

ONLINE PUBLIC POLICY ENGAGEMENT

by

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Abstract

This paper considers the use of online public policy engagement as a potential tool for political parties to create sustainable competitive advantage. The analysis draws on business strategy frameworks to review how online policy engagement would affect party operations, supply chains and brand attitudes. Key issues considered include whether public servants or party employees should run the project; how parties can use the data provided by participants to acquire competitive advantages; and a discussion on potential project risks, process design and project costs.

Keywords: online public policy engagement; social media; social networks; participatory democracy.

Executive Summary

Political parties are interesting entities. While many people choose not to become involved in politics, or even to vote in democratic elections, major parties rely on public support. As such, many parties are using social media to engage voters. Once engaged, organizers can attempt to turn online followers into supporters, volunteers and donors.

Pammett and LeDuc (2003) observed that Canadians are “less likely to cast a ballot if they feel they have no influence over government actions.” Offering voters ways to engage with political parties may encourage more British Columbians to become involved in the democratic process.

One way to engage the public would be to use online media to solicit the public’s views on public policy. Such an Online Public Policy Engagement Project (OPPEP) could provide several benefits to politicians. We might infer from Pammett and Leduc’s (2003) work that voters who see a party that is listening to their views and implementing solutions based on public feedback are more likely to support that party and engage in the democratic process. An OPPEP may also draw support for the party from young adults, a segment of voters that is more likely to use social networks (Statistics Canada, 2010) but less likely to vote (Burgar & Monkman, 2010). This would have long-term benefits for parties that can capture younger voters, since most voters choose the same party in subsequent elections (Shachar, 2003). Lastly, parties may be able to recruit some of the participants to become volunteers during election campaigns, increasing the likelihood that the party will succeed in future elections.

Governing parties must recognize that they will someday return to opposition. Therefore, they should resist the temptation to have government employees manage the project. This would hand a fully functional OPPEP over to a rival when the party loses control of government. Further, using government resources to run the project would prevent parties from asking participants to volunteer for partisan activities.

While social media celebrates the ability of everyone to publish opinions, this can pose a risk for parties. Politics evokes strong emotions and a few people react

inappropriately during disagreements, potentially driving away some participants. Open forums also provide an opportunity for special interest groups to hijack the project (Macnamara, Bamford & Betts, 2010) and promote a view not endorsed by the majority.

Evans (2010, p. 17) noted that, “one of the biggest misnomers... is that marketing in the online medium is easy, quick, and cheap.” This project is not without trade-offs. Once a party is paying more attention to the public, it may not be able to lend as much support to the views of cooperating special interest groups. This is important because those groups can bring resources to the election campaign. Cost is another trade-off, since even a modest effort to set up and run an OPPEP would cost approximately \$200,000 per year. Once participants provide suggestions, parties must invest resources to analyse and act on the comments because, as the OECD (2003) notes, participants have a legitimate expectation that leaders will use the feedback provided. It might take a single staff person approximately two weeks to complete all of the work required to ask a question and to follow up on the comments received.

Once the project is running, the party could draw participants into the party fold. Managers will learn what topics interest each participant and could develop individualized marketing materials. Organizers could ask participants to volunteer for the party, a request they may be more likely to accept once they have taken part in the OPPEP. Organizers will only be able to ask participants to volunteer if the party runs the project. Parties cannot use OPPEPs to recruit volunteers if public funds support the project.

Engagement offers a way to find people who are interested in politics and invite them to become involved with a political party. It is also a way to get participants' permission to market to them. This permission could increase the effectiveness of marketing efforts. The many benefits of engaging the public in government policy suggest that party leaders should incorporate such efforts into their online marketing strategies.

Dedication

I dedicate this project to my family who have supported me during my studies. It was not easy for my wife Janet and my sons George and John to have a husband and father focused on studies during my two-year degree. I would also like to recognize my parents who made my studies possible by providing a place to stay on school days and transportation to and from ferry and float plane terminals.

I would also like to thank Minister Margaret MacDiarmid and Minister Shirley Bond who allowed me to undertake these studies while working in their offices.

Lisa Dominato, Michael Harrison, Jay Schlosar and Jeff Hanman deserve recognition for their encouragement and support of my studies. My studies were personally rewarding and I appreciate their willingness to allow me to take on this degree while working at the Legislative Assembly.

Lastly, I would like to thank my interviewees for taking the time to walk me through many of the issues that I needed to address within the project. I received a lot of good advice and many ideas about different directions that I could explore. While I was unable to discuss my chosen approach with them as I had not formulated or considered my strategic options at the time of most of the interviews, they pointed out many important considerations required for this project.

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Glossary

BDN	This acronym stands for Benefits Dependency Network.
Benefits Dependency Network	A cause-effect network map linking tools, business processes and project benefits. This map also assigns responsibility for delivering each item to individual managers (Peppard, Ward & Daniel, 2007).
Caucus	This refers to both the set of MLAs elected from a single party and to the staff organization supporting the caucus.
Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform	A group of randomly selected voters empowered to recommend options for a new electoral system. The recommended option was defeated in two separate referenda (Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, n.d.).
Conversation on Health	A large-scale public consultation initiated by Government in 2006 at a cost of \$10 million (Mickleburgh, 2006). The goal was to identify ways to ensure the public health system would remain sustainable.
Critic	An opposition MLA designated as party spokesperson for a file.
Earned Media	Any media coverage not paid for by the focal entity. Earned media include news stories, letters to the editor and editorial columns. Marketers refer to this as publicity.
e-Democracy	This is the use of online communication technology in political processes to communicate with voters.
Friend Finder Tools	Social networking tools that suggest accounts the user might be interested in following.
Interest Groups	This term refers to special interest groups.
Issue Groups	This term is used to refer to special interest groups.
MLA	Member of the British Columbia Legislative Assembly
Open Platform	A project inviting members of the public to submit ideas that party leaders might consider for inclusion in the campaign platform.

OPPEP	This acronym stands for Online Public Policy Engagement Project.
Organizer	An organizer is either a paid or a volunteer political worker who arranges people or projects.
Party	This is short for political party.
Push Strategy	This term refers to any media effort attempting to push content out to consumers.

1: Introduction

"[I]t is a contradiction in terms: you can be open or you can have government."

Sir Arnold, fictional Cabinet Secretary

BBC Series "Yes Minister" – Open Government

The above quote, from the sitcom *Yes Minister*, highlights an attitude that many people perceive their governing parties to hold. This perception leaves many people feeling voiceless in decisions affecting their daily lives. It also reduces public support for political parties and even the likelihood that an individual will vote (Pammett and LeDuc, 2003). Political parties may be able to change this by inviting people into the decision making process.

Prior to the advent of electronic social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, it could be a difficult and expensive task to hold consultations about potential policy changes. Consultations often meant hearings and town hall meetings would be set up across B.C. in order to study how the suggested policy changes would affect different regions. The province budgeted \$10 million to run one particularly large consultation (Mickleburgh, 2006). Most consultations cost less, but the price of running them can lead decision makers to conduct more informal, cheaper surveys, such as simply getting feedback from a few knowledgeable individuals. This approach can improve the quality of public policy but may leave the average citizen feeling that they have had no say.

Social networks, a form of social media, are providing inexpensive ways to consult voters. One need no longer visit a community to get feedback from local residents. Personal interaction can take place online. This is pushing politicians across the world to consider how they can use social networks to interact with constituents.

Inviting public participation in decision-making provides benefits to parties over and above simply improving the popularity of their platforms. Parties must attract members to earn the donations, volunteer labour and votes needed for success. Involving the public in policy development has the potential to improve performance on all three measures. As people spend more time online, properly designed social media

strategies may improve the odds of electoral success. “Customers have become increasingly suspicious of... online marketing.” (Evans, 2010, p. 19) Asking for input may provide a way to navigate around that suspicion, by earning the trust of engaged citizens along with the permission of participants to market the party to them.

Parties using social media might attract younger voters. Younger Canadians are more likely to use social networks (Statistics Canada, 2010) but are less likely to vote (Menard, 2010). Bugar and Monkman (2010) note that British Columbians aged 20-24 are only 34% likely to cast a ballot. Once people vote for a party, they are very likely to make the same choice in the next election (Shachar, 2003), which makes gaining the votes of young people a long-term advantage for politicians.

Chapter 2 will explore political competition through a business strategy lens to identify success factors that will help to compare different ways to open up an online policy forum. This chapter will also review voter behaviour, along with the social and technological changes affecting politics.

A number of agencies could manage the project on behalf of a party. I will explore which agency should run the project in Chapter 3. This chapter will also look at whether to open the project up to the public or limit participation to invited guests, whether to display feedback and which platforms organizers should use to host the project. Part of the discussion in this chapter will also review how some parties are currently using social media at home and around the world.

Before discussing the detailed design choices required to implement the project, I will review potential risks and mitigation strategies in Chapter 4. Awareness of these risks will allow organizers to avoid or minimize potential consequences.

Chapter 5 will explore detailed OPPEP design choices. It will look at traditional consultation processes, to inform the design of the project. The chapter will finish with a discussion of the next steps that organizers can take to use project data to market the party to participants.

Ultimately, parties must recognize that the project is resource intensive, thus limiting the number of consultations that can be carried out. Therefore, these projects could only provide occasional engagements and should not be a stand-alone social media strategy. The appendix outlines the project costs and underlying assumptions.

This is a fascinating topic that I look forward to reviewing in detail with the reader.

2: Industry Analysis

Electoral politics is an industry. Its products are candidates and platforms which, as Belch, Belch and Guolla (2005, p. 20) noted, can be marketed to voters. Employees are hired, competitors work to earn voter support and the winners form government or sit in opposition. Competitors use many channels to market themselves. Parties have to manage both brand image and supply chains. Therefore, it makes sense to use business strategy frameworks to review the options that competitors might choose when deciding whether to engage citizens through an OPPEP.

This chapter will define the industry, explore competitive behaviour within politics and review success factors. To do this, I will start by reviewing the supply chain to show how parties can create advantages. I will also explore some technological and social changes affecting politics and look at consumer behaviour. Reviewing these topics will develop a clearer understanding of the benefits of holding online policy discussions.

2.1 Industry Definition

Developing an industry definition will help to describe the challenges and opportunities facing parties. Since different players exist in each jurisdiction, the definition is limited to a specific geography. The actions of a party in one province may not influence public perception in another, and sub-national governments rarely invade one another's turf. Additionally, each region has different rules and traditions governing elections. For example, some municipalities have entrenched party systems, while others lack civic parties. Some governments subsidize competitors while others do not. However, much of the following analysis is transferable to other jurisdictions.

Special interest groups insert themselves into the process to advocate for the views of their members and should be included in the industry definition.

I will define the industry to be the set of political parties competing to form government or to win legislative seats in British Columbia, and the special interest groups attempting to influence the result of elections and government decisions.

2.2 Supply Chain

The supply chain illustrated in Figure 1 shows how a party can combine ideas, candidates, volunteers and financial resources to market its product: an option for voters to support. The product is both the candidates and the policy platform. Understanding supply chains will illuminate potential sources of advantage.

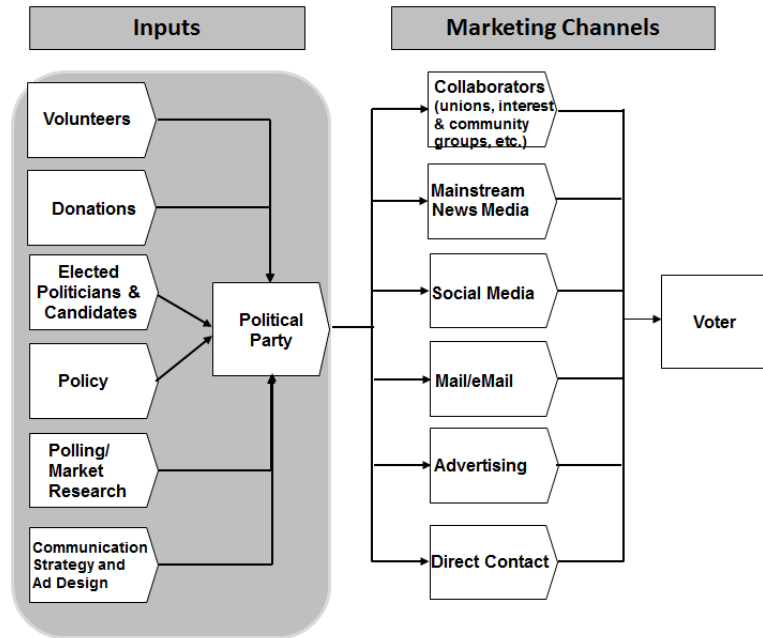


Figure 1 - Industry supply chain

As shown in Figure 1, managers can combine several inputs to market a party. Parties organize large volunteer networks to complete the thousands of tasks that parties must carry out during campaigns. Donors supply the needed financial resources. Parties offer policy platforms and candidates to voters. Each input can help to run a successful campaign.

Organizers use the inputs in Figure 1 to run marketing efforts. As subsequent sections will show, parties can use these inputs and channels to earn public support. Figure 2, located on the following page, shows simplified views of frequently performed marketing tasks that parties perform. I will discuss these processes in further detail throughout this chapter.

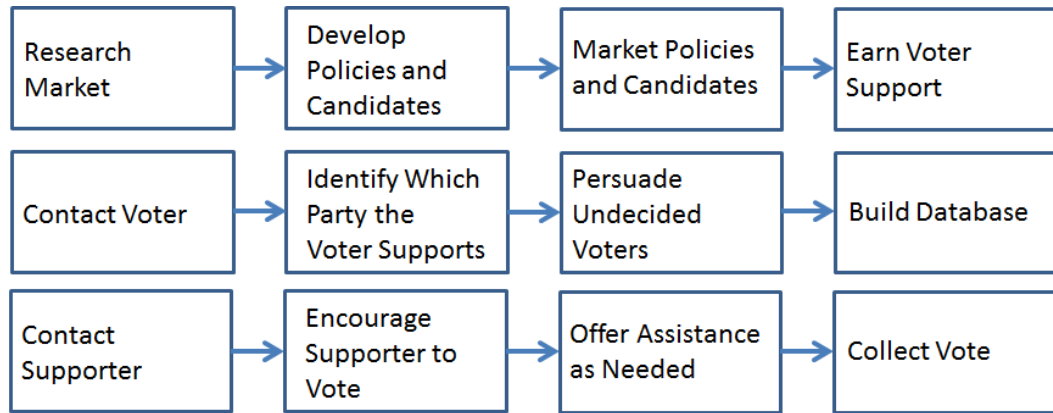


Figure 2 - The marketing processes of political parties

2.2.1 Supply Chain Inputs

As shown in Figure 1 on page 4, parties use many inputs to arrive at the desired outputs of winning legislative seats and earning influence over public policy. Inputs include volunteers, donations, elected officials, candidates, policies, market research and communication strategies. Organizers use these inputs to operate campaign efforts that may convince a voter to mark an x beside the desired name. While some of these inputs depend in part on the others, they are also all somewhat independent. I will describe these inputs in sections 2.2.1.1 – 2.2.1.7 below and show how each influences a target audience – the voter.¹ Understanding the inputs will highlight how OPPEPs could affect each resource and how each resource can be used to influence potential voters.

2.2.1.1 Volunteers

Sayers (1998, p. 67) noted that, “campaign teams must be large enough to fulfil the labour-intensive activities of a campaign.” A dozen or more volunteers may be required in each riding every day during a campaign to carry out the tasks that lead to

¹ Other potential target audiences exist such as journalists, cooperating special interest groups and donors. These other potential targets will be discussed as needed throughout this paper. However, this analysis primarily focuses on how OPPEPs would influence voters since it is ultimately their choices that determine whether a party succeeds.

² With the exception, as noted by Sayers (1998), of the few core workers who manage the campaign.

³ The act allows parties to spend \$4.4 million provincially plus \$70,000 in each riding, indexed to inflation.

⁴ The reader may note that some lobbyists may ‘volunteer’ in expectation of future rewards. Sayers (1998)

victory (at least that is the case in ridings actively contested by the party). These jobs range from putting up signs, to knocking on doors, to running the local office. A riding cannot rely on the same workers every day, since most people have limited time to volunteer.² On voting day, managers may require more than 100 workers per riding to scrutineer at polling stations.

Volunteers are important for many of the marketing efforts that parties use to communicate with voters. They put up signs, phone into radio shows, draft letters to the editor, knock on doors and contact voters. These functions can help to win elections. For example, Nickerson (2005) showed that partisan phone banking could increase voter turnout by over 3%. This can be an advantage if parties contact their supporters.

Many jurisdictions impose campaign-spending limits, thus affecting the ability of parties to substitute paid labour for volunteers. Sections 198 - 201 of B.C.'s *Election Act* (1996) limit a party's province-wide spending to \$10 million during provincial general elections.³ From this amount, each party must purchase advertising, rent office space, pay for their leader's campaign tour, rent computers and software and print brochures. This leaves little room in the budget to pay for many workers. Therefore, while some workers are paid, parties can only hire a fraction of the needed campaign staffers. As with any organization, employees must be motivated to work, but organizers must use non-monetary incentives to motivate unpaid workers.

Unger (1991, p. 72) reports that the research of Mueller and others shows that in general "...volunteers are 'paid' for their work in four ways: the family unit consumes the collective good, the volunteer enjoys a 'selective incentive'..., the family's human capital is improved, or an altruistic motivation is served." Butler and Collins (1994) state that many volunteers are motivated by proximity to power and the ability to contribute to a meaningful cause.⁴ OPPEPs could enable volunteers feel closer to power. Policy engagement may also help potential volunteers to feel like they are contributing to an important cause when they see the party act on the input received through the OPPEP.

² With the exception, as noted by Sayers (1998), of the few core workers who manage the campaign.

³ The act allows parties to spend \$4.4 million provincially plus \$70,000 in each riding, indexed to inflation.

⁴ The reader may note that some lobbyists may 'volunteer' in expectation of future rewards. Sayers (1998) notes that each of the 85 local campaigns needs a large number of volunteers. As of writing this paper, B.C.'s Lobbyist registry only shows 514 registered consultant lobbyists in the previous year, not enough to fill the several thousand jobs required on election day. Further, not all lobbyists volunteer for their lobbying targets. For example, Premier Christy Clark's most recent by-election opponent has declared that he is lobbying her on several issues (Office of the Registrar of Lobbyists for British Columbia, n.d.).

2.2.1.2 Donors

Many parties invest substantial financial resources to win elections. Organizers spend funds on advertising, office space and all the materials needed to mount a credible effort. Parties use donations to fund a variety of voter communications. Since the B.C. government does not subsidize parties, organizers must solicit donations.

As Levitt (1994) noted, potential donors are less likely to contribute to candidates who have less hope of winning. Engaging potential donors through online media and building brand awareness and positive attitudes through online tools can help to raise funds. Section 2.6.2.4 contains details about the fundraising capabilities of each major rival political party.

2.2.1.3 Elected Politicians

It is rare for parties to succeed in an election if none of their members were elected to the Legislature in the previous election. In the past 60 years (17 elections), only five parties have had members elected to the new Legislature after failing to have any of their members elected in the previous campaign. In two of these instances, the successful candidates had all won seats in the previous election under different banners (Elections B.C., 2010; Elections B.C., 2005; Legislative Library of B.C., 2002; Elections B.C. & Legislative Library of B.C., 1998). Elections B.C. (n.d., d) listed 28 parties active in December 2011, yet despite this number of parties, only two parties elected any candidates in the 2009 election.

Having an elected caucus provides a platform for communicating with the public. Representatives can champion causes on behalf of constituents. News media may report on the activities of these representatives and give voice to the ideas they put forward. Tomz and van Houweling noted (2008, p. 304) that “voters choose candidates not only on the issues, but also on... competence, trustworthiness, and other factors.” Elected politicians who perform their jobs well can build a reputation for competence and trustworthiness.

Engaging citizens is one way to unlock the benefits of having elected politicians. Politicians can do this through a variety of forums, including online media. Working with citizens to develop policy can help to build confidence and trust in the political party.

2.2.1.4 Candidates

Successful parties must offer candidates that the public will support. Parties try to attract credible candidates who are prepared to put their lives on hold while they expend the significant time and effort required to win. Sayers (1998, p. 34) noted that it is easier for parties to attract candidates when there is a better chance of winning. Since better candidates are more likely to step forward when the party is more electable, candidate quality depends partly on the other supply chain inputs. Parties may also train their nominated candidates in order to achieve the best possible performance. OPPEPs could help to increase party strength making it easier to attract candidates.

2.2.1.5 Policy

Voters wish to elect candidates whose policies they support. No voter wants to cast a ballot for a party only to see government policies adjusted in ways that they believe are wrong. As a result, parties develop policy platforms that they believe will attract public support. They also work to undermine the popularity of rivals' commitments.

Campaign promises are only an advantage if they are popular enough to improve the odds of winning, yet challenging enough to deter rivals from imitating. An easily imitated policy may provide no advantage since rivals can mimic such positions. Parties work to adopt popular positions that rivals cannot imitate without upsetting a portion of the opponent's support. Such issues, while challenging to identify, can be invaluable on voting day. As an example, tax cuts were popular during the 2001 election (Sullivan, 2001), but they may have been difficult for the then governing party to support. That party had frequently raised taxes during its term in office, so it is unlikely that voters would have believed a promise from the party to cut taxes. Furthermore, many of that party's supporters might have opposed tax cuts. This may be why the rival party at the election attacked tax cuts, noting that taxes pay for public services (Mickleburgh, 2001).

The policy platform is part of brand identity. It may or may not attract people to support the cause. Online engagement can improve the players' abilities to build positive brand identity in potential supporters' minds. That is "where the power of the brand lies", according to Keller (1998, p. 595). Online supporters may also spread awareness of the platform's benefits, expanding the reach of the party's efforts.

2.2.1.6 Polling/Market Research

Successful strategists often obtain research pointing to what voters actually want before drafting policy. While it is desirable to incorporate the feedback of constituents who approach their elected representatives, this introduces selection bias. Input from self-selected individuals may not represent the majority perspective. Clarke (2010, p. 6) notes that social media groups may also contain these biases. More scientific methods, such as polling, can provide better information. Focus groups can also be used to gather ideas about why people react the way they do to various topical issues. As noted by Keller (1998, p. 503), “brands that receive inadequate [research] support... risk becoming out-of-date.” Parties should not risk irrelevance by underinvesting in market research.

Parties demonstrate the importance of market research by the amount of money they invest in this activity. The Liberals invested \$280,000 in polling during the 2009 election year, while the BC NDP spent nearly \$324,000 (BC Liberal Party, 2011, a; BC NDP, 2010). OPPEPs cannot replace market research, since Clarke (2010) noted that online communities might not represent the broader public. However, the comments may provide insight into how people feel about the party, its policies and its candidates.

2.2.1.7 Communications/Ad Design

Communicating through news media can help organizers to achieve their marketing objectives, whether through paid advertising or through news coverage. Research and creative support can make media communications more effective.

Research can help to design successful communication strategies. Politicians do not like surprises that undermine their objectives. A recent example from the NDP’s 2009 election campaign illustrates this point. The party used their planned Earth Day event to attack government for approving run of the river electric power generation projects. This backfired when reporters determined that the former NDP government had approved nearly half of all active run of the river projects (Canadian Press, 2009), a fact that may not have been found by the party’s researchers when planning the event⁵.

A well-researched announcement will not create problems but neither will it

⁵ Alternatively, the fact may have been uncovered by party researchers but discounted during the event planning process. However, this event still shows that acquiring good data and correctly interpreting its significance can improve decision making.

guarantee coverage. Without a gripping story, media may look for another topic that is more likely to sell advertisements. Communication specialists may help craft an appealing story.

Research and communications experts can also help design advertisements. As noted by Belch et al. (2005), most people see or hear over 1000 advertisements per day but perceive fewer than 100 of them. Appealing advertisements are more likely to grab the attention of viewers and break through the clutter of messages that advertisers collectively bombard voters with on a daily basis.

Designing advertisements does not get them published. Parties must purchase airtime and print space from media outlets. The NDP spent nearly \$2 million on advertisements in 2009, while the victorious Liberals invested \$429,000, demonstrating the importance parties place on this function (BC Liberal Party, 2011, a; BC NDP, 2009).

OPPEPs can improve the efficacy of advertisements and other communication efforts. Party communications can get people talking. If they talk with an OPPEP participant who supports the party, they may hear a word-of-mouth referral. Keller (1998, p. 103) noted that 40% of people feel that word-of-mouth recommendations are most important to choosing a brand.

2.2.2 Marketing Channels

Parties employ many marketing channels to communicate with voters, and to build support for their political platform. It is less likely that electors will vote for a party if organizers do not build support for its candidates and platform.

Individual voters use different channels to gather information to inform their decisions. Some base their choice on conversations with friends while others look to news media. Some search social media sources while others get information through a newsletter. A party that is better able to use these channels is more likely to succeed.

Parties need to communicate with voters using channels that voters listen to if they wish to communicate successfully. While B.C.'s voters may be different from the Californians surveyed by Lipsitz, Trost, Grossman and Sides (2006), many voters prefer to receive campaign communications through debates, town hall meetings and call-in shows. While the researchers conducted this study before the rise of social networks, social media share similar features to the forums identified in the study. Earned media,

or publicity, is important too as Belch et al. (2005, p. 9) noted, “consumers tend to be less sceptical toward favourable information” when the source is thought to be unbiased. OPPEPs may become a source of information that some voters will use to inform their choices at the polling station.

2.2.2.1 Collaborators

Special interest groups can pick sides and use their resources to sway voters. Interest groups can carry weight with their members and with the public, as Belch et al. noted above. Groups with credibility and long mailing lists can be valuable allies. Voters can choose to take information provided by special interest groups into account before making their choice at the polling station.

Interest groups can buy advertisements on behalf of candidates that they support. For example, the BC Teachers’ Federation spent \$1.5 million on pro-NDP advertisements during the 2005 election (Fowlie & Rolfson, 2009).

OPPEPs are unlikely to help relationships with collaborators. In fact, as a party listens more to OPPEP participants, it may have to give less weight to collaborators.

2.2.2.2 Mainstream News Media

News media play a significant role in politics. Reporters lend credibility to candidates by reporting on their activities, or make MLAs invisible by ignoring them. Journalists frame issues and choose which stories to report. Unfortunately, Miljan and Cooper (2003, p. 172) found “strong evidence that the individual views of journalists do influence the way they cover the news” in their study of Canadian journalists.

A recent poll showed that 32% of Canadians trust journalists (Pearce, 2010). This is a sizable portion of the electorate, given that a small portion of the vote can decide the winner. To paraphrase Belch et al.’s 2005 (p. 9) observation, consumers are generally less sceptical of positive information about a product received from a source perceived to be unbiased. As a result, parties maintain communications teams to present stories that will attract the interest of reporters. These teams also train candidates in how to respond to questions to avoid, or get out of, trouble.

Policy engagement programs may or may not influence news reporters directly. Journalists may or may not choose to take part in an OPPEP. Some might be cynical,

while others are supportive. As noted above, their views can influence their coverage. However, if OPPEPs facilitate better policy development, then fewer media issues may arise. This may lead more journalists to become personally supportive of the party (or at least devote less time to highlighting problems).

2.2.2.3 Social Media

As with any new medium, many politicians have looked at ways to employ social networks. Unlike mainstream media, social networks allow politicians to reach constituents, in a way that is unfiltered by reporters. However, politicians can only reach voters if people are listening. I will discuss some contemporary political uses of social media in section 3.1.

Clarke (2010) noted that Canadians are increasingly using online sources to inform their decisions. Veenhof and Timusk (2009) found that internet use is increasing amongst all age groups and that by 2007 more than 70% of those between the ages of 15 and 64 used the internet. Statistics Canada (2010) recently reported that 58% of Canadians use social networks, and that this number is skewed toward younger age groups as shown in Figure 3. More Canadians are likely to use online tools in the future as younger people age which will increase the potential size of the OPPEP audience. A larger audience would enable an OPPEP to have more impact on the electorate.

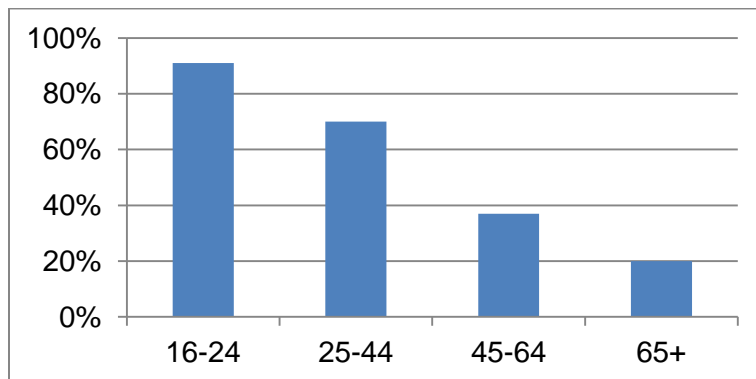


Figure 3 - Social network use by age group, adapted from Statistics Canada (2010)

2.2.2.4 Direct Mail/email

Lipsitz et al. (2005) noted that very few voters prefer to learn about a political campaign through political mail. Gerber et al. (2003) found that eight pieces of mail increased the likelihood of getting someone to vote by 1%. This margin separated the major parties in four ridings during the last election (Elections BC, 2010). Therefore, parties should continue to use this tool in tight races.

2.2.2.5 Mass Advertising

It is often not enough to rely on news media to get a message out. Belch et al. (2005, p. 418) note that publicity typically only lasts for a short time. Candidates who want to frame an issue for an extended period might use advertising to ensure that voters hear the message often enough for it to really become familiar. Section 2.2.1.7 provides a more thorough discussion of the role of advertising in political communication. Politicians are now advertising on new media in addition to more traditional formats.

OPPEPs could increase the impact of advertising. Advertisements may generate conversation, and if voters talk with an OPPEP participant, they may get a word of mouth referral that Belch et al. (2005) noted is important to many people's decision-making process.

2.2.2.6 Direct Contact (Door Knocking, Telephoning, Events and Debates)

Direct contact can help to swing elections. In a controlled experiment, Nickerson (2005) found that partisan phone banking increases the rate of voting by 3.2%, a margin that decided 10 ridings in the 2009 B.C. provincial election (Elections BC, 2010). Pattie and Johnston (2003) found that face-to-face canvassing had a statistically significant effect during the 1997 British election. Therefore, a party can sway the outcome of a close election by convincing more supporters to vote in close ridings. Direct contact can also help to identify which party an individual voter supports.

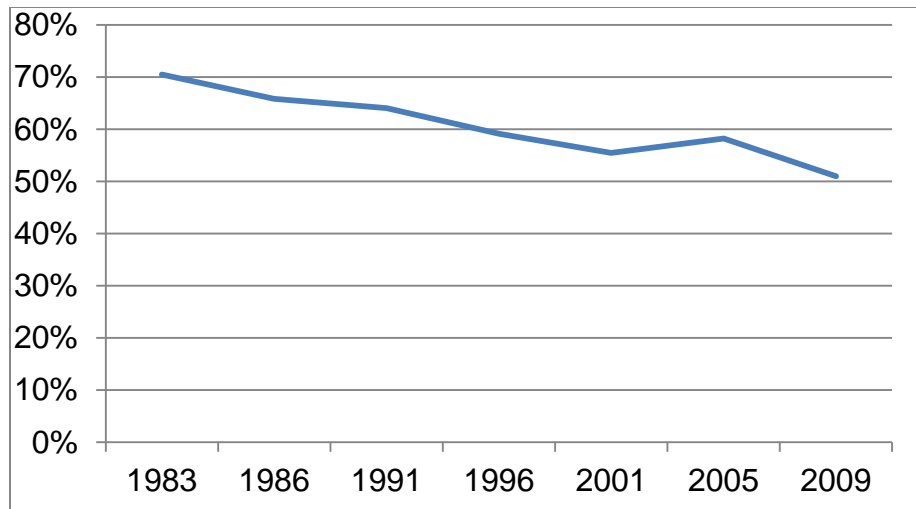


Figure 4 - B.C. voting rate by provincial election, adapted from Elections BC, *Statistics and Surveys* (n.d., c)

As shown in Figure 4, fewer eligible voters are exercising their right to vote. Just half of eligible voters cast ballots in 2009. Low turnout means that a party can win with only minority support, so long as its supporters actually vote. In fact, the NDP could have won the last election with only 5,700 more votes, provided each ballot pushed the ten closest ridings just over the edge. This represents only 0.34% of all ballots cast in an election the party lost by nearly 4% of all valid votes⁶ (Elections BC, 2010). Many parties build databases to track support so that they can focus on encouraging supporters to come out and vote.⁷ OPPEPs can help attract the volunteers needed to identify voter support and to push voters to the polling station.

2.2.3 Final Thoughts on the Supply Chain

The preceding discussion has shown the importance of many inputs and marketing channels to the operations of political parties. This analysis showed that some are important while others, such as mail, are relatively ineffective.

⁶ A similar event happened in 1996. The NDP secured 39% of the vote and defeated the Liberals who secured 42% support during the election (Legislative Library of BC, 2002).

⁷ While beyond the scope of this paper, some parties have reportedly gone so far as to purchase marketing data and developing niche database marketing strategies (Cillizza, 2007). Others simply use databases to track voter contacts so that identified supporters can be encouraged to vote.

Using an OPPEP would have positive or neutral impacts on most of the inputs and channels, as shown in Figure 10. Since OPPEPs may improve relationships with volunteers and strengthen public perception of the party’s platform, they represent an opportunity to improve links in the supply chain. The next sections will explore social and technological changes, along with voter and competitor behaviour. Combining these items with the supply chain will inform a consequent discussion of sources of advantage.

2.3 Voter Behaviour

Levine (2005, p. 63) pessimistically noted that, “there is little research to help us understand how each individual follower decides which leader will receive the sought-after vote.” However, there is still some data available to help our understanding of this component of electoral politics. In addition to research on voter behaviour, we can use marketing and brand management research to derive further insight into voter choice.

Tomz and van Houweling noted (2008, p. 304) that “voters choose not only on the issues, but also on charisma, competence, trustworthiness...” Therefore, parties should improve public perception of their leadership and their perceived ability to manage key files.

Parties can identify segments of the population and develop consistent platforms targeting the segments. Table 1 shows a benefit segmentation and Table 2, located on page 16, shows how people are likely to vote based on those benefits, if they are only voting based on a single issue. Unfortunately, more demographic data about the likely members of each segment are not available from the Angus Reid Public Opinion (2012) survey. However, older voters are more likely to care about hospital services (Parliament of Canada, n.d.) while families with

Table 1 - Voter priorities, adapted from Angus Reid Public Opinion (2012, p. 7)

What do you think is the most important issue facing British Columbia today?	
	Total
Economy	27%
Health Care	21%
Leadership	7%
Poverty	7%
Tax Relief	6%
Environment	6%
Education	5%
Housing	4%
Homelessness	4%
Crime/ Public Safety	3%
Drug Traffic/ Drug Use	3%
Municipal Funding, Services & Powers	2%
Day Care / Child Care	1%
Energy / Electricity	1%
Aboriginal Affairs	1%
Other	3%

young children may care more than other segments about education. However, there are no hard and fast rules. For example, a newly retired teacher may vote on education issues despite having no children. These segments shift over time as Chapter 5 will show.

Table 2 - Relative rankings of party leaders on major issues, adapted from Angus Reid Public Opinion (2012, p. 6)

Which of these leaders is best suited to deal with each of the following issues?

	Health					Federal/
	Crime	Care	Economy	Environment	Education	Provincial Relations
Christy Clark	19%	20%	24%	14%	21%	27%
Adrian Dix	20%	33%	23%	22%	30%	21%
John Cummins	16%	7%	12%	5%	7%	13%
Jane Sterk	2%	4%	3%	26%	4%	2%
None of them	10%	10%	9%	8%	9%	8%
Not Sure	32%	26%	29%	25%	29%	29%

Across these market segments, there are six major groups of customers or non-customers facing each party: members, supporters, independent voters, non-voters and supporters

and members of rival parties. These segments form a spectrum shown in Figure 5. Organizers achieve victory by getting enough members, supporters and independent voters to endorse the party so that it can sit in opposition or form government. Rival supporters should not be a big focus since it is hard to persuade them to switch (Shachar, 2003).

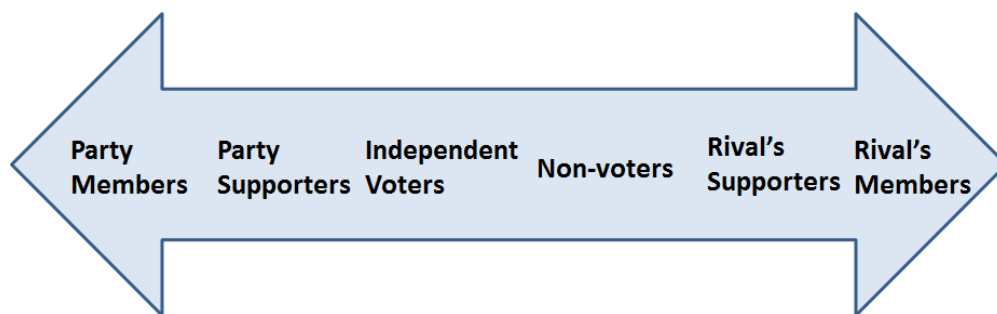


Figure 5 - Basic customer segments

Each party's goal is to move voters to more supportive segments. Parties also

work to increase the likelihood that members volunteer for or donate to the party. Party organizers do this by identifying political and policy positions that will achieve the party's goals, preferably positions that rivals cannot imitate without alienating some of their supporters. Figure 6 describes some potential goals that parties might have for each segment.

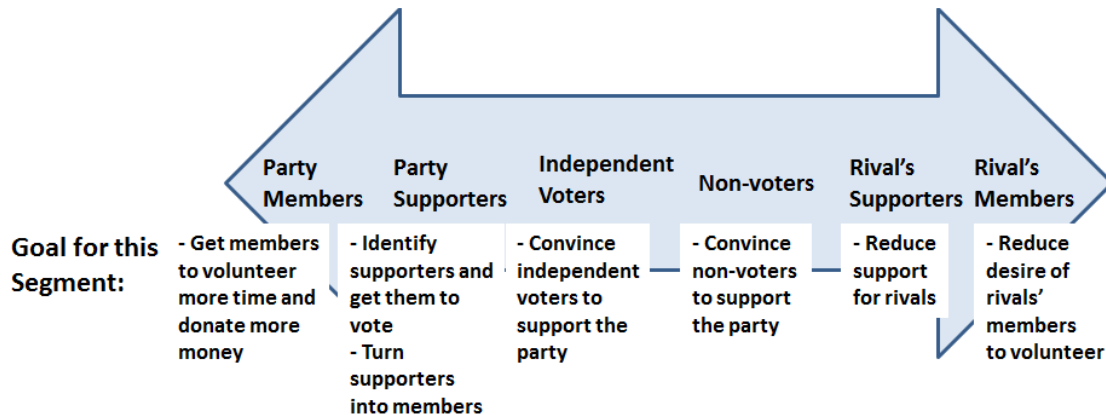


Figure 6 - Possible party goals for each segment

Most parties direct resources to identifying supportive constituents and to getting them to the polls. Parties' efforts to convince opposing voters to change their choices are often less fruitful. As noted by Butler and Collins (1994), a voter's "first electoral choices tend to be enduring." Shachar (2003) came to a similar conclusion saying: "In most democracies, two out of any three individuals vote for the same party in sequential elections". Since potential voters are only 50% likely to vote, after developing and communicating a platform, parties should direct substantial effort to increasing the numbers of their supporters who vote. OPPEPs can help attract members and convince people to become party supporters.

Fringe parties become problematic if a third party siphons off enough support to cost a major party seats. It is debatable how often this happens. There were frequent allegations, during the 1990s, that the Conservative and Reform parties split votes thus handing majorities to the federal Liberals (see for instance Thorsell, 1995). However, voters supporting a third party might have been unwilling to support another party as shown in the 2000 and 2004 elections. During the 2000 federal election, the

Progressive Conservatives and Alliance parties earned a combined 56% of votes cast in B.C. This declined to 36% in 2004 after the parties merged (Elections Canada, 2004; Elections Canada, 2001).

The fact that most voters choose the same party in consecutive elections helps to reduce the threat new parties entering the contest. Strategic voting further limits the threat of entry. As shown by Merolla and Stephenson (2007), up to 15% of Canadians vote for their second choices meaning that even if a voter prefers a minor party, they may vote for a major party simple because the ballot would have a better chance of influencing the election.

Brand awareness appears to be high among consumers. Angus Reid (2012, p. 6) shows that 75% of voters have a definite perception of who would make the best premier. I suspect that many of the remaining 25% of voters are also aware of the major party brands. While it is possible that people are forming opinions without being aware of the brand, it is more likely that people formed these perceptions based on their brand awareness.

Keller (1998) suggests that it is important to increase the perceived benefits provided by the brand when awareness is high. When this is the case, Belch et al. (2005, p. 124) state that improving perception of salient beliefs is important. They go on to state that many consumers select a brand based on the formula:

$$\text{Attitude} = \sum (\text{Belief}_i * \text{Importance}_i)$$

where Belief_i is the individual's belief about the product's ability to satisfy a voter's need and Importance_i is the relative importance of that attribute. Keller (p. 100) noted that brand attitude could form the basis of brand choice. However, as noted earlier, some voters will vote for their second choice, possibly because the ability to win is an attribute that factors into their selection.

2.4 Competitor Behaviour

Understanding competitor behaviour helps to identify how managers should select and frame OPPEP questions. This section will also describe, at a high level, what kind of voter each party attracts and which topics appeal to those voters. Chapter 5 discusses topic selection in more detail.

The previous sections showed how parties can manage supply chains to gain

advantages over rivals. In addition to operating supply chains to manage voter identification and persuasion, rivalry in politics involves taking differentiated positions in order to appeal to voters. Parties work to identify and claim popular positions and to make their existing positions more popular. Unlike many other industries, where it is possible to operate profitably by identifying and serving a niche, politics requires that support be substantial enough to elect representatives. This often means identifying a number of voter segments and the positions that can satisfy each group.

B.C.'s two main parties adopt two competing platforms to appeal to different segments of the voters. Throughout the rest of this section, I will appropriate Mark Wexler's terminology, from his work *Leadership in Context, The Four Faces of Capitalism* (2005), to describe how the two main B.C. parties position themselves.

The mission statement of the BC Liberals party proclaims that it is a "free enterprise party" and that its first key priority is to "promote private sector job creation and competitiveness" (BC Liberals, n.d., b). The party clarifies this priority by stating that it means enhancing rather than impairing the ability of business to create jobs. This is analogous to the entrepreneurial worldview described by Wexler that appeals to voters who believe that markets offer the best solutions. While not wanting to eliminate government, adherents of this view prefer that regulation be limited in favour of market solutions. The party has cut government regulations by more than a third, in support of this view (Ministry of Finance, 2011).

Individual choice and market solutions are important to this view. This platform appeals to people who believe that the role of government is to provide essential public services but otherwise to stand back and let businesses create jobs and prosperity. Allies include many businesses and industry associations. While the resulting distribution of wealth may lead to the creation of both 'haves' and 'have-nots', adherents believe the system will maximize wealth and ensure that everyone has a chance (at least in theory).

The NDP's web site states that "social and economic justice [are its] guiding principles" (BC NDP, n.d., a). The party believes government should actively reduce inequality, placing the party in Wexler's regulatory worldview. Wexler (2005) argues that adherents to this worldview do not like the unequal distribution of wealth endorsed by the entrepreneurial view. Party leader Adrian Dix has confirmed his preference for a more equitable wealth distribution on a number of occasions (see for instance Dix, 2011).

According to Wexler, this worldview holds that government leadership should look to regulation to create stability, to prevent problems from occurring and to limit the unfairness of the entrepreneurial view's solutions. In this approach, the party has found natural allies in the labour movement.

The NDP has also been able to promote a social justice agenda to appeal to adherents of the communitarian worldview, described by Wexler. Many feel the NDP competes with the Green Party for votes, including Green Party leader Jane Sterk (Burrows, 2012). However, it is not clear how many Green voters would vote for the NDP if their preferred party did not exist.

2.5 PESTs

A number of political, economic, social and technological (PESTs) forces shape politics. Parties must adapt if they wish to be meaningful in tomorrow's landscape.

Section 2.2.1.1 has already discussed one of the most important political factors: campaign-spending limits. Other rules set by government include the length of the campaign period, reporting requirements, and the voter data supplied by Elections BC.

The economic factors shaping the industry are interesting but not particularly important in terms of OPPEPs.

Social factors, such as changing demographics, are important. The well-noted phenomenon of more people spending more time online may make people more open to participating in OPPEPs. Clarke (2010) noted that voters are increasingly using online media to inform voting decisions. As highlighted in Figure 3, located on page 13, Statistics Canada (2010) showed most Canadian youth are using social networks, making this a potential forum to reach first time voters.

Social factors change over time. "Effective brand management requires proactive strategies to maintain or enhance brand equity in the face of change" (Keller, 1998, p. 501). I will discuss the importance of adapting the brand in section 2.6.1.3. It is important for parties to keep up with changing social attitudes if they wish to stay relevant to their target voters.

The technological factors affecting politics are interesting. In the past, people had fewer media sources to inform their voting decisions compared to today. Now, social networks are playing a role in educating the public about current events. Because

of this, politicians can reach the masses directly through the internet (if the masses choose to listen).

Technology is also opening up the possibility of niche marketing. Marketing firms are building databases that outline significant demographic, economic and social data about individual voters.⁸ Marketers can use these databases to identify potential customers and to classify them by segment. Political parties can do the same and can send targeted messaging that will help to appeal to each voter. Parties using this marketing technology may be more likely to succeed in the future. OPPEP participants will provide information that parties can use for this kind of marketing effort by informing the party of which topics interest individual participants.

2.6 Sources of Advantage

The industry analysis points to sources of advantage that fall into two categories: customer utility advantages, which are the ways a party can differentiate itself, and cost advantages that allow a party to operate efficiently. These advantages will allow us to compare strategic options to host OPPEPs.

Table 3 highlights some of the industry's success factors. These factors line up with the advantages noted by Tomz and van Houweling, as cited in section 2.3. The cost advantages come from factors cited in Sayers (1998) work and research cited in the following sections. The advantages are not weighted in light of Levine's (2005, p. 63) finding that "there is little research to help us understand how each individual

Table 3 - Sources of advantage for parties

Customer Utility Advantages
Party Leadership
Record in Office
Platform/Policies
Cost Advantages
Ability to gain positive news media coverage
Ability to attract volunteers
Fundraising Abilities
Links to collaborators (trade unions, community groups, interest groups, etc)
Local MLA
Ability to move volunteers to swing ridings
Ability to communicate directly with the voter through social media, email or canvassing

⁸ While beyond the scope of this paper, some parties have reportedly gone so far as to purchase marketing data and developing niche database marketing strategies (Cillizza, 2007). Others simply use databases to track voter contacts so that identified supporters can be encouraged to vote.

follower decides” who to vote for. Different voters may decide how to cast their ballot based on a number of factors and different parties may extract value from their operations in numerous ways. Instead of weighting the factors, I will use these sources of advantage to identify trends and graphically display the relative advantages of various options.

2.6.1 Customer Utility Advantages

Parties can offer many utility advantages in their struggle to give voters a reason to vote for them. Three major utility advantages are leadership, the record in office and the platform. These three line up with Tomz and van Houweling’s (2008) observations about voter choice.

2.6.1.1 Party Leadership

Leadership is an important advantage to parties in B.C.’s politics. Our Westminster-style government grants executive power to the leader who wins the most seats in the house. A voter cannot vote separately for a local representative and a premier and most people are more concerned about who leads government. Blais et al. (n.d.) confirmed this to be the case for English Canada, when they found that the local candidate plays a decisive role for only 5% of voters. OPPEPs would provide an opportunity to influence perceptions of party leadership.

2.6.1.2 Record in Office

Voters can use party records to judge if potential leaders have the right vision and the ability to turn it into a reality. Past performance falls under the competence and trustworthiness categories that Tomz and van Houweling (2008) noted factor into voter decision making. This means that a party’s record in office can be an advantage, or disadvantage in this sector. Voters know that usually only one party will control government and they may look at each team’s record to determine which will do the best job. Many voters use historical performance to predict future behaviour. However, history is only relevant for a limited time. Skilfully used, an OPPEP might improve participants’ attitudes toward a party’s record.

2.6.1.3 Platform and Policies

Platforms provide a source of differentiation since many voters look at promises before deciding how they will vote. More than half of Canadians consider campaign promises before casting a ballot, according to a Nanos Research poll reported by CTV (2011). An important advantage is the ability to adapt platforms to changing public views. This is difficult because, as Keller (1998) noted, it is hard to change voters' brand associations once they are established; however, Belch et al (2005) noted that it is important to adapt the brand to ensure that it stays relevant to consumers.

Tomz and van Houweling's (2008) study found that most voters, 58% in their estimate, prefer policies that closely match the voter's goal. The study also found that 28% of voters appeared to discount candidate positions as not entirely realistic and then chose candidates whose discounted position is closest to the voter's preference. The remainder appeared to perceive issues as two-sided and choose based on which side the voter prefers. This means that parties should adopt policies that closely match the preference of the party's target voter segments, including on OPPEPs.

An OPPEP could improve the party's chances in two ways in this context. First, it could help a party to develop policy that is more supportable. Second, it might improve attitudes towards the platform amongst participants, who may then share their perceptions with friends and neighbours.

2.6.2 Cost and Resource Advantages

The fact that voting is free prevents price competition. However, parties search for cost advantages that allow them to get the most from operations. Cost advantages allow parties to reach more voters and to persuade them to elect their candidates.

B.C.'s election spending limits (discussed in section 2.2.1.1) force parties to be efficient. Elections BC, the independent non-partisan agency that oversees provincial elections in B.C., enforces these limits, as one former cabinet minister recently found out when he was fined for exceeding the limit (Heed v. The Chief Electoral Officer of B.C., 2011). A party can achieve several cost advantages.

2.6.2.1 Ability to Garner Positive Media Coverage

One way to market utility benefits to voters is to earn free news coverage. Sitting

governments always have two advantages in this context: their control of public spending and the advantage of having more elected politicians than rivals.

The ability to control public spending allows the holder to create and announce new government programs. Opposition politicians do not have this advantage. Governments can implement and take credit for popular ideas. Further, the fact that government can surprise the opposition with announcements means that opponents have a limited time to formulate a response before press deadlines.

Being able to control public spending is not always an advantage. Governments must sometimes make unpopular spending cuts during a recession, or face the unpleasant challenge of running a deficit and appearing to be fiscally incompetent.

Having more elected politicians means that a party has more voices giving its side of the story to newspapers. This means that voters are more likely to hear a party's message when that party has more representatives.

OPPEPs provide a way around poor media coverage, by directly communicating with supporters. They may also improve policy limiting the time spent putting out fires, which in itself can generate poor publicity.

2.6.2.2 Ability to Attract Volunteers

As discussed in section 2.2.2.6, only 50% of people voted in the most recent provincial election in B.C. Parties can improve their odds by increasing the number of supporters who actually vote. In theory, a party could win a majority of votes in every riding with only 13% of popular support, so long as each of those supporters casts a ballot during the election. Volunteers can help in this regard by identifying supporters and urging them to vote. Nickerson (2005) showed that partisan phone banking could increase voter turnout by just over 3%. This can help to decide a close election, if the right voters are contacted, i.e. those that support the party.

This advantage depends in part on the other sources of advantage. Some parties hold greater appeal to potential volunteers while others have less. However, the more popular a party is, the more likely it is to attract people interested in volunteering for the cause. Marketing through OPPEPs could help to attract and retain more volunteers.

2.6.2.3 Ability to Move Volunteers to Swing Ridings

As discussed in section 2.2.1.1 on volunteers, unpaid labourers are critical to success in electoral politics. However, a volunteer in a close riding matters more than one in a sure riding.

Most of the province's 85 electoral districts are solidly behind one party or another. Twenty-four MLAs won their seats by more than 25% of the vote in the 2009 election and a further 24 MLAs won by margins between 15% and 25% (Elections BC, 2010). It makes little sense to use hundreds of volunteers in ridings that the party is going to win or lose by a landslide. Thus, moving volunteers to seats that are more marginal can make a difference in the ways described in section 2.2.1.1. Moving workers is difficult because many volunteers may prefer to work for candidates they know personally (Sayers, 1998). Candidates may also become upset if the central party moves volunteers to other ridings.

OPPEPs may help in this respect by building an engaged audience that may be more receptive to invitations to volunteer on key ridings. However, OPPEPs run by individual candidates would be likely to build attachment to those candidates and make matters worse.

2.6.2.4 Fundraising Capabilities

While fundraising is not a cost advantage, the ability to raise money reduces the need to be efficient. Levitt's research (1994) found that the ability to raise funds depends, at least partly, on many of the other success factors. Laws imposing campaign-spending limits, such as Division 5 of B.C.'s *Election Act* (1996), limit any obtainable advantage in this respect as discussed in section 2.2.1.1.

Some parties appeal more to donors while others have more difficulty raising donations. In addition, some parties put more effort into fundraising. The B.C. Liberals raised \$9.6 million in 2010 compared with \$4 million raised by the NDP, \$139,000 raised by the Green Party and \$61,000 raised by the Conservatives (BC Liberal Party, 2011, b; BC NDP, 2011; Green Party, 2011; BC Conservative Party 2011). This shows the disparity in funds raised and the advantage that parties can obtain in this context. OPPEPs may help parties improve this measure by developing better policy that would attract potential donors.

2.6.2.5 Elected Representatives

Having a local elected representative who can speak with community groups, voters and local media outlets is an advantage. MLAs can build public support both for themselves and for the party while receiving a public salary. Elected representatives can meet with their constituents and community groups to help solve their problems and advance the public interest. This activity helps to build support. Also, as identified in section 2.2.1.3, having more elected officials helps to gain positive media coverage.

2.6.2.6 Links to Collaborators

Marketers stress the importance of the five Cs, including collaborators.⁹ As shown in section 2.2.2.1, collaborators are also important in politics, since they can gain media attention, provide donations and attract volunteers. Important potential collaborators include unions, community groups and interest groups. OPPEPs pose a risk to links with collaborators. Inviting the public into decision-making might reduce the privileged status that parties may grant to some collaborators.

2.6.2.7 Ability to Communicate Directly with the Public

It takes skill to draft communication materials that can get traction. I am not only referring to press releases, since newsletters, advertisements, and videos matter too. Governing parties have an advantage in this respect. Governments can implement new policies and programs that politicians can announce with much fanfare. These announcements can be supported with press releases, video clips and informational packages developed by government communication officers. Opposition parties must rely on their smaller caucus staffs, while fringe parties receive no public financing. Engagement projects would provide a reason for more voters to pay attention. The engaged OPPEP audience may be more interested in these party communications.

2.6.3 Concluding Thoughts on Sources of Advantage

There are millions of potential voters in B.C. and it is not possible for a party to contact each one directly; nor is it possible through that contact to convince each to change their preferences. Therefore, the utility advantages would seem to be more

⁹ The other four Cs are company, customer, competitor and context. Silk (2006) provides a detailed discussion of these topics.

important since Tomz and van Houweling (2008) note that these form the basis of voter choice. However, cost advantages can also help as shown by the research cited in section 2.6.2 of this paper.

On the cost advantage side, I would give low weight to fundraising capabilities in light of Levitt's (1994) research. Since a party's goal usually is to convince a large number of voters to support it over rivals, this paper will place greater weight on those advantages that enable communication with many people. This only leaves out the ability to move volunteers to swing ridings. This is important, but the research of Sayers (1998) showed that this could be difficult if the volunteer has a personal attachment to the candidate. Therefore, while advantageous, it can be difficult to achieve and only applies to swing ridings.

An OPPEP should ideally improve all of the sources of advantage. Chapter 3 will look at several different ways to implement an OPPEP before comparing each on the sources of advantage. Ideally, one of these options for implementing the OPPEP will be clearly better on each source of advantage, however, the real world is complicated and an option that is better for one source of advantage may be worse for another. If trade-offs are observed within the options presented in Chapter 3, managers should prefer those that improve utility advantages, and use cost advantages (minus fundraising) to break ties. Within the cost advantages, the ability to attract volunteers would be a good goal for the party to improve, since it is possible to get online participants to become real world volunteers. Chapters 3 and 5 will explore these ideas in greater detail.

2.7 Key Insights

Traditional channels that parties use to communicate with voters include direct contact¹⁰ through telephone and door knocking, mass media, and flyers. News media may report on the party in unfavourable ways and the other traditional methods can be labour intensive. However, social networks are emerging as tools that allow politicians to speak directly with those voters who choose to listen. Parties can directly reach supporters en masse through social media, increasing supporters' willingness to support the party and become involved as volunteers.

We have seen that many voters choose how to vote based on the advantages

¹⁰ Direct contact occurs both through politicians and through paid and voluntary workers.

described earlier in this paper. Any party wishing to improve their standing should look to improve these sources of advantage. An OPPEP could improve the participants' perception of the party, creating word of mouth referrals.

On the cost advantage side, Nickerson (2005) provides strong evidence that volunteers in close ridings can make the difference between victory and defeat, if they perform the right activities. The OPPEP can help to build relationships with potential volunteers, thus improving this source of advantage.

The research cited under the analysis of sources of advantage and the supply chain helps to sort out which factors are more important. This will help to compare the strategic options to open a public policy dialogue. In particular, this paper will give more weight to utility advantages, the ability to attract volunteers and cost advantages that enable mass communications. Chapter 3 will explore these topics in more detail.

Statistics Canada (2010) showed that most Canadian youth of voting age use social networks. Using social networks to engage youth could help to win their first votes. Shachar (2003) showed that first choices are enduring for most voters in western democracies. Winning first-time voters may create a long-term sustainable advantage.

3: Strategic Options

Many elected politicians already use social media in a variety of different ways. I will explore some of these uses in section 3.1. This will help me place the OPPEP into the context of existing political uses of social media before devoting the rest of the chapter to reviewing the strategic alternative ways that parties could set up an OPPEP. I will evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of each option against the criteria outlined in section 2.6.

There are three major decisions to make once a party decides to implement an OPPEP. The first is whether to allow anyone to provide feedback, or else to keep the project limited to invited participants. The second is whether to display feedback or to keep submissions private. Table 5, located on page 34, shows the advantages and disadvantages of these choices, which are discussed in detail in sections 3.2 to 3.4. The third decision concerns the question of which agency should oversee the project. Possible overseers include party headquarters, but publicly funded agencies such as caucus communications or the civil service could manage the project on behalf of a party. This chapter will explore these decisions, as well as the question of which online channels should host the project. Later chapters will discuss risk mitigation strategies and project design.

3.1 Examples of New Media and Policy Engagement in Politics

At home and across the world, parties are exploring how to use new media to reach voters. Before discussing the strategic options to implement an OPPEP, I will review some related political projects covering both social media and policy engagement. Some policy engagement projects run offline, while many uses of new media do not seek feedback on policy ideas. These projects will provide ideas that will inform this chapter and later sections.

3.1.1 Open Platforms

The BC Liberals ran an “Open Platform” before the 2009 election (BC Liberal

Party, n.d., a). This project was similar to an OPPEP, except in the respect that the party did not ask specific questions. Instead, the Open Platform allowed people to contribute ideas on any topic, for potential inclusion in the liberal platform. Party organizers received and reviewed more than 1,500 submissions.

Open platforms do not guide people to think about the problems the party is trying to solve. It is a matter of chance whether a submission deals with a problem that organizers will prioritize and try to solve. This means that a participant may prepare a thoughtful analysis, only to see nothing happen as a result. The participant might then feel slighted and the party would miss an opportunity to get feedback on an issue that it specifically is trying to solve. An OPPEP could supplant a future open platform.

3.1.2 Obama's 2008 campaign

Harfoush's book (2009) talks about her experience on the US presidential candidate Barack Obama's 2008 campaign's social media team. Not only did Obama win the Democratic Party nomination over rival candidate Clinton, he decisively won the general election, with 365 Electoral College votes to the 173 votes gained by Republican Party candidate McCain. The campaign team used new media to attract online followers and went one-step further; it motivated followers to act in the offline world. Many have attributed his success, in part, to the use of social media (Aaker & Chang, 2009).

Ms. Harfoush discussed how the team motivated offline action. Studies have shown that offline activities can have a significant impact on electoral results. Nickerson (2005) showed that partisan phone banking could provide an important boost in tight races. Obama's team divided the voters list and had online volunteers contact small portions of the list to identify which party they supported in order to build a list of Democratic Party voters. The team also contacted Obama supporters to encourage them to vote on polling day. Social media participants received a small list of names, perhaps as few as five, making this an easier way of volunteering when compared to going into a campaign office.

Obama's team also used social media to build crowds at events. Larger crowds can help to create the appearance of proximity to power and a contribution to a meaningful cause that, Butler and Collins (1994) noted, attracts volunteers.

The team built a scoring system that volunteers could use to prove their

commitment. The campaign awarded volunteers points for activities such as fundraising or performing voter identification. The points had expiry dates so volunteers had to continue working to maintain their rankings. Some unpaid workers received other rewards, such as exclusive campaign event tickets or invitations to other activities.

These uses of online media are important for all parties to consider. An OPPEP can build a list of supporters that parties could motivate to carry out volunteer work. Ideally, the engagement project would attract new volunteers to the party which would increase the number of workers available to carry out campaign tasks.

3.1.3 Conservative Policy Forum

Britain's Conservative Party runs the "Conservative Policy Forum" (CPF). This is an offline version of an OPPEP. Members read background information pieces, commonly known as backgrounders, on policy topics, and then local branches meet to discuss ideas. Each local group submits its ideas to the party for consideration by the minister responsible for the topic.

This approach could strengthen local riding associations across the country. It provides social interaction that, as Unger (1991) notes, motivates volunteers. The CPF also engages political volunteers by bringing them closer to power and helping them to contribute to a significant cause, which, as Collins and Butler (1994) note, are important motivations for political volunteers. The CPF may also keep local networks strong, a challenge noted by Sayers (1998).

The CPF has one disadvantage when compared with OPPEPs. Online forums allow people to participate when convenient. This is important in an era of dual income families that may be unable to come to events. Single parents would likewise have similar difficulties. On balance, I suspect the CPF will pay dividends for the party and outsiders should therefore pay attention.

3.1.4 The NDP Facebook and Twitter Strategy

Galloway (2011) noted that the federal NDP had a social media strategy that incorporated Twitter feeds, an iPhone app and QR coding. The NDP used these tools during the federal election to help supporters get information about the party. While other factors were at play during the election, the party achieved a victory and moved from fourth place in the House of Commons to second.

Surprisingly, the provincial NDP's strategy seems less advanced. While the party invited Rahaf Harfoush, who wrote a book about her experience on Obama's social media team, to speak at the party's 2009 B.C. convention, the BC NDP's Twitter and Facebook accounts do not seem to act on some of the recommendations offered in her book. Table 4 below shows that the party's Facebook account seems to only push messages out to supporters, rather than ask followers to become more involved with the party.

Table 4 - Comparison of Facebook uses - January 1, 2012 - March 7, 2012

	Share a press release or statement	Share media coverage	Event Invitation	Ask followers to join party or volunteer	Share multi-media Content	Encourage followers to connect with other followers	Other
# of NDP posts	40	3	0	2	4	1	1
%	78%	6%	0%	4%	8%	2%	2%
# of Liberal posts	46	9	4	10	25	1	0
%	48%	9%	4%	11%	26%	1%	0%

While I am not privy to the BC NDP's social networking strategy, a scan of the party's Facebook account provides a breakdown of the party's Facebook activity between January 1st and March 7th 2012. Table 4 shows that 84% of the party's posts simply share a news release, a media statement, or a published story. This educates the online followers but does not invite people to participate in a two-way relationship with the party. A two-way relationship may encourage more people to become actively involved with the party. Despite current upcoming by-elections in two ridings, the party has only put out one post so far to introduce its followers to the candidates' Facebook accounts. As of the date of writing this section, there have been no invitations to volunteer in the by-elections. The party's Twitter account follows a similar strategy to its Facebook account.

While the party does not appear to have a blog, it does encourage followers to post messages on other blogs and provides tips for supporters (BC NDP, n.d., c). However, the party does not appear to update this list frequently, since the top blog has been dormant for some time.

The party's MLAs may each have individual social media strategies, but this party

appears to use social media mostly to push out information prepared for other formats.

3.1.5 The B.C. Liberal Facebook Strategy

As shown above, the BC Liberals' Facebook strategy is more diverse than the NDP's. The party pushes out pre-packaged materials developed for other formats, but it also advertises events and opportunities to become involved. This gives supporters a chance to engage with the party and attempts to convert online support into offline action. The liberals post more video to create a multimedia experience for followers. This party also appears to be trying to build relationships with bloggers and social media users, by sponsoring social media camps (Social Media Camp, 2011).

The party's Twitter feed devotes more space to re-Tweeting the posts of followers, MLAs, and others. Re-Tweeting followers' posts may be a conscious attempt to connect followers with each other. This could help to build a community.

The party is also developing an "Ideas Lab". This is similar to the Open Platform except that the party will publish feedback and other users can comment on responses. This party has not announced the lab at the time of writing so it is too early to say how popular it will become. If the liberals use their legislative majority to implement some of the suggested changes, they are likely to attract and retain a significant following.

3.1.6 Summary of Case Lessons

The most important case lesson comes from the Obama campaign. An OPPEP should not be limited to improving policy. Organizers should look at how the community could be a source of volunteers.

Some parties appear to be using social media to host a one-way conversation with followers. While this may educate followers, it does not build the community, nor does it encourage people to come out to events.

3.2 Open vs. "By Invitation Only" Forums

A major decision facing parties is whether to run open or closed forums. This will influence the acquisition of followers who may become volunteers. Table 5, displayed on the following page, outlines the advantages and disadvantages of each option in combination with the next major design decision, which is whether a party should display

feedback or keep it private.

Table 5 - Summary of major decisions for public policy engagement

	Private Feedback	Public Dialogue
Open Consultation	<p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project will gain more participants than through an invitation only OPPEP and the party may gain more supporters. • Minimal pressure to implement popular suggestions since feedback is not public. • Participants cannot treat each other negatively without dialogue. <p>Cons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants are less likely to return to the site without an engaging discussion. • Without dialogue, participants will not expose problems with responses. 	<p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having more participants makes it more likely that parties will attract new supporters. • Dialogue can motivate some participants to take part. • More weaknesses in ideas are exposed. <p>Cons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rivals could embarrass the party (Macnamara et al., 2010, p. 234). • Self-selected participants may be biased (Clarke, 2010). • Abusive participants may drive away others. • Showing responses increases pressure to implement suggestions, even ones that do not make sense.
Invitation Only (Closed Consultation)	<p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invited participants feel special. • Parties face minimal pressure to implement feedback because responses are not public. • Participants cannot be nasty to each other. <p>Cons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invitations raise participants' expectations that feedback will be implemented. • The lack of dialogue means users are not creating interesting content for others and followers cannot expose problems in other responses. 	<p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opponents will not be able to use the project to advance their own interests. • The invite makes participants feel special. • Abusive participants can be uninvited. • Dialogue maintains participants' interest. <p>Cons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The OPPEP is less likely to attract new supporters. • This option contains the most pressure to implement recommendations – even if not wise.

Running an open forum could attract more participants than an invitation only vehicle. Engaging more participants means that more people will learn about the party's activities and have a role in shaping decisions. Participants may be more likely to believe the party represents them, something that Pammett and LeDuc (2003) correlated with voting in Canada. People who have had a say may be more likely to defend the action at the water cooler and are more likely to volunteer or donate. Supporters who understand the issues are more likely to convince friends to support the party too. This

contrasts with closed forums, where participants only take part by invitation. Restricting participation limits the acquisition of new supporters.

Another advantage of allowing more people to participate is that more feedback increases the likelihood that participants will identify potential landmines. Decision makers could address the identified issues in the resulting policy change, limiting the time spent cleaning up mistakes. However, open forums are more labour intensive, as the party will receive more feedback requiring more effort to analyse submissions.

Open forums provide an opportunity for rivals to hijack the platform (Macnamara, Bamford & Betts, 2010). Rivals could skew the results. This could force the party to ignore the 'majority' feedback, if it does not represent broader public opinion, or at least the opinion of the party's target voter segments, making the party appear undemocratic or uncommitted to engaging the public through its own forum. Neither outcome would help the party gain an advantage.

A "By Invitation Only" forum would reduce the volume of submissions that must be analysed. This is important if minimal staff resources are available for the project.

Closed forums may solve the self-selection problem posed by open forums. Online communities might not represent the wider public (Clarke, 2010). A party may need to ignore the online feedback, even if it is in consensus, if it does not feel that the wider population, or at least the party's target voter segments, agrees with this view. Limiting participation would also make it difficult for special interest groups to skew results.

Unfortunately, closed forums would not draw as many new people into the party as compared to open forums. While improving policy helps to attract new supporters, parties running open forums may also attract new members who can create a buzz.

Leaders must balance these issues before deciding on an open or closed site. If one goal is to attract volunteers, then organizers should establish open forums. However, if the only goal is to retain volunteers, then closed forums may be better.

3.3 Published vs. Private Feedback

Publishing feedback enables participants to debate one another. Participants may expose flaws in possible solutions, flaws that might otherwise go unnoticed. It is better to prevent issues from arising than to put out fires.

Unfortunately, publishing feedback allows participants to attack each other, aided by the “dissociative anonymity” problem noted by Suler (2004) where anonymous users are not held to account for their actions. People often feel strongly about their positions and this can lead to negative behaviour directed toward participants who disagree. The resulting behaviour can drive the right people away from the site and retain the wrong people. A party could moderate posts to prevent participants from attacking each other. However, moderating posts often raises cries of censorship. This can cause its own problems.

Another issue with publishing feedback is that it can create a forum “for vested interests and the ‘usual suspects’ among political actors to hold the stage” (Macnamara, et al., 2010, p. 234). Interest groups and rivals may use the forum to promote a view not endorsed by the majority (or at least the party’s target voter segments). This would require a difficult choice about whether to implement the policy or not. Implementing a policy opposed by the majority risks the wrath of the electorate. However, rivals may frame a decision to ignore feedback as undemocratic. This is a serious charge for any party to face and online participants will be less motivated to contribute their feedback if they feel the party is not sincere about acting on the advice received. “Engaging citizens online raises legitimate expectations that public input will be used in policy making” (OECD, 2003, p. 18).

Open forums host dialogue. This turns control of the brand over to participants (Dunne, 2012). Losing this control is acceptable if it helps to gain advantages elsewhere. However, the self-selected group of OPPEP participants may not be up to the task of appealing to the broader population and might be too small to gain a compensating advantage. Therefore, careful thought is required before going down this path.

Saebo, Rose and Molka-Danielson (2010, p. 410) stated that “Ainsworth et al. (2005) found [that online] discussions often ended in irrelevant and inconsequential topic areas.” There is no point in investing resources to host a discussion that leads nowhere.

Keeping submissions private offers several advantages. It prevents negative debates from arising and does not create a platform for rivals to advance their own agendas. It also prevents an irrelevant discussion from occurring by not having any dialogue between participants. Unfortunately, there are also some drawbacks to consider. Avoiding dialogue will increase the potential for mistakes. Participants may

notice problems with proposals that come forward. It is always better to prevent problems from occurring than to lose time and credibility resolving these problems later.

On balance, open dialogues create content that may attract more members (provided the dialogue is not toxic) and potentially attract more volunteers. However, the dialogue puts the party’s brand management strategy at risk and provides a platform for rivals. Therefore, parties should look to keep feedback private.

3.4 Strategic Options

Combining the two major decisions, which are whether to publish feedback and whether to limit the project to invited participants, leaves several basic options to consider. Table 6 presents the alternatives that I will discuss thoroughly in sections 3.3.1 – 3.3.7. The appendix describes the underlying assumptions supporting the cost estimates provided in each section.

Table 6 - Strategic options for online public policy engagement

Strategy Type	Potential Strategies
Passive/Ignore	1. Do not create a public policy engagement site. 2. Scan existing sites to find ideas and identify public opinion.
Keep public feedback private	3. Host a “by invitation only” web site with private feedback. 4. Post questions to a website and receive private feedback.
Post feedback for participants to see	5. Host an “invitation only” dialogue to discuss policy. 6. Host an open online forum to discuss public policy.

3.4.1 Do Not Create a Public Policy Engagement Site

This option is the easiest to implement. It consumes no resources and creates no expectation that the party will act on responses. Unfortunately, this alternative has a major shortcoming: parties that are slow to initiate an OPPEP miss an opportunity to influence first time voters. This is particularly important given that voters usually pick the same party in subsequent elections (Shachar, 2003). It is only a matter of time before one party starts an OPPEP and waiting costs the others first mover advantage. The first mover game tree in Figure 7, shown on the following page, shows the sequential game in a two party system. While B.C.’s political system appears to have three or four major parties at present, the tree still provides a useful simplification.

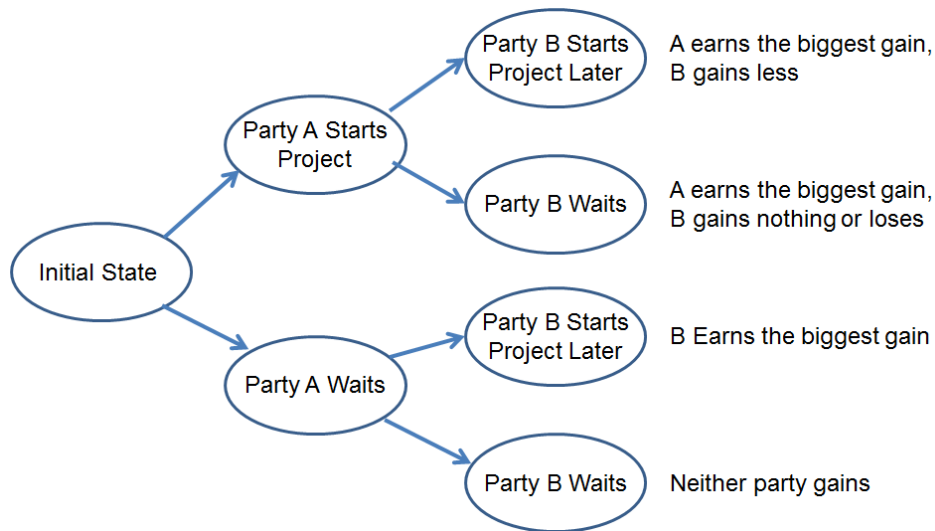


Figure 7 - First mover game tree

Acting on this option also changes industry structure. Even a minimal OPPEP could cost \$150,000 per year, as discussed in the appendix. This is far more than the BC Conservatives were able to fundraise in 2010 (BC Conservatives, 2011); this may create an entry barrier for third parties. It may also be harder for rivals to shake the loyalty of supporters who feel more closely connected to their party.

It may be argued that third parties could use volunteers to run the project. This is possible, but it would be hard to achieve the same consistent flow of topics, thus risking disengaging participants. It will also be hard to find volunteers willing to put in the research required to draft quality backgrounder articles, thus exposing the party to risks. Lastly, it may be harder to find participants who want to contribute to a project that will not make a difference because the party has little ability to influence public policy. After all, Butler and Collins (1994) noted that a desire to contribute to a worthwhile endeavour or to be close to power motivates many volunteers. A fringe party would have a harder time convincing participants that it offers either benefit.

3.4.2 Scan Existing Sites to Identify Public Opinion and Capture Ideas

Existing social media groups can provide a trove of information that organizers could review to identify public opinion. Participants can identify potential issues with

proposed solutions and provide a barometer of public opinion¹¹.

This option offers the advantage that the party is not committed to acting on responses. The feedback received from a consultation may endorse an impractical or unpopular position. Interest groups can magnify this risk by skewing results. Solutions put forward by consultees might only benefit a few people, at the expense of the wider population. Alternatively, proposed solutions may be inconsistent with the party's previous policies and could thus impair brand consistency. There would be minimal pressure to implement this input, in contrast to the scenario where parties ask for suggestions; the OECD (2003) suggests that requesting input would create expectations that this feedback would be used.

There are disadvantages with this option. Parties could not directly ask questions, nor could they provide background information. Politicians could speculate about ideas to spur public debate, but this would not guarantee that opinion leaders ask their followers the right questions or provide good information to inform debate.

Another disadvantage is that politicians could not take credit for consulting with the public on the ideas they implement. If the party did not ask the question, it will not appear that leaders made the decision based on feedback.

Participants would not be engaged with the party; therefore, they would be less likely to respond to a request to volunteer for the party.

This option does not conflict with the other alternatives. Politicians should use this approach, when appropriate, to gain the associated benefits. It would make sense when a topic is too divisive for the party to ask participants on an OPPEP to respond to. The cost of this option will depend on the number of sites monitored and the frequency and depth of analysis. Managers can choose how much to invest in this option and control the flow of work so that only the right amount of resources is used.

3.4.3 “Invitation Only” with Private Feedback

This alternative would create a channel for asking questions of a select group of consultees. These invited participants would provide feedback on the questions asked. Participants would not be able to see each other's submissions.

¹¹ Although Clarke (2010) warns the barometer could be biased.

This option does not make sense. If participants can only take part by invitation, then invitations could be limited to people who can be trusted to engage in respectful dialogue. Moderators could sanction members who break the rules of etiquette. Creating a dialogue would make the project more engaging satisfying a volunteer motivation identified by Unger (1991).

Alternatively, if the feedback is private, then the party might as well leave the channel open to anyone wishing to participate. More people will become involved increasing the odds of finding new supporters and volunteers. Since this alternative is clearly inferior to the two other options, I will drop it from further consideration. However, this would be the cheapest style of OPPEP to run, as shown in the appendix. The appendix estimates that this style of project would cost \$150,000 per year.

3.4.4 Open Questions/Private Input

This option builds on the Open Platform described in section 3.1.1, by providing a series of regular questions to focus participants and get regular feedback.

This alternative improves matters by engaging people more frequently. Asking questions reduces the odds that participants will feel slighted if the feedback is not used. Questions can be framed to focus participants on problems that government is trying to solve, increasing the odds that the feedback will have a demonstrable result. Seeing the party's action might motivate participants to continue taking part, particularly for those whose feedback is used. This increases the odds of converting participants into volunteers.

Sections 3.2 and 3.3 describe the other pros and cons of this option. This option is relatively inexpensive at only \$200,000 per year, as described in the appendix.

3.4.5 Invitation Only Dialogue/Share Input with Participants

This is similar to the option described in section 3.4.3, except that participants would be able to see each other's comments. The benefit of this option is that the dialogue creates content that would keep some participants coming back on a regular basis. This will deepen commitment to the party and could increase the amount of time volunteered and the amount of money donated.

Another benefit is that dialogue will potentially bring to light some problems with

the ideas that participants share. If the decision makers do not anticipate these problems before implementing a solution, then the party may have to face what would have been avoidable problems.

Unfortunately, as discussed in section 3.3, this option does not reach out as effectively to potential new supporters as would an open forum. Parties choosing to implement this approach can expect to pay \$250,000 per year in staff costs to manage this project, as identified in the appendix.

3.4.6 Open Forum with Published Submissions

This alternative would see the party create an open forum and allow anyone to participate. Responses would be published allowing for a dialogue that may expose problems with the responses put forward by others.

People participating in such a project will be seeking a positive experience. This is unfortunate, because a few participants will behave inappropriately towards those who disagree with their views destroying that environment of trust that should characterize the community. Therefore, managers must carefully moderate comments. This option is likely to attract the most participants and the most comments per question. The appendix shows that parties could expect to pay \$750,000 per year to operate this type of OPPEP. Practically speaking, neither political party nor caucus budgets are large enough to afford this expense, as shown in the appendix. Only the provincial government could easily spare the resources needed to run this type of OPPEP.

3.4.7 Option Evaluation

The previous sections discussed the relative advantages of each option. Private feedback appears to work better for the utility advantages, protects party brand management strategies and does not risk visibly ignoring the majority's feedback. It also prevents some participants from creating a hostile environment.

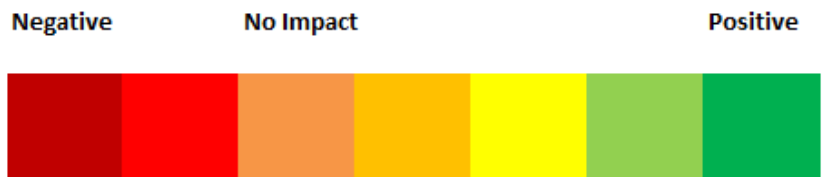
Open forums hold greater potential to attract followers. Organizers could convert some followers into volunteers, increasing performance on the cost advantages relating to the number of volunteers. Invitation only forums would be more useful if the goal is only to retain and strengthen support among existing followers, but this is a significant investment and many managers will want to attract new people to the fold.

As Table 7 plainly shows, parties should look to either an open forum with private submissions, or a closed forum with an open dialogue. We should also look at Figure 9 to see how this option fits with the parties' goals for each segment.

Table 7 - Ranking of strategic options

	Do Not Create the Channel	Scan Existing Sites	Invitation Only with Private Submissions	Open Forum with Private Submissions	Invitation Only with Open Dialogue	Open Forum with Public Dialogue
Customer Utility Advantages						
Party Leadership						
Record in Office						
Platform/Policies						

Cost Advantages						
Ability to gain positive news media coverage						
Ability to attract volunteers						
Fundraising Abilities						
Links to collaborators (trade unions, community groups, interest groups, etc)						
Local MLA						
Ability to move volunteers to swing ridings						
Ability to communicate directly with the voter through social media, email or canvassing						



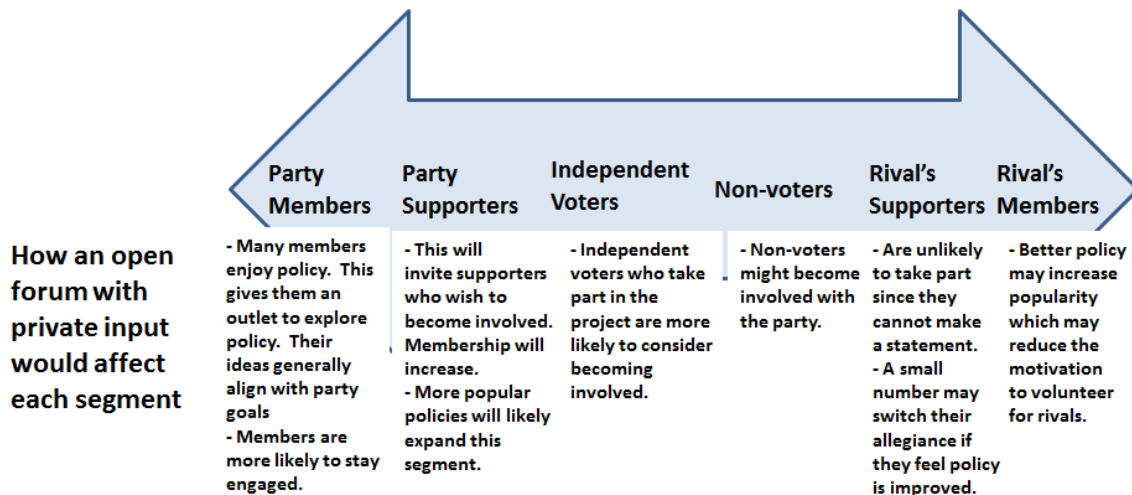


Figure 8 - How an open forum with private feedback would affect each voter segment

Therefore, I recommend using an open forum with private submissions. However, it will be important to encourage people to visit the site. Project managers should post notifications to social media accounts every time there is a new question. If the social media feed allows comments, these comments should be monitored.

3.5 Which Agency Should Manage the Project?

There are multiple agencies capable of managing a public policy engagement project on behalf of elected officials. The agencies that could manage the project include Government Communications and Public Engagement (GCPE), Caucus Communication teams, Party Communications and individual MLAs. As discussed in Chapter 1 and in Sections 3.1.2 & 3.1.6, this paper concludes that the party's communication team should directly manage the project. However, some governments are implementing similar projects through their civil services¹² while individual MLAs are taking implementing similar ideas through their individual social media accounts. Therefore, I will explore the advantages and disadvantages of each potential managing agency in sections 3.5.1 - 3.5.5 to explain why the party should manage the OPPEP directly.

Each agency's objectives differ, thus influencing how each can perform the

¹² Which includes GCPE in B.C.

project. GCPE is an agency of government, not the party, and therefore it only serves the executive branch of government, the cabinet, no matter which party is in power. It does not serve opposition members. Caucus communication departments focus on the needs of their MLAs. While caucus communication teams are not directly controlled by the party, these teams are controlled by the party's MLAs. Since taxpayers fund this group, it cannot help with party activities. Parties are only funded by donations and can therefore be as political as they wish while individual MLAs have similar freedom. Table 8, compares each of the managing agencies. The comparisons will be discussed in further detail in sections 3.5.1 - 3.5.5.

Table 8 - Comparison of potential managing agencies

	Can the OPPEP be used during elections? Can it be used to recruit political volunteers for the party?	Can ministry program staff be involved in the OPPEP?	Is communications expertise readily available?	Will the party lose control of the OPPEP if it loses an election?	Is it possible to generate a steady stream of engaging topics?	How easy is it to resolve the problems raised by participants?
GCPE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Easy
Caucus Communications Department	No	Only political staff can support these accounts.	Yes	No	Yes	Depends on whether the party forms government.
Individual feeds for each MLA	Yes	Only political staff can support these accounts.	Yes	No	Difficult	Depends on the MLA.
Party communications team	Yes	Only political staff can be involved and only after work hours.	Yes	No	Yes	Problem can only be solved if party is in government. Otherwise, can advocate on the issue.

3.5.1 Government Communications and Public Engagement (GCPE)

This option is only available to governing parties because opposition parties are not able to direct the actions of civil servants. A central team would canvass ministries for ideas and ensure that a regular flow of topics appears on the OPPEP. Ministry experts could prepare backgrounders and answer questions raised by participants. Public funding would cover project costs making it free for political parties. Government budgets are large enough to cover the cost of any of the options outlined in the appendix, unlike caucus and party budgets that may be insufficient.

A major downside of having GCPE run the project is that the account would remain under government control if there were a change in power. A fully functioning OPPEP would be handed over to the new government should a rival win an election and the party would have to start again from scratch. Another downside is that organizers cannot use the OPPEP to recruit volunteers into the party because the government runs the project. This would miss the benefits described in section 3.1.2.

3.5.2 Caucus Communications

Caucuses have communication teams to support MLAs. Their staffs are increasingly becoming social media experts. One advantage of using caucus staff is that the channel would remain under the party's control even if it lost an election¹³. For opposition, this option is feasible unlike the alternative described above.

Another advantage is that public funding would cover the cost. However, having caucus communications run an OPPEP would require trade-offs within the caucus budget. Based on the formulae listed in Metrics EFG (2008), neither caucus receives more than \$3.2 million in funding. This would rule out the open forum/public dialogue, since it would cost nearly \$750,000 per year as shown in the appendix, but the other alternatives remain feasible.

The disadvantage of using caucus teams is that ministry staff could not directly support consultations. As noted by Macnamara et al. (2010, p. 233), “[s]enior policy maker involvement is essential to ensure online public consultation initiatives are not tokenism...” This only affects governing parties, but it would affect the quality of consultations. Ministry experts could not work directly with caucus staff to develop backgrounders to inform the debate, or to answer questions. Political staff in ministerial offices could act as a go-between, or supplant the staff role as they become more expert in their ministries. However, this adds a layer of complexity and is only available to a governing party¹⁴. Ultimately, the minister responsible for the file will need to take up the cause to make the engagement meaningful. Once each engagement is complete, it would be difficult to expect ministry staff to analyse the feedback. Non-experts would have to review comments and prepare options for the minister to explore. The minister

¹³ Of course, caucus funding is tied to the number of members. If the party is reduced to a rump caucus, it may no longer have the funding required to operate the project. While rare, it does happen.

¹⁴ However, no option is available to opposition parties to use government employees to support the project.

would then have to work through the options with departmental staff, rather than simply let the ministry manage the entire process.

Another issue with this approach is that caucus communication officers already have seasonal periods with lengthy hours. This would force the caucus to hire more communication officers, reduce their workload in other areas, or tolerate project inactivity for long stretches. It is not likely that caucuses could hire more communication officers, since funding is limited. It would be unpopular to increase caucus funding during this time of fiscal restraint. Lightening the workload of staff in order to free up time for social media is not feasible. Their existing work helps make voters aware of the actions of their elected representatives. At this time, social media is a valuable supplement to traditional communications efforts, but not everyone uses these tools. This means that traditional media will continue to play a role.

The final issue with using caucus teams is that caucuses receive public funding. This means that caucuses could not use an OPPEP to recruit party volunteers.

3.5.3 Party Communications Staff

Using party communication officers to manage the OPPEP offers significant benefits. The party does not receive public funding and can therefore recruit volunteers. In other respects, this option suffers from the same drawbacks as the option of using the caucus to manage the project, with the exception that the party communication staffs are smaller in number and it would be even more difficult to bridge the gap between ministry staff and the project. As noted earlier, party budgets are limited. Even the BC Liberals, who led the parties in fundraising in 2010, only raised \$10 million in 2010 (BC Liberals, 2011, b). Therefore, this option may limit the use of open forums with public dialogues unless parties are willing to make trade-offs.

3.5.4 Individual Members of the Legislative Assembly

Many elected representatives already engage with their constituents through social media. These efforts range from simply pushing out announcements to increase the reach of press releases, to efforts that connect community groups together. Some even use social media to ask their constituents for their ideas. This approach has the obvious benefit of branding the MLA within the social media community. Voters who see the MLA listening to feedback received from constituents and followers are more likely to

become involved in the MLA's riding association.

Unlike caucus or government feeds, MLAs can actively use social media accounts during an election, when it is important to communicate with potential voters.

The drawback is that it would take a substantial time commitment from each MLA to implement this alternative. They would have to frequently monitor accounts and respond to constituents on a timely basis. This poses a problem for MLAs who devote most of their time to legislative and constituency duties. Meetings with community organizations and constituents often require significant follow up work in order to achieve a meaningful outcome. Matters are worse for cabinet ministers who have responsibility for a ministry. This leaves them with little time to manage their accounts and as a result, is unlikely to be a successful way of managing the project.

Practically speaking, this option does not require funding since MLAs would handle the work. However, since their time is limited, this would force each MLA to make trade-offs in their workloads.

3.5.5 Recommended Project Management Team

Given that all democratic governments will eventually lose an election, having GCPE manage the project is not a good idea. The advantages of being able to use ministry staff support are offset by the disadvantages of the channel always being at the service of the incumbent government; meaning that outgoing governments could not take the intellectual property and data inherent in the channel with them. This means the governing party would invest significant effort to build a following only to hand the OPPEP over to rivals if the opponent forms government.

Caucus staff could manage the project, but they are already overworked and it would be difficult to decide which low priority tasks the caucuses could neglect in favour of the project. It is also not possible to hire enough new staff to run the project, since the current economic challenges would make it difficult for legislators to increase caucus budgets while government is extracting wage freezes from public sector unions.

There is one further drawback to using a publicly funded agency to run the project: the agency would own the data. This means that parties could not recruit participants to join the party.

Individual MLA feeds will not work well since it would be difficult to create and

find enough interesting new content for each member. This would also multiply the work needed to analyse content and implement changes. Further, every time an MLA loses their seat or resigns, the associated channel would become worthless.

Therefore, by a process of elimination, we can conclude that each individual party should handle this project on their own behalf. Each serious party already has the communications expertise and the understanding of social networking needed to proceed. Some parties may not have enough staff resources to manage the project; however, they may be able to raise more funds to hire additional staff.

3.6 Which Social Media Tools Should Parties Use to Host the Project?

People interact via an array of online networks. Each program has different features, providing different advantages. People use each network for different purposes and some tools are more popular.

Evans (2010, p. 18) said that “focusing [marketing] effort on a place where the [target] audience [does not look] is a common mistake.” Managers should use buzz monitoring tools to help them locate their audiences. After all, it does not make sense to be active in one forum when all of the party’s target voters are having conversations in another. However, just because a tool is right for a party’s social media strategy does not mean that it will support the project. Therefore, I will explore the strengths and weaknesses of each tool as potential project hosts before making a recommendation.

Evans noted that communities are fluid. Members move from one to another over time. Therefore, I will not spend much time looking at where the audience is, since this may change before any party implements an OPPEP. Rather, I will look at how suitable some popular social media tools would be as potential project hosts.

Selecting the right program(s) is critical to achieving the maximum benefits possible from the project. Some social networks are better suited to hosting dialogues, while others would allow private feedback. Changing the channel once the project is in operation may be difficult, since it would risk disengaging participants who do not join the new network. Decision makers must exercise care when selecting the channel.

There are more social media tools than space available here to talk about them. Please see Table 9, located on page 49, for a summary of some tools that might be used to host the project.

Table 9 - Channel options

Channel	Benefits	Disadvantages
Facebook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook offers a complete platform. It allows the user to do most things that other social media tools permit. • Facebook aggregates comments allowing for discussion. • Users do not have anonymous accounts. Followers posting under their own names are less likely to use vitriolic language. • 16 million Canadians are already on Facebook (Checkfacebook.com, n.d.). New accounts are free. • Friend finder tools help users find interesting accounts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is harder for politicians to attract a following with Facebook than on channels like Twitter, but not impossible as discussed in section 3.6.1.
Twitter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is easier for politicians to establish a following on Twitter than on Facebook. • Friend finder tools suggest you follow them same feeds as your friends. This allows for rapid growth in the number of followers without major advertising costs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twitter only permits short messages. This prevents detailed responses.
YouTube	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes advantage of the media skills of politicians. 	
Blogs/ Websites with private submissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content management services make sites easy to maintain. • Allow for longer posts and unpublished feedback. • Gives the party maximum control over the look, feel and format. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Users have to choose to come back to see updates. • No friend finding tools to drive users to the site. • Responders can be anonymous. This enables users to attack each other of responses are published.

3.6.1 Facebook

Facebook offers a complete multimedia platform. Users can create appealing multimedia experiences.

Facebook (n.d.) says it requires users “to provide their real names.” This gets around the “dissociative anonymity” problem noted by Suler (2004), where anonymous users are not accountable for their actions. Most people will self-moderate comments that they think might harm their reputations. This could limit the aggressive and abusive behaviour that many have come to expect from other online discussion forums.

The major benefit of Facebook is that it is so popular. As of January 2012, it had 16 million Canadian users (Checkfacebook.com, n.d.). This means that many voters are already using the site and political feeds are available to those users who wish to follow

them. This provides a large potential audience for parties to target.

Another benefit is that Facebook is easy to use and it takes little effort to establish or maintain accounts. This frees up time to focus on content creation and day-to-day OPPEP work.

One of the downsides of Facebook is that local politicians seem to have relative difficulty acquiring Facebook ‘friends’, the term used by the site to denote a connection between two Facebook accounts. Many politicians maintain both Facebook and Twitter accounts. Followers may view a politician’s Twitter feed as a source of news, without having to subscribe to the connotation carried by Facebook ‘friendship’. If so, this might explain why many politicians have more Twitter followers than Facebook friends. Whatever the reason, it would appear that politicians are less popular on Facebook than Twitter as shown in Table 10. This is particularly interesting given that the Star (2011) reports that half of Canadians use Facebook while Wikipedia (n.d.) reports that Twitter users do not make up more than 25% of the population of any country.

Table 10 – Number of Facebook and Twitter followers for various political accounts as of January 2012

Elected Official/Party	Facebook Followers	Twitter Followers	Difference	%
Christy Clark	7,183	12,924	5,741	55.6
Margaret MacDiarmid	215	1,138	923	18.9
Adrian Dix	3,607	2,979	-628	121.1
Stephen Harper	67,790	187,381	119,591	36.2
John Cummins	186	781	595	23.8
James Moore	4,309	8,291	3,982	52.0
BC Liberal Party	1,575	4,032	2,457	39.1
BC NDP Party	1,843	4,944	3,101	37.3
Shirley Bond	271	1,549	1,278	17.5
Mike Farnworth	644	1,540	896	41.8
Joyce Murray	453	2,362	1,909	19.2

Facebook would be very useful for an open forum with an unmoderated dialogue,

but is not well suited to the private submission format recommended for the project.

3.6.2 Twitter

Twitter is a popular tool to create a news feed and push information out quickly. According to Gauthier (2011), Twitter had 5 million Canadian users as of May 2011 and offers the advantage that politicians can attract followers more easily on Twitter than on Facebook.

Unfortunately, Twitter only allows users to post messages with a maximum of 140 characters. This does not give enough room for detailed comments. Given the complexity of most issues worth commenting on, more space is required to gather meaningful responses from participants. Tweets could advertise a consultation on another site and share a link, but this does not make the site a good host for the OPPEP.

3.6.3 YouTube

YouTube is a good tool for sharing videos. Most politicians receive camera training and can deliver engaging messages to voters so it can be easier to have a politician record a brief message than to write an equally engaging text message. Representatives share video messages with constituents relatively often, so most parties and caucuses have trained staff capable of quickly recording professional quality video. YouTube is easily linkable to other websites, allowing users to share videos.

3.6.4 Websites with Private Submissions

Today's content management systems make it easy to maintain a website. Webmasters can install submission forms on the site to accept feedback from the public. Parties that do not wish to post feedback should use websites to collect responses.

3.6.5 Recommended Platform

The platform must support the design choices in earlier sections. Parties that make different high-level design choices for their OPPEPs may wish to select different platforms to host the project. Table 11 on the following page shows the recommended platform based on the choices described in section 3.4. Parties that choose not to display feedback should still use social networks to promote the project. Facebook and

Twitter accounts can send messages to followers, with links to the site every time the party asks a new question. This will give followers another reason to pay attention to the party's social networking activities.

Table 11 - Recommended OPPEP platforms

	Open Forums	Invitation Only
Unmoderated Published Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use <u>Facebook</u> to host the dialogue and other networks to draw participants in. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host the dialogue on <u>private blogs</u> that require a login.
Moderated Published Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host the dialogue on a <u>moderated blog</u>. Use social networks to attract participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host the conversation on a <u>moderated blog</u>.
Undisplayed Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host a <u>website</u> with a submission form. Use social media to attract participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host a <u>private website</u> with a private login.

Parties could choose to operate the project across multiple online platforms simultaneously. However, this approach has a significant drawback. More resources are required to manage multiple platforms. Given the limited number of additional users that politicians could reach through additional channels, I do not recommend attempting to set up dialogues on multiple platforms. However, parties should use the other platforms to advertise and link to the project.

Before proceeding to the next set of design choices for the project, the next chapter will discuss major risks and potential risk management strategies.

3.7 Key Insights

Implementing an OPPEP will improve most of the identified sources of advantage. Figure 9 on the following page highlights how the project would affect each input and marketing channel. The figure also highlights the fact that undertaking the project could strain relationships with interest groups. This is hardly surprising, because giving more weight to the public means that a party will have to pay less attention to the needs of collaborators.

OPPEPs would create entry barriers limiting the ability of third parties to become serious political contenders or to siphon off votes from the major parties. This could happen because the project costs would be likely to exceed the annual budgets of minor

parties, as I will show in the appendix.

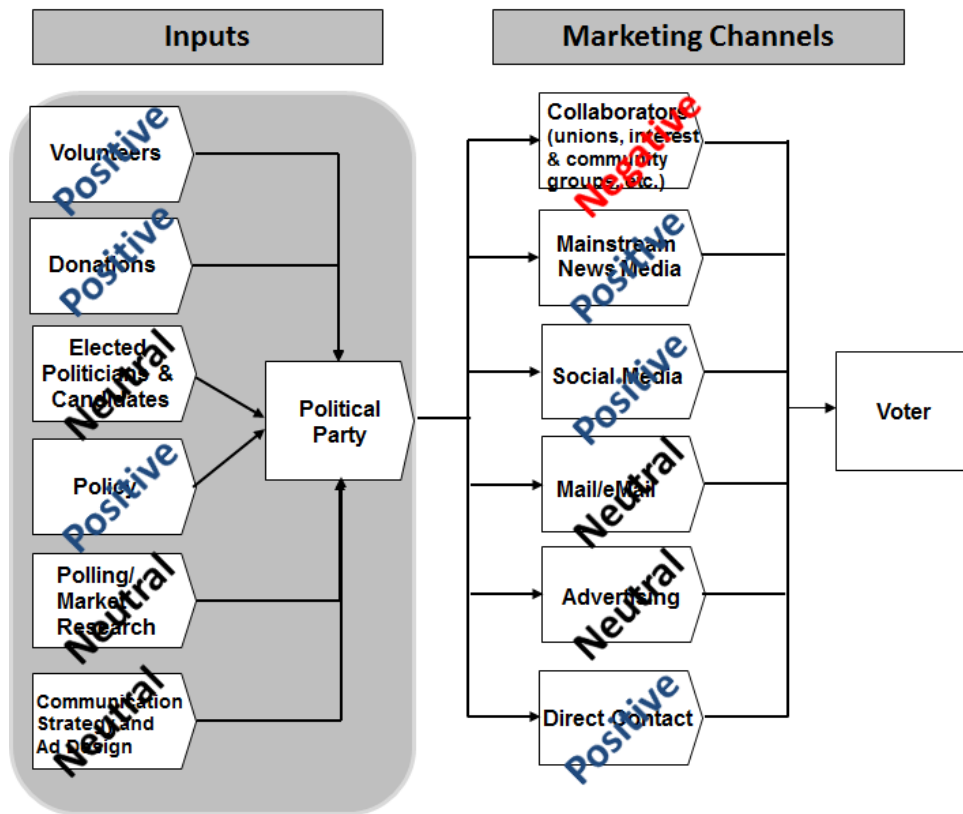


Figure 9 - Supply chain effects of hosting an OPPEP

As discussed in section 3.4.7, parties should not display the feedback, since this could invite arguments between participants with differing views, potentially driving away more reasonable members. It would also allow rivals to use the forum as a platform to promote views that may not be widely shared. This could put a party in the awkward position of having to act against the feedback it solicited.

Should a party decide to implement the project through a format supporting a public dialogue, it will be necessary to provide a welcoming environment for participants. Without that, many reasonable participants will leave while the remainder will attract participants that are more negative.

Governing parties could choose to implement an engagement project through the civil service, but this is not a good approach. Doing so would make it easier to

implement changes and respond to questions but it would also leave the party open to key risks. Most importantly, implementing this approach would hand over a fully functioning project team and a network of engaged participants to a new government, should a new party come to power. This would hand advantages to a rival, making it more difficult to win back the right to form government in a subsequent election. In addition, publicly funded OPPEPs could not be used to recruit party volunteers. Therefore, parties should implement their own projects.

Using the right tool for the project is important. “Just because Twitter is the latest, greatest, hyped-up thing on CNN [does not] mean everyone should be [on it]” (Evans, 2010, p. 88). Not every tool would make a good host for the project, no matter how popular it is. It is important to select tools that the target audience uses but that are also capable of achieving the objectives of the organizers.

In the following chapter, I will discuss the key risks and their mitigation strategies. This will allow me to present a design for the project and a final recommendation for any political party wishing to undertake an OPPEP.

4: Risk Mitigation Strategies

This chapter will identify key OPPEP risks and describe mitigation strategies. The OPPEP’s design, which I will discuss further in chapter 5, should address the potential risks identified in this chapter in order to prevent problems from reducing the benefits achieved.

Key risks include the possibility that rivals may hi-jack the channel, that participants may not understand the issues well enough to provide useful feedback and that a few “bad apples” might insult and drive away other consultees. It would not be desirable if participants only represent a subset of the province or the target audience. It is also possible that questions posed by the party on the OPPEP could generate more feedback than the party has resources to analyse.

Each of these challenges could negatively affect an OPPEP, if not mitigated. The following table briefly describes project risks. I will elaborate on the key risks in the remaining sections of this chapter.

Table 12 - Summary of risk mitigation strategies

Risk:	Potential Mitigation Strategy(ies):
Issues not understood by participants.	(1) Educate participants through backgrounders. (2) Limit the range of topics addressed.
The public is sceptical following well publicized efforts like the <i>Conversation on Health</i> .	(1) Demonstrate that feedback is taken seriously through action.
Framing induces bias or undesirable results.	(1) Managers must understand the impact of framing to prevent bias.
OPPEP generates more feedback than can be processed	(1) Hire more staff. (2) Reduce the rate of consultations.

Table 12 - Summary of risk mitigation strategies

Risk:	Potential Mitigation Strategy(ies):
The party must disregard popular but unworkable views and appear undemocratic.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Do not display feedback. (2) Limit the forum to invited participants. (3) Carefully explain decisions to the community. (4) Select topics to avoid this position. (5) Ask open queries rather than yes/no questions (eg – “What could we do to reduce drunk driving?” vs. “Should we increase the carbon tax?”).
Participants generally favour increased spending proposals to fiscal restraint.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Attract fiscal conservatives to the OPPEP. (2) Be as open as possible about public finances. (3) Use open queries that can be resolved with money. (4) Don't ask questions unless the party is prepared to loosen the purse strings to solve the problem (5) Do not display feedback or limit participation to invited participants.
Aggressive/abusive participants (this is only a risk for forums that post user responses).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Establish a code of conduct and encourage the community to self-enforce the code. (2) Moderate posts if necessary. (3) Limit participation to invited people.
The project does not generate enough value to justify the cost and must be shut down.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Address the other risk factors. (2) Slow down the rate of consultations to reduce resource requirements. (3) Stop asking questions and shift to an “Open Platform” approach.
People will be upset when some matters cannot be consulted on.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Be open and explain the reason not to consult on that topic.
Misinformation is brought into the discussion (This is only a risk on forums that post user responses).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Monitor and quickly respond to misinformation. (2) Community members may post corrections too.
Losing an election means losing control of the portal (This is only a risk if the channel is run by GCPE).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) This risk could be dealt with by using a channel owned by the party, caucus or individual MLAs. However, professional public servants cannot staff the channel in each of these cases making it more difficult to identify and correct misinformation.
Time is wasted dealing with rivals’ supporters.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Most rivals’ supporters will get bored after a while. Not many people want to waste a lot of time getting little reaction. (2) Learn to identify the complainers. If someone always complains, simply be polite and thank them for feedback but do not engage.

4.1 Key Risk Mitigation Strategies

Not every risk is as likely to arise, nor do they all share the same potential impacts. Organizers must address the most important risks within the project's design. The more complicated risks and associated mitigation strategies are discussed in further detail below.

4.1.1 Issues Are Not Well Understood by Participants

The OECD (2003) identified this challenge with e-Democracy. Many policy ideas are complex and potential solutions have wide-ranging ramifications that participants may not understand. Participants may be upset if leaders do not implement their ideas and as a result may stop supporting the party. After all, “engaging citizens online raises legitimate expectations that public input will be used to inform policy-making” (OECD, 2003, p. 18).

Organizers can mitigate this issue by creating backgrounders. Many consultees will not review encyclopaedia-sized documents limiting the potential size of backgrounders. However, some people will be interested in receiving some information on the topic. A high-level overview could inform potential participants, while links could direct interested readers on to more detail.

It will be important to ensure that poorly researched backgrounders do not become an issue. Fortunately, a party with a large base of public support will have access to many experts who can vet backgrounders. However, even well researched backgrounders could become controversial. If this happens, simply thank participants who point out real or perceived errors and note that one goal of the OPPEP is to uncover the facts surrounding the problem and correct any problems with the backgrounder.

Another strategy is to limit the range of topics that the party brings into the OPPEP. Parties should not use the project to explore complicated policy questions requiring a deep level of subject matter expertise in order to understand them.

4.1.2 Framing Questions

Kahneman and Tversky (1979) showed that framing questions affects the answers received. Framing can encourage risk aversion or loss aversion. It will be important to understand common biases when drafting questions. The decision makers

who approve the final wording will also need to be aware of the impact of framing. Similarly, choosing closed or open questions will affect the results of the consultation.

Closed questions will get yes/no responses and set the wrong frame for creative problem solving. Responders may shy away from difficult trade-offs and may generally favour increased spending on the program in question. This would reduce the quality of feedback received.

Open questions on the other hand invite creativity. This will provide decision makers with more options to consider and is more likely to generate startling new ideas for consideration.

Managers must prevent framing from unintentionally biasing the results.

4.1.3 Aggressive and Abusive Participants

Negative participation is only a problem if the party chooses to post feedback. Abusive participants can drive away other contributors who would shy away from a negative environment. Choosing a forum such as Facebook, where participants use their own names, would reduce this risk. Most participants would not want friends or family to see them misbehave and may moderate their comments accordingly. Alternatively, a moderated blog could prevent this problem.

Limiting participation to invited participants can solve the issue, but this reduces the impact of the project, and the potential to attract new members.

Lastly, organizations can avoid this problem altogether by not posting responses.

4.1.4 The Project Fails to Deliver More Value than it Costs.

As will be shown in the appendix, OPPEPs are not free. This investment must create value. There is the possibility of many responses being misinformed or unreasonable. If parties have to disregard feedback, voters could gather the impression that “this party does not care about public opinion.” It is also possible that the project will fail to attract new supporters, or to increase the commitment of existing members.

The party must give managers time to attract participants. This is not easy, as noted by Macnamara et al. (2010, p. 233) who stated that “the UK central government offered £20,000 in prizes in its ‘Show us the way’ consultation project based on earlier experiences in which relatively low levels of participation were achieved.” Work will be

required to promote the project since “many efforts fail to attract widespread interest among citizens” (Saebo et al., p. 404). Demonstrating that the party acts on the feedback will help to attract and retain participants.

Addressing the other risks will also help to prevent this challenge from arising, but risk mitigation may not be enough. If the project generates insufficient value after addressing the problems, then reducing the rate of consultations would limit the resources required to operate the project.

Lastly, if the project’s resource requirements place too much strain on overall party resources, the solution may lie in reducing the number of questions asked on the OPPEP, or even stopping them altogether. Instead, parties could invite random feedback through an open platform project. The challenge with moving to this approach is that it requires a personal response to each participant.¹⁵ However, it will reduce the flow of input and limit the resources required, while still being open to public suggestions and feedback.

4.2 Final Thoughts on Risk Mitigation

Ultimately, no one can foresee all of the risks associated with the project. Social media is an ever-changing set of tools and people use these programs in different ways to interact with each other. Therefore, risk management will always be a work in progress.

Proper design at the outset will limit problems, but managers must regularly review risk mitigation strategies. Once implemented, the participants and party will together define a culture for the project that will influence the nature and types of risks posed by the project. This culture will shift over time. Therefore, management will need to keep an eye on these changes and occasionally update risk mitigation strategies.

In particular, managers will need to pay close attention to educating participants to make the feedback more valuable and to framing questions so that they are not biased. Parties will also need to budget for the amount of participation they receive. The OECD (2003) noted that participants have legitimate expectations that their responses will help to guide the final decision.

The next chapter will keep these risks and mitigation strategies in mind as it

¹⁵ A form letter may suffice when all participants are engaged on the same topic.

designs a process and looks to take advantage of project data to accrue additional benefits.

5: Implementation

Leaders must assign responsibility for project components and managers must update work processes to support an OPPEP if it is to succeed. Managers must assign staff to work on the project and the frequency of consultations must be determined. This chapter will explore these issues.

5.1 Benefits Dependency Network

A wide range of activities must be coordinated, if the project is to succeed. Project managers could execute their roles flawlessly but the project could still fail if politicians do not meaningfully act on responses. Party leaders could implement meaningful policy changes to address the points made by participants, but these changes will have little impact if the consultations are too infrequent to keep citizens engaged.

All too often, organizations fail to reap the expected benefits from projects. Often this is because business units do not adapt processes to support the effort. Without updating operations to support the new project, the effort may be wasted.

The work of Peppard, Ward and Daniel (2007) shows a way to deal with interdependencies between technology, processes and benefits through the Benefits Dependency Network (BDN). The BDN maps out the relationships between IT tools, business processes and benefits. Once mapped, organizers can assign responsibility for each element to key managers who will be accountable for their portion of the project.

Please see Figure 11 on the following page for a sample BDN. Parties must assign each responsibility to a manager to ensure the project's success. Without a focal party, I can only assign generic positions that may or may not exist within an organization. Even if these positions exist within a party, specific employees may not have the time, experience or authority required to carry out these responsibilities, in which case managers must assign the responsibilities to someone else.

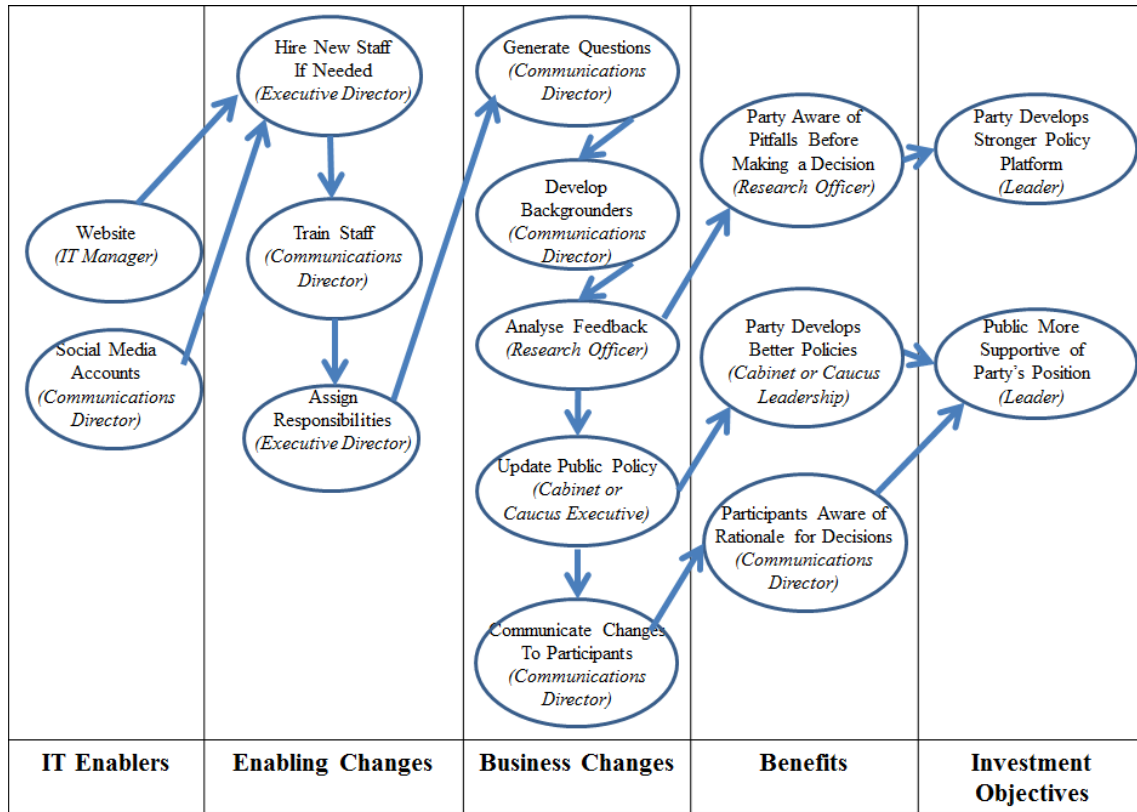


Figure 10 - Public policy engagement project sample BDN

5.2 Process

As with any undertaking, the project will be more successful if there is a clear process to follow. This will ensure that employees understand their responsibilities. The process will allow managers to develop a checklist to monitor performance and to ensure that work is completed.

I have designed the process in Table 13, located on page 64, which shows the step-by-step process that this paper proposes for running each engagement, based on the traditional government consultation process as described to me by Susan Kennedy (2011) who oversaw the B.C. Government’s full day kindergarten consultation. The steps of planning a traditional consultation may include:

1. **Define your goal.** Do you want to get policy advice? Alternatively, do you want your partners to help promote a new initiative?
2. **Scan the environment to determine if there are stakeholders that**

managers should engage. Speak with experts or stakeholder groups that have relevant knowledge.

3. **Determine how stakeholders expect you to interact with them.** Meetings? Telephone? Email? There is a range of options. Organizers must respect stakeholder's expectations of the consultation format.
4. **Determine how you will measure feedback.** Are you looking for ideas or a straw poll? This will determine how you frame the questions.
5. **Prepare any background materials you wish stakeholders to review.**
6. **Draft questions.**
7. **Present questions and backgrounders to stakeholders.**
8. **Collate and tabulate feedback for consideration by decision makers.**
9. **Make and implement policy decisions.**

Traditional consultations are similar in format to what I propose for an OPPEP, which is described in Table 13, on page 68, so they provide a working structure. However, I have made some adjustments to reflect the fact that a party, as opposed to civil servants, would run the project and to reflect the fact that that this would be an online project. The appendix provides cost and resource assumptions for each step under each option.

Table 13 - OPPEP process

Step	Details
Brainstorm engagement topics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add this item to regular staff meetings. The communications director would select the best topics.
Determine if the question requires consultation with stakeholders. If yes, either conduct that consultation before the engagement or halt the process for this question.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The communications director should be responsible for this step. They should talk with an MLA who has subject matter experience to answer this question. Failing to do so could offend important stakeholders. Further, it may be a good idea to accept their feedback in the form that they deem appropriate, whether that is online, or in a meeting with party leadership.
Develop a discussion paper to help participants to get up to speed before providing feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This backgrounder does not have to be very extensive, but providing some research will inform responses.
Obtain expert feedback on the backgrounder.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expert feedback will help to identify and prevent mistakes or omissions in the background information.
Determine how you will measure feedback. ¹⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is important to determine how the party will measure feedback to help frame the question. Eg – Prepare yes/no questions for yes/no measurements.
Draft engaging question.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It should take little time to write questions once research is complete. Framing is critical as discussed in section 4.1.3. The minister or critic must approve the question.
Post question to website. Notify Twitter and Facebook followers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sending a link to the question to social media followers may increase the number of responses received.
Monitor engagement (only necessary if organizers display the feedback provided).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderators should review feedback throughout the day if parties publish responses to correct errors and moderate posts.
Post message from the minister or critic responsible to close the discussion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The response should repeat key themes heard and commit to providing a fuller response later. Organizers may wish to experiment with personal notes from party staff or the constituent's MLA. These messages may have the effect of earning more permission to market to the constituent. This could increase their attention to the party and the likelihood they become more involved.
Collate and tabulate feedback. Research the options presented and prepare recommendations and alternatives for the minister or critic to consider.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This step includes recording any data needed to build a profile on each participant that organizers can use to inform recruiting efforts.
Make decision and implement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The minister or party critic will handle this step so the investment will not come from party resources.
Send a message about what the party accomplished to participants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This message should ideally motivate participants to continue to take part in the OPPEP.

¹⁶ This step precedes writing the question since it should be designed to match the way feedback will be measured.

5.3 Staffing & Costs

Project staffing needs will depend on the number of questions asked, the number of followers attracted and participation rates. Please see the appendix for cost models, along with the underlying assumptions for each option.

5.4 Timing

An OPPEP will not hit full speed overnight. It will take months to build a network of participants and months beyond that for a governing party to implement meaningful policy changes based on consultations. As a result, parties cannot expect the project to have an immediate impact and should not wait until a general election to get started.

Parties wishing to start such a project should aim to have the first consultation at least one year before voting day. However, such a project could conceivably start six months before voting day and still have an impact. If the start is any later, there will be no time to build a following. In this case, it might be better to set up an Open Platform.

5.5 Topic Selection

Choosing the right engagement topics will be important. Topics need to draw people in, while recognizing that party supporters often have interests that compete with those of the supporters of political rivals. It is never possible to please everyone in politics while also creating a differentiated position that rivals cannot imitate. If this were possible, everyone would adopt the position nullifying the advantage.

The chosen topics should appeal to supporters. A major goal is to bring together supporters so that the party can win seats. In votes where only half of eligible voters cast a ballot, parties can gain an advantage when they have supporters that are more likely to vote.

Organizers will want supporters to agree with the final position they take on issues, otherwise, there is a risk that supporters will become disengaged. Engagement topics should naturally lead supporters to positions that the party will happily adopt. The solutions should create advantage and strengthen the competitive standing of the organization. Figure 11, located on page 66, highlights what might be a party's goals for how each question will influence each voter segment.

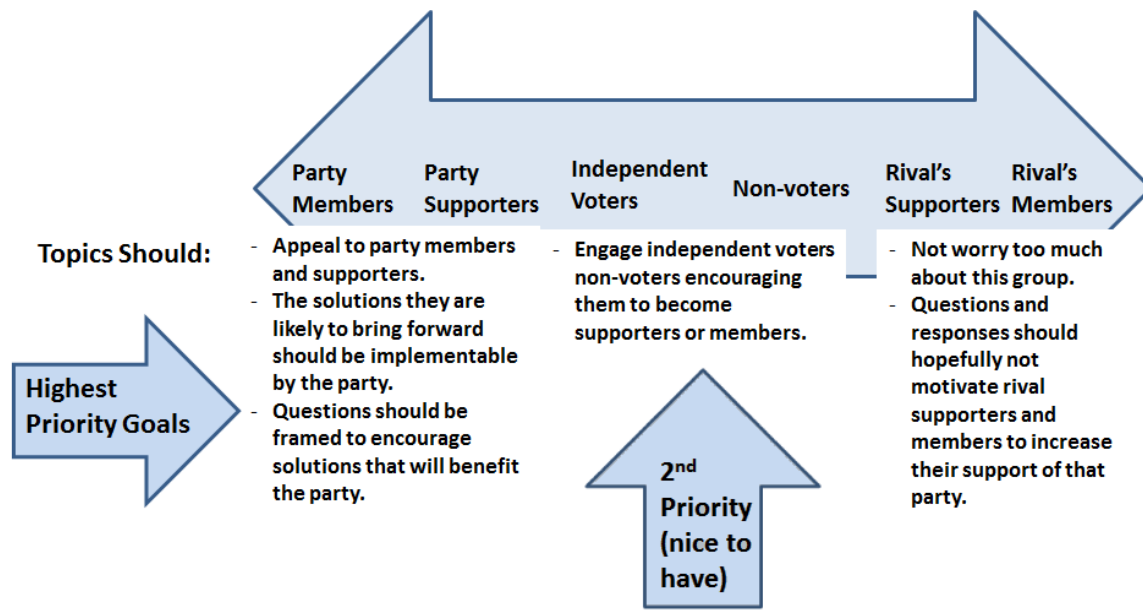


Figure 11 - Possible project goals for each voter segment

Independent voters should not be alienated in the process. Otherwise, there is a risk they will support rivals. If possible, questions should encourage independents to consider supporting the party. However, not every question needs to achieve this goal. In any event, no question should lead to a conclusion that contradicts current party policy, unless organizers intend to reverse that policy position. Issues polling will inform topic selection and framing for each party. The conclusions will differ for each party.

As shown in section 2.3, different voters see different policy areas as priorities. Some segments vote based primarily on whom they feel is better able to manage the economy, while others might vote based on who will best manage health care. Polling can help to identify major themes that organizers should address through consultation.

Not every topic is good for every party to use in an OPPEP. As Keller (1998, p. 107) notes, it is “very difficult to try to create an association that is not consistent with existing consumer knowledge” about the brand. If voters perceive the party to be weak on important issues, they are more likely to withdraw their support. Highlighting the issue through consultation can increase the issue’s perceived importance and increase the amount of time voters spend thinking about the topic. Further, improving peoples’ perceptions of the party’s strength on an issue that is not relevant to the voting decision

does not make a difference. Not all associations are important (Keller, 1998, p. 108). However, “inconsistent associations may cause confusion over meaning and may cause less favourable new associations” (Keller, 1998, p. 257).

For example, it would be unwise of the NDP to consult on matters of criminal justice that are top of mind for only 2% of voters. Further, Angus Reid Public Opinion (2012) found that only 1 in 5 British Columbians feels that the NDP is best suited to manage the file. This means that many of the 2 in 5 British Columbians who the survey found intend to vote NDP would only be reminded that they perceive the party to be weaker than another party on this topic. Similarly, the BC Liberals should be careful about health care topics, a top priority for 17% of voters. Table 14, located on page 68, shows which topics might be good for each of the two major parties. The recommendations are based on data published by Angus Reid Public Opinion (2012).

Table 14 - Relative merits of consultation topics by party

Policy Topic	B.C. Liberals	NDP
Crime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is a good topic if crime becomes an issue, but only 3% of voters place it as their top priority. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is a poor topic since the NDP are traditionally perceived to be weak on crime.
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is an important issue. However, highlighting health topics will soften support since the NDP looks better on this file. One way to consult on this topic is to bring forward new ideas that the public will support but the NDP cannot due union interests. Such topics include private involvement in the health system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is a great issue for NDP to use. Given the NDP's worldview, it should attack any perceived attempt by the liberals (or others) to increase private health care services.
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is a great issue for the liberals. Voters have traditionally perceived them to be better managers and it is prominent in many voters' minds. This issue is top of mind for 27% of voters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attack liberal fumbles, but otherwise steer clear.
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The liberals trail slightly, but as the carbon tax showed, environmental issues can be used weaken support for the NDP in the environmental movement. Should not be too prominent since few voter say this is their top priority. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The NDP will need to be careful due to their opposition to the Carbon Tax. However, there is a natural affinity between environmentalists and the social justice platform of the NDP.
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only 5% of voters say this is their top priority. However, education may become more important as the economy improves and becomes less or a voter priority. Questions should explore choice in learning topics that the NDP cannot pursuit because union allies oppose these ideas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only 5% of voters presently this is their top priority. However, the issue may become more important once the economy improves. The NDP should attack personalized learning and focus on uniform solutions.

These issues can become more or less important to voters over time, as shown in Figure 12, located on page 69. These shifts will affect the value of consulting on each topic. In addition, the perceived strengths of each party on these issues will change from time to time. Organizers must consider these changes when developing their topic selection strategies.

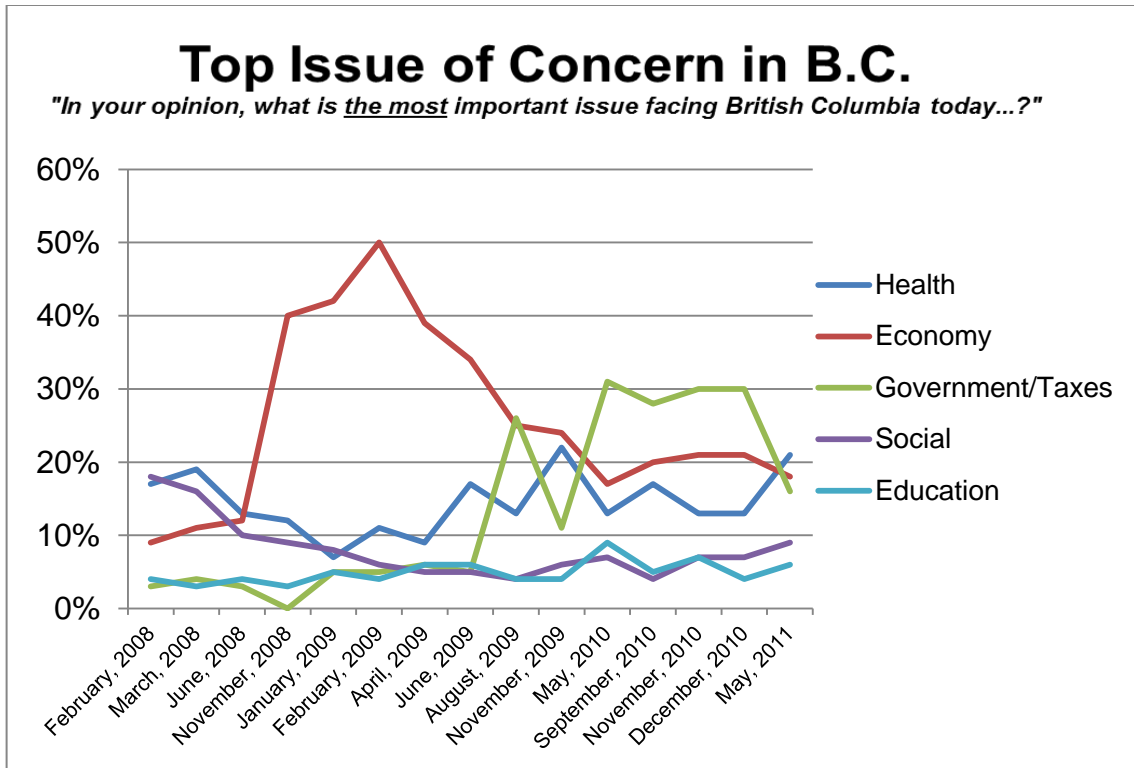


Figure 12 - Shifting importance of selected issues, adapted from Mustel Group (2011)

Managers should also look to see which topics interest young voters. Shachar (2003) noted that a voter's first choice tends to be enduring between elections, so catching young voters is important. These voters are likely to have different priorities compared to other segments, such as senior citizens approaching retirement.

It is not enough to consult on the right subjects, parties must also play to their strengths within these topics. The major parties often find themselves differentiating themselves based on the worldviews identified by Wexler (2005). This allows parties to promote unified platforms appealing to a large segment of the population, with policies that do not contradict other policies in the platform.

The parties seem to divide themselves on the Wexler wheel between the Communitarian, Entrepreneurial and Regulatory views as described by Wexler (2005). This division is shown in Figure 13, and is discussed in further detail in section 2.4. Parties do not exclusively represent one dominant worldview. For example, the NDP has an affiliation with communitarians through social justice issues. The BC Conservative's platform appears to straddle both the regulatory and entrepreneurial

views. This is not surprising since that party's leader has voted NDP in recent elections (Freeman, 2012). Its core principles support free enterprise competition, but also increasing environmental and natural resource protection which typically means increased regulation (BC Conservative Party, n.d.).

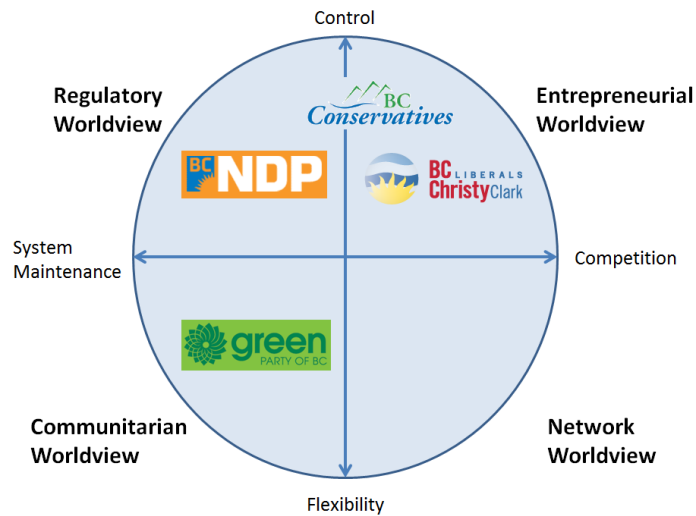


Figure 13 - Worldviews represented by B.C.'s parties on Wexler's map

These worldviews highlight how organizers should frame questions. The B.C. Liberals should pose questions that appeal to freedom, competition and limited regulation while the NDP should focus on uniform solutions. For example, the Liberals might look to improve schools by offering more choice in education and letting the various types of schools compete for students. The NDP might look to a uniform solution where every child is educated in the same type of classroom. Framing questions will be important to draw out these differences, so that the topics and answers appeal to both potential and current party supporters. In addition, framing would highlight the positives about the party's worldview and may convince independents to become supportive. Section 4.1.2 provides additional information on framing.

5.6 Participation Incentives

As noted by Harfoush in "Yes We Did", keeping people involved will be important for project success (Harfoush, 2009). One way to achieve this will be to offer small rewards to keep participants interested. These rewards should be appealing and ideally

draw participants closer into the party fold. Organizers could distribute prizes through contests or random draws as a reward for participation. These rewards will keep some people motivated to stay involved with the project.

Potential rewards might include a phone call from the party leader, free tickets to a fundraising dinner, invitations to receptions or coffee parties to meet the premier or other party leaders. The rewards do not have to be expensive; they merely need to be special enough to keep participants involved. Rewards should also incentivize participants to engage in other offline activities that create value for the party.

5.7 Harvesting Additional Benefits

OPPEP participants provide a potential network of volunteers that parties can use to support campaign efforts and thereby increase the odds of winning elections, or at least of retaining opposition status. While a complete discussion of how to implement these next steps is beyond the scope of this paper, I will briefly touch on them so that managers can think about how they might accrue these benefits.

Participants will be handing a wealth of personal information over to the project team. Responders will reveal what issues are important to them. This will allow organizers to personalize marketing efforts to suit each participant, potentially increasing the likelihood that the marketing strategy will achieve its goal. People who are interested in a specific topic should get information about the party's promises on that topic rather than generic messaging. Therefore, parties should plan to codify participants into groups and gather their contact information for use during the election campaign.

Organizers can also ask participants to become volunteers. It may be inferred from the fact that the participants have provided comments that they must be interested in politics. Asking OPPEP participants to volunteer for quick jobs is likely to succeed in converting online support into offline action. However, this will mean that the party will need to keep track of participants.

Readers wishing to gain further insight into how parties can use the relationships built by OPPEPs for direct marketing efforts should read Harfoush's 2009 book "Yes We Did" about her work on the Obama campaign.

5.8 Measuring Success

Given the project cost, it will be important to deliver value for the investment. Belch et al. (2005) note that it is good to measure results against objectives. It will be important to determine which objectives parties should use. Public opinion polls are not appropriate, since polls may shift for reasons unrelated to the project.

While it is important to measure the number of participants that are attracted to the project, numbers alone are not sufficient to determine the project's success. For instance, attracting participants who will never support the party does not achieve organizational objectives. Alternatively, attracting people who already contribute to policy development through party conventions does not move the party closer to its goals. Lastly, it is unlikely that more than ten or twenty thousand British Columbians will become frequent OPPEP participants, in which case the goal might be to attract volunteers who will convince others to vote for the party. Therefore, parties should seek other measures in addition to the number of participants taking part in the OPPEP.

Harfoush (2009) noted that online activity is good when it leads to offline support. Good measures of the benefits would include the number of new members who sign up through the project and the number who become volunteers or attend events.

As discussed in section 2.3, more than 75% of the population appears to be aware of the B.C. political brands. Therefore, goals aimed at increasing brand awareness seem to be inappropriate. Keller (1998) suggests that it is important to raise the perceived benefits provided by the brand when awareness is high.

If successful, the project will affect the tone and volume of online conversations about the party and its policies. As noted earlier, these conversations provide word of mouth recommendations that help to form brand attitudes. Parties that currently use social media should already be measuring the effectiveness of their investments. Phillips (2001) noted that, even ten years ago, entities could use neural nets and data mining to determine the efficacy of PR.

Sophisticated buzz monitoring tools to measure the volume and tone of internet

conversations are available to parties (Evans, 2010).¹⁷ Parties should track how volume and tone change during the implementation of the OPPEP to measure success, since they reflect how brand attitudes are changing. Unfortunately, public attitudes might be changing due to other, non-OPPEP factors, so analysts must take care when interpreting this data.

5.9 Final Thoughts on Implementation

The first step in the process will be to identify the technologies and business process changes required to implement the project. Organizers must clearly assign responsibility to individual managers for each change. Individual parties will make different implementation choices and will have different business structures, and this will affect how managers link and assign these responsibilities within a BDN.

Running an OPPEP would not be cheap. Parties must budget for the expense and must aim to staff the OPPEP appropriately. Analysing feedback will take time, but is necessary to make the project meaningful. The OPPEP must be genuine, or participants may disengage. Participants who feel the party was not serious when it asked for their feedback may come to distrust the party and its motivations.

Topic selection is not a trivial matter. Some topics are better suited to the project and to individual parties. Organizers must apply a strategic lens to this activity. Interns should not be responsible for selecting topics, since parties must choose these topics to achieve strategic marketing and communication objectives. Organizers should avoid the issue of the day if the public perceives the party to be weak on the subject. This would highlight the weakness and may prod participants to rethink their support of the party.

It is not enough to start the project and hope that it succeeds. Managers should measure success and failure in order to determine the value generated by the project and to make improvements to the format. Some good measures include how many new members join because of participating in the project and how the project affects the tone of online discussions about the party.

¹⁷ Evans also noted the importance of ensuring the monitoring tool's dictionary assigned the right meaning to words. A word that is neutral in one context may be positive or negative in another. For example, loyalty is perceived by many to be a good quality. However, an MLA said to be putting party loyalty of the interests of constituents may not be highly regarded. Complicating matters is that fact that a party might wish to be seen as standing up to a group or demographic. This would make posts emanating from that group appear negative despite the fact they are intended. However, some measures should be in place given the size of investment.

Once running, an OPPEP is likely to provide a source of new members, volunteers and even donors. However, organizers will need to reach out and ask participants to join the party, volunteer for events and even donate money.

6: Recommendation

As we have seen, OPPEPs provide parties with an opportunity to engage members of the public in policy development. Engaging citizens in the process may create a network of informed people and improve the public's understanding of the issues involved in policy development. In addition, people who have had a role in developing a policy are more likely to support the outcome. Participants are more likely to become ambassadors for the policies, and to encourage other people to support the outcome. Participants are also a potential source of volunteers. This means that parties who undertake an OPPEP will potentially have more people to carry out the multitude of tasks that lead to winning seats during elections.

Public engagement through online media is not free. Parties must either hire staff to implement the project or else free up the workload of existing employees so that they can carry out this work. Participants might disengage if nothing meaningful comes of their participation. These problems mean that parties cannot afford to implement the project poorly. Project staff must receive training for their new duties, including studies of bias and framing.

Implementing a public policy engagement project requires the creation of a complex network of IT and business process changes in order to generate the desired benefits. Creating a BDN and assigning managers to be responsible for each node would mitigate the risk that the complexity involved would jeopardise the project.

Despite all of the challenges and the significant effort required to implement the project, substantial rewards await parties that choose to engage with the public in this way. It will strengthen their appeal to voters, increase the number of volunteers dedicated to their team, make it less likely that their supporters will defect to other parties and, ultimately, make it more likely that they will win and retain the right to form government. In short, the project will reduce the influence of rivalry in this industry and help parties compete from differentiated positions. This will also raise entry barriers for new parties, since they will not be able to build meaningful projects; after all, how many people will be willing to dedicate time to a project that will have no impact?

Appendix – Detailed Costing of OPPEP Options and Agency Budgets

This appendix will look at the detailed cost model that I have prepared for the project in order to determine the expected project budget. I will start by providing resource assumptions for each step and then cost out the process for each option. Once I have estimated staffing costs, I will perform a sensitivity analysis on the recommended option to highlight which steps must be accurately estimated when planning the budget. The project will not hit full steam overnight. Therefore, I will provide monthly budget estimates at quarterly intervals for the start-up period and discuss the sensitivity of the estimates.

These operating costs must yield a benefit. Therefore, I will perform a benefits analysis after looking at the costs.

Cost Model, Assumptions and Sensitivity Analysis

The primary cost driver of the OPPEP will be the staff time required to monitor the site and follow up on engagements. Costs will vary depending on the type of project, the frequency of consultations and popularity of the OPPEP.

I have assumed that parties that do not share feedback will receive 10,000 participants (that is, observers, since not everyone will respond to each post). I based this on the observation that nearly as many people responded to a recent consultation hosted by the BC Legislature (2012) on a very hot topic (cosmetic pesticide use). I have also considered the Facebook pages of politicians with the largest followings, such as Christy Clark who recently surpassed 8,000 fans. I have also assumed that as the dialogue will engage participants it is likely to attract twice as many followers.

While the site will have many followers, not everyone will respond to each question. Observation of BC Liberal policy sessions shows that each topic engages some people and bores others. There is no reason to suspect that online engagement will be different. I have based the response rates on observation of MLA John Rustad's Facebook account, which is the closest facsimile I have found to the project in B.C. Seldom do his 4,400 followers provide more than 70 responses to any of his questions. The sample average was 42 or 1%. Political parties are likely to achieve a higher response rate because they corporately have more power to effect change and therefore the accomplishment will be more visible. This lines up with research cited by Saebo et al. (2010) stating that "Janssen and Kies (2005) argue that citizens' will to participate is dependent on assumed political impact." While I cannot measure the difference in perceived impact of the two, I have conservatively assumed a 5% response rate for each question on an open forum that is hosted by a party.

In developing these models, I have assumed that sites with published feedback will receive 2.5 times as many responses. I based this estimate on observations of political dialogues hosted by a B.C. MLA (John Rustad) where the observed samples had averages ranging from 1.5 to 4.0 responses per responder with an average of 2.5 responses per unique responder.

Most BC Liberal Party conventions attract approximately 1000 members. Since it is easier to participate online, I have assumed that three times as many will join an invitation only website and have slightly increased the response rates since invited

followers are less likely to observe passively.

The remaining estimates come from the observations of interviewees performing or managing similar work. Salary and benefits are similar to those doing similar work at GCPE and with government caucus and within the liberal party.

Lastly, the squares shaded in yellow are variable figures that are completely at the control of the party. I have not included the “do nothing” option since the operating cost is zero. I also have excluded the “scan existing sites” option since the costs are entirely variable and depend on how many sites are monitored and how frequently.

I have not included costs to identify and invite participants into closed forums. Regional organizers whose jobs are to get more people involved with the party could accomplish this. These invitations do not represent an additional cost because without the site, they would look to other ways to get people involved with their party.

Table 15, located on page 78, displays the resource and cost assumptions used to estimate the annual operating cost of each type of OPPEP.

Table 15 - Project cost model

Step (time in hours)	Invitation Only With Private Feedback	Open site With Private Feedback	By Invitation Only With Dialogue	Open Forum With Dialogue
Brainstorm engagement topics	1	1	1	1
Determine if question requires stakeholder consultation	1	1	1	1
Develop public discussion paper	14	14	14	14
Obtain expert feedback on discussion paper	7	7	7	7
Determine how feedback is measured	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5
Draft Question	1	1	1	1
Post Question	0	0	0	0
Monitor/Moderate feedback (per response)	0	0	0.02	0.02
Draft and send form response from minister or critic	1	1	1	1
Analyse feedback (per response)	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25
Give analysis to minister or critic	3	3	3	3
Make decision and implement (not a party expense)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Inform participants about the result.	3	3	3	3

Assumptions

Total # of participants	3000	10000	3000	20,000
average # of responses per question	100	200	250	1000
# of questions per year	52	52	52	52

Calculations

Staff hours required per question	58.5	83.5	101.6	305.7
Total staff FTE required	1.73	2.47	3.00	9.03
Salary + benefits per FTE (Average Salary of \$67,500 per year)	\$84,375	\$84,375	\$84,375	\$84,375
Cost	\$145,835	\$208,157	\$253,168	\$762,134

As with any estimate, there is a possibility that the assumptions driving the cost model are inaccurate. Therefore, I have conducted the sensitivity analysis shown in Table 16, located on page 79, on the chosen option, in order to determine how each assumption affects project costs. I have omitted the number of participants since responses, not participants, drive the workload. I have also left out staff hours required per question, total FTE required and the total cost since these are dependent variables.

Table 16 - Open site with private feedback sensitivity analysis

Step	Annual cost reduction if time for this item is reduced by 10%	Annual cost increase if time for this item is increased by 10%
Brainstorm engagement topics	-\$249	\$249
Determine if question requires stakeholder consultation	-\$249	\$249
Develop public discussion paper	-\$3,490	\$3,490
Obtain expert feedback on discussion paper	-\$1,745	\$1,745
Determine how feedback is measured	-\$623	\$623
Draft Question	-\$249	\$249
Post Question	\$0	\$0
Monitor/Moderate feedback (per response)	\$0	\$0
Draft and send form response from minister or critic	-\$249	\$249
Analyse feedback (per response)	-\$12,464	\$12,464
Give analysis to minister or critic	-\$748	\$748
Make decision and implement (not a party expense)	n/a	n/a
Inform participants about the result.	-\$748	\$748

Assumptions	Annual cost reduction if this item is reduced by 10%	Annual cost increase if this item is increased by 10%
Total # of participants	n/a	n/a
average # of responses per question	-\$12,464	\$12,464
# of questions per year	-\$20,816	\$20,816

Calculations	Annual cost reduction if this item is reduced by 10%	Annual cost increase if this item is increased by 10%
Salary + benefits per FTE (Average Salary of \$67,500 per year)	-\$20,816	\$20,816

As shown above, the accuracy of the cost estimates depends most on the number of questions per year, the average number of responses and the time it takes to analyse feedback. In the worst-case scenario, where each step takes 10% longer than predicted and the average number of responses and salaries are 10% higher, the total project cost is \$266,000 per year or 28% higher than the base case. The best-case scenario, where each of these items is 10% less than expected, implies a cost reduction of 28%.

An OPPEP will not hit full steam overnight. It will take time for participants to become aware of and attracted to the project. Word of mouth referrals through the party social media accounts will be important to attracting people. The online following will grow until it reaches equilibrium when there are fewer interested people to attract and they become harder to find. This equilibrium will be dynamic as the number of potentially interested people changes. One of my interviewees felt that it would take 2 years to hit this equilibrium unless heavily advertised. Not much research appears to be available to determine the rate of acquisition of followers. As such, I will approximate growth with a straight line. This is not perfect, but should be close enough to develop a

preliminary budget for the chosen option, open site/private feedback. This monthly budget is:

Month	0	3	6	9	12	15	18	21	24
Monthly Cost	\$0	\$2,168	\$4,337	\$6,505	\$8,673	\$10,842	\$13,010	\$15,178	\$17,346

If it takes 3 years for the project to hit full steam, then these estimates are \$3,500 per month too high in month 24 (although closer in all other months). If it only takes a single year to hit equilibrium, then the estimates in months 1-12 are off by a factor of two. Therefore, parties should plan to be ready in case there is a surge in participation.

Benefits Analysis

The project's operating cost would not be cheap for any party and therefore it must yield some benefits in return. As discussed in section 5.8, those benefits might be finding and retaining volunteers who will help with the campaign and changing the tone of internet conversations.

Measuring increased donations is somewhat complicated by the fact that parties should not include any donations that are cannibalized from traditional fundraising efforts. The party should only consider money received from new donors who participate in the OPPEP as a project benefit. The amount of funds raised should be measured, but may be small.

It will be difficult to ascribe changes in the behaviour of existing members to the project. They may donate more, volunteer more or even be less likely to leave the party. Unfortunately, it would be difficult to measure these outcomes.

One change that would be relatively easy to measure is the number of new volunteers that are attracted through the project. While many of the participants will already be party volunteers or even supporters of rivals, some will be non-members that can be recruited into the party. Assuming these new members volunteer for two four-hour shifts per week during the month long campaign and assuming the contribution is valued at \$15 per hour (a modest rate for temporary labour), each new volunteer would be worth \$480 per campaign. If this were the only project benefit, over 1,700 new volunteers would need to be attracted to make the project worthwhile. This is modest at 17% of expected participants, but parties cannot take this for granted and must track whether participants volunteer. This measure does not include any hours volunteered between elections.

Changes to the tone of internet conversations should also be measured, but it will be difficult to place a dollar value on the results.

Start-up Costs

Project start-up costs are highly dependent on the parties' content management service contracts and the format used. If launched on Facebook, this could be done virtually without cost. An open project with private responses would be more difficult since there are few off the shelf tools to implement the project (Pederson, 2012). One should expect start-up costs to total between \$15,000 and \$40,000 depending on the

bells and whistles attached to the project and the time it takes to design and experiment with the look and feel (Pederson, 2012). Organizers thinking about undertaking this project should consult with their web content management services to develop cost estimates.

Marketing costs are not included in the estimates above. Regional organizers and MLAs are in a good position to plant the seed early. They are in regular contact with riding leaders and can as part of their day jobs, encourage them to help market the project, so there is no incremental cost to promote the project.

Budgets of Each Potential Managing Agency

The reader should also note the relative budgets of the agencies that could manage the project. Table 17 below outlines the agencies' budgets. Government run projects are not available to opposition parties. Caucuses' annual funding must cover all administrative, research and communications needs. Therefore, managers cannot direct all of a caucus' annual funding to the project. Organizers likewise cannot direct the entire party budget to the project. Party budgets must cover administration, communication, research, and debt repayment while saving some money for the next election. MLA-run projects would not cost money per se, but the trade-off would be that the MLA would have less time available for their other priorities.

Table 17 - Annual budgets of potential managing agencies

	Government	Caucus annual funding (March 2012)	Party Fundraising (2010)	MLA
BC Liberals	Limited to voted appropriation.	\$3.05 million	\$9.6 million	*
BC NDP	Not available for this party.	\$3.16 million	\$4 million	*
BC Conservatives	Not available for this party.	-	\$61,000	*
Green Party	Not available for this party.	-	\$139,000	*

One thing to note from the chart above is that the open input/published feedback option is really only practical for government. The Liberals could possibly set up a party run project in this format, but this would be a significant portion of that party's budget. The next observation is that project costs are out of the reach of the Green Party and the Conservatives. These parties would have to rely on volunteer-run efforts. The data for Table 17 come from Metrics EFG (2008), BC Liberals (2011, b), BC NDP (2011), BC Conservatives (2011) and BC Green Party (2011).

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