Values Added

Community University Research Alliance

Planning Event, 12 December 2002

Report of Proceedings

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Tattoo Annex, Signal Hill Interpretive Centre
St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador
12 December 2002

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The *Values Added* Community University Research Alliance

The *Values Added* Community University Research Alliance (CURA) is a collaborative research project focusing on the Strategic Social Plan, an experiment being undertaken by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Strategic Social Plan (SSP), released in 1998, represents a deliberate shift in the province's approach to social policy and therefore provides a unique opportunity for research in policy formulation, collaborative relationships and program implementation. CURA is a multi-disciplinary partnership between the Community Services Council and Memorial University of Newfoundland that combines the strengths of academic and community-based researchers in creating a framework for research, knowledge generation and analysis.

Among the themes to be explored by the *Values Added* CURA are:

> ➢ the historical roots of the SSP;
> ➢ implementation processes related to and the issues emanating from the SSP;
> ➢ how government responds to public input in setting policy objectives;
> ➢ the role and contributions of the voluntary, community-based sector (VCBS) in the environment created by the SSP;
> ➢ the SSP's contribution to fostering social cohesion, community capacity, inclusive citizen engagement, and a climate of growth and development;
> ➢ deliberate policy shifts and new models of collaboration; and
> ➢ the barriers and bridges to collaborative, public-voluntary sector partnerships.

The CURA research team would like to cooperate with others having an interest in the Strategic Social Plan on collaborative research undertakings to develop these themes and to identify other issues and future activities of mutual interest.

The *Values Added* CURA project is funded primarily by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

The Strategic Social Plan

In 1998, the provincial government released *People, Partners and Prosperity: A Strategic Social Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador*. Based on recommendations resulting from an extensive public dialogue (carried out by the Social Policy Advisory Committee in 1996), the SSP emphasizes the link between social and economic development, investing in people, and building on community and regional strengths. The SSP is a deliberate government policy instrument advocating a place-based model for development while encouraging a more collaborative form of governance and represents a significant shift in the province's approach to policy formulation, program design, and service delivery. It is about shifting public policy and decision-making from a reactive mode to a preventive

and early intervention model. It advocates a results-based approach to population well being and seeks to link social and economic development through broad-based strategies at government and community levels using integrated and coordinated public policy responses. It proposes greater collaboration and increased partnerships involving the provincial government, the federal government, communities, and voluntary organizations as the basis for sustainable development.[*]

Perhaps the most significant feature of the plan for the VCBS is its acknowledgement of the sector's role in community capacity building and as a channel for citizen engagement. In recognition of its contributions to society, the SSP also commits government to strengthening the sector's capacity to facilitate community development, to provide input into the policymaking process, and to participate in collaborative government.

Purpose of the Planning Event

To this point, CURA researchers have explored the origins of the SSP and have begun collecting baseline data on levels of awareness and understanding of the Plan in the voluntary, community-based sector. We now wish to move beyond these foundational research activities to work more closely with those involved at many levels of the implementation process. This event was organized to bring together researchers, stakeholders and policy shapers to identify new avenues of exploration to help shape our research agenda with the longer term view of increasing understanding of the implementation process and what the SSP might mean for the province as a whole.

Our primary expectations for the day were to:

- bring together people involved with or interested in the Strategic Social Plan to discuss and contribute to CURA's research agenda;
- identify key questions and research themes for exploration;
- strengthen our networks and formulate potential joint approaches to undertaking research initiatives; and
- share the results of our preliminary research.

Among the issues we hoped to elaborate on were:

- the SSP as a model for collaborative government;
- the role of specific groups and organizations in the implementation process (for example, the Premier's Council on Social Development, the SSP Unit, the Regional Steering Committees, community groups);

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[*] Malcolm Rowe and Vivian Randell, "Newfoundland and Labrador's Strategic Social Plan," in Susan Delacourt and Donald G. Lenihan, eds., *Collaborative Government: Is There a Canadian Way?* (Toronto: IPAC, 1999).

- the SSP's contribution to fostering social cohesion, community capacity, inclusive citizen engagement, and a climate of growth and development; and
- the barriers and bridges to collaborative, public-voluntary sector partnerships.

We also wished to discuss how we might work together in exploring these and related issues as CURA is committed to building collaborative research partnerships to ensure that others benefit from its findings and activities.

Research Themes

Many important and useful suggestions for potential research topics were generated during the panel session and group discussions at the planning event. These have been organized under several broad themes which are outlined below. Several sample research questions have been included to illustrate each theme.

Evidence-Based Decision-Making

The Strategic Social Plan emphasizes the need for evidence-based decision-making, i.e., for identifying issues and choosing priorities based on research. Participants agreed that this was one of the most widely accepted principles of the plan to date, both within government and in the community. In fact, the Community Accounts, a database containing information on a variety of indicators at the provincial, regional and community levels, created and maintained by the Newfoundland Statistics Agency (NSA), is considered one of the major achievements of the SSP to date. It allows government departments and agencies, regional committees and boards, and community groups to compare data for different geographical areas or to track change over time in a particular region.

Several planning event participants suggested, however, that there are some limitations to the utility of the Community Accounts. For example, some of the Regional Steering Committees have found that they require more detailed information than is currently available in order to properly explore issues in their regions. Furthermore, some data sets are incompatible making comparison of the data difficult. The periods for which data is available also poses potential problems as it may only show short-term trends producing an erroneous impression of the issues facing particular communities or regions. Unfortunately, the Regional Steering Committees and most community groups lack the necessary resources (primarily funding and experienced researchers) to gather additional data or even to properly analyze existing data in order to support evidence-based decision-making. Some of the Regional Steering Committees would like to identify some short-term indicators to explore what is happening in their regions to inform their discussions and decision-making but find this an insurmountable challenge in the absence of research support.

Another challenge identified around the use of evidence in decision-making is the tension created when the results of research fail to support a favored position or approach. It was noted that all research is politicized but there must be widespread acceptance of the value of knowledge, whether it supports one's position or not.

Research Questions/Themes:

1. What indicators/models can be developed to measure long-term well-being?
2. How can we quantify the changes that have occurred over the last ten years in Newfoundland and Labrador?
3. How can communities gather and use evidence in a meaningful way?
4. How do the regional steering committees affect/influence the decision-making process in government?

Change (Cultural and Structural)

The Strategic Social Plan advocates that government – and its partners – change the way they do business. It calls for more evidence-based decision-making, horizontal cooperation among government departments, more consultation with the public and with community groups, a place-based approach to development, linking social and economic issues, and so on. Each of these entails some degree of change whether cultural, structural or both, particularly in government but also in the community. There is significant interest in the nature of the change required by the SSP, whether change has occurred, and whether some are adapting to change more readily than others and why.

Among the structural changes considered essential to the successful implementation of SSP strategies/principles was the creation of structures to enable and encourage VCBS input into the development of government policies and programs. Related issues include the establishment of partnerships in a structure that is not "partnership friendly" and the structural change associated with the shift from a government to a community perspective.

A number of planning event participants also noted the difficulties associated with introducing a new culture in a bureaucratic institution such as government. Among the necessary cultural changes discussed was a greater willingness on the part of politicians and civil servants to take risks by introducing new or modifying existing policies and programs as opposed to preserving the status quo. Other suggestions included valuing social as well as economic planning, recognizing the linkages between social and economic development, greater emphasis on horizontal cooperation among departments, providing greater authority to frontline workers, encouraging flexibility in program delivery, and a client-centered rather than program-oriented approach to services. While these primarily reflect cultural changes within government, the need for change within the community and the VCBS was also noted. This would entail a greater willingness to

engage in collaborations and an awareness and acceptance of the difficulties and limitations facing government.

Research Questions/Themes:

1. What structural and/or cultural changes are required within government to implement the SSP? What changes are required within the community? The voluntary, community-based sector?
2. What structural/cultural changes have already taken place in government as part of the SSP implementation process? In the community?
3. Are some organizations or government departments more open to change than others (i.e., are learning organizations)? If so, why?
4. What is the role of leadership in introducing change?
5. How can change be measured?
6. Is it possible to determine which changes were engendered by the SSP?

Barriers and Bridges to Implementation

While discussing the need for change in government and the community to implement the SSP, several participants pointed out some of the barriers to introducing change. Although the SSP advocates greater accountability, particularly within government, this is in some ways incompatible with the plan's emphasis on collaboration. Involving more groups in the decision-making process makes determining accountability increasingly difficult. Another difficulty related to the decision-making process and collaboration is the need for trade-offs. Government must frequently balance the importance of one expenditure over another which becomes problematic when others, unfamiliar with the demands on government, are brought to the table. A third possible contradiction relating to government accountability and the SSP is the demand for more flexible programs and policies.

One barrier already faced by the Regional Steering Committees is how to involve community groups and the general public in collaborations when simply defining "community," as well as who or what groups constitute the community, is problematic. Overcoming barriers to information exchange and identifying effective communication strategies has become another, related concern for government and the steering committees alike, raising questions regarding how much information should be released to the public and the most effective means of disseminating information. Another serious challenge facing the regional steering committees is a lack of resources, particularly for conducting research to gather data essential to evidence-based decision-making. Although the value of the Community Accounts in providing a foundation for evidence-based decision-making is widely recognized, without the staff and skills to supplement and analyze the available data, the Accounts cannot be fully utilized.

Distrust of government and its motivations in seeking input from community groups was cited as another barrier to collaboration. It was suggested that, in order to succeed, the

collaborative model requires trust, especially public trust in government and a belief that consultations are meaningful. Government can foster trust by providing feedback on consultations, i.e., repeating the views expressed to ensure accuracy and explaining which suggestions can and will be acted upon and why some may be less feasible. In this way, government can help bridge the divide between it and the community and build successful partnerships.

Research Questions/Themes:

1. How can an elected form of government be balanced with a collaborative model?
2. Who is accountable for decisions made collaboratively?
3. How can government design an agenda that recognizes the challenges it faces with the public demanding a role at the table?
4. What structures or mechanisms are best suited to connecting government to the community and for involving the community in the SSP implementation process?
5. How can we ensure that all groups, regardless of size and means, have an opportunity to influence policy?
6. What are the barriers to change within an organization (e.g., reluctance to take risks)? What are the bridges (e.g., a department's past experience with consultation/collaboration/strategic planning)?

Volunteerism

One of CURA's identified research themes is the province's voluntary, community-based sector (VCBS) in the environment created by the Strategic Social Plan. CURA researchers have already begun conducting research on the historical and current perspectives/awareness/understanding of the SSP among those in the voluntary sector. Planning event participants suggested several other avenues of exploration related to the VCBS and volunteerism in the province. Some were interested in the involvement of voluntary, community-based organizations (VCBOs) in the decision-making process and whether patterns of government consultation with the sector have changed. Others wondered what the role of VCBOs has been/should be in the SSP implementation process.

Interest was also expressed regarding volunteerism in general and what impact the shift towards a regional focus may have on patterns of volunteering. It was suggested that in the past, people, particularly in Newfoundland and Labrador, have volunteered in order to help others in their community. This led to the question of whether individuals would be less inclined to volunteer if the focus was regional benefit/improvement, as is being encouraged by regional implementation of the SSP, rather than to help a neighbor or their community?

Another important consideration is the impact of rising demands on volunteers in the province which will likely increase under a collaborative model. The Regional Steering Committees, for example, are composed in part of volunteers who, in addition to working

with their primary organizations, have been asked to assume demanding roles in the SSP implementation process which require them to examine and respond to a great deal of information. One participant also raised the question of what happens when, due to information overload, only those heading up an organization or committee possess all the requisite knowledge. This can lead to an imbalance of power and individual dominance over an organization's agenda.

Research Questions/Themes:

1. Has the nature of government consultations with VCBOs changed since the release of the SSP in 1998?
2. How does government respond to public input on policy?
3. Does government provide feedback to community groups following consultations?
4. What is the role of the VCBS in the SSP implementation process?
5. How has the shift to a regional perspective affected volunteerism in communities around the province?
6. Is volunteer burnout/information overload contributing to an imbalance of power in organizations?

Collaborative Research

Laying a foundation for collaborative research is one of the primary aims of the *Values Added* CURA and the planning event was seen as an opportunity to get feedback from potential research partners on how this might be accomplished. While participants expressed significant interest in collaboration, it is apparent that this will require dialogue, cooperation, and ingenuity.

One impediment to collaboration between community groups and academics is their widely divergent research needs and interests. While community groups require practical data and information on the issues facing their communities, academics must develop and test theoretical models and engage in debates within their disciplines. Although their research interests may sometimes overlap, there is rarely a perfect fit. For example, some representatives of the Regional Steering Committees have expressed a need to identify long-term and short-term indicators to explore what changes are taking place within their regions. This is seen as essential to evidence-based decision-making and to communicating the importance of strategic social planning through evidence of change. Few academics, however, are able to spend time gathering data that will not contribute to the body of knowledge in their disciplines.

Another concern is the politicized nature of most research, which can lead to tensions among the groups involved. When the results of a research project contradict the arguments/interests/values of those with a vested interest in an issue, it can create division and controversy. It was argued that the value of knowledge, whether it supports or disputes one's position, must be recognized.

Despite these concerns, it is clear that both sides can benefit from collaborative research efforts – community groups from the skills and expertise possessed by academics and academics from the firsthand knowledge of those working at the community level and from opportunities to test theoretical models in the field. In this way, the knowledge generated by academics when working with community groups is even more valuable as its theoretical underpinnings mean that it can be applied to other communities and regions and is not only applicable to the geographical area in which the research was conducted.

Research Questions/Themes:

1. How can the research interests of academics be reconciled with the practical needs of community groups?
2. How can the value of research and all knowledge be communicated to the public and groups with vested interests?

Establishing Research Priorities

During the afternoon, planning event participants were divided into four groups to discuss the ideas generated in the morning sessions and to generate new research questions. The discussions were facilitated by a CURA team member and recorded by a CSC staff person. At the end of the discussion, groups were asked to select the four most interesting, important or pressing research topics/questions discussed and these were written on a flip chart. The flip charts from all four groups were then displayed and planning event participants were given an opportunity to read the questions/themes generated by other groups. Each person was given a number of colored dots and asked to place them next to the research questions or topics they considered most important. This enabled us to see at a glance what issues participants considered priorities.

The results of this exercise suggest participants view the development of long- and short-term indicators as evidence of change and well being as important. Similarly, many wanted to know what distinguishes a viable from a non-viable community and to learn more about the success stories coming out of the SSP, what makes them successes and whether these "small wins" are important. The popularity of these suggestions indicates that participants are interested in the use of evidence to support decision-making and want to learn from the experiences of others so that this knowledge can be applied to their own communities and regions. The most popular choice, however, was a study of structural issues related to the shift from a government to a community perspective as a result of the SSP and the barriers and bridges associated with this change.

Other research questions/topics appearing on the flip charts included the impact of social changes on volunteering in the province; the unintended consequences of and tensions

resulting from SSP implementation; how communities can gather and use evidence in meaningful ways; and the issue of accountability in a collaborative model.

Moving the Research Agenda Forward

Over the coming months, the *Values Added* CURA research team will examine the ideas coming out of the planning event, focusing on those that are feasible, will contribute to the body of knowledge on collaborative partnerships, and will be of widespread benefit to academics, the community, government, and other stakeholders. Already, we have begun moving forward on one of the suggestions made at the event, the documentation of success stories related to SSP implementation. It is hoped that these stories will provide examples for other regions, communities, and groups to consider and will encourage the widespread application of SSP principles.

Meanwhile, we will also continue to gather data on previously identified research themes, among them the VCBS's awareness of and role in the SSP implementation process and perceptions within government of the plan and how it can be implemented.

The team will also be exploring opportunities for research brokerage to match academics and students with community organizations to conduct research on issues of mutual interest. We are currently developing a CURA page on CSC's vortal for the voluntary sector, enVision.ca, and plan to encourage researchers and community groups to post ideas for research with the aim of developing online connections.

Participants' Final Thoughts

It is very encouraging that all participants who completed final thoughts sheets found this event useful and were interested in participating in future activities and collaborations related to the *Values Added* CURA. This interest bodes well for the success of the CURA and its efforts to establish a platform for collaborative research in the province. Participants were also asked to list additional research questions or themes which had not already been raised during in the presentations, panel session or group discussions. Some of these are listed below:

1. What is the sustainability of the SSP, i.e., will it survive a change in government?
2. How can the impact of the SSP be translated into measurable indicators?
3. How can we ensure that government-community consultation is reciprocal and interactive?
4. Clear definitions of the concepts and strategies associated with the SSP to increase our understanding of the necessary changes and better ensure its success.
5. The economic contribution of the voluntary, community-based sector.
6. How can community engagement be strengthened?

7. How can the principles embodied in the SSP become engrained so that facilitators are no longer required?
8. How can government assist the voluntary sector in building community capacity?
9. How can we ensure that disadvantaged groups are included in consultations/get their issues on the agenda (i.e., social inclusion)?
10. Does the collaborative model require greater human capacity than grassroots organizations currently possess?
11. How can grassroots organizations participate in the implementation process and collaborate when the structures for collaboration/consultation are unclear?
12. Identification of best practices for fulfilling the objectives of the SSP.
13. A cost/benefit analysis of successes related to the SSP.
14. What are the capacity building needs of community organizations to collect, analyze and use data for planning?
15. How can government territoriality be reduced to enable community development?
16. How does government deal with social policy initiatives coming from the community?
17. How is the concept of "community" in Newfoundland and Labrador changing as the focus of volunteer boards shifts towards a regional perspective?
18. What are the connections between a healthy society and a healthy economy?
19. How can the specific causes of provincial growth be identified?
20. How can evidence-based decision-making be encouraged?
21. How is this significant shift in policymaking being undertaken with minimal staffing and volunteers?
22. Using short-term indicators as evidence of success to encourage long-term change.
23. What are the unintended consequences of initiatives and policies resulting from the SSP?
24. What distinguishes a viable from a non-viable community?
25. What contributes to community capacity building in rural areas and what makes some communities come together more readily than other?
26. What effect has the SSP had on the VCBS's contribution to community capacity?
27. What is the role of volunteers in the SSP implementation process?

Appendix I: Planning Event Agenda

Values Added CURA, Strategic Social Plan Research Planning Event
Visitor Interpretation Centre, Signal Hill National Historic Site, Tattoo Annex
9am-4pm, 12 December 2002
Agenda

9:00 *Welcome and Overview of the CURA* Penelope Rowe, Director, CURA
  Introductions

9:30 *Strategic Social Plan Implementation* Dana Spurrell, Manager, SSP Unit
Social Audit Framework

9:50 *CURA Research Program* Carla Wheaton, Coordinator, CURA
  Penelope Rowe

  Questions and Discussion

10:30 BREAK

11:00 *Panel: Research Themes and Perspectives on the Strategic Social Plan*
  Vivian Randell
  ▪ Deputy Minister, Human Resources and Employment
  Fay Matthews
  ▪ Chair, Regional Steering Committee, Eastern Region
  Phil Warren
  ▪ Chair, Premier's Council on Social Development
  Alicia Sutton
  ▪ Regional Planner, Labrador SSP Region
  Donna Kelland, Moderator
  ▪ Assistant Deputy Minister, Industry, Trade and Rural Development

  Questions and group discussion

12:30 -1:30 LUNCH

1:30 *Synopsis and highlights of morning's discussion* Sandra MacDonald, CURA Team
  Introduction to afternoon session Penelope Rowe

1:45 *Exploring the Strategic Social Plan: Themes and Research Issues*
  Small Group Discussion

2:30 BREAK

2:45 *Conceptual Framework: Shaping the Research Agenda* Abe Ross, Co-director, CURA
  Larry Felt, Co-director, CURA

3:00 *Working Together: Building Research Collaborations*

3:30 *Final Thoughts* Penelope Rowe

Appendix II: *Values Added* CURA Team

Director:	Ms. Penelope M. Rowe, CSC
Co-Directors:	Dr. Larry Felt, Dept. of Sociology, MUN
	Dr. Abe Ross, Dept. of Psychology, MUN
Team Researchers:	Dr. David Close, Dept. of Political Science, MUN
	Dr. Sandra MacDonald, School of Nursing, MUN
	Dr. Michelle Sullivan, Aspens & Oaks
	Dr. Adrian Tanner, Dept. of Anthropology, MUN
	Dr. JoAnne Zamparo, Social Work, Lakehead University
Team Partners:	Mr. Mike Bruce, HRDC
	Ms. Shirley Dawe, ACOA
	Ms. Dana Spurrell, SSP Unit
Staff:	Dr. Carla Wheaton, Researcher/Coordinator
	Ms. Melanie Thomas, Research Assistant
	Mr. Mark Coaker, Project Assistant

Appendix III: Planning Event Participants

Borlase, Tim	Labrador Insititute
Bruce, Mike	HRDC
Close, David	MUN/CURA
Coaker, Mark	CSC/CURA
Collier, Conrad	Coast of Bays Zone Board
Corrigan, Pamela	enVision.ca/CSC
Davidge, Charmaine	Expanding Their Universe/CSC
Dawe, Shirley	ACOA/CURA
den Otter, Lori	MUN
Felt, Larry	MUN/CURA
Fitzpatrick, Jamilee	Avalon SSP Region
Gogan, Aisling	Women's Policy Office
Green, Susan	Kids Eat Smart
Greening, Kim	Youth Mobilizing Youth/CSC
Guy, Allison	Eastern SSP Region
Hancock, Doris	Cormack-Grenfell SSP Region
Hawco, Ray	CSC Board
Holloway, Colin	Eastern SSP Region
Holmes, Peggy	Dept. Health & Community Services
Janes, Gillian	Northeast Avalon SSP Region
Kelland, Donna	Dept. Industry, Trade and Rural Development
Kufeldt, Kathleen	CSC Board
Lake-Kavanagh, Jackie	Dept. of Justice
Locke, Fran	SWASP/CURA
MacDonald, Sandra	MUN/CURA
Matthews, Fay	Eastern SSP Region
Parsons, Linda	enVision.ca/CSC
Powers, Patti	Policy Analyst
Randell, Vivian	Dept. of Human Resources and Employment
Rodgers, Pam	Cabinet Secretariat
Ross, Abe	MUN/CURA
Rowe, Penelope	CSC/CURA
Spurrell, Dana	SSP Unit/CURA
Sullivan, Michelle	Aspen&Oaks/CURA
Sutton, Alicia	Labrador SSP Region
Tanner, Adrian	MUN/CURA
Thomas, Melanie	CSC/CURA
Walsh, Brian	Dept. of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs
Warren, Phil	Premier's Council on Social Development
Wheaton, Carla	CSC/CURA
Williams, Kevin	Newfoundland & Labrador Housing Corp.
Wiltshire, Sean	Northeast Avalon SSP Region
Woodfine, Louise	CSC
Wyse, Carmel	Dept. of Youth Services and Post-Secondary Education