

INTRODUCTION

Founded in 1978, the Canadian Study of Parliament Group (CSPG) will soon be celebrating its 25th anniversary. Since its inception, the Group has committed itself to pursuing the aims and goals envisioned by its founding members, as outlined in the Group's original charter. Much has been accomplished. Over the years, the Group has organized conferences and seminars, held learning events, established vibrant partnerships, provided forums for education and information exchange, and published numerous articles and papers, all with a view to fostering greater understanding of, and appreciation for, Canada's parliamentary institutions. At the same time, membership in the Group has grown from a small core of like-minded individuals to a diverse and dynamic mix of nearly 400 today.

But while each important milestone is an occasion for reflection and taking stock of accomplishments, it also affords an opportunity for looking ahead and for charting a course for the future. It is with this in mind that the Group's Executive Committee decided to embark on a strategic planning process culminating in the development of this Strategic Plan.

This is the first time since its inception that the Group has undertaken such a vital organizational exercise. It has been a rewarding process. In April of this year, all CSPG members received a survey from the Executive Committee asking for members' views regarding key issues and priorities to be considered for the future. The survey results were analyzed and findings summarized into a report to the Executive. Using the results from the member survey as a foundation, the Executive Committee then convened a strategic planning session on May 10th, 2002, in Ottawa. Over 30 members participated in the session which was facilitated by a team of external management consultants. This Strategic Plan is the culmination of these efforts; it reflects the insights, wisdom and contribution of a broad cross-section of members regarding where the Group should focus its energies in the immediate years ahead.

CHALLENGE AND CHANGE

Today, many Canadians are questioning the relevance of legislative institutions. Worse, public apathy, disengagement and cynicism towards government risks undermining the legitimacy of democratic processes. Yet these same conditions are giving rise to renewed interest and debate about legislative bodies. Hardly a day goes by without media commentary or critique regarding some aspect of parliament; much of that commentary is not as well informed as it should be. More than ever, there is a need for enlightened discourse regarding parliament's future, and for dispelling common myths and misconceptions about its role.

CSPG is well positioned to respond to this need, but to do so effectively will require a more formalized and structured approach better suited to CSPG's size and to the growing complexity of the environment in which it operates. If used appropriately, technology can be an important enabler. Today, the Internet and its related technology is ubiquitous and e-mail now rivals voice-mail as a means of communicating and exchanging information. Technology holds potential to further enhance communications linkages between CSPG and its members.

Financial resources will continue to be a challenge for a the larger, more active CSPG of the 21st century. Many members see the challenge as opportunity, believing there is potential for CSPG to leverage its efforts towards promoting understanding of parliamentary systems through greater participation, collaboration and involvement with other groups and organizations.

CSPG's greatest asset has always been the quality and commitment of its membership. The mix of academics and practitioners makes for a dynamic blend of the theoretical with the practical. The ability to draw on excellent minds and first-hand experience in a spirit of collegiality has, in the past, generated a high caliber of communication, debate and exchange. Yet, membership growth has brought with it new challenges, chief among them providing the means for effective member interaction and ensuring that members have sufficient opportunity to become engaged in the work of the Group through involvement in committees or other activities. It is increasingly evident that a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to satisfy the majority of members and that initiatives aimed at addressing the interests of specific member segments offer a way forward.

CSPG has been, and continues to be, first and foremost a "study group"; while individual members have made their mark, the Group itself has tended to favour analysis while stopping short of taking positions or making recommendations. However, at a time when the very relevance of parliament is being challenged and debated, there are those who would like CSPG to be more visible and to speak with a louder voice. There is much that CSPG can do to reach out to audiences who have a stake in the evolution of our parliamentary systems; more proactive outreach can contribute positively to perceptions of CSPG's own relevance. Whether, as some have suggested, CSPG should reach beyond the bounds of its existing constitution is another matter for future consideration.

For nearly a quarter century, CSPG has responded successfully to challenge and change. It has done so by focusing on those opportunities that best serve the interests of its members and mandate. Armed with a clear vision and strategy, CSPG is now well positioned to build on this legacy – doing so with renewed energy, commitment and enthusiasm. All signs point to a promising future.

CSPG's STRATEGIC ROADMAP

This section constitutes the body of CSPG's Strategic Plan and will provide direction and focus for the energies of the Group and its Executive over the coming years. It is based on analysis and synthesis of the collective wisdom and input of CSPG members who participated in the strategic planning process either through the member survey or via the May 10th Strategic Planning workshop.

The Plan consists of six (6) key priorities (P.1 to P.6). Associated with each key priority is a key result (R.1 to R.6). Each key result represents a desired outcome, in other words, what would be achieved by successfully pursuing the related priority. Finally, a set of strategies (S.1, S.2, S.3, etc.) accompany each of the priorities and results sought. These represent the primary ways and means by which the priorities will be achieved.

P.1 Provide a planned schedule of activities

R.1 CSPG contributes effectively and consistently to the knowledge and understanding of parliamentary systems and institutions for the benefit of its members and for Canadians.

S.1 Develop/provide/publish an annual schedule of planned activities (e.g. conferences and seminars)

S.2 Establish subcommittees to focus on needs of specific audience segments (e.g. education subcommittee, regional subcommittee)

S.3 Create additional opportunities to spread knowledge and ideas and encourage debate

S.4 Hold more targeted events (e.g. special breakfast/lunch sessions, youth parliament)

S.5 Identify what CSPG can do that is unique (not done by anyone else)

P.2 Exploit potential for joint programming, partnerships and alliances

R.2 CSPG leverages its scarce resources by working closely with and through others while achieving new synergies and greater value for members.

S.1 Identify and build upon shared interests with other related organizations

S.2 Examine potential for closer links to related provincial bodies

S.3 Forge alliances with like-minded associations, foundations and institutes

S.4 Seek sponsorship and/or partnership with complementary organizations for programs and activities of mutual interest and benefit

P.3 Strengthen Member Communications

R.3 Members are fully cognizant of the existence and outcomes of CSPG programs and activities. Members have an effective means to provide input, share information or exchange ideas among each other or with the Executive.

S.1 Ensure regular and consistent member communications (e.g. systematize communications both electronic and regular)

S.2 Create new vehicles to enhance member communications (e.g. e-newsletter, listserv)

S.3 Disseminate Group knowledge and output routinely and systematically (e.g. electronic dissemination of publications and conference proceedings)

S.4 Provide greater opportunity for member involvement at all levels (locally, regionally, provincially and nationally)

S.5 Update CSPG promotional literature/brochures and create web versions

P.4 Promote Membership Development and Engagement

R.4 Members actively advance their intellectual development and knowledge through interaction with other members, their involvement in Group activity and, should they desire, their engagement in Group committees, programs and activities.

S.1 Actively recruit new members, especially those who can enhance the quality of Group's member mix (e.g. ex-MPs, ex-parliamentary interns)

S.2 Ensure that a balance of interests among interests of different Group members is achieved (e.g. activities targeted to audience segments)

S.3 Establish new categories of members (e.g. honorary member)

S.4 Organize the Executive for maximum participation and effectiveness (e.g. committees model, functional model)

S.5 Recognize and celebrate member achievement (e.g. publish best intern papers)

P.5 Increase Profile, Visibility and Outreach

R.5 CSPG is recognized as a highly credible source of knowledge about legislative bodies and an important contributor to the on-going discourse and debate about their relevance, evolution and change.

- S.1 Disseminate knowledge and information more effectively and systematically (e.g. use of web site to connect to youth, use of e-mail for membership, establish Listserv and links to other sites)
- S.2 Hold more events locally as well as in the regions and provinces
- S.3 Proactively cultivate relations with and provide learning opportunities to media and publishers. Develop media relations capability designed to give a voice to CSPG (e.g. contact list, spokespersons, media kit)
- S.4 Reach out to selective target audiences (e.g. teachers, professors of political science, constitutional lawyers, MPs, Senators, Diplomats, MPPs and other practitioners)
- S.5 Develop “content” designed to appeal to specific audiences (e.g. youth games module, education module, legal module)
- S.6 Strengthen ties with universities and other related organizations

P.6 Examine the extent to which CSPG’s constitution continues to serve the interests of the organization and its members.

R.6 CSPG’s constitution supports relevant and practical goals in a way that continues to garner the support of the Group’s sponsors, members and partners today and in the foreseeable future.

S.1 Consider the organization’s name and whether or not it is too limiting and should be changed

S.2 Consider possible changes to Articles 1 and 2 (e.g. broader, more inclusive terms, role of education/learning, choice of verbs, English/French equivalency)

S.3 Reconsider CSPG’s role and whether it is too limiting or too ambitious (e.g. question of advocacy, sponsorship, MPs)