



**CALEDON**  
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL POLICY

# **Community-Led Development**

*by*

**Sherri Torjman and Anne Makhoul**

**January 2012**

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## *Executive Summary*

Community-led development is a unique approach to tackling local problems and building on local strengths. It is guided by several core principles.

- *The voice and views of citizens lie at the heart of community-led development.*
- *Community-led development seeks to empower community members to ensure they have the competencies to identify and formulate key questions.*
- *Community-led initiatives are guided by local leaders who typically co-create a governance process to help plan and advance the ongoing work.*
- *Community-led development involves the identification of key questions to be addressed. This focus is then framed as a set of aspirational goals or vision that the community seeks to achieve.*
- *Despite their differences, community-led development approaches are bound together by a set of guiding principles.*
- *Community-led development assumes that all communities and their members have strengths, skills and resources on which to build.*
- *Communities can harness and apply their identified assets through conversations that help create frameworks for change.*
- *Community-led development is an evolving process that involves the translation of aspirational goals into specific steps to be taken in respect of that vision.*
- *Community-led development is not a straight pathway. It is a process of continual learning and checking of progress against objectives.*
- *While community-led initiatives are guided by local residents, they require support from government. Governments can play three major roles in support of this work – as exemplar, investor and enabler.*

Each of these principles is discussed in Section 1 of this paper. They derive from more than a decade of research and practice linked to the pan-Canadian Vibrant Communities project. This effort, in turn, drew from US practice on comprehensive community initiatives and helped shape the Inspiring Communities movement in New Zealand. The principles were applied and tested in another pan-Canadian example, Action for Neighbourhood Change, which was supported by five branches of three federal government departments.

## *Community-Led Development*

The purpose of this paper is to explore the concept and practice of community-led development. It is an approach to tackling local problems that is taking hold throughout the world. While its expression may vary depending upon the community and the specific area of focus, there are nonetheless some common principles that hold it in place.

‘Community’ is a broad term that can refer to both physical places and groups of people with common interests or concerns. For the purposes of this discussion, the notion of community is used only in its geographic sense. Community-led development in this paper focuses on initiatives undertaken in physical places – be they neighbourhoods, cities or towns, rural or remote regions of the country, or First Nations reserves.

Section 1 of this paper identifies and briefly explores ten core principles that comprise the basis for community-led development.

Section 2 summarizes the experience of selected examples of community-led development in Canada and elsewhere in the world. It is of interest that the Inspiring Communities work from New Zealand drew upon – and was coached by – the Vibrant Communities initiative under way in Canada.

Section 3 highlights the lessons from Aboriginal community-led development. These lessons derive from personal interviews with Aboriginal leaders.

Section 4 presents the conclusions of this report and Caledon recommendations to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada regarding the support of community-led development.

There is no question that community-led development comes with a unique set of challenges. But there is also no question that it has emerged as the most effective approach to tackling complex local problems and to building community strengths over the long term. The evidence speaks powerfully for itself.

## ***Section 1: Guiding Principles***

### ***Principle 1***

*The voice and views of citizens lie at the heart of community-led development.*

#### ***The Details***

Community-led development is being recognized in a wide range of fields as the primary methodology for effecting fundamental shifts in communities and institutions.

Community-led development is a movement that is gaining traction around the world as people in under-resourced, neglected or impoverished areas seek to rebuild their communities and re-establish a sense of pride in the place where they live [[www.care2.com](http://www.care2.com)].

At its core, community-led development places citizens at the heart of a process that seeks fundamental changes in the way in which a community, organization or system functions. The concerns and preferences of the individuals who comprise that community or utilize a given set of services ideally should drive the way in which the goals are formulated and the change process is undertaken. Citizens articulate the vision along with the steps to be taken to achieve it.

There are several core bodies of knowledge that have helped shape the practice of community-led development: the Capability Approach, the shift toward local governance and the emergence of comprehensive community initiatives. Each of these influences is described briefly.

#### ***a. The Capability Approach***

The central thesis of the Nobel prize-winning book *Development as Freedom* is that healthy human development is a function not only of what individuals *have* in the form of concrete assets but also of what they can *do* in terms of abilities [Sen 1999]. Human development must be concerned with both poverty and capability – the capacity to cope, adapt, grow and thrive through mobilizing often unrecognized skills and opportunities.

The concept of innate assets or strengths figures prominently in community-led development (see Principle 4). The notion of innate strengths applies equally well to communities. Every locality – no matter how poor or impoverished – is rich in skills and human capacities that provide a strong foundation upon which to build. Every community can start from a position of strength despite the fact that it typically is viewed from the perspective of its weaknesses.

The principles of community-led development apply to communities of all shapes and sizes, and to both urban and rural areas.



Rural development policy and practice in the ‘advanced’ Western nations is based increasingly on community-led strategies that seek to manage risk and facilitate change at the local level with minimal direct state intervention. It is widely assumed that such development strategies enable local people to have a greater say in transforming the fortunes of their communities, and are therefore a means of empowerment [Herbert-Cheshire and Higgins 2004].

The concept of empowerment lies at the heart of community-led development and is discussed in Principle 2.

### ***b. Focus on governance***

A second conceptual underpinning has been the shift throughout the world from leadership by government alone to government in partnership with civil society actors. The shift *from government to governance* reflects a move away from governing by detailed rules and regulations set out in acts of parliament to decision-making by frame-setting legislation [Torjman 2002]. The development of more thorough regulation and policies is left to local institutions and actors.

Citizen engagement is implicit in the concept of local governance. Citizen engagement is a new way of thinking about how government works with stakeholders and citizens to achieve a wide range of goals that it cannot achieve alone, such as improved population health, adjustment to climate change or the development of a skilled labour force. An active public engagement process, described in Section 2, was employed successfully in the New Brunswick poverty reduction strategy.

In fact, significant reform of the health and social service systems is actually moving well beyond seeking citizens’ views. They are being actively engaged in the co-design of these services. The redesign of health care services in selected jurisdictions and communities throughout the world involves the active engagement of patients in service improvement.

There is also growing attention being paid in community work to the design sciences and experience-based design, in which the traditional view of users as passive recipients of products or services has shifted to the new view of users as co-designers of the improvement and innovation processes [Bate and Robert 2006].

Social innovation initiatives at MindLab in Denmark and the Australian Centre for Social Innovation are leading the way in this co-design process. Through MindLab, several ministries in the Danish Government are working together to engage citizens in developing new approaches to selected public services. The consumers of home care services, for example, have identified approaches that more effectively meet their needs and have proposed changes in the ways in which the government administers and delivers this assistance.

### *c. Emergence of comprehensive community initiatives*

Community-led development is also being shaped by changing practice on the ground. All communities seek, either explicitly or implicitly, to attain a high quality of life for their citizens. But few communities actually can claim that they are close to achieving this goal.

There is growing recognition, both within and outside government, that the economic, social and environmental challenges confronting communities and nations have become increasingly complex. This complexity is rooted in factors such as the globalization of economies, the impact of rapidly changing technologies, the polarization of wages and working time, rising poverty and inequality, social exclusion and population aging – to name a few.

There is also greater awareness that the traditional methods of dealing with challenges – single government programs to tackle identified problems – have not had particularly positive results. These methods are ineffective because they do not take into account or focus upon the myriad factors that typically contribute to a given problem.

While significant activity is under way in many communities to meet social and economic needs, the interventions currently in place work like independent parts of a machine with no links to one another. They tend to be discrete entities with their own missions, values, mandate, objectives and funds.

Moreover, the solutions of the past are inappropriate because they assume that governments alone can solve problems without appreciating or harnessing the substantive contributions of citizens and other sectors, including business and voluntary organizations.

The complexity of the issues and the limitations of traditional interventions have given rise to a more integrated approach to addressing community problems, known as ‘comprehensive community initiatives’ [Kubisch et al. 2002]. These efforts draw upon the accumulating evidence that services meant to tackle complex economic and social challenges often prove unsuccessful – at least in part because they are so fragmented.

The goals of comprehensive community initiatives go beyond the remediation of particular problems, such as teen pregnancy, low income or substance abuse. These local efforts attempt, instead, to foster a fundamental transformation of communities facing significant challenges. These initiatives seek to catalyze a process of sustained improvement in the circumstances and prospects of selected communities. They often try to create new social networks and local economic opportunities.

Comprehensive initiatives are broad in scope and tackle a range of issues rather than a single concern. They typically identify an overarching theme or population as their broad focus. They then determine, in collaboration with key players in the community, the wide set of interconnected required actions that fall within that domain.

These efforts are also concerned with fostering a community's capacity to solve its own problems – such as high rates of child abuse, crime or unemployment. They seek to build this problem-solving capacity by creating or sustaining networks, which serve as an important base for making local decisions. Often the focus of these discussions goes beyond the resolution of problems and considers various means of improving local areas through expanding economic opportunity or 'greening' the environment.

In addition, comprehensive community initiatives try to identify the links among various issues. They then engage diverse sectors in tackling the complexities involved in the social, economic and environmental challenges the community seeks to address.

This form of community-led development represents a new perspective on the changing role of government and the place of communities in promoting local capacity. Comprehensive community initiatives place local actors and citizens at the centre of the page.

### ***Principle 2***

*Community-led development seeks to empower community members to ensure they have the competencies to identify and formulate key questions.*

### ***The Details***

Community-led development does not just happen on its own. There is a process of building the capability of community members to assume leadership roles. Bill Ninacs, well known for his community development work in Québec, has developed a model to describe this empowerment process [Ninacs 2008].

In this model, empowerment is based on the notion that individuals and communities have the right to contribute to the decisions that affect them. It assumes that the individuals and communities already possess – or at least have the potential to acquire – the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in such decisions.

Ninacs argues that empowerment effectively involves the assumption of power, which consists of the capacity to do three things. First, power means an ability to voluntarily choose a course of action. Second, it involves the capacity to see the choice through from conceptualization to implementation. Third, power involves the means to act accordingly, including taking responsibility for the consequences.

The individual empowerment process is composed of key four elements: participation, technical ability, self-esteem and critical consciousness. Empowerment stems from the interweaving of these four elements, with each component simultaneously building on and strengthening the others.

Ninacs notes that the concept of critical consciousness is particularly helpful for populations, such as Aboriginal people and persons with disabilities, who have long encountered policy and societal barriers. Critical consciousness emerges as community members embark on a process of:

- becoming aware of one's own problem (individual consciousness)
- realizing that others have a similar concern (collective consciousness)
- becoming aware of the way in which society has an effect on the problem (social consciousness)
- recognizing that the resolution of structural problems requires collective action and thus accepting some personal responsibility for change (political consciousness).

Critical consciousness enables individuals to understand how forces beyond their control affect their capacity to act. It is a state of mind that helps reduce the guilt and stigma of being associated with a marginalized group.

There is a similar process through which communities become empowered. This process also has four interwoven components related to participation, knowledge and ability, communication and community capital [Ninacs and Leroux 2008].

Ninacs describes the challenges associated with harmonizing the ideals of individual and community empowerment with the structures and operations of existing institutions and systems. Current structures tend to intervene on behalf of 'clients' rather than act in conjunction or collaboration with citizens. Existing systems seek concrete results and outcomes. Their activities focus on planning, coordination, execution and evaluation. Management style tends to be hierarchical and formal.

Empowerment processes, by contrast, place important emphasis on process. They involve mutual help and cooperation. They seek to build consensus through approaches that are more informal and linked up through networks.

### ***Principle 3***

*Community-led initiatives are guided by local leaders who typically co-create a governance process to help plan and advance the ongoing work.*

### ***The Details***

One of the first steps in development is to establish a process for collaborative decision-making. Local governance bodies provide a focal point for a community's unique expression of its vision and associated strategic plan.

The emerging shift from government to governance has seen citizens assume an increasingly active role in decisions that affect their lives. While governments are the primary formulators of policy, there is growing recognition of the need to engage the potential targets of any measure and community members, more generally, in articulating policy questions and developing feasible options.

The decision-making structures currently in place typically are not able to effectively address the complexity of the challenges they face. Neither do they usually include the voices of persons who are marginalized in the community – and society more generally.

Some form of governance structure is required to guide the development process. Its purpose is to develop a strategic plan that is both comprehensive and long term. Despite the focus upon challenges, the plan must build first and foremost upon community strengths.

Local governance processes make a deliberate and conscious effort to capture the diversity of community in both demographic profile and composition by sector. An instructive insight from the ALLIES partnership: Getting respected, proven leaders in the room is far more important and effective than simply ensuring sector representation. (ALLIES is a pan-Canadian network of local immigrant employment councils that seeks to better attach qualified immigrants to the Canadian labour market.) Involving business people rather than business organizations is key [Makhoul 2011]. Diversity must be reflected not only through demographics.

The sharing of decision-making responsibility may involve multiple linkages among citizens, government departments, the private sector and voluntary organizations. It also requires the collaboration of diverse stakeholders at local, regional, provincial, national and international levels.

Unlike local governments, community-led governance processes are not bound by the rhythms and constraints of the political process. They can develop plans which are longer term in vision and scope than can municipal strategies that are limited by electoral mandates. Local governance bodies do not simply emerge on their own. They must be convened by an individual, group or organization able to act in this capacity. Effective conveners must be local actors with the ability to bring together many different parties with diverse interests.

The convener usually has a designated role in the community – such as Chief of a Tribal Council, mayor or city official, or local funder like a United Way. The convener must be – and must be perceived to be – balanced and fair in their words and actions.

The efforts of conveners must be recognized, legitimized and prioritized by bodies traditionally responsible for directing and funding community improvement efforts. Governments and Tribal Councils must support the work of conveners in order to avoid the confusion that inadvertently can arise through multiple organizations and local initiatives.

The governance body formulates, implements and evaluates all aspects of the local poverty reduction strategy. Its work is guided by the principle of inclusion.

Community residents are viewed not as targets or subjects of the proposed interventions but as participants in the formulation and application of these actions. Their involvement helps ensure the relevance of the work. Some communities have created advisory groups of residents who serve as a sounding board for local initiatives.

A major challenge around inclusion relates to the logistics of participation. Many community members have not participated in these kinds of efforts. The processes can be intimidating – or at least not welcoming.

There are practical issues as well. Meetings may be held in the evening to accommodate employed members of the local governance body. The result is that prospective participants with young children must find or pay for child care to enable their participation outside of school hours. The lack of accessible and affordable transportation may be a barrier for others.

Lessons from current local practice include the fact that it is important to hold meetings in places like community venues where all members feel comfortable. It is also helpful to provide practical assistance, such as child care subsidies or transportation, to enable participation. Ideally, meetings are combined with a nutritious meal for participants – and for their children if child care is made available on site.

A new style of leadership is necessary to support the work of local initiatives seeking to engage diverse players in tackling multifaceted issues. This type of leadership involves a focus on relationships. The ‘leading between’ style differs from traditional models, which view leaders as the individuals who are vested with power and influence, and who can persuade people to follow a single or common vision [Skidmore 2004].

Participants in a community process often become the followers who look to the leaders to provide direction. Followers rarely are encouraged to recognize their own capacity to take initiative or solve problems for themselves. Collaborative relationships, built on mutual respect rather than formal authority, involve skills that have not before been required of leaders.

The new leadership style required for community-led development lies less in decision and more in deliberation. It is not so much a question of characteristics or personality traits of individuals but rather their behaviours or what they do, especially around building trust and cultivating strong working relationships among parties to a common effort.

An Aboriginal model of leadership can be defined in terms of skills, abilities and traditional gifts underlying an individual’s traditional-spiritual name, clan, life experience or what are commonly referred to as Aboriginal identity and cultural ties. The ideal personality in Native American cultures is a person who shows kindness to all, who puts the group ahead of individual wants and desires, who is a generalist, who is steeped in spiritual and ritual knowledge – a person who goes about daily life and approaches “all his or her relations” in a sea of friendship,

easy-goingness, humour, and good feelings. She or he is a person who attempts to suppress inner feelings, anger, and disagreements with the group. She or he is a person who is expected to display bravery, hardiness, and strength against enemies and outsiders. She or he is a person who is adaptable and takes the world as it comes without complaint. That is the way it used to be! That is the way it should be! [Wesley-Esquimaux and Calliou 2010]

The community is then ready to embark on the next key step: defining the question.

#### ***Principle 4***

*Community-led development involves the identification of key questions to be addressed. This focus is then framed as a set of aspirational goals or vision that the community seeks to achieve.*

#### ***The Details***

Community development approaches are often structured to meet a set of goals that have been identified by a government or other funder. The community development process subsequently organizes itself in a way that meets the objectives set on their behalf.

There typically is an expectation of certain results to be attained within a designated time frame. The government or other funder sets out the desired outcomes that it would like the community to achieve. These may include, for example, reduced rates of crime, unemployment or poverty.

The problem with this approach is that the community itself is not involved in determining the core objectives to be achieved. They are basically told what to do and funds are allocated in respect of these predetermined goals.

A community-led process, by contrast, is concerned not only with solutions. It focuses first and foremost on enabling the community to identify *its core questions*. Once the community has determined the questions that it considers important, it can then formulate the course of action that it wishes to take. It often sets out its goals in the form of an aspirational statement or vision.

Action for Neighbourhood Change was a neighbourhood renewal initiative supported by several federal departments. The federal government was looking for activities that would result in higher rates of employment and lower crime. Four of the five local United Ways were tasked with selecting a neighbourhood for participation; one United Way decided instead to allow its neighbourhood to self-select.

The residents of these neighbourhoods, when called together to identify their priorities, did not start with jobs. They were concerned first and foremost with a healthy, clean and safe environment.



Residents wanted to ensure that there was no excess garbage in their respective neighbourhoods and that the parks and playgrounds were healthy and safe places for their children. They wanted to repair rusty playground equipment, fill the holes on the grounds of the basketball courts and plant community gardens. They wanted sports and recreation programs for their children and youth as well as meeting, learning and sharing opportunities for their adult members.

The parks and common spaces became the entry points for a bigger and broader discussion about the well-being of the neighbourhood and its residents. It was only after they created safe places for families to stay and kids to play that they felt ready to focus on other concerns, including training and employment.

### ***Principle 5***

*Despite their differences, community-led development approaches are bound together by a common set of practice guidelines.*

### ***The Details***

By definition, community-led development is *community driven*. Citizens play the primary role in identifying the nature of the concerns and the community assets, prioritizing the issues and determining the interventions they deem appropriate for tackling those concerns.

An approach shaped by the community is distinct from government practice, which tends to be more linear in nature. It typically sets out clearly defined parameters for the goals and objectives of any given project, the activities deemed acceptable and the associated time frame for their achievement.

*Inclusion* is another practice guideline. Community-led development approaches seek to be comprehensive not just from the perspective of the issues they address. They also try to be inclusive with respect to the members they involve.

Community-led development seeks *diversity* in terms of the people engaged in local efforts, the voices it hears and the options for action that it considers. It recognizes the value of contributions from diverse backgrounds, networks and areas of expertise.

This type of local development encourages partnering and *collaborative work*. Collaborative relationships create value by bringing new resources, insights and expertise to the table. Community-led development is a consensual approach in which compromise is sought among diverse views.

It is a process that is *asset-based*. Communities are viewed not from the lens of their weaknesses but rather from the perspective of their unique strengths.



Finally, community-led development recognizes the importance of both *outcomes and process*. It acknowledges the need for *longer time horizons for tackling complex problems*.

### ***Principle 6***

*Community-led development assumes that all communities and their members have strengths, skills and resources on which to build.*

### ***The Details***

Traditional approaches to local development typically assess communities in terms of their weaknesses. They are often described from the perspective of their deficiencies and an associated litany of problems. Community-led development, by contrast, views communities as the sum of their strengths – i.e., the capacities that can be harnessed to tackle their challenges. The asset-based approach clearly acknowledges the deep-rooted problems with which communities must grapple. It does not gloss them over or pretend that these have no impact upon local well-being.

It recognizes, for example, that loss of traditional ways of life have deeply upset the balance in Aboriginal communities. Economic insecurity more generally – both in Canada and throughout the world – has been linked to poverty and poor health outcomes.

Despite the acknowledgment of these challenges, community-led development focuses upon capacities and strengths. A capacity framework leads to the formulation of actions and policies based on abilities, skills and assets as a way to move constructively toward solutions. It can help open up a range of possible interventions not previously considered.

The resource manual *Building Communities from the Inside Out* sets out a framework and practical advice for finding and mobilizing a community's assets [Kretzmann and McKnight 1993]. These assets are listed in the form of an inventory that identifies the potential gifts – especially of community members such as young people or persons with disabilities – typically considered to have little to offer in the way of positive contributions.

The inventory of personal skills, in particular, is wide-ranging and substantial. Virtually every aspect of household management, including window washing, household cleaning, cooking, dishwashing and driving a car, is considered a valuable skill. These personal skills are complemented by the inventory of community skills, such as organizing pot-luck dinners and participating in school events.

Together these lists of capacities carry a strong message: Most people have a wide range of abilities that are rarely recognized as strengths or exceptional qualities. Many of these skills can be used to help tackle the challenges that communities face – and can even form the basis of a business or enterprise.

This notion of innate strengths applies equally well to communities. Every locality – no matter how poor or impoverished – is rich in resources. Communities also have innate resilience or assets that provide a strong foundation upon which to build. Every community can start from a position of strength despite the fact that it typically is viewed from the perspective of its weaknesses.

Furthermore, communities can learn when outside expertise is needed and be prepared to ask for and receive help. Skills and knowledge requirements can become the starting point for the creation of new job training and educational opportunities.

In its *Community Resilience Manual*, the Centre for Community Enterprise identified 23 local assets that are associated with resilience, such as the outlook of citizens, quality of their relations, and availability of financial and organizational resources [Colussi, Lewis and Rowcliffe 2000]. The manual describes how communities can assess their vitality in relation to these features and take intentional action to meet their respective challenges.

The concept of assets also figures prominently in a body of literature on sustainable livelihoods. This work is concerned with the ways in which communities self-organize to ensure that all members have access to the basics of life. It identifies the major pools of capital – natural, built, social, human and financial – upon which communities can draw to create sustainable livelihoods.

Natural capital refers to land, stocks of natural resources and ecosystems. It is essential to survival and comprises the basis of life.

Built capital includes buildings, equipment, machinery and physical infrastructure, such as water and waste systems, community centres and playgrounds that do not occur naturally.

Social capital refers to relationships, networks and norms that enable collective action.

Human capital comprises the knowledge, skills, competencies and other attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being.

Financial capital involves stocks of available wealth in the form of cash and other liquid assets as well as capital held as stocks, bonds and other securities.

Another significant asset that is being recognized increasingly throughout the world is cultural capital, which links members of a group through bonds rooted in common values, language, customs, traditions, beliefs and arts. The United Nations *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, which took effect in 2002, defines intangible cultural heritage as the practices, representations, expressions, and knowledge and skills that communities and groups recognize as part of their cultural heritage.

Intangible heritage is expressed through language, performing arts, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and traditional craftsmanship. It is seen as distinct from tangible cultural heritage and its derivative cultural industries – which include publishing, music, audiovisual technology, electronics, video games and the Internet.

The mapping of assets has emerged as a key methodology to help identify obvious and latent strengths embedded in individuals, groups, organizations, institutions, and natural and built space. All communities can build from a position of strength despite their struggle with tough problems. The Government of Australia has identified a set of core principles to help promote social inclusion in that country. Here is what it says about assets:

Taking a strength-based, rather than a deficit-based, approach means respecting, supporting and building on the strengths of individuals, families, communities and cultures. Assuming, promoting and supporting a strong and positive view of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity and culture will be particularly important ways to reduce social exclusion for Indigenous Australians, working in parallel with specific initiatives to improve their health, education, housing and employment prospects. Recognising the varied and positive contributions of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds will also be an important feature of the social inclusion approach [[www.socialinclusion.gov.au](http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au)].

The challenge for community-led development lies in finding leaders who bring with them, and can draw out, this ‘abundance’ mentality.

### ***Principle 7***

*Communities can harness and apply their identified assets through conversations that help create frameworks for change.*

### ***The Details***

Once a community has identified its overall vision or aspirational goals, it typically engages in a structured conversation to determine how it will reach those objectives. This process contributes to the development of its framework for change.

The framework for change is a statement of intended pathway – a linked sequence of steps that lead to a set of desired goals [Fulbright-Anderson, Kubisch and Connell 1998]. It is a brief description of the context in which the initiative is taking place, the goals and targets it is pursuing and the strategies it has adopted.

The framework for change presents the ideas and assumptions guiding the initiative and explains the unfolding pathway required in order to achieve its intended results. It serves as a conceptual baseline against which progress and lessons can be identified as the initiative evolves [Leviton-Reid 2007].

The process starts with a statement of the desired objective(s) and spells out the many steps that can be taken to arrive at that point. The community engages in discussion of the options and ultimately decides on the feasible alternatives. The framework for change represents a road-map for the journey upon which community members together have agreed to embark. It draws, to the greatest extent possible, upon the various assets that the community has identified.

The process involves clear identification, even at the early planning and design stages, of designated results in pursuit of specified objectives. It entails regular monitoring of progress toward these results with continual benchmarking against itself or similar efforts, where possible. Organizers then reflect on the information attained through monitoring in order to make required adjustments to the work.

Frameworks for change have been used extensively as a core methodology in community change efforts, particularly in the area of poverty reduction. Convening organizations define a statement of their poverty profile, develop a list of community assets and challenges, and map out the possible strategies they could undertake to reach their desired objectives. By charting a course early in their development, convening groups can report regularly on progress and course correct, as needed.

Challenges can arise, however, from the implication of a logical and consistent sequence of events. A rise in educational attainment, for example, typically leads to a better job. Wage increases improve a household's standard of living. The availability of quality affordable child care helps ensure that working parents can seek and maintain employment.

While these sequences are probable, they are not always guaranteed. Sometimes the route is not always direct. Other unexpected variables, such as marriage breakdown, illness or death of a family member, sudden layoff or plant closure, or environmental disaster, such as toxic spill or poisoned water supply, can affect the trajectory of a designated set of actions.

Governments may also introduce a new policy or program that affects the course of the local work. Over the past few years, for example, Alberta has introduced a 10-year homelessness strategy. Ontario brought in a provincial child benefit and 4-year-old kindergarten. Healthy Child Manitoba has sought to integrate services for all families with young children. These kinds of initiatives can influence the work – or even change the trajectory – of a community-led effort.

Every community will formulate its own unique framework for change. It will differ by context, local values and culture, governance structure, identified issues and how the community defines its respective challenges.

With regard to the latter, in particular, there are many possible interventions to attain an identified goal. Take, for example, the challenge of poverty. Many citizens who live in poverty cannot afford decent housing. Because they cannot pay for this accommodation, they may live in unstable, poor quality housing that affects their physical and mental health. The community may choose, as a result, to launch a series of actions to tackle the lack of affordable housing.

Another community may decide, by contrast, that the poverty challenge would be better addressed by focusing on appropriate training and employment. If the problem has been compounded by discrimination or workplaces that are inaccessible to persons with disabilities, it may embark upon a broad educational approach in which citizens actively engage in dialogue on the identified barriers.

At the policy level, measures that help reduce poverty include a living wage for paid work and higher child benefits to provide more money to lower-income families. An associated set of actions can be taken by local governments to decrease or offset costs, such as setting lower fees for recreational and cultural programs; making available financial assistance for recreational equipment and clothing; and providing allowances to assist with the cost of special diets for medical conditions.

Another set of interventions is concerned with trying to influence the broader social and economic context – such as ensuring the availability of quality child care, establishing a system of energy rebates for low-income families or securing access to affordable high-quality food.

Other communities may identify local economic development as a desired objective. It is possible that economic opportunities in resource industries, such as diamond mining, already exist. But residents may need skills training in the equipment or technology employed in the mining operation. They may also require transportation or temporary accommodation (or housing subsidy) if the work is available in locations that involve a temporary move away from their home base.

In other cases, the community may decide that patient venture capital is the missing ingredient in the economic opportunity equation. They may have ideas for local businesses, such as ecotourism, but do not have access to the funds to translate their proposals into concrete actions. The Capital for Aboriginal Prosperity and Entrepreneurship Fund is an important recent development in helping to address the financing problem.

Communities may also decide to focus their efforts on systems change. There may be regulatory barriers that make it difficult or impossible to set up local businesses in certain locations or in the absence of numerous permits. The community-led development process can work on reducing these barriers to entrepreneurship.

One of the most helpful components of the Vibrant Communities work was the sharing of experience around selected local efforts. In one case, groups came together to discuss how they had set up food-related businesses, including the development of a new product – wild game pies.

At one particular meeting, a group was explaining how its members had established a small café in the local library. They described the entire process involving approvals from the health department and the acquisition of business permits. A second group noted that the detailed

description of the steps likely would help save them six months of exploratory work required for their own similar business.

Whatever the selected plan of action, community-led development must pay attention to both outcomes and process in the course of carrying out its work.

### ***Principle 8***

*Community-led development is an evolving process that involves the translation of aspirational goals into specific steps to be taken in respect of that vision.*

### ***The Details***

Comprehensive local initiatives must have a clear sense of what they are seeking to achieve. They must set transparent goals, carefully track their work and try to the best of their ability to reach designated targets.

There must be a concerted effort to ensure that comprehensive community efforts work strategically to achieve their desired outcomes. These may include, for example, a rise in the availability of shelter spaces or permanent affordable housing units. Positive results may also involve an increase in the numbers of persons with paid employment or households that moved out of poverty.

At the same time, the process by which these goals are reached is also important. The dual focus on both outcomes and process is different from typical funding arrangements that are generally concerned only with the former.

Process indicators seek to capture shifts that may have occurred in the community as a result of a given effort. These may include, for instance, the creation of new partnerships between groups and organizations that had not worked together in the past, the secondment of staff and other resources to the initiative, or a review by local government or private business of their respective policies and practices.

The local efforts that comprise the Vibrant Communities project serve as a good example. Each of the 13 partners set up an active governance structure that includes business leaders, government officials, representatives from social agencies and people living in poverty.

Members of the diverse governance bodies are trying to raise community awareness about the various dimensions of poverty and social inclusion. The members provide a focal point for local efforts through strategic planning and the development of new models of poverty reduction.

Several projects promoted awareness about the realities and complexities of poverty through newspaper, radio and television stories. Many more community members now have a



better understanding of the scope and dimensions of living on low income, and have become involved in trying to do something about it. Vibrant Communities literally has engaged hundreds of individuals, groups and organizations in developing innovative and comprehensive approaches to tackling poverty.

The diverse governance bodies are basically asking their respective communities the following question: “What can *you* do to reduce poverty?”

Representatives from the business community in some projects have encouraged their corporate peers to examine their employment practices and community contributions. A committee of private sector representatives formed as part of one local effort developed a human resources guide for employers. It covered a range of areas including adequate wages, associated benefits, flexible work time, and training and volunteer contributions, such as mentoring.

One project held discussions with the local Chamber of Commerce, which assigned staff to assist its members become involved in some way in the local project. This involvement might entail volunteering in the effort, mentoring prospective entrepreneurs or hiring participant households.

On another front, the community project engaged in ongoing discussions with local government. The Council subsequently passed a motion to work towards reducing poverty to the lowest rate in the country. It assigned one staff member to become directly involved in the local initiative. The Council also committed to undertaking a review of its policies and practices to determine how these may create barriers for low-income households.

At the community level, one local effort engaged at least 30 different agencies in partnerships around various aspects of poverty reduction. The project requested and received \$1 million from the (former) Department of Human Resources Development Canada for support of various community projects. The United Way in that region also planned to second staff to this work in an effort to sustain, beyond the actual Vibrant Communities project, the many poverty reduction actions already under way.

A key lesson from the Vibrant Communities initiative is that setting and striving to achieve clear outcomes are crucial. But good process is also an essential component of effective community practice. Good process can help extend the reach, scope and sustainability of a local effort over the longer term.

## ***Principle 9***

*Community-led development is not a straight pathway. It is a process of continual learning and checking of progress against objectives.*

### ***The Details***

Evaluation typically is undertaken to determine whether selected efforts are working relative to their intended results. While this information is important, it clearly is not sufficient. The purpose of monitoring progress is not only to measure results. Equally crucial is the need to learn from the work in which the community is collectively engaged and to adjust direction as the initiative develops.

A major weakness of evaluations is that they usually begin after the foundations of an initiative have been laid and the work is already under way. It would be more helpful to have feedback about performance and progress on an early and ongoing basis so that collaborative efforts that appear to be less than effective might be identified and altered.

Traditional learning and evaluation generally look back and assess the difference between then and now. Emerging work within community-led initiatives moves beyond a simplistic retrospective. It is important to know this information sooner than later – which may be too late.

Perhaps the central question in the review process is not so much which interventions worked effectively but rather what was learned from a given effort. Both the ‘what’ and ‘why’ are important. Which decisions and actions were considered positive and why? What factors contributed to their success? Why did certain measures not work well? What could have been done differently to ensure a better result?

Evaluation that values learning shifts the focus of the review from one of judgment to continual improvement. It assumes that mistakes will be made because the course being pursued is virtually uncharted. At any point, a shift in direction from the original work plan may be required and should not be considered a failure. In fact, no change in direction may be a sign that there has been little self-critique – or even fear to take bold steps.

The review processes themselves are complex and messy – as they should be. They typically require a new form of assessment, known as developmental evaluation, to capture the scope of the work and its impacts [Quinn Patton 1997]. This type of review sends back information into the effort on an ongoing basis as a feedback loop to allow continual course correction. It is an evaluation process that values learning as much as it seeks results.

Developmental evaluation supports the process of innovation within an organization and in its activities. Initiatives that are innovative are often in a state of continuous development and adaptation, and they frequently unfold in a changing and unpredictable environment. This intentional effort to innovate is a kind of organizational exploration. The destination is often a notion rather than a crisp image, and the path forward may be unclear. Much is in flux: The



framing of the issue can change, how the problem is conceptualized evolves and various approaches are likely to be tested. Adaptations are largely driven by new learning and by changes in participants, partners and context [Gamble 2010].

Developmental evaluation is rooted in the framework for change that guides the community work. As discussed, the framework for change is a statement of intended pathway – a linked sequence of steps that lead to desired goals. The process involves clear identification, at the planning and design stages, of designated outcomes in pursuit of specified objectives. It involves regular monitoring of progress toward these results with continual benchmarking against itself or similar efforts, where possible. Organizers then reflect on the information attained through monitoring in order to make required adjustments to the work.

Different types of data are needed to capture the various process and outcome results that these community-led development efforts can achieve. Some elements, such as higher incomes or numbers of households that have gained access to affordable housing, lend themselves to quantification.

Other qualitative results are conveyed only by capturing perceptions, such as better self-esteem, enhanced sense of belonging or improved community relationships. Communities may find that in order to demonstrate progress, they must employ a range of data collection methods, which can be time-consuming and resource intensive.

Any desired pathway requires an associated set of indicators to determine progress toward a defined objective. Say, for instance, that the goal of the community initiative is to encourage local economic development. There are many possible strategies that may be undertaken to reach this goal.

The community might decide, for example, to work on raising the literacy and numeracy proficiency of individuals who are under-represented in the paid labour market. Other efforts may focus on language skills development for new Canadians or second language acquisition. Communities may seek to ensure that all residents complete high school and have access to apprenticeships and trades, community colleges and universities.

A second route to encouraging local economic development is to help individuals currently involved in or exploring certain careers or businesses gain access to advice and counsel in their selected fields. A mentorship strategy may be created in which experienced individuals are paired with those seeking to enter or remain in a given area.

Alternatively or in addition, the community could enable access to venture capital. This access could take the form of low-interest loan or equity investment in a company. Some local efforts have established community loan funds that provide access to low-cost money for business development as well as strategic planning, legal and marketing advice.

In addition to encouraging privately-owned businesses, some communities are developing various forms of social enterprise. The proceeds or profits of the venture are shared and reinvested for the continued economic and social benefit of a designated group. The *l'économie sociale* comprises a major component of the economy in Québec; community economic development has long been part of the fibre of the Atlantic Region and the co-operative movement has been a stronghold for years in the West.

Other communities may set poverty reduction as their primary goal. There are many possible ways to get there.

The desired outcome may be achieved, for example, by enhancing the education and skills of an identified group in an effort to promote their employability. While the immediate result is not necessarily reduced poverty, the intervention typically improves employability potential. Evidence points to a strong positive link between educational attainment, occupational status and income. Higher levels of education are clearly associated with better jobs and higher income.

Based on this information, a focus upon knowledge and skills development is considered a powerful poverty reduction strategy – though the ultimate goal may take some time to achieve. If this route is selected, then a desirable short-term result in respect of this objective might be the number of participants who increased their level of education or acquired new or upgraded skills.

A project that targets vulnerable individuals, such as young people who have dropped out of high school, the long-term unemployed or homeless persons, might consider improved literacy proficiency as the relevant measure of success. If, by contrast, the effort seeks to upgrade the skills of those who become unemployed because of technological change, then the desired results might involve retraining options.

Alternatively or in addition, a poverty reduction effort might create jobs or link jobless workers to employment opportunities. In this case, the measurable outputs of the effort would be the number of new jobs or work placements.

These various possible actions in respect of a specified policy objective are intended to illustrate a general point: The desired outcome – reduced poverty – can be achieved in different ways including education and training, employment and increases to wages and/or benefits. Specific results and their associated measures will vary depending upon the selected route.

Because collaborative community-led initiatives usually involve a broader scope of actions, they also seek to achieve wide-ranging impact. In fact, outcomes at three levels – households, organizations and larger systems – are tracked [Leviton-Reid and Torjman 2006].

Community-led development generally seeks changes in the social and economic well-being of individuals and households. Meaningful and committed support networks around individuals may have been nurtured. Members of groups typically marginalized, such as

racialized youth, Aboriginal people, persons with disabilities or people living in poverty, may participate more actively in local decision-making or in community activities and events. Social results at the household level include, for example, access to affordable accommodation and improved quality in terms of security, space, cleanliness and repair.

Economic measures for individuals relate to employability, employment status, and level of income and assets. Employability indicators are concerned with the knowledge and skills of prospective workers as well as upgraded training and education. Employment measures pertain to the availability and quality of jobs.

Other economic indicators involve longer periods of earned income and reduced reliance on social assistance, Employment Insurance or other program of income support. A change in source of income – such as a shift from social assistance to paid employment – is as important as a change in level. Actual earnings may not increase substantially in the near term because the initial move often involves low-paying, unstable employment or self-employment. Nonetheless, the change in income source represents an important step on the pathway to economic independence.

In addition to improvements for households, community-led development is often concerned with organizational shifts that enhance community capacity to effect fundamental change. As a result of the local effort, social agencies may provide more integrated services that better meet household needs.

Finally, these wide-ranging local efforts seek broader systemic changes, such as access to affordable nutritious food, cleaner drinking water and improved sanitation, or more accessible transportation. Procedural changes in public policy include removal of disincentives or provision of appropriate supports, such as home visiting programs for parents of newborns and young children. As a result of the local effort, there may be improved coordination of policies across government departments – just one of the ways that governments can enable these initiatives.

### ***Principle 10***

*While community-led initiatives are led by local residents, they require enabling environment. Governments can play three major roles in support of this work – as exemplar, investor and enabler.*

### ***The Details***

*As exemplar, governments set the moral, legal and fiscal context within their respective jurisdictions.*

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. Governments also act as exemplars through model employment practices and diversity in their workforce.

Clearly governments do more than set frameworks and lead by example. They also make *strategic investments* – in both citizens and communities.

At the individual level, governments invest in income security and in educational and training opportunities that enable citizens to participate in the knowledge economy. Community investments include decent affordable housing, early childhood development centres, schools and educational curriculum, and recreational and cultural facilities programs.

Governments can also support local economic efforts through their procurement practices. Manitoba, for example, has introduced an Aboriginal Procurement Initiative to help increase the participation of Aboriginal peoples and suppliers in providing goods and services to the provincial government. Strategic purchase is intended to promote Aboriginal business development and create new employment opportunities.

Alberta has just announced that rural entrepreneurs and small businesses will receive enhanced advice and support as the result of a three-year pilot program that will partner local community organizations with the Government of Alberta.

The Rural Alberta Business Centre program will provide one-stop access to business information and advice, research services, seminars and workshops in locations across the province, beginning in early 2012. The \$2 million pilot program is being jointly funded over three years by Alberta Treasury Board and Enterprise, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, and Alberta Human Services.

Government of Ontario investments in rural communities and businesses this year created or retained more than 6,000 jobs and strengthened local economies. In 2011, through the Rural Economic Development Program, Ontario has invested in 78 projects, supporting new and existing jobs. The government funds have levered additional investments of \$139 million from private and public sector partners.

The *enabling role* is relatively new for governments. Community-led development is enabled through support for the convening role described in Principle 3.

As noted, local governance bodies do not simply emerge on their own. These processes require assistance to sustain their efforts over time. They need time to develop competence, especially in light of the myriad challenges embedded in complex local efforts. The ‘leading between’ skill, earlier described, requires an ability to foster links among diverse participants.

Another area entails support for the development of frameworks for change, discussed in Principle 7. This process can be a time-consuming task that involves several iterations, good facilitation and access to information. Community members need to think strategically about change, select priority challenges, identify assets and determine possible interventions.

But funds generally have not been available to support community-led development. Public dollars typically flow to projects rather than to community processes.

Moreover, these local initiatives require more than just dollars. They need ‘patient capital’ that supports an initiative as it evolves.

A collaborative structure to grapple with complex problems usually does not achieve quick, measurable results. It is concerned with developing a process of local decision-making that can be sustained over time to tackle complex challenges. Funder requirements, by contrast, typically come with expectations for near-immediate, clearly identified and quantifiable outcomes.

An important consideration upon engaging a community in a planning process is whether they are better suited to a strategic plan or a community plan. Strategic plans may be appropriate where the administration is running smoothly and the focus is on business or economic development. Community planning is more suited to circumstances in which there is mistrust among community members and where limited or poor operational structures are in place [personal communication, First Nations interviewee November 2011].

Governments and other funders can do more than simply provide financial support for a local convening process and its collaborative work. They can participate as active partners in the decision-making process. They can share information about relevant work under way in other regions of the country or throughout the world.

Governments and other funders can demonstrate their commitment to coordinated strategies by incorporating joined-up methods into their own activities. This so-called ‘horizontality’ is best applied to complex issues requiring collaboration among multiple partners sustained over long periods of time, like the neighbourhood renewal process in Action for Neighbourhood Change described in Section 2. Horizontality requires agreement among partners on policy outcomes, collaborative programs, leadership mandates and budgets that cross departmental lines.

Governments can also take steps to ease the administrative requirements that can hamper local projects. Evaluation of community efforts, for example, represents a 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.

In a report submitted to (the former) Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, the Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources observed that: “The range and scale of funding, programs,

project and policies offered by INAC and the 33 other federal departments and agencies can be overwhelming... even government staff members may be unaware of all the opportunities available” [Cooper, Hardiss and M’Lot 2010].

Considerable resources, which could be put to far better use, 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 the federally funded Action for Neighbourhood Change was assessed through a common evaluation framework.

Finally, governments and other funders can support learning. Community-led development is demanding and complex. Participants are continually challenged to innovate in response to a changing environment.

The strategic sharing of lessons from local practice does not emerge spontaneously in communities. The process must be carefully developed. Governments and other funders are uniquely poised to enable this learning role.

The Vibrant Communities initiative, described in Section 2, demonstrates the value of a national system of supports, including peer learning coupled intensive with local coaching. Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development has been working to establish an online community development mentoring initiative. Use of this tool and Facebook offer intriguing possibilities for short-circuiting the learning curve of prospective planners.

Structured learning sessions can help ensure that participants do not lose perspective or feel abandoned. A strong community of practice allows members to support each other in grappling with tough problems, sharing new ideas and applying effective methods.

Learning exchange can also take place in groups or even in pairs in which two communities join together for the purpose of peer learning. Mainstream municipal councils now routinely offer training experiences for new members. Such a program would be invaluable for newly-elected Band Council members.

In one Vibrant Communities example, the comprehensive initiative in Edmonton invited a colleague from a similar effort in Niagara Region to share their respective experiences. There was a presentation on identifying and engaging hard-to-reach citizens to ensure that they were receiving government benefits. At the end of the session, the Niagara visitor committed himself publicly to a similar campaign in his region.

As noted, Facebook and other social media now offer the opportunity to do this kind of work online, with virtually no delay between reading a post about a promising practice and adapting it for local use.



## ***Section 2: Community development planning successes***

In Aboriginal communities, the social problems associated with climate change, community relocation and the legacy of residential schools require a robust change mechanism.

Community-led development and comprehensive community initiatives seek to improve the environmental, economic and social functioning of a group of people – whether a First Nations community on a reserve, an Inuit hamlet in Nunavut, a neighbourhood in a city or, as in the case of Québec, the entire low-income population of a province. Examples of this work from Canada, the US and New Zealand are explored in this section of the report.

### ***Government-initiated First Nations community development work***

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) has been encouraging the adoption and use of community-led development principles in First Nations communities since the early 1990s. Conceptual models have been formulated, tested and applied in many parts of the country through partnerships forged among community residents, academics, and federal and provincial governments.

#### *Atlantic Canada*

One model was developed by Dalhousie University's Cities and Environment Unit in partnership with several Atlantic First Nations communities and government departments. It was pilot tested in three Nova Scotian communities in the early 2000s. Refinements were made to the model, a workbook was published in 2003 and the updated model was applied by another 15 communities. Though the tools were seen as very useful by the communities that helped develop and test them, project participants felt that the process could have benefited from more face-to-face contact – e.g., the involvement of people who had first-hand experience of applying the model and who believed in the value of developing community plans.

#### *Saskatchewan*

In 2005, a technical advisory committee with representation from AANDC, Tribal Councils and First Nations took Dalhousie University's Atlantic model to Saskatchewan. By then, members of the Cities and Environment Unit had developed a seven-stage planning process. Over a six-year project run, they helped 11 communities to better shape their own futures. Communities used what was now termed Comprehensive Community-Based Planning (CCBP) to:

1. gather background information
2. identify community strengths and issues
3. establish root causes
4. realize a community vision
5. develop a framework for carrying out the vision

6. prepare and execute an implementation strategy
7. monitor the plan and projects.

AANDC selected communities to participate in the pilot project on the basis of six principles:

- through their Councils, pilot communities had to confirm a willingness and desire to advance CCBP
- the north and south of the province had to be represented
- pilot communities had to possess demonstrated financial management capacity and be committed to principles of accountability
- technical expertise from Tribal Council advisory staff and planning consultants was considered essential to building comprehensive planning capacity
- pilot communities had to be affiliated with a Tribal Council to ensure linkages were developed and planning was supported over the long term
- pilot communities had to have demonstrated a commitment to community engagement as part of their day-to-day operations.

Consultations with Saskatchewan First Nation communities introduced potential participants to the planning process. They were offered funding to hire a local coordinator who would ensure continued engagement in the work. Communities designated a community contact that would supervise the coordinator and liaise with other staff and contacts. Planning Working Groups helped extend each community's involvement in the work; ongoing support was provided by Dalhousie University's Community and Environment Unit.

Since the work began in 2005, the 11 participating Saskatchewan First Nation communities (representing seven of the province's nine Tribal Councils) have created plans to guide their long-term development. In addition, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Saskatchewan and Health Canada have invested in building community capacity in order to ensure long-term First Nation community sustainability.

### *British Columbia*

In response to requests from First Nations, AANDC BC Region began supporting Comprehensive Community Planning (CCP) in 2004. Recommendations from a large First Nations' forum on CCP led to the launch of a pilot project with five First Nations in 2005. This initiative tested several approaches to CCP and developed planning tools and resources to facilitate community-based planning.

BC Region is committed to supporting First Nations communities interested in long-term community planning and, to date, has supported the CCP efforts of more than 100 BC First Nations. The central principles employed are that the planning efforts be community-driven and comprehensive. The use of one specific planning model is not encouraged; instead, each



community and each process focuses on the unique circumstances and priorities of the First Nation.

Another distinguishing feature of the BC Region's approach is that CCP is not considered a program. The Region has taken an integrated approach to this type of planning, allocating financial and non-financial resources from across AANDC directorates. As a result, AANDC BC Region's CCP support includes funding from a variety of sources and dedicated CCP staff members who provide guidance and advice to communities.

### ***Providing expertise and experience in CLD: Four Worlds International***

In response to the deepening levels of despair, addiction and poverty in their communities, 40 indigenous leaders from across North America met on the Indian Blood Reservation in southern Alberta in late 1983. Four Worlds International was formed out of those meetings. Its name signifies a connection with the four cardinal points of the medicine wheel, a widely-used symbol of the complex and interconnected elements of personal and community development.

For the last 30 years, Four Worlds principals Michael and Judie Bopp and associate Helgi Eyford have been involved in culturally-based, participatory community development work. Four Worlds represents a set of foundational principles:

- development from within
- no vision, no development
- individual and community development are connected
- learning is required.

Time and experience working with communities expanded these principles into a set of 16. At their core lies the interconnection of the individual's spirit, mind and heart with their community. The Four Worlds principals have worked throughout North and South America, Africa, former Soviet countries and Asia in projects that include community planning and development work, curriculum development for schools and operating conferences, and seminars on development issues. For more information and publications, visit: [www.fourworlds.ca](http://www.fourworlds.ca).

### ***Asking the right questions: The Health Council of Canada***

In 2010, the Health Council of Canada began a multi-year project to learn more about the crisis in Aboriginal health. It focused on programs or initiatives that have the potential to reduce unacceptable health disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

In January and February 2011, the Health Council held a series of seven regional meetings across Canada to learn what makes a difference in the health of Aboriginal mothers and young children. Front-line workers (mostly in health care), academics and government representatives

from a mix of urban and rural, northern and southern settings, and representing First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities came to learn about one another's work, including the issues they face and their success stories.

The sessions revealed participants' belief that Aboriginal maternal and child health programming is crucial in addressing health disparities, reducing inequities and improving health outcomes for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities and individuals. Moreover, there are common elements that characterize service models, programs, policies and other initiatives as "promising." The practices outlined by participants are having a positive impact.

While governments, regional health authorities, Aboriginal leaders, community partners and others have made great strides in developing promising practices, participants' overriding message was that the "landscape on which the promising practices are occurring is fractured," for essentially three reasons:

1. There is no comprehensive, long-term, coordinated and concerted approach to service delivery, which is needed to fill gaps remaining in many First Nations and Inuit communities or to address gaps faced by Métis people. Programs such as Maternal and Child Health, the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program and Aboriginal Head Start result in improved outcomes for mothers, infants and young children, and are incorporating many of the common features of promising practices. Not all Aboriginal people share in the advantages offered by these programs.
2. The level of complexity involved in the various funding arrangements severely limited opportunities for success – specifically the lack of alignment among governments' goals, the multiple rounds of grants and administrative requirements, and the lack of coordination among government programs for streamlined approaches and reporting. Moreover, participants indicated that front-line providers are "burning out" in the process of trying to make the programs work amidst this complexity. Participants emphasized the need for governments to commit to expanding programs that are working and to take a long-term, coordinated, outcomes-focused approach to service delivery.

The importance of evaluation, specifically participatory evaluation, was emphasized. Without a sustainable plan and dedicated funding for evaluations, the gains achieved from many great initiatives are lost on many levels. Not only does the community for which the program was designed lose out, but there are missed opportunities in terms of helping other communities in need. Participants validated what experts have been saying for years: We need a solid base of evidence with which Aboriginal communities and practitioners can advance their healing efforts.

3. "The model is inside out." Traditional knowledge and community-based approaches must comprise the foundation of Aboriginal health care. Culturally relevant approaches should be driven by and owned by the communities themselves. Yet the

current norm is the development of a medical model based on Western notions of illness and medicine, often imposed “from the top down.” For Aboriginal communities, successful practices are based on Aboriginal ownership of services and the development of local programs to meet their needs.

Following a final working session on promising practices, the Health Council prepared an online compendium that includes descriptions of the promising practices, along with contact information. It is available on the Health Council’s website at: [www.healthcouncilcanada.ca](http://www.healthcouncilcanada.ca).

### ***Poverty reduction on a national scale: Vibrant Communities Canada***

Since its founding in 2002, Vibrant Communities Canada (VCC) has evolved into a 13-member pan-Canadian poverty reduction network. It emerged from a Waterloo Region initiative known as Opportunities 2000 that demonstrated the power of multisectoral partnerships. VCC grew by attracting participation from existing poverty reduction and community revitalization initiatives operating in other parts of the country and by encouraging the formation of new ones. Funding for core operations and a proven track record of success helped create interest in the fledgling organization.

Vibrant Communities’ first 10-year phase ended in November 2011, and it now operates under the name Cities Reducing Poverty. Its current mission is to connect a learning community in 100 Canadian cities with structures to support poverty reduction work. Through this larger effort, it seeks to align poverty reduction strategies in cities, provinces and the federal government in order to reduce poverty for one million Canadians.

Phase one of Vibrant Communities operated under the guidance of a three-member partnership. The Tamarack Institute provided overall direction, coaching and learning opportunities, the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation contributed operational funding and the Caledon Institute of Social Policy undertook policy-related research and writing, and chronicled local change efforts.

Early on, Vibrant Communities chose to focus on poverty reduction rather than poverty alleviation. Four other guiding principles were the establishment of *local governance structures* that had to *include diverse sectors* as well as people with lived experience of poverty. The purpose was to *enable community learning and change*. All efforts had to *build on local assets*. They all had to *adopt a comprehensive approach* to thinking and action.

Vibrant Communities Canada offered an operational structure, funding, resources and a set of guiding principles that allowed for local experience, history and assets to direct local efforts. The initiative has helped build a national conversation aimed at poverty reduction. It has contributed an enormous amount of learning and experience to the country’s understanding of poverty and the ways and means by which it can be tackled.

Each Vibrant Communities convening organization undertook to define a statement of its community poverty profile, develop a list of community assets and challenges, and map out the possible strategies it could undertake to reduce poverty. This process was referred to as developing ‘frameworks for change’ in order to communicate the idea that a starting framework is necessarily incomplete and always subject to later addition. This planning exercise helped articulate a clear, concise vision statement that distilled the essence of the community’s poverty reduction direction. Saint John would “dismantle the poverty traps,” Niagara Region would “untie the knots and connect the dots” and Hamilton would become “the best place to raise a child.”

By charting a course early in their development, convening groups could regularly report on progress and course correct, as needed. Because of the complex nature of poverty, Vibrant Communities Canada has worked diligently to develop numerous indicators of poverty reduction at the household, organization and systems levels.

### ***Comprehensiveness***

‘Comprehensive’ is now more commonly used as a qualifier to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada’s description of community-led development. As outlined in Principle 1, comprehensive initiatives are broad in scope, membership and outlook, and seek to help communities help themselves.

Vibrant Communities Canada has recently published *Cities Reducing Poverty: How Vibrant Communities Are Creating Comprehensive Solutions to the Most Complex Problem of Our Times* [Tamarack 2011]. One of several summary publications aimed at capturing the learnings of Vibrant Communities’ first phase (2002-2011), this book presents six case studies that illustrate how communities can think and act in a comprehensive manner.

In addition to presenting overall approaches to comprehensiveness, the publication reviews five processes that assist communities working on complex problems. These include getting a bird’s eye and worm’s eye view of poverty, navigating the local context, learning by doing, making vertical and horizontal links, being persistent and having appropriate expectations.

*Cities Reducing Poverty* concludes by reviewing the four elements that laid the foundation of the Vibrant Communities approach to poverty reduction and that have stood the test of time and experience:

- organizers should adopt a poverty reduction (not alleviation) approach
- multisectoral collaboration and leadership provides a robust social infrastructure for change
- efforts must built on local assets
- efforts are more effective when part of an ongoing process of learning, evaluation and change.

## *Empowering community residents: Action for Neighbourhood Change*

Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC) was introduced between 2005 and 2007 and later adopted as United Way of Greater Toronto's neighbourhood strategy blueprint. ANC was designed as an action learning project that would strengthen neighbourhoods in five cities across Canada (Surrey, Regina, Thunder Bay, Toronto and Halifax). It would test out two processes simultaneously: the development of each community's capacity for identifying and addressing barriers to community vitality, and a process to tackle policy-related challenges that emerged in the five sites. It was further hoped that the policy process would explore longer-term measures needed to improve the collaborative relationship between government and community in the overall work of neighbourhood renewal.

Action for Neighbourhood Change included the participation of five government sponsors from three different departments. From Human Resources and Social Development Canada, there was representation from the National Secretariat on Homelessness, the Office of Learning Technologies and the National Literacy Secretariat. ANC also involved representatives from Canada's Drug Strategy (a Health Canada initiative) and the National Crime Prevention Strategy (which operates under the auspices of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada). Other ANC partner organizations included United Way Canada and five local United Ways, Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement, the Caledon Institute and the National Film Board.

Federal departmental mandates covered many of the interrelated factors that contribute to poverty: homelessness, housing instability, crime and victimization, substance abuse and poor health, safety, low educational attainment and unstable labour market attachment. Over the two years of their involvement with a policy dialogue working group, departmental representatives came to appreciate that their role was not to direct neighbourhood activity. Rather, it was to build cross-departmental relationships and understanding, and identify the policies and programs that helped and hindered neighbourhood revitalization efforts.

Community ownership of the ANC process and outcomes were key to the learning project's ultimate success. Needs surfaced by neighbourhood residents were prioritized according to locally developed criteria. Two sets of \$80,000 action grants were released to each neighbourhood to help residents solve their own problems.

By the end of the two-year pilot phase of ANC, all five neighbourhoods had established a community structure that – it was hoped – would be capable of continuing the work. The original design for ANC was for it to operate on a five-year cycle; federal political will was not sufficiently strong to make this project length a reality. Even its two-year mandate was threatened by a change in government at the end of ANC's first year of operations. It became one of only a handful of community-focused projects that was granted a second year of federal funding.

Time and experience have shown that far longer timelines are necessary to ensure a robust development framework and process. A four- to ten-year lifespan is now considered realistic

for the work to move into a stage where deep and durable improvements can be made to a community's poverty profile. Ongoing support from the United Way of Greater Toronto and United Way of Halifax Region has seen a continuation of ANC-type neighbourhood development in those cities. The influence of a resident-driven process has continued to shape United Way Canada and local United Way operations.

Similarly, work to effect changes in policy has evolved into newer processes by which community organizations seek to influence government policy direction. Strategic Inquiry, a 'thinking alongside' process articulated by consultant Sean Moore on behalf of the community sector, is an example of the emerging shift from government to governance.

### ***Public engagement as a tool for widespread change***

Between October 2008 and November 2009, the New Brunswick government embarked on a three-stage public engagement process in order to design an economic and social inclusion plan. Its goal was to ensure that all sectors of New Brunswick society, including business, community nonprofit organizations and citizens, would share responsibility with the government for creating new opportunities for residents. Together they implemented action in three areas: Being (meeting basic needs), Becoming (life-long learning and skills acquisition) and Belonging (community participation).

In early 2008, Premier Graham engaged consultant Don Lenihan to work with the public service to design a new model for public engagement. This work culminated in a report entitled *It's More Than Talk* whose preface states that: "None of us can achieve the big goals we set for ourselves without the help of others... . Governments, stakeholders, communities and citizens need to have a real dialogue where they listen, learn and then act, together" [Lenihan 2008].

The poverty reduction/social engagement public engagement initiative involved three phases: a public dialogue, a roundtable and a Final Forum. As the public dialogue got under way, members of the leadership team tracked the major concerns that were surfacing and alerted appropriate departments and officials. In the second phase of the public engagement process, a 30-member roundtable was tasked with shaping the ideas put forward by citizens into a series of options that could be developed into a poverty reduction plan. Roundtable members were chosen for their life experience and expertise, and included people that were currently living – or had previously lived – in poverty.

Throughout the public engagement process, it was agreed that the plan would be consolidated, finalized and adopted at a Forum event to be chaired by the Premier. Fifty people participated in that final event, which ended with a well-received plan entitled "Overcoming Poverty Together." Endorsed by the ruling and opposition parties, it also included an agreement that the New Brunswick Chiefs and the provincial government would work together on a nation-to-nation approach to poverty reduction and social inclusion in First Nation communities.



## *International community planning work*

### *United States*

Twenty years after the widespread adoption of community-led development initiatives in the United States, New York City-based Aspen Institute published *Voices from the Field III: Lessons and Challenges from Two Decades of Community Change Efforts*. This publication outlines the possibilities and limits of this approach. The lessons of the US echo in the Canadian experience of the first ten years of Vibrant Communities [Kubisch et al. 2010].

On the plus side, comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs) have been able to bring about large and small improvements, including helping individuals improve their life opportunities, increasing social housing construction and assisting in the establishment of commercial spaces in areas of need – e.g., small grocery stores in formerly central urban areas from which businesses had withdrawn.

CCIs have also had a positive impact on community development, including building up local leadership, lines of communication, social capacity and increased organizational capacity. At the systems level, CCIs have shown their ability to leverage investment, create a greater receptivity to the principles of community-led development and lend legitimacy to place-based initiatives. While some municipal governments have begun the policy and program changes that support a continued CCI approach, these tend to be isolated and not systemic examples of transformation.

*Voices from the Field III* recognizes that CCIs have not effected neighbourhood transformation. While there is evidence that people who participate in CCIs have improved their lives, people living in poverty cannot bring about widespread transformation on their own. The greatest strength of CCI work in the United States has been its ability to anchor the poverty reduction movement and help it articulate a common agenda.

One of the difficulties with which CCIs must grapple is the need to achieve quick wins that demonstrate the capability of the local planning organization. The administration of targeted events or programming must be balanced with the development of a comprehensive approach to the work. While CCIs must be able to clearly demonstrate an ability to formulate, launch and conclude poverty reduction strategies, they must also keep a clear eye on the larger scale of the work – its mission and governance structures.

### *New Zealand*

Inspired by local initiatives and encouraged by community-led development work under way in Australia, the US and Canada, organizers in New Zealand established Inspiring Communities in 2008. The network aims to spread the concepts and language of community-led development, and the policies and practices that are needed to support this kind of work. Inspiring

Communities receives funding through a number of philanthropic and community trust funds and businesses.

While the community-led New Zealand work offers another example of how this approach is becoming a widespread practice around the globe, there are some differences with similar initiatives in Canada. A key point of difference is that country's focus on the environment as a significant driver for change. Its health is increasingly understood to be integral to the social and economic well-being of New Zealand's people. There are also many other cultural and linguistic differences between the two countries with respect to Aboriginal treaty history, governance and the relative homogeneity of New Zealand's Maori people when compared to North America's First Nations. Te Reo Maori is New Zealand's national language.

During the early 1990s, the central (federal) government began negotiating and implementing the settlement of historic Treaty of Waitangi (1840) claims. Settlements generally include financial redress, a formal Crown apology for breaches of the Treaty and recognition of a group's cultural associations with various sites. Through these processes, traditional links to – and authority over – land and water areas are acknowledged and reinstated.

Environmental issues are of primary importance to New Zealanders. Regional governments – which, along with municipalities, compose the country's second tier of government – are legislated to protect and enhance the environment. Formal requirements, including those being negotiated through Treaty Settlements, necessitate engagement with Iwi (large social groupings of Maori) who have traditional oversight of land and water areas. There are also many examples of community-led and Iwi-led environmental restoration and enhancement work. The relationships forged through these endeavours led to the potential for collaboration on other matters. Groups that formerly would never have interacted are now talking; all organizations must re-think their corporate relationships.

AANDC might find inspiration from New Zealand communities' efforts to create wrap-around services for young, unemployed and disengaged citizens. The successes of some small communities are dramatic and provide an important learning ground, particularly as overall youth unemployment is running at 30 percent across the country.

Another interesting trend is the reinvigoration of communities that had nearly been ruined by the failure of the local economic base. Younger, educated Maori are returning to play leadership roles in their home communities. The Treaty Settlement processes have required claimant Iwi to establish formal registration processes for members. These databases and other forms of social media become connector points and Iwi are using them in their local work.

The principles and practices of community-led development have a lot of synergy with Maori philosophies and Iwi development approaches. Holistic world views which recognize the interconnection of social, cultural, environmental and economic dimensions are one shared feature, along with a deep interest in sustainable, long-term horizons.



### ***Section 3: Wise practices – reflections from Aboriginal community leaders***

Section 3 presents a view of community-led development through the eyes of six individuals associated with these planning initiatives. Regional AANDC staff identified potential contacts in five communities from across the country. Each person was offered an opportunity to participate in a 45-minute telephone interview and provided with a list of questions upon which to reflect. Once the interviews and write-ups were completed, interviewees reviewed and made changes to the draft document, as necessary.

The material gathered from these conversations has been organized to provide a brief overview of the development processes the five Aboriginal communities used to improve community health and well-being. Second, this portion of the report describes outcomes and offers advice to other First Nations that are contemplating a community-led development (CLD) process. The section concludes with a series of recommendations that interviewees wanted to make to the federal government in the event that it chooses to orchestrate a widespread CLD initiative for First Nations communities.

The representatives who provided input during telephone interviews were from three First Nations (one each from BC, Saskatchewan and Ontario), an urban Aboriginal Council and an Inuit community in Nunavut. Community-led development continues in all but the Inuit example. Because of that community's very different trajectory, its process and results are presented separately.

#### ***The Nunavut experience***

In the late 1990s, members of a 750-person Nunavut community took it upon themselves to draw up an in-depth land use plan. The community's population was growing and would soon require new development to meet its housing needs. Residents wanted to be able to enforce standards in the event that difficulties arose.

The land use plan is renewed every five years and, in the early 2000s, there was hope that it might help inspire greater levels of community economic development. A profitable annual hunting harvest generated jobs and income, and there were plans to build a road to a nearby historical site which has an abundance of wildlife. Making the community more attractive to hunters, tourists and residents seemed like a good idea.

In the late 2000s, the hunt was suspended due to the ill health and climate change-related deaths of the animal population. The loss of 50 local jobs and the associated revenue severely dampened the community's spirit. Plans to open a local processing plant were put on indefinite hold. The road took 10 years to get half-way built; its progress has halted and the completed sections are already showing signs of heavy wear.

The community itself is proud of the sharing spirit its members show one another, particularly in the obtaining and division of country food. However, an interviewee who formerly was employed by the community Council observed that with the disappearance of the hunt, things have begun to change.

Unemployment levels – always high – are higher. The municipality is the community’s major employer and it has become a common practice for people to hire their relatives when jobs become available. Levels of mistrust, nepotism and drug use all appear to be on the rise. The zoning work – though valuable – has recently led to the siting of a new housing development, but the proposed subdivision would be far away from the existing community. The area is now zoned for construction, but it is without access to electricity and there are no signs that construction will begin any time soon. Things, in the interviewee’s opinion, do not appear to be unfolding in a positive direction.

Given the divisions and mistrust, it is not surprising that no one has suggested the idea of coming together to develop any kind of comprehensive community plan. While a counselling group for young men was introduced a few years ago, it is run by a private operation and is not linked to any kind of integrated community planning.

Where in the late 1990s, there was hope that the land use-based planning process might result in a more holistic healing and development plan, it was not to be. The loss of an economic engine due to unforeseen climate change and disease, lack of locally-led planning expertise and a faltering sense of cohesion have dimmed this community’s optimism.

### ***What does planning success look like?***

Each interviewee was given the chance to reflect on what they perceived ‘success’ looked and felt like in their particular community.

***In the BC example***, the profiled community had recently received a claims settlement. A lawyer suggested that before it began spending its money, the community should establish a plan to identify needs, priorities and a vision for the future. In a fortunate turn of events, the settlement coincided with funding from the province in support of comprehensive local planning. A trust was established for the funds alongside a community plan, and it was hoped that the plan’s goals would be reflected in the trust’s funding priorities.

The benefits went far beyond the establishment of the trust and plan. Said the communications officer: “Our positive community gatherings, the productive way people now become involved in community discussion and action, our adoption of simple but effective meeting tools like speakers lists – all of these demonstrate the way people now feel about one another in the community. Where we once had distrust, we have respect and thankfulness.”

Productive planning discussions held over several years helped engender a spirit that people can and should change things for the better. Using creative means of engaging people – e.g., developing videos with children and youth, interactive mapping activities and facilitation tools – were all effective way to get people talking. They got used to a participatory process and now become irritated with top-down methods.

Even in circumstances in which local voices are not typically heard, residents are now demanding to be part of the decision-making process. Where previously disenfranchised individuals might have staged protests or gathered evidence against elected officials, they are now assuming leadership roles. The communications officer has seen a number of individuals start their own community development processes, modelling their efforts on the success of the community planning project.

Focused use of Facebook has been an important channel for residents to express both gratitude and annoyance. The page is monitored daily, and when people are at a boiling point, the communications officer is able to gracefully and politely respond. In her words: “Good moderation keeps communication positive. It took about six months of daily moderation before people began to infiltrate the network and make it their own. They now regularly put in links and updates about community events.”

The Band administration decided to adopt the local plan as a foundational document and recently announced the intention to update it. The interviewee continues: “Comprehensive community planning established the groundwork to bring people together and get involved in planning. By embedding the plan into the trust’s work, there is a continuing requirement for strong community representation. We are now at a point where the social planning model we followed could evolve into a community economic development-focused strategic plan, but human resources are scarce. We have the rules and frameworks we require but we need to extend our capacity-building efforts. It’s very tough to find project managers for the work we need and want to do.”

*The Ontario community’s* work was originally spearheaded by an individual. He wanted to build an approach to community-led development that honoured his community’s history and traditions, and the First Nations philosophy that they are protectors of the earth.

Over the last two decades, a philosophy for community-led development based on the Medicine Wheel has won support from residents and the Chief and Council. One of the overarching goals of the development work is to formulate a community constitution.

Part of the community process includes using a star graph that charts progress along each of the star’s ‘arms.’ The community employs the charts as a way to arrive at consensus on where they are along the continuum of 12 determinants of health. At the end of the review, a detailed Community Story becomes the basis for updating the next version of the ten-year Community Healing and Development Plan.

One local representative says: “Based on our plan, you might assume that everyone is moving together to the same level of understanding, personal growth and development; this is not the case. Using our current time line, some people have yet to begin year one of the process. Growth and development are organic. We know that we won’t be a perfect community at the end of a 10- or 12-year change effort, but we can strive for that end.”

One example of the kind of change that is happening in this community is its adult language training classes. These are providing grandparents and parents with the training they need to keep up with school children who now receive immersion instruction in their traditional language. These and many other training opportunities are changing the social and cultural fabric of the community. “Using the Medicine Wheel framework keeps us grounded. The amount of work to be done is overwhelming, however. The Medicine Wheel teaches us that when you start in one place, you are starting in all places – everything is interconnected. We begin to learn appropriate entry points.”

Like the BC First Nation, *the Saskatchewan community* had secured a land claim settlement shortly before participating in a community-led planning process.

Led by AANDC, Tribal Councils and First Nations, each community selected a resident to act as a Plan Champion. In this case, the Champion became the person in charge of engaging residents in the formulation of a community vision and the eventual publication of a five-year capital development plan.

Residents were initially suspicious of yet another government-led planning process, so early meetings were only sparsely attended. The Champion recognized that she had to get beyond the technical and bureaucratic language of the planning materials in order to win both herself and her people over to the concept and practice of Comprehensive Community-Based Planning (CCBP). “I had to communicate to people that the plan was ours – it was going to be by us and for us. It was about our vision of ourselves, at that moment in time. As that idea took hold, support for the process and plan was slowly built up.”

By the end of four years, more than 50 of the Nation’s 500 on-reserve members were involved in the work. They came from all ages, family situations, and educational and employment backgrounds. With the plan’s publication in 2007 and a Band Council resolution to adopt it as a foundational document, the work moved off the paper and into projects and programs. By the time CCBP funding ended in 2010, the plan had become an integral part of the work undertaken by the community’s 14 program managers.

Though very proud of the plan itself, residents realize that there is still much work to be done to improve the social and economic future of this community. The Plan Champion believes that improved housing conditions, expanded job and skills training opportunities, and a stronger local economy will help bring back the Nation’s 1,000 off-reserve members. The CCBP planning office closed in 2010 with no firm commitment to renewing or reviewing the plan in the future.

However, recent questions about a plan evaluation from a new service provider have stimulated thought and discussion about possible next phases of community development.

Says the Champion: “We have built trust among our community members, and we believe that we have a really strong, holistic plan in place. Working through the seven steps laid out in the planning process helped us identify the root causes of the problems we experience. By being part of a larger planning group, we had the chance to learn more about the resources and people that we can bring into our community to support our members. We also had the chance to share our planning experiences with other First Nations throughout the pilot project. The relationships we built among our sister communities continue to this day, and the success of our plan has inspired other planning groups.”

*An urban Aboriginal Council in western Canada* has two challenges: maintaining its focus on the social inclusion of Aboriginal people while building bridges between cultural differences. Established in the mid-2000s, the Council grew from a coalition of agencies that delivered services to Aboriginals in an urban setting to a more broadly-based, membership-driven organization. It continues to provide a forum for discussing issues faced by Aboriginal people. More recently, it has elected to fill a program/service role as needed or requested by the community in cases where no other local program or service exists.

Formed in 2005, the Council went through a difficult period in 2007 when its leadership changed and when Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) funding was directed through its operations. The funding situation was later adjusted; the organization no longer disperses UAS funding. More importantly, members realized that they had lost touch with their Aboriginal roots and philosophy. A period of community consultation helped renew and refresh the organization’s community development plan and signalled a return to a healthier, grounded orientation.

Though it serves Métis and several First Nations, this group’s philosophy is to celebrate all Aboriginal people. Members appreciate that local school boards and post-secondary institutions have instituted Aboriginal Studies programming; both the university and college’s Aboriginal enrolments have shown steady growth. Elected and appointed members of municipal and provincial government have been very supportive of the Council. The elected federal member is new on the scene; the spirit of positive engagement that Council members have adopted will likely help forge a similarly productive relationship with that individual.

Getting a better understanding of the dynamics of the city’s Aboriginal population – its numbers, needs, economic profile and other data – is now a priority. Funding has been secured and a consultant hired to conduct a community needs assessment and service mapping project. Further work to obtain Census-type data from the municipality is also under consideration.

Overall, the Council has become adept at identifying and communicating community needs and finding the right set of partners with whom to act. Meshing funding and service opportunities serves both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interests. Rather than approaching government

partners simply as funders, the conversation now is about working together to create the best possible outcome for community-identified issues.

### *Advice to other First Nations*

The interviewees were given the opportunity to think about their individual planning paths and what advice they might have for others contemplating similar work.

**BC:** Government and community planners should consider the importance of assessing readiness for planning. Says the BC First Nations community representative: “In general, there are two ways to go – one can either do a strategic plan or a community plan. In bands or communities where the bureaucracy is running smoothly or if the focus is on business or economic development, people use a strategic planning model. These look at strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. They typically adopt short timelines and multiple deadlines, establish budgets and define personnel needs.

The second type of planning takes place in communities where there is a lot of mistrust or where things are not running as they should. In such instances, organizers must back up a step and prepare a comprehensive plan that focuses on social issues. The key thing is to take a broader view, develop goals and try to build inclusivity into the work. Relationships are central. In a real way, the planning process itself is more important than the outcome. The process is what builds the community’s strength.”

**Urban Council:** Says the Council interviewee: “It can be difficult to overcome the ‘me first’ mentality that some Aboriginal groups bring, particularly when they are new to the urban environment. Switching people’s thinking to an understanding that it’s about everyone is the critical task that community leaders must accomplish. Listening, building stronger relationships and figuring out together what groups want their relationships to look like ensures success. You can’t be an island. Being community-led means holding on to your visioning framework and remaining passionate about your goals. Don’t lose your focus.”

**Saskatchewan:** The Plan Champion knows first hand the challenges of winning people over to the planning process. “It’s tough at first, but there are rewards. Our settlement funds were what got us involved in the pilot project, but every community needs to understand that this kind of work is about creating a vision. At the end of the word ‘community’ is ‘unity’ and once people have that in mind, things begin to get moving.”

**Ontario:** A second representative from the Ontario First Nation encourages other communities to believe in themselves, have the courage to share their ideas and focus on the possibility of positive change. Invariably, others in the community will be thinking along similar lines. Equally important is the establishment of a cultural sensitization process that allows residents to see history through an indigenous lens. Learning about their shared past allows community



members to work together in new ways. They learn to be proud of their collective strength and to draw on their culture as the basis of their approach.

In her words: “Residential schools broke the spirit of our women – the mothers and grandmothers who had to watch the children leave. When you grieve and numb that out, alcohol and other addictions get in the way of healing. Community-led development is all about social and human development. Through it, you come back to the realization that the people are the greatest asset.”

Encouraging residents to re-establish ties with their traditional territories is part of the reclamation of a community’s spirit. Rekindling a relationship with the land and each other helps rebuild trust among all members of the community.

Community development and healing must be spirit- and principle-centred.

### ***Interview feedback***

At the conclusion of each of the five community interviews, spokespeople were asked to reflect on their planning experiences and suggest areas that the federal government might adjust in order to better support community-led development.

*Processes take time:* Using the analogy of the community as a person, one interviewee sees his First Nation in the same light as a formerly-addicted body and the community development process as its treatment. In his words: “You have to expect relapses in this work or for people to shy away from treatment from time to time. It takes a long time to deal with so many barriers to healing and some of them create a lot of fear, but we’re gradually working through the issues.”

The Saskatchewan example points to the fact that community-led planning needs long-term funding to ensure that plans are continually updated, refreshed and evaluated.

*Trust that communities want to heal:* The Nunavut example demonstrates that failure is to be expected and addressed. The process and the people need to be ready for one another. First Nations can drop seeds for other First Nations very effectively. The Ontario community took five years to catch up with one of their members who had had earlier exposure to the concepts that underlie community-led development.

*Walk alongside, not in front:* Representatives of the urban Council are appreciative of the substantial encouragement and funding they have received to date. They feel that more work remains to be done to really achieve a closer alignment with community needs and desires. “Parallelism” is the term the Council representative used to describe what must become a softer federal approach to laying out its mandate, and really listening to what communities would like to



achieve as partners in the work. Demonstrating more flexibility and granting greater levels of autonomy to communities is preferable to a directive approach.

*Allow the exploration of models:* Encouraging First Nations communities to explore and adapt models that are suited to the history and assets of their people is an important part of putting ‘community-led’ into ‘development.’ Most of the interviewees expressed the view that human development is the third leg of the community-led and economic development stool.

*First Nations need to mentor other First Nations:* “Nothing about us without us” is the central tenet of community change. Governments must understand that community leadership and involvement in planning and coordinating activities are vital to a successful outcome. People “from the outside” are valuable, but not necessarily welcomed. Training community members is preferable to bringing non-First Nations people to the planning table.

In some instances, however, outside support may be needed to bring new skills and competencies into a community; residents themselves sometimes request input from third party experts. At other times, First Nations would benefit from First Nation mentors. Building capacity and encouraging First Nations people who become experienced in the work to go out to involve other communities will speed the adoption of this way of working.

*The human touch:* Federal government representatives from Ottawa and regional offices must go to the communities and get to know them. Asking about problems and then imposing solutions is no longer an option. Neither is it acceptable that regional officers never visit communities in person. Holding face-to-face meetings with leaders, seeking out opportunities to speak with a variety of age and interest groups (e.g., elders, young mothers, school children) and attending community events and celebrations are powerful ways to communicate commitment and deepen relationships.

*Get creative:* Creating a structure that encourages the development of inter-Band relationships, similar to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) that enables learning exchange and mentorship, would help build community resiliency. First Nations Chiefs and Band Councils could also benefit from programming similar to UCBM’s ‘boot camp’ training experience for new city councillors. Introducing people to legislation, projects, acronyms and the basic machinery of government help fast-track newly-elected officials’ learning.

*Expanding support systems:* AANDC’s work to build an online community planning network will be of great help to future planners. Instead of researching planning models, newcomers would have direct access to people with planning experience who can walk them through all kinds of scenarios.

As demonstrated by the BC and Saskatchewan examples, enabling First Nations access to online or in-person discussion groups helps build relationships among communities and builds the sense of commonality and common purpose.

*Reconciling indigenous policies:* Several years ago, one community representative had made a Masters-level presentation on social welfare reform to a university review panel. She recommended that the government put \$25 million into selected pilot projects, let communities develop their own reforms and eradicate poverty themselves. She essentially transposed a community-level process onto the national stage. Action for Neighbourhood Change was premised on the same idea: Give people structures they can adapt, provide them with funds and let them decide how to improve their communities.

*Getting the money piece right:* To continue a process that recognizes and respects local needs, funding must be given directly to communities to allow them the freedom to design policies and procedures that suit their respective goals and aspirations. Forcing communities to go cap in hand to multiple departments wastes precious time and resources. It is both inefficient and demeaning to be put in a position of begging for small amounts of money. One individual likened the current funding process to panhandling.

The “Indian industry” – the legal machinery attached to land rights claims and treaty issues – must ensure that more money flows into capacity development. Funding must be put into places that build self-reliance and that allow individuals and communities to participate in the economy.

*Communities deserve to benefit from large scale industrial projects:* Currently, capital projects on First Nations reserves are make-work programs; serious wealth creation will come when First Nations control a larger percentage of revenue from resource development. Communities could be realizing a greater share of natural resource royalties. If this piece of the economic puzzle can be successfully redesigned, First Nations will work to codify an economic philosophy that aligns with their stewardship philosophies.

*Staffing issue:* A persistent frustration is the turnover in personnel in federal and provincial departments that interact with Aboriginal communities.

*Concerns for the future:* Particularly in urban centres, the Urban Aboriginal Strategy has been a major source of assistance. However, there is uncertainty around the renewal of the strategy, a process that begins in March 2012.

*Elephants in the room:* Though the federal government’s desire is to create planning and policy structures, the unspoken and critical basic needs associated with mental health are not being sufficiently addressed. There is lack of access to holistic healing processes that incorporate traditional cultural practices, counselling and skill-building support. These problems have been felt more acutely with the closing of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. Many communities continue to experience very high suicide rates and require 24-hour crisis management programs.

Additionally, there needs to be a way to tie together support services, such as addictions treatment and education. The BC spokesperson believes that the charter school model would be an ideal way to create a continuum of care.

### *Concluding remarks*

After 20 years of learning and working with the processes of community-led change, one of the Ontario interviewees said that her way of working now relies completely on residents' input and inclusion. She believes that community-led development gives her people back their voices and that it has resulted in phenomenal change in her community. In her words: "The improvements we have seen in just the last ten years would have seemed unbelievable in that earlier time. The limits of this work are unknown. The biggest change comes when people see that they are all on the same side and want the same things for their children."

Communities have endured despite the many difficulties imposed by policies for Aboriginal people. Says this spokesperson: "All is not well back at home, but we never gave up our right to protect ourselves, our children and our families. We still have our medicine, ceremonies and language. We are still strong and our spirit is still alive. Community-led development works because it honours the deepest and best qualities of First Nations. It includes everybody and it remembers the teaching that we must be kind with our strength, kind with our honesty and kind with our sharing."

## ***Section 4: Recommendations***

There are many lessons that emerge from the practice of community-led development. The following recommendations are directed toward governments and other funders seeking to enable this emerging process.

### ***Recommendation 1:***

Governments and other funders should support the time-tested elements described by adherents of comprehensive community initiatives:

- adopt a broad approach that identifies the relationships among related factors
- encourage multisectoral collaboration and leadership to provide a robust framework for change
- build on local assets and strengths
- enable change efforts by embedding them in an ongoing process of learning, assessment and adjustment.

### ***Recommendation 2:***

Governments and other funders should enable communities or should themselves seek to build personal relationships with community members and commit to deepening these relationships over time.

### ***Recommendation 3:***

Governments and other funders often require that plans be fully developed prior to funding a community process. The problem with this approach is that the formulation of the plan is a crucial component of the work and merits its own funding and support. Planning is itself a valid activity that typically evolves through several stages.

### ***Recommendation 4:***

Establishing and updating community development plans require dedicated funding and staff time. Governments and other funders should create mechanisms that both support this work and have the capacity to respond to community initiatives that arise from planning efforts.

### ***Recommendation 5:***

Governments and other funders should adopt a longer change horizon. Time and experience have shown that longer timelines are necessary to ensure a robust development framework and process.

A minimum four- to five-year lifespan is now considered realistic for the work to move into a stage where deep and durable improvements can be achieved. Some communities have been involved in their respective local development efforts for more than 10 years. Community-led development needs long-term funding to ensure that plans are continually updated, refreshed and evaluated.

***Recommendation 6:***

Governments should establish cross-departmental relationships that are able to plan together, harmonize reporting requirements and redesign funding envelopes.

Cross-departmental working groups can be used to build relationships and understanding, and identify the policies and programs that help and hinder change efforts. For example, such groups could be tasked with crafting a common evaluation framework that would be acceptable to multiple departments.

***Recommendation 7:***

Community-led and top-down processes are not easily reconciled. Top-down programming can actually impede community-led development. Long histories of government-led initiatives have made communities wary of involvement. Governments and other funders must acknowledge that local buy-in and control are essential if planning processes are to be successful.

***Recommendation 8:***

Initially, a third party might be necessary to begin teaching and mentoring community-led practices. Governments and other funders should support this capacity building and encourage Aboriginal communities that become experienced in the work to share their successful practices with other communities in order to expedite the adoption of this development approach.

Governments and other funders should explore new ways of disseminating information and raising awareness about community-led development. Several wise practices, such as encouraging inter-community learning/mentoring, ‘boot camp’ for new Chiefs and Councils, and websites that combine resources and opportunities for interaction (e.g., [www.fnbc.info](http://www.fnbc.info)) offer new ways to speed up knowledge acquisition.

***Recommendation 9:***

Governments and other funders should employ developmental evaluation as a way of determining whether progress is being made, while recognizing the long-term nature of the development process and the need, at times, to ‘hold steady.’

***Recommendation 10:***

Opportunities to advance local planning processes that can be linked to community involvement in resource development have tremendous potential to enable community-led development.

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