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The Enabling Environment for Community Work

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by

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Introduction

Communities play a vital and unique role in promoting resilience. The components of the communities agenda were discussed in a related paper entitled *Organizing for Neighbourhood Renewal*. Both papers were developed as part of a forthcoming book *Shared Space*: *The Communities Agenda*.

Communities can achieve only so much on their own. The wide-ranging interventions that comprise the communities agenda in no way minimize the need for a strong core of public goods and services. *Community interventions both supplement and complement– but can never replace– public measures concerned with the well-being of individuals, households and neighbourhoods*.

Governments must act like governments if the communities agenda is to succeed. They must carry out more effectively their traditional roles as *exemplars* and *investors*. But the communities agenda also needs another form of support. Complex community work requires an appropriate context. Governments, other funders and the private sector can act as *enablers* of the communities agenda by supporting its major functions– how it organizes for complexity and the knowing, doing and reviewing that comprise this work.

This paper focuses largely upon the role of governments and the federal government, in particular, in creating an enabling environment for comprehensive community work. But the responsibility for ensuring an enabling environment applies equally well to employers, and to private and community foundations. They all act – or should act – as exemplars, investors and enablers in support of the communities agenda.

Traditional Roles

Exemplar

As *exemplar*, governments set the moral, legal and fiscal context within their respective jurisdictions. Government leadership involves translating into action the conventions and obligations which they have signed. At the federal level, both international commitments and national legislation establish regulatory and policy frameworks, which set the parameters for household and business transactions in economic, social and environmental domains.

Provincial governments play an important role in the communities agenda. Many of the substantive areas with which this agenda is concerned – decent affordable housing, social assistance, early childhood development, literacy, and training and employment – fall primarily within provincial domain.

While provinces may provide funding for recreation, municipalities typically are responsible for the design and implementation of recreational programs and amenities. In Ontario, in particular, local governments have broad social responsibility, including social assistance and child care, social housing and supports at home. This wider responsibility resulted from the exchange of authority known as 'disentanglement' – though some billed it more as an exercise in disengagement [Torjman 1997].

The role of local government with respect to economic and social well-being is especially significant in light of comprehensive community initiatives which are developing a new forum for addressing local issues. These emerging governance structures are filling a significant void in decision-making processes that have not been designed to respond effectively to complexity.

As community governance structures become increasingly common, there is a growing need to clarify the roles of local government relative to local governance bodies. Most community governance structures have tried to link with municipal governments in some way – and for good reason. These governments are profoundly important to the success of comprehensive initiatives.

Municipal governments can create awareness about social needs and the role of social investment. They can foster social capital by acting as a bridge among neighbourhoods, community organizations and social institutions, and by convening in local dialogue citizens and representatives from diverse sectors. Local councils can create opportunities for developing a shared vision for the community [Torjman and Leviten-Reid 2003].

Governments also act as exemplars by practising desirable behaviour. They can start in their own backyard through model employment practices. Governments establish bottom-line pay standards for employers in the country though minimum wage legislation. The federal government sets the minimum wage for workers in federal departments and agencies while provinces and territories set their respective rates. These range in 2007 from a low of $6.70 an hour in New Brunswick to a 'high' of $8.50 an hour in Nunavut.

A recent study identified the minimum housing wage that would be required for accommodation in major urban centres. For an average bachelor apartment in Toronto or Vancouver, for example, workers would have to earn more than $13 an hour compared to the current minimum hourly wage of $7.45 and $8.00 in those cities, respectively. In these same centres, an hourly wage of more than $20 would be required for a single-earner family while wages in eight other cities would have to exceed $17 an hour – more than double the minimum wage in all provinces [Pomeroy 2006].

The low rate relative to poverty standards has given rise throughout North America to a living wage movement [Employment Policy Foundation 2003]. 'Living wage' refers to the fact that statutory minimum wages are not high enough to allow workers with children to adequately support their families. Comprehensive community initiatives in Edmonton, Calgary, Niagara and Waterloo have embarked upon living wage campaigns to convince public and private employers to improve their wages and associated employment practices.

Beyond living wages, employers can help meet sustenance needs by providing associated benefits, such as pensions and extended health care coverage. Pro-rated benefits ideally are made available to employees working less than full time. The provision of health- and disability-related benefits is crucial, especially for those trying to make the transition from welfare to work.

Welfare typically covers these additional costs while paid work usually does not. The special assistance budget within welfare provides for these needs in the form of wheelchairs, hearing aids, prosthetic equipment, medications and personal services required for independent living or work. Because special assistance is intended only for welfare recipients, this policy virtually ties many individuals to that income program because they have no other source of support for the required aids and equipment. Many low-wage employees find that they are worse off working if they must cover health- and disability-related costs from their meagre pay cheques [Battle and Torjman 1993].

Ideally, supplementary health benefits should extend to a broader segment of Canadians and not just to those on social assistance. The goal should be to make available these benefits to all low-income households not currently covered by employer-supplied or individually purchased private insurance, notably most of the working poor [Battle, Mendelson and Torjman 2006].

Exemplary employers seek diversity in their workforce. In fact, diversity has been identified in the literature on resilience as a critical factor in the success of complex adaptive systems. Local government in York Region, for example, developed in association with community partners an Inclusivity Plan to ensure the accessibility of all its programs and services. It sought to act as role model to business and community organizations. The plan focused upon several areas including a welcome and resource centre, English language development programs, learning opportunities for children, leadership and volunteer prospects for immigrants, and an awareness campaign [Human Services 2005].

Progressive employers also make an effort to accommodate the special needs of actual or prospective workers who typically are marginalized from the labour market, such as persons with disabilities, new Canadians and racialized youth. With respect to young people, in particular, employers can offer mentoring, establish internships and accept students for co-op placements. The demands of the knowledge economy have created pressures for employers to encourage continual staff training and upgrading.

Finally, employers can be exemplars when it comes to responsible procurement. They can make a conscious decision to 'buy green' from producers and suppliers with a strong environmental record. They can also purchase from private companies that pay decent wages or from social economy enterprises, thereby supporting work in the sustenance and opportunity clusters, respectively.

Investor

Governments do more than set frameworks and lead by example. They also make *strategic investments* in both citizens and communities. Governments can make individual and community investments in all four resilience clusters related to sustenance, adaptation, engagement and opportunity. These resilience clusters are described more fully in *Organizing for Neighbourhood Renewal*.

Governments play an especially important role in sustenance by ensuring income security and access to decent affordable housing. The latter involves direct support for building new affordable units and indirect assistance in the form of rent supplements, reduced taxes for land and supplies used for social housing, and bylaws that allow secondary suites. In adaptation, governments can provide funding for early childhood development, literacy programs and settlement services for newcomers. In respect of engagement, governments can fund recreational programs and accommodation efforts. They can protect public space, and create opportunities for engaging citizens in decision-making. Funds for training, job creation and financial asset-building are all significant investments around opportunity.

Governments and funders more generally can also improve the way in which they support voluntary organizations. There has been some important work recently undertaken in this area. In 2005, the federal government launched the Task Force on Community Investments to examine current policies and practices. It was asked to make recommendations that would result in more consistent and coherent funding across the Government of Canada and more seamless horizontal approaches to community investment. The Task Force made numerous recommendations, including the development of umbrella terms and conditions for the funding of programs with similar objectives. Terms and conditions should be developed that facilitate experimentation; joint collaboration across programs, departments and jurisdictions; and flexibility for community-based responses and innovation [Task Force 2006].

The private sector also has an important investment role through the contribution of financial and in-kind resources. In British Columbia, for example, Coast Capital Savings has supported persons with disabilities in their efforts to establish microenterprise. The credit union entered into an arrangement with Western Economic Diversification Canada to deliver the Advice and Business Loans for Entrepreneurs with Disabilities program. It administered loans of up to $75,000 to entrepreneurs with disabilities. The government contributions helped pay for managers' salaries, marketing activities, costs associated with operating an advisory committee and loan loss reserve. Coast Capital Savings provided business advice and mentorship [Makhoul 2002].

Finally, by virtue of their legislative authority, governments play a significant regulatory role in respect of the communities agenda. They can both enable and discourage certain forms of investment, behaviour and purchase. As part of the (former) federal Social Economy Initiative, the Department of Industry was exploring how its policies intended for small business, such as various loan programs, could apply to social enterprises.

But the communities agenda has created a new role for governments and other funders. Beyond the traditional functions of exemplar and investor, there is a novel set of activities involved in creating the context for and sustaining the activities within this agenda. The emerging role requires funders to act as *enablers* of complex community processes.

Emerging Role

Enabler

Shared Space: *The Communities Agenda* describes how work in the shared space involves knowing, doing and reviewing. Governments and other funders play a vital enabling role in respect of these key functions.

a. Knowing

Governments have substantial expertise in the area of evidence and the broader foundational knowledge base. They continually collect, store and analyze information, which is crucial not only for understanding the current context. This activity is also helpful for tracking trends and determining whether progress has been made over time – all part of the vital accountability agenda.

In response to the need for local data, for example, the statistical agency of Newfoundland and Labrador developed, in association with Memorial University and the provincial Strategic Social Plan, a set of Community Accounts. These accounts are compiled from a variety of statistical databases and sources of information that are then translated into a uniform template for every community across the province.

The profiles are posted to a Community Accounts website to which all government departments, community organizations and individuals have access. While the information enables each locality to understand its unique profile, the province-wide consistency allows communities to assess their progress relative to other regions. Nova Scotia is involved in a similar effort known as Community Counts.

In addition to data, governments and other funders can support research and the strategic collection of information related to the core resilience clusters. The research might focus on substantive questions pertaining to decent affordable housing, income security, skills training and community economic development. It can identify barriers that may be embedded in housing or welfare policies that make it difficult to build affordable housing or help the unemployed move from social assistance into the labour market. Research can also examine new approaches to community work that involve linkages between and among the core resilience clusters.

Governments can enable the process of knowledge development by linking community practitioners with policy institutes and university researchers. This type of work would connect comprehensive local efforts to a steady stream of knowledge and ideas for innovation. Grant criteria could require the active engagement of community advisors to define the focus of the research and its methodology. In fact, there has been important progress in this area. The Community-University Research Alliances program, introduced in 2002 by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, was designed to facilitate such collaboration.

Other aspects of knowledge development in support of comprehensive community initiatives involve the identification of exemplary practice both within and outside Canada. Governments and other funders can create opportunities for documenting and sharing innovative local practice.

b. Doing

By definition, all communities engaged in comprehensive efforts are involved in tackling complex issues. They begin their work by organizing for complexity. The main task in this process involves the creation of a diverse and multisectoral structure that assumes responsibility for the governance of the comprehensive community initiative.

Governance bodies play a foundational role in the communities agenda. They provide a focal point for local expression and act as its champion. They set out a guiding vision for the community effort and associated strategic plan. They select the resilience clusters and areas of shared space upon which to focus. They identify and bring together key players from diverse sectors to make these decisions.

Local governance processes also harness resources, including financing and technical expertise. They link the comprehensive initiative with relevant organizations, projects and resources in the wider community. They provide opportunities for learning and monitor results on an ongoing basis.

Community governance bodies do not simply emerge on their own. These processes and their respective conveners require assistance to sustain their efforts over time. They need opportunities to develop skills and expertise, especially in light of the myriad relationship challenges embedded in these complex local efforts.

Another area worthy of support involves assistance in developing theories of change. This is a time-consuming, resource-intensive task that entails several iterations, good facilitation and access to information. Stakeholders need to be guided through the process of thinking strategically about change, drawing connections among identified problems and proposed interventions, identifying the possible effects of their actions and understanding potential interactions among the components of their initiatives [Auspos and Kubisch 2004: 15].

But funds are not generally available for these purposes. Public dollars typically flow to projects rather than to community processes, such as local governance mechanisms, which support problem-solving capacity. A collaborative structure to grapple with complex problems usually does not achieve swift measurable results. It is concerned with identifying and convening key players. It generally does not meet funder criteria – which tend to be short-term often over the course of a fiscal year. These requirements are also results-based with expectations for near-immediate, clearly identified and quantifiable outcomes.

Many funders are not interested in supporting more complex, less certain forms of community process. Most prefer to invest in the start-up phase of promising ventures. Most look for a prescriptive methodology that proceeds without diversion from point A to point B. They want to know precisely the results that the process intends to achieve and over what period. Unfortunately, the expectations of most funders run counter to the time and flexible support that communities require in order to build resilience.

Neither is it easy for funders to work with 'emergence' or processes that unfold over time [Westley, Zimmerman and Quinn Patten 2006]. They prefer a pathway in which anticipated actions are clearly spelled out and in which deviations from the stated plan are minimized. The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation provides insightful advice to funders in this regard – especially in respect of lessons from the growing body of literature on complexity theory.

> One is not working entirely in the dark, however. Complexity theory provides some insights into what to expect and how to work on change in complex organizations. 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 is normal. …. Funders can, however, request a well-articulated vision, a case for support, and a good sense of strategy, while being ready for significant variability as the social change initiatives are spread and 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 assessing its potential [Pearson 2006: 12].

Substantial time and energy are spent trying to secure funding to achieve sustained benefits for communities. Promising initiatives are often unable to realize their potential because they never move beyond the pilot phase. Lack of stable funding makes it difficult to maintain staff on a sustained basis. High rates of staff turnover undermine efforts to learn, acquire knowledge and pursue innovative action.

But local processes do not simply require dollars – they need a certain kind of money. Significant changes, by their very nature, take place over an extended period of time. They evolve continually – a good thing from the perspective of community process but difficult from the vantage of funders who generally prefer predictable and early returns on their investment. Patient capital is essential for long-term changes in cooperative relationships and the policy work that comprise the communities agenda.

Governments and other funders can do more than simply provide financial support for a local convening process and other collaborative work. They can participate as active partners. They can share information on research and projects under way in other regions of the country or throughout the world that can guide the local effort. They can be part of the doing. In fact, they can start in their own backyards.

If funders want to achieve positive impact, they must demonstrate their commitment to coordinated strategies and systemic solutions by incorporating joined-up methods into their respective activities [Connor and Kadel-Taas 2003: 42]. They can structure their own giving by funding communities and systems. Funders can support collaborative initiatives within neighbourhoods rather than the individual components of a comprehensive effort. They can pool resources in support of an enabling infrastructure – such as the one around community access to information. Funders alone and together can support technical assistance, policy knowledge and learning-based evaluation.

There is still more to changing funder behaviour than financing practices. Just like comprehensive initiatives in community work, collaborative relationships in government, in particular, create value by bringing new resources, insights and expertise to the table. These relationships can increase efficiency and effectiveness through shared investment and reduced conflict. Government departments and agencies need to collaborate – horizontally across mandates rather than vertically within their sole jurisdiction – in order to work on complex files, such as homelessness, urban Aboriginal issues and climate change.

Horizontality involves managers from different departments working together to tackle a common concern beyond the areas for which they are primarily responsible. The need for horizontal approaches arises from the fact that many objectives which governments seek to achieve are multifaceted and relate to the mandates of two or more departments, jurisdictions or voluntary organizations. Treasury Board points out in *The Development of Results-based Management and Accountability Frameworks for Horizontal Initiatives* that the ability to build alliances, form partnerships and manage horizontal initiatives is considered an essential ingredient for delivering high-quality, cost-effective public services [Treasury Board 2002]. Too bad that it is so hard to do.

Collaborative work is being driven partly by the pressure to enhance performance and achieve measurable improvements in service delivery. The 2005 Budget was just one node in a string of federal documents that highlighted the need to strengthen and modernize public sector management. Horizontality is seen as a way to ensure that the federal government acts as a vibrant, cohesive and coherent national institution.

Even the Auditor General has pointed to the need for the federal government to step up its efforts around horizontal management.[1] The lack of appropriate coordination causes inertia and is detrimental to the effective functioning of individual departments within government. Central agencies were instructed to provide stronger and more explicit guidance for improving horizontal practice. This guidance ideally would apply to common application procedures, funding instruments, data collection, reporting practices and evaluation frameworks.

The report of the Task Force on Community Investments, earlier described, proposed various ways to improve horizontality within government. It cites Action for Neighbourhood Change as an example of horizontal management within government. For this project, the government partners pooled their efforts in support of a common goal: strengthening neighbourhoods. They crafted two contribution agreements from five separate funding streams. The project employed a coordinated reporting procedure in respect of its financing. A single monthly report was prepared for all five funders. Through a special policy dialogue created for this project, the government partners joined together several of their procedures.

There are still other opportunities for consolidation that would advance the communities agenda. If governments genuinely want to support collaborative community efforts, they could work to combine their extensive submission procedures that currently involve different, and sometimes conflicting, information and multiple letters of support. Ideally, the application process for the same or similar initiatives should be coordinated to promote program coherence, and to reduce the administrative burden on both communities and funders.

In fact, the Task Force on Community Investments proposed the development over time of a single portal for all federal grants and contributions. This common entry point would improve access to information around diverse funding programs and move toward the standardization of certain application procedures. Numerous grant categories gradually could be integrated into a combined contribution agreement [Task Force 2006].

Governments at all levels have begun to explore ways to more effectively support multifaceted community initiatives. Experiments in horizontal management, such as the Sustainable Communities Initiative that had been based in Nova Scotia, sought to change the culture and operating practices of government to enable various departments and orders of government to pool their interventions and resources in aid of local development strategies. The Sustainable Communities Initiative brought together federal, provincial, municipal and First Nations governments to help selected communities in Nova Scotia work together on the environmental, economic, social and cultural dimensions of sustainability.

Other governments have taken similar steps. The Manitoba Community and Economic Development Initiative employs an integrated social and economic lens for shaping government policies and programs. An interdepartmental committee of Cabinet oversees the effort and provides a forum for decision-makers to align the efforts of their respective departments.

Evaluation of community efforts represents another potential area for consolidation. Because all government departments and funders require an assessment of the projects they support, communities must collect information from diverse sources. Considerable yet scarce resources end up being invested in project accountability. While essential, this activity diverts local efforts from their primary focus. Fortunately, the work of the five neighbourhoods involved in Action for Neighbourhood Change was assessed through a common evaluation framework.

A positive recent example was the preparation of a joint evaluation framework for the (former) Social Economy Initiative in which several departments collaborated in respect of a common goal: to support and grow the practice of community economic development. Federal partners included Human Resources and Social Development Canada, Industry Canada, Western Economic Diversification, the Federal Economic Development Initiative in Northern Ontario, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Canada Economic Development (Québec), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

The joint evaluation framework written for this purpose created a logic model for conceptualizing the work of the social economy, including its broad societal objectives, underlying guiding principles, and major investments and supports required to sustain local activity. The framework set out the range of possible results at the household, organizational, community and sector levels [Leviten-Reid and Torjman 2006].

If the benefits of joined-up work are so obvious, then why it is not the accepted practice? Why is it more the exception than the rule? While there is no definitive answer, it appears that there are basic human factors at play that have little to do with logic and more to do with the psychology of risk and reward.

The Task Force on Community Investments devoted considerable attention to the issue of risk. It explored how to balance concerns about risk with the government interest in achieving clear outcomes and results. Its report explored the question of accountability and the need to clarify information expectations while reducing the reporting burden on community organizations [Task Force 2006].

In fact, the structures of government tend to be driven by public accounts – and accountability. Ministers are assigned responsibility for a certain level of expenditure for which they must answer to Parliament. The so-called clear lines of reporting become muddied when a joint initiative involves the pooling of funds from different sources. The question of accountability also arises in horizontal initiatives because of the many cooks contributing to the collective broth.

While more complex, the accountability challenge need not be insurmountable. The most reasonable solution is to designate a given Minister as lead in a common effort with primary responsibility for reporting on funding. The other departments clearly must monitor their expenditures but recognize that the outcomes may be somewhat more broad or different from those they typically see.

The very reason for working in this way is to create a whole that is greater than its constituent parts. Someone with the designated authority needs to state that joined-up efforts are the expected method of operation when collaborative work is likely to lead to better results. Government workers must get the green light from their superiors, who need to hear from higher ranks that this joined-up approach is, indeed, the expectation.

Even Deputy Ministers who are in charge of their respective departmental ships need direction from their bosses. They must get the signal from Privy Council Office to work in this way. They must hear the message from Treasury Board, the Auditor General and the political level [Torjman 2006].

If politicians do not understand the need for joined-up efforts, then it is unlikely they will communicate this message to public servants. Moreover, if government caucus members are vying for the attention of the Prime Minister in hopes of a Cabinet position, the last thing they may want is to 'share glory' with their colleagues. They will seek to shine the spotlight on themselves – in which case they will not likely want to pursue collaborative work.

Politicians and government officials need to learn the same lessons as communities when it comes to leading collaborative efforts. Joint work involves a sharing of responsibility, risk and reward. If any progress is to be made in government around horizontal efforts, there needs to be clear direction on this expectation from the highest possible source. That is the lesson from the UK experience in joined-up solutions to joined-up problems, which is probably the most sophisticated example in the world of government involvement in joint ventures [Bogdanor 2005].

Joined-up government is an explicit political strategy that seeks to coordinate the development and implementation of policies across departments in order to address complex problems, such as social exclusion and poverty, in a comprehensive way. But it moves beyond government to include a range of private sector and voluntary organizations. The approach is based on the principle that joined-up solutions are created by involving as many interested parties as possible in relevant policy design and implementation.

One of the first joined-up initiatives was introduced in 1997 when Prime Minister Tony Blair established a Social Exclusion Unit to improve local action to enhance social cohesion. The Unit was housed within the (then) Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and worked on projects agreed to by the (former) Deputy Prime Minister in consultation with the Prime Minister. The Unit's central place in government helped cut through red tape and encouraged cooperation among staff from different departments and between public and private concerns. In May 2006, the Social Exclusion Unit moved to the newly-created Department for Communities and Local Government.

Similarly, the (former) Neighbourhood Renewal Unit was designated as responsible for overseeing the UK government's comprehensive neighbourhood renewal strategy. Created in 2001, the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit had also been housed in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and now resides in the new Department for Communities and Local Government. Its purpose was to harness the hundreds of billions of pounds being spent by diverse departments. The Unit worked with Neighbourhood Renewal Teams throughout the country to monitor and support local strategic partnerships in the 88 most deprived districts [Cabinet Office 2001].

The national production of neighbourhood statistics helped track progress in communities and identify areas considered vulnerable or at risk of decline. The Unit created a knowledge management

system to share evidence of effective practice and to ensure that community workers have appropriate training and skills. It also monitored the progress of the National Strategy on Neighbourhood Renewal, which set clear targets around five identified problems: poor job prospects, high levels of crime, educational underachievement, poor health, and problems with housing and the physical environment. The targets and associated actions were determined and carried out by individual departments but monitored and coordinated by the overarching Neighbourhood Renewal Unit.

In the area of employment, for example, the Department for Education and Employment and the Department of Social Security set three-year targets to raise employment rates in the 30 districts with the poorest employment records. The intent was to narrow the gap between these areas and overall rates for the country, and similarly to close the gap for disadvantaged groups. Several key policies were identified to achieve these targets, including £40 million for 32 Action Teams for Jobs and a large investment in child care and transportation. The plan also sought to 'make work pay' through changes to the income security and tax systems. A new small Business Service was created and £96 million Phoenix Fund was set up to encourage small enterprise in deprived areas. Additional funding was allocated for regional development agencies.

As noted, this joined-up approach is one of the most elaborate examples of collaboration to be found anywhere in government. But the degree of central government involvement naturally raises questions about the extent to which the neighbourhood renewal process was community driven. On the positive side, it is an example of extensive government collaboration – coupled with significant support for comprehensive community work.

Here at home, an interesting model example of joined-up work is the Integrated Service Strategy developed by the Community Services Department of the City of Edmonton. It is based on a clear vision of Edmonton as a collection of urban villages, each with its own unique assets and strengths. The Strategy is organized around six major themes: citizens first, community building, focused efforts, urban wellness, ribbons of green and blue (its environmental focus), and community places. Perhaps most important is the identification of roles that the local government can play in effecting this strategic vision. These involve sharing knowledge, brokering services, shared funding, coaching capacity and stewardship.

Sharing knowledge means that ensuring information is accurate, readily available and publicly accessible. *Brokering services* involves putting together the right people at the right time in order to mobilize and enhance community efforts. To effect *shared funding*, the City creates partnerships to maximize its financial resources and is exploring new grant relationships with communities to enable access to arts, culture, recreation and sport. As part of *coaching capacity*, the City shares its experience and expertise to foster community leadership. Its *stewardship* role involves the preservation and protection of urban parks, open spaces, natural areas and built assets.

Finally, it is important to recognize that joining up is vital not just from the perspective of effective service delivery. It also reduces the likelihood of unanticipated negative consequences in

which one order of government withdraws or shrinks benefits in the face of improvements made by another.

c. Reviewing

While all orders of government recognize the value of learning, they usually express this interest by investing in traditional educational institutions. These investments are necessary but not sufficient. Governments – and other funders for that matter – should support learning within and between communities.

Moreover, comprehensive community initiatives are demanding and complex. Participants are continually challenged to innovate in response to a changing environment. Learning sessions help ensure that they do not lose perspective and feel abandoned [Westley, Zimmerman and Quinn Patten 2006: 181]. A strong community of practice allows members to support each other in struggling with tough problems, sharing new methods and applying effective practice.

But learning does not simply emerge spontaneously in communities. The process must be carefully developed and strategically pursued. Comprehensive local efforts require support in respect of these goals. Action for Neighbourhood Change has demonstrated the value of a national system of supports, including a methodology for tracking progress and for assessing local work.

It is also important to facilitate exchange between groups or even in pairs in which two communities join together for the purpose of peer learning. This type of shared learning on community practice is beginning to take place increasingly even within government. A community of practice called the Federal Family – Collaborative Community Initiatives recently has been organized in which officials from 25 departments and agencies meet regularly to expand their knowledge and skills on various aspects of the communities agenda.

In fact, the Task Force on Community Investments made special reference to this area. It recommended that funding programs be enhanced by encouraging learning about effective programs and practices. It noted that a number of federal departments are moving in this direction, creating feedback loops from program evaluation to policy and from policy to program implementation, enabling knowledge development to inform practice [Task Force 2006]. This new knowledge effectively comprises the foundation for future work – whether undertaken by funders or by communities.

Conclusion

Communities promote resilience through one of four major clusters of intervention. While they can accomplish a great deal, their work must be facilitated and bolstered by governments and other funders. They can support community efforts by acting in an exemplary capacity and making the appropriate investments in well-being. They enable the processes of gathering information, assisting collaborative work and reviewing progress on an ongoing basis. Governments and other funders can also join up their own efforts, where appropriate, in order to ease access to programs and reduce the administrative burden on communities.

Endnote

1. See the 2005 and the 2006 Report of the Auditor General of Canada to Parliament. Ottawa: Government of Canada.

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