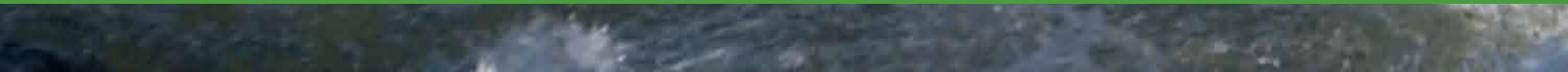


Collaboration on Policy

*A Manual developed by the
Community-Government
Collaboration on Policy*







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This manual reflects the experience and personalities of ten individuals who comprised a community of practice: Caroline Andrew, Maria Basualdo, Scott Cameron, Katherine Graham, Fran Locke, Anne Makhoul, Marc Nisbet, Penelope Rowe, Sherri Torjman and Liz Weaver.

The support provided by our Human Resources and Skills Development Canada Program Officer, Chantal Lavictoire, reflected a deep respect for our goals and process, and a willingness to learn from our work. We appreciated her interest and passion, as well as her efforts to link our work with the 13 other projects that the federal government was funding as part of its Social Development Partnerships Program.

We offer special thanks to our two university partners, Katherine Graham and Caroline Andrew, and two postgraduate students, Michael Bulthuis and Marisa Casagrande. Through their efforts, we will be pleased to offer postsecondary instructors a companion guide for this manual [forthcoming]. It is intended to support teaching instruction with respect to how government, community and business can combine their ideas and resources into effective policy measures.

The partners appreciated the administrative support provided by the Caledon Institute's Melanie Burston, the evaluation expertise of Pierre Renaud from C.A.C. International and the editorial input from members of the Federal Family (described later in our document). We are indebted to the Tamarack Institute for continued technical advice and the promotion of the project through the Vibrant Communities network. Scott Cameron – our partner from Red Deer – suggested using a river analogy to describe the process of collaboration on policy. Designer Laura Zikovic's choice of rafting photos gave expression to our sense of the inherently risky and invigorating work of collaboration – especially around the turbulent waters of policy change.





Introduction

The Community-Government Collaboration on Policy was supported through the Social Development Partnerships Program of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC). We operated as a community of practice from March 2008 to March 2009. Our purpose was twofold: to develop an effective policy monitoring process that could be undertaken regularly by communities, and to create an information-rich guide to successful collaboration on policy. Because our collective experience was most closely associated with the issue of poverty reduction, it is the lens through which we viewed collaboration on policy. The lessons we present, however, are equally applicable to any complex or ‘wicked’ problem.

Part way through the project, partners had the opportunity to hear a presentation by graduate student Émilien Gruet, from Concordia University, about the Continental network for the co-construction of knowledge, research and training (ReCO). ReCO researchers, students, civil society members and government representatives from Québec and Latin America commit themselves to share their knowledge in an environment of learning and exchange. The concept of the “co-construction of knowledge” came to embody the spirit of collaboration as understood by our own community of practice. By pooling our shared knowledge and experience, we were effectively co-constructing knowledge.

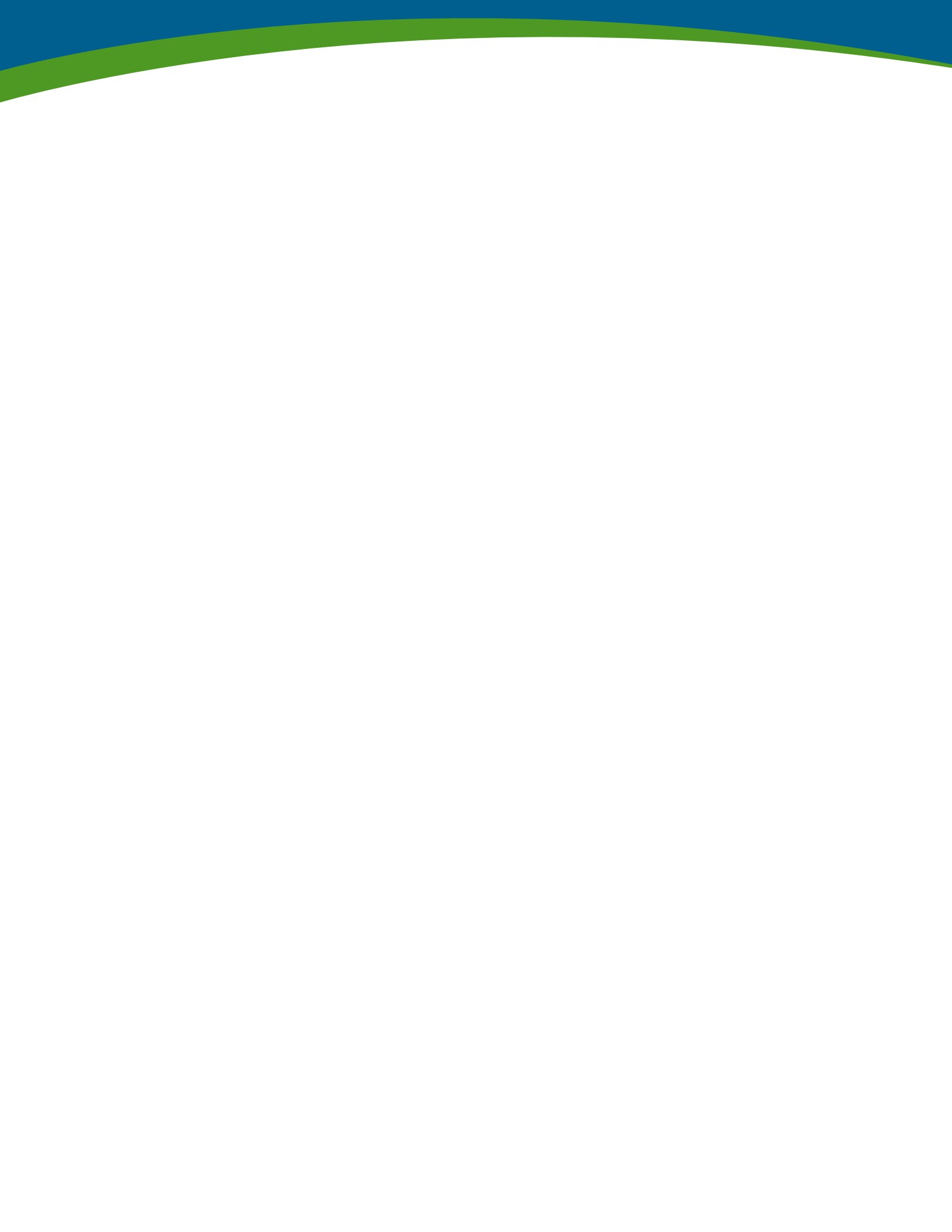
There has been growing interest in recent years in place-based interventions and their unique contribution to tackling complex issues. Place-based strategies seek to achieve a desired objective through interventions in the neighbourhoods and communities where people live. Increasingly, however, place-based interventions are also trying to influence relevant public policies. This manual was developed to help guide community practitioners and government officials who are working to design policy solutions to complex problems.

We mined years of work on policy and collaboration as experienced by the project’s five community and two university partners, the Caledon Institute, Vibrant Communities and Action for Neighbourhood Change. After extensive discussions, we distilled our lessons about collaboration on policy into a series of “what we know and don’t know” statements. We shared these lessons and early versions of the *Collaboration on Policy Manual* with the partners in our community of practice, the Federal Family (a learning community of federal public servants interested in collaborative community initiatives), graduate students at Concordia University, community workers who have expressed interest in the project and members of Vibrant Communities.

This manual is not the final word on collaboration on policy. Rather, we see it as a continuing effort that will grow and mature. If your experiences teach you something valuable that you would like to pass along to others, please contact us at caledon@caledoninst.org.

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- Gruet, E. (2008). *New Governance Concepts: An Annotated Bibliography*. Power Point presentation, November.
- Gruet, E. (2008). *An annotated bibliography of the new governance concepts*. ReCo Karl Polanyi Institute, Concordia University, November.





A. Assembling strong paddlers: Our community of practice

The Community-Government Collaboration on Policy was built on a community of practice – a collaboration about collaboration. Caledon invited five community partners from across the country, four of which had been involved in some way with the Vibrant Communities (VC) poverty reduction and community revitalization movement. The fifth partner – *Santropol Roulant* – is a small nonprofit organization whose members were beginning to appreciate the importance of developing a policy perspective in their work. Two university professors with expertise in governance and community engagement were invited to provide a connection between community practice and knowledge development within learning institutions.

At the outset, our partners had several things in common: an interest in policy and poverty reduction, the desire to build sustainable communities and a strong background in collaboration and networking across multiple sectors. However, the scale, scope and range of their work were quite different. Could they come together to pool their expertise and build a robust understanding of how communities and government can collaborate on policy?

We had set clear goals for this work: to understand more about relevant policy measures being introduced by the federal and selected provincial and municipal governments, and to document lessons about effective government-community collaboration on policy. With these objectives in mind, we set off on a journey where no one partner was identified as the expert – we all had relevant knowledge and experience to contribute. Tools were developed and tested – some were refined and used throughout the year, others were abandoned. By our second learning session in June – four months after forming – our community of practice had begun to coalesce into a supportive, functional group with many lessons to share. As time progressed, we came to know that we were more alike than different.

The practices that worked for us:

1. *Tele-learning events* in which individual members took responsibility for planning and presenting their work
2. *Policy monitoring* – developing a regular and consistent process for this work and discovering that one uniform template does not meet all needs
3. *Working within time constraints and technical competencies*
4. *Face-to-face meetings* – these were critically important initially to familiarize partners with faces and voices, and later on to consolidate learning and deepen appreciation for everyone’s working environments, restrictions and successes; our second face-to-face also provided an opportunity for out-of-town partners to meet HRSDC officials, including our project officer
5. *Evaluation framework* – formulated as an example of developmental evaluation – a continual process of goal setting, learning, readjusting and shifting to reflect increased understanding
6. *One Thing I Learned* – a practice of continually evaluating learning sessions with the goal of using experiences to enrich or change current work practices and thinking, and then share these with significant partners or co-workers
7. *Regular contact* – strengthening bonds among partners through regular e-mail and telephone meetings. Face-to-face and voice-to-voice contact remained our most efficient and richest means of communication
8. *Lead organization* – the Caledon Institute’s facilitator role included maintaining contact between meetings, gathering resources, planning meeting agendas and monitoring the progress of the project
9. *Partner selection* – selecting project partners with a range of experiences and mandates meant that we were able to share novel approaches for connecting with governments. We learned from one another throughout the process and the presentations.



A1. *Introducing our partners*

The Community-Government Collaboration on Policy drew together a community of practice – a working group that met twice in person and had regular teleconferences and e-mail exchanges over a 13-month period. Members included:

- the Caledon Institute of Social Policy
- five community partners
- two university professors
- C.A.C. International (our project evaluator).

Caledon Institute of Social Policy

The Caledon Institute was the lead organization for the Community-Government Collaboration on Policy project. Caledon's mission is to assist in the development of sustainable practicable social policy. Our interest in forming a community of practice around community-government collaboration evolved from a number of previous initiatives including our work with Vibrant Communities to establish policy dialogues with government partners and subsequent Government Learning Circles. (www.caledoninst.org)

The City of Red Deer Social Planning Department

Operating within a municipal context, the City of Red Deer Social Planning Department strives to support healthy child development and reduce inequalities associated with income and social status. It provided leadership in the creation of inclusive social and physical environments. The Department achieves its outcomes through community development activities; allocation of municipal, provincial and federal resources; building capacity in the human services sector; and social research and policy development. (www.reddeer.ca)

Community Services Council Newfoundland and Labrador (CSC)

CSC is an independent organization promoting social and economic well-being. Its goal is a prosperous and inclusive society that supports individuals, families and communities. Its mission is to encourage citizen engagement, promote the integration of social and economic development and provide leadership in shaping public policies. (www.envision.ca)

Community-University Institute for Social Research (CUISR)

CUISR facilitates partnerships between the university and local groups and agencies in order to engage in relevant social research that supports a deeper understanding of communities and that presents opportunities for improving the quality of life. Several CUIISR initiatives, including Monitoring Quality of Life in Saskatoon, involve community-government collaboration. (www.usask.ca/cuisr/)



Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (HRPR)

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction is a cross-sectoral community planning table which has a strategic focus on poverty and the aspiration of making Hamilton the best place to raise a child. The Roundtable achieves community change by leveraging resources and investments in five critical areas that have an impact on the lives of children and their families including early learning and parenting; skills through education, activity and recreation; targeted skills development; employment; and asset building/wealth creation. (www.hamiltonpoverty.ca)

Santropol Roulant

Santropol Roulant is a youth-led organization that lives its mission: to break social isolation and increase the food security of Montrealers living with a loss of autonomy. It keeps one foot in the world of daily front-line services and the other in the realm of long-term social change. (www.santropolroulant.org)

Carleton University

The Faculty of Public Affairs at Carleton University is a leader in theoretical and applied work in the areas of policy, governance, social justice, political and economic change and communications. Much of the work in the Faculty concerns the increasing entanglement of different orders of government and the private and not-for-profit sectors in the quest for good governance. The role of communications in developing and implementing good public policy is also a primary concern. The Faculty is engaged with a myriad of organizations at the local, national and international levels. (www2.carleton.ca/fpa/about/od/deangraham.php)

University of Ottawa

The Centre on Governance is part of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ottawa. It is a research centre that works primarily with partners outside the university and is interested in the ways universities and university researchers can collaborate with communities, civil society organizations and governments to tackle ‘wicked problems’ that require the combined action of a range of public, private and civil society actors. (www.sciencessociales.uottawa.ca/pol/eng/profdetails.asp?login=candrew)

C.A.C. International

The Coopérative d’animation et de consultation (C.A.C. International) is a consulting firm with over 20 years of experience working in international development. The firm specializes in the fields of management, training, communication, law, basic education, good governance and evaluation. (www.cacinternational.com/other/cadre_cop_a.htm)





A2. *Using practice as our base*

Three major sources of information were used to identify the core elements of collaborative work:

- learning about the collaborative interventions undertaken by the participating partners in our own community of practice
- drawing from the experience of the 15 participating members of the pan-Canadian Vibrant Communities project
- culling from the work of numerous comprehensive community initiatives under way throughout the country.

Learning from each other

Newfoundland/Labrador: From disconnection to a world-class evidence base

The Community Services Council NL (CSC) was founded in 1976 to identify unmet social needs, lay the foundation for new social programs and policies, encourage greater cooperation between the voluntary sector and governments, and support citizen participation. Pressure from CSC and others for integration of social and economic policies and inclusion of community-based groups in policy discussions led to a Strategic Social Plan (SSP) in 1998.

The SSP, dismantled in 2004 by a new administration, left a considerable legacy and laid the foundation for the Rural Secretariat. The concepts espoused in the SSP of linking social and economic development and engaging citizens in formulation of policy and programs have had considerable influence on the way government works. The SSP experience also greatly increased cross-departmental activity within government itself around key initiatives such as the Poverty Reduction Action Plan. Both the SSP and the Rural Secretariat were founded on prescribed regional and provincial structures created explicitly to encourage collaboration. The notion that communities should direct self-improvement initiatives led, under the SSP, to the creation of a world class social auditing system through which the public can access socioeconomic data, housed at www.communityaccounts.ca. (Caledon Community Story)

Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction: Strategic use of policy developments

From its inception in May 2005, the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (HRPR) has been identifying a range of policy issues which affect children and their families living in poverty. The Roundtable has strategically engaged elected officials from all three orders of government, providing them with information about the impact of poverty on Hamilton and through the development and distribution of policy briefs, strived to inform policy decisions. The Roundtable monitors policy developments, convenes local stakeholders to dialogue about major concerns



and engages with partners to develop policy briefs. Supporting the policy focus of the Roundtable is an active Policy Working Group and a Government Engagement Working Group composed of senior public officials from all three levels of government. The Roundtable also connects with provincial and national organizations to share information, identify resources and discuss policy positions. (www.hamiltonpoverty.ca) (Caledon Community Story)

Seven Cities: Alberta's approach to ending homelessness

In 2001, representatives from seven Alberta communities were invited to discussions with federal officials to work out the details of the new National Homelessness Initiative. From those first meetings, the Seven Cities Partnership was formed and, over its seven-year history, has influenced provincial policy and programs around affordable housing and homelessness. Red Deer and Calgary both released 10-year plans for ending homelessness in early 2008 and Edmonton followed suit in January 2009. The Government of Alberta is in the process of developing a 10-year homelessness strategy. (Red Deer Plan) (Calgary Plan) (Edmonton Plan) (Alberta Plan) (Caledon Community Story)

Saskatoon's Station 20 West Project: A matter of social justice

In March 2008, Saskatchewan's newly-elected provincial government withdrew \$8 million from Station 20 West – an \$11.5 million community-based project in Saskatoon that had been 10 years in the making. The money had been promised to help build Station 20 West's service-rich Community Enterprise Centre in a part of the city poorly served by businesses and services.

Between March and December 2008, corporate donors and community organizations contributed a total of \$975,000 to the project. Since the removal of provincial funding, organizers have reduced their building plans from 45,000 to 19,000 square feet. Station 20 West's construction is slated to begin in April 2009 – proving the value of fostering relationships around the work and raising awareness about the objectives of the project. (<http://station20west.org/index.html>) (Caledon Community Story)

Santropol-Roulant: Tracking policy through the labyrinth of bureaucracy

Santropol-Roulant's work to better understand the reorganization of the provincial health care network and its impact on their activities led them to establish a collaboration with two other community players in Montreal. Their efforts sought to clarify the origins of the policy – its basic aims and intent – and track its implementation through the municipal and provincial policy labyrinth. The working group prepared three forthcoming publications: a policy overview document, a chronology of the policy's implementation and a paper that explores how to create effective policy-focused partnerships.



A3. Learning about policy monitoring

The Community-Government Collaboration on Policy monitored relevant policy developments through three key sources:

- tracking announcements on official government websites
- identifying key changes introduced in government Budgets or Strategies
- documenting new measures highlighted on the websites of relevant groups and organizations, such as the Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction and the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association.

Policy monitoring refers to the process of keeping track of policy developments reported by various orders of government and across issues of concern to the individuals or organizations undertaking the work. Monitoring policy requires regular, consistent monitoring of government websites and other sources (such as the reports of relevant organizations). The information gathered is then organized within a framework or template in which developments can be grouped for easy reference.

Lessons from policy monitoring:

- A key contact in communities is useful for providing feedback on the impact of federal or provincial policies on municipal policy decisions.
- Be careful when tracking major changes introduced in government budgets or strategies; official government websites often re-package and re-announce various policy measures. Government budgets are very important; they generally provide the substantial announcements for any given year that signal subsequent policy announcements.
- Careful monitoring allows a coherent understanding of particular policies. In some cases, certain initiatives are shared by multiple departments and it is important to understand the relationships.

- The policy monitoring tool employed for this purpose must be simple enough to be understandable and useful but also have some complexity if it is to be sufficiently comprehensive. Our community of practice made two attempts to design a tool that was both useable and effective.
- Locally designed policy tools reflect the action priorities of community initiatives. Policy monitoring is not a one-size-fits-all activity. It can be useful to research existing tracking templates, then tailor entries according to specific areas of interest. Key sources of information include organizations and groups whose websites highlight new policy measures in specific areas. The Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, for example, tracks emerging developments in housing policy.



An example of our Federal Policy Monitoring Index

Federal Government Policy Update June 2008

Aboriginal Issues

Federal government issues apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools on June 11 in House of Commons. Apology is in addition to the Settlement Agreement and creation of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission. New legislation takes effect to extend human rights protections to First Nations communities on and off reserve.

Elder Abuse

Launch of national awareness campaign on elder abuse, which includes advertising and information tools.

Employment

Funding to 13 sector councils to provide post-secondary graduates with the opportunity to secure quality jobs and gain work experience in key sectors of the economy.

Homelessness

The following investments were made under the *Homelessness Partnering Strategy* ([hyperlink](#))

- \$150,000 for the Iris Kirby House for purchase and renovation of an eight-room house for transitional housing in Conception Harbour, Newfoundland.
- \$2 million for Toronto Community Housing to provide transitional housing for 27 pregnant women and mothers under 25. City of Toronto contributed \$660,000 in land and waived development charges for the \$5.2-million development.
- \$230,000 for the Central Urban Métis Federation Inc. in Saskatoon for purchase of land and office building to centralize services.

Persons with Disabilities

\$79,338 for the Opportunities Fund/Worklinks Employment Services project for the Breaking Down Barriers Independent Living Centre in Collingwood. Financial support provided through the *Opportunities Fund* ([hyperlink](#)).

Refugee Settlement

Projects supported under the *Resettlement Assistance Program* through Citizenship and Immigration Canada ([hyperlink](#)).

- \$790,000 to Catholic Social Services in Edmonton to assist up to 378 refugees in Alberta
- \$260,000 to Saskatoon Open Door Society and \$65,000 to Global Gathering Place to help up to 200 refugees
- \$1 million to the Catholic Immigration Centre to assist up to 380 refugees in Ottawa

Government of Canada Homelessness Partnering Strategy

The Homelessness Partnering Strategy was announced by the federal government in December 2006. It replaces the National Homelessness Initiative, which expired in March 2007.

The Homelessness Partnering Strategy took effect on April 1, 2007. It provides \$269.6 million over two years to address homelessness by helping to establish the supports required to move homeless and at-risk individuals towards self-sufficiency and full participation in their communities. It is based on a 'housing first' approach, which focuses first and foremost on the need for transitional and supportive housing in order to provide basic shelter.

The Homelessness Partnering Strategy encourages the alignment of federal and provincial/territorial investments by working with communities, provinces and territories, partners in the private and not-for-profit sectors and Aboriginal partners. Under the Strategy, the federal and provincial/territorial governments create bilateral partnerships and develop links between homelessness programs and social services to enable communities to make required investments to tackle homelessness.

http://www.homelessness.gc.ca/home/index_e.asp



A4. Tracking policy changes

The Community-Government Collaboration on Policy tracked the use of the indices we developed by:

- asking our partners on a monthly basis about their use of the material
- requesting that partners send the indices to their networks for feedback
- identifying where the Caledon Institute incorporated relevant changes in our policy papers (*Poverty Policy*; *The Forgotten Fundamentals*).

Input from the field

Each month, the Caledon Institute distributed a Provincial Policy Index to our partners for review and edits. Changes and clarifications were made, and related municipal policy developments were included, where appropriate. The final version was posted to the Special Projects portion of the Caledon website at www.caledoninst.org. A federal index was produced on a schedule that reflected major federal government spending announcements. Late in 2008, partners were asked to make a special request of their local partner groups to provide feedback on the format and usefulness of the templates. All but two of the 20 responses were positive. One person did not feel them to be directly applicable to her work; the second preferred to use on-line pipes and feeds (RSS and Twitter) to receive electronic updates.

As user-selected, web-based monitoring programs become more sophisticated and allow greater specificity in the information they deliver, it may be possible to switch from scanning and collecting to simply editing the information received. Currently, Caledon provides a filter and focus function in our monitoring work, while also tailoring entries around our own interests and those of our partners.



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Practical uses of the information

In December 2008, the Caledon Institute published a well-received paper called *The Forgotten Fundamentals* which suggested several ways to strengthen existing income security programs as part of the federal economic stimulus package. The paper included recommendations related to Employment Insurance. One of these recommendations actually was identified through the regular policy monitoring efforts (see bolded sentence).

Ottawa should take immediate steps to restore EI as a key element in the stimulus package. A pivotal change would be to increase coverage by reducing the number of hours worked to qualify for benefits. ***The federal government could apply more broadly some transitional measures, originally introduced in 2000, which it recently extended in New Brunswick and Quebec.*** The effect of these measures is to apply a higher unemployment rate than would otherwise be the case so that potentially eligible EI recipients in those areas can now qualify for benefits. The wage replacement ratio could also be raised to 70-75 percent, having dropped to just 55 percent of average insurable earnings. [Battle, Torjman and Mendelson 2008].

Three [EI pilot projects](#) will be continued to further assess their effects. These pilots complement [recent EI changes](#). Existing EI regional boundaries will also remain in place following the conclusion of the boundaries review process.

EI transitional measures in the economic regions of Madawaska-Charlotte, New Brunswick, and Lower St. Lawrence and North Shore, Québec, were extended for 18 months to allow application of a higher unemployment rate. Claimants in these regions will require fewer hours to qualify for EI and receive benefits for a longer period.

Foreign students

campus work permits. Other recent changes for [foreign students](#) help them acquire work experience.

Similarly, a Caledon paper called *Poverty Policy* referred to the Ontario Rent Bank program, identified during the monitoring process in May 2008 [Torjman 2008]. Understanding the policy environment and staying on top of recent developments help collaborators build credibility and draw connections among various components of their work. In Caledon's case, the policy monitoring process developed as part of our Community-Government Collaboration on Policy led to immediate and substantial consequences: reports now being read and cited which contain important policy details that would not otherwise have been considered.

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Torjman, S. (2008). *Poverty Policy*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, October.





B. Learning the course: *Collaboration basics**

Collaboration is a broad concept that refers to a wide range of engagement possibilities – from the simple exchange of information to deeply entangled joint ventures. Included in the collaboration continuum are information exchange, shared learning and training, integrated development plans and initiatives, consolidated application procedures and protocols, joint procurement and common evaluation.

Some would argue that collaboration involves the production of a common good or service. It results when people from different organizations or units within the same organization produce something together through joint effort, resources and decision-making and share ownership of the final product or service [Linden 2002]. Collaboration is not an end in itself but is merely the means to an end – whether it be improved service delivery or a broader objective like reducing poverty. Collaboration on policy reflects a deepened awareness of the issues that underlie complex problems. As we invite the participation of people with lived experience of poverty and seek the input of community organizations and government, we are co-producing policy solutions that reflect wider and deeper understandings of the links among various initiatives.

Governments or communities working alone are no longer adequate to the task of solving complex problems. Despite diverse definitions and forms of collaboration, these relationships are linked by a common foundational principle: The whole is generally greater than the sum of its parts. There is an underlying assumption that the results of a collaborative effort typically are larger and deeper than what any single person, group or organization alone can achieve.

Groups in Québec have long worked in various collaborative forums. Their ‘*tables de concertation*’ are just one example of how they have tried to organize strategically both within and between sectors. Collaborative practice has become the norm in other parts of the country as well.

The trend toward joined-up interventions is now a world-wide phenomenon. The move has been promoted through the power of new communications technologies. Open source programming and knowledge-based collaboration, such as the listing of this manual on a wiki-type site that allow continuous revision, are breaking down traditional boundaries and are pushing the limits of the possible. In fact, the exchange of knowledge is the most common form of collaboration.

*Excerpt from Torjman, S. (2007). *Shared Space: The Communities Agenda*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy.

Reference

Linden, R. (2002). *Working Across Boundaries: Making Collaboration Work in Government and Nonprofit Organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.





B1. Understanding collaboration

Collaboration is a broad term but usually involves activities that:

- include diverse sectors
- may focus either on a single problem such as improving a disability income program or a complex problem, such as poverty reduction which comprises many dimensions
- assume a long-term time frame and involve a continuing conversation about the identified issue(s).

The work of the partners

Each of the five Community-Government Collaboration on Policy partners was involved in a different kind of collaboration.

The City of Red Deer – multiple municipal partners were invited to a discussion by the federal government and formed their own partnership, initially as a way to gather information and answer process-related questions around involvement in the National Homelessness Initiative.

Community Services Council Newfoundland and Labrador – founded in 1976 by a group of concerned citizens and with the support of the provincial and federal governments, CSC had advocated over several decades for policy change and integrated social and economic planning. In the 1990s, the CEO was invited to represent the community sector in a provincial process to develop a Strategic Social Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador and continues to participate in the Provincial Council of the Rural Secretariat and in consultations associated with the recent provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Community-University Institute for Social Research – the Station 20 West project provides an example of multiple local partners coming together to create a new community space to house essential goods and services.

Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction – sparked by concerns expressed by a municipal employee, a three-way leadership with representatives from government, the community foundation and business led to a multisectoral collaboration, which has influenced the shape of the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Santropol Roulant – newly interested in the effects of a specific policy related to their operations, staff are collaborating with two other community organizations to learn more about how policies are translated into action by government ministries.



An example from the field

In 2004, Vibrant Communities Calgary helped organize a working group around establishing a half-price transit pass for low-income earners. Calling itself Fair Fares, the collaboration included representatives from City Council, City administrators and transit officials, community groups and people living with low incomes. In 2008, a three-year low-income transit pass pilot project was approved as a permanent Calgary program, crowning a community and municipal initiative that spanned a total of 10 years.

Successes like these rarely happen overnight and they rely on the goodwill and effort of every participant.



Anardako Canada Corporation – a Vibrant Communities Calgary partner – designed the Fair Fares Calgary postcard. Pictured are Ruth Kohut, past co-chair of VCC’s Steering Committee, and her two daughters.



B2. Identifying types of collaboration

Collaboration is more than a consultation. Consultations are often organized as single events to which agencies and community members are invited to give their opinion around a specific issue or proposal. Typically:

- the relationship between community and government varies depending upon the nature and purpose of the collaboration
 - collaborative arrangements fall into two temporal streams: a one-time effort around an identified issue or ongoing association around a specific goal
 - collaborations are formal or informal. Formal relationships involve money, partners, processes, rules and protections. Informal arrangements may result from dialogue about common concerns, and may develop to a level where they require a more formal structure.
- catalytic collaboration extending throughout the culture of the broader community beyond the membership.

Community-government collaboration around poverty reduction, for example, involves different kinds of working relationships that focus on distinctive tasks. These include:

- ensuring access to programs and services
- planning and participating in community processes
- making the case/building an evidence base for policy change
- improving existing programs
- designing new measures
- co-convening various meetings/tables.

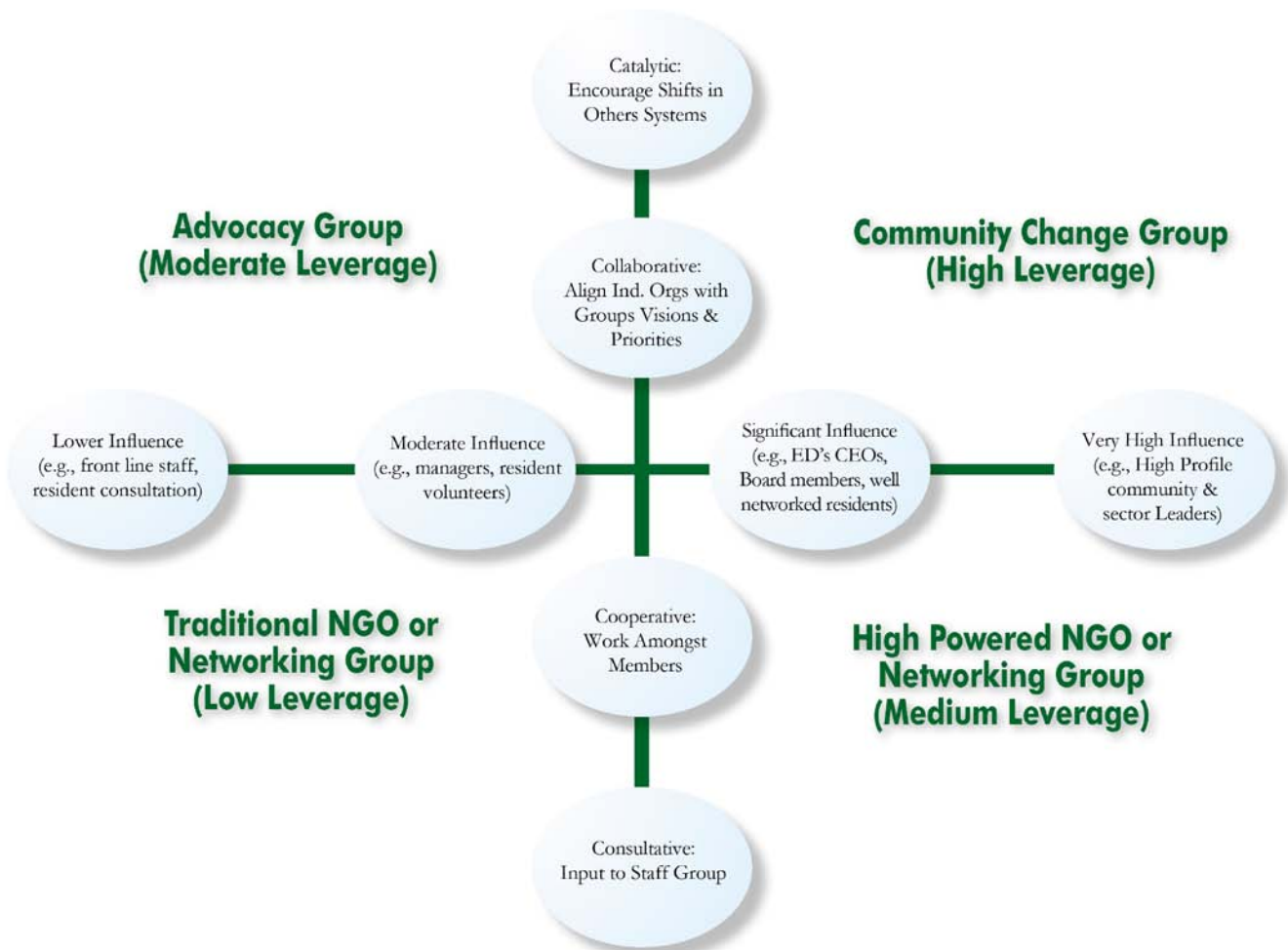
Relationship spectrum graph

Based on the work of the Wilder Foundation, Mark Cabaj at the Tamarack Institute has developed a “Working Together Continuum” that reflects different intensities of collaborative effort and approaches to leadership:

- competition among member organizations
- coexistence among member organizations
- communication and networking to share information on issues and actions
- consultation among members about their work
- cooperation among members on specific projects
- coordination of spontaneous alignment of goals and focus
- collaboration of members in strategic shared planning, actions, structures and possibly space



Working Together Continuum



When a group of organizations and leaders plots its leadership style (from consultative to catalytic) and the influence of its members (from low to high) on a simple grid pattern, the result can provide a new perspective of the different approaches the group might take to undertake action in their community.



B3. Exploring governance models

The governance of collaborative efforts or ‘local tables’ refers to the decision-making structure put in place to formulate a strategic plan and track progress against that plan. Local tables may be:

- convened by an existing organization, such as the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative in Saint John, which has played a key leadership role in Vibrant Communities Saint John
- established by a new structure set up for that purpose (e.g., the Leadership Roundtable of Waterloo Region directs Opportunities Waterloo Region)
- co-convened by a community organization and local government (e.g., the Region of Niagara’s proposed poverty reduction plan); a community organization and business group (e.g., Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council); or all three – a community organization, municipal government and business group (e.g., Red Deer Mayor’s Task Force on Ending Homelessness, Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction).

Working collaboratively has not been fully explored and we do not know definitively if it makes a big difference in communities. However, this manual and resources like it are beginning to validate the impact of the work.

Emerging governance models

Under the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement, the role of municipalities is officially recognized. It borrows from the innovative agreements signed in 2005 in BC and Ontario for the administration of the federal Gas Tax Fund. Within these documents, the Union of BC Municipalities, Association of Municipalities of Ontario and City of Toronto were – perhaps for the first time in a federal-provincial agreement – signatories and members of the agreement governing bodies.

Pursuant to the Immigration Agreement, Local Immigration Partnerships will be supported, bringing together various actors within a community who have an interest in and capacity to improve newcomer integration in those places. Thus, a formal bilateral agreement has an official role for a third order of government and a mechanism that will help stabilize relationships in “place” over the years.

Planning the work and working the plan*

Given the volume of work and number of partners involved in a collaboration on policy, care must be taken to plan the effort, assign responsibilities and regularly check progress. Key issues in “working together initiatives” are the dynamic and the balance between leadership and governance – particularly within those initiatives striving for a high level of collaboration. There is a need for further study to understand how patterns of leadership and governance vary and are intertwined according to the way that the organizations relate to and collaborate with each other.



Governance Functions

Governance Functions can be undertaken by the collaborative's principal agents (collaborative leadership table, legal sponsoring agency or staff and contracted personnel)

Mission and mandate

- develop poverty reduction mission and mandate
- approve poverty reduction mission and direction
- develop framework for change
- approve framework for change
- establish working principles for collaboration
- ensure best collaborative practices
- set poverty reduction priorities
- initiate poverty reduction activities
- track poverty reduction outcomes
- report poverty reduction outcomes

Personnel

- personnel policy, hiring, supervision, setting salary grid, deliverables and accountable for contracted services

Finances

- finance policy
- acquire revenue
- budget tasks: development, approval, monitoring and reporting, management

*Excerpt from *Leadership and Governance in Comprehensive Community Initiatives, Part One: Governance Patterns in Vibrant Communities' Trailbuilders*, draft, January 2009.

Useful Tool

See the governance portion of the *Guidance on Local Safety Audits: A Compendium of International Practice*, published by the European Forum for Urban Safety with funding from Public Safety Canada. Produced in the context of crime prevention and based on UN principles which include focusing on the importance of the community, building an evidence base and working multisectorally, the tool details the benefits of engaging a variety of groups, particularly hard-to-reach populations.



B4. *Knowing the context*

All collaborative initiatives must understand the relevant context for their work by:

- identifying selected policy measures pertinent to the issue with which they are concerned
- understanding current government priorities to determine how community interventions can line up with these priorities, where possible
- being aware of upcoming changes that potentially may help or hinder their work.

Collaborators outside of government must stay current with their local policy context. Having a detailed understanding of the development and direction of policy initiatives helps identify possible entry points and contacts through which relationships and collaborative initiatives may begin.

An example from the field

In late 2004, the federal government announced plans to develop a comprehensive Canadian Housing Framework which was intended to focus on a continuum of housing. Representatives from Saint John, New Brunswick's business, nonprofit and community organizations worked together to prepare a presentation for (then) Housing Minister Joe Fontana's cross-country, information-gathering tour.

Minister Fontana visited urban centres across Canada, soliciting proposals from organizations with expertise in housing. Key housing experts in Saint John decided to submit one common proposal and were granted an accordingly longer time to speak with the Minister. Because the submission was presented by a united leadership – which included the city's Mayor, business representatives, a prominent city councillor and all local nonprofit groups involved in housing development – the report's first, short-term recommendation carried significant weight.

Saint John's presentation team asked the Minister to devote one Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) employee to the task of building momentum for new affordable housing in their city. The timing of the request for CMHC support in Saint John coincided with the Corporation's own recognition that it needed to expand efforts nationally in the area of community development. This recognition, Saint John's clearly defined need, a community-based plan for improvement and support from the municipality and province made CMHC's evolving role complementary to the community's objectives. By the summer, Don Connolly – a corporate representative from CMHC's Community Development Business Centre (Atlantic Region) – had arrived.



The combined efforts of dedicated personnel from various levels of government and a committed community which supports organizations like Vibrant Communities and the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative have a significant impact on Saint John's affordable housing plans and projects. Don Connolly's relationships with representatives from the private and public sectors have strengthened and extended the multisectoral partnerships already developed by Vibrant Communities Saint John. Don's efforts demonstrate the effectiveness of having a person on site that can focus on the administration of public policy.

Reference

Cabaj, M., A. Makhoul and E. Leviten-Reid. (2006). *In From the Field: Exploring the First Poverty Reduction Strategies Undertaken by Trail Builders in the Vibrant Communities Initiative*. Waterloo: Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement, May.

Useful tool

See pages 20-27 of the *Guidance on Local Safety Audits: A Compendium of International Practice*, published by the European Forum for Urban Safety with funding from Public Safety Canada. This section is useful for learning about the important of setting and knowing the context.



B5. Building relationships

Collaborative relationships can succeed only if they are built on strong relationships. Fostering these relationships involves:

- identifying a range of relevant partners, including ‘unusual suspects,’ who join together to inform the policy agenda in the community
- gaining a good understanding of the unique perspectives of all partners and their respective needs, pressures and accountability expectations
- taking the necessary time to build a strong collaborative team – a task that often can take between 12 and 18 months.

Mini-vignettes

Connectors: Alberta’s Seven Cities partnership

In 2001, representatives from seven Alberta municipalities came together to clarify the terms and conditions under which they would work with the federal government’s National Homelessness Initiative. For the first time, municipally-based organizations would work with federal counterparts without a provincial intermediary and there were many details to be sorted out. Over time, the group recognized its potential to influence the development of municipal and provincial homelessness policy. Keeping its numbers small and committing to regular communication, Seven Cities members created strong bonds of trust and appreciation for one another’s work and local efforts. (*Alberta’s Seven Cities Partnership*)

Community experience: Federal Council in Nunavut

The Federal Council in Nunavut holds an annual “boot camp” wherein they take a mixed group of federal public servants to a single community for a visit. Each community presents its issues to the Council members, who are there first to listen, then to facilitate and enable local citizens and groups to take action. Appropriate federal tools and resources are reviewed in a collaborative fashion – work that has already led to multi-year funding for

tackling locally identified priorities. Through meaningful dialogue with local residents, the history, issues and needs of that community are made more meaningful for the participants.

Flexibility: Station 20 West – time spent building relationships is always worth the effort

Station 20 West in Saskatoon was going to be a community economic development project with a difference. Planned as a 50,000-square foot community enterprise centre, its proponents had convinced the former provincial government to contribute \$8 million of the project’s total cost of \$11.5 million. Station 20 West represented a decade’s



worth of discussion, grassroots participation and a deeply-held belief that residents of the City's oldest and poorest neighbourhoods deserved access to basic necessities – healthy food and good medical care.

Shortly after the provincial government changed in the winter of 2008, funding was revoked and Station 20 West seemed about to disappear. An outpouring of community support and donations affirmed that the planning team's ideas and processes had, indeed, been on the right track. Construction on a 29,000-square foot facility will begin in the late spring of 2009. Station 20 West's two founding partners have remained committed to one another, identified new partners to replace some that faltered when provincial funds were removed and affirmed to low-income Saskatoon residents that their fellow citizens stand ready to help. (www.station20west.org/index.html) (The Station 20 West Project Keeps on Chugging)

Station 20 West Community Enterprise Centre • The Engine for Urban Renewal Capital Campaign - Windows Internet Explorer

http://station20west.org/index.html

Station 20 West Community Enterprise Centre • The E...

Station 20 West
Community Enterprise Centre

HOME WHY? BENEFITS SUSTAINABILITY FEATURES PARTNERS DONATE

THE ENGINE FOR URBAN RENEWAL • CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

Station 20 West, Saskatoon's innovative engine for urban renewal, is back on track!

...Station 20 West will contribute greatly to improving the quality of life for people living in our core neighbourhoods.

Christine Smillie
Executive Director
United Way of Saskatoon

DONATION GIFT CARDS

A perfect way to recognize the special people in your life and make a gift to Station 20 West. Easy to arrange, either online or by phone.

OUR CAPITAL CAMPAIGN - ONE MILLION AND GOING STRONG

So far Station 20 West has received donations of \$1,000,000 –including a recent contribution by an anonymous Corporate Donor of \$500,000.

Station 20 West Update

Station 20 West is back on track and moving forward. The support of thousands of people across Saskatoon and beyond has made the difference.

With a renewed energy and commitment to our goal of building an integrated service centre that includes the Good Food Junction, a locally owned grocery

Internet 100%



B6. Ensuring effective leadership

Collaborative efforts require a unique form of leadership which is less about making decisions and more about deliberation. This means:

- finding a leader with the credibility to convene diverse sectors that may have conflicting views
- renewing leadership on an ongoing basis to ensure that the collaborative effort continues, if appropriate, beyond the mandate of any given individual
- focusing on desired behaviours, not personality traits. Behaviours include:
 - building trust and cultivating strong working relationships to a common effort – paying attention to relationships within and between parts of the system
 - showing understanding of smart networks – those which spark innovation and help address complex problems – and being skilled in network weaving (quality connections).

We do not yet have all the answers to the challenges embedded in collaborative practice. In fact, we are only really starting to frame the difficult questions to which this practice gives rise.

Leadership that assists in change initiatives – questions to ponder

How and when to invite elected officials?

It was a City Manager in Hamilton who – wanting to make real progress on reducing poverty rates in her City – helped found the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (HRPR). Even with the changes and challenges that accompany a municipal election, the HRPR’s aspiration of “Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child” was adopted by Hamilton’s City Council. Hamilton provides an excellent example of the roles that elected and appointed officials can have to play in promoting a vision for – and ensuring the vibrancy of – their communities.

Can public servants make a difference?

Another example of empowering the community is the work of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) Corporate Representative in Saint John, who has made it his priority to listen to local voices. Soon after the position was created in May 2005, the representative began meeting with the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative, Vibrant Communities Saint John and other local groups to learn of Saint John’s housing priorities. Upon learning that improved housing in the Old North End and Crescent Valley neighbourhoods were community priorities, the representative began attending Old North End and Crescent Valley activities. He recognized that he needed to know the community in order to respond to its concerns. Through his efforts, CMHC supported a five-day planning exercise in the Old North End in late 2005, resulting in the identification of more than 170 ways in which the community could help itself.



Can we envision a mechanism, governance arrangement or coordinating body that could enhance horizontal collaboration?

Communities need this new kind of engagement and perspective to move beyond mere consultation. Can such a body enable governments to more easily identify their role within broader and more comprehensive strategies? Should organizational structures be further adapted to facilitate participation in collaborative processes? Or might more informal processes, driven by common data and research, be more effective in advancing comprehensive efforts?

How can community actively engage with government to advance the agenda without having to spread too thinly their valuable human and financial resources?

There are four key sectors involved with this type of work: government, business, voluntary and citizens with lived experience of poverty. Community representatives struggle to know where within government to signal their interests and contributions, while government officials point to a seemingly fragmented community sector.

References

- Bulthuis, M. (2007.) *Shared Leadership – Collaborative Governance: Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, May.
- Bulthuis, M. (2007). *Leading to Enable: Government Engagement in Vibrant Communities Saint John*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, May.



B7. Tracking results

Collaborative efforts need to track their results on an ongoing basis by:

- developing a pathways-to-change approach to ensure that the collaborative effort is moving in the right direction as it seeks to produce concrete results
- tracking results in terms of both process and outcomes – this may involve monitoring the impact of their engagement on their members and government partners
- monitoring results at three levels: households, organizations and community-wide or systemic change.

Example from the field*

Opportunities 2000 (OP2000) was an award-winning community revitalization initiative that operated in Waterloo Region from 1997 to 2000. It brought together more than 80 partner organizations as well as people living in poverty and launched 47 projects aimed at reducing poverty.

In the first phase of Opportunities 2000, substantial attention focused upon tracking one key outcome – the movement of 2,000 households out of poverty by the end of the year 2000. The key evaluation tool for measuring progress in achieving this outcome was a household survey to be completed by low-income participants when they entered their particular poverty reduction project and again when the project ended. Substantial time and effort were spent trying to design and implement the survey in order to collect the income data needed to assess the progress of participants in moving above Statistics Canada’s low income cut-offs.

This investment in the survey diverted limited evaluation resources away from efforts to understand the dynamics, strengths and weaknesses of the various strategies employed in the project. Ultimately, a drastically scaled-down survey was used to obtain some basic information about income changes. It was then coupled with interviews and focus groups so as to obtain a well-rounded picture of the initiative’s different projects and the variety of outcomes they achieved [Leviten-Reid 2001; Torjman 1999].

Evaluation usually is undertaken for the purpose of determining whether certain interventions worked or not – whether they were positive or negative with respect to their intended results. The pervasive concern with “What works?” helps drive this obsession. While this information is important, it may not be the most critical. Perhaps the central question that should be asked is not so much what works, but rather what did we learn from this work? What appears to have been a successful intervention and why? What factors contributed to its success? Why did certain interventions appear not to work effectively? What could have been done differently to ensure a more positive result?



Moreover, evaluations typically begin after the key foundations of a project have been laid and the work is already well under way. It would be far more helpful to have feedback about performance on an ongoing basis so that interventions which appear to be less than effective might be identified and shifted. Or perhaps the process by which a program has been set up is not operating appropriately or is far more problematic than originally intended. It would be important to know this information earlier rather than later in the process.

In short, the focus of evaluation needs to shift from one of judgment to one of learning. It also needs to evolve from an after-the-fact black or white judgment to ongoing feedback about the grey areas – reflecting the complexity of the processes represented by these comprehensive community initiatives.

References

- Leviten-Reid, E. (2001). *Opportunities 2000: Multisectoral Collaboration for Poverty Reduction*. Final Evaluation Report, unpublished. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, September.
- Torjman, S. (1999). *Are Outcomes the Best Outcomes?* Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, November.

*Excerpt from Torjman, S. (2003). *Think Piece: Policy Conversation on Community Learning*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, April, p. 16.

Useful tools

The Urban Aboriginal Strategy at the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs has developed a Community Assessment Tool. The tool requires the multiple partners involved in a community site to answer a series of questions about the degree to which their collaboration reflects all the interests in the local strategy, and about the effectiveness of the relationships. What is most innovative is that the report is developed primarily for the purpose of speaking transparently to the community, rather than answering primarily to government for accountability purposes.

See pages 10-11 of the *Guidance on Local Safety Audits: A Compendium of International Practice*, published by the European Forum for Urban Safety with funding from Public Safety Canada. This section could be used to help ensure a good starting point for effectively tracking results.





C. Navigating rough waters: Benefits and challenges of collaboration

Public policy seeks to achieve a desired goal that is considered to be in the best interest of all members of society. Examples include clean air, clean water, good health, high employment, an innovative economy, active trade, high educational attainment, decent and affordable housing, reduced levels of poverty, improved literacy, low crime and a socially cohesive society.

In the case of reducing poverty, there are many possible interventions at the public policy level. It would be unrealistic and even incorrect to say that the formulation of policy follows a clear and consistent pathway or route. Policy development is actually an involved and sometimes haphazard process that takes a pathway depending upon the concern being addressed. Sometimes it is a long and winding road with lots of detours and stops along the way.

The power of policy interventions stems from the fact that positive changes can touch not just one or several households. Depending upon the nature and scale of the policy measure, the lives of hundreds, thousands or even hundreds of thousands of Canadians can be affected. Because of their potentially broad reach, policy interventions represent scale.

They are a significant way to extend the scope and impact of community efforts. The down side of policy efforts is that they often require extensive time and resources and there is no guarantee at the end of the day of any policy change.

Substantive shifts in policy can also take a long time to effect. Funders looking for immediate or short-term results are often not interested in supporting this type of work.

This section considers the benefits and challenges of working collaboratively around policy and provides practical suggestions for improving the means by which participants can achieve their policy objectives.





C1. *Appreciating the benefits*

The benefits of successful collaboration include:

- the chance to pool and align intervention tools
- the opportunity to make considerable progress around issues where nothing else has worked; the more you work in a policy-focused kind of way, the clearer your messages become, even when the issue is as complex as poverty
- developing interventions that involve diverse sectors and players. These collaborative arrangements help government representatives, in particular, respond to complex challenges that transcend specific mandates and do not fit neatly into current departmental boxes or leadership structures.

the challenges and successes in collaborating for community change and in fostering effective relationships among government, business and community leaders.

Benefits for government collaborators:

- many factors affect the quality of life; and collaborations seek to create a space for all sectors to work together and see the big picture
- government organizations that assume partners and/or convener roles help create a culture that promotes a sense of collective responsibility

Lessons from the Government Learning Circle

In May 2007, four stories were written which focused on the roles and relationships of government inside multisectoral collaborations operating in four Vibrant Communities: BC's Capital Region, Hamilton, Calgary and Saint John [Bulthuis 2007a, b, c, d].

The stories helped inform a Vibrant Communities Government Learning Circle (GLC) which brought together, on average, 90 government and community representatives on five occasions in 2007. The GLC allowed government learners from all levels and portfolios to come together to learn how they could play a role in helping to reduce poverty through collaboration with business, voluntary sector organizations and citizens.

The GLC provided a venue where participants could talk about government-related issues and learn from government leaders, experts and exemplary practice in order to grow the impact of poverty reduction work in communities across the country.

The GLC offered government participants a neutral forum and safe space to exchange ideas and experiences. It helped to build a national network of officials interested in better understanding community building and poverty reduction through a community lens. Participants in the GLC learned together about



- shared recognition of the importance of collaboration enables the development of powerful, effective and often informal relationships
- common objectives make it easier to work with representatives of other governments than with one's own colleagues from departments that may be addressing very different priorities. At issue was not the process but the substance of the initiative, and the recognition of collective or linked objectives.
- working collaboratively allows the attainment of shared goals; what can be accomplished together is greater than what can be achieved alone – goals otherwise unattainable become possible
- by choosing to claim responsibility – not necessarily for the problem of poverty, but for being a leader in working for change – it becomes possible to champion a response and attract like-minded partners.

Unique contributions

The City of Ottawa, United Way of Ottawa-Carleton and University of Ottawa worked together on a project to collect video footage from residents of four at-risk neighbourhoods. By providing cameras to young persons, the project encouraged residents to describe what living in their neighbourhood meant to them, partly as a way to build their collective sense of assets and needs, encourage creative expression and assemble messages into a format that could be useful to community organizations and municipal politicians. The “Voices” project provided an opportunity to blend the university's data and analysis expertise with the City's work to create recreational policy that supports neighbourhood development and the United Way's existing efforts to build strong neighbourhoods. Together, they assembled an emotionally powerful methodology for capturing citizen input.

References

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C2. Identifying the challenges: Time, money and responsibility

There are many challenges to collaboration. They include:

- creating and holding together the leadership table in which there may be different underlying values, appreciation of key issues and preferred approaches
- achieving results in a reasonable period of time
- finding funds to support a long-term collaborative effort in an environment in which monies typically are directed to single projects.

Time:

- It takes communities an estimated 12-18 months, on average, to set up a governance table in which members work together effectively and achieve significant results. Collaborators from Vibrant Communities in Montreal's Saint-Michel neighbourhood use the phrase "faster alone, farther together" to help make the case for long-term change efforts.
- Government officials note difficulties in finding time for interdepartmental and multigovernmental initiatives, and for community outreach and networking. When multiple community efforts or government comprehensive frameworks appear to pursue similar objectives, officials face tough decisions in allocating their support – be it human resources, technical assistance or financial aid.

Money:

- Funding envelopes are still allocated to specific departmental priorities – with less attention paid to a community's articulation of its challenges and how to overcome them. Funding allocations to departmental policies and programs are usually time-limited and constrained, presenting challenges for the dialogue needed to pursue comprehensive, multistakeholder responses.

Responsibility:

- Another challenge is the degree to which residents and community representatives become involved in inter-jurisdictional squabbles. It may sometimes be necessary for them to act as community advocates and work with multiple orders of government.



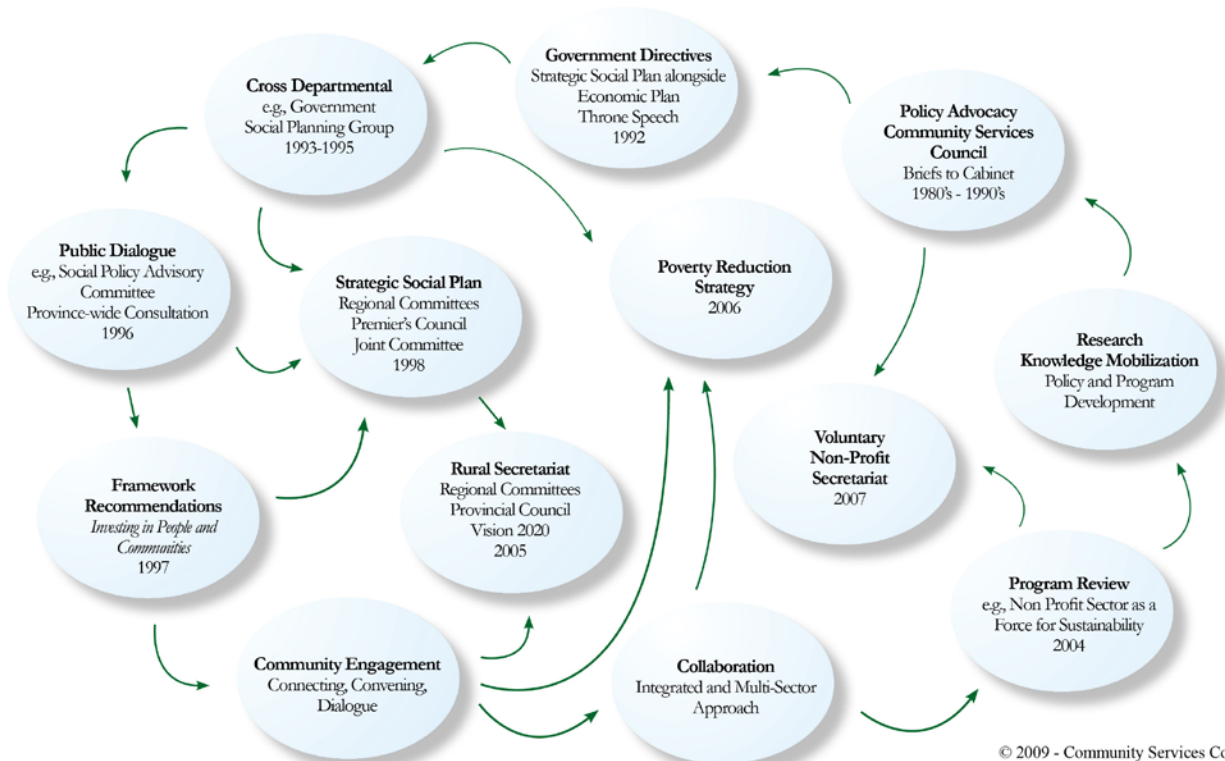
We concluded that it takes courage to look beyond an individual domain and identify potential areas for synergy – where more than one party can ‘win.’ Collaborative models take courage from the perspective of public officials to push beyond their boundaries and courage from elected officials to welcome new approaches in the community.

References

Powers, P., F. Locke and L. Felt. (2006). *Everybody Wanted It: Collaboration between the Voluntary, Community-based Sector and the Regional Steering Committees of the Strategic Social Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador*. St. John’s: Values Added CURA and Community Services Council Newfoundland and Labrador, May.

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Collaboration: Influencing Policy and Structure in Newfoundland and Labrador



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C3. Enabling participation

Enabling participation in collaborative initiatives involves:

- sustaining interest of participating members over an extended period
- recognizing that government officials may want to participate actively but fear that they will be perceived as having lost their objectivity
- ensuring authentic opportunities for citizens to participate (particularly those who live in poverty and are socially excluded).

More about the challenge of government participation:

Many questions arise about the potential roles and contributions of provincial and federal officials at a local roundtable or similar collaborative processes. These officials may not be viewed as representing the communities in which they live – their insights as citizens may therefore be discounted or undervalued. Participants may be seen as departmental rather than governmental representatives. Senior level officials or even Ministers may be unavailable or unwilling to represent other departments within their government. Government partners in a collaboration may not be vested with the authority to speak on behalf of their department. While collaborative processes may be more effective with smaller rather than larger numbers, questions of representation may leave out certain voices or organizations. Governments need to continue working to ensure a collaborative approach when participating in these arrangements, thereby enabling a community to determine how it might best partner with the public sector in achieving its priorities.*

Suggestions from our Community-Government Collaboration on Policy:

For all partners:

- Seek to create a culture of passion.
- Be an eager learner – know as much as you can about who formed the collaboration, and how and why.
- Communicate that information, particularly to government partners who need to know where the work fits the priorities of a department or ministry.
- Develop guidelines about when or how to stay private or go public with information.
- Write clear statements of objectives and convene regular check-ins with partners.
- Find out if there is an overriding priority that defines each partner's mandate – e.g., in the City of Red Deer, the municipality is concerned with promoting the well-being of citizens.



- Set clear guidelines and guiding principles for the collaborative work (see section E1).

With government partners:

- Meld passion with vision and accountability – take advantage of party policy, government direction and personal commitments to frame a common agenda.
- Acknowledge that government representatives are often constrained by their corporate culture and that their passion may be constrained by their position.
- Be clear about the work’s intent rather than getting bogged down with program guidelines and funding requirements.
- Work to create a safe space – ask officials how the specific collaborative efforts fit within their organigram. If government is the collaborative’s initiator, allow the possibility that the original mandate may need to be broadened to allow other partners to come in.
- Try to align the work, where feasible and appropriate, with departmental or ministry priorities.
- Know when to engage with staff and when to engage with elected officials – both need to be included to move forward in particular areas and to ensure optimal participation.
- Look for successes or ‘wins’ that reflect well on the collaborative and all its members – e.g., how participation leverages knowledge, resources and connections.

With people living in poverty:

- Though true for all partners, spend time building relationships.
- If low-income representatives are invited into the process after a first round of collaboration-building, find ways to include them in committee or other aspects of the work where they feel they can make a meaningful contribution.
- Recognize the barriers to participation faced by people living with low incomes: the costs of child care and transportation, poor health or job demands. In both Vibrant Communities BC Capital Region and Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, citizen leaders helped develop inclusion policies using input from all levels of the work. These documents demonstrated the level of social, professional and financial support organizations were willing to provide and represented a clear test of the extent of trust the group had managed to build among members.

Reference

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- Shookner, M. and Social Inclusion Reference Group Atlantic Region. (2002). *An Inclusion Lens: workbook for Looking at Social and Economic Inclusion and Exclusion*. Halifax: Atlantic Regional Office, Population and Public Health Branch, Health Canada.



C4. *Securing representation*

There are a number of challenges relating to representation within collaborative initiatives. They include:

- acknowledging that no single individual represents a given sector; their perspectives more likely reflect commonly-held views in that sector
- understanding the representation of government officials in particular – are they participating on behalf of their unit, branch, department or government, and to whom they are reporting
- knowing if, when and how to engage elected officials in the collaborative effort.

Representation

A further challenge: How can government officials participate actively in policy reform efforts, knowing that recommended proposals may cost more and create other changes in their department or a different order of government?

Suggested actions from our Community-Government Collaboration on Policy:

- Acknowledge that collaboration is an iterative process that may have to change over time.
- Be smart about collecting important evidence, such as short-term results which leverage long-term interest and investments; reflect how individual contributions help the change agenda; link to any larger existing agendas; ensure briefs and policy approaches are shared with key representatives and partners.
- Discuss messaging in a deliberate way – have frank, strategic discussions with partners to ensure various perspectives are included in key messages. (See section B2 Types of Collaboration, “Working together continuum.”)

• Government programs and funding sources are created to influence change or mitigate the impacts of a pre-existing condition – collaborative initiatives need to understand these conditions and help governments see how their efforts will work to address to these issues. Identifying possible cross-departmental efficiencies must be done diplomatically.

- Learn to provide the type of information government representatives need in order to support policy-related decisions.
- Be prepared to ask for policy changes that represent “One Big Thing” or many small ones, as the circumstances require.



- Government departments are often looking for good ideas and may appreciate input from the community. Collaborations need to find ways to link the two sides and find common framing for an issue, thereby making it easier for public officials to communicate objectives with their colleagues and elected officials, where appropriate.
- Keep government officials informed about what you are doing and to whom you are talking.
- As communities deal with increasingly more complex issues like poverty, integrated strategies and approaches provide an opportunity to work horizontally across government departments and ministries, across orders of government and in partnership with diverse organizations. Complex issues, changing economic conditions and the pent-up capacity of communities to think and work differently provide important leverage points for government at all levels. Human resource and financial investments in collaborative planning tables by governments require a different way of thinking and acting – even while all orders of government are looking to streamline their processes. The new conversations are less about consulting and more about collaborative processes which will shift community outcomes. Collaborative processes require the active engagement of government at the local level but also the involvement of policy and strategic staff to identify those policy barriers which prevent progress on reducing poverty.



C5. *Enhancing impact and accountability*

Accountability within the context of collaborative efforts presents its own challenges. These include:

- managing the pressure to show results because these likely will not be seen in the short term
- tracking changes both in process and outcomes as a result of the collaborative work
- trying to attribute positive results to the efforts of the collaborative initiative, when there are many other factors and organizations that could have played a role in the desired change.

Suggestions from our Community-Government Collaboration on Policy:

For both impact and accountability

- Recognize that these are emergent processes.
- Collaborators should embed learning into their considerations of impact and accountability and ask questions such as: To whom are we – the members of the collaborative – accountable? For what are we accountable? What have we learned? What has been successful? If we had it to do again, what would we do differently? What can we learn together as a community?

Impact

- Consider:
 - Collaboration may not be the best approach. Some times it is preferable for groups and organizations to work on their own.
 - Were we successful in collecting data or in achieving our desired objective?
 - Did we succeed at collaborating? How do we evaluate the process?

- Develop consensus on desired outcomes.

• Develop a process for tracking impact. The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction established a weekly methodology for gathering evidence, which has helped collect evidence of change and high-impact stories. Find out the impact of your work on individuals, on how the community is working differently and on policy and system changes. Gathering evidence is the critical component.

- Track changes as they occur, have a circulation plan to share evidence with partners and ask for their feedback.
- Help inform partners' work and priorities through continual sharing of practice and lessons.
- Keep impact data as hard as possible – collect figures on money and participation levels – and document partners' roles.



- Acknowledge that it becomes more difficult to gather data which demonstrates whether partner actions affect broader outcomes as you move from tracking activities to assessing the scope of the impact (e.g., from gathering recreational participation figures to whether children complete their high school education).
- Find a partner who has the capability of assessing impact if current partners do not have this capacity – perhaps a learning institution or the provincial government.

Accountability

“Accountability is the obligation to answer for the results of authorized actions and for the manner in which responsibilities are discharged”
[Roberts 2004].

Accountability in collaborative efforts is a murky business. Organizations and people come together to tackle community issues that no one organization can address on their own, yet to whom are members accountable? To their host organization, each other or the broader community? Moreover, for what are collaborations accountable? They often seek multiples outcomes and work with evolving objectives. Their ability to guarantee outcomes is limited because of the many factors underlying complex issues outside of their control. In addition, the manner in which they pursue goals is often highly adaptive and uncertain given the dynamic environments in which collaborative efforts often unfold.

Community-driven efforts may not take the funder’s preferred path. Questions may arise as to how best to marry funders’ requirements with community preferences. Collaboration requires resources, long-term engagement and the right people to build trust. It means breaking out of the standard program-to-fit-a-departmental-need mindset.

Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC)

A two-year process for improving the vitality of five at-risk neighbourhoods, ANC included five government partners from three departments, United Way Canada, five local United Ways, the Caledon Institute, Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement and the National Film Board. Initially, government funders wanted one accountability framework with specific departmental mandates embedded into it. Ideally, the partners would have liked to have had a ten-year poverty reduction plan and work back to develop short-term objectives for the work. Because ANC was a resident-driven initiative, projects grew from their knowledge of what the neighbourhood needed – be it more garbage collection, community gardens, interactive theatre production about racism, sports equipment or a neighbourhood advisory committee.

Reference

Roberts, J. (2004). *Alliances, Coalitions and Partnerships: Building Collaborative Organizations*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers.



C6. Promoting sustainability

While the original problem that brought a group together may remain a concern, the specific objectives of a given collaboration may have been achieved. Participants must decide whether its work should:

- continue in its current form with the present collaborative structure but with a new set of goals (renewed)
- be handed over to another agency for further development (institutionalized)
- wound down (concluded).

Identifying problems within a collaboration on policy*

The life cycle of collaborations involves stages of birth, maturation, decline and renewal [Holling and Gunderson 2002]. At each stage, there are “traps” that can prevent a collaboration from moving constructively to the next stage. Social innovation theorist Brenda Zimmerman has suggested that after collaborations move from an initial trial and error phase and adopt patterns and approaches to their work, they often experience the “parasitic trap.” In this scenario, problems involving operational elements make it difficult to sustain or expand the collaboration’s efforts [Zimmerman 2007].

Zimmerman singles out charismatic leadership as the most common trap. Ongoing research by the Tamarack Institute suggests several other dangers to which collaborations are prone: lackluster outcomes, limitations of the model, insufficient resources, a weak supporting environment and fragile leadership (this last element includes a consideration of charismatic leadership). Any or all of the elements can be at play when a collaboration struggles to sustain itself. How participants navigate the parasitic trap will determine whether they go through a phase of “creative destruction” and renewal or become a spent force.

Inadequate outcomes

Sometimes, the outcomes generated by a collaboration do not appear to justify the time and energy that were invested to achieve them. This problem is most likely to occur when a collaboration has not been clear enough about the outcomes it is attempting to achieve, or loses its focus. Sometimes a collaboration achieves strong outcomes, but is not able to get recognition for them. This problem may be due to a weak evaluation and tracking system or an inability to communicate subtle or complex outcomes in a clear way. Ideally, feedback loops are built into policy work. Knowing how many times the collaborative is invited to tables, responds to the media, develops policy briefs or is cited by government demonstrates its relevance and helps ensure its continuation.



Limitations of a collaboration's structure

A collaboration represents a complex interplay of governance, programmatic and role choices. Alignment of these factors is critical. Some collaborative structures work well at a certain scale but are difficult to sustain or to expand to a larger scale. Other efforts take up so much energy in sustaining themselves that the structure gets in the way of achieving cost-effective outcomes. Some collaborations are able to provide concrete outcomes to which stakeholders can relate, while others produce results that, while important, are hard to sell. For example, Opportunities Niagara Region (a Vibrant Communities convenor organization) was able to demonstrate the importance of an inter-municipal transportation strategy in the Niagara Region. Unfortunately, it was unable to secure the financial and organizational commitment to expand a pilot project into a region-wide initiative.

Insufficient resources

There are situations in which a collaboration may be judged very successful and well recognized, but the resources to sustain it are simply not available. In other instances, resources might be present but the members of the collaboration have not been effective at tapping into them. Funding problems may occur because of inadequate sustainability planning or simply a failure to have cultivated sufficient supportive relationships.

Weak support environment

It usually takes broad support to tackle complex social issues. A collaboration may have success in building that support at first but later find that public interest starts to wane. Declining interest may occur because of general public fatigue with the issue or because a new, more compelling issue grabs people's attention. In other cases, community interest may remain high but other organizations, collaborations or initiatives begin to compete for public and multisectoral attention.

Fragile leadership

Collaborations must be able to attract and retain the interest of persons of influence; otherwise, as the work of the collaboration continues, influential members may start to be replaced by people of lesser influence or the original members may become less engaged in the work. In some cases, the success of a collaboration may depend on a charismatic personality. If that individual moves to other work or is unable to play the range of roles upon which the collaboration has come to depend, the collaboration is placed at risk.

References

Holling, C. and L. Gunderson eds. (2002). *Panarchy: understanding transformations in human and natural systems*. Washington, DC: Island Press.
Zimmerman, B. (2007). Presentation to the Communities Collaborating Institute. Waterloo, September.

*Excerpt from Loewen, G. and A. Makhoul. (2009). *When a Collaboration Stumbles: The Opportunities Niagara Story*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, January.



C7. Managing risk

All projects must manage risk. But collaborative efforts face special challenges related to:

- finding balance between innovative approaches that are not yet tried and true, and achieving positive results
- ensuring that partners are on the same page – at least when it comes to public announcements
- making sure that there is sufficient community support for the work to help insulate the collaborative effort from political and funding threats.

Collaborations must seek to create environments that encourage innovation and new approaches but that minimize risk for all partners.

Suggested approaches from our Community-Government Collaboration on Policy

- Some words, such as risk and innovation, need to be replaced by alternates where appropriate. Words such as deliberate, intent and purposeful help reduce the sense of risk. Continue to share examples of collaborations that have worked.
- Recognize the reality of the word ‘risk’ for some partners – ask if parts of the proposed plan appear risky and give them the ability to opt out if necessary.
- Monitor and communicate changes, achievements and successes.
- Look for opportunities to continue to build relationships.
- Deciding on key messages can help minimize concerns over going public with information about the work of the collaborative.

Consider these ideas*

Funders can also work together to support promising initiatives through these various [life cycle] stages and thus “share the risk.” Community foundations, for example, are often early funders of promising local innovations. They may then turn to national or regional funders to extend the innovation’s reach and impact beyond the community of origin.

One challenge for funders is to allow organizations or initiatives to come to a natural end (“creative destruction”) so that new ideas or entities can emerge. Many of us are justly accused of funding innovations only to abandon them once they have been tested in order to pursue the next great idea; but we are equally guilty at times of propping up organizations or ideas well beyond their natural life-cycles. An innovation may need in fact to be taken apart – “creatively destroyed” – to be reassembled at another level, for example when it is being disseminated and applied in a different context.



Having the room to experiment is vital. Funders need to be mindful of their role and work closely with organizations to determine both support and exit strategies. Important questions to ask include:

- At what point in its life cycle is an organization, a leader or an initiative?
- What skills and supports will they need as they shift from one stage to another?
- Why, when and how do we wind down our support?
- How can we enlist the help of others who might be better suited for a group's emerging challenges and opportunities?

A final point related to [life cycle] and complexity is the notion of risk. Developing a tolerance for risk – especially among trustees and boards of directors – is vital. In highly complex and evolving environments, an initiative may not achieve its initial objectives, may take much longer than anticipated to get results, may generate controversy as established norms are challenged or may not work at all. Innovation is inherently risky.

One way of managing that risk is to set aside a modest proportion of a funder's granting to higher risk initiatives, and learn from the results together with the grantee. At the same time, funders should be ready to commit to an initiative over time, to tap into the rich reservoir of knowledge that will be created with both successes and failures.

*Excerpt from Pearson, K. (2006). *Accelerating our Impact: Philanthropy, Innovation and Social Change*. Montreal: J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, November, pp. 18, 19, 26.

One more point to consider

There is a risk when being proactive in informing the policy agenda – you may find yourself either with favour or against the government platform – it can be dicey to be perceived as opposing the current government agenda. One way to manage this kind of risk is to be clear on the facts of the issue and present them in a non-confrontational way. Engaging and including the broader community in your response also helps mitigate some of the risk.





*D. Charting a better course: Policy work**

Public policy represents a decision, made by a publicly elected or designated body, which is deemed to be in the public interest. Policy development involves the selection of choices about the most appropriate means to a desired end.

It would be unrealistic and even incorrect to say that the formulation of policy follows a clear and consistent pathway. Policy development is actually an involved and sometimes haphazard process that differs widely depending upon the concern being addressed. Despite the variation in policy process, there are some general steps that are common to its development. These are:

- selecting the desired objective
- identifying the target of the objective
- determining the pathway to reach that objective
- designing the specific program or measure in respect of that goal
- implementing the measure and assessing its impact.

A policy decision is the result of a method, which in theory at least, considers a range of options and the potential impact of each. The weighing of options takes into account various factors, including:

- who benefits (the more the better)
- who might be negatively affected (the fewer the better)
- time required to implement the solution
- associated cost and financing
- political complexities of a federated government structure.

In short, the formulation of public policy involves a process of making good decisions for the public good.

This section discusses the ways and means for community and government collaborators to engage in policy work. It highlights successful collaborations as a means of stimulating discussion and action on policy collaboration.

*Excerpt from Torjman, S. (2005). *What is Policy?* Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, September, p. 18.





D1. Monitoring policy developments

The purpose of monitoring policy is to:

- identify changes to existing programs that may affect the identified issue or a given population
- track new programs or measures that may have been introduced
- ensure that information is as up-to-date as possible for inclusion in the evidence base or any public awareness campaign to be undertaken as part of the overall collaborative effort.

Members of the community of practice had each developed their own ways of keeping informed of policy developments, though most had not formulated a methodology for doing so on a regular, systematic basis. Once a policy tracking process is established, its ultimate usefulness depends on how and when the information is used.

The impact of policy at the municipal level

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (HRPR) was conceived in 2005 as a way to join up and expand poverty reduction partnerships and efforts already active in Hamilton. The initiative is taking a long-term, generational approach to the work by making investment in the well-being of children its major objective.

HRPR has created a matrix which tracks relevant policy changes at the federal, provincial and local levels. Developments are monitored according to five investment points which the Roundtable has identified as the key levers for poverty intervention – quality early learning and parenting; skills through education, activity and recreation; targeted skills development at the post-secondary level; employment; and asset-building and wealth creation.

The HRPR policy matrix also helps to focus policy efforts around the HRPR framework for change. Everything is tied back to this framework. The Roundtable is currently taking the policy matrix to key stakeholders to inform our work and approach.



HRPR Policy Matrix

Aspiration: Making Hamilton the best place to raise a child

Overarching Policy Principles:

- Each level of government develops an integrated children's plan
- The well-being of children is the primary consideration in policy development
- Children do not live in isolation, supporting children means supporting their families, neighbourhoods and communities
- Policy approaches are integrated across all orders of government and across government departments
- Communities are best positioned to determine local solutions for the implementation of policy priorities
- Flexible, predictable and stable planning and funding models lead to the most effective outcomes for children and youth
- Investing in children and youth is a long term investment which will reap significant dividends for government and communities

| Level of Government | Quality Early Learning and Parenting | Skills through Education, Recreation and Employment | Employment | Asset Building and Wealth Creation | Integrated Poverty Strategy |
|---------------------|---|---|--|---|---|
| | <p>Policy Direction: Ensuring all families have access to healthy, early learning and parenting neighbourhood hubs and supports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated approach to early learning and child care planning and delivery • Enhanced access to subsidized child care spaces • Supporting community delivery of full day learning program for 4 and 5 year olds • Enhanced supports focusing on parental engagement in early learning and parenting • Targeted supports for special populations including Aboriginal, diverse communities, and pregnant and parenting teens | <p>Policy Direction: Ensuring all youth bridge successfully from high school to employment through a range of opportunities and youth are engaged in the community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth graduate from secondary school and are able to access a range of opportunities including employment preparation, co-ops, apprenticeships, skilled trades, and post secondary • Supports are provided which encourage young people to stay in school including alternative learning in the school and/or community • Greater engagement of employer partners willing to employ youth • Youth planning and use integrated opportunities | <p>Policy Direction: Ensuring all effective employment supports through integrated local labour market planning and service delivery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased access to employment training supports for marginalized groups including OW/ODSP recipients, Aboriginal, diverse communities, immigrants, women returning to the workforce and individuals engaged in the second career strategy • Employers provide family friendly work places, progressive employer standards and jobs at a living wage • Increased access and reform of Employment Insurance • Affordable and integrated transit providing options to employment opportunities | <p>Policy Direction: Ensuring all children live in decent, appropriate and stable housing supports which enable to build community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased supports for affordable and accessible housing • In good repair • Assistance rates for individuals and families to have sustainable housing • Community development to develop local housing across the housing market from social housing to home ownership • Financial literacy, financial counseling and supports and services for families to establish and grow savings accounts • Increase in the number of predatory lending services available in the community • Integrated community planning and delivery in key areas including transportation, food, housing, and safe neighbourhoods | <p>Policy Direction: Ensuring integrated poverty reduction strategies at the municipal, provincial and federal levels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish an inter-ministerial secretariat on poverty reduction • Establish a multi-sectoral panel including the voices in individuals living in poverty • Develop measurable targets and timelines to reduce poverty • Invest the resources and create the necessary policies to prevent and reduce poverty |



D2. Building the evidence base

The evidence base:

- helps make the case for policy-makers to intervene in a given problem
- assists in raising public awareness about the concern
- involves the collection of quantitative and qualitative forms of evidence, both of which can be used as a foundation for monitoring progress.

Building an evidence base for policy change

A desire for integrated and place-based planning and service delivery is not the only legacy of the Strategic Social Plan (SSP) for Newfoundland and Labrador. Through this process, critical questions were raised about what was happening in communities across the province, particularly with regard to issues such as poverty. Two projects were launched during this period, both of which have made an invaluable contribution to social development in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency (NLSA) was charged with designing a means to gather and make available information on indicators of community well-being for evidence-based decision-making connected to the SSP vision. It developed a set of Community Accounts (CA) online, accessible to anyone with Internet (www.communityaccounts.ca). These enable a drilling down to the level of neighbourhoods of 1,000 people, and provide community, regional and provincial level composite data. The NLSA, in partnership with the Premier's Council on Social Development, also devised the first phase of a social audit, which included data on family income, children living in poverty, persons with disabilities, the gap between high and low-income households, as well as labour market participation. Community Accounts continues its innovative work under the auspices of the Rural Secretariat of Newfoundland and Labrador and is closely connected to the current Poverty Reduction Strategy Division.

In 2001, CA staff began to develop a Market Basket Measure (MBM) of poverty for Newfoundland and Labrador. This is a measure of the actual cost of a basket of essential goods and services, adjusted by community and family size. It provides a fixed reference point (or absolute point) against which to measure the adequacy of household income, and serves as an important complement to existing relative income measures such as the low income cut-off produced by Statistics Canada. Recognizing that living costs are not consistent across the province, the NLMBM uses Community Accounts capacity to display community and neighbourhood level information. The NLMBM will be



used to track the incidence, depth and severity of poverty. Release is expected in 2009. The model for the measure has been tested through information sessions hosted by the Community Services Council Newfoundland and Labrador, and once nation-wide through a webcast for the Caledon Institute and our partners in the Community-Government Collaboration on Policy project. The development of the Community Accounts and the NLMBM ensure that data are available in an understandable and meaningful format; they provide a means of measuring social progress on a variety of indicators of well-being.

*Excerpt from Locke, F. (forthcoming). *Poverty Reduction Policy and Programs in Newfoundland and Labrador – Tracing a Path from the Past to the Future*. Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development, Social Development Report Series.

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After words

Similar statistical indices have been established in other Canadian jurisdictions (e.g., Nova Scotia’s Community Counts, and the Government of Canada’s Rural Secretariat’s [Community Information Database/Base de données sur les collectivités](#)). Besides these comprehensive databases, more needs to be done to inform the evidence base for proposed policy change. The Government of Ontario, for example, has identified eight poverty reduction indicators in its Poverty Reduction Strategy by which policy impacts and progress for children and youth will be measured. Collaborators should continually monitor national policy developments and create whatever connections are appropriate between their efforts and the work undertaken by national policy organizations (e.g., the Caledon Institute, Canadian Council on Social Development, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Conference Board of Canada).



D3. Ensuring access to programs

Individuals and households are often unaware of benefits or programs for which they are potentially eligible. The policy work in this case:

- identifies potential beneficiaries who are not currently receiving benefits
- assists with the completion of required forms and the acquisition of essential documents, and provides translation assistance where required
- ensures that the appropriate government department undertakes a proactive campaign to reach other potentially eligible beneficiaries.

Connecting sites in northern Canada

The Northern Community Partnerships Initiative was originally launched out of the Rural Secretariat at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. This initiative represented collaboration across some 13 federal organizations, three territorial governments and the local government in selected communities. The partnership was built over the course of two years of investment in strengthening relationships for a common purpose. It was hoped that selected sites would benefit from a single comprehensive community plan. Moreover, a single financial and activity report put the onus on participating government organizations to agree on common information needs and to “translate” reported information for their own purposes.

Make tax time pay*

Several Vibrant Communities partners have undertaken significant work to enable access to programs intended for low- and modest-income households. As part of the Make Tax Time Pay initiative, for example, Vibrant Communities Edmonton set out to find effective ways to inform low-income residents about the Alberta Child Health Benefit. This provincial measure provides an average \$265 a year per child for prescription drugs, dental and optical care, and emergency ambulance services.

While the Alberta government had developed strategies to publicize the benefit, take-up levels were relatively low – at just 36 percent of the eligible population in the Edmonton area. An estimated 14,900 eligible residents of the city were not collecting the benefit. In order to redress this gap, the conveners of Vibrant Communities Edmonton developed relationships and collaborated extensively with three orders of government – the Canada Revenue Agency, Government of Alberta and City of Edmonton.

The partners subsequently identified a total of six benefit and subsidy programs of which low-income families likely were unaware. The collaborating partners planned a publicity and education campaign, selected and secured tax assistance locations accessible to low-income households, provided the required training and support materials for volunteers, and prepared the infrastructure to handle the higher number of applications.



Make Tax Time Pay operated in the 2006, 2007 and 2008 tax seasons and will do so again in 2009. The numbers of people assisted with their returns rose from 530 in 2006 to 1,367 in 2008. Numbers nearly doubled between 2007 and 2008 (from 783 clients to 1,367) partly as a result of the Canada Revenue Agency's decision to scale back its 20-year-old Community Volunteer Income Tax Program. This initiative had helped approximately 5,000 Edmontonians complete their income taxes annually.

*Excerpt from Torjman, S. (2007). *Shared Space: The Communities Agenda*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, pp.127-8.

Ontario Task Group on Access to Recreation for Low Income Families

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction is a member of the Ontario Task Group on Access to Recreation for Low Income Families. Created by Parks and Recreation Ontario, group participants have used a collaborative approach that focuses on the barriers faced by low-income families accessing recreation programs and facilities. Over the last seven years, the Ontario Task Group has commissioned research on municipal and organizational access policies, the benefits of increasing access to recreation and has hosted two sessions focused on the development of a provincial policy framework and action plan. In addition, the Task Group has published a promising guide that provides concrete examples of programs that have helped improved access in communities across the province (www.prontario.org/initiatives.html; www.lin.ca/access-to-recreation).

In addition to the research and policy framework, the Ontario Task Group has met with senior staff and Ministers to inform policy development and promote access to recreation as a key poverty reduction and health promotion strategy. The goal of the Ontario Task Group is to develop an integrated approach to the delivery of recreation in communities which is accessible to all but also provide those essential supports for low income and marginalized children and their families. It is a promising practices framework.

References

- Makhoul, A. (2007). *Trail Builder Update: Make Tax Time Pay 2007*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, June.
Makhoul, A. (2009). *Success for Fair Fares*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, February



D4. *Improving existing measures*

Some benefits or programs may not have seen improvements for years or may be outdated in light of social and economic changes. Ideally, the possible areas for improvement are identified in collaboration with relevant government officials. The policy work in this case:

- proposes possible changes to a specific program, such as higher benefits or adjustments to inflation
- puts forward options for change in design or delivery, such as a lower income-taxpaying threshold or modified parameters to the Working Income Tax Benefit
- suggests changes in eligibility, such as reducing the numbers of hours to qualify for Employment Insurance or discounting the value of certain assets in order to be eligible for social assistance.

Voices of experience*

In the summer of 2003, staff at United Way of Calgary and Area (one of two co-conveners of Vibrant Communities Calgary) began a 20-month process to pilot a policy initiative that would help the Calgary nonprofit sector build and improve relations with the provincial government. In short order, they assembled a working group of eight individuals from a cross-section of organizations and formed the Calgary Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) Public Policy Roundtable. They were joined in the work by two policy consultants, a member of the Legislative Assembly and a senior bureaucrat from the Alberta Ministry of Human Resources and Employment.

Participants were asked to identify problems with the benefits and delivery of the provincial AISH program. The group believed that if government officials understood the difficulties with the program, they would be better able to resolve these concerns or at least propose compromise solutions. The context also helped promote the work of this group. There had been considerable media attention to this issue thanks to the efforts of people with disabilities and their families.

In September 2004, one year after the Roundtable began its policy initiative, the Alberta Government announced a review of the AISH program. As a result of this process, the province introduced several important changes, including a rise in benefits, an increase in the employment earnings exemption and a reduction in the clawback rate on earnings which exceed the exemption that beneficiaries may gain through employment.

In mid-April 2005, the Government of Alberta announced that the AISH living allowance would rise immediately from \$850 to a maximum \$950 each month, and an additional increase in April 2006 for a maximum of \$1,000 per month. The province made a commitment to review the benefit level every two years starting in 2007.



The Government of Alberta also agreed to implement recommendations to improve the earning power of AISH recipients by enhancing the employment earnings exemptions for those who work. The full exemption for employment earnings was increased from \$200 to \$400 for singles and from \$775 to \$975 per month for couples and families. The clawback rate was raised from 25 to 50 percent for amounts above this exemption, to a maximum \$1,000 for singles and \$2,000 for couples.

The province announced as well that it would provide supplementary benefits to help pay for additional medical supplies, special transportation, child care and special needs, which previously were not covered by the AISH program. Other recommendations were approved regarding more effective and better integrated services for Albertans with disabilities.

*Excerpt from *Shared Space: The Communities Agenda*, Sherri Torjman, 2007, Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, p.87; 130.

Reference

Makhoul, A. (2005). *Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Public Policy Initiative*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, May.



D5. *Creating new measures*

Sometimes existing programs may simply not meet the identified needs and the collaborative initiative may decide that it must promote or help design a new approach. The policy work in this case:

- determines the reasons why the existing program or system is inappropriate or inadequate
- helps design and possibly test a new set of measures that appear to be more suitable to current needs or circumstances
- makes the case for why the new measures should be of interest to policy-makers.

Strength in numbers*

The Quality of Life CHALLENGE in BC Capital Region, coordinated by an organization known as the Community Council, is a multi-year effort to improve the lives of people living in poverty. It also seeks to strengthen the social fabric of the entire community. Not surprisingly, given the geography and economy of the region, affordable housing is a primary concern.

BC Capital Region has a rental vacancy rate of 0.6 percent - among the lowest in Canada. It has one of the highest average house prices in the country, at more than \$500,000. Some 22,200 households in the area are deemed to be in 'core housing need' - i.e., they are unable to find housing that meets basic standards for adequacy, suitability and affordability. A regional government commitment to limit urban expansion in respect of environmental and agricultural sustainability added to the pressure on the housing supply.

In response to the accommodation problem, a number of groups and organizations found themselves pursuing - through diverse pathways - common objectives related to expanding the supply of decent, affordable housing in the region. The concerned parties began to realize that they likely could achieve more significant results if they combined their respective efforts into a coordinated approach.

The Housing Affordability Partnership subsequently was established with representatives from the Community Council, BC Housing, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Canadian Homebuilders' Association, Urban Development Institute, Rental Owners and Managers' Association, nonprofit housing providers, Vancouver Island Health Authority, financial institutions, municipal planners and community associations.

The group noted that a serious problem in the region arose from the fact that the 13 separate municipalities that comprise the BC Capital Region tended to take individual action with respect to affordable housing. There was no



coordinated strategy for coherent investment throughout the region. This type of disjointed approach is ineffective – especially around a concern like housing that requires both a land use planning strategy and substantial financial investment.

The Housing Affordability Partnership recognized that the current approaches in which individual municipalities focused only on their own backyards was doing little to resolve the regional problem. The Partnership worked collaboratively with representatives from the diverse local governments to support the creation of a regional housing trust fund that would coordinate the flow of capital into various housing projects. The purpose of housing trust funds is to increase the availability of affordable accommodation, including new construction, retrofit of older buildings and rental subsidies.

In April 2005, six of the region’s 13 municipalities – which account for more than half of its population – voted to establish such a trust fund, contributing a total estimated \$635,000 annually. If all 13 municipalities (ideally) join the Regional Housing Trust Fund, they would contribute \$1 million annually with the capacity to create up to 75 affordable housing units each year. These funds would leverage 14 times that amount from provincial and federal governments and other sources.

While significant, there is no question that a trust fund must be supplemented by other measures to enhance the supply of affordable housing. The Quality of Life CHALLENGE also succeeded in influencing bylaw changes in seven municipalities, including the use of an affordability lens in assessing new housing developments and the legalization of secondary suites. Community representatives in BC Capital Region were able to work with government officials to create a new financial arrangement and influence the relevant context through changes to selected municipal bylaws.

*Excerpt from Torjman, S. (2007). *Shared Space: The Communities Agenda*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, pp. 118-9.

Reference

Makhoul, A. (2005). *Victoria’s Regional Housing Trust Fund: So Far, So Good*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, November.



D6. Reducing costs

When it comes to reducing poverty, relevant interventions involve not just improving current measures or creating new programs. Sometimes the purpose of the interventions is to enhance the economic security of households by reducing the costs they must incur. The policy work in this case:

- seeks to identify possible areas in which costs are especially high in that community or jurisdiction
- puts forward and tests proposals for cost reductions for certain goods, such as local transportation or home heating fuel
- makes the case for applying the tested reduction to additional populations or regions.

Policies that tackle poverty*

Increasing income security benefits is one way to tackle poverty. An equally important action is to reduce the cost of basic goods so that lower-income households can keep more money in their pockets. This type of intervention does not focus directly on bolstering household income. But it has a significant impact on disposable household income by reducing the cost of essentials, such as public transit and home heating fuel.

One noteworthy initiative grew out of the efforts under way in the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped review (described in section D4). The policy group subsequently built on the goodwill that had been created in the AISH program to work in a related area of policy interest. When the Alberta government completed an assessment of the AISH program in 2004-05, members of the Calgary Committee for Discounted Transit Passes had made submissions to the MLA AISH Review Committee.

Of the estimated 8,500 people who receive AISH benefits, about 5,000 use public transit. The Committee asked the province not only to increase the program's income payments (then \$855 per month), but also to share with municipalities the cost of providing affordable transportation for all low-income Albertans.

Joining together in 2004 under the name "Fair Fares," Vibrant Communities Calgary and the Calgary Committee for Discounted Transit Passes launched a concerted effort to convince City staff, aldermen and Calgary Transit officials of the importance of reduced fare passes. The City of Calgary decided to establish the passes for AISH recipients in 2005 and then extended the program in 2006 to all low-income residents, including AISH beneficiaries, who have been able to apply for a Low Income Transit Pass (LITP) pass since January 2006. The new measure allows low-income riders to buy passes at half the regular rate, for a savings of \$37.50 per month.



Fair Fares presentations to Calgary's Standing Policy Committee on Land Use, Planning and Transportation in September 2006 helped secure funding for LITPs for 2007. But the program's future was not certain. Over the summer of 2007, the Fair Fares Action Team spent time preparing for the City's upcoming decision to continue the pilot program, make it a permanent expenditure or shelve it entirely. Calgary Transit ultimately decided to fund the passes through to the end of 2008 using surplus funds from 2007.

To help make the case, Vibrant Communities Calgary and Calgary Transit jointly commissioned a study to evaluate the social and economic impact of the LITP program on pass purchasers. Researchers were heartened to learn that, among the survey's 401 respondents, affordable transportation had the effect of increasing volunteerism, social engagement, learning and participation in the labour force. Respondents also said that the less expensive passes made it easier for them to meet their monthly expenses.

In the fall of 2008, a budget-setting exercise presented a critical opportunity to establish the passes as a permanent program. Fair Fares members got jittery: Was this the time to launch another publicity campaign aimed at City aldermen? Calgary Transit officials on the Fair Fares committee counselled a quieter approach; their experience on budget processes told them that another way could be found. Trusting their partners' experience and instincts, Fair Fares' other members stepped back. The passes were adopted as a permanent program. This example illustrates the power of community-government collaboration in effecting a permanent change that will provide significant assistance to thousands of households.

*Excerpt from Torjman, S. (2007). *Shared Space: The Communities Agenda*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, p.130.

Reference

Makhoul, A. (2009). *Success for Fair Fares*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, February.



D7. Designing appropriate environments

Policy responses to poverty typically involve the provision of some form of benefit or service. At times, they also include the reduction of basic costs. But another important element is the design of environments that seek the views of citizens in creating healthy neighbourhoods and communities. The policy work in this case:

- helps identify the dimensions of the challenge facing the community (e.g., lack of affordable housing)
- formulates possible design options for discussion and debate
- organizes meaningful community participation in the conversation about possible options (e.g., community charrettes in which residents debate or even create the scenarios). In some cases, the formulation of design options emerges from, rather than precedes, the community conversation.

A wave of provincial poverty reduction strategies*

Since Québec and Newfoundland and Labrador led the way with provincial poverty reduction strategies in 2002 and 2006, respectively, the poverty reduction agenda has come to centre stage in Nova Scotia, Ontario and New Brunswick. In Canada's western provinces, interest in creating similar provincial responses is growing. Organizations from across British Columbia joined together in February 2009 in a call for all-party support for a legislated BC poverty reduction plan (see <http://bcpovertyreduction.ca/>).

Québec - In December 2002, the National Assembly in Québec unanimously adopted a new anti-poverty law that includes a National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion. In April 2004, the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion was released. Entitled *Reconciling Freedom and Social Justice: A Challenge for the Future*, it outlines measures to implement the provisions of the Act. The measures reflect Québec's key priorities: individual and community health, increased personal income, support for families and facilitation of the integration of young people into the labour market. In May 2007, the province released a three-year program review document entitled *Fighting Poverty and Exclusion in Québec*, which identified the need for more accurate statistical reporting measures. A new action plan for the next three-year period is

due in the spring of 2009. Critics have stated that improved income security measures for families with low earned incomes achieved during the plan's first three years were offset by other changes in policy, including an increase in the parental contribution to subsidized daycare (from \$5 to \$7 a day), increases in HydroQuebec rates and the decision to reduce income taxes and pave the way to privatization for many public services. Inflation, lack of adequate control over rent increases and the government's lack of action on social housing are other issues of concern.

Newfoundland and Labrador - In June 2006, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador released the document entitled *Reducing Poverty: An Action Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador*. The province's Poverty Reduction



Strategy is a government-wide integrated approach based on the principles of social inclusion and collaboration. A formal consultation process was carried out to ensure all interested parties could contribute to the strategy. Stakeholders included people living in poverty, community-based groups, business, labour and government officials. A Ministerial Committee was established to guide the work of the strategy and is being supported by a Deputy Minister's Committee and an Interdepartmental Working Group. Continuing community involvement will include province-wide roundtables every two years. The first of these were held in 2008.

Nova Scotia - In December 2007, an Act to establish a Poverty Reduction Working Group was passed unanimously by the House of Assembly. A series of public meetings were held over several months to gather community input on how best to tackle poverty in Nova Scotia. In June 2008, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Working Group presented its recommendations to government. The province's Poverty Reduction Strategy Interdepartmental Committee began meeting in July 2008 to begin developing the strategy, which is expected in 2009.

Ontario - In its 2008 Budget, the provincial government announced that it was committed to improving the quality of life for all citizens, particularly the most vulnerable. A Cabinet Committee was established to develop the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy. *Breaking the Cycle* was released in December 2008. The key areas of the strategy include strengthening income security measures, investing in early childhood development, promoting literacy and conducting a social assistance review. The province conducted 14 public consultation forums across Ontario to obtain stakeholder input.

New Brunswick - In the Fall 2008, New Brunswick residents were asked participate in poverty reduction discussions. Province-wide dialogues and forums will conclude in a final forum in the Fall of 2009 when a Poverty Reduction Plan for New Brunswick will be produced. (The plan made specific reference to the work of Vibrant Communities Saint John.)

*Excerpt from PovNet (<http://www.povnet.org/>), an online resource for advocates, people on welfare, and community groups and individuals involved in anti-poverty work.



D8. Ensuring compatibility of policy measures

Policies that are intended to help the same population inadvertently may work at cross-purposes. In other cases, the improvement of an existing program or introduction of a new measure is intentionally offset by the removal of a benefit or service by another department or order of government. The policy work in this case:

- helps identify possible areas of interaction which can have negative consequences for households
- puts forward proposals to minimize the impact of or reverse the negative interaction
- anticipates prior to the introduction of any policy change where potential sources of conflict may lie and intervenes proactively to ensure that the benefit of any change or new measure is protected.

Responding to new measures*

A variety of asset-based instruments has emerged in recent years to help tackle poverty. Individual development accounts enable private savings for education, training, business development or home ownership. Registered Education Savings Plans (RDSP) encourage savings for postsecondary education. The Canada Learning Bond is intended to enable lower-income households to put aside funds for this purpose. The new Registered Disability Savings Plan provides tax-assisted savings to help families with a member with a severe disability create a pool of capital to which the individual would have access after the death of supporting relatives.

These new measures have given rise to a policy challenge. Because they are considered assets within the context of social assistance (commonly known as ‘welfare’), special provision must be made to exempt them from the calculation of income. Otherwise, households would be no better off financially than if these measures were not in place. A benefit derived from a new federal initiative such as the RDSP potentially could be lost if provinces and territories decided to offset the benefits they pay by the amount of the new measure.

In this case, community groups have been involved in policy work that makes the case for exempting the value of asset-based measures. Groups such as Social and Enterprise Development Innovations (SEDI), Supporting Employment and Economic Development (SEED) Winnipeg and the Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network (PLAN) have engaged with provincial and territorial governments in an effort to protect the full value of newly introduced assets intended explicitly for low-income households.

PLAN has succeeded, for example, in convincing Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, BC, Northwest Territories and Yukon to fully exempt the value of and income generated through the RDSP. Quebec and New Brunswick have agreed to exempt the RDSP as an asset and partially exempt



the income derived from the Plan. PEI has fully exempted the RDSP for calculating eligibility for income-tested social programs. Nunavut has not yet made a decision on the RDSP.

In addition to assets, social assistance programs have rules with respect to earnings. Welfare recipients are permitted to earn a certain amount of income per month before they start losing part of their welfare benefits. This designated sum is set out in rules known as ‘earnings exemption guidelines.’

Typically, these exemptions are so low that they barely cover additional work-related costs, such as child care, clothing or transportation. Unfortunately, these guidelines have the effect of penalizing work efforts with little recognition of how difficult it is to get started or re-engaged in the labour market. There has been some moderation in the stringency of these exemptions over the years – though welfare recipients claim that these rules still represent a significant disincentive to work. Community initiatives concerned with training and employment, in particular, have tried to make the case for more generous earnings exemptions in order to create an incentive to work.

Other examples of policy efforts involve identifying the various ways in which the programs intended to assist low-income individuals and families actually create problems for these households. For example, an improvement in income – generally considered a good thing – may result in eviction from affordable housing, which represents a real setback for a family just getting back on its feet. Program rules can create a ‘Catch-22’ for many households, making it virtually impossible for them to get ahead. Communities play an important role in identifying the problems and disincentives created by programs whose conflicting rules leave households worse off [Stapleton 2008].

*Excerpt from *Community Roles in Policy*, Sherri Torjman, 2009, Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, January, p. 19.

Reference

Stapleton, J. (2008). *Why Is It So Tough To Get Ahead? How our tangled social programs pathologize the transition to self-reliance*. Toronto: George Cedric Metcalf Foundation.



D9. *Assessing policy impact*

The policy work in this case:

- determines possible indicators and types of information that would help assess the impact of a given policy change
- assists in the collection of both quantitative and qualitative evidence on the policy measure
- feeds back information to both community initiatives and relevant policy-makers on the effectiveness and efficiency of the policy measure in order to assess whether any adjustments are required.

Tracking change*

A veritable explosion of work is under way throughout the country, and indeed the world, on assessing the impact of various policies and monitoring progress related to the quality of life. There are scores of initiatives developing various types of indicators, ranging from national government work in the form of 15 Headline Sustainability Indicators in the UK to local community work, such as Sustainable Seattle. There are even reports that attempt to capture the range and scope of available indicators to determine the respective strengths and limitations of the various measures currently in use.

For the purposes of this discussion, one example has been selected to illustrate the kinds of monitoring work being undertaken in communities across the country. While this community reporting system is unique to BC Capital Region, the Quality of Life CHALLENGE has developed its work to be consistent with the Quality of Life Monitoring System formulated by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. Building on an accepted national approach enables the community to compare its progress not only against its own targets but also relative to other municipalities engaged in a similar process.

The review efforts in BC Capital Region are important for several reasons. First, the process in that community links to a broader national effort, which enables the production of benchmarks and comparisons relative to other communities. Second, BC Capital Region has been involved in tracking progress over time, which allows the production of benchmarks and comparisons relative to themselves.

The Quality of Life CHALLENGE in BC Capital Region is concerned with a wide range of factors related to the quality of life including poverty reduction, decent employment, affordable housing and active engagement of citizens. In 1999, the initiative published the first Quality of Life Indicators report, which provided baseline information on key indicators in six domains – population, community affordability, housing, workforce, health and community safety, and participation.



The second report, issued in 2005, charted changes over the intervening period and included additional indicators to expand the scope of reporting. For example, it tracked selected indicators of participation such as charitable giving, voting, attendance at festivals, recycling practices, use of a recreation centre and leisure time physical activity.

In the area of housing, six key dimensions were monitored: housing tenure, rental vacancy rate, owner and renter affordability, dwelling condition, core housing need and social housing. The community needs to assess this range of data that it collects and to explore precisely what it means. This ongoing review creates a foundation for revising the knowledge base and monitoring progress toward achieving the community's desired goal – more affordable housing. The initiative may decide, on the basis of the figures, to step up its activity in some areas and, conversely, to pull back from others.




The information gathered through monitoring changes in respect of certain variables and feeds back into the beginning of the process. Updated information should be incorporated into a revised evidence base so that this case for intervention actually becomes a work in progress – a continuing story that ideally has many happy endings.











*Excerpt from Torjman, S. (2009). *Community Roles in Policy*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, January, pp. 131-133.

Reference

Community Council. (2005). *Quality of Life in BC's Capital Region*. Victoria: Community Council, Quality of Life CHALLENGE.

LEGEND

-  Trend moved toward sustainability
-  Trend moved away from sustainability
-  There is no discernible trend

| | |
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*E. Paddling in the same direction: Creating an enabling environment**

It may be fairly straightforward to set out the various roles in which communities potentially can become involved in policy. But it is certainly no easy task to undertake this work. For one thing, the stakes are high. The relevant political and economic context can change rapidly and even unpredictably. The best-laid plans can be scuttled without warning.

Second, it is difficult to find financial support for policy work. Most funders – including all orders of government, community funders and private funders – prefer to support direct projects in communities where they can see the results of their investment. Another problem is that funding tends to be directed toward short-term interventions while policy interventions often involve a long-term time frame. Fundamental changes are required in the broader policy and funding context to sustain comprehensive local work over the longer term and to ensure that the voluntary sector can continue to play the leading role that it effectively has assumed.

Governments can play several key roles to enable community collaboration around policy. They can provide direct support for this work or indirect support in the form of data collection and interpretation, technical assistance and cross-community learning. But governments can also look for ways to improve current measures and keep their ear to the ground to identify potential problems. Ideally, governments will engage in ongoing dialogue with community groups to create positive working relationships and opportunities for constructive and collaborative work on policy.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that it is generally not easy for people living in poverty to participate in an authentic way in many of the comprehensive collaborative efforts being established in communities throughout the country. The venues in which meetings are held, the language that may be employed and the activities being undertaken by the group (e.g., developing a strategic plan) may be foreign to people who typically are excluded from these processes. All collaborative initiatives must make a conscious effort to ensure that they themselves create appropriate and inclusive environments that enable genuine participation by all community members.

*Excerpt from Torjman, S. (2009). *Community Roles in Policy*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, January, p. 21-23.





E1. Respecting key principles

It may be fairly straightforward to set out the various roles in which communities potentially can become involved in policy. But it is certainly no easy task to undertake this work because:

- the stakes are high; the results of a given effort can be very positive and result in changes that affect substantial numbers of people – even those beyond the borders of a given community
- the results can inadvertently be negative
- the relevant political and economic context can change rapidly and even unpredictably – the best-laid plans can be scuttled without warning.

Work done by the federal government

The Voluntary Sector Initiative (2000 to 2005) was a \$95 million federal investment aimed at improving the relationship between the federal government and the voluntary sector. It evolved from the Voluntary Sector Roundtable that had been created to tackle many common issues. The subsequent [Accord between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector](#) was a framework agreement that set out the values, principles and commitments to action that the federal government and voluntary sector made to each other when they chose to work together. Signed by the Prime Minister in 2001, the Accord's purpose was to strengthen the ability of both sectors to better serve Canadians. The formulation of the Accord included consultations with close to 2,000 sector organizations across the country.

England had developed and instituted a similar accord (Compact) in the late 1990s as did Ireland, Scotland, Wales and other European countries. In these jurisdictions, compacts were signed at the highest government levels. While there are positive working relationships between individual groups and selected government departments in Canada, there remain unresolved challenges in the relationship between the voluntary sector and the federal government as a whole.

The Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue fulfilled the Accord's commitment to take measures to put its provisions into action. The Code was meant to be a tool for deepening the dialogue between the federal government and the voluntary sector at the various stages of the public policy process in order to achieve better policies for Canadians.

Unfortunately, the Accord and Code were not well internalized within the federal government, making it more difficult for communities to pursue collaborative partnerships with officials.



A practical list of principles for collaboration on policy was developed by our Community-Government Collaboration on Policy. It includes:

- Adopt a ‘no blame’ principle to ensure that representatives from all sectors are comfortable participating in the collaborative effort on an ongoing basis
- Value equally the contribution of all partners in the collaborative effort
- Respect partners’ needs related to accountability and public relations
- Know when to keep notes and written records; take care with minutes and attribution
- Honour and respect confidentiality – if you need to go public with information, tell your partners when and why you want to do it. Make sure everyone is comfortable and that there are no surprises. Sometimes, you are not asking permission, but rather giving a ‘heads up.’ You may have to act unilaterally, but you may need partners’ consent to do it.
- Be clear about formal versus informal participation – e.g., is the government partner there with formal departmental permission? If not, do they need explicit permission to participate?
- Build the sense that everyone is in this together
- Recognize that we are all working toward positive outcomes for citizens – take time to learn partners’ perspectives and limitations. Test assumptions by asking questions and making sure you are not operating under false assumptions.
- Determine how best to mobilize local media –
 - If handled poorly, the media can hamper the process; if handled well, it can lever positive change. Be particularly careful to consider the effect of media on government engagement and participation. Media can take things out of context and stories can take on lives of their own. But even bad stories can have good outcomes at times – e.g., a Minister might hear of an issue that otherwise would be missed and positive action may result.
 - In Saint John, NB, the PALS program – an effective school mentoring and tutoring program – stayed out of the public spotlight for five years in order to test and prove its effectiveness. Positive media coverage at the end of the PALS pilot phase increased awareness of its next steps and community lessons.
- Be reasonable about expectations of involvement – initially quiet participants may become significant partners. With time and a growing comfort level with the process, they often move from simply listening to more active participation.

References

www.vsi-isbc.org/eng/relationship/accord.cfm
www.vsi-isbc.org/eng/policy/policy_code.cfm



E2. *Securing funding*

Collaborative efforts are more likely to succeed if they are carried out in an enabling environment that is supportive of their work. Money is a major factor that is enhanced by:

- recognizing the need for patient capital that may not see outcomes or concrete results in the short term
- providing money that supports the local governance process in addition to investment in specific interventions only
- ensuring the availability of funds over a multi-year period to enable the extensive and long-term work typically involved in collaborative efforts.

A good start: The Treasury Board Blue Ribbon panel

In June 2006, the Treasury Board commissioned an independent Blue Ribbon Panel “to recommend measures to make the delivery of grant and contribution programs more efficient while ensuring greater accountability.”

The panel worked to find ways to ensure that Canadians get the best value from the nearly \$27 billion spent every year on more than 800 grant and contribution programs operated across Canada by more than 50 federal departments and agencies.

Federal grant and contribution programs support investments in research and productivity by businesses, individuals and institutions in every part of Canada. They also contribute to the work of literally thousands of nonprofit organizations across the country that serve the needs of communities large and small. They make it possible for Canadians to help themselves in ways that are more efficient and more effective than governments could ever hope to achieve through direct programming.

The Blue Ribbon Panel used a web-based technique to consult with approximately 1,100 recipients of grants and contributions and over 500 federal program administrators. The Panel also reviewed 40 written submissions and held face-to-face consultations with business leaders, representatives from the nonprofit sector, Aboriginal leaders, the science and research community, and provincial officials. They met with members of Parliament, the Auditor General of Canada, the Comptroller General of Canada, federal deputy ministers, the Chief Information Officer and other senior officials directly involved in policy and program administration at the federal and provincial levels.



The panel arrived at three major conclusions:

- there is a need for fundamental change in the way the federal government understands, designs, manages and accounts for its grant and contribution programs
- not only is it possible to simplify administration while strengthening accountability, it is necessary to do the former in order to ensure the latter
- making changes in an area of government as vast and multifaceted as grants and contributions requires sustained leadership at both the political and government officials levels.

It made four simple proposals to government:

- Respect the recipients
- Dramatically simplify the reporting and accountability regime
- Encourage innovation
- Organize information so that it serves recipients and program managers alike.

In June 2008, community representatives were invited to the Munk School of Social Policy in Toronto to hear about progress made on the four recommendations. Before the federal election in October 2008, plans were in the works to initiate changes in grants and contributions administrative procedures in federal departments across the country.

Report website: www.brp-gde.ca/pdf/Report_on_Grant_and_Contribution_Programs.pdf

Grant Craft

Grant Craft (www.grantcraft.org), created by the US Ford Foundation, provides “Practical wisdom for grantmakers.” Offering publications, video and workshops, it has recently published “Funding Community Organizing: Social Change through Civic Participation.” Aimed at foundations, the guide offers a grounding in the basics of community organizing as well as the results the work can achieve in many different fields and communities.

www.grantcraft.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewpage&pageid=1091



E3. Ensuring sufficient time frames

Collaborative efforts are more likely to succeed if they are carried out in an enabling environment that is supportive of their work. With respect to time, the supportive context involves:

- acknowledging that complex initiatives, especially those that involve policy interventions, typically require significant time to effect
- developing a strategic plan that is carried out over a period of several years and a monitoring process which shows progress over time – both of these will help keep people engaged and focused on the effort
- ensuring that certain objectives are achieved in the short term as the effort moves toward the achievement of its long-term goal(s).

Ideas from innovator and social change agent Katharine Pearson*

Without knowing which specific strategies will in practice be most effective, many innovative organizations make an educated guess about their potential reach. This is not a fault. In many cases, clear intentions and commitments can serve as a stable platform on which to plan a course of action. Rather than a blueprint, organizations have a *strategic intent*, which gets fleshed out as they develop and execute. Since their intentions are clear, their plan can evolve coherently and in the right direction – provided they have established reasonable indicators to track their progress.

Which strategy will have the greatest potential for maximum impact will depend upon a host of factors – such as the nature of the innovation, community receptivity, the institutional framework/system to be changed, and the disseminating organization's own mandate and resources.

Typically then, many social innovators begin with the development and testing of an idea. If it is sufficiently promising and fills a gap that others have not addressed, it is likely to attract attention. Other communities seek information on the model and the initiating organization responds.

But a single-minded focus on growth will inevitably run up against barriers, such as competition, political or institutional resistance to change or lack of resources that affect the originator's ability to sustain the innovation. At that point, many will turn their energy to finding long-term solutions. Their efforts may challenge existing systems and will almost certainly demand new skills, relationships and mindsets – including those held by funders.

... Although funders are typically more comfortable in the birth, growth and maturity of organizations and/or ideas, they can enter into the process at any point. Some, less amenable to risk, will choose to support initiatives that are at the stage of consolidation; that is, they are already tested and ready for larger scale implementation. At this point,



predictability, systems, accountability and so forth become essential to rolling out programs and services to reach large numbers of citizens. Other funders will want to invest in research and development – the generation of ideas (“renewal”). Still others such as venture philanthropists may want to step in just as ideas are ready to be turned into prototypes (moving into consolidation). And some may want to follow and support an entire cycle.

Generally, funders prefer clear pathways in which actions are clearly spelled out to processes that unfold over time. However, the growing body of literature describing complexity theory offers other insights.

Complexity theory provides some insights into what to expect and how to work on change in complex environments. Understanding complexity can serve to reassure boards and participants that the lack of a precise blueprint is not an omission or a fault; rather, that the dynamics they are seeing and experiencing are normal... Funders can however request a well-articulated vision and a robust strategy, while being ready for significant variability as the social change initiative is implemented. Above all, funders should accept that complex is not synonymous with unmanageable and that there are recognized guidelines that can help maintain a consistent direction at all stages, from choosing an initiative to measuring results.

*Excerpt from Pearson, K. (2006). *Accelerating our Impact: Philanthropy, Innovation and Social Change*. Montreal: J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, November. pp. 11, 18, 19.



Katharine Pearson passed away in May 2008 and made an invaluable contribution to our understanding of social innovation.



E4. Learning from peers

Collaborative efforts are more likely to succeed if they are carried out in an enabling environment that is supportive of their work. Continual learning helps advance this work and is best undertaken by:

- supporting opportunities for peer-to-peer learning
- providing customized technical assistance on how to transfer successful interventions from one community to another
- making available technical assistance and training on relevant subjects that apply broadly to comprehensive initiatives, such as frameworks for change and developmental evaluation.

Example from the field: Red Deer's Family and Community Support Services Funding Review

For more than 40 years, the City of Red Deer has participated in a regional Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) program with the Province of Alberta and five other municipalities – Red Deer County, Town of Penhold, Town of Bowden, Village of Delburne, and Village of Elnora – for more than 40 years. In 2008, the Red Deer and District FCSS Board agreed to engage in a comprehensive funding review.

Based on provincial legislation created in the mid-1960s, the FCSS mandate assumes familiarity with a few key concepts, including preventive social services and social well-being. Recognizing that these concepts are likely well known among stakeholders but not necessarily understood elsewhere, the Red Deer and District FCSS Board began their funding analysis with a literature review. In a first round of consultations with community stakeholders – including agencies that receive funding from the program – Red Deer's FCSS Board was eager to share the results of the literature review and subsequent draft principles. Board members have established a review process that is intended to be iterative and result in dialogue that will prove instructive for the Review and the general community.

As much as Red Deer's FCSS Funding Review will help identify priorities and determine future practices, it is also designed to assist the community position FCSS within the scope of funding programs available to human services organizations. Further, by establishing the program's appropriate place along the continuum of preventive social services, FCSS administrators will be more able to articulate their desired outcomes and make the changes necessary to address their clients' social well-being.

For more information on the Red Deer FCSS Funding Review, please visit www.reddeer.ca/socialplanning.



How government can help support learning*

Learning is an area that usually does not emerge spontaneously in communities. It is a process that must be carefully developed and strategically pursued. (See section C5 Impact and accountability). The challenge for communities is to identify their learning priorities from among a wide range of options. The equally pressing challenge for governments is to figure out how best to support and enhance these choices.

Governments can play an important role in supporting cross-community learning. In addition to helping communities learn from each other around policy work, governments can take action internally to improve the policy context. They can examine their programs and services in order to improve coordination within their own jurisdiction and with colleagues in other orders of government. Government can meet with individuals and groups affected by the policies for which they are responsible to assess their impact and the ways in which they can make appropriate changes.

A group of public servants known informally as the ‘Federal Family’ brings together federal officials interested in horizontal collaborative action in order to enhance their understanding of ‘place-based’ policy, its potential to improve well-being at the community level and the related implications for the national government. It focuses on how social, economic, environmental and cultural issues intertwine and affect local communities. It also seeks to improve federal participation by studying key concerns, such as policy coherence, engagement, accountability and data sharing. As part of its activities, the Federal Family invites speakers from across the country to present various comprehensive community initiatives to federal officials from different departments and community-based organizations.

*Excerpt from Torjman, S. (2007). *Shared Space: The Communities Agenda*, Sherri Torjman, 2007, Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, pp. 234-44.



E5. *Developing evaluation frameworks*

Collaborative efforts are more likely to succeed if they are carried out in an enabling environment that is supportive of their work. Evaluation is a core requirement that is facilitated by:

- requiring one report for the collaborative effort rather than individual evaluation reports for each funder involved in the comprehensive initiative
- acknowledging the value of attaining short-term goals in support of achieving long-term objectives – i.e., the ‘pathways’ approach
- valuing both quantitative and qualitative measures as equally important in the collection of relevant evidence.

Developmental evaluation*

The dominant approach to solving problems is that of logic. There is a natural sequence of steps that moves us from problem to solution. We move methodically from assessing the situation to gathering and analyzing data, formulating a solution and then implementing that solution. This linear logical approach works very well when the problem is well understood; there are clear boundaries and there is a limited set of possible solutions, of which there is likely one that is optimal. Current evaluation is generally built around supporting this kind of problem solving. Summative evaluations render judgments about the merit, worth and value of a standardized program. Formative evaluations help a program become an effective and dependable model.

The challenge for evaluators, and for problem solvers, is that not all problems are bounded, have optimal solutions or occur within stable parameters. These kinds of problems – called complex or ‘wicked’ – are difficult to define. This is the place where innovators often find themselves. When innovating within a complex system, it is difficult to understand the ramifications of changes. The dynamics of a complex system have a high degree of connectivity and interdependence. There are diverse elements whose interactions create unpredictable, emergent results.

Instead of the logical steps, the experience of innovating often looks more like rapidly moving back and forth between problem and solution. A solution initially may appear ideal, but does not get at what was intended, so the problem needs to be re-examined in light of what was learned in that experience. Or a solution may be crafted that excludes critical stakeholders and the definition needs to be reworked so that these organizations, and their contributions to the solution, can be included. This description tends to resonate with people’s experiences in innovative situations; it is familiar to those who have worked on stubborn social issues, like poverty, or anyone who has experienced the process of policy-making.



Developmental evaluation supports the process of innovation within an organization and in its activities. Initiatives that are innovative are often in a state of continuous development and adaptation, and they frequently unfold in a changing and unpredictable environment. This intentional effort to innovate is a kind of organizational exploration. The destination is often a notion rather than a crisp image and the path forward may be unclear. Much is in flux: the framing of the issue can change, how the problem is conceptualized evolves and various approaches are likely to be tested. Adaptations are largely driven by new learning and by changes in participants, partners and context.

Evaluation is about critical thinking; development is about creative thinking. Often these two types of thinking are seen to be mutually exclusive, but developmental evaluation is about holding them in balance. What developmental evaluation does is combine the rigour of evaluation, being evidence-based and objective, with the role of organizational development coaching, which is change-oriented and relational. To do this, the evaluator is positioned as a part of the team that is working to conceptualize, design and test new approaches. The evaluator's primary role is to bring evaluative thinking into the process of development and intentional change. The developmental evaluator is there to introduce reality testing into the process of innovation. Feedback is supported by data and is delivered in an interactive way that helps the innovator(s) fine-tune what is going on, consider and adapt to uncertainties and inform decisions. Developmental evaluation facilitates assessments of where things are and reveals how things are unfolding; helps to discern which directions hold promise and which ought to be abandoned; and suggests what new experiments should be tried.

*Excerpt from Gamble, J. (2008). *An Evaluation Primer*. Montreal: J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, April.





F. Docking safely: Lessons from this work

Despite increasingly sophisticated means of communication, spending time in one another's company is the fastest and best way to forge and strengthen relationships, exchange ideas and fuel one another's excitement for a body of work.

Our Community of Practice had only 13 months to work together, but the lessons from this effort have changed how we think about policy monitoring, manage collaborative work around policy and communicate what was accomplished.

We are continuing to develop this Collaborative Manual on Policy by making it available on the Internet for comment, input and change. We consider it a living document, subject to new learning, successes and failures, and methods of collaborating about policy.

The learning tool for postsecondary instructors developed by Caroline Andrew, Katherine Graham, Mike Bulthuis and Marisa Casagrande will offer another avenue for sharing the lessons from this project with the next generation of community workers and policy makers. The companion guide will soon be available on the Caledon website.





F1. Learning from our own work

As part of the evaluation process for our Community of Practice, we developed a logic model that involved the following components:

- identifying on an ongoing basis the lessons that we were learning around policy monitoring
- determining the lessons around community-government collaborative practice
- modifying our work on the basis of these lessons to ensure that our learning was continually shaping the activities undertaken throughout the course of the project.

Community of Practice Logic Model

Our work consisted of knowledge development, knowledge exchange and knowledge application.

We *developed knowledge* around policy monitoring and collaboration.

We first created a policy monitoring template for gathering major federal and provincial policy developments. It took several attempts to find a model that worked well for all partners. To keep each policy index brief, we embedded hyperlinks to supporting material, websites and reports.

For the collaborative practices stream, we held seven teleconferences that covered substantive and administrative issues. Partners made presentations which subsequently were documented as stories and widely distributed.

We also developed knowledge about collaboration by holding a face-to-face meeting with government officials. A one-page discussion guide was created that identified core challenges relevant to collaborative work.

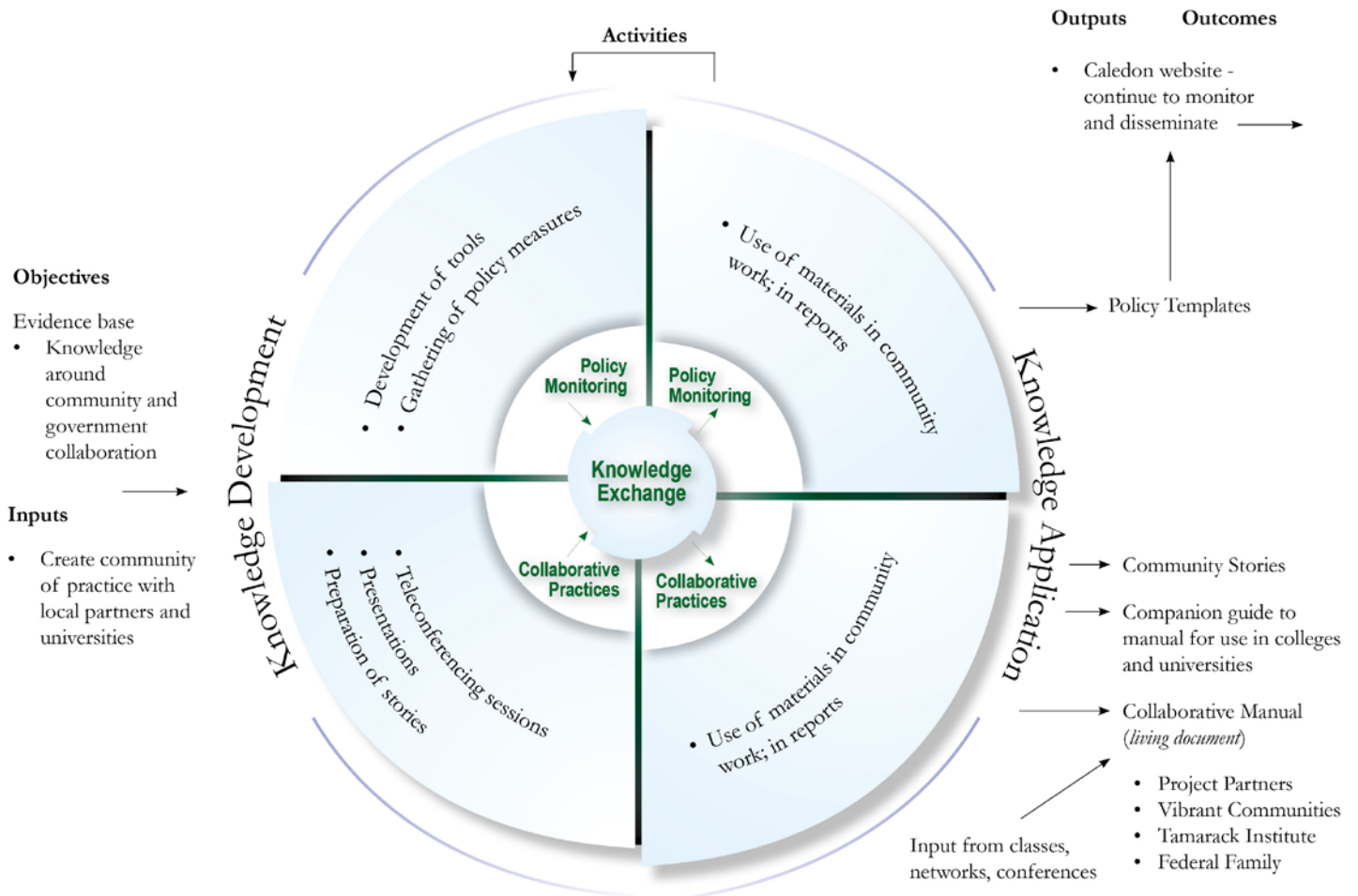
Knowledge development is not sufficient to ensure its application. There must also be a process of *exchange in which knowledge is documented and shared* through structured learning opportunities. Our partners exchanged knowledge by participating in face-to-face meetings and tele-learning sessions, and telling their stories for wider dissemination.

We have already *applied the knowledge* developed and exchanged through this work. Several Caledon reports have incorporated reference to measures identified through policy monitoring. Our partners are applying the principles related to successful collaborative practice.

The desired outcome of this work is to advance collaboration between communities and government around policy. We hope that more open and trusting relationships in which partners advance shared interests will result, in the long term, in more responsive and effective policy solutions for communities.



Community of Practice Logic Model





F2. *Some key lessons*

As part of our work as a community of practice, we tracked key lessons on an ongoing basis. These included:

- asking all members to identify 'one thing I learned' after every meeting and activity that we organized
- learning that the policy tracking process must be customized to the needs of individual communities if it is going to be relevant to them
- recognizing that many communities have found solutions to collaboration challenges; a major task is to identify these successes and extrapolate the lessons for broader application.

"One Thing we Learned" Example: Saskatoon's Station 20 West Initiative

Your comments about the people from the system colocators continuing to feel supportive and invested in the project speaks to the differences between human nature and systems nature. How is it that systems composed of people who "get it" can't seem to collectively get on board politically? I seem to face some of this within my own system as a municipal government and I haven't quite wrapped my head around the reasons. I am, however, the eternal optimist and believe that we are making incremental improvements in the right direction. Thanks for continuing to feed the collective wisdom!

The lesson for me here was about community resilience and the power of a good idea. In the end, there was a demonstration of huge community support which also shows that there is a solid base in communities in Canada for trying to solve the problems of the marginalized and disadvantaged parts of the community.

Through this presentation, I came to appreciate the absolute fragility of community alliances in the face of changing political conditions. Is there some way that this reality can be addressed as part of a collaborative risk analysis?



The one thing I learned is that the balance and tension between developing relationships for the long term and the need to generate short-term results is delicate. While relationship building is critical, you do need to identify wins and show progress. I also learned more about the challenges of dealing with partners from different sectors. We may have certain ways of working and priorities which may come into conflict with partners.

It became clear to me in the Station 20 West discussion that there is really no such thing as risk-free collaboration. If we accept the fact that there is inherent risk in these arrangements, then we need to ask ourselves about the possible steps that can be taken to lower or minimize this risk. I heard two discussed yesterday. The first involved the importance of garnering local support early on in a process so that citizens can act as allies if and when necessary. A second involved action at the political level – making sure that all political parties are informed of the objectives and work associated with the effort. Again, there is no guarantee that these strategies will be successful (the project had actually tried the latter). But I do think we need to keep asking ourselves about risk mitigation and build a body of knowledge from our collective lessons.

While there is a temptation to identify all interested parties as partners, being a true partner requires a level of involvement and commitment – a real personal stake in the success or failure of the project – that only the residents of the downtown core (individuals and CBOs) had. This lesson might help guide us in identifying partners for future collaborative efforts.

The presenters' determination and continued work on behalf of their community and its needs throughout the past decade speak for themselves, even if they were misunderstood in certain quarters. The questions they raised to themselves and to the group are not easily answered, but they are already weaving their way into the work we are doing to help other communities consider their own forays into collaboration.



F3. *Our Wish List*

Our experience with the Community-Government Collaboration on Policy gave rise to several recommendations for future work in this area. These included:

- having available longer-term support for this kind of joint learning because it takes several months for a disparate group to work cohesively as a learning community
- having more occasions and safe spaces to engage in dialogue with government officials around the challenges of collaborative work and their specific roles in these initiatives
- having access to additional support for sharing the findings of the policy work with more communities beyond the time frame of our community of practice.

Finally, we wish that more organizations could have the same wonderful opportunity that we had to participate in such a challenging and engaging Community of Practice.

We wish for:

1. More opportunities to gather collectively and share our learning and experiences with other partners around informing policy. Continued tracking of key policy changes through the policy monitoring template.
2. The opportunity to gather community leaders and government staff together to discuss what they have learned through this Collaboration on Policy Manual and where there might be opportunities for further work and engagement.
3. The Collaboration on Policy manual become a living document and that other community leaders contribute their thoughts and expertise.
4. Support for practitioners to have time and a space to write about their practice and its implications for policy - and get this material distributed widely.
5. Support for community groups to be given resources to travel to places that do similar kinds of policy-relevant work and to observe and discuss the differences and similarities in context and strategies.
6. More time to talk. This project has just formed the foundation of an important conversation and we really need to keep talking.
7. A future in which we can continue to work collaboratively, regardless of jurisdictions. A citizen of a neighbourhood lives in a community located in a province that is part of our great country. But it is the same person and he or she has a story, circumstances and needs. When we collaborate with citizens' needs in mind and not necessarily the needs of our respective systems, that is when we are truly collaborating!
8. Opportunities to teach people new to the field of policy-making. We offer our forthcoming companion guide as a first step.



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