



# Government and Communities: Strengthening Neighbourhoods Together

*by*

**Cheryl Gorman**

**June 2006**



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## *Executive Summary*

The Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC) policy dialogue group developed this paper to present lessons learned through the project. Policy was defined as the “represent(ation) of a decision, made by a publicly elected or designated body, which is deemed to be in the public interest” [Torjman 2005b]. Policy dialogue is described as “an example of a supportive structure that combines both informal and formal elements.” It is based on a facilitation technique called deliberative dialogue in which “small groups of diverse individuals exchange opinions around common concern. The process allows participants to examine public issues and develop strategies for change” [Torjman 2005a: 4].

In designing the ANC policy dialogue, partners and government sponsors decided to intentionally explore the project objectives across a continuum of collaboration: sharing information (easiest level of difficulty); setting common directions; consolidating administrative procedures; and solving problems (hardest level of difficulty). Course correction was built into the policy dialogue process in recognition of the complex nature of the project and to reflect the project’s action research focus.

In general terms, the project was able to broadly share information on substantive policies, “systems of support” impact on strengthening neighbourhoods and various aspects of relationship building. In many cases, it was also possible to set common directions. There was limited progress on consolidating administrative procedures and solving problems.

The most important lessons learned are:

1. Neighbourhood residents must lead the process.
2. Strengthening neighbourhoods is a complex process that requires transformational change on the part of many stakeholders.
3. Governance structures, operational mechanisms and appropriate resources are urgently needed and required over the long term to effectively support comprehensive community initiatives.
4. Collaboration is more than cooperation – it is fundamentally about sharing power. Are those who have traditionally held power ready and willing to do so?

Other highlights include:

### *Substantive, department-specific policies*

Results:

- Neighbourhood visioning and action planning pinpointed a number of general themes and priorities, most of which are associated with two or three levels of government (e.g., housing). In some cases, projects were resourced and are under way. (e.g., free recreation programs).
- Substantive policy papers on literacy and housing were written and distributed.

## *“Systems of support” impact on strengthening neighbourhoods*

### Results:

- Five government departments were able to creatively use internal funding mechanisms to create two, rather than five, contribution agreements for the project. Departments agreed to a single reporting and evaluation format.
- The United Way movement is using the ANC experience to intentionally expand and adjust its priority of community capacity building – a potentially powerful and long-term impact on neighbourhood well-being beyond the life of the ANC project.
- Social capital has been increased through the wealth of relationships formed through this project.
- Residents are starting to see concrete changes in their neighbourhood, and, this progress gives them some hope and the desire for training to do more.

### Lessons learned:

- In the near future, local policy dialogues are the most likely to achieve impact by mobilizing a broad range of stakeholders on specific topics.
- These local policy dialogues will continue to bump up against larger, systemic issues. Until these systemic issues are addressed, local strengthening efforts will struggle with sustainability.
- Strengthening neighbourhoods requires solutions that are not within the mandate of any one organization or even one level of government. There is a significant gap in structures designed to support multi-partner initiatives.
- An internal culture shift is required for government to effectively support its public servants involved in comprehensive community initiatives.
- Governments must pay more attention to their internal succession planning and knowledge transfer with respect to comprehensive community initiatives. They also require internal governance structures that bring senior decision-makers of funding departments together on a more regular basis.
- Time and resources to manage horizontal and vertical partnerships must be officially provided and recognized.
- Communities require access to technical support and good data in addition to appropriate time and resources.
- Government sponsors must better integrate policy and program perspectives when designing initiatives like ANC.
- Face-to-face reflection sessions are essential to capture lessons learned and effectively course correct at the site and system level.

### *Building relationships – common language and framework*

#### Results:

- Several products have been developed – policy papers, community capacity building tools, a theory of change, a preliminary logic model and neighbourhood well-being index.
- Local policy dialogues are under way and are at various stages.

#### Lessons Learned:

- As project activity moves from general to specific, there is a corresponding need for more specific shared language and frameworks.
- As we engage in shared activities, gaps in our understanding are brought to the forefront and signal the need to revise our common language. Shared use of language continues to have important implications as ANC scales its activity up and out.
- Some people absorb information best through policy dialogue-style papers while others relate more naturally to community stories, film, conversation circles and drama.
- More effort is required around governance and evaluation in order to create common frameworks.
- It is important to use asset versus deficit-based approaches when defining common language and frameworks.

### *Building relationships – information from the field*

#### Results:

- Site-specific results are described in the five individual community stories.
- A rich blend of data is an important ANC legacy and can be found in the project quarterly reports.

#### Lessons learned:

- There are multiple entry points to strengthening neighbourhoods. These can be asset or relationship-based. All sites reported a surge of excitement when residents began taking leadership roles.
- There are several preconditions for success: acknowledging, respecting and supporting the long-term nature of the work; “doing no harm”; having an asset-based approach; presence of skilled intermediaries; access to good risk management tools; and, government capacity to work with communities as equal partners.

- Linkages among activities and outputs are preliminary in nature:
  - Qualitative and quantitative data is needed to effectively plan and course correct.
  - Resident mobilization is a critical first step and cannot be rushed.
  - Success with an activity in one neighbourhood does not guarantee success with the same activity in another neighbourhood.
  
- A number of questions have been raised that need further exploration. These include:
  - What happens when empowered residents encounter politicians and officials who are not ready for them? Is government ready to respond to the community capacity they help to facilitate?
  - Is there a way to speed up the mobilization process while working with additional neighbourhoods within a city?
  - What is necessary to create sustainable, resident-led governance structures?

### *Building relationships – insights into future public policy*

Three topics have been identified: 1) the urgent need for governance, operational mechanisms and appropriate resources to effectively support comprehensive community initiatives; 2) the need for a significant national research capacity that can inform debate; and 3) the need to acknowledge that strengthening neighbourhoods is a complex problem and requires a comprehensive community initiative approach.

Clearly, ANC has made significant progress in sharing policy information and in setting common directions for policy that advances neighbourhood strengthening work. There has been great success at the national sponsor level in consolidating government procedures. But it remains to be seen whether this is a one-time success or the beginning of standard government practice. To a lesser extent, there has been progress on policy problem-solving. This activity has occurred at the site level and it, too, may be situation-specific rather than indicative of a new policy trend across the country.

One thing is certain: It is only through continuing to talk and learn together that governments and communities will achieve effective policy dialogue.

## ***Action for Neighbourhood Change – Policy Dialogue in Context***

### ***Background***

Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC) is a pan-Canadian project that involves four national, five local partners and five government sponsors in an effort to revitalize and improve the quality of life in five selected neighbourhoods across the country. This paper was developed to present policy lessons learned through the project. It documents activity from February 2005 to March 2006.

The four national partners are United Way of Canada-Centraide Canada, Tamarack - An Institute for Community Engagement, the National Film Board of Canada and the Caledon Institute of Social Policy. The five local partners are United Ways in Halifax, Thunder Bay, Toronto, Regina and Surrey. These local partners are expected to convene a process that brings together individuals who reflect the views of diverse sectors including residents, voluntary organizations, business and governments, in an effort to strengthen their respective neighbourhoods.

Action for Neighbourhood Change also involves as partners its five key government sponsors: the National Secretariat on Homelessness (Human Resources and Social Development), Office for Learning Technologies (Human Resources and Social Development), National Literacy Secretariat (Human Resources and Social Development), Canada's Drug Strategy (Health Canada) and the National Crime Prevention Strategy (Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada).

### ***Policy and policy dialogue***

Early in the project, Sherri Torjman wrote two papers to develop common language and frameworks. In *What is Policy?*, public policy is defined as the “represent[ation of] a decision, made by a publicly elected or designated body, which is deemed to be in the public interest.” She continues by explaining that:

Policy development involves the selection of choices about the most appropriate means to a desired end. 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 [Torjman 2005b: 19].

*Policy Dialogue* is described as “an example of a supportive structure that combines both informal and formal elements.” It is based on a facilitation technique called deliberative dialogue in which “small groups of diverse individuals exchange opinions around common concern. The process allows participants to examine public issues and develop strategies for change” [Torjman 2005a: 4].

**Building on past work**

In creating ANC, government sponsors decided to build on policy lessons learned from the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI). The sector and the federal government adopted *A Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue* which seeks to improve public policy by, among other practices, increasing the opportunities for dialogue as well as “developing and using mechanisms to engage in dialogue” with the voluntary sector and “harder-to-reach groups.”

Through its VSI work, the former Human Resources Development Canada funded a policy dialogue within Vibrant Communities, a pan-Canadian project exploring promising approaches to community-based poverty reduction. The purpose of the policy dialogue was to deepen awareness among government policy-makers about comprehensive, multisectoral and community-based strategies for poverty reduction. It provided a forum in which a wide range of project participants and interested stakeholders could share information, experiences and perspectives about such work [Leviten-Reid 2004]. One of the key lessons from Vibrant Communities was the understanding that policy dialogue has the potential to fulfill three additional purposes: setting common directions, consolidating administrative procedures and solving problems. These three objectives are obviously more complex than the mere sharing of information and require a commitment from participants [Torjman 2005a].

**Moving the bar forward – what’s possible?**

<b>Vibrant Communities Collaboration Continuum</b>	Sharing Information	Setting Communication Directions	Consolidating Administrative Procedures	Problem Solving
<b>Government Sponsor Priorities</b>	(easiest level of difficulty)			(hardest level of difficulty)
<b>Substantive Policies</b> department-specific policy – e.g., public safety	→	?		
<b>System of Supports</b> e.g., leadership to create new governance	→	?		
<b>Building Relationships</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• common language/frameworks</li> <li>• information from the five sites</li> <li>• insights into future policy</li> <li>• collaborative learning</li> </ul>			→	?

## *ANC Objectives*

Government sponsors set out three broad learning objectives for ANC policy work:

- Identify department-specific policies and programs that support and/ or hinder neighbourhood renewal (substantive policy)
- Identify how the “systems of support”<sup>1</sup> can more effectively assist this work
- Build stronger relationships among the project partners and government sponsors through three related activities – establishing common language and frameworks; identifying specific challenges and developing strategies arising from the work of local communities; and identifying insights to inform future public policy pertaining to neighbourhood renewal.

In designing the ANC policy dialogue, project partners and government sponsors decided intentionally to explore these objectives across the continuum of collaboration: sharing information (easiest level of difficulty), setting common directions, consolidating administrative procedures and solving problems (hardest level of difficulty). ANC partners and sponsors wanted to cross-reference government objectives with levels of collaboration to create a framework for exploring what was possible in a Canadian context.

The preceding diagram shows the intent of the ANC policy dialogue. Using the content topics of substantive policies, “systems of support” and building relationships, the group wanted to explore how far it could develop collaborative processes for policy. How far beyond sharing information and setting common directions was it possible to go? The arrows and question marks in the diagram depict this question. In other words, ANC project partners and government sponsors used action research to learn what was possible at the more difficult levels of collaboration on policy. The answer to this question is summarized at the beginning of each section of this paper. Although government sponsor priorities are interconnected, they are reported on separately for the purpose of analysis.

## *ANC Process*

From this starting point, project partners and government sponsors were asked to identify specific topics on which they would like to work. An example is evaluation of comprehensive community initiatives. The initial plan was to establish an ongoing group that would meet monthly by phone and teleconference in order to learn how much could be achieved on a given topic through information sharing to problem solving. Care was taken to build the group by establishing norms and processes that would encourage participants to build trust and make it possible to move beyond information sharing. For example, participants would approve meeting summaries before they were distributed.

In addition to monthly meetings, a Policy Forum was planned with full input from the policy dialogue group. This event was held in October 2005 for 160 interested stakeholders, including the policy dialogue group.

It is important to know that the policy dialogue was integrated into the larger ANC work plan so that learning from one component could inform and support other activities. For example, participation in the five sites' project manager teleconferences became an effective means of gathering policy-related information and additional policy papers were written to address the needs identified by the site staff.

Finally, ongoing course correction was embedded into each policy dialogue meeting. This decision was made for two reasons: 1) in recognition of the complex nature of the work – we realized that although we had a general direction, the specific path would emerge with experience<sup>2</sup>; and 2) to reflect the project's action learning focus. As expected, reflection on our group learning led to a number of changes: the group was expanded to include participants from other interested federal departments, topics were adjusted and links were made to internal government groups exploring related issues. As a result of priorities identified at the October 2005 ANC Policy Forum, a decision was made to explore two topics in greater depth through small working groups.

In total there were nine group meetings, five individual sponsor meetings and a Policy Forum. Each meeting generally had 15 to 20 participants. In addition, three working groups were set up to explore topics in greater detail: a commentary on the Auditor General's 2005 Annual Report (the fourth chapter on horizontal initiatives); a theory of change and logic model for investment in strengthening neighbourhoods; and recommendations for investing in community capacity building related to neighbourhoods. Additional information about group membership and decision points can be found in the appendices.

## ***What have we learned? What has changed?***

### ***Substantive policies (department-specific mandates)***

The project was able to broadly share information regarding department-specific priorities. In the five sites, progress was made at different paces on setting common directions and problem solving.

As one would expect, government sponsors hoped to see learning and action related to their individual mandates: personal and neighbourhood security; substance abuse; health; housing stability; learning; and literacy and skills development for employment. Project partners made it clear from the outset that it was necessary to identify criteria for selecting a neighbourhood first and then to build

trust and engage neighbourhood residents. This process is time-consuming and cannot be rushed. Consequently, partners thought substantive, department-specific policy issues would probably be identified towards the end of the project's first year, if at all.

That having been said, the neighbourhood visioning and action planning activity identified a number of general themes and priorities, most of which are associated with two or three levels of government. These include: social inclusion; affordable and appropriate housing; access to services; income and employment; recreation opportunities, especially for youth; health; community safety; education and literacy, particularly school readiness and stay-in-school initiatives; and environmental issues.

In some cases, the sites secured additional resources and projects are already under way to address these needs. For example, municipal services and volunteer efforts are beginning to solve a garbage problem in Bridgeview through clean-up days that target litter-filled vacant lots – a major source of frustration in the neighbourhood. The problem of no free, accessible recreation programs in Scarborough Village was partially solved by negotiating gym space and program staff at reduced rates. These staff run an after-school recreational program now offered two nights a week [Makhoul 2006a].

The ANC project pool money is also being distributed effectively to address substantive issues. For example, Spryfield has funded a “partnership with the Chebucto West Community Health Board and the residents of the Greystone housing complex to create a garden which will be established and maintained by the residents. Knowledge on food production and garden tending will be provided through a curriculum delivered by the Urban Farm Museum” [Makhoul 2006b]. Simpson-Ogden will fund five projects, including one operated by the Neighbourhood Women's Coordinating Committee to help young women who are trying to exit the sex trade [Makhoul 2006c].

Partner sites have also used ANC to leverage results with pre-existing projects. For example, United Way of Regina has managed to break the impasse with the multi-government Regina Inner-City Community Partnership (RICCP) by securing an agreement for ongoing dialogue among RICCP, United Way of Regina and the North Central Community Association. The United Way of Greater Toronto used ANC evidence to convince the City of Toronto to place resident leaders on its strategic planning committees. In another Toronto example, a non-governmental and multi-level government working group was established to address public safety concerns. Several members of this group participate in the ANC policy dialogue and are able to bring this capacity building approach to the table.

Finally, information has been shared through two papers on department-specific policy issues. Sherri Torjman prepared a paper on *Reading, Writing and Neighbourhood Renewal*, which highlights the role of literacy as one of the social components of strengthening neighbourhoods. It discusses recent findings on the status of literacy proficiency in Canada and describes various measures that communities can take to promote literacy. *Neighbourhood Change through a*

*Housing Lens* by Steve Pomeroy focuses on the role of housing, both as a central feature of neighbourhood fabric and as an agent of influence on neighbourhoods. The paper reviews how housing policies and programs have often reinforced neighbourhood decline and identifies how proactive, purposefully designed housing policies can improve neighbourhood well-being.

Additional examples of substantive impact made through ANC can be found in the community stories which were released in April 2006.

### ***Systems of support***

The project was able to share information and contribute to direction setting at the national level. Consolidation of government procedures occurred among the project sponsors. In the five sites, some progress was also made on consolidating government procedures.

### ***Context***

Although some neighbourhoods may appear to be isolated islands, in reality they are part of a larger system. The influence of that system is often invisible but it is always there. For instance, the need for affordable and appropriate housing is directly and indirectly affected by municipal decisions to enforce property standards; by neighbourhood association decisions to create covenants that limit housing design; by provincial decisions about rent control; by federal decisions to invest in social housing; and by bank decisions about mortgage policies. These are just a few of the complexities related to one policy issue alone.

Many organizations are involved to various degrees in neighbourhood revitalization. The relationships among organizations are often referred to as horizontal and vertical links and are usually quite complex:

*Comprehensive community initiative context* – Although neighbourhoods are at the heart of this work, success usually depends on the support of others. Within ANC, we have described the interrelationships as nested circles. *Bridge builders* are the individuals and local level organizations that function as intermediaries among residents, neighbourhoods and the larger systems of support. The *systems of support* are found at all levels (i.e., local, regional, national). These systems may or may not be integrated and can include not-for-profit organizations, government at all levels, community-based agencies, educational institutions, and private sector companies and associations [Gorman 2006: 7-8].

ANC intentionally worked to blend project experience with Canadian and international research to fully explore collaboration in the systems of support. Despite obvious challenges, ‘miracles’ have occurred that demonstrate ANC potential for becoming a standard practice within the federal government and the United Way movement.

## *Experimenting with governance*

The early policy dialogue sessions focused on government-community and government-government collaboration. This was explored through research and the structure of the policy dialogue itself. We experimented with governance structures in order to move beyond information sharing. As mentioned earlier, the second policy dialogue decision was to create a stable group of participants. This led to a series of related questions such as: “Who should be part of the group?” The short timeline between Call for Proposals and project start meant that government sponsors did not have the opportunity to form their own internal governance structure. This created initial confusion as decisions could not be made as quickly or as effectively as the project required in the start-up phase. As a result, community members were not involved in the policy dialogue until May 2005 and two sponsoring departments were unable to fully participate due to time constraints. The latter circumstance reflects the tendency for collaborative initiatives to be undertaken “off the side of the desk” rather than being integrated into the work plans of partners and thereby allocated the required time and resources.

Another group membership challenge was the temporary disruption created by staff turnover and the need to expand the group. Once community members were involved, there was a strong push to identify issues upon which members could act within the project time frame. Most members of the policy dialogue group had limited decision-making authority so the need was clear to expand the group just as it was getting started. In both cases, new members needed to be brought up to speed, a buddy system had to be put in place and processes adjusted as group size increased. This delay was offset by the value brought by new members. For example, sites were able to influence future research projects that would provide them with needed data by linking directly to Statistics Canada researchers.

It also became obvious that our existing group could become a ‘scouting party’ to survey the route ahead and to identify some possible courses of action for recommendation within each individual member’s sphere of influence. This led to the decision to support local policy dialogues that were springing up in most sites and usually involved non-governmental organizations and all three orders of government. Government sponsors also sought means to connect ANC to internal strategic planning at more senior levels, including the newly formed federal Working Group on Neighbourhood Revitalization. Finally, this shift resulted in invitations to several international speakers for the Policy Forum, to learn about the “systems of support” experience in other jurisdictions. All these steps occurred within four months of the project start date.

At the five sites, partners are either creating new local policy dialogues or strengthening existing ones. Local United Ways are using ANC as leverage to gain both attention and strategic commitment. This is time-consuming and challenging work but already small to large successes are evident. For example, United Way of the Lower Mainland is using ANC to extend its systems of support as part of the larger Sustainable Surrey initiative. Advocacy by the United Way of Greater Toronto, using experience in Scarborough Village, contributed to the provincial government decision to increase its investment in community health centres.

### *Using research to test and course correct*

The Policy Forum was planned for the middle of the project to facilitate course corrections. Initial sessions on government-government and government-community collaboration highlighted the need to better understand these issues in other jurisdictions. As a result, the scope of the Policy Forum increased exponentially from a project-only activity to a learning event for a wide range of government and community stakeholders interested in strengthening neighbourhoods. Invitations were extended to federal government participants at multiple levels, Vibrant Communities local convenors and policy researchers from a variety of national organizations.

The process to develop the Policy Forum demonstrated a commitment to both information sharing and common direction setting. Program planning for the Forum was undertaken with government sponsors and project partners regarding event outcomes, questions to be posed to speakers, program format, participation of site managers and residents in the program, and an expanded guest list.

Canadian and international presenters at the Forum provided specific information on making the case for neighbourhood revitalization, engaging citizens in neighbourhood revitalization, the mechanics of comprehensive community initiatives and evaluating comprehensive community initiatives. Positive informal feedback indicated that the Forum was a catalyst for new thinking about strengthening neighbourhoods.

Forum participants identified four priorities for further investigation and application in the ANC project: governance, capacity building, accountability and evaluation, and funding. Additional department-specific policy papers were prepared in order to address these priorities. *Remaking Neighbourhood Renewal: Towards Creative Neighbourhood Renewal Policies for Britain* by Duncan MacLennan and *Rethinking Neighbourhood Renewal: Review of the US Experience and Possible Lessons for Canada* by Steve Pomeroy both examine all four Forum priorities. A third paper by Sherri Torjman was written with input by the policy dialogue group to respond to the chapter on horizontal initiatives in the Auditor General's annual report [Torjman 2006a].

In addition to policy papers, two working groups were established to help set direction at the national level. The first group used research and project experience to develop a theory of change and logic model for investment in strengthening neighbourhoods. The second group concentrated on recommendations for investing in community and neighbourhood capacity building. They will also be used to adjust ANC governance, evaluation and capacity building activity in its next phase.

### *Lessons learned about the “systems of support”*

Research and project experience suggest several important conclusions about systems of support for neighbourhood revitalization:

- In the near future, local policy dialogues are the most likely to achieve impact by mobilizing a broad range of stakeholders on specific topics.
- These local policy dialogues will continue to bump up against larger, systemic issues. Until these systemic issues are addressed, local revitalization efforts will struggle with sustainability.
  - ANC sites experienced mixed results when trying to engage regional staff of the federal government. Regional staff also face a challenge when trying to feed local priorities to the national office.
  - Progress at the system level, involving all three orders of government, will require a visioning exercise as well as long-term strategic and financial commitment. At the federal level, this could take the form of a national strategy similar to Canada's Drug Strategy, the Urban Aboriginal Strategy and the National Housing Strategy.
- Neighbourhood renewal is a complex problem and requires solutions that are not within the mandate of any one organization or even one level of government.
  - "Strengthening neighbourhoods is an example of a *complex problem* – problems that have neither agreed upon descriptions or solutions. Complex problems involve multiple factors and diverse partners that continually shape and re-shape one another. Consequently, these problems can never be fully or finally solved" [Gorman 2006: 5].
  - Resident-led solutions are essential. Champions at many levels as are required for sustainable change [Gorman 2006: 7].
  - "A clear, big picture understanding of the relationships between social and economic development over time (is needed) and how that is embedded in places. This requires Finance Ministries, without abandoning the long-term intent of maximizing national competitiveness, to recognize how current spatial patterns of economic development and its social consequences influence future prospects for the nation; economy, society and place are connected" [MacLennan 2006: 36].
  - "The multisectoral nature of renewal policies requires that they need senior coordination within the political levels of a government and senior bureaucratic leadership of the ideas too; usually, there would have to be cross-departmental ministerial and official groupings to pursue appropriate policy coordination. If this approach is adopted, then governments must audit the factors that inhibit cross-departmental cooperation and devise systems to reward cooperation and penalize 'selfish' behaviour" [MacLennan 2006: 37].
- The public servants involved in this project were active and collaborative learners along with their project partners. Direct participation in projects they fund is a non-traditional but essential role for public servants if strengthening neighbourhoods is to move into the problem-solving level of collaboration. This form of participation requires an internal culture shift for government.

- Governments must pay more attention to their internal succession planning and knowledge transfer with respect to comprehensive community initiatives. The success of this work is rooted in personal relationships that are built by working collaboratively. Consequently, when public servants are transferred, the remaining partners feel a sense of loss. It is easier for new relationships to form with the incoming public servants if they are personally introduced to the partners by their predecessor and have been well briefed on the initiative. While the same principles hold true for other partners, staff turnover is much lower.
- Time and resources to manage horizontal and vertical relationships must be officially provided and recognized. Individual passion and commitment are not sufficient to sustain the effort.
  - “The Auditor General was correct to conclude that central agencies must take a stronger leadership role in mandating, resourcing and rewarding collaboration among government departments” [Torjman 2006a: 3].
  - Project sponsors cited the importance of having a lead department that acted as a resource to others. They also need their own governance structure that brings senior decision-makers of funding departments together on a more regular basis [SML & Associates 2006: 16].
- Communities also need sufficient time and resources for horizontal and vertical management of comprehensive initiatives. They have additional need for access to technical support and good data.
- Government sponsors must better integrate policy and program perspectives when designing initiatives like ANC. The potential for conflict between these two perspectives parallels and connects to the one between qualitative and quantitative research. At the end of the day, both are necessary to form a complete picture. This tension surfaced in ANC when it came time to translate the Contribution Agreement, written from a policy perspective, into an evaluation framework. Government sponsors responsible for programs were looking for more concrete measures of outputs and activities. For example, what does ‘holistic’ mean in measurable terms? What are the most effective ways to demonstrate the success of community engagement? Some of these difficult questions can be addressed by continuing to work on common language and frameworks. This issue raises the question of government commitment to use the learning from projects like ANC in order to do their work differently.<sup>3</sup>
- Face-to-face reflection sessions are important to capture lessons and effectively correct course at the site and system levels. There will always be tension between site and system needs and these meetings provide an opportunity to find common directions and solve problems collaboratively [SML & Associates 2006: 16].

### *What are the ‘miracles’ of ANC?*

Despite challenges, some important outcomes have been achieved from a systems perspective. Five government departments were able to strategically use internal funding mechanisms for one project. They also managed to channel this funding through two contribution agreements rather than five separate agreements. Considerable negotiation led to a single reporting and evaluation format. Communities have identified simplified reporting requirements and associated paperwork as priorities.

The United Way movement is using the ANC experience to intentionally expand and adjust its priority of community capacity-building – a potentially powerful and long-term impact on neighbourhood well-being beyond the life of the ANC project. A wealth of relationships has been formed across the country by working collaboratively. This collaboration occurred in spite of the compressed time frame of the project – a stress that could have prevented these relationships from developing. The result is a committed and growing network that adds to social capital.

The best litmus test of progress on the system level is the reaction of neighbourhood residents. According to the residents at the final project meeting, they are happy to finally be heard, not just listened to. They are also starting to see concrete changes in their neighbourhood. This progress gives them some hope and the desire for training to do more.

### ***Building relationships***

#### *Common language and framework*

The project was able to share information and set common directions among project participants. Information has been shared widely at the national level. Additional work is required to share information and set common directions with the complete range of neighbourhood strengthening stakeholders.

Several important activities have already been described in this area. The *Policy Dialogue* paper was critical to the project’s early work in setting objectives for intentional experimentation and learning. Likewise, the policy dialogue group’s decision to develop a theory of change and preliminary logic model is an important snapshot in time that will inform future work. Policy papers, local policy dialogues and community capacity-building tools all provide an important knowledge base for shared understanding and common direction-setting that can lead to the more challenging consolidation of government procedures and problem-solving.

Four additional dimensions of common language must be raised at this point:

*Specificity:* As project activity moves from general to specific, there is a corresponding need for more specific shared language and frameworks. For example, as sites new to local policy dialogue work began to approach potential participants, basic questions were asked about policy and the policy development process. Community developers were looking for models and tools to assist them. Their questions led to the development of the paper *What is Policy?* and the preliminary policy resource guide.

*Shared use:* As we engage in shared activities, gaps in our understanding are brought to the forefront and signal the need to revise our common language. Perhaps one of the most important lessons regarding language emerged from the collaborative approach used to prepare for the Policy Forum. It quickly became apparent that some people used the terms ‘community’ and ‘neighbourhood’ interchangeably while others used them specifically. This inconsistency had important implications for things like presentations by ‘experts.’ Is an expert a neighbourhood resident, a community-based agency staff member or both? Shared use of language continues to have important implications as ANC scales its activity up and out. Do the new partners and stakeholders share the project’s common language? Are we intentional about testing this rather than assuming that we mean the same thing? Are sufficient time and resources provided?

*Employed medium:* Some people absorb information best through policy dialogue-style papers while others relate more naturally to community stories, film, conversation circles and drama. The power of the National Film Board’s work with youth in the ANC sites is an example of how to mobilize a previously disengaged group by changing the medium of language.

*First language:* Language cannot be considered common if the audience does not speak one of Canada’s official languages. This dimension of language is most striking in Scarborough Village where 49 percent of the residents have a home language other than English. For language to be shared in this environment care must be taken to use a variety of communication tools in many languages.

In terms of common frameworks, more effort is still needed regarding:

*Governance:* To a large extent, the governance issue requires championing by and support of senior decision-makers. This is a system of support issue.

*Evaluation:* At the project level, success can be achieved in developing a more robust evaluation framework. Helping government sponsors articulate the value of ANC is still a challenge. Preliminary work on a Neighbourhood Well-being Index was completed in late February and March. This can be finalized and field tested within ANC in the next phase of work. The Index should also be connected to work being done by government sponsors on integrating outcomes. However, it should be noted that providing a crisper evidence base for neighbourhood revitalization has not been empirically linked to investment decisions in other jurisdictions. While quantitative evidence is important, it is not sufficient. Other factors such as equity are influencing decisions [Lupton 2003].

Finally, it is important to use asset versus deficit-based approaches when defining common language and frameworks. This point is further discussed in lessons from the field.

### *Information from the field*

Sites are at the information sharing stage and are using a project managers' site tour in March 2006 to identify some common directions they can pursue in the next year.

### *Are there multiple entry points to change?*

The simple answer is yes and all sites shared the perspective that, at some point, neighbourhood activity must be resident-led. Examples of relationship entry points are diverse. In Thunder Bay, the project was deliberately launched with fanfare as a means of gaining attention from residents and potential partners; the launch was followed up quickly with a neighbourhood block party to build momentum. United Way of Halifax Region engaged a project manager who then hired local residents as project staff. These staff/residents met quietly with small groups of their peers. Regardless of approach, all sites reported a surge of excitement when residents began taking leadership roles. This excitement certainly was evident at the third national project meeting in February 2006.

The view that there are multiple entry points for this work is further reinforced by the range of themes and priorities chosen by residents during the visioning exercises and in the project pool selection. Here the focus is on issues. Clearly each community has different needs when it comes to taking action. From a policy perspective it is important to build in sufficient flexibility so that neighbourhoods are not hamstrung in their early mobilization efforts.

An important implication regarding the role of neighbourhood residents is the need to provide training around a wide range of skills: leadership, facilitation, conflict resolution, grant writing, program planning and meeting management. The five sites hope to deepen (e.g., engage more residents) and broaden (e.g., work on policy development) this training in the next year.

### *Are there necessary conditions?*

Six general conditions exist in the experience of the sites:

*Acknowledge, respect and support the long-term nature of the work.* Although the project partners know that a great deal was accomplished this year, all are convinced that it would have helped the project results if had there been a two year funding commitment. Although it is impossible to measure the impact of what was not done, partners sensed that opportunities were lost as a result of the intense time pressures. For example, the first national project meeting in May 2005 was

dominated by operational and logistics discussions that were essential to selecting neighbourhoods in the first quarter of the fourteen month project span. This limited the time available to discuss a strengthening neighbourhoods theory of change. It was also necessary to make an early decision about the learning and assessment framework. In the absence of a theory of change, a less targeted set of data was collected for analysis.

*Attitudes.* All sites found it essential to use an asset-based, inclusive approach. Many residents and city leaders were initially suspicious of being identified as an ANC site, “Why do people think we need help?” was a common reaction. It was important that staff be able to make the case that ANC was an opportunity.

It was critical from the United Way movement perspective that the project “do no harm.” This was a serious discussion topic in the early days of the project as site partners tried to figure out how to reconcile the very short time lines of the project with a concern that neighbourhoods could potentially be left high and dry if project funding were not continued after the first year. As a result, signing onto ANC was a leap of faith.

Each site handled the challenge differently. In Bridgeview, United Way of the Lower Mainland engaged the system of support early; starting in September this group met regularly. They also hired a resident business consultant to build links to the local business community. United Way of Halifax Region went to its board and secured a five-year commitment for strengthening neighbourhoods work. In Regina, United Way had already spent three years working with the community to help define its role as a facilitator of capacity building. The staff and board provided tangible evidence of this role when they moved to a larger facility that made it possible to set up the Centre for Collaboration on behalf of the community.

*Presence of skilled intermediaries.* United Ways provided organizational support and then hired individuals skilled in community capacity building. In some cases, key staff within United Ways needed to provide support by paving the way within their organization when the ANC project put pressure on traditional ways of doing their work. Awareness-raising regarding the changing roles of boards has emerged as a priority in this regard. Ongoing commitment to collaborative relationships is essential for community building.

*Time and resources.* Community capacity building takes not only specialized skills but long-term commitment of time and resources. In addition to changing internally, United Ways also recognize the need to provide training and support for the community-based agencies they fund. Governments also need to re-think their position on core funding or at least adopt multi-year timelines for project funding. In the short-term, community groups in large cities like Toronto have been able to shift how they approach donors in order to raise the necessary resources. This is not an option in smaller cities like Thunder Bay.

*Risk management.* Part of the challenge with complex problems is that the path forward is not known at the outset, but emerges over time. To quote one project manager: “We are always in

beta testing mode’ – constantly assessing measures being pursued and making necessary adjustments. It is difficult to manage expectations in this environment. Scenario planning and other risk management tools can help balance the need for flexibility with accountability.

*Government capacity to work with communities as equal partners.* As mentioned earlier, this capacity requires different roles of individual public servants as well as leadership and support from politicians and central agencies. Individual sites are in a limited position to impact change in this area without a major advocacy campaign.

*Are there linkages among activities, outputs and outcomes?*

There are some preliminary linkages between activity and outputs but it is too soon in the project life cycle for outcomes.

All project partners believe that good quantitative data are needed to support neighbourhood revitalization. Partners at the national and site level also pointed to the need for qualitative data to gain a more accurate, balanced picture. A rich blend of data is a significant part of the ANC legacy. A good example of this principle in action was the selection process in three of the five neighbourhoods. Some level of quantitative data was used to narrow the field of potential neighbourhoods. Site partners also employed a wide variety of methods to determine whether external support would be welcome in the neighbourhood and had the possibility for success. This sensitivity created favourable conditions for mobilizing neighbourhood residents at a later stage in the project. Requirements for good data have implications for a range of policies from public access to national data to the need for leadership in training community practitioners to use this data.

While it may be tempting to go directly into project planning mode, it is not possible to skip the resident mobilization step without suffering serious setbacks later in the project. Holding conversation circles, going to where residents naturally gather, listening to ‘loud’ and ‘soft’ voices, and being prepared to facilitate conflict situations are examples of activities necessary for success. Effective mobilization requires a shift in the balance of power in a neighbourhood and in relation to the larger community. This shift needs to be addressed openly and respectfully.

Finally, the project also demonstrated that an activity is not, in and of itself, a guarantee of results. Neighbourhood climate plays a critical role in whether the activity will be successful. As an example, the option to award project funds to neighbourhood groups created tension in Bridgeview. The short time line for submission was a negative influence in an environment that was already dealing with a shift in power balance between existing and emerging neighbourhood groups. In Spryfield, short time lines for the project pool funds had the exact opposite effect. As several ANC staff are neighbourhood residents, they were able to go to people with good ideas and help them find partners. In this way, emerging community groups had a level playing field with more established groups and, in several cases, broader partnerships were formed. This learning again reinforces the need for flexible funding terms and conditions.

### *Questions that require additional exploration*

Not surprisingly, learning from the project triggered other questions for later stages in the revitalization process. These include:

- What happens when empowered residents encounter politicians and officials who are not ready for them? Is government ready to respond to the community capacity they help to facilitate?
- Is there a way to speed up the mobilization process while working with additional neighbourhoods within a city?
- What is necessary to create sustainable, resident-led governance structures?
- Can the tri-level government agreement model be used to further the neighbourhood strengthening agenda?
- How can we contribute to a more effective evaluation framework that blends qualitative and quantitative methodologies? What is the impact of collaboration ‘downstream’?
- How can knowledge management and transfer be made more effective in this field?
- As the sites move into implementing their action plans, what government policies and programs support and/or hinder their work?

### *Insights into future public policy*

The project has shared information about this topic at the national level.

Three issues have been discussed frequently within ANC policy activities. One issue is beginning to gain momentum on the Canadian policy agenda – the urgent need for governance, operational mechanisms and appropriate resources to effectively support comprehensive community initiatives. Two other issues involve strengthening neighbourhoods: the need for a significant national research capacity that can inform the revitalization policy debate, and, the need to acknowledge that this issue is complex and warrants a comprehensive community initiative approach. The last point has not been on Canada’s policy agenda since the 1970s.

### *Collaborative learning*

The project has shared information about this topic.

Building on the above experiences and knowledge, what else can be said about how we have learned together? It has been essential to create a safe place, where everyone assumes that all partners are acting with positive intent. It has also been important to keep the following principles in mind:

- Know when you can best contribute by leading and following.
- Good results come from planning, acting and reflecting with intent.
- Act with persistence, in slow steady steps, and be ready to take great leaps when opportunities are presented.
- Building solid relationships requires open and honest communication, even if the topic is difficult.
- Keep an open mind – what one person perceives as resistance to change, another sees as good risk management.

### *Connecting the dots*

As mentioned, it was necessary to separately examine project results by sponsor objectives in order to identify specific policy learning. In reality, most of the results and lessons learned are inter-dependent due to the complex nature of this work. Readers wishing for an integrated overview of neighbourhood strengthening will be interested in the theory of change and logic model found in the project's *Orienteering Over New Ground: A Neighbourhood Theory of Change*.

### *Next steps*

Clearly ANC has made significant progress in sharing policy information and in setting common directions for policy that advances neighbourhood renewal. There has been great success at the national sponsor level in consolidating government procedures but it remains to be seen whether this is a one-time success or the beginning of standard government practice. To a much lesser extent, there has been progress on policy problem solving; this activity has occurred at the site level and it too may be situation-specific rather than indicative of a new policy trend across the country.

Project partners and sponsors are hopeful and remain committed to advancing the policy agenda in whatever way they can. In the short-term, project partners will concentrate on securing funds to continue this work. Project sponsors are identifying how their department priorities fit with the agenda of Canada's new minority government.

At the site level, work will continue on resident training; developing and implementing neighbourhood action plans; and pursuing policy objectives through various local policy dialogues. Nationally, each partner and sponsor will use the lessons of ANC to advance the strengthening neighbourhoods agenda in their spheres of influence.

One thing is certain. It is only through continuing to talk and learn together that governments and communities will achieve effective policy dialogue.

## Endnotes

1. “Systems of Support” are found at many levels (local, regional, national). These systems may or may not be integrated and can include not-for-profit organizations, government at all levels, community-based agencies, educational institutions and private sector companies and associations [Gorman 2006: 8]
2. For additional information on complex issues and emerging processes, please see *Orienteering Over New Ground: A Neighbourhood Theory of Change*. (2006). Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, May.
3. For a more detailed explanation of the natural tension among competing needs, please see *Orienteering Over New Ground: A Neighbourhood Theory of Change*. (2006). Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, May.

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## **Appendix A: Participating Organizations in the ANC Policy Dialogue**

Caledon Institute of Social Policy  
Cities and Communities Secretariat, Infrastructure Canada  
Lakehead University  
National Crime Prevention Strategy, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada  
National Film Board  
National Secretariat on Homelessness, HRSDC  
Office of Learning Technologies, HRSDC  
Public Interest Group  
Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy  
Social Development Canada  
Statistics Canada  
Tamarack - An Institute for Community Engagement  
United Way - Centraide Canada  
United Way of Greater Toronto  
United Way of Halifax Region  
United Way of the Lower Mainland  
United Way of Regina  
United Way of Thunder Bay

Other departments copied:  
Canada's Drug Strategy, Health Canada  
National Literacy Secretariat, HRSDC  
Privy Council Office

## **Appendix B: ANC Policy Dialogue Session Topics and Choice Points**

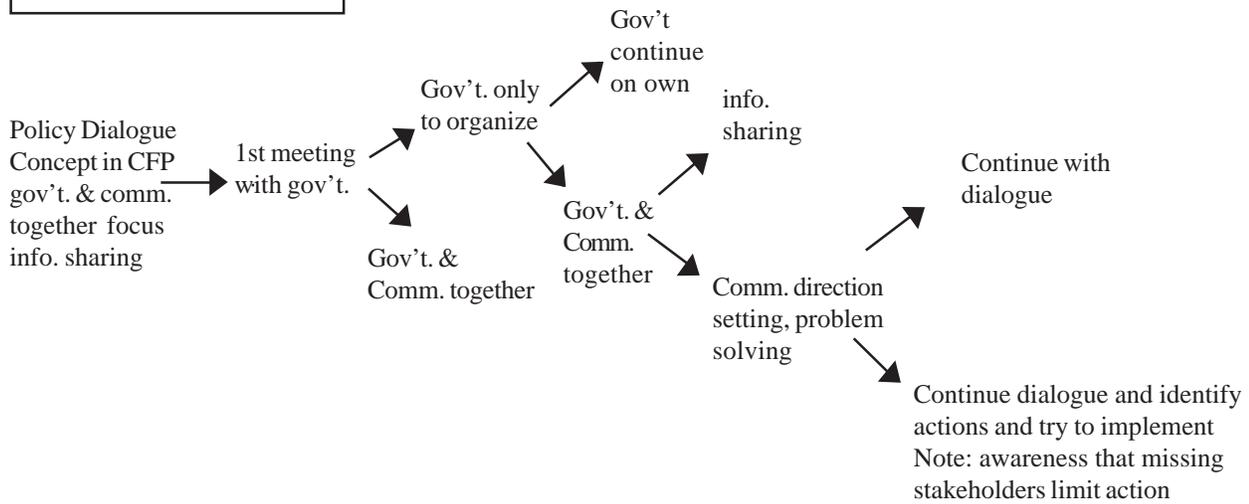
February 2005	Objectives and Structure of Policy Dialogue
March 2005	Individual meetings
April 2005	Policy Dialogue Strategy
May 2005	Evaluation
June 2005	Government-Community Collaboration
July 2005	ANC Process Map
August 2005	Government-Government Collaboration
September 2005	Supporting Local Policy Dialogues
October 2005	Policy Forum (presentations can be found at <a href="http://www.anccommunity.ca">www.anccommunity.ca</a> ) themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Making the case for neighbourhood revitalization – setting the stage;</li><li>• International perspectives on neighbourhood revitalization;</li><li>• Engaging citizens in neighbourhood revitalization;</li><li>• The mechanics of comprehensive community initiatives; and</li><li>• Evaluating comprehensive community initiatives</li></ul>
November 2005	Reviewing the Policy Dialogue Strategy three working groups established: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A commentary on the Auditor General’s 2005 Annual Report (the fourth chapter on horizontal initiatives );</li><li>• A theory of change and logic model for investment in neighbourhood revitalization; and</li><li>• Recommendations for investing in specific supports required to build community and neighbourhood capacity related to neighbourhood revitalization</li></ul>
December 2005	Working groups Auditor General Commentary completed and disseminated
January 2005	Working groups
February 2005	Review of final two working group products

### Note:

There were two key choice points in the policy dialogue. In June 2005, the group was aware that limiting membership also limited potential for action on common directions. A decision was made to expand the group. The October 2005 Policy Forum was a pivotal point in the project. Group learning was compared to international experiences and a decision made to explore two complementary topics in greater depth. The thinking behind these choices was documented as the “forks in the road” diagrams seen on the following pages.

## Forks in the Road – Theory of Change for ANC Policy Work

### Pre Policy Forum



## Forks in the Road – Theory of Change for ANC Policy Work

### Post Policy Forum

**Maintain policy dialogue schedule, exploring remaining topics**

**Note: 4 scheduled sessions left + reflection paper**

- methodology – same as current; could add others such as Federal Working Group on Neighbourhood Change
- outstanding topics – skills/qualities within Comprehensive Community Initiatives (CCI) + lessons from the sites including substantive policy issues

### Policy Dialogue

Need to continue integrating with other ANC work

**Reconfigure policy dialogue to focus on**

**1 or more of the 4 areas identified at Policy Forum**

- governance; capacity building; accountability; funding
- methodology – same as current or break into work groups; may need to host some additional one-off meetings (see Federal Government below)

**Common message regarding needs to take work to the next level**

- work in more depth on a communication and knowledge management strategy to be used immediately and beyond March 2006
- methodology – same as current

**Drafting an action plan for engaging missing stakeholders and setting a common direction for comprehensive community initiatives**

- recognition that we have not had opportunity to link up with regional staff of federal government + the other orders of government + limited direct involvement from neighbourhood residents
- realistically – for an event post-March 2006
- methodology – small working group to develop a draft event plan using Future Search or similar planning tool and bring back to all Policy Dialogue participants

**Concentrate remaining resources on future – developing capacity in areas that can be undertaken independently**

**Community – support capacity for effectively advocating policy change**

- focus on expanding support for local policy dialogues; bringing NHQ staff to regions; developing training kit/workshop; research into specific government support for capacity building; expand community of practice
- methodology – small working group and bring back to full group or work with Tamarack and sites individually

**Federal government – methodology varies by focus area**

- take ANC + other CCI learning to higher level decision-makers, e.g., politicians, DM's – small meetings
- take 1 or more areas from Forum and create working groups to draft recommendations and bring back to larger group, e.g., a logic model for government investment in CCIs or an RMAF template for CCIs
- link ANC learning to related programs/groups – e.g., Task Force on Community Investment – small meetings.

### Combination

- see attached proposal