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Engage!

## **Engaging Communities in Policy Making**

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Can communities influence public policy?

At Tamarack, we believe the answer is a resounding, "Yes." But moving from a conventional, top-down policy process to a shared governance model is not easy. This cultural shift requires substantial capacity building by both government and communities.

A community's capacity to effect change and engage government in meaningful policy dialogue is directly related to its abilities in areas including:

- Issue identification
- Articulation of a future vision
- Knowledge of best practices
- Working collaboratively across sectors

Governments must also work to build the capacity for citizen engagement through:

- Commitment to utilize community input in policy development
- Supporting the breakdown of traditional government silos
- Accessible language
- Transparent policy processes

Tamarack is currently sponsoring two initiatives to build the capacity of communities and government to collaborate around the communities' agenda. We invite you to learn with us in *Policy Change From the Ground Up* and the new *Vibrant Communities Government Learning Circle*.



on engaging communities in policy making

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## Related Links:

- [Policy Change From the Ground Up](#)
- [Vibrant Communities Government Learning Circle](#)

By: Susan Eckerle Curwood

## A Consensus for Change!

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Nearly a third of Canada's low-wage workers do not earn sufficient income to meet their costs of living.

They are failing to make ends meet, not because they do not work hard, but because they can't earn enough to cover what it costs to live and work in Canada – especially in our large cities.

We don't think that someone working full-time in this country should be living in poverty.

In fact, we believe that it is a fundamental tenet of Canadian society that any individual working full-time should be able to lift themselves and their family out of poverty.

This week a group dedicated to studying the issue released a paper to reform income security in Canada. Made up of diverse leaders from all walks of life and political leanings the group, M.I.S.W.A.A., reached consensus on what this reform should look like and its associated costs and benefits.

Their recommendations are critical to ensuring the future success of Canada.



[on this consensus for change](#)

## Related Links:

- [Time for a Fair Deal \(M.I.S.W.A.A. Report\)](#)
- [Task Force Addresses Urgent Need to Reform Income Security Policies with Unveiling of Report \(Press Release\)](#)
- [M.I.S.W.A.A. Frequently Asked Questions](#)

By: Paul Born

## Keeping the Lights On in Saint John

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In early 2005, New Brunswick Power (NB Power) announced its intention to raise utility rates by 16%. This increase would be catastrophic for low-income residents, who already paid 10-15% of their incomes on home energy.

Vibrant Communities Saint John (VCSJ) provided a voice for low-income residents at the Public Utility Board hearings surrounding the proposed increase. Working with other organizations, VCSJ prepared a detailed case for tackling energy poverty, looking at rate design, energy efficiency measures, and other issues.

Several shifts in energy policy in New Brunswick have resulted from the advocacy of VCSJ and others.

First, NB Power's rate design has changed from offering volume discounts to high energy users to rewarding energy conservation. The provincial government has capped the maximum rate increase at 8%, far lower than the proposed 16%.

And, NB Power has agreed that energy is an essential service – that everyone, regardless of income, has the right to be warm.



[Read the full story of how Vibrant Communities Saint John is tackling energy poverty!](#)

### Related Links:

- [Vibrant Communities Saint John](#)
- [Vibrant Communities Saint John: Dismantling the Poverty Traps](#)
- [Affordable & Efficient: Towards a National Energy Efficiency Strategy for Low-Income Canadians](#)

By: Susan Eckerle Curwood

## Vibrant Communities Update

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**Saint John, NB** – Vibrant Communities Saint John has formally expressed an interest to Premier Bernard Lord to work together on his pledge to see New Brunswick lead the country in poverty reduction. Read the letter to Premier Lord [here](#).

**Edmonton, AB** – During the most recent tax season, 575 households benefited from Vibrant Communities Edmonton's Make Tax Time Pay initiative. Learn more about Make Tax Time Pay [here](#).

## Peer Input Process

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I like the expression, "There are no problems – only puzzles to solve."

One of the great things about being part of a community of practice is having a whole group of puzzle-solvers as part of your team. At Tamarack, we use a technique called the *Peer Input Process* (PIP) to make it easier to tap into the knowledge of your peers and turn their ideas into solutions to your puzzle. PIP is especially helpful when the issue you are seeking to solve is a complex one.

The technique is simple and quick. Gather a group of colleagues (by phone is fine) and in a structured way, present your issues. Your peers have a period of time to ask clarifying and probing questions before launching into a discussion among themselves about the issue presented. The person seeking input listens to this conversation, harvesting ideas and new perspectives. A closing reflection wraps up the session.

It's a simple, but effective way to find a puzzle solution!



[information and details on the PIP technique](#)

### Related Links:

- [Tips on peer coaching for professionals](#)

By: Susan Taylor Simpson

## Crash

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*Crash*, Academy Award winner for best picture, considers the ways we collide with each other.

The film follows a Mexican locksmith, a Persian storeowner, a television director and his wife, a rookie cop and his jaded partner, two carjackers, and a variety of other characters, as they crash into each other over the course of 36 hours in Los Angeles.



The film is an unflinching look at the complexities of racial tolerance.

*Crash* examines the heartache of disconnection and powerlessness. The characters in this film are all searching – be it for acceptance, safety, recognition, assistance, or love – against the backdrop of a cosmopolitan, multicultural city. The beauty of *Crash* is that it doesn't have to be set in L.A., this story could be told in Vancouver, or Johannesburg, or Dublin, or Paris. In our world of diffuse borders and global travel, its themes are universal.



[Get the full \*Crash\* review](#)

### Related Links:

- [Visit the film's website](#)
- [Check out other Tamarack reviews](#)

By: Louise Kearney