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Looking to the Future: How to Engage Everyone

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When we look to the future what do we see? Issues that are complex and require the help of multiple players in order to be able to overcome them; a shift in understanding and a recognition that not all the answers or the solutions lie within the purview of any single organization or government and a demographic shift where in the younger generation is more educated and increasingly fluent with the newest technological devices.

In this dynamic space how can government engage multiple players in order to develop a collaborative path forward? What does public engagement look like in an age of social diversity, increasing complexity and the proliferation of social media? Germany's "Dialog über Deutschlands Zukunft" (A discussion on Germany's future) is a case worth following. Under this initiative, the government of Germany has engaged in an open discussion with citizens, experts and business to develop a vision for the country's future.

Germany's foresight project

In February 2012, Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, launched the interactive, collaborative initiative with German citizens. She has invited all German citizens into an open discussion both online and in person on the future of Germany. All discussions and online engagement can be viewed on the [web site](#).

The project has three phases: the first began in May of 2011 and involved consultations with 100 experts; the second phase runs from February 2012 through to April 2012 and involves the engagement of civil society. The third and final phase runs from April 2012 to September where all of the information

obtained will be analyzed and consolidated into the final report for publication in September 2012.

The national dialogue centers on three broad questions with sub-themes:

1. How do we want to learn together? (sub-themes include learning, internet and cohesion);
2. How do we want to live together? (sub-themes include intergenerational relations, security and identity); and
3. What do we want to live from? (sub-themes include work, innovation and how do we create wealth?)

So how does one go about engaging the public in a discussion on their future?

Germany has established two means for civil participation: in person and online.

Ms. Merkel held and facilitated three town hall discussions in three different German cities: [Heidelberg](#), [Bielefeld](#) and [Erfurt](#), each of which is available for viewing on the website. Each discussion, broadcast live, focused on one of the three themes. One hundred participants were invited to each session ranging from retirees to university students, people working in trades to those in professions, private business and academia. In addition, individuals who attended the town halls had the

opportunity to provide written proposal and leave them with Ms. Merkel.

Individuals have several options for participating online. Citizens can directly post their suggestions for any of the three themes. To date over 10,000 suggestions have been posted. Citizens can vote on the suggestions they like the best, they can comment on suggestions and have online discussions, pose [questions](#), review all [videos](#) pertaining to the themes, or read and comment on various [blogs](#) via the same website that discuss specific themes. Ms. Merkel also maintains a personal blog on the website.

How will the results be used?

Policy Horizons Canada will be following Germany's visioning exercise and providing a brief summary of its outcomes following the final report in September 2012.

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