



**Listening to the Public:
Understanding and Overcoming Barriers to Sustainability**

Sustainability Research Initiative

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Listening to the Public: Understanding and Overcoming Barriers to Sustainability*

VIEWPOINT LEARNING, INC.

Executive Summary

Canada presents an apparent paradox when it comes to sustainability. Polls indicate that Canadians are among the most staunchly pro-environment citizens on the planet. Yet their actions often do not live up to their words.

Explaining this gap between the public's stated values and their actual behaviours is essential if Canada is to move toward sustainability. Yet the paradox is poorly understood at best. Policymakers, business leaders, the media and other experts have a long list of assumptions about how the public views sustainable development, but these assumptions have not been widely put to the test. This gap in understanding makes it more difficult to create successful policies and products – ones that will win public acceptance and active support.

ChoiceDialogues™ were developed to engage representative samples of citizens in working through their views on complex, gridlock issues. In the case of sustainability, ChoiceDialogues provide a powerful tool to understand the real reasons for the gap between what the public says and what it does, and what leaders can do to close that gap. (More information on the ChoiceDialogue methodology is in Appendix A.) In October 2005, Viewpoint Learning conducted a series of four ChoiceDialogues™ with representative samples of citizens (an average of 40 at each dialogue) from the Greater Vancouver area (GVRD).

Findings

The most striking (and surprising) finding from these dialogues was that the public's views on sustainability represent considered judgment, not just raw opinion. In approaching these dialogues we had assumed that the public's views on sustainability were still at the "raw opinion" stage. The inconsistencies between the public's stated attitudes about sustainability and their actions seemed to indicate considerable wishful thinking and a lack of resolution.

Yet as the ChoiceDialogues made clear, this was not the case. We found that the public already had worked through the issues to a considerable degree and reached a firm judgment. The attitudes and values of participants supporting sustainability were clear, consistent and strongly held from the outset. Instead, the gap between stated values and

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behaviour were the result of a set of practical barriers, which participants were able to identify and discuss in some detail.

A. Six barriers to acting more sustainably

In all four dialogues, participants identified and explored six barriers or types of barriers that they saw as key obstacles to acting more sustainably:

1. **Structural barriers.** Too often, participants said, making sustainable choices feels like swimming upstream. In particular, sustainable alternatives cost more and are less convenient than the status quo.
2. **Mindset barriers.** Participants described a set of internal expectations and assumptions that often get in the way of their making the sort of environmentally sound decisions they wanted to see. In particular they highlighted:
 - a. The force of habit
 - b. Consumerism and all of the encouragement and peer pressure to over-consume
 - c. A sense of entitlement to “the good life” defined in material terms
 - d. The belief that one person cannot make a difference
 - e. The assumption that environmentalism meant deprivation and was not much fun
 - f. A belief that most problems related to sustainability result from human nature and human nature won’t change
3. **Information/communication barriers.** Participants saw a lack of reliable information and feedback as a major obstacle to acting sustainably. In particular:
 - a. Prices for goods and services do not reflect real, long-term social and environmental costs.
 - b. Product labels often do not provide reliable information about products’ energy, ecological and social “footprints.
 - c. The measures Canada uses to assess performance (such as GDP) tend to reinforce the focus on relatively short-term economic factors.
 - d. The media tends to cover sustainability issues as short-term isolated stories, diminishing the public’s sense of urgency and reinforcing the sense that environmental problems are too overwhelming and complex for individual action to have any effect. In addition, the media tends to distort Canadians’ image of themselves as a public by suggesting that Canadians on the whole really do not care about environmental issues. Participants’ sense that they were alone in their beliefs, isolated and outnumbered, made them reluctant to speak up and pessimistic about the possibility of change.
4. **Trust barriers.** The issue of trust – or more accurately *mistrust* – emerged in all four dialogues as the most fundamental barrier to effective action on sustainability

values. When citizens believe that others, especially leaders, cannot be trusted to do their fair share, they are less likely to take action themselves. In particular:

- a. The discussion made clear that even as companies and governments wonder whether they can trust a public that appears to say one thing about sustainability and do another, the public has exactly the same question about companies and governments, who appear to them to send very mixed signals.
- b. Participants felt that lack of accountability from government, business or individuals encourages them to continue along the path of least resistance.
- c. Participants were not willing to trust any single source. Instead they described trust as something that they constructed by drawing on and cross-referencing many different sources.

5. *Isolation: weak sense of community and engagement.* Participants said that without a stronger sense of community and engagement it would be more difficult if not impossible to build trust or move toward effective action on sustainability. In particular, they underlined:

- a. The sense of isolation in today's society, which makes it harder for individuals to feel responsible for others or to recognize their ability to make a difference in the world.
- b. The less you are engaged the less responsible you feel for the outcome. Participants said they had too few opportunities to become engaged and most had little idea of how to do so effectively.

6. *The term "sustainability" itself.* Participants suggested that the very term "sustainability" may be more an obstacle than a help. They felt that the term is too abstract, too far removed from the practicalities of everyday life, and tends to reinforce the idea that the problem is overwhelming and alienating. Several added that "sustainability" seemed little more than a buzz word for bureaucrats and technical experts, one that meant different things to different people.

B. Opportunities for leaders

Understanding these barriers to sustainable action opens new opportunities for leaders not only to communicate more effectively, but also to translate the strongly held values of the public into action. These values provide a tremendous reservoir of potential support for sustainable initiatives, support that can be energized by effective leadership. Overcoming these barriers and activating the values of Canadians will depend on a strong ability to:

1. Communicate in a climate of mistrust
2. Provide information and metrics that build trust and manage expectations
3. Change the frame and broaden mindsets
4. Engage the public as partners

1. **Communicating in a climate of mistrust.** Mistrust is far more than background noise: it is a fundamental barrier to acting on sustainability values. When citizens believe that others, especially leaders, cannot be trusted to do their fair share, they are less likely to take action themselves. In such a climate, communication presents an enormous challenge, but organizations that recognize this circumstance gain the opportunity to communicate in a different way. The report suggests 10 principles for communicating under conditions of mistrust.
2. **Provide information and metrics in ways that build trust and manage expectations.** The public is looking for trustworthy information that can help them make more sustainable choices. They are also looking for better yardsticks they can use to measure how well they – and businesses and governments – are doing in moving toward sustainability. Keys to success will include:
 - Setting high but achievable goals and reporting regularly on progress.
 - Making it measurable.
 - Using public rather than technical language.

At the same time, simply providing more or better information is not sufficient. Decades of research have shown that when faced with information that contradicts deeply held assumptions or beliefs, people tend to discount, deny or explain away that information. In a climate of mistrust, this tendency is amplified: in other words, trust shapes citizens' response to information, not the other way around.

3. **Change the frame and broaden mindsets.** When people are operating as individual consumers in the marketplace, the consumer mindset predominates -- making individuals less likely to purchase a sustainable product or to put a high premium on long-term sustainability goals. Encouraging people to make more sustainable decisions will involve enabling them to change frameworks and move beyond a narrow consumer mindset.

One-sided information campaigns are generally not the most effective way to accomplish this. Throughout our research we have found that when people feel they are being “spun” – that they are being presented with one-sided arguments designed to sell a pre-determined agenda – they become more mistrustful and resistant to change. The public's ability to see through spin, and the damage that the resulting mistrust can cause, should not be underestimated.

To build trust, communication must present information in a balanced and honest way. An even more effective approach is to incorporate opportunities for two-way dialogue into communications initiatives. By moving from spin to dialogue, decision-makers can engage the public as partners in devising, implementing and marketing more sustainable approaches. (More detail on dialogue can be found in Appendix B.)

4. **Engage the public as partners.** In recent years a variety of dialogue-based approaches to engaging the public have emerged. In the world of marketing, we now see “community marketing,” and “open source marketing.”; in the public sphere, “public engagement” and “deliberative democracy.” These approaches are a response both to

the declining effectiveness of more traditional approaches and to the emergence of a better informed and less deferential customer and citizen.

In marketing, these approaches replace the monologue of the mass market with a real dialogue that taps into customers' intelligence to help develop the brand. By challenging customers and citizens to get involved and co-create, they generate excitement and build a sense of ownership and support. In the public sphere, the newer dialogue-based approaches are designed to overcome the limits of more traditional ways of hearing the public voice (such as polls, focus groups, town meetings, and special interest advocacy). The newer techniques are conducive to listening rather than arguing, and they provide safe opportunities to explore multiple points of view.

New messaging alone will not lead to the adoption of more sustainable products, policies and services. More important will be taking active steps to engage customers and citizens as members of a community and as partners in building a more sustainable Canada.

Conclusions

Perhaps the most important conclusion from these ChoiceDialogues is that it is time to stop underestimating not only the public's desire for a more sustainable future but also the value and potential benefit of engaging customers and citizens as full partners in this effort. Each organization will need to find its own way to engage the public in overcoming the barriers to adopting more sustainable products and policies, and to realize the opportunities for leaders described above.

In doing this, one critical point to keep in mind is that engaging the public is very different from persuading the public. Where persuasion too often emphasizes one-sided arguments or even spin, engagement is based on two-way dialogue and learning from each other. It assumes the public has an important piece of the answer.

For example, rather than trying to sell a pre-determined view of sustainability, a dialogue-based approach would engage the public in defining what sustainability means to them – in their own language (not technical language) – and what steps they are prepared to support to achieve it. As we saw in the ChoiceDialogues, finding this common ground builds a sense of community and confidence in people's ability to work together. Such communities also create the shared norms that are the strongest motivators for action, for changing behaviour and for moving beyond a narrow consumer mindset.

Empowering the public to devise and take actions that promote more sustainable development is an under-developed strategy, but one that holds real promise. The effect of this is to position your organization as a partner for the public and the community in creating a more sustainable future.

***Listening to the Public:
Understanding and Overcoming Barriers to Sustainability****

VIEWPOINT LEARNING, INC.

I. Introduction

Canada presents an apparent paradox when it comes to sustainability. Polls indicate that Canadians are among the most staunchly pro-environment citizens on the planet. Nine out of ten Canadians rate the environment as one of their top concerns; and three out of four say that sustainable development should be a major priority for Canada.

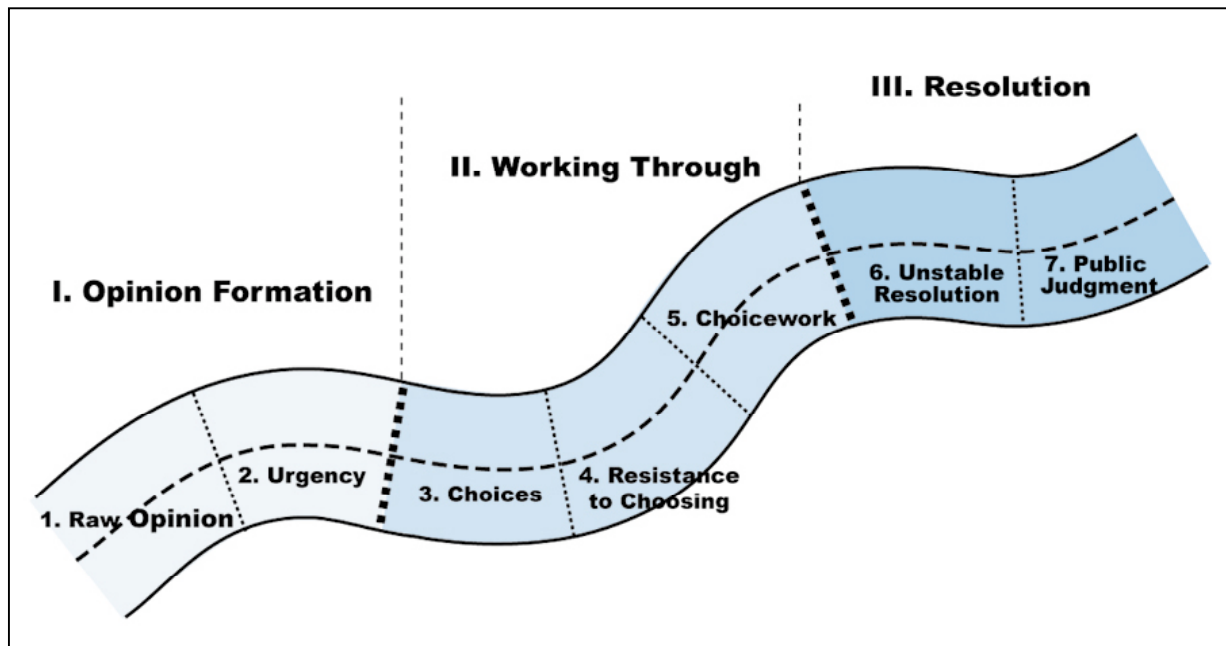
Yet despite these strongly held views and values, Canada is among the world's most wasteful nations in terms of energy consumption, water use, and greenhouse gas emissions. And even though strong majorities of Canadians say that automobiles and fossil fuels pose a "major" threat to nature and that they are "very concerned" about air quality, SUV sales have increased at double-digit rates over the last several years.

Explaining this gap between the public's stated views and their actual behaviours is essential if Canada is to move toward sustainability. Yet the paradox is poorly understood at best. Policymakers, business leaders, the media and other experts have a long list of assumptions about how the public views sustainable development, but these assumptions have not been widely put to the test. This gap in understanding makes it more difficult for decision-makers to create successful policies and products – ones that take into account not only where the public stands today, but also where they are likely to go in the future, what they will be prepared to support and under what conditions. Any policy or product, no matter how well-thought-out from a technical standpoint, is unlikely to succeed if it does not respect the public's values, beliefs and experiences. This is doubly true if a policy requires significant change.

More than 50 years of research, led by Viewpoint Learning Chairman Daniel Yankelovich, has demonstrated that public opinion evolves in stages. From an initial stage of highly unstable "raw opinion" the public moves through a series of steps in which they confront tradeoffs, establish priorities and reconcile choices with their deeply held values. Information is just one of many factors involved in this process. Other factors – such as a sense of inclusion, an ability to confront wishful thinking and exposure to a wider range of perspectives – are equally important, if not more so. (See Figure 1.)

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Figure 1: The formation of public judgment



Daniel Yankelovich: *Coming to Public Judgment: Making Democracy Work in a Complex World*. Syracuse University Press, 1991.

ChoiceDialogues™ were developed by Viewpoint Learning to engage representative samples of citizens in working through their views on complex, gridlock issues. Dialogue participants come to understand the pros and cons of various policy options, struggle with the necessary trade-offs of each, and come to a considered judgment – all in the course of a single eight-hour day. When conducted with a representative sample, ChoiceDialogues provide both a basis for anticipating how the broader public will resolve issues once they have the opportunity to come to grips with them, and insight on how best to lead such a learning process on a larger scale. As a research tool, ChoiceDialogue represents an important means of hearing the thoughtful voice of the unorganized public, uncovering the public's underlying values and assumptions and developing a deeper understanding of the solutions they would be willing to support. (Additional detail on the ChoiceDialogue methodology can be found in Appendix A.) In the case of sustainability, ChoiceDialogues provide a powerful tool to understand the real reasons for the gap between what the public says and what it does, and what leaders can do to close that gap.

II. Project Overview:

This project was designed as part of the *Sustainability Research Initiative (SRI)*, an unprecedented multidisciplinary research effort led by James Hoggan Associates, and undertaken by McAllister Opinion Research, StoryTellings™, and Viewpoint Learning. The SRI was designed with several specific purposes in mind:

- To understand, from a public perspective, what the term “sustainability” means, and how it might be framed more effectively to build public support.
- To create a clearer picture of how the public views the situation, its causes and possible consequences for the Canadian economy and for their own lives.
- To provide an in-depth understanding of how citizens’ values and priorities shape their approach to sustainability and how they reconcile conflicting priorities when making difficult tradeoffs.
- To reveal what sorts of sustainable policies, products and services the public would be likely to support, at what cost, and under what conditions.

In October 2005, as its contribution to this research program, Viewpoint Learning conducted a series of four ChoiceDialogues™ with representative samples of citizens from the Greater Vancouver area (GVRD). Each ChoiceDialogue brought together 35-45 randomly selected participants representing a cross section of the public in the area, and each dialogue represented a wide range of socio-economic circumstance, ethnic backgrounds, and political leanings. A comparison of ChoiceDialogue participants with the general population of the GVRD shows that the sample was demographically representative, and ChoiceDialogue participants’ responses to questions about their values were consistent with recent polls of British Columbia and Canada residents.

As a starting point, participants used a specially designed workbook constructed around four distinct scenarios or choices for addressing “sustainable development” – which was defined as “development that meets our present social, economic and environmental needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.” Each of the four scenarios represented a distinct approach based on a distinct values set, and each was presented from a citizen’s rather than an expert’s perspective.

The scenarios were:

1. **Continue on our current path.** The first choice is to continue dealing with the environment and development as we do now. We will make no major changes that might require us to pay higher taxes or change our habits and lifestyles. Economic growth will continue to have priority over environmental concerns. We will rely on environment departments, improvements in technology and voluntary conservation to minimize any environmental damage. We will deal with environmental problems as they emerge and as the evidence becomes clear that there is harm involved.
2. **Use the market to promote more sustainable development.** The second choice is to harness the power of the market to create more sustainable development. In this scenario, the prices of some goods and services will increase to reflect the real

costs of the natural resources they use and of repairing any environmental damage they create. This will encourage consumers to conserve and companies to search for ways to produce more with less and be more efficient. Products will be labeled to show their impact on the environment, so that consumers can make more informed choices.

3. **Develop more sustainable cities and regions.** The third choice is to focus on developing cities and regions that are more sustainable economically, socially and environmentally. Planning for transportation, housing, and land use will be closely coordinated to create more dense and walkable cities and to conserve open space. Cleaner knowledge-based industries (like software and biotech) will be developed in each region. Workplaces will be located closer to housing, shopping and public transit in order to reduce commute times, traffic congestion and air pollution.
4. **Make sustainable development a top priority of government.** The fourth choice is to make sustainable development a top priority for governments at all levels. Public spending on environmental protection will increase and regulations will be strengthened and strictly enforced. Each year, governments will set specific economic, social and environmental goals to promote more sustainable development and improve quality of life. Governments will more actively engage the public in setting these objectives and reviewing results, which will be regularly measured.

These scenarios were presented as only a starting point for discussion, and participants were encouraged to adapt and change them to best reflect the future they wanted to see.

III. General Findings:

The most striking finding from these dialogues was that the public's views on sustainability represent considered judgment, not just raw opinion. In approaching these dialogues the research team, and our sponsors, had assumed that the public's views on sustainability were still at the "raw opinion" stage. The inconsistencies we saw between the public's stated attitudes about sustainability and their actions seemed to indicate considerable wishful thinking and a lack of resolution.

Yet as the ChoiceDialogues made clear, this was not the case. We found that the public already had worked through the issues and tradeoffs to a considerable degree and reached a firm judgment. Instead, the gap between attitudes and behaviour were the result of a set of practical barriers, which participants were able to identify and discuss in some detail.

Overall, the public strongly supported making sustainable development a much higher priority. They were aware of the costs of doing so, and they were willing to make considerable changes in their own way of life in order to bring that about, provided that certain key conditions were met.

This is not to say that the public was especially well informed about the technical details surrounding sustainable development (though they were better informed than many had expected). Instead, what was striking was how quickly participants assimilated the

technical information provided on ways of advancing sustainable development. The speed with which participants absorbed and used that information is actually an unobtrusive measure of how firmly established people's views and values are on this issue. In other dialogues we have found that, when information provided does not correspond to participants' views and values, their initial reaction is not to hear it, to discount it or even reject it. And it usually takes time to work through such resistance. This was not a problem in these dialogues. The overall views and values of participants on these questions were clear, consistent and strongly held from the outset, and participants expressed surprise that so many others in the room shared the same values and priorities.

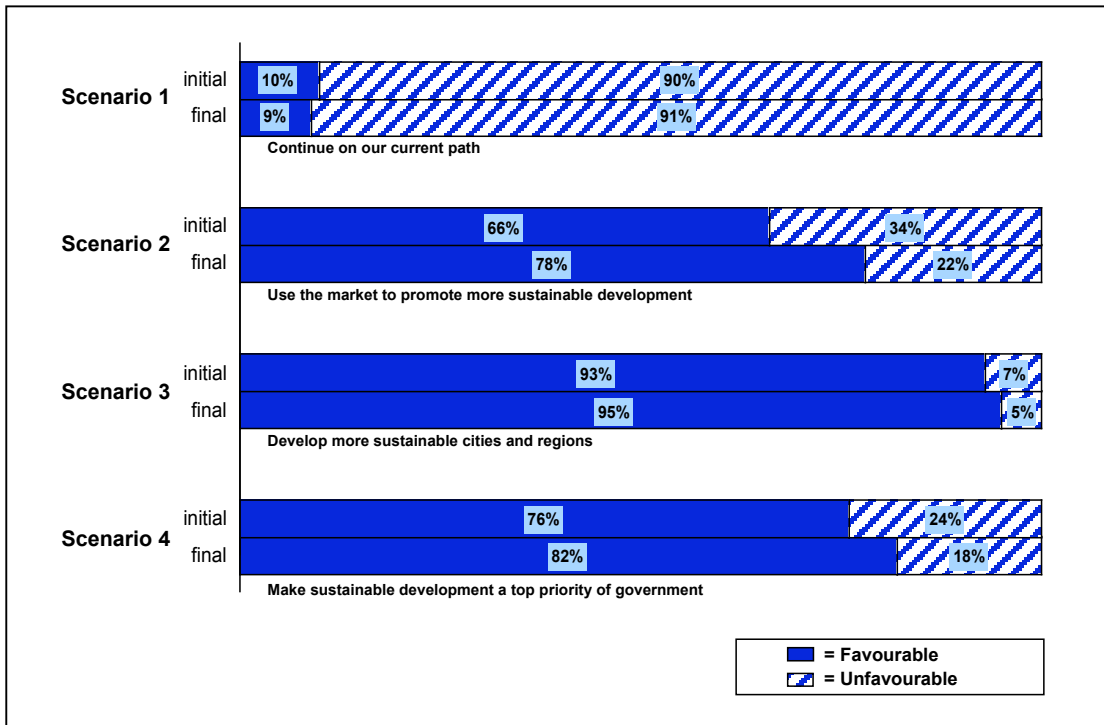
A. Where they began

Participants' initial responses to the four scenarios were clear and unequivocal. In all four dialogues, participants decisively rejected the "status quo" scenario (Scenario 1: continue on our current path), with only 10% of participants viewing it favourably at the beginning of the day and an initial mean of 2.6 points out of a possible 10.¹ Participants viewed the other three scenarios much more favourably: an overwhelming 93% of participants had a favourable view of Scenario 3 (Develop more sustainable cities and regions). 76% had a favourable view of Scenario 4 (Make sustainable development a top priority of government), while Scenario 2 (Use the market to promote more sustainable development) had significant though less unanimous support, with 66% of participants rating it favourably.

Not only were participants' initial reactions strong, they remained stable throughout the day. After the dialogue, most participants still had an overwhelmingly negative view of Scenario 1 (9% favourable), while their opinion of the other three scenarios rose slightly (See Figure 2).

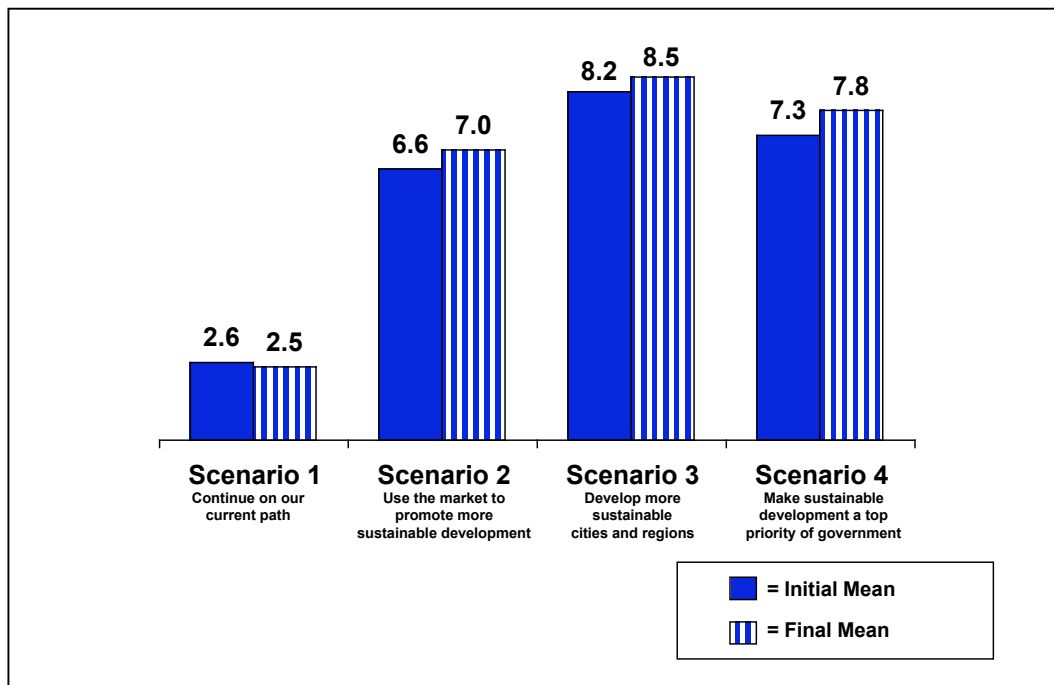
¹ In each ChoiceDialogue, participants were surveyed twice, once at the beginning of the day and again at the end. They were asked to rate their response to each scenario independently on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being totally positive and 1 being totally negative. The initial mean for each scenario indicates participants' average rating of the choice in the morning; the final mean represents participants' average rating of the same scenario at the end of the dialogue. The overall "unfavourable" rating of a scenario indicates the percentage of participants who rated that scenario from 1 to 5, while the overall "favourable" rating indicates the percentage who rated it from 6 to 10. Participants also were asked a series of questions at the beginning of the day relating to their general values and attitudes, and a longer series of questions at the end of the day concerning their priorities and habits with respect to sustainable development. All figures represent the combined results from all four ChoiceDialogue sessions. Complete quantitative results can be found in Appendix C.

Figure 2: Initial/Final Favourability Ratings of the Four Scenarios



The initial and final means followed a similar pattern, showing only a slight change from the beginning of the dialogue to the end. (See Figure 3)

Figure 3: Initial/Final Means of the Four Scenarios



These stable findings indicate **a public that has already reached stable judgment** – participants had made up their minds before the dialogue even began, and their minds stayed made up throughout the course of the day. The slight increase in favourability for Scenarios 2, 3 and 4 shows participants becoming more settled in their strongly held initial opinion, mostly likely because they realized that others shared their priorities.

Another indicator of having reached stable judgment was the striking amount of common ground identified early in the dialogue. In all four dialogues, participants strongly supported several key ideas from the outset:

- Higher density/integrated communities.
Participants strongly supported creating denser “walkable” communities, with housing, businesses and retail close together. This priority was strongly established from the outset: an overwhelming 93% viewed the “smart growth” Scenario 3 favourably at the beginning of the day. In addition, when asked whether they would prefer “a larger house in a community where you have to drive everywhere” or “a smaller house in a ‘walkable’ community,” 93% chose the smaller house in the walkable community.

Participants expressed several reasons for supporting denser “smart growth” communities. First, they felt this would help preserve the region’s open space and agricultural land, while also making more efficient use of existing infrastructure especially for transportation. In addition, they felt denser development would help create more vibrant communities for people of all ages, ethnicities and economic walks of life. They insisted that these denser developments be carefully planned to reduce congestion; better coordinate the location of homes, workplaces, shopping, and community services; and provide open space for recreation.

PARTICIPANT COMMENTS²

By condensing the population you certainly do decrease your need for transportation -- everyone is living and working in the same area and it really [reduces] the burden of moving around. The other thing that we quite liked was the fact that if you stop building on farmland and build in a high density area, then you have a greenbelt and natural resources left. You haven't taken them and destroyed them or buried them.

I live downtown and it's not the downtown people that are contributing to [congestion] – we're all walking. ... We see you all heading for the bridges at 4 o'clock as we walk along in your exhaust fumes.... The problem is that the planning is bad... [We need to] plan our communities with work, community services, transportation, density, all in the same place.

² Participant comments illustrating key points are taken from all four dialogues.

Most people that I know prefer taking public transit when it's convenient. It's not convenient for a lot of people [and] it's very expensive for a lot of people.... Also, it's overcrowded at many times, and there need to be more busses and so on.

- Improved public transportation. Along with their support of higher density communities, every dialogue called for an improved and expanded public transit system across the GVRD. Many participants already use public transit: about half said they use it regularly (48%) and another 28% said they use it “sometimes.” In addition, many people indicated that they would use transit if it was available near their homes or workplaces. Participants agreed they wanted to see a more comprehensive, convenient and accessible system of bus, ferry and rail services that would make mass transit an appealing alternative to travel by private automobile.
- Full cost pricing. All four dialogues supported the notion of requiring companies and individuals to pay more of the real long-term cost of goods and services – including the real cost of natural resources used, the cost of disposal and the cost of cleaning up any environmental damage created by the product or its manufacture. Participants also supported having the cost of utilities (especially water and electricity) reflect their real environmental cost. 84% agreed (strongly or somewhat) that “the best way to get people and companies to conserve is to make them pay more of the real costs of gas, electricity and other resources they use.” In addition, 78% of participants said they themselves would be willing to “pay up to 20% more than the usual price for things if it would help the environment and future generations.” However, this support came with a strong condition that the poor be protected, especially in areas like water, heat and other necessities of life.

Some of the poorest people in Newfoundland this winter are having their oil costs subsidized by the government because the winter is so cold and long they can't afford to heat their homes all winter any more. So if you pumped up the taxation on oil, it would only hurt those people – the government would have to subsidize that.

- Public education. All four dialogues made a strong call for broad-based education and outreach efforts to help the public to make more sustainable decisions in consuming and lifestyle. Most supported making a special effort to teach children about the importance of environmental responsibility, in hopes of passing on sustainable attitudes to the next generation. Such public education campaigns had worked very effectively in other contexts (participants pointed to efforts to curb smoking and promote seat belt use in particular), and participants saw them as an essential component of bringing about a more sustainable future.

It's important to educate us – [but] it's more important for us to take a stance and share that education with the next generation that's coming up. Because those are the ones who are truly going to help us evolve as a society. A lot of us [adults] are pretty stagnant in our lifestyles I have friends, for example, where the idea of recycling or having a recycling bin doesn't make sense to them. But children in kindergarten are already starting at that age to reduce, reuse, and recycle – it's more likely that they're going to carry on those practices in their adult life.

- A global perspective. Participants agreed that while the dialogue's focus was on Vancouver and the Lower Mainland, sustainability cannot be dealt with on the community or regional level alone. The complexity and interconnectedness of the issue requires cooperation across all levels of Canadian society, and internationally as well.

- Government needs to do more. Finally, participants agreed that government should make environmental protection a higher priority at all levels. In particular, participants called for a strong regulatory climate of incentives and disincentives (as they put it, both “carrots and teeth”) aimed at promoting more sustainable behaviours. A full 95% of participants agreed that “we need stricter laws and regulations to protect the environment,” with 67% agreeing “strongly.”

We all agreed that we want sustainability to be a high priority of the government, and we want the government to have a major role in setting the standards for sustainability.

Government leadership is critical. They are the guys that are going to make the rules, provide the framework for how everything works. We also felt they need to provide examples of how things should work and set an example. They should be the “do as I do” people, instead of the “do as I say” people.

B. What is stopping us? Barriers to acting sustainably

Participants were surprised to find that they already shared so much common ground at the outset: the pervasive environmentalism they heard in the room seemed at odds with what they imagined average Canadians believe. Yet as participants saw that their own beliefs and priorities were actually shared by so many of their neighbors, a deeper question surfaced – **if we all care so deeply about the environment and sustainable development, and agree so strongly on the future we want to see, why haven't we made more progress toward it? This question – “what is stopping us?” – quickly became the central focus of the dialogues.**

Listening to everyone [in these initial comments] I am surprised at how much everyone agrees there is a problem, and yet when I walk through the world I see so many people wasting things and throwing away plastic and buying more plastic and ... things that are not biodegradable and not recyclable. So I guess I'm interested in finding the connection between the awareness that we all seem to have and the behaviour that most people seem to be engaging in.

As the dialogue progressed, participants identified six barriers or types of barriers that they saw as key obstacles to acting more sustainably:

1. **Structural barriers**
2. **Mindset barriers**
3. **Information/communication barriers**
4. **Trust barriers**
5. **Isolation: weak sense of community and engagement**
6. **“Sustainability” as a term**

These barriers were consistently identified across all four dialogues, along with a number of steps participants suggested to overcome them.

1. Structural barriers. Participants first noted that there are significant structural barriers that get in the way of their acting sustainably. Too often, participants said, making sustainable choices feels like swimming upstream. As participants discussed this pattern, two key themes emerged:

- Convenience. Many individuals said they find it difficult to make sustainable choices because they are often so much less convenient than the status quo. Participants noted that it is more difficult to find environmentally friendly products than ordinary ones.

A few years ago they started bringing out antibacterial soaps, which are horrendous for the environment. Scientific experts said don't use these products, they're really bad. I don't want antibacterial soap – but I have a hard time not buying antibacterial soap now, because that's all you can buy.

They saw this pattern extending far beyond the supermarket shelves to the way that Canadian life and cities are designed. For example, it is often not very convenient to use public transportation to go to and from particular parts of the GVRD, making automobile use a necessity for those who live or work in those areas.

A car is an essential of life in this region and in this country. Currently, for my job I go from Knoxland to Surrey three times a week. Look at the transportation from bus to Sky Train – what kind of choice do I have? I have to use a car.... I'm using, in my family right now, six cars. But there's no alternative. There's no choice.

I don't have the choice of buying the more expensive organic products. I'm a student. I can't go to the store and say, I'll buy those tomatoes, they cost me \$3.00. I don't have that kind of money, and I know a lot of people don't have that. I don't want to support using pesticides, but I don't have that choice.

- Cost. Even when “alternative” products are available, participants said, they are often too expensive, especially for those with low incomes. Too often environmentally friendly products seemed to be luxuries out of reach for many lower income Canadians.

2. Mindset barriers. Yet as they considered the matter further, participants came to feel that while external forces do shape people’s choices, there are internal barriers that are even more significant. As participants saw it, they – and most Canadians – have a set of expectations and assumptions that often get in the way of their making the sort of environmentally sound decisions they wanted to see:

I have a friend who is a biologist, a Ph.D. He understands ecosystems, he's very conscientious – but he has a garbage bin, and he throws everything into it. He knows it goes into the ocean. He knows that we've got a serious problem with the Georgia Basin, and when I press him on it, it ultimately turns out that it's too inconvenient [to do anything else]. And that sounds silly, and it sounds like it can't be that simple, but I can see it. He had all his mess, and that was his convenient way of dealing with it. That was his habit.

I'm one of those shoppers that goes in a store and I just grab the products that I always buy because I've always bought them – without being aware of what I'm actually buying.

- Habit. Many participants noted that they tended to make choices based primarily on habit. They were more than willing to make more sustainable choices, but in the course of their daily lives they often don't think of it and as a result simply do as they always do. They felt this lack of mindfulness was a significant reason that they did not do more to help the environment.

- All the signals say “buy.” Participants noted the many ways that Canadian society encourages them to over-consume – in fact many felt that not consuming is far more difficult than consuming. They pointed to messages like “keeping up with the Joneses” and “you are what you own.” Many felt that Canadians, especially the young, are “brainwashed” to seek status, meaning and validation in consumer goods, messages that are strongly reinforced by peer pressure. These messages are a staple of the media: advertising and television promote goods from SUVs to hot tubs as symbols of “the good life” while ignoring their environmental costs.

The major value of young people is materialism. How many things can they get, and how much can they show off, and can they wear the latest things and so on. And it's not their fault – that's what they've grown up with – but it would take a sort of revolution to have other values.

TV and media teach to us to buy, buy, buy, buy as much as we can. We have to change that, so that I don't have to own a big fancy SUV to prove to everyone I'm rich.

Overall, participants felt that the consumer mindset makes it more difficult to act sustainably. Moreover, there is little incentive for individuals to take the initiative and act differently when others (including government, business and ordinary citizens) continue to act wastefully and over-consume.

- “We deserve the good life.” Some participants linked this emphasis on consuming with a general sense of entitlement. Canada was such a rich country, they felt, that citizens had come to expect a high standard of living. The resulting assumptions – that everyone should have a single-family home on a large lot, or that every generation should have a higher standard of living than its parents – made Canadians unwilling to redefine or moderate their expectations of “the good life.”

I'm from a small community in northern Ontario and there's lots of space there. I grew up thinking that you had to have a big house with a big yard and that was the only way to go. It was only recently that I actually learned about how people live in other parts of the world and how they actually don't need a whole lot of space to live.... Until we are able to somehow change our mentality that we all want to have our own place for our family then it's very difficult to discuss densification because nobody wants to live in that smaller area.

As we've become more affluent, the next generation has higher expectations.... I never had a car until I was in my 30's. But now, a kid coming out of high school expects to have a car, and a young couple that gets married in their 20's, they feel that they are not performing if they don't have a house or own something.

One of the reasons that we can't change the paradigm in Canada is because we're too wealthy.... We have space, we have resources, we have money, we have easy living, we have access to consumer goods at very good prices and it's going to be very difficult to change that paradigm.

A lot of people feel pretty resigned to some sort of environmental doomsday – resigned to the fact that there's nothing that we can do. There is a sort of apathy among us. So we just do the little bit is really easy for us like recycling at home.

If you look on a shelf of cleaning products in a superstore... there's one that isn't potentially toxic.... People look at that symbolically – everybody else is buying these other products. They're there. They must be being purchased. So how can we [maintain] the mindset of doing no harm?

- “I’m only one person.” A key reason that many did not act sustainably was because they felt on some level that individual acts don’t make a difference. This fatalism was the product of two related perceptions: first the sense that they were alone in their concern for the environment; and second, the perception that the problems were so huge and overwhelming that no one person could make a difference.

- Environmentalism = deprivation. Another barrier underlined by participants was the assumption that environmentalism meant sacrifice and deprivation. If “living sustainably” meant they had to sit in a cold room eating bran, they didn’t want to do it. The challenge, they suggested, was to demonstrate that this is not the case and that being environmentally responsible could be “cool” or even fun. Participants also pointed out examples not only that this can happen but that it is happening. Some noted that “smart cars” – small, high-mileage, low-emission vehicles – are gaining in popularity not only because they are sustainable but also because they are cool.

I don't want to live like a peasant. We have things that are available to us, and I think it's too [narrow] to say we shouldn't have these luxuries.

These new smart cars that are out there -- people buy them. Are they buying them because they want to use less gas, are they buying them because they're less expensive? No.... They are buying them because they are cool.

Instead of banning [something] altogether or shunning it -- create a new substitute idea of what is cool. You work with a culture and try to change it. I don't know how to do this. It's a long and slow and arduous process, probably.

Perhaps, participants thought, environmentally responsible behaviour could be made easier, less expensive (at least in the sense people would have a higher appreciation of the value they received for what they paid), more convenient, and more *fun*. At the same time, participants underlined that this would require more than individual action.

- Human nature won’t change. Another set of assumptions that stood in the way of participants acting sustainably is pessimism and lack of trust in people’s willingness to change. About half the participants felt that “you’ll never get most people to change their lifestyle and give up their big houses and yards” and nearly two-thirds (62%) agreed that “no matter how much you improve public transportation, people will always prefer the convenience of driving their own cars.”

A factor analysis of the values and attitude questions linked these two items with a general distrust of people. Not surprisingly, participants who scored high on this factor were less likely to engage in practices that support sustainability.

3. Information/communication barriers. Participants pointed out that one major obstacle to acting sustainably is the lack of reliable information or feedback on the environmental impact of specific products and practices. This is especially important given that the benefits of acting sustainably tend to be more apparent in the long term and on a larger scale. They are easily drowned out by short-term cost, convenience and other factors. Participants saw this lack of reliable information and feedback as particularly crucial at several points:

○ Prices don't reflect long-term environmental costs.

Participants felt that current prices for goods and services give misleading signals because they do not reflect real environmental/resource costs (e.g. the long-term costs of the resources used to manufacture the product or the cost of disposing of it after use). Many also felt that prices are badly distorted by subsidies, and that if those subsidies were eliminated sustainable options would compare favourably to polluting or wasteful products. Participants strongly supported making prices reflect long-term environmental and resource costs, as long as some protections for the poor are included.

I would like to discuss the myth that environmentally friendly products cost more. I don't think that's true. I think the cost of environmental unfriendly products have been subsidized for years because the true cost of the product isn't built in. The way it is now, if you want environmentally safe products you have to pay more. That's bullshit. Because when you buy disposable things, the cost of landfill is not in the price, the cost of all the other stuff is not in the price.... We've been subsidizing products [like this] to make them cheaper. If their price [reflected their real cost] they would cost far more and the environmentally friendly things would be cheaper.

[What about] labels on each product, -- or on shelves -- so that every time you went to buy the product you were faced with the environmental cost, the way you are with cigarettes... So you're reminded. Each time you buy a disposable Swiffer package, you're reminded what you're doing, instead of being able to be sort of blind every time. I'd like to see that kind of really obvious labeling, not like the little nutrition label, but a really obvious label.

○ Labels don't give us the kind of information we need. Participants also said that product labels often do not provide good information about products' energy and ecological "footprints": information that is essential to making responsible decisions at the point of purchase. Many people wanted to know more about where the things they buy come from and whether they are made in an

environmentally and socially responsible way. But only a few manufacturers and retailers routinely made that information available – and all too often the information was hard to decipher or put into context. Participants called for a kind of “seal of approval” for all products that would explain a product’s environmental impact in clear and accessible language and provide information that could be trusted. A few participants extended this idea to include the product’s “social footprint” as well, suggesting that labels should indicate whether a product was created under fair trade practices or by underage workers.

○ We don't have good yardsticks.

Participants noted that the measures Canada uses to assess performance (such as GDP) tend to reinforce the focus on relatively short-term economic factors. Given that the benefits of more sustainable approaches are often not clear, especially in the short term, this leads to a distorted picture of the value of sustainable approaches. Participants raised a case in point: the benefits of Sky Train far outweigh the subsidy required to keep the system operational. However, discussion of public transportation in the media and among public officials tends to focus on economic yardsticks like capital outlay and profitability – a metric that makes it nearly impossible for any public transit system to be viewed as a success.

As a corrective, participants suggested balancing economically-oriented metrics like GDP with others measuring a broader set of social and environmental factors.

You've got Sky Train that's running about 14 million people a year. Before Sky Train where did those 14 million people come from and go to? Now we have Sky Train running 14 million people a year. Who cares if Sky Train isn't paying for itself?

In Bhutan apparently they have a happiness quotient as a way of assessing how their society is doing. We have the gross national product. Maybe we need to bring in [a measure] that reflects happiness and the future of children.

- Media's distorted lens. Participants repeatedly cited misleading media coverage as a critical barrier to action. They felt that the media's current approach to environmental issues focuses too heavily on immediate short-term effects to the exclusion of more remote impacts. In addition, many felt that media coverage encourages public apathy and fatalism. Participants noted that sustainability issues tend to be covered as short-term, isolated stories that get dropped with the next turn of the news cycle. Such a fragmentary narrative diminishes the public's sense of urgency. Even worse, it reinforces the sense that environmental problems are unfixable – too overwhelming and complex for individual action to have any effect.

If corporations are dumping railway cars into our rivers, we just sort of hear about it in the news, but then the next day, back to the teacher's strike or whatever. It's just sort of brushed over. We're not getting enough of that information, and we need that information so that we can take a little more control of our environment.

I think we blame the media for a lot, but I think we can blame the media a lot here. They love to sensationalize, they love to exaggerate, they love to make money off of distress. And if you get the media to change... that's where I think we can make a lot of headway in terms of the environment.

A lot of times, yes, we feel pretty isolated. I think people feel like they can't make a difference. But what this group realized is that we do have a lot of power and I think that is not reflected in what gets shown through the media. The media always talk about the environmentalists like they are people "out there" – [as if they] aren't people like us who are concerned every day with what's happening in our communities and with the environment.

I didn't realize in a random sample of the population you'd have so many people who are so concerned about the environment. A lot of issues certainly have been brought to my attention [in this conversation]. So either I've been ignorant or these issues aren't being broadcast to the population enough, and people aren't aware enough of these problems.

The dialogue also indicated that the media tends to distort Canadians' image of themselves as a public when it comes to sustainability. Many participants began the dialogue assuming that other Canadians really do not care about environmental issues. This sense that they were alone in their beliefs, isolated and outnumbered, made them reluctant to speak up and pessimistic about the possibility of change. As the dialogue revealed the extent to which "typical" Canadians *do* feel that sustainability should be a priority and are willing to act on those beliefs, participants felt powerfully encouraged – and they wanted that message to get out to the general public.

4. Trust barriers. The issue of trust – or more accurately *mistrust* – emerged in all four dialogues as the most fundamental barrier to effective action on sustainability values. When citizens believe that others, especially leaders, cannot be trusted to do their fair share, they are less likely to take action themselves. The discussion made clear that even as companies and governments wonder whether they can trust a public that appears to say one thing about sustainability and do another, the public has exactly the same question about companies and governments, who appear to them to send very mixed signals:

- Business and government send mixed signals.

If participants were going to struggle to make more responsible choices, they wanted to see government and business doing their part. However they did not see that happening at the moment. Participants noted that government and companies call for sustainable approaches but often seem to act in different ways – companies present a "green" face while polluting rivers and streams; governments promote energy efficiency while exempting SUVs from the mileage and emissions standards required for passenger cars.

The government can put responsibility onto the corporations, but they will just put that back on the consumer. Right? And I will take some of that. But I'd like it to be more of a sharing. I want the corporation to carry some of the brunt.

*The accountability and penalties have to go beyond monetary. We hear about these big chemical companies – like 3M or Dow – dumping stuff in the river and all they do is pay \$300 million and then they're home free. If we were to read *The Economist* we might know about this, but when we buy our product, it doesn't say by the way we did this and we got fined.*

Faced with such apparent contradictions, participants did not trust that governments and business could or would do as they say with respect to sustainability. For example, participants agreed that they were willing to pay more of the real environmental cost of goods and services, but they were deeply concerned that businesses would simply take advantage the opportunity to rake in windfall profits.

Others expressed concern that their tax dollars would disappear into a budgetary black hole and not be used for their intended purpose.

- If we don't trust, we don't act. Participants drew a repeated connection between their levels of trust and their willingness to take steps to live a more sustainable lifestyle. As noted earlier, the questionnaires revealed a correlation between participants' sense that other people could be trusted and their willingness to engage in environmentally friendly behaviours themselves.
- Lack of accountability increases mistrust. Participants agreed that the current system does not require enough accountability from government, business or individuals, and that this is a significant barrier to more sustainable behaviour. Without greater accountability and transparency, participants felt, governments, businesses and individuals will continue along the path of least resistance.

We talked about communication between levels of government, business, the consumer. All the parties that are involved have to be talking to one another. The left hand has to know what the right hand is doing. The left hand has to be able to trust the right hand.

We talked about using the media as a way to market [sustainability]. There's all kinds of ratings and standards that come up – like rankings of universities or best companies to work for. But this is all marketing, this is all PR driven. People get seduced by these things and they're not always actually a fact... There is a lot of false information that goes out with the marketing.

Can you trust businesses to actually do what they're supposed to do? We've had a lot of information thrown at us where businesses are not actually doing what they say... they're not accountable at all.

Participants wanted to see a much stronger regulatory climate for businesses – one that offers real incentives to behave responsibly and real consequences for violations. Many participants felt that the current system doesn't work well. Too many companies simply chalk up fines as part of the cost of doing business, and participants felt that stronger measures were necessary – for instance requiring companies to indicate on their product labels if they have had to pay fines for violating environmental laws.

Participants were especially wary that businesses and government were out to “spin” them. A “sustainability seal of approval” for products was a nice idea, some participants said, but what was to keep it from becoming just another empty marketing tool? When the chips are down, companies are out to make a profit, and they may try to manipulate the public to gain market share.

Participants also expressed significant mistrust of governments. They felt strongly that government *should* be responsible to them. However, they feared that government and politicians were far more influenced by special interests, and they called for greater transparency and accountability from governments.

I don't have trust or faith in government policymakers They go on their campaign and they preach on what they're going to do for you, but they turn around and do something else. It's always about economics – they want revenues.

The thing that I learned today, perhaps the biggest thing, was that if this truly representative of the population in greater Vancouver then there are considerably more people in support of policies and goals that I would define as green, than I thought before I came here today, and if that is the case, then I would say that government in general, the various levels, have not been implementing the policies, the things that we want, at least not to the extent that we want them.

To be able to say [governments] are trustworthy, we need transparency. The more we push for transparency, that's where we can get the trust. They must be accountable, responsible, for whatever they do. We have to know about it. If they tax us we want to know what it is they are taxing and what they're going to use it for. Everything has to be transparent.

At the same time, participants did not let themselves off the hook – ordinary citizens too need to be more accountable and responsible for their actions both as consumers and as citizens. As consumers, they felt that they should pay more attention to the sustainability impacts of their purchases and their lifestyles. If consumers were educated, committed and vocal about their priorities, they felt, companies would respond to those demands. Many participants noted that this was happening already with respect to organic foods and high mileage vehicles, but they felt that far more concerted effort would be needed to move environmental concerns higher on businesses' list of priorities.

Consumers and consumers' choices may force them to change – if we have the information.

We can't depend on our government and corporations to take responsibility. Because that's not where they're at. If we don't buy their products, if we boycott the stuff that destroys the environment, if we say we're not going to be part of this, that's when the changes are going to come about because they'll feel it in their pocket. That's the only way they're going to make changes because that's where they are in their head. It's our responsibility.

We get the government we deserve. Unless we play a more active role as members of the public, we can't expect government to play a stronger role as leader in this effort.

We do need some sort of government legislation in order for this stuff to actually happen, but in order for that to happen we as a group of citizens have to actually get the government to listen to us. We actually have to be proactive and talk about these issues. We can't just leave it to the environmental groups -- let's join the environmental groups. Let's go in as a group of citizens and make them listen to us. Otherwise the government isn't going to change. They're still going to care about what they care about now which is mainly money.

Participants also underscored their obligation as citizens not only to vote and participate in the political process, but also to contribute in other ways to making sustainability a front-burner issue.

I was totally shocked by the statement about Canada and the discrepancy between what we say we care about and what we're actually doing. I was quite indignant about that and thinking about how wrong that was and then, as we talked during the day about what we're doing ourselves, I realized that I'm one of the members of the Canadian community and what am I doing? I am kind of halfheartedly being environmental and I have all kinds of great excuses and procrastination. So one of the big things today was I thought if I'm expecting Canada to be a role model in the world, which is what I hope for from our country, then I better step up to the plate too.

Who we trust is fragmented and scattered. In the course of the dialogues it became clear that no one group or individual will be able to step in and “fix” the trust issue. Participants pointed to individual organizations and individuals as somewhat trustworthy, but in today’s world they were not willing to trust any single source. Instead they described trust as something that they constructed by drawing on and cross-referencing many different sources. In the end, trust grew out of the conversations in the community or communities of which they were a part.

Who do I trust? Actually, for me, trust resides in a fragmented place in the world. There are certain university professors I might trust a little bit. The guy over there? I might trust him a little. But trust is dispersed throughout the community, it doesn't reside in a single place.

5. Isolation: weak sense of community and engagement. In all dialogues, participants said that without a stronger sense of community and engagement it would be more difficult if not impossible to build trust or move toward effective action on sustainability. More specifically, participants underlined:

- Lack of community and meaning. Many felt consumer society is too often characterized by isolation and lack of meaning: they pointed to factors like the breakdown of the family, the increasingly frantic pace of life and a tendency to substitute consumer goods for meaningful connection with others. This pervasive sense of isolation and lack of community support makes it harder for individuals to feel responsible for others or to recognize their ability to make a difference in the world.

We're a materialistic world.... I heard a statistic that 50% or more of families are single parent families now. And so what happens is the family structure obviously has separated and the kids are not getting that same love and affection, especially from the parent that had to move out. So what happens in return is that the parent that's not at home doesn't want to create any friction, and they only have limited time with them, so they tend to buy them things. And that's how they fill that need. And it's very unfortunate. So I see a lot of kids getting that quite easily today.

Life 40 years ago was a lot slower. Today I can't get over the way young people have to rush and run to get everything done. It's harder now to stop and say no, this doesn't feel right, I want to back off and think about it. They don't have time to do that.

More generally, participants saw community as a powerful antidote to over-the-top consumerism and materialism. For many participants, community – whether physical (in the form of a denser walkable neighborhood) or a more abstract community of shared values – represented an opportunity to break down that isolation and build a shared sense of meaning. Several expressed this idea in terms of slowing down, escaping the race to accumulate money and material possessions, and establishing a different, more caring and connected model for community.

But clearly, materialism does not work. Because ... no one is ever satisfied if that's their value. They just have to keep having more and more and more.

Very often we see NIMBYs, the local minority, when it comes to making decisions in the city for planning, and I thought this was a terrific forum for really seeing what people feel. With a random sampling of people, you get a sense that a lot of the things that you see [presented as] negatives in the news and the media are actually things that most people want to see go through.

I think the three major players of government, industry and the individual, we really have to work together on this one because each one has a separate role to play but an integrated role. An individual can do certain things, government certain things and industry can do certain things, but together, we can work and we integrate them together using a multifaceted integrated approach, including all parties, will end up getting away from the us versus them mentality. It's not us versus them, it's us, period.

- Few opportunities for engagement. Overall, participants drew strong links between effective public engagement and a general sense of responsibility among citizens – the more people are engaged, the more responsible they feel for the outcome, and vice versa. Such engagement also creates a sense of being empowered to make a difference. However, participants felt that they had few opportunities to become involved, and most had little idea of how to do so effectively. Governments did not seem interested in seriously soliciting citizen input in setting objectives for sustainability and reviewing results, and many highly-publicized “consultation” efforts seemed more ritual than real.

Participants emphasized that creating more opportunities for public engagement was an essential part of overcoming the barriers to acting more sustainably. They told us repeatedly that the path to success on these issues lay in developing better ways for citizens, business and government to act together.

6. The term “sustainability” itself. Interestingly, many participants suggested that the very term “sustainability” may be more of an obstacle than a help in efforts to engage the public in creating an environmentally and socially responsible way of life. They raised several objections.

- Abstractions and “buzz-words” don’t move us. The most common criticism was that that the term is too abstract, and too far removed from the practicalities of daily life. Many found it uninspiring and vague, and several participants suggested that the term reinforced the idea that the problem is overwhelming and alienating. Several also felt that “sustainability” was little more than a buzz-word for bureaucrats and technical experts, they did not feel they knew what it was or how to measure it, and they frequently fell back on more familiar terms like “green,” and “environmentally friendly.”

Overall, participants were more moved by tangible impacts than by abstractions. For instance, when asked to list reasons that would motivate them to pay extra for a more energy efficient house, participants’ top reason was individual health benefits (it is healthier for the people who live in the house and will reduce air pollution), followed by economic benefits to individuals (it will pay for itself over time and protect against future energy cost increases). More abstract benefits – e.g. conserving resources for future generations, doing the forward-looking thing – came much further down their list of priorities. Similarly, when asked how much they worried about various environmental problems, participants cited immediate and tangible concerns like air and water pollution first, while global effects (loss of tropical rain forests) ranked much lower. Participants agreed that it was far easier to start with a local perspective and expand it to encompass the global than the other way around.

Everything that we’re saying [about sustainability] just comes off as so Utopian and idealistic. It’s a huge job to break it down and make it practical and achievable. It’s something that we have to do, but it’s so phenomenal, and I think people are tired.

We’ve got a nice definition up there, but I personally have no sense of scale of how far away from sustainability we are as a society or as a planet. Nobody in our group had any idea where we were relative to sustainability, how close we actually were or were not to sustainability on a number of measures of sustainability – or even for that matter what the measures of sustainability are.

I made a comment earlier this morning that sustainability didn’t mean a thing to most of the people in the marketplace and I still don’t think it does. If you’re talking to a forest industry person you can understand that if you plant more trees 100 years from now you will have trees to cut. You have some kind of sustainability. But if you buy a new automobile, what does sustainability mean? It’s an absolutely useless word. I think we’ve tied it in as a buzz word to a whole bunch of things and it has become meaningless.

I think ‘sustainability’ is an abstraction and abstractions don’t motivate people. Abstractions mean absolutely nothing to people. I also think our definition of sustainability involves future generations, but the “what’s in it for me” factor is completely and utterly absent.

- Sustainability — one word, many meanings. Participants also noted that the word “sustainability” means different things to different people. For example, some were troubled by its connotation of trying to maintain our *current* lifestyle and standard of living, a goal that struck participants as entirely the opposite of what the term should try to convey. Several noted a fact that appeared in their materials: if every person on the planet consumed as many resources and produced as much waste as the average Canadian, we would need four more planets like earth to meet our needs. This state of affairs, they felt, was just what we do not want to sustain.

I think a lot of people think of “sustainability” as being able to maintain your current lifestyle. With the increase in population, I don’t think that’s realistic. When you look at China developing, the buildings, the people there, Asia in general, third world countries – if they all start consuming resources like us, something has to give.

C. Possibilities: Building on common ground

The experience of the daylong dialogue became for the participants a microcosm of what might be possible – and needed – to build trust and overcome the barriers to more sustainable action. In particular, they highlighted:

- The amount of common ground. Participants were amazed and impressed at the amount of common ground they discovered over the course of the dialogue, which far exceeded their initial expectations. Many were encouraged to find that they were not the only ones who cared about the environment and sustainability – the environment was a priority for far more people than they had dreamed possible. As we often find in dialogues of this kind, participants were surprised at the quality of the conversation and the thoughtfulness of their fellow citizens. With so many people, from so many different walks of life, sharing common goals and priorities, great changes became possible.

I think much is made of apathy and cynicism in the Canadian public but if this group is representative, I didn’t see a lot of that today. I saw a real level of concern.

The most important thing that I learned today was that we’ve got more issues in common that bind us than there are issues that divide us.

I think this group is really a cross-sample of Vancouver’s culture and I was pleasantly surprised to hear of the level of conversation and dialogue that went on. It was quite intellectual and it was a little bit above the standards that I thought would happen today.

What I learned today was the same as a lot of us, we’re not alone. We have each other and we can tell our family, our friends, our clients, our customers – let’s share some of the stuff we’ve shared here today.

For instance, the car industry is directly related to the oil industry.... We can make fuel efficient cars, but that will directly impact the oil industry, and all the other industries that are related. Roads and everything else. So we have to look at the whole picture and see all these industries are related. Let's do an educational governmental piece that will [help people understand] that.

I think what I learned from this whole experience is ... that every little bit helps. Before I was thinking it has to be some grand thing in order to change things, but I realized that you can do the littlest things and make a small change. It's not going to happen overnight, we're not going to have an amazing environment tomorrow, but we can make those little changes everyday and it will have a snowball effect into a bigger change over time..

- Connecting the dots and taking small steps. Many participants felt that the day's dialogue had been especially valuable in helping them connect the dots between their individual actions and larger issues of sustainability. They hoped that many other people could have that opportunity, and they called for broader education and outreach. If more people could make these connections – for instance between short-term actions and long-term impacts, or among the complex factors linking urban design, transportation, energy use and economic development – more people would be able and willing to take the small steps that add up to real social change.

- The value of two-way dialogue and learning. Participants especially appreciated being able to talk with and learn from each other, and the richness that such a diverse group brought to the search for solutions. In particular, they were pleased with how the dialogue format focused not on what divided them (as is so often the case in debate-type formats) but on the common ground they shared. They also underscored that two-way dialogue was essential not only between citizens, but also between citizens and businesses/governments.

I've certainly learned that a public discourse is an effective means of sharing ideas across culture, across income and across occupation, but that process is still very muddled. We still need to have [dialogues] like this to figure out how to solve these problems.

My only thought for today is that we've got to start talking to each other more often.

I think this should be done more often. I was concerned about the environment and all the things around me [when I came here] -- but something about discussion helps us. We can [learn] by reading but that does not impact us as much as when we discuss and everybody has their own ideas. We come up with the solution ourselves today, and I am sure that people here will be more motivated about the environment after this – I think I am. I will be more sensitive because I had input into it... [This dialogue] is a listening – the government or the corporation is listening to us through these type of studies.

- A sense of hope and renewed purpose. Participants were also excited and energized by the amount of learning that took place and the sense of community that emerged over the course of the day. Many found the experience of 40 strangers coming together and emerging with a common vision and a strong sense of purpose extraordinary and even moving. For many participants their renewed sense of community and shared purpose – the social capital generated by their experience – was as important an outcome of the dialogue as any specific recommendation.

As a result, many participants left the dialogue with a renewed sense of hope. The amount of common ground they had discovered was a revelation, and many were heartened by a sense that their voices had been heard and they could make a difference. In their closing comments participants returned repeatedly to the theme that they wanted to be engaged and they wanted to be part of the solution. Many spoke of feeling a renewed commitment to take small personal steps that would help improve the environment, and of their desire to spread the word to family, friends, neighbors and co-workers.

The one thing that really surprised me was how a diverse group of 40 people has really jelled on issues and on a social aspect as well.

I found it really engaging to be here today talking intimately with people from very different places and coming to understandings with each other. I'd really like to see that happen in our neighborhoods and our communities, having people come in from different demographics and be able to live together because we have that variation in housing costs and affordability to do that. Yes, I thought this was really great.

From the session today, again I learned how wonderful people are and how pessimistic I can be, but when I'm around a group of people I pick up a very positive energy, so I thank everybody for that.

I learned today that, yes, we all do have similar concerns and because there's so many of us there must be a whole lot more out there that would like this information from this group, so hopefully what was discussed today gets passed on to lots of people and then we could take the government and businesses and ask them to help us work on it.

I learned today that an individual can make a difference. We often hear it in terms of the environment. I believe it's true because many individuals here feel the same way and as a collective whole that will make a difference.

The most important thing I learned today and it actually starts with so many people share a common concern that I do and I've never actually sat in a group like this and spoken to so many people about the environment and it was moving. What the government and we as individuals can do, I think setting goals and standards, and perhaps more often for me anyway, is sitting in perhaps a forum or doing this more often, sitting in groups of large people and discussing what can be done. I think that does make a difference because it made a difference in me.

Participants hoped that more Vancouverites and Canadians could have a similar opportunity, and they saw this as an important step to bringing about the sort of broad-based change they wanted to see.

IV. Opportunities for Leaders

Understanding these barriers to sustainable action opens new opportunities for leaders not only to communicate more effectively, but also to translate the strongly held views and values of the public into action supporting sustainable products and policies. These values provide a tremendous reservoir of potential support for sustainable initiatives, support that can be energized by effective leadership. Overcoming these barriers and activating the values of Canadians will depend on a strong ability to:

- A. Communicate in a climate of mistrust
- B. Provide information and metrics that build trust and manage expectations
- C. Change the frame and broaden mindsets
- D. Engage the public as partners

A. Communicating in a climate of mistrust.

As the ChoiceDialogues demonstrated, mistrust is a fundamental barrier to acting on sustainability values. When citizens believe that others, especially leaders, cannot be trusted to do their fair share, they are less likely to take action themselves. The public's mistrust of leaders – already reflecting a broader climate of mistrust in society – is exacerbated by their perception that companies and governments say one thing and do another.

In such a climate, communication presents an enormous challenge. A mistrustful public is more likely to discount messages and less likely to give leaders the benefit of the doubt. But organizations that recognize this circumstance gain the opportunity to communicate in a different way – one that builds trust and turns it into an advantage for the organization.

Drawing on decades of research and experience, Viewpoint Learning Chairman Daniel Yankelovich has suggested the following ten principles for communicating under conditions of mistrust:

1. Effective communication in a climate of mistrust is at least 80% performance and no more than 20% telling people about it.
2. Make few promises/commitments and live up to each faithfully. Performance should exceed expectations.
3. Core values must be made explicit and framed in ethical terms. Ethically neutral/value-free stands are seen as deceitful.
4. More is expected from privileged institutions
5. Silence/denial/closed doors is almost always interpreted as evidence of bad faith
6. No one gets the benefit of the doubt
7. Anything but plain talk is suspect
8. Honesty/integrity responds to a genuine hunger on the part of the public
9. Noble goals with deeply flawed execution are seen as hypocrisy, not idealism.

Being “good people” with “good motives” are not acceptable rationalizations

10. Especially in a climate of mistrust it is not enough to talk about sustainability, it is essential to walk the talk. This requires a conscious effort to move toward a “stewardship” ethic in all activities of the organization.

The basic point is that mistrust is not just background noise; it is a fundamental barrier to success in moving toward sustainability, and also to achieving other goals. For these reasons building trust needs to become a priority objective in its own right.

B. Provide information and metrics in ways that build trust and manage expectations.

As the ChoiceDialogues demonstrated, the public is looking for trustworthy information they can use to help them make more sustainable choices. They are also looking for better yardsticks they can use to measure how well they – and businesses and governments – are doing in moving toward sustainability. As participants noted, the absence of such feedback is a significant barrier to action and reinforces mistrust. Keys to success in addressing this barrier will include:

- Setting high but achievable goals and reporting regularly on progress. It is important to focus on specific objectives that the public wants to see achieved and then to set standards and goals that are high but do not create unrealistic expectations. To build trust, there also needs to be regular reporting to the public on both success and failure in achieving those goals (verified by third parties where possible to increase credibility). Setting explicit goals and reporting regularly in this way not only helps to build trust but also gives some measure of control over public expectations. Recent efforts by a range of companies to institute “triple bottom line” reports, and comparable efforts in the public sector, are early steps in this direction.
- Making it measurable. It is essential that these objectives and standards be as explicit as possible. Even when objectives are intangible (as those related to sustainability and quality of life often are), they can be reduced to more tangible indicators. For example, participants in the ChoiceDialogues used time lost in traffic as an indirect measure of the health of communities, noting that people with burdensome commutes have less time to devote to their families or to community-building activities. In addition (and often more relevantly) it is possible to measure the perceptions of experts and the public on how well intangible benefits are being delivered, and turn these into useful metrics.
- Using public rather than technical language. Just as important, complicated information needs to be translated into the language of the public. This is not to say that information should be “dumbed down” for public consumption. Rather, it needs to take the public’s priorities into consideration and be expressed in non-technical language – while technical details may be important, most citizens are focused more on how a situation affects their families and their communities.

At the same time, providing more or better information is not in itself sufficient to create

trust. You cannot resolve a trust issue by throwing data or information at it. Decades of research have shown that when faced with information that contradicts deeply held assumptions or beliefs, people tend to discount, deny or explain away that information. In a climate of mistrust, this tendency is amplified. Our work has borne this out in project after project: **trust shapes citizens' response to information, not the other way around.** To resolve issues of trust, much more is needed.

C. Change the frame and broaden mindsets

When people are operating as individual consumers in the marketplace, the consumer mindset predominates. ChoiceDialogue participants described this mindset as an important barrier to taking more sustainable action, making them less likely to purchase a sustainable product or to put a high premium on long-term sustainability goals.

These assumptions and frameworks are the mental maps people use to decide what to pay attention to and what to ignore, what is important and what is not. Most of us have a range of frames we use, depending on circumstances. Encouraging people to make more sustainable decisions will involve enabling them to change frameworks and move beyond a narrow consumer mindset.

One-sided information campaigns are generally not the most effective ways to accomplish this, especially in a climate of mistrust. Throughout our research we have found that when people feel they are being “spun” – that they are being presented with one-sided arguments designed to sell a pre-determined agenda – they become more frustrated, mistrustful and resistant to change. The more politicians or businesses engage in this kind of spin, the more the public (as well as media and analysts) discount what they say and assume the worst. This creates a vicious circle that undermines trust and builds cynicism. The public's ability to see through spin, and the damage that the resulting mistrust can cause, should not be underestimated.

Especially in the current climate, trust-building communication depends on presenting information in a balanced and honest way. Communications crafted in this way are more likely to be heard. An even more effective approach is to incorporate opportunities for two-way dialogue into communications initiatives.

While spin undermines trust, dialogue builds trust. The ChoiceDialogue sessions themselves demonstrated the value and potential of using dialogue. Participants quickly set aside political posturing and focused on pragmatic problem solving. The speed with which participants were able to absorb and apply complicated concepts was impressive, as was the amount of common ground they were able to find in a relatively short time. Over the course of the day a community formed among participants who had been strangers at 9AM that morning, and participants repeatedly expressed the view that the support of such a community would be an essential part of overcoming the barriers they had identified to creating a more sustainable future.

By moving from spin to dialogue, decision-makers can build or strengthen such a community and engage the public as partners in devising, implementing and marketing more sustainable approaches. (More detail on dialogue can be found in Appendix B.)

D. Engage the public as partners

In recent years a variety of dialogue-based approaches to marketing and engaging the public have emerged under names like “community marketing,” “open source marketing” and “word of mouth marketing.” In the public sphere, comparable approaches have been developed under names like “public engagement” and “deliberative democracy.” In part these approaches have been a response to the declining effectiveness of more traditional approaches to public education and marketing. They also are a response to the emergence of a better informed, more skeptical and less deferential customer and citizen. In no area do these approaches hold more promise than in advancing sustainable products, policies and services.

These new approaches to marketing and public education replace the model of the mass market with a model of the market as a community of interconnected conversations, in which customers and citizens are full participants not just recipients. These marketing approaches make it easy for customers to get involved with a brand and affect its direction – they become co-creators. This replaces the monologue of the mass market with a real dialogue that taps into the intelligence of customers to help develop the brand. While most evident in rapidly growing on-line communities, this approach also is relevant to more local face-to-face communities. Both involve setting some rough parameters and challenging customers and citizens to get involved and co-create, generating excitement and buzz and building a sense of ownership and support. Just a few examples:

- The communities of Apple computer and iPod customers – both on-line and off-line user groups
- Howard Dean’s presidential campaign in the U.S., the fundraising and recruitment techniques of which are now being widely copied
- The development and marketing of the Firefox browser and the Linux operating system
- The work of moveon.org (for example ads created by the public and then broadcast – Nike is now doing something similar to market a number of its products)
- The *Participation* program was an early example of this approach, and was frequently cited by ChoiceDialogue participants.

In the public sphere, the newer dialogue-based approaches are designed to overcome the limits of more traditional ways of hearing the public voice (including polls and focus groups, town meetings, public hearings and special interest advocacy). The newer techniques are conducive to listening rather than arguing, provide safe opportunities to explore multiple points of view, are organized around choices and tradeoffs, and give participants time and support to work through difficult issues.

The ChoiceDialogues themselves are an example of such dialogue-based techniques, though at a research scale. When scientific samples are not required, other approaches can be used that enable many more to participate (both on-line and face-to-face) at a lower cost per-participant. For example, Viewpoint Learning has conducted online dialogues

that have brought thousands of participants into the conversation. We have also designed self-contained dialogue kits that leaders and their representatives have used to conduct a different kind of conversation with citizens and customers.

The participants in the ChoiceDialogues underlined how much they want to be engaged in finding ways to make Canada's society and economy more sustainable, and how critical they believe engagement with fellow citizens, government and business – in other words, community-building – will be in overcoming the barriers to a more sustainable future. They placed a particular value on many people taking small, practical steps, feeling that this can add up to huge social change. Community engagement, they felt, would be vital to helping people to learn what sort of steps can have the greatest impact and to connect the dots between these small steps and larger sustainability goals.

The ChoiceDialogue participants' conclusions about the importance of community and engagement also resonates with other research that has shown that the most effective messages to motivate behaviour change are those that are based on social norms – messages that indicate a given behaviour is the norm for members of your community. This underlines the importance of reflecting back a more accurate image of Canadians' strong views and values. In the course of the ChoiceDialogues we found that one of the strongest motivators to take action was the news that Canada ranks 28th out of 30 developed countries on a range of sustainability indicators. Participants were determined that their community, Canada, could and should do better, and to work together to that end.

New messaging alone will not be enough to overcome the barriers to a more sustainable future – to the adoption of more sustainable products, policies and services. More important will be taking active steps to engage customers and citizens as members of a community and as partners in building a more sustainable Canada.

V. Conclusions

Perhaps the most important conclusion from these ChoiceDialogues is that it is time to stop underestimating not only the public's desire for a more sustainable future but also the value and potential benefit of engaging customers and citizens as full partners in this effort. Each organization will need to find its own way to engage the public in overcoming the barriers to adopting more sustainable products and policies, and to realize the opportunities for leaders described above.

In doing this, one critical point to keep in mind is that engaging the public is very different from persuading the public. Where persuasion too often emphasizes one sided arguments or even spin, engagement is based on two-way dialogue and learning from each other. It assumes the public has an important piece of the answer.

For example, rather than trying to sell a pre-determined view of sustainability, a dialogue-based approach would engage the public in defining what sustainability means to them – in their own language (not technical language) – and what steps they are prepared to support to achieve it. As we saw in the ChoiceDialogues, finding this common ground builds a sense of community and confidence in people's ability to work together. Such

communities also create the shared norms that are the strongest motivators for action, for changing behaviour and for moving beyond a narrow consumer mindset.

Empowering the public to devise and take actions that promote more sustainable development is an under-developed strategy, but one that holds real promise. The challenge is that it will require trusting the public more, and giving up some of the sense of control (some would argue the illusion of control) that most decision-makers try to protect. But there are also considerable advantages to such a strategy, especially in a climate of mistrust.

First, engaging the public is a powerful way to develop a shared sense of ownership and responsibility for outcomes. Some years ago, a Provincial Premier succinctly summed up why this is so important: “If you include me,” he said, “I will be your partner, but if you exclude me I will be your judge.”

In addition, engaging the public builds trust. In today’s climate, the public tends to take a skeptical view of claims that an organization is acting to promote sustainability, while readily accepting any evidence to the contrary as confirmation of their worst suspicions. This readiness to believe the worst makes it essential that organizations ensure that their actions are consistent with their claims – but in the end, even this may not be enough. A less risky (and more honest) position is to acknowledge from the outset that you do not have all the answers, and to ask the public to become more engaged in finding better ways to overcome barriers and build a more sustainable future. As we have seen in this research, many of these barriers are not technical, and the public has much they can contribute to overcoming them.

The effect of this is to position your organization as a partner for the public and the community in creating a more sustainable future.

Appendix A

ChoiceDialogue™: The Methodology

ChoiceDialogue methodology differs from polls and focus groups in its *purpose, advance preparation, and depth of inquiry*.

- **Purpose.** ChoiceDialogues are designed to do what polls and focus groups cannot do and were never developed to do. While polls and focus groups provide an accurate snapshot of people’s current thinking, ChoiceDialogues are designed to predict the future direction of people’s views on important issues where they have not completely up their minds, or where changed circumstances create new challenges that need to be recognized and addressed. Under these conditions (which apply to most major issues), people’s top-of-mind opinions are highly unstable, and polls and focus groups can be very misleading. ChoiceDialogues enable people to develop their own fully worked-through views on such issues (in dialogue with their peers) even if they previously have not given it much thought. By engaging representative samples of the population in this way, ChoiceDialogues provide unique insight into how people’s views change as they learn, and can be used to identify areas of potential public support where leaders can successfully implement policies consonant with people’s core values.
- **Advance Preparation.** ChoiceDialogues require highly trained facilitators and (above all) the preparation of special workbooks that brief people on the issues. These workbooks formulate a manageable number of research-based scenarios, which are presented as a series of values-based choices, and they lay out the pros and cons of each scenario in a manner that allows participants to work through how they really think and feel about each one. This tested workbook format enables people to absorb and apply complex information quickly.
- **Depth of Inquiry.** Polls and focus groups avoid changing people’s minds, while ChoiceDialogues are designed to explore how and why people’s minds change as they learn. While little or no learning on the part of the participants occurs in the course of conducting a poll or focus group, ChoiceDialogues are characterized by a huge amount of learning. ChoiceDialogues are day-long, highly structured dialogues – 24 times as long as the average poll and 4 times as long as the average focus group. Typically, participants spend the morning familiarizing themselves with the scenarios and their pros and cons and developing (in dialogue with each other) their vision of what they would like to have happen in the future. They spend the afternoons testing their preferences against the hard and often painful tradeoffs they would need to make to realize their values. To encourage learning, the ChoiceDialogue methodology is based on dialogue rather than debate – this is how public opinion really forms, by people talking with friends, neighbors and co-workers. These 8-hour sessions allow intense social learning, and both quantitative and qualitative measures are used to determine how and why people’s views change as they learn.

Steps in a ChoiceDialogue Project

- 1) Archival analysis of polls (or conducting a special one) and other research to provide a baseline reading on what stage of development public opinion has reached;
- 2) The identification of critical choices and choice scenarios on the issue and their most important pros and cons, and the preparation of a workbook built around those scenarios in a tested format for use in the dialogues;
- 3) A series of one-day dialogue sessions with representative cross-sections of the population. Each dialogue involves about 40 participants, lasts one full day and is videotaped. A typical one-day session includes the following:
 - Initial orientation (including the purpose of the dialogue and the use to be made of the results, the nature of dialogue and ground-rules for the session, introduction of the issue and some basic facts about it);
 - Introduction of the choice scenarios on the issue, and a questionnaire to measure participants' initial views;
 - Dialogue among participants (in smaller groups and in plenary) on the likely good and bad results that would occur as a consequence of each choice if it were adopted, and constructing a vision of the future they would prefer to see;
 - A second, more intensive round of dialogue among the participants (again both in smaller groups and in plenary) working through the concrete choices and tradeoffs they would make or support to realize their vision;
 - Concluding comments from each participant on how their views have changed in the course of the day (and why), and a questionnaire designed to measure those changes.
- 4) An analysis of how people's positions evolve during the dialogues. We take before and after readings on how and to what extent people's positions have shifted on each choice as a result of the dialogue. This analysis is both quantitative and qualitative.
- 5) A briefing to leaders to make sense of the results. The briefing summarizes what matters most to people on the issue, how positions are likely to evolve as surface opinion matures into more considered judgment, the underlying assumptions and values that shape that evolution, and the opportunities for leadership this creates.

Appendix B

What is Dialogue?

Dialogue is a special kind of discourse structured within certain rules. The most important of these rules are that, in a dialogue, status and decision-making are suspended, participants listen to each other responsively, and underlying assumptions are brought to the surface. Dialogue is the opposite of debate or spin:

Dialogue: The Opposite of Debate/Spin	
<i>Debate/Spin</i>	<i>Dialogue</i>
Assuming there is one right answer	Assuming others have a piece of the answer
Combative	Collaborative
About winning, accentuating differences and using "wedge issues"	About finding common ground
Listening to find flaws	Listening to understand
Defending assumptions	Exploring assumptions
Focus on one-way communication (making my case)	Focus on two-way communication (learning from each other)
Seeking an outcome that agrees with your position	Discovering new possibilities and opportunities

The basic assumption in a debate is that there is one right answer (and you have it). So the purpose of a debate is to convince others – to win. The basic assumption in a dialogue is very different: it is that everyone involved has a piece of the answer. So the purpose is to learn from each other, to understand other perspectives in order to widen your own and to find new ways forward. You cannot win a dialogue. In a debate or negotiation, or in decision-making, you try to control the outcome. In a dialogue you relinquish at least some of that control (for the duration of the dialogue) in order to learn and build trust. Dialogue does not replace debate or decision-making, it precedes them and creates the mutual trust and understanding that can make subsequent negotiation and decision-making more productive.

Appendix C

Quantitative Findings

Initial Judgment

N = 162

	Negative	Positive*
1. Continue on our current path	90	10
2. Use the market to promote more sustainable development	34	66
3. Develop more sustainable cities and regions	7	93
4. Make sustainable development a top priority of government	24	76

Final Judgment

	Negative	Positive*
1. Continue on our current path	91	9
2. Use the market to promote more sustainable development	22	78
3. Develop more sustainable cities and regions	5	95
4. Make sustainable development a top priority of government	17	82

Initial vs. Final Means

	initial mean	final mean
1. Continue on our current path	2.6	2.5
2. Use the market to promote more sustainable development	6.6	7.0**
3. Develop more sustainable cities and regions	8.2	8.5**
4. Make sustainable development a top priority of government	7.3	7.8**

*"Negative" = rated the scenario from 1-5; "Positive" = rated the scenario 6-10.

** Statistically significant shift between initial and final mean

Basic Values

Q: For each pair of statements, please choose the one that comes closest to your point of view, even though it may not capture it completely.

Science and technology give us the control over nature that we need to make life better for everyone.	54
OR	
Using science and technology to control nature means taking risks that endanger our future.	46

Most people can be trusted.	58
OR	
You can't be too careful in dealing with people.	42

Humanity has a bright future.	58
OR	
Humanity has a bleak future.	41

The growing gap between rich and poor is a social injustice that needs to be corrected.	89
OR	
A gap between rich and poor is the price we pay for prosperity – and it is worth it.	11

Overuse of natural resources threatens the safety and welfare of future generations.	87
OR	
Experience has shown that we can use our natural resources for our economic growth without threatening future generations.	13

We have gone too far in the direction of individual rights; we need a better balance between rights and responsibilities.	79
OR	
We need more individual choice in our society, not less.	21

I would rather trust market forces than government to deal with most problems facing society.	43
OR	
I would rather trust government than market forces to deal with most problems facing society.	55

Reasons for making a more sustainable purchase

Q: Suppose that you are deciding whether or not to pay the extra money to buy a house that was considerably more energy-efficient. How important would each of the following reasons be to you in making your decision?

	Extremely important	Very important	Somewhat important	Not at all /Not Very important
It is healthier for the people who live in the house	59	33	6	3
It benefits everyone's health because of reduced air pollution	45	43	9	3
In the long run it would pay for itself through lower heating and cooling costs	40	41	17	1
It won't be a worry if energy costs rise in the future	37	42	16	4
It benefits future generations because it uses up fewer resources	34	41	21	4
Buying a sustainable product is the smart, forward-thinking thing to do	34	38	22	6
It is easier to maintain	32	37	28	3
It is at least as comfortable, attractive and convenient as a more conventional house	25	39	27	9

Attitudes toward sustainable development

Q: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Agree strongly	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree strongly
We need stricter laws and regulations to protect the environment.	67	28	4	1
The best way to get people and companies to conserve is to make them pay more of the real costs of gas, electricity and other resources they use.	43	41	12	3
No matter how much you improve public transportation, people will always prefer the convenience of driving their own cars.	24	38	27	11
I would pay up to 20% more than the usual price for things if it would help the environment and future generations	22	56	18	4
Sustainable development may be a good idea, but you will never get most people to change their lifestyle and give up their big houses and yards.	14	39	39	9
With the aid of technology, we will be able to solve our environmental problems without making major changes in our lifestyle.	10	21	37	32

Attitudes towards Sustainable Development

Q: Which would you prefer?

A larger house in a community where you have to drive everywhere? OR	7
A smaller house in a “walkable” community?	93

Q: Which of the following approaches to solving our energy problems do you think Canada should follow right now?

Emphasize production of more electricity? OR	6
Emphasize more conservation of existing electricity supplies by industry and consumers?	94

Environmentally Favorable Behaviors

Q: In your household, how often do you....

	Regularly	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never	
Recycle newspapers, aluminum and/or glass?	89	9	3	1	
Adjust the temperature in your house to save energy?	69	20	8	3	
Look for products that are energy efficient?	51	37	9	3	
Use public transit?	48	28	16	7	
Try to reduce water consumption?	47	39	11	3	
Look for recycled products when buying paper or plastic goods?	36	44	16	5	
Look for products and services that are produced by socially responsible companies?	32	39	21	8	
Buy organic foods?	24	37	29	9	
Car pool?	21	25	23	31	
In investing, seek out socially responsible companies?	23	31	18	10	Do not invest 18

Level of Concern about Environmental Problems

Q: How much do you personally worry about each of the following environmental problems?

	A great deal	A fair amount	Only a little/ Not at all
Pollution of rivers, lakes, reservoirs	59	36	5
Contamination of soil and water by toxic wastes	53	35	14
Air pollution	52	38	10
Loss of natural habitat for wildlife	48	35	17
Loss of open space to development	45	35	20
Loss of tropical rain forests	44	36	21
Damage to the earth's ozone layer	38	43	18
The "greenhouse effect" on global warming	35	42	22

	We are making progress	We are losing ground	It's about the same as it has been
How well do you think BC is dealing with its environmental and quality of life problems?	28	40	29

	Better	Worse	Same
Thinking about the future of the community in which you live--by the year 2020, do you think your community's quality of life will be better, worse or stay the same?	39	37	24

Demographic Information

Gender			Age		
	Sample	GVRD		Sample	GVRD
	%	%		%	%
male	46	47	18-29	27	20
female	54	53	30-49	39	40
			50-65	28	25
			over 65	6	15

Highest level of education completed			Income		
	Sample	GVRD		Sample	GVRD
	%	%		%	%
less than high school	1	15	under 20K	13	22
high school graduate	7		20-29K	8	
some college	24	24	30-49K	29	33
college degree	35	31	50-74K	22	23
graduate study/degree	34	30	75-99K	13	12
			100K or more	15	10

Own or rent home		
	Sample	GVRD
	%	%
own	47	42
rent	53	58