include up to 200 invited guests made up of targeted numbers of parents, students, staff and community members. The meeting begins with background information about specific topics. This is followed by round table discussions among eight randomly assigned individuals as well as a school administrator who serves as facilitator. This allows for focused discussions on specific topics.

Participants generate and rank their strategies, which are then shared with the entire group. Using electronic polling technology, all participants prioritize the strategies. This provides valuable input to the planning process.

The Red Deer Public Schools process attracts people each year who indicate high levels of satisfaction with the process and feel their involvement makes a difference. A similar format is used for its Student Town Hall Meeting with technology used to a greater extent.

### **Why hold one?**

Town Hall Meetings can address complex issues with a diverse group of individuals. Discussions can be either broad or focused. For example, the immediate need is to gather input regarding challenging budget issues and highlight what budget cuts may mean to teaching and learning, but town halls can also build support for public education and increase awareness of the importance of locally elected school boards. Other advantages:

- Through their deliberations, participants see the issues from different points of view. This interaction helps to create understanding.
- You can capture a representative perspective of stakeholders and ensure, through structured consensus-building or a prioritizing process, an equal voice for all participants.
- Electronic polling or similar processes provide a true reflection of the views of participants.
- A Town Hall Meeting focused on difficult budget decisions can provide a valuable opportunity to share information with the broader community, either through the media or other communication means at your disposal.

A Town Hall Meeting does have potential risks because it can be a very public forum that draws a wide range of perspectives and opinions.



## Key characteristics of a town hall meeting

- Determine up front if the meeting will be to inform, consult or involve participants in the decisions you face.
- Attendance is by invitation to ensure diverse and balanced perspectives and to make numbers more predictable. An open invitation typically results in a low turnout.
- A structured meeting guide is used to orchestrate and support speakers, facilitators, logistics, technical details and timing.
- Participants are assigned to round tables of 8-10 people to ensure a good cross-section of stakeholders.
- Each table has a facilitator. Internal or external facilitators can be used. Ensure facilitators have the same orientation and detailed instructions to support them in their roles.
- Before discussions begin, provide background information and context for discussion to participants in a simple but meaningful way.
- Trustees and staff are observers and should not be part of the discussions and deliberations. They are there to listen.
- Inform participants how their input will be used and commit to providing a summary of the discussions.
- Media may be invited.

## Logistical details

- Invite those who may not traditionally be involved such as ESL and FNMI parents, seniors, business and community leaders, those who do not have children in school, 'regular students' who are not involved in leadership roles in their school, etc.
- Provide child care if you want to attract families.
- Provide transportation for those you would like there but don't have a ride.
- "Break people up" by assigning them to tables rather than having spouses, friends or co-workers seated together.
- Select topics that provide good opportunities for broad discussion.
- Choice of facilities is important. Schools provide convenient locations, but off-site may be more welcoming for some. A library or similar gathering area is more comfortable than a gymnasium.
- Rather than having a room filled with empty tables or chairs, plan conservatively and bring in extra tables or chairs (which are planned and close by) as needed.
- A proper sound system is critical. Use cordless microphones that can be moved around the room and insist people use a microphone when speaking so all can hear. Control the use of the microphones by having organizers responsible for them.
- Ensure your meeting does not conflict with other school and community events and activities.



## **Appendix I: Format – World Café**

A world café has about the same organizational and timing considerations and needs as a town hall. It takes about 4-6 weeks to plan and host, can be used for a large number of people and encourages participants to learn from and build on the input provided by others.

### **What is a World Café?**

A World Café is a conversational approach to getting input, resolving issues or reaching consensus. It usually focuses on a key issue for the organization, a problem that needs to be solved quickly, or something which means significant change for the organization or community. Table conversations link and build on each other as people move between groups, cross-pollinate ideas, and share insights into the questions or issues at hand.

The World Café features a series of multi-table conversations in response to predetermined questions. Participants change tables at intervals during the process and focus on identifying common ground. Each table has a designated host to record the conversations, keep the group on task and to build on what previous participants raise.

In the case of a discussion on education cuts, each table would have a core question for discussion. For example, one table might ask: “What services or programs do you feel should be protected?” while another table discusses: “What services or programs do you feel we can live without?”


### **Why hold one?**

As a process, the World Café is effective in drawing out the collective intelligence of any group. It lends itself to focusing people’s energy in the pursuit of a common aim. Other advantages are:

- As they move from table to table, participants get instant feedback on what others are saying and have an opportunity to develop ideas further.
- The format works for any size group but is particularly good for large groups.
- People are quickly engaged in targeted conversation and in-depth discussion of key challenges and opportunities.
- All voices are heard; everyone feels engaged.

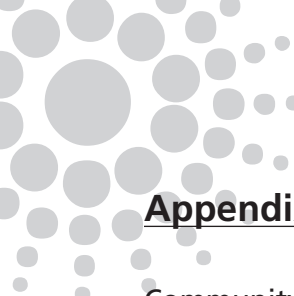
### **Key characteristics of a World Café**

- In a typical World Café, participants sit at round or square tables that fit 4-8 people. The tables are distributed in a large room that allows for easy movement between tables.
- Encourage good dialogue and diversity by assigning participants to tables.
- There is a host/facilitator (can be a staff member, trustee or participant volunteer) for each table. A flip chart is used for recording notes, drawings, etc.
- Usually there is no plenary presentation. The host/facilitator at each table provides whatever background information is required, either verbally and/or in writing.
- After introductions, the host/facilitator starts the dialogue with the first group of people by introducing a question that is compelling, energizing and will generate meaningful dialogue.
- Table changes are made every 15-30 minutes, depending on the depth of the question and the intensity of discussion. After the change, the host/facilitator does a quick review and invites people to build on what was previously discussed.
- World Cafés vary in length but there should be at least three table changes for each group to make it a meaningful exercise for participants.

- 
- To work well, a World Café needs to be 90 minutes or longer in length and have 12 or more people.
  - The host/facilitator may report back to a plenary or the flip charts can be displayed in their raw form in an exhibition style at the end of the café. Regardless, a summary of what was said should be sent to all participants.
  - Media may be invited.

### **Logistical Details**

- You may wish to create a real Café atmosphere by putting a tablecloth on each table with some adornment like a tea candle, napkins and water to drink.
- Stagger the tables and have soft music playing as people arrive.
- Provide refreshments and food throughout the session.
- Have an overall facilitator in place to manage tables and time, call for switches and provide general troubleshooting.
- Prepare and provide any background people need to know (ideally in advance of the session)
- Collect names and addresses of participants for follow-up.



## **Appendix J: Format – Community forums**

Community forums, like town halls and world cafés, take some time and resources to pull together. However, because there are fewer organizational details than the others, a forum can be planned and hosted in about four weeks. A forum is a less preferred method for gathering public input on a subject like education cuts because of the format’s informality and the inability to have a guided discussion with a group of participants.

### **What is a community forum?**

Community forums, also referred to as open houses, are informal, casual affairs where people get information about a plan or project and have an opportunity to share their impressions or opinions. There is no formal agenda, discussions or presentations.

People do not sit and listen to speakers but go from table to table or display to display conversing with staff members, collecting information and giving feedback. Attendees can give feedback either orally or in writing.

### **Why hold one?**

People are attracted to community forums because they offer one-on-one interaction, and are often more convenient and less intimidating than other forms of engagement. Other advantages:

- Participants have many opportunities to ask questions and receive detailed answers.
- Participants have direct interaction with staff and other experts.
- Attendees determine when they attend (during the hours of the session) and how long they stay.
- The focus is on issues rather than positions. This focus allows participants to consider strategies to deal with the issue at hand and offer solutions.
- Community forums are a good way to ensure critics, who tend to dominate formal public meetings, become just one of many opinions voiced.

### **Key characteristics of a community forum**

- Information is presented “buffet style” through graphics, charts and related documents. Information may be posted on the walls or displayed on tables.
- School board trustees are available to listen to forum participants who want to speak directly to decision-makers. However, selected staff members or subject experts should be available to provide background and answer questions.
- Because there is no fixed agenda, people drop in at their convenience.
- Take-home materials are available.
- People have the option to speak to a decision-maker or write out their submission/comment.
- A summary of what was said at the forum are made available to interested people after the event.
- Media may be invited.



## Logistical Details

- Use a large enough room so that refreshments, an information area with staff and experts to answer questions, tables for participants to use when writing comments and an area where participants can talk individually with decision-makers are well separated.
- Have designated people to greet people at the door, explain how the forum works and to help those who want to talk directly with certain decision-makers.
- Have tables and writing materials available for written comments.
- Collect names and addresses of participants for follow-up.
- A forum should be a minimum of three hours long so it is convenient for people to 'drop in' at any time.
- Holding such forums right after work and through the dinner hour where a meal is provided makes it very convenient and easy for people to say yes to an invitation to attend.