

City of Toronto Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam on Public Engagement, Gender Responsive Budgeting, and Inequality in Toronto's Budget

As an advocate for gender responsive budgeting (GRB) at the City of Toronto, Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam hosted a Town Hall, bringing together residents from across the city to gather at the 519 Community Centre to discuss how Toronto's budget can better reflect the needs of women.

WHAT IS GRB?

GRB, an analytical tool, brings an intersectional gendered lens to the budgeting process. The purpose of GRB is to ensure that policy makers and decision makers address how men and women access public programs and services. Recognizing the inequality between men and women can help ensure that resources are more fairly distributed to better serve all residents. As well, with an intersectional approach to GRB, gender inequality includes the disparities that exist between women, acknowledging intersecting forms of oppressions.

Disrupting the budget process, GRB is an innovative mechanism for meeting commitments

to gender equality by ensuring that policy makers and decision makers rethink how budgeting impacts the lived experiences of women. In applying an intersectional gendered lens, GRB is an opportunity for governments to better reflect the needs and priorities of all residents.

THE TOWN HALL ON GRB

Councillor Wong-Tam's town hall began with a "fireside chat" with Finance Minister Bill Morneau, followed by a panel discussion with subject matter experts, and concluded with a facilitated round-table workshop for participating residents. The purpose of the round-tables was to create a space where residents shared their ideas, lived experiences, and knowledge on the need for a gendered lens in the budgeting process.

Unlike the standard town hall format, the facilitated round-tables were strategic in stimulating solution-oriented conversations. With high participation rates, people from across the city came together to solve problems that directly impact their daily lives. At each table, residents collectively worked through the budget, reallocating funds to better represent the needs of women. In this activity, participants were empowered to engage in a policy process that is so often removed from the public. Similar to participatory budgeting, participants had opportunity reimagine what Toronto's budget would look like if it was more equitable, providing a variety of solutions to addressing some of the barriers to equality.

In designing the town hall and creating a safe space for knowledge transfer, Councillor Wong-Tam referred directly to teachings from Canada's Indigenous communities. Active and careful listening was essential to hosting meaningful and valuable engagements. Listening with both our ears and hearts ensures for a better understanding of the experiences and expectations of residents.



Other initiatives have been a reference point for the Councillor, like Porto Allegre, where the introduction of participatory budgeting has resulted in the reduction of inequalities. Moreover, lessons learned from David Miller's Listening Tour (the Councillor herself recommended the initiative while on the newly elected Mayor's Transition Advisory Committee) further reflect the current approach to meaningfully engage with constituents. While Councillor Wong-Tam represents Ward 27, the Town Hall was well attended by residents from all over the city, which certainly suggests an ever-growing desire for more meaningful citizen engagement and a keen interest in GRB.

In planning future town halls and citizen engagement activities, Councillor Wong-Tam identifies opportunities where municipal initiatives can improve. In an ideal world, the Councillor envisions greater online capacity, beyond the Facebook live streams. An interactive online platform with real-time data visualization is something the Councillor is interested in exploring. Given the growing attendance, and the clear desire from residents to engage in these sorts of activities, the Councillor would also like to extend the time residents have in the round-table discussions, increasing the capacity for community-based learning.

Acknowledging the time and commitment made by residents for participating in the town hall, Councillor Wong-Tam [provides a summary of insights voiced by participants](#), along with a pledge to continue to advocate for a more inclusive and innovative approach to ensuring a more equitable budget.

Policy Wars: Brainstorming budgets, pushing platforms

INTRODUCTION

On March 8, 2018, in collaboration with Toronto Star Columnist and Ryerson Visiting Professor Martin Regg Cohn, CPIPE hosted [Policy Wars: Brainstorming budgets, pushing platforms](#). The panel discussion on budgets, platforms, and policy-making was moderated by Cohn, who was joined by an esteemed panel including:

Shelly Jamieson, former Secretary of Cabinet, Head of the Ontario Public Service and Clerk of the Executive Council;

Jamison Steeve, Executive Director at the Martin Prosperity Institute and the Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity; and

David Lindsay, President and CEO of the Council of Ontario Universities.

For a more detailed description on the backgrounds of our moderator and panelists, please see our event invitation [here](#).

HIGHLIGHTS

The diversity in experience and expertise of both the panel and moderator allowed for an enlightening conversation on a range of issues dealing with campaign platforms, budgets, and the impact on designing policy.

A number of themes were apparent throughout the conversation, woven within a number of the responses. Some of these include:

Effective and Appropriate Working Relationships: Relationships, not just between political leadership and the public service, but with other actors impact platforms and policy development. Throughout the conversation, the necessity of building appropriate working relationships with the media, auditor general, stakeholders, and other public service entities support the roles and responsibilities of both the public service and the political class. In terms of the working relationship between the public service and political leadership, all three panelists spoke of their experience, from either the perspective of the public service or political leadership, and the impact of creating appropriate working relationships to meet campaign platforms and to implement good policy.

Evolving Platforms: Platforms inevitably change, and the reality of implementation makes platforms more of an intention document than a contract. Platforms are a means of informing the public on the direction the party will take if elected. In reality, as David Lindsay points out, some platform ideas are impractical or unrealistic in terms of implementation. As was shared

by all panelists, the public service must execute decisions of the political class whether advised or not. As well, in the right setting, the public service has an opportunity to challenge political leaders to ensure that decisions made have longevity.

A Prepared Public Service: Having a prepared public service allows for a smooth transition from platform to policy, and creates an opportunity for the public service to propose ideas for addressing some of our more complex policy problems. As part of being prepared, Shelly Jamieson spoke about the importance of understanding the budget and campaign platform, dissecting for important and crucial pieces. She also spoke about the public service taking initiative, rather than waiting to simply be directed. Political leadership can learn from the expertise of the public service, and being prepared is an opportunity for knowledge sharing.

POLITICS, BUDGET, POLICY AND INNOVATION

In terms of budgets and platforms impacting policy innovation directly, Jamison Steeve spoke to the need for creating a supportive environment that encourages the government to try new things. As well, in a response to a question about engagement with other public service entities and stakeholders, the panelists unpacked the current state of public service consultation approaches. As allocated time for consultations decreases, there is little opportunity to engage in legitimate consultations, being left with often “comment on what we have done” sessions.

CONCLUSION

At CPIPE, we look forward to sponsoring more events and panel discussions that contribute to an evolving dialogue on policy, innovation, and engagement.

From Around the World: The Policy Lab

Based out of Australia, the University of Melbourne's Policy Lab connects public servants, academics, and policy professionals to explore contemporary challenges in politics and policy making. The Policy Lab works under three main themes including, opinion and expertise in politics and policy, policy systems, and projects that deal with specific issues and policy sectors.

Having launched in 2016, The Policy Lab has been working with governments and organizations to address major policy issues, challenging existing notions of policy making processes and systems. As part of its work, The Policy Lab explores three main questions:

What shapes policy decisions?

How do policy systems and processes operate?

What works in policy design?

Public Sector Innovation Labs in Australia and New Zealand

Innovation labs, units, and teams are not new to Australia, becoming increasingly important within the public sector. They have been established to drive innovation and experimentation in public policy and service design - for example, by adopting more collaborative approaches and employing methods and skills that may not be available in other public sector organizations.

In order to better understand the key characteristics of these units and the different policy areas and approaches they are working on, The Policy Lab is conducting the first large-scale survey of public sector innovation units in Australia and New Zealand. Supported by an Australia and New Zealand School of Government research grant, the survey will be followed with several in-depth case studies of various public sector innovation units. As innovation labs, units, and teams continue to grow, the research project aims to examine their impact on Australia's policy systems.

For more information on the University of Melbourne's Policy Lab, visit their website [here](#).



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

We invite you to bring any initiatives you are leading or special events you are organizing to our attention. We would very much like to profile your work for the broader community.

We would also like to hear from those who are interested in collaborating on a research project on policy innovation labs and hubs in Canada and abroad.

Contact Us

Inquiries can also be sent to the care of:
Prof. Bryan Evans, PhD
Director Centre for Policy Innovation and Public Engagement

<http://www.ryerson.ca/cpipe/>