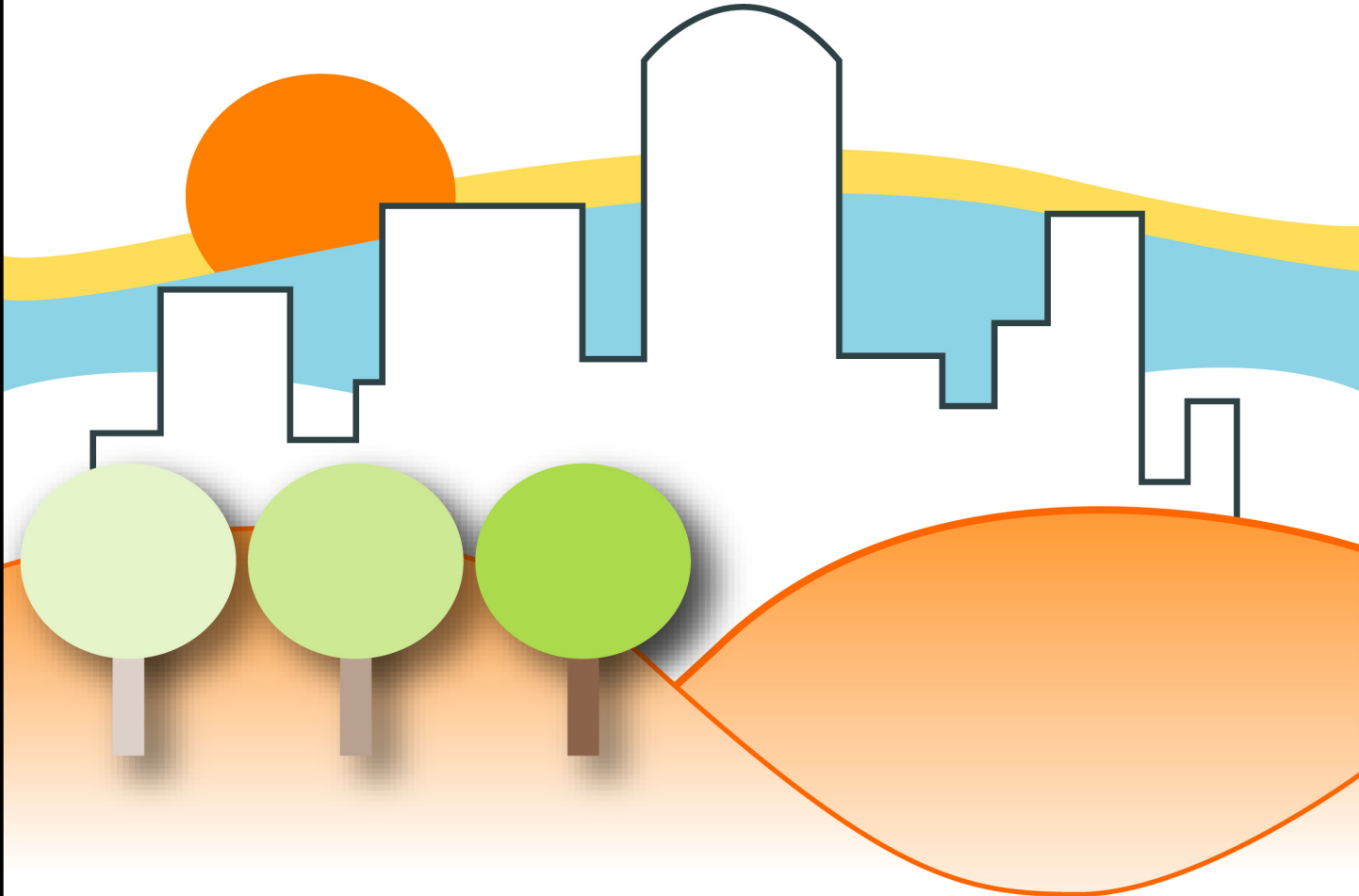


Strengthening Relationships with Local Government



**Action for
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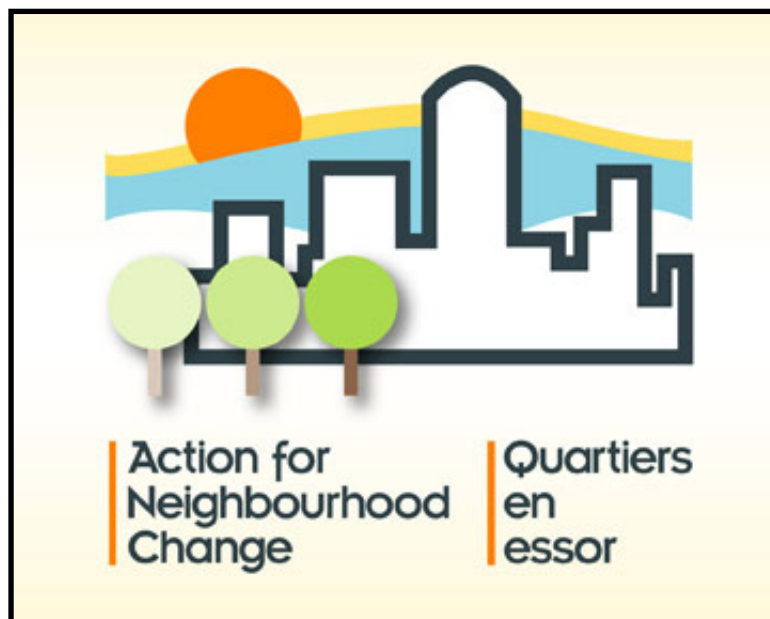
About Action for Neighbourhood Change

Action for Neighbourhood Change is a unique learning initiative that explores and assesses approaches to locally-driven neighbourhood revitalization that can enhance the capacity of individuals and families to build and sustain strong, healthy communities.

Working with local residents, not-for-profit agencies and public and private sector partners, Action for Neighbourhood Change combines local resources in new ways to develop creative, locally-based solutions for sustainable community development and neighbourhood revitalization.

Action for Neighbourhood Change is active in Surrey, Regina, Thunder Bay, Toronto and Halifax.

For more information, please visit www.anccommunity.ca



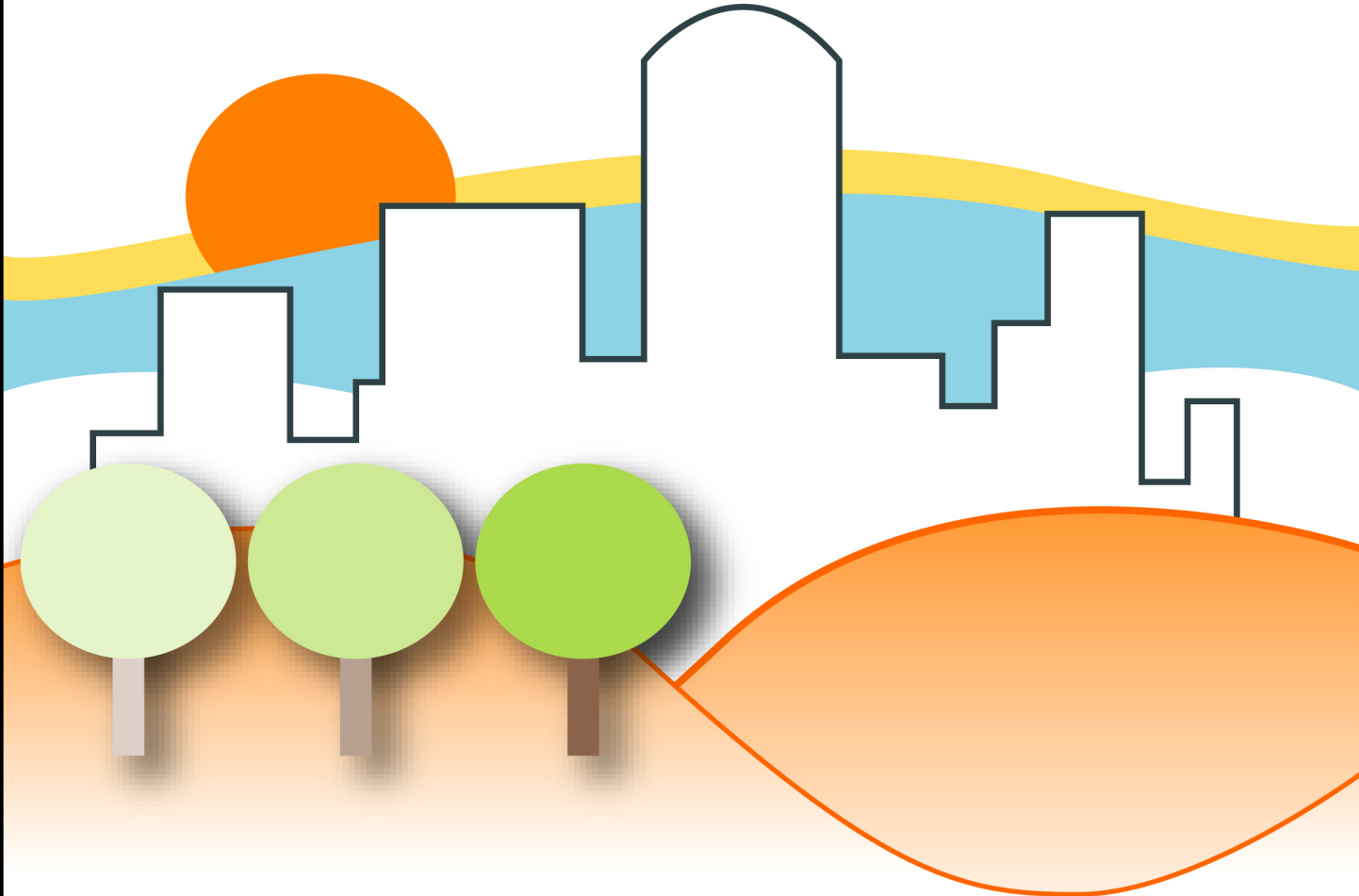
This is one of a series of tools Tamarack is developing to aid communities during the key stages in the development of their ANC project.

Tools are based on Tamarack's experience and will be further shaped by the results of the ANC project and the experience of local organizations. The tools will be modified as communities use them to ensure they remain relevant to the local experience.

Please note that this tool can be downloaded free of charge. Hard copies of the tool are available for \$10 to cover the cost of reproduction and mailing. To order a hard copy of this tool, please email tamarack@tamarackcommunity.ca.



Strengthening Relationships with Local Government



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About this Tool

This document is one of a series of tools that Tamarack has developed to aid communities during key stages in the development of their Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC) project.

This tool has been developed in response to the realization that community-based projects, such as ANC, eventually find themselves in a relationship with their municipal government. The reason for this is simple. Municipal government is the provider of services that directly impact people's day-to-day lives and it is the level of government that is easiest to access by local residents. Residents know their mayor and councillors, often on a personal basis, and they expect their civic leaders to have intimate knowledge of the community, its neighbourhoods and the people who live there. Whenever something is happening at a community level, it's inevitable that the Mayor and councillors will have a stake in its outcome.

The relationship, however, between municipal government and resident-led projects can be complex. There are many ways the relationship can go off the rails, and something that starts out with good intentions can become a source of tension and unproductive exchange. On the other hand, there are countless ways that local government and resident-led, community-based projects can work collaboratively to improve the quality of life for everyone and ensure continued economic, environmental and social sustainability.

This tool looks at the many different interactions between players that, collectively, determine the nature of the overall relationship between a resident-led, community-based initiative and local government. It also makes practical suggestions for ways to improve those interactions and to strengthen relationships with local government.

The primary audience for this tool is the staff and volunteer residents who are working together to revitalize their neighbourhoods through the Action for Neighbourhood Change initiative. Hopefully, this tool will also be a helpful resource to mayors, regional chairs, municipal councillors and staff who share a vision for neighbourhood vitality.

For further background information on community engagement and its relationship to social policy, visit <http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca> and <http://www.caledonist.org>.



A Personal Note

Before joining Tamarack, I worked for almost 20 years in various roles within municipal government, always with a focus on engaging the community and integrating human services. During that time, I had the opportunity to work with elected officials, senior civil servants, directors of community agencies, school boards, hospitals and police departments, as well as with frontline and middle management staff. I also came to know and respect many volunteers and residents who work to make their communities better for all. In that time, I learned a great deal from my colleagues and friends who supported the community's agenda and, perhaps, even more from the people who struggled to reconcile the community's agenda with their own.

When I reflect on my years of experience and learnings about comprehensive multisectoral initiatives – their challenges and their opportunities – I believe it is even more important than ever to strengthen the relationship between community-based initiatives and local government.

When I began to explore this relationship with Joanne Linzey, Paul Born, Pat Steenberg, the ANC project staff and steering committee, I was encouraged to document my experience and knowledge of municipal government in the form of a tool. To prime my thinking, I asked five people about their experience with local government and community-based initiatives and their perspectives on how the relationships between each could be strengthened.

I am very grateful to the following people for generously sharing their insights with me in April 2006:

- Councillor Clive Doucet – Ward 17, City of Ottawa
- Councillor Colleen Jordan – Regional Councillor, Town of Ajax, Durham Region, and former Executive Director of Community Development Council of Durham
- Councillor Peter Papp – Municipal Councillor, Town of Pelham and Opportunities Niagara Project Manager
- Sean Meagher – Public Interest Strategy and Communication Inc. and Project Manager for Scarborough ANC
- Joe-Anne Priel – General Manager, Community Services Department, City of Hamilton

The first version of this tool was released at the Communities Collaborating Institute, September 18-22, 2006. It was also presented at the ANC National Face-to-Face meeting in Halifax, October 25-27, 2006. Many thanks to all those who provided comments and suggestions – especially those who reminded me to put residents first!



Introduction

It is often said that local government is the level of government closest to the people. This may have been true in the past because local government is the level that takes care of garbage pick-up, fixing pot-holes and snow removal. While local government still has those responsibilities, today's local governments are much more complex, with some jurisdictions in Canada having both upper and lower tier municipal governments. Municipalities have emerged as a significant level of government that are now deserving of their own seat at important public policy and financial allocation tables, such as infrastructure funding and immigration. The shift in perception and reality that local government has a significant role to play in determining quality of life at the community level can be seen in the downloading of services from provincial jurisdiction to municipal governments and the recognition that the federal government needs an urban agenda.

Canada is experiencing rapid growth in its major urban centres. Indeed, many cities have begun to exceed provincial populations.¹ In addition, unlike previous generations, many immigrants now settle in or around urban centres. The increasing population in cities and in the sprawling suburban and rural areas surrounding metropolitan cities has led to new relationships between local governments and their residents. Residents expect local government to provide not only the traditional "hard" services, but are also increasingly looking to their local government to ensure that the softer or human services side of quality of life is protected and enhanced.

In *The Social Role of Local Government*, Sherri Torjman and Eric Leviten-Reid of the Caledon Institute of Social Policy maintain the following:

Local governments are in a position to promote awareness of the pressing social needs in the community and of the importance of social investment. They can foster a sense of responsibility for social well-being among all sectors including business, community groups and other levels of government. They can help build relationships among the diverse organizations and sectors that comprise the community. They can integrate more effectively the services that they themselves provide. Equally importantly, they can undertake, in collaboration with key partners, several focused interventions or flagship initiatives in order to tackle major issues such as poverty reduction.

More specifically, there are several roles that local governments can play in creating vibrant communities. These include exemplary employer, service provider, investor, leader and champion, convener and partner.²

Through Action for Neighbourhood Change, Vibrant Communities, and in collaborations in communities all across Canada, people are learning that complex local and social issues do not lend themselves to quick-fix solutions. To help tackle the social problems our communities face, we must think and act in broader, more comprehensive ways. This approach, known as a

¹ The populations of Toronto (2,500,000) and Montreal (1,800,000) are greater than Saskatchewan (994,100) and Nova Scotia (937,900). The population of Ottawa (859,000) is greater than New Brunswick (752,000). The population of Vancouver (545,600) is greater than Newfoundland and Labrador (516,000), PEI (138,000), Nunavut (27,500), the Yukon (31,000) and Northwest Territories (43,000) combined.

² Torjman, S and E. Leviten-Reid (2003). *The Social Role of Local Government*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, p. 10.

comprehensive community initiative (CCI), is grounded in local efforts that work to improve community conditions, and the lives of individuals and families in those communities by working across social and economic sectors.

The Aspen Institute in the United States has defined CCIs as “neighborhood-based 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.”³ Tamarack has expanded the Aspen Institute’s definition by including a practice of collaboration so that CCIs can also be defined as “an approach that seeks transformation in communities across a number of areas of community life with a commitment to building local institutions and community engagement.”⁴

This tool makes references to the generic term “CCI”, which refers to the site staff, community and resident advisory committees, and resident volunteers.

³ For more information, see Anne C. Kubisch, *Comprehensive Community Initiatives: Lessons in Neighborhood Transformation* at <http://www.nhi.org/online/issues/85/compcominit.html>.

⁴ For more information, see “Engaging & Animating Your Community” at http://tamarackcommunity.ca/downloads/clife/mcabaj/mc_creativecity.pdf.

The Diamond Relationship

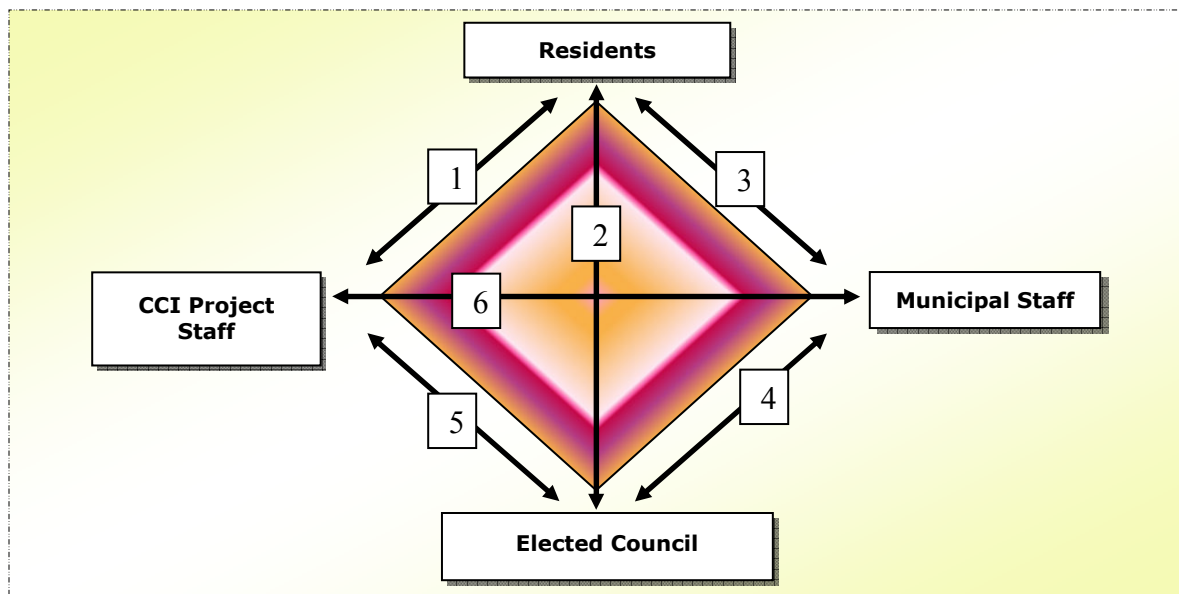
As in most relationships, the one between a municipality and a CCI is complex. The harmony of any relationship, whether personal or professional, will depend upon effective communication, and a willingness to listen, understand and respect other points of view. The same is true of the relationship between a CCI and local government.

However, unlike most relationships, the one between a CCI and local government is comprised of many people and many different perspectives. While this diversity provides strength in collaborative work, it can also be a weight that slows and interferes with progress towards a shared vision. To understand how to build strong relationships, it is necessary to first understand all the factors that are involved in those relationships. To do that, it helps to separate the stakeholders from each other and to take a closer look at the dynamics between them.

When we look at the relationship between a CCI and local government, we find there are actually four different stakeholders, each having a distinct role to play. They also have different motivational drivers, and a variety resources and tools available. At the same time, each is constrained by a diverse set of factors. In essence, rather than a single relationship between a CCI and local government, we find there are six distinct relationships. These multiple stakeholders and relationships reflect various dynamics. Because of this multi-dimensional aspect, the relationship between the stakeholders can be thought of as the facets of a diamond.

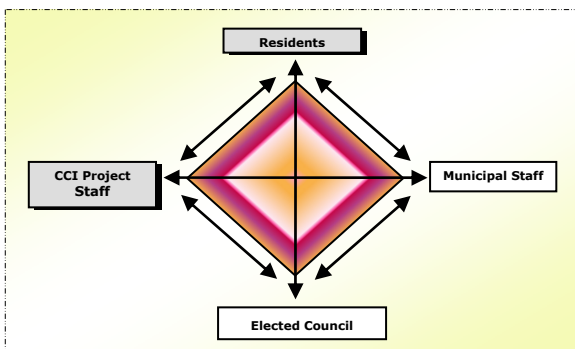
In the next section, we will take a closer look at each of those six relationships and how the dynamics play out between them. In doing this, we will be able to see that, because of the characteristic dynamics of each relationship, strengthening the linkage between a CCI and local government requires strategic action.

Even though there are four stakeholders and six relationships that make up the “diamond,” the reason for building a strong relationship with local government is to create neighbourhoods and communities in which residents have the means to determine their own destiny, as well as to have the amenities, services and programs that provide access to opportunities in order for them to enjoy a high quality of life for themselves and their families.



1. Residents and CCI Project Staff

Residents will look to CCI project staff to provide leadership and to implement action plans to achieve their desired goals. CCI project staff may find that they spend the majority of their time building and sustaining this relationship.



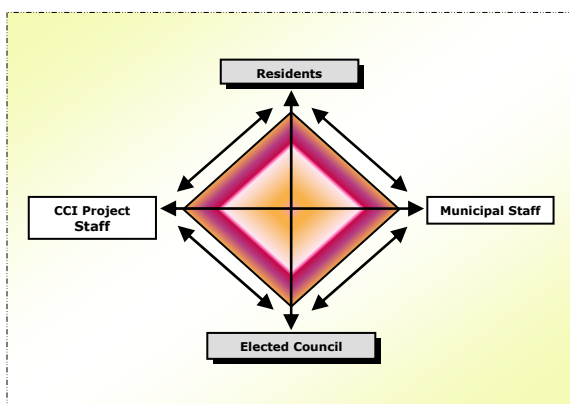
Models of servant leadership can be useful in understanding the dynamics of this relationship. Servant leadership emphasizes the leader's role as the steward of resources and as an enabler of collaborative efforts through raising awareness, building trust and creating conditions for success. Project staff should strive to become servant leaders by gaining and building the trust of residents. Their role is to build community understanding and will before supporting action plans to realize the shared vision.

Residents will have a range of expectations for CCI project staff and, as servant leaders, project staff will try to find ways to fulfill those expectations. As residents find their voice, project staff may play the role of convenor and facilitator. CCI project staff will often help to secure financial resources and manage a process of community assessment. As the relationship matures, it is more likely that residents will direct the CCI project staff, set the priorities and determine the allocation of resources.

Maintaining a positive and trusting relationship between residents and CCI project staff is critical but, as in all relationships, things change over time. Power struggles between resident and staff leadership can occur if there is frequent staff turnover, personality clashes or competing priorities. The onus is largely on CCI project staff to maintain a harmonious relationship with residents. Therefore, an investment in developing and sustaining the relationship between project staff and residents is very important.

2. Residents and Elected Council

As one elected official once said about the connection between residents and council, "This is a very sensitive relationship." In an ideal world, the Mayor and council members are elected to represent the interests of all residents, but the reality of politics is much more complex.



Elected representatives must juggle competing priorities, conflicting resident and stakeholder demands, and limited fiscal resources. Mayors and councillors have demands on their time that far exceed the number of hours in a day. Politicians are driven to enter local politics for a variety of reasons but, for most, the desire to provide civic leadership is a key motivator. Unfortunately, the demands of governing can be overwhelming and many elected representatives find that they do not have the time or resources to devote to every cause they support.

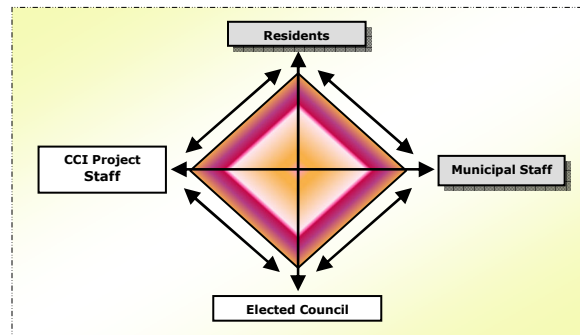
Residents who have found a champion in their mayor or council members will find it easier to attain their goals. But, often the expectations of residents are not met by elected representatives who, they believe, should be more supportive of the community's priorities. When this happens, building a bridge between the two perspectives can be difficult.

Municipal elections are a time when residents have the greatest opportunity to influence their councillors to represent their interests. Once in office, the Mayor or Councillor is often less responsive to the immediate demands of their constituents, but since elections are always looming in the distance, elected representatives and residents continue to have a mutually dependent relationship.

3. Residents and Municipal Staff

Because municipal staff is primarily accountable to the elected council, the relationship between residents and municipal staff can be a difficult one, especially if a municipal staff person finds him or herself in the middle of a conflict between council's interests and the interests of the community.

In programs that are delivered directly to residents, such as social assistance, recreational programs and social housing, staff often have a good relationship with individual residents or representative resident groups. The relationship can become strained if the expectations of program users or advocates exceed the authority of municipal staff or the boundaries of the approved program.



In traditional land-use planning or in the delivery of hard infrastructure services, the relationship between municipal staff and residents is often limited to the dissemination of information and one-off consultation. This can be frustrating to residents who may view municipal staff as obstructionist and protective of council's pre-determined agenda.

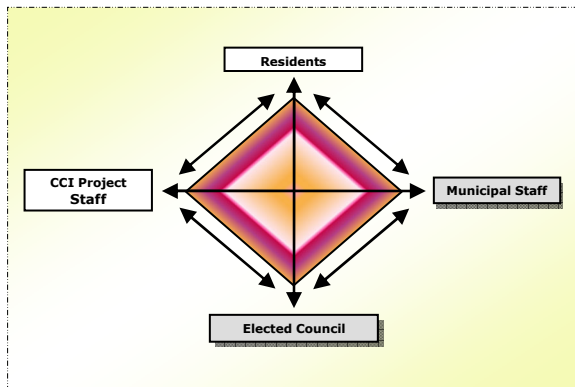
When this relationship falters, residents may complain that they are the people who pay the salaries of staff. As a rule, it takes a very talented civil servant to bridge a gap between council and residents if the two stakeholders have different interests. Although there are exceptions to the rule, most bureaucrats know that while they are likely there for the long run, elected officials are the ones to come and go. Bureaucrats can afford to wait until the tide turns – and they often do.

4. Municipal Staff and Elected Council

The defining characteristic of the relationship between municipal staff, the Mayor or Regional Chair, and council is the clear accountability between municipal staff and the elected representatives of a municipality — the Mayor or Regional Chair and municipal councillors.

Municipal staff is accountable through a chain of command to the elected representatives of council. They look to council for strategic direction and approval for policy and programmatic expenditures. Municipal staff, through the Chief Administrative Officer or City Manager, provides options and recommendations for council's consideration.

The Mayor or Regional Chair and members of council, in turn, depend on the loyalty, leadership and professional expertise of municipal staff to guide them in setting agendas, making policies and allocating budgets.



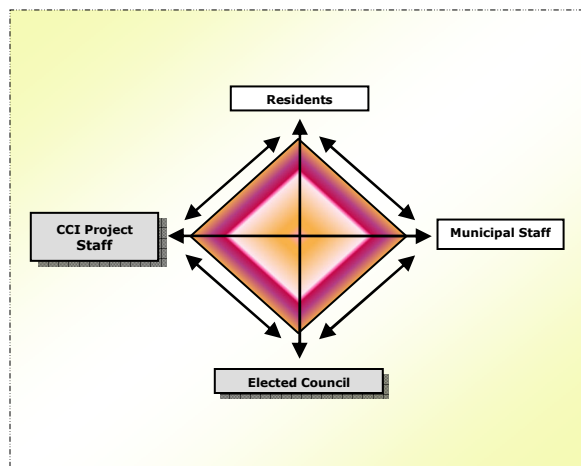
For example, if a mayor or council is fiscally conservative, they may direct staff to prepare budgets that show very concrete, measurable outcomes. In this situation, municipal staff may find it difficult to rationalize programs that support community capacity building because of its long-term and difficult-to-measure outcomes. If, on the other hand, a mayor or council is supportive of community-based initiatives, municipal staff will have greater flexibility to design and deliver creative solutions to ensure community well-being.

A progressive bureaucrat will understand the relationship between council's interests and those of the community, and will seek ways to broker mutual benefit.

5. CCI Project Staff and Elected Council

The relationship between CCI project staff, and the Mayor and council can vary greatly depending on the personalities and priorities of the elected politicians.

If a mayor, regional chair or councillor can easily identify with community issues, he or she will probably be a strong supporter of the goals of a CCI, be more inclined to give residents and the CCI an opportunity to put their case before council, and will also be more likely to direct staff to provide support. If this is the case, then CCI project staff can be an *enabler* and the Mayor or a councillor can be a *champion*. CCI project staff can be a valuable ally to the Mayor and council, helping them to win the confidence of residents and implement the community's agenda. CCI project staff and members of council become partners in creating a healthy community for everyone.

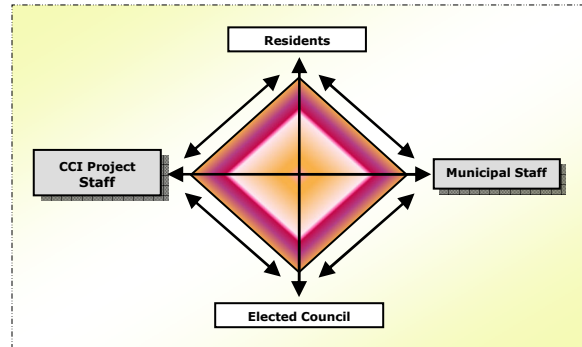


If, on the other hand, the CCI's vision and goals do not agree with the priorities of council, the CCI may be seen as an advocate or lobbyist and the relationship may be fraught with problems. The elected representatives may see the CCI as usurping their civic leadership and may react negatively to the perception that their authority is being challenged. Politicians tend to attract media attention and many have become very adept at using the media to their political advantage. When a troubled relationship between a CCI and council receives media coverage, returning to a productive relationship can become very difficult and require an enormous amount of energy.

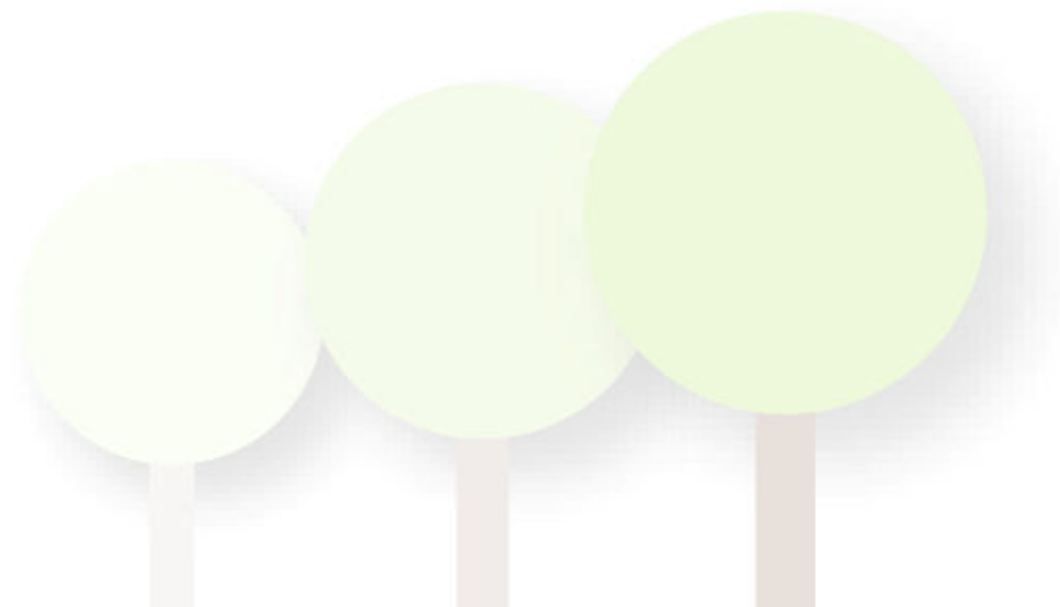
6. CCI Project Staff and Municipal Staff

For both municipal and CCI project staff, investing in a strong relationship between staff members is one of the best ways to advance the community agenda.

Civil servants enter public service for a variety of reasons but for many, it is the desire to make a difference and contribute to a higher quality of life for all. A motivated bureaucrat will probably be receptive to community-driven initiatives, especially if a CCI has solid leadership and a realistic action plan. In turn, CCI project staff who identify and work with municipal staff leaders will find a wealth of expertise, capacity and wisdom to help realize the vision of CCI partners.



Often, the ways in which municipal and CCI project staff can help each other is not immediately apparent. Time spent nurturing this relationship can pay off in many ways. In developing a better understanding of each other's driving and restraining forces, staff can become conduits of information and, ultimately, create capacity to build bridges between others.



A Model of Community Engagement

The previous section identified the six relationships that must be developed, maintained and nurtured to build an efficient, effective and harmonious relationship between local government and a CCI. These relationships can be thought of as facets of a diamond and, just as diamonds are graded on their clarity, the quality of the six relationships also depends on the clarity of vision and purpose of the community's initiative.

In nearly every community initiative, there is a process of engagement that has five phases. The dividing line between each phase is often blurred and unclear, but research and experience have shown the most successful initiative proceeds through each of these five phases.⁵

The five phases are:

- 1) A Vision Emerges
- 2) Building Community Will
- 3) Creating Conditions for Success
- 4) Action, Leadership, Learning and Change
- 5) Renewal and/or Wind-down

In the next section, ideas for strengthening the relationships between a CCI and local government are organized by the five phases of community engagement. As already noted, the line between each phase is not always clear. While these ideas have been organized by the phase in the engagement process for which they will be most helpful, they are also ideas that could be used at any stage in the relationship. These phases are not necessarily linear. Instead, they are more like a constantly repetitive cycle.

⁵ For further reference, see "Convening a Comprehensive, Multisectoral Effort to Reduce Poverty: A Primer," which can be downloaded from <http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g3s211.html>.

Strengthening Relationships

A Vision Emerges

This phase of engagement is about getting the community and the partners ready to work together by exploring and defining the issue. A vision emerges through dialogue in a variety of forums, such as focus groups, town hall meetings and one-on-one interviews.

It can be difficult to get the local government “on board” once the initiative has progressed. Consequently, getting the involvement of local government at this stage of the initiative will save a lot of time and effort. Keep in mind that the Mayor or Regional Chair and council may keep their distance until they really understand what the CCI is doing. Here are some ideas to consider for bringing the Mayor or Regional Chair to the table early in the process.

Understanding the Dichotomy Between Short-term and Long-term Solutions

By definition, CCIs are about finding solutions that are beyond the “quick fix.” But, working comprehensively across social, economic and physical sectors to improve community conditions and individuals’ lives takes time – a lot more time than any one government’s single term in office.

Maintaining a harmonious relationship between elected members of council and a CCI requires accepting, with tolerance, that there will be different views about when results should become evident. It is helpful if the work undertaken by a CCI is “chunked,” phasing some projects for completion in the short term.

It is also important to report overall results to local government in a format that recognizes both short and long-term timeframes. This serves to raise awareness that *change* can happen in the short term, but that meaningful and influential *solutions* will probably occur only over the longer term.

Distinguishing Between Issue-based and Place-based Approaches

Most CCIs focus on place-based rather than issue-based approaches. The horizontality that is implied in place-based approaches, whether at the neighbourhood or community level, requires participants to come together with a willingness to work across sectors, departments and specialties to share information and resources to solve problems.

Local government, on the other hand, tends to focus on issues. As a result of this focus, the services they provide are organized into discrete categories, such as road maintenance, waste management, public health, social services, or recreation and parks. Recognizing that municipal government is biased toward issue-based approaches and that it often does not work well in horizontal organizational models, a CCI must stress its place-based approach to solving problems in all presentations and communications with local government.

Although municipal councils tend to be more focused on issue-based solutions, there is a paradox that occurs when an individual councillor seeks support from other council members for an issue specific to the residents of his or her ward. By political convention and with expectations that the

favour will be returned, their colleagues on council will usually be supportive of a resolution that has such a well-defined constituency. Similarly, if a mayor was elected based, in part, on lending support to a particular constituency, then he or she can usually drive council's agenda to deliver on promises made.

Comprehensive initiatives that work across social and economic sectors usually do not have a natural constituency nor do they address a single issue. While maintaining a place-based approach is important for CCIs, it can be helpful to cross-reference the CCI's goals in terms of the issues addressed and constituencies touched. Taking the time and developing resources to demonstrate to council the differences in approaches will help minimize miscommunication and encourage greater understanding.

Raising Awareness

Municipal politicians have great demands on their time and often have very little staff resources to help them oversee analysis and administration. CCIs can help by providing backgrounders, executive summaries and one-on-one briefing sessions. Not only will this help build a good working relationship between a CCI and local government, but it will also increase the likelihood that a busy mayor or councillor will be inspired to take action.

Getting the Mayor and councillors to emotionally experience an issue can help to focus their efforts on doing something about it. Providing the Mayor or councillors with a personal experience that allows them to connect with the CCI's work will help them remember the emotional impact when other issues are competing for their attention at committee or council meetings. Some successful examples include a series of physical tasks that approximate the kind of ordeals that seniors or disabled people face on a daily basis. In another example, members of council were invited to a role-playing exercise that required them to apply for social assistance, housing and support from the food bank.

Building Community Will

By the time the CCI is ready to build community will, it is actively engaging people in the vision and in the need to work collaboratively. Discussions will focus on the value of working together and, in time, will generate a shared vision of the work that needs to be done.

Local government, as the level of government closest to the people, has a lot to give at this stage. Here are some ideas to ensure their participation and encourage their leadership.

Building a Leadership Roundtable

The cross-sectoral approach of CCIs in finding long-term solutions is greatly enhanced when knowledgeable people from different backgrounds have an opportunity to see and monitor progress toward the community's goals. Leadership is needed to do this and the leadership role, often provided by a roundtable or steering committee, is an important element in bringing clarity to all partners, not just those interested in strengthening the relationships between local government and CCIs.

The leadership roundtable should set a positive tone and, by example, demonstrate to all stakeholders that multi-sector partners are coming together to share and build a common vision. Vibrant Communities, a comprehensive multisectoral initiative to reduce poverty in 15 communities across Canada, found leadership roundtables to be a critical factor in building the will of the community.

A leadership roundtable or similar convening body transforms the diamond relationship between a local government and CCIs into a multi-faceted diamond that includes business, senior government representatives, disenfranchised residents, other public institutions, as well as the voluntary and non-profit sectors – all working together to support the community's agenda.

Supporting Council's Budget Priorities

Council's budget is local government's most important policy tool. Preparing and presenting the budget for council's consideration and approval is primarily the responsibility of the Chief Administrative Officer or City Manager.

Budgets are not created in a vacuum – there is a process for establishing strategic direction and setting priorities. For some municipalities, the process is thorough and set within the framework of three or five-year plans. For other municipalities, the process is much less structured.

Research the municipality's corporate strategic or annual business plan, and the timelines and processes for preparation and approval. Showing how the CCI's objectives complement the priorities of the municipality's budget can help ensure that the necessary projects are funded. This can be done by preparing briefing notes and structuring presentations to council in a way that reflects their strategic priorities, uses the same terminology and shows how the CCI helps council achieve its desired outcomes.

Creating Conditions for Success

When a CCI has sufficiently built understanding and created community will, it must turn its attention to creating the conditions for success. In this stage, the partnerships will become formalized and a leadership structure will emerge. The work will focus on creating the community's plan and acquiring the resources to implement the plan.

Here are some ideas to ensure that the CCI and local government are sharing resources and knowledge as effectively and as often as possible.

Inviting the Mayor, Regional Chair or Councillor to be a Co-Chair

Leadership in a CCI is usually shared through a governance structure such as a leadership roundtable, or a steering or advisory committee. A great way to tangibly and visibly win council's support for a CCI is to appoint or invite an elected representative to co-chair one of these committees.

The time demands on a mayor or councillor makes them better suited to provide leadership in public relations matters, while the other co-chair leads business and organizational matters. Approaching shared leadership with this division of responsibilities engages the reluctant politician and provides an opportunity for the supportive politician to gain exposure and to champion the initiative without placing an undue burden on their time and resources.

Finding a Senior Staff Champion

Finding a senior staff champion and supporting this person to be strong within the administrative and management structure of the municipality should be a high priority for a CCI that wants to increase its relationship with local government.

A frontline staff person who works with a CCI is often given implicit approval by his or her manager to be a contributing member, but their assignments and job descriptions are often not adjusted to reflect the added workload. While frontline and middle management staff can make significant contributions to the community's initiative, the management of collaborative processes across departments within local government will also require staff support and championing by a senior manager.

Target a senior municipal manager who has sufficient tenure and influence to support community engagement and marshal cross-departmental staff teams to work with the CCI. It is also important that this individual be able to voice support for the CCI and influence senior management colleagues.

Ask the senior staff person for advice, ensure they have advanced notice and keep them aware of developments. If there is a specific task to be completed by the senior manager, prepare brief and concise background material and be very clear about what is needed from the municipality. This helps the senior manager delegate and assign the request to the appropriate manager and unit.

Arrange for one or two of the CCI leadership team members to meet regularly with the senior manager over breakfast or lunch. Acknowledge their support and demonstrate appreciation for their contribution in written documents and presentations.

Building a good relationship with a senior manager in the municipality can pay dividends to both the CCI and council, and can result in the contribution of invaluable wisdom and guidance from an experienced civil servant.

Acting as a Third-party Broker

Providing effective and accountable community leadership can be a significant dilemma for local government. The community often has an expectation that local government should be engaged and supportive of the community's agenda, but if a municipality assumes a forceful leadership role, it may be viewed with distrust.

A CCI can help solve this dilemma by acting as a third-party broker, opening doors for other players and providing opportunities that might not be possible if local government had the lead role. A CCI that positions itself as a third-party broker can be nimble and flexible while still encouraging horizontality in local government. A successful CCI can even become the convener of inter-departmental collaboration within local government.

In practical terms, a CCI could host community consultations on behalf of the local municipality or they might make specialized presentations to a municipal department, the Mayor or to council as a voice representing community interests. At the same time, a CCI can help residents organize their messages and expectations of local government by guiding in the development of asset and needs assessments, residents' councils and community plans.

Municipalities have resources, both financial and persuasive, that can be used to ensure that the conditions for success are in place. Municipal staff has access to research and policy analysis, both as a result of their work on behalf of council and in their professional training and commitments. They will have a good understanding of the community's demographics and assets, and should be encouraged to share their information resources with a CCI. Similarly, a CCI can use its relationships with neighbourhood leaders and residents to help to strengthen the municipality's engagement with the community and open the door to many more ways of meaningful resident dialogue.

The ability to act as a third-party broker can be very powerful, and this role can be maximized when local government works with the leadership of a CCI for mutual benefit.

Ensuring Adequate Funding for Accountability Requirements

The trend toward greater governmental accountability is a positive development that protects scarce tax dollars and ensures responsible public spending. Most municipalities that fund community initiatives through grants or fee-for-service programs have accountability and performance measurement processes in place.

While increased accountability is good for everyone, it should be appreciated that program evaluation, monitoring, data collection and analysis take work and money. There is a cost in staff and resources to conduct surveys, focus groups and research and in preparing reports for dissemination. A well-planned and managed CCI can help keep evaluation costs in check, but it is important that municipalities recognize that the accountability measures required of CCIs need to be adequately funded.

CCIs should plan for evaluation and outcome measures from the outset, and include them in their workplans and budgets. For a more detailed approach to evaluation and accountability frameworks see:

- *ANC: A Guide for Neighbourhood Planning*.
http://www.anccommunity.ca/Downloads/ANC_Tool2_02132006.pdf
- *Learning and Evaluation for Trail Builder Initiatives in Vibrant Communities*. February 2005. <http://tamarackcommunity.ca/downloads/vc/TBpackage.pdf>
- Sherri Torjman. *Are Outcomes the Best Outcomes?*, Caledon Institute for Social Policy. 1999: <http://caledoninst.org/Publications/PDF/outcomes.pdf>

Action, Leadership, Learning and Change

Once a CCI begins to work on the conditions for success described in the previous section, they set into motion a dynamic community process that results in a vibrant cycle of action, leadership, learning and change. Doing the work produces both intended and unintended outcomes, the culture shifts and people increasingly build ownership and commitment to the success of the initiative.

Here are some ideas to ensure this phase continues to build engagement with residents and local government.

Knowing How Local Government Governs

Some people see municipal government as a black box, where the political process is closed, the timing of decisions suspect, and access to decision-makers obscure.

In fact, access to the decision-making process of local government is much more open and transparent than it used to be. The municipal clerk's office is responsible for managing council business and is a good source to answer questions about committee structures, meeting schedules and budget matters. Inviting the clerk to speak at a learning session is a great way to educate residents and CCI staff on how local government works.

Most municipalities make their committee and council agendas and minutes available on their website. Knowing how to request and make an effective deputation takes some work but, when done well, it goes a long way toward raising awareness and getting the commitment of council. The first step is to file a request to make a deputation with the clerk's office. The next step is to do your homework by talking with councillors and municipal staff to gather advice on the best timing, and whether to make the deputation to a committee or directly to council. Your presentation should be well-prepared and rehearsed with informative background material that is invitingly packaged.

If there are upper and lower tiers of municipal government, CCI staff needs to know who does what and understand the nature of the relationships between regional government and area municipalities. A CCI should not be caught in the middle of a historical dispute between municipalities. It is much better to find strategies that recognize and support the role of each level of government. This can only be done if the staff and leadership of a CCI have a good understanding of the local dynamics at play.

Linking Social Investment to Economic Prosperity

A healthy, sustainable community is one in which its economic, social and environmental elements are strong and symbiotically balanced. CCIs build social capital by working comprehensively across social and economic sectors, transforming communities by strengthening local institutions and enhancing community engagement.

Most local governments readily understand the need to invest in hard infrastructure, but they tend to be less willing to invest in the social infrastructure of the community. This has been particularly true in recent years, as federal and provincial governments have cut funding to balance their budgets, forcing municipalities to function with less.

Economic prosperity depends on a community's capacity to attract business and a skilled, adaptable labour force, which, in turn, depends upon a community's capacity to create and sustain social capital. CCIs that can demonstrate the link between their efforts and the building of social capital can significantly affect economic prosperity.

This important case for support should be made as often as possible. It is simple and compelling but often gets lost in the complexity of comprehensive approaches that link social investment to economic prosperity.

Measuring Outcomes

The difficulty in measuring the outcomes of comprehensive, place-based approaches is well known. Even though it is often cited as necessary to make the case, quantitative research-based evidence is often not enough to persuade decision-makers. At the same time, anecdotes and stories that narrate a causal link between (usually a lack of) resources and impact are illustrative. Even those stories that are well told, such as Vibrant Communities and ANC, often are insufficient on their own.

Additional tools must be found to make a credible, causal link in both an understandable and evidence-based way, but also in an efficient and accepted way.

Malcolm Gladwell, in a fascinating article about the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General's decision to legislate a ban on pit bull dogs, looked at both statistical evidence and stories about pit bull attacks and concluded that policy-makers needed to have "a more exacting set of generalizations more exactly applied."⁶

Tamarack and the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, through their work with Vibrant Communities, the United Way of Canada–Centraide Canada and their partners in the ANC initiative, have developed many tools that specifically set out a more exacting set of generalizations to help link cause, effect and collaborative approaches in CCIs. More resources on how to describe and capture the impacts of comprehensive multisectoral approaches can be found at:

- Eric Leviten-Reid, *Asset-based Resident-Led Neighbourhood Development*, July 2006. Available at <http://www.caledoninst.org/Publications/PDF/599ENG.pdf>.
- Cheryl Gorman, *Government and Communities: Strengthening Neighbourhoods Together*, June 2006. Available at <http://www.caledoninst.org/Publications/PDF/593ENG.pdf>.
- Sean Meagher. *A Neighbourhood Vitality Index: An Approach to measuring Neighbourhood Well-Being*, ANC. (To be released shortly.)
- Mark Cabaj and Eric Leviten-Reid. *Understanding the Potential and Practice of Comprehensive Multisectoral Efforts to Reduce Poverty*. May 2006. Available at http://tamarackcommunity.ca/downloads/vc/TB_May292006_final.pdf.
- Mark Cabaj, Anne Makhoul, Eric Leviten-Reid. In *From the Field: Exploring the First Poverty Reduction Strategies Undertaken by Trail Builders in the Vibrant Communities Initiative*. May 2006.

⁶ Gladwell, Malcolm, "Troublemakers: What Pit Bulls Can Teach Us About Profiling." *New Yorker Magazine*. February 6, 2006. Available at: http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/articles/060206fa_fact.

- Duncan Maclennan. *Remaking Neighbourhood Renewal: Towards Creative Neighbourhood Renewal Policies for Britain*, ANC. February 2006. Available at <http://www.caledoninst.org/Publications/PDF/575ENG.pdf>.
- Steve Pomeroy, *Rethinking Neighbourhood Renewal: Review of the US Experience and Possible Lessons for Canada*, February 2006. Available at <http://www.caledoninst.org/Publications/PDF/574ENG.pdf>.
- Winton Pitcoff. *Comprehensive Community Initiatives: Redefining Community Development*, Annie E. Casey Foundation. Available at http://www.aecf.org/rci/cci_insert.pdf.
- Bruce Katz. *Neighbourhoods of Connection and Choice: The Evolution of American Neighbourhood Policy and What it Means for the United Kingdom*. 2004. Available at <http://www.jrt.org.uk>.

Renewal and Wind-down

At some point during the lifetime of a CCI, the volunteer leaders, staff, partners and even funders begin to wonder if they should continue with the effort, change course or wind down. Sometimes the question is a practical response to the end of the group's first community plan and, at other times, it is born out of the frustration of unrealized expectations or success that is threatening to over-burden the core infrastructure.

Here is an idea that every CCI should consider at this stage in order to maintain its good relationship with local government.

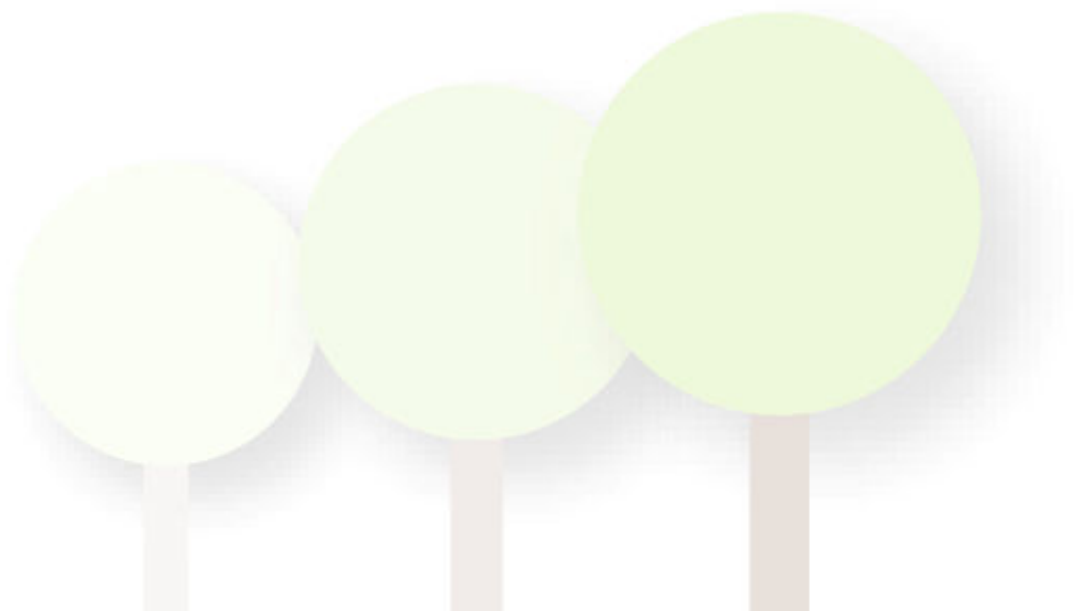
Managing Expectations

Many CCIs follow a pattern of starting with small, carefully selected action plans. As trust and credibility are built and the CCI begins to deliver results, expectations of what is possible grows exponentially.

The downside of becoming a successful CCI is a tendency of being seen as the panacea to solve all kinds of community needs. It is important that a CCI, especially as it matures, develops strategies for spinning off successful programs to other entities. A CCI that develops a continuous cycle of renewal will maintain a strong core and reduce the chances of being weighed down by the expectations created by its success.

Because, by definition, a CCI is grounded in the community's agenda, it will have a natural interface with programs and services provided by local government. The programs and initiatives that are started by the work of the CCI should also lead to systemic change so that the newly created capacity is sustained. Building neighbourhood vitality, for instance, should not be a one-off program for distressed neighbourhoods. Instead, building neighbourhood vitality should be the goal for all municipal departments, from community services, to waste management, to land-use planning.

A CCI, especially in the renewal and wind-down phases, should be assessing the capacity and appropriateness of continuing to support programs, as well as strategizing ways to attain continued support within the structure and mandate of local government. Continuous dialogue and building on the previously established relations with elected officials and staff will be critical.



Conclusion

Building and maintaining productive and positive relationships between local government and the community is both an art and a science. The art is expressed through the creativity of individuals who respond to the challenges raised by multiple and differing perspectives. The science is in the tools and techniques that residents and professionals use to create and manage efficient, effective and progressive public policy.

Finding solutions to complex social, economic and environmental issues requires local governments to engage with communities and to provide new styles of civic leadership. At the same time, community leaders must master the art and science of collaboration with their local government to meet the challenges faced.

Local government has always been an important leader in setting and implementing the community's agenda, even more so in recent years as Canada's major urban centres have grown in size and diversity. Local governments in rural and remote communities also have an important role to play in protecting and enhancing quality of life and social equity for all residents.

The Honourable Mike Harcourt, Committee Chair of the External Advisory Committee on Cities and Communities, said he found, early in the committee's investigations, "a growing consensus about the need for fundamental change in the relationship between communities and governments, and for a profound shift in thinking across government, business and the community."⁷ The Committee's report called for all levels of government to work together to assist communities in developing integrated and sustainable strategies. However, the report confirms that local government "are the ones with the most to gain and most able to understand the special circumstances that give rise to exclusion and the initiatives that can address them."⁸

This tool has provided a starting point to building and sustaining relationships by deconstructing the relationships between residents, local governments and CCIs, and by suggesting ways to strengthen the relationship. But, this is only the beginning.

⁷ Canada. External Advisory Committee on Cities and Communities. *From Restless Communities to Resilient Places: Building a Stronger Future for All Canadians*. Final Report of the External Advisory Committee on Cities and Communities. June 2006. Pg. i. Available at http://www.infrastructure.gc.ca/eaccc-ccevc/alt_formats/pdf/eaccc_rep_ccevc_rap_e.pdf.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Pg. 59.



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