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Engage!

Where are Canada's stories?

The Importance of Canadian Case Studies

The case method has been used for years to teach law, business, and medicine because it humanizes processes while illustrating methodology and values at work.

Case studies are also wonderful tools for showcasing the practical side of community engagement and for communicating real practice in real communities.

Unfortunately, finding well-written and "meaty" Canadian case studies can be difficult.

We encounter this problem each time we develop learning initiatives and seek resources for seminars and workshops. We are deluged by case studies from the US. While helpful, these stories are based in a political, social and cultural context that is essentially foreign to Canadian communities.

What makes Canadians so reticent to share our community stories?

There are organizations working to remedy this situation, such as the Caledon Institute of Social Policy which has been writing a series called Community Stories since 1997.

Thanks to Caledon, and organizations like them, there is a growing body of case studies rooted in the Canadian context, but more needs to be done to ensure that Canadians continue to learn from each other.

Achieving Impact

Engage the community at the right time

Engaging the community in any planning process can pay enormous dividends, but at what point in the process should a community be engaged?

When and how you engage your community in a planning process is entirely dependent upon the level of public impact you would like to achieve.

Varying levels of impact require different types of engagement and assorted tools of engagement.

The engagement continuum (below) from the NSW Department of Planning illustrates this nicely.

INCREASING LEVEL OF PUBLIC IMPACT

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Objective	Objective	Objective	Objective	Objective
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, or solutions	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, or decisions	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public and private concerns are consistently understood and considered	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	To place final decision making in the hands of the public
Promise to the public	Promise to the public	Promise to the public	Promise to the public	Promise to the public
We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge your concerns, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible	To place final decision making in the hands of the public

Source: IAP2 International Association for Public Participation.

The decision on when to engage the community is dependent upon a number of factors, including:

- the purpose of engagement
- who needs to be consulted
- the environment in which engagement is being carried out (political, social, cultural)
- money, time and skills available.

[on this model](#)

Related Links:

- [Community Engagement study](#)
- [Models & Processes of Engagement](#)

Saskatoon's Story Goes International!

The Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition, in collaboration with Public Health Services (Saskatoon Health Region), is working hard to communicate their story with others.

Later this year the partners will have the opportunity to present at two high-profile conferences, the Community Development Society (CDS) 37th Annual Conference and at the International Conference on Engaging Communities.

At each event, the partners' presentation will focus on the use of a community capacity tool to analyze grassroots work and the extent to which they have influenced public policy.

The CDS 37th Annual Conference, being held from June 26-29, 2005 in Baltimore, Maryland, focuses on "*Linking Community Development Practice to Public Policy: Does Practice Inform Public Policy? Does Public Policy Promote Creative Practice?*"

The International Conference on Engaging Communities will be held on August 14-17, 2005 in Brisbane, Australia and is an initiative of the United Nations and the Government of the State of Queensland. The conference will explore all issues related to community engagement and will include guest speakers such as Robert Putnam author of [Bowling Alone](#).

Both conferences will provide an invaluable opportunity for the Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition to share who they are and what they do with an international audience.

Related Links:

- [International Conference on Engaging Communities](#)
- [CDS Conference](#)
- [Saskatoon in Vibrant Communities](#)

Measuring Success

Local leaders and organizations working at comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs) have quickly realized that traditional approaches to evaluation are difficult to apply when evaluating comprehensive approaches to complex community problems.

Traditional approaches are generally designed to assess initiatives that are focused on a very specific problem, which is usually short-term, stable and easily measured.

CCIs, on the other hand, are deliberately broad, evolving, and dynamic, and generate outcomes that are often difficult to measure. Recent case studies demonstrate that the use of traditional techniques can be unproductive and even counterproductive when used in a CCI.

A very useful resource, *Principles for Evaluating Comprehensive Community Initiatives*, can help organizations overcome this challenge.

The paper explores 27 principles for designing and implementing CCI assessments and is a terrific resource for staff and lead volunteers to increase their understanding of ways to assess the effectiveness of their own CCIs.



[Read the report here](#)

Related Links:

- [Comprehensive Community Initiatives](#)
- [Voices from the Field - Learning from early CCIs](#)
- [Challenges of Measurement](#)

Celebrating Community

With each issue of Engage we try to inject a little fun by offering a review of one of our favourite movies, or a new recipe that's tied up in a memory of community.

It's our way of recognizing that you can experience community in many ways – over dinner with friends and family, through film and media, through simple exchanges with others.

And it looks like you do the same! [Soup's On](#) and [Pop Culture](#) are two of the most visited sections on our website.

We thought you'd like to add your own contribution to these pages so we're putting out the call for recipes, stories, and movie reviews from you!

What films have you seen recently that reflected community themes?

Is there a recipe you'd like to share with others on our website?

Let us know! Email [Louise](#) with your story. Who knows? The next issue of Engage might feature your celebration of community!

Related Links:

- [Visit our Soup's On page to see recipes from other readers!](#)
- [Check out our Pop Culture page to see the movies we've already reviewed.](#)