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Engage!

Voices of Experience

"I'm feeling like I'm not being heard, and this is a really big issue for me." - A community member.

For many years community planners and community development workers have been trying to find effective ways to involve community members in the community's decision-making process.

Community-based planning (CBP) gives community members optimal influence in the planning process by involving them from the very beginning. CBP is based on democratic principles and a belief that everyone has something to contribute.

But that doesn't mean it's a widely accepted way of working.

Critics of CBP believe that many of society's challenges are too complex for lay people and that important decisions should be left to, or at least greatly influenced by, the 'experts.' They say that CBP is prone to internal conflicts and costly time delays.

Supporters of CBP believe that involvement in community building is a right of citizenship and that the involvement of community members in the planning process will increase the chances of identifying successful solutions.

The debate regarding the viability of CBP versus top-down approaches to community planning is not going to go away. And while the debate rages, proponents of CBP need to continually enhance their understanding of effective practice.

Related Links:

- [A recent presentation by John McKnight](#)
- [Resources from Pew Partnership for Civic Change](#)
- [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#)

By: David Pell

Moving Beyond Evaluation ***Building Knowledge About Community Change***

With nearly 15 years of experience under their belt, researchers and local organizations have learned a lot about how to assess their efforts to create comprehensive community change.

The wisdom of that experience is captured in a recent publication by the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change, which describes some important learnings and makes recommendations for community residents, policy makers, evaluators and researchers, practitioners.

Two key lessons stand out.

The first is that traditional evaluation approaches that focus simply on measuring change using “scientific” methods are usually intricate experimental designs and are often inappropriate and can actually be counterproductive. Comprehensive change efforts are too organic, unique and complex for such devices and new ways must be found to capture the multiple, often unpredictable, outcomes that emerge from such initiatives.

The second lesson is that while capturing outcomes is a major concern of any evaluative effort, more emphasis should be paid to using evaluation as learning, integrating a focus on the larger process of community learning. CCIs are not easy and evaluative efforts should be designed to inform – rather than merely judge - the work of networks trying to renew communities.

These lessons provide simple but critical advice for people and organizations serious about creating broad community change.

 [Read Moving Beyond Evaluation here!](#)

Related Links:

- [Useful Evaluation Resources](#)
- [Annie E. Casey Foundation on Evaluating Comprehensive Community Change](#)

By: Mark Cabaj

Speaking for Themselves

Low-income citizens have a voice in the CHALLENGE

Wrestling with how to better include people on low incomes in the Quality of Life CHALLENGE's decision-making process, organizers invited low-income people living in Victoria to a meeting to share their thoughts and ideas.

That meeting sparked the formation of the "Community Action Team" (CAT). Along with participating on various CHALLENGE working groups, the ideas of CAT members have been incorporated into ongoing CHALLENGE projects and have been integral in establishing an Inclusion Policy adopted by the CHALLENGE's Steering Working Group. CAT members have also become involved outside their local community as they work to establish a cross-country dialogue with other Vibrant Communities low-income participants.



While the ongoing work of attracting and retaining low-income committee members is a challenge, CAT representatives report feeling less isolated as a result of their CAT work. The bonds of friendship, support and shared purpose that have developed are powerful motivating factors for this dynamic and evolving group of citizens.



[Read the full account of this exciting, ongoing initiative here.](#)

Related Links:

- [Quality of Life CHALLENGE](#)
- [Victoria in Vibrant Communities](#)

Working with Passion

Corporate social responsibility gets a lot of press time these days; corporate scandals and the trials of high profile executive officers have prompted renewed interest in the operations and ethics of business.

But on the back pages of the business section is a growing acknowledgement and awareness of those being called “social entrepreneurs”; they’re university and college graduates who are using their corporate training in the not-for-profit world.

A recent profile in the Globe & Mail highlighted this growing trend.

Social entrepreneurs are attracted to organizations that help them to use their education and skills to profit people, not corporations. They are motivated by the belief that the skills they bring to a job can be used to overcome social problems.

The organizations they choose to join are benefiting from a renewed emphasis on social values and the energy and skills these young people bring to the work.



[Read the Globe & Mail profile!](#)

Related Links:

- [Imagine Canada & Corporate Citizenship](#)
- [More links and resources on Corporate Social Responsibility](#)

By: Louise Kearney

Fire up the Grill!

There are few things as enjoyable in life as sitting on a deck on a warm afternoon – after months of being cooped up indoors – eating grilled food with people that want nothing more than to spend time talking about everything from techniques they use to take fur balls off their cat to the evolution of New Zealand's foreign policy in the 20th century. Growing up, I spent nearly every summer weekend doing this and as an adult, I create as many chances as I can to do the same. Nothing beats outdoor eating with friends.

One of my favourite recipes provides an opportunity to enjoy good food with good friends in the great outdoors. About six years ago I came across a recipe for Grilled Cajun Chicken Salad that's a simple meal, but it's a winner that includes spicy chicken contrasted with a cool milky dressing on top of a bed of greens and assorted vegetables. Like hot and sour soup, or hot chocolate sauce on ice cream, the contrast is remarkable.

I rush for the moment there is a hint of warmth in the air and I can go to the store with the reasonable expectation that I can get spring potatoes and fresh green beans.



[Get Mark's recipe!](#)

Related Links:

- [Visit our Soup's On page for more Tamarack recipes!](#)

By: Mark Cabaj