

Innovation in Working Together

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The power of community...the promise of community engagement

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Our time together Today:

- Introductions
- The story of the Ottawa Community Loan Fund
- The power of community
- The promise of community engagement
- Partnerships
- The Multi factor

The case for civic participation and community engagement

There is compelling evidence that there is a link between high levels of civic participation/engagement in various areas of community life and a community's overall quality of life.

Civic participation includes:

- Community and religious organizations
- Voting and political office
- Work related associations
- Social and recreational networks
- Level of volunteerism



Community life

Research shows that communities with high levels of community engagement are substantially better off in a number of key areas:

- Educational achievement and childhood development
- Safe and productive neighborhoods
- Economic prosperity
- Physical and mental health



Community survival

There is also a strong link between higher levels of community engagement and the ability of the community to respond to, manage and survive "shocks", such as floods, sudden economic downturns and health crises.



The Community Engagement Continuum



Tamarack's key interest is in leadership style engagement

Replenishing social capital

Community-led initiatives replenish the pools of much needed social capital. Some of these include:

- Community policing/Restorative justice
- Local poverty and homelessness reduction
- Community-based environmental restoration
- Community health and health promotion
- Community based foundations and philanthropy
- Municipal based visioning/strategies (e.g. Toronto Summit, Our Common Future)
- Community education
- Faith-based initiatives

Common features of community-led initiatives

Preliminary research by Tamarack suggests that these initiatives appear to share a number of common characteristics. They:

- Are initiated and led by local residents and organizations;
- Focus on complex issues;
- Involve a broad range of peoples and different sectors;
- Emphasize collaboration and social inclusion;
- Create vision, movement and change;
- Strike a balance between process and action;
- Are results oriented.

Increasing social bonds

These leadership-type community engagement approaches appear to be effective in addressing local issues AND increasing the bonds and trust between local residents and organizations that are so critical in developing social capital.



Benefits of community engagement

The overall benefits of community engagement can include:

- creating higher quality solutions;
- better conflict management and resolutions;
- strengthening a sense of community; and,
- creating communities that take a greater responsibility for what is happening in their area.

(Queensland Government, Department of Emergency Services (2002) The New South Wales Department of Planning (2003) and the Kirklees Metropolitan Council (2002))


Benefits of community engagement

Community engagement benefits organizations by:

- informing policy-making at the local level;
- improving the targeting and effectiveness of services;
- helping to measure how agencies and partnerships are performing;
- helping to build community ownership.

Community engagement benefits communities by:

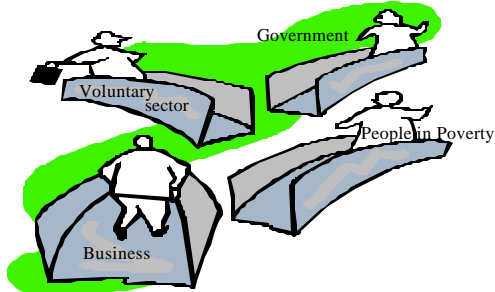
- involving those who might not be normally included;
- building community spirit and cooperation; and,
- empowering individuals.



Tamarack is building such an approach through Vibrant Communities, a community-driven effort to reduce poverty in Canada by creating partnerships that make use of our most valuable assets – people, organizations, businesses and governments.

Vibrant Communities links up to 15 communities from British Columbia to Newfoundland in a collective effort to test the most effective ways to reduce poverty at the grassroots level.

Engaging Partners



A Challenge: The power of multi-sector synergies

We have learned that when the Business, Government, Voluntary and people in poverty sectors are working at the issue of poverty at the same time they focus their efforts on results -- rather than blaming each other.

Each sector becomes an inspiration to the other and cross sector co-operation stimulates new ideas and ways of helping each other. One sector has the ability to help the other.

We feel so strongly about this that we would recommend any future projects funded should always have this blend of sectors as central to "the new way of doing business".

Engaging the Multi Factor Intersectoral collaboration

- Everyone is the solution and the problem
- Together we can do more
- We do not have answers - only a commitment to learn, change and grow.
- We take on issues that no one sector can take on alone. (Poverty, environmental restoration etc.)
- Together we create increased Credibility, Capacity and Capital for the work.
- The synergy is magic !!

Business – Government – Voluntary Sector – Grass roots people

A challenge: Strengthening civic society

We now believe that it is possible for a few people, who make a conscious decision, to build a civic response to a social issue.

A community can make a deliberate choice to reduce poverty! However it must also be open to differences of opinion and conflict in the struggle to find common ground. In addition, it must be willing to engage a lot of leadership and find ways for that leadership to collaborate within a common vision.

It does not require a government resolution or a formal mandate, it requires people who have the ability to bring people together in a common goal. We have called this ALL or Action-Leadership and Learning.

We have shown that, at the end, multi-sectoral relationships all mean people working in an organized, collective fashion within an idea.

The Process of Engagement (ALL)

We have used an action learning approach to building organizational capacity. The work is incremental.

People – planning-partner-projects-performance

- **Action** – A bias for doing - Develop projects NOW which would effect real change in their sector.
- **Leadership** –We ask people to take leadership by establishing a vision for how their sector could reduce poverty and then to partner with the others sectors around their vision. And, to make a commitment to 'do something' to create opportunities for low income families;
- **Learning & Change** - determine what worked/what did not, and make fundamental changes to policies, practices and mandate.

A Thought

At first people refuse to believe that strange new things can be done, then they begin to hope it can be done, then they see it can be done -- then it is done and all the world wonders why it was not done centuries ago.



- The Secret Garden, Frances Hodgson Burnett, 1911



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A Challenge: Building your vision

Getting to the future first is not just about outrunning competitors bent on reaching the same prize. It is about having one's own view of what the prize is. There can be as many prizes as runners; imagination is the only limiting factor.

Renoir, Picasso, Calder, Serah and Chagall were all enormously successful artists, but each had an original and distinctive style. In no way did the success of one preordain the failure of another. Yet, each artist spawned a host of imitators.

In community building, as in art, what distinguishes leadership is the ability to uniquely imagine what could be.

- [Competing for the Future](#), Hamel and Prahalad (adapted)

Grassroots motivation and commitment

The reasons for the link between healthy and vibrant communities and the level of community engagement are not clear. However, it appears that local organizations and residents:

- have a high motivation and long term commitment to addressing local issues
- are in a better position to mobilize untapped local resources
- demonstrate a greater willingness and capacity to experiment with innovative responses tailored to the local situation.

For example, a US study of poverty reduction efforts, found that initiatives led by local residents outperformed those with very little community involvement by as much as 40% (Kelly 1977).

The decline in community engagement and its consequences

Canadian communities continue to be some of the most vibrant in the world, but researchers have identified some worrisome trends in community engagement in past decades.

The number of people involved in the following "participative and leadership" forms of engagement has dropped significantly:

- holding public office
- active involvement in community associations and religious bodies
- participation in work related organizations, like unions and professional associations
- informal social recreational networks
- volunteering generally.

Trends affecting level of community involvement

The root causes of the decline in community involvement aren't clear, but the following inter-related trends appear to play an important role:

- **Higher income expectations**, less job security and declining real wages prompt families to spend more time at work and less time in community issues;
- **Increased suburban sprawl** results in fewer easy-to-access opportunities for informal interactions and reduces the amount of time for non-work activities;
- Substantial amounts of time devoted to watching television with **reduced time for community involvement**;
- **Profound shifts in values** from older generations to younger generations - less embedded in community life and more individualistic.

What's the solution?

It is clear that increasing social capital and community engagement is not a panacea for any of the complex, often controversial, issues Canadians are facing.

Many of the root causes of social, economic and environmental challenges lie well outside of community control.

At the same time, communities need all the skills, resources, knowledge, enthusiasm and patience of engaged citizens if they hope to make any headway in maintaining and strengthening the quality of life for all residents in their communities.

Measures that lead to greater community engagement

We can address the decline of social capital and promote the structures and mechanisms that support formal and informal networks by:

- Investing in civic education and community service programs
- Promoting family and community friendly work practices with employers
- Using urban planning that reduces suburban sprawl and increases social connections
- Increasing and improving investment practices that strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of community organizations and other formal networks and associations
- Encouraging the use of more collaborative policies and practices by all levels of government.

Comprehensive Community Initiatives and Community Building

Comprehensive Community Initiatives (CCIs) are neighborhood-based or community wide efforts that seek improved outcomes for individuals and families as well as improvements in neighborhood conditions by working comprehensively across social, economic and physical sectors. Additionally, CCIs operate on the principle that community building -- that is, strengthening institutional capacity at the neighborhood level, enhancing social capital and personal networks, and developing leadership -- is a necessary aspect of the process of transforming distressed neighborhoods.

The principle of community building is explicitly stated in the charge of most initiatives and implicit in both the mission and approach of all CCIs. A community building process aims to build capacity in neighbourhood institutions, strengthen ties among residents, and assist residents to work individually and collectively toward neighbourhood change. Community building encompasses a number of dimensions, including: community participation; capacity building; neighbourhood governance; collaboration; social capital development; an asset orientation; strengthening civic practices; and addressing deep-rooted issues of race and racism. (Aspen Inst.)
