



View *Engage!* online at: <http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/newsletter/engage.htm>!

A Poverty Reduction Strategy for Nova Scotia By: Sherri Torjman

On April 3rd, 2009, the Government of Nova Scotia released its poverty-reduction strategy entitled, *Preventing Poverty, Promoting Prosperity*.

This strategy is the result of work that was initiated back in December 2007, with the passage of Bill 94, *An Act to Establish a Poverty Reduction Working Group in Nova Scotia*. The mandate of the Working Group established by Bill 94 was to prepare a report recommending strategies and priorities to reduce poverty.



Based on the Working Group's recommendations, the Government of Nova Scotia's poverty-reduction strategy puts forward a framework for tackling the needs of persons living in and at risk of falling into poverty, while promoting prosperity for the province. *Preventing Poverty, Promoting Prosperity* is a multi-year plan with four main goals: enable and reward work; invest in households in need; focus on children; and, coordinate and collaborate. The paper describes the various measures that have been undertaken or are being planned in order to achieve each of these goals.

With the release of *Preventing Poverty, Promoting Prosperity*, Nova Scotia joined Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba as part of a growing majority of provinces embracing comprehensive poverty-reduction strategies. Adding to this growing trend, Federal MPs unanimously passed a motion on November 24th, 2009 that the "Government of Canada ... develop an immediate plan to eliminate poverty in Canada for all." This is a significant step towards a comprehensive and integrated federal poverty elimination plan.

Beautiful thinking for
December
In this issue you'll find...

- A Poverty Reduction Strategy for Nova Scotia - By Sherri Torjman
- Why Strategic Non-Profits Value Economic Clarity - By Garry Loewen
- Measuring Progress Towards Less Poverty and More Vibrant Communities - By Liz Weaver
- ALIV(e) Enlivens Opportunities Waterloo Region - By Anne Makoul & Mary MacKeigan
- Community, Peace and the Environment - By Paul Born
- Peace and Joy - By Sylvia Cheuy

Related Links:

- [Read *A Poverty-Reduction Strategy for Nova Scotia* by Sherri Torjman](#)
- [Access Nova Scotia's *Preventing Poverty, Promoting Prosperity*](#)
- [Learn more about *Understanding Poverty*, a Vibrant Communities Action-Learning Topic](#)

Why Strategic Non-Profits Value Economic Clarity By: Garry Loewen

For most non-profit organizations, the art of making tradeoffs is a condition of survival as well as a key element of success. With limited means to address substantial social challenges, non-profit leaders constantly make choices about the most effective way to allocate available resources among competing priorities.

The consequences of these tradeoffs are visible daily: in the activities a non-profit offers, the programs it supports, and the initiatives it pursues. Together, they constitute the engine that either drives the organization's strategy forward or renders it irrelevant. That is why resource-allocation decisions present one of the most powerful levers non-profit executives can apply to achieve their organization's goals.



Given this fact, the scope of the financial data available in many non-profits is worrisome. Although information about revenues (in the form of donations, grants, and earned income) is usually fairly solid, organizational knowledge about costs tends to be weak. This is particularly the case when it comes to the true, all-in costs of providing services, running programs and otherwise operating the organization. Lacking this information, non-profit executives often end up having to make important resource-related decisions on the basis of intangibles such as intuition, the skills and knowledge of the program staff, or the preferences and inclinations of the organization's funders. As a result, they run the risk of undermining their organization's mission (however inadvertently) by failing to allocate resources to the programs and services that have the greatest impact.

By complementing a strong sense of mission with a strong understanding of their organization's operating costs, non-profit decision makers can equip themselves to make the right allocation choices.

For most non-profit organizations, the art of making tradeoffs is a condition of survival as well as a key element of success. With limited means to address substantial social challenges, non-profit leaders constantly make choices about the most effective way to allocate available resources among competing priorities. The consequences of these tradeoffs are visible daily: in the activities a non-profit offers, the programs it supports, and the initiatives it pursues. Together, they constitute the engine that either drives the organization's strategy forward or renders it irrelevant. That is why resource-allocation decisions present one of the most powerful levers non-profit executives can apply to achieve their organization's goals.

Given this fact, the scope of the financial data available in many non-profits is worrisome. Organizational knowledge about costs tends to be weak. This is particularly the case when it comes to the true, all-in costs of providing services, running programs and otherwise operating the organization. Lacking this information, non-profit executives often end up having to make important

resource-related decisions on the basis of intangibles such as intuition, the skills and knowledge of the program staff, or the preferences and inclinations of the organization's funders. As a result, they run the risk of undermining their organization's mission (however inadvertently) by failing to allocate resources to the programs and services that have the greatest impact.

By complementing a strong sense of mission with a strong understanding of their organization's operating costs, non-profit decision makers can equip themselves to make the right allocation choices. The economic clarity that full cost data creates can provide invaluable input to decisions about how to allocate resources among programs and across them, whether to expand into a new location, and where to set the level of funding required to sustain the organization's operations.

To make resource-related decisions intelligently, that is, in a way that maximizes an organization's impact and promotes its mission, non-profit leaders need to have a clear picture of the full costs of operating their programs and services. Among the reasons such clarity is essential, one simple explanation stands out: you can't spend the same dollar twice. Funds that an organization uses for one purpose can't be used for something else. And when resources are scarce—as in non-profits they invariably are—it is critically important that they be devoted to the programs and activities that advance the mission most.

The most basic resource-allocation decisions relate to funding multiple programs in a single department. For example, one organization was providing a variety of counseling, adult education, youth, and economic development services to its clients to help them become more self-sufficient. An analysis of this organization's costs showed that within the economic development department, the employment-services program and the resume-services program were incurring the same expense. In other words, it was costing the organization the same amount of money to place a client in a job as it was to help her prepare a resume. Because having a job provides clients with greater economic self-sufficiency than simply having a resume on hand, the organization decided to focus its resources on the employment-services program instead of growing the resume-services program as it had originally planned.

Striking as the effects of economic clarity are on individual decisions, the impact on an organization's strategy can be even more powerful. The reason is that accurate cost data also make it possible to look at program finances from a strategic perspective, to see the flow of funds within the organization as a whole. With a full understanding of all their programs' costs, decision makers acquire a clear view of how, precisely, the organization's scarce resources are being allocated: which programs are covering their own costs or even generating surplus funds, and which ones require subsidies. As a result, they can determine whether those scarce resources are being used in the ways that most effectively advance the organization's mission.

To access this entire article, including material on how to calculate full costs, please see our related links below.

Related Links:

- [Access the full article, *Costs Are Cool: The Strategic Value of Economic Clarity*](#)
- [Visit our *Resource Library* for more resources on the not-for-profit sector](#)

Ideas we're following...

Measuring Progress Towards Less Poverty and More Vibrant Communities

By: Liz Weaver

Measuring the progress of a community-based collaborative initiative can be a challenging and complex task but there are many examples to build from. Vibrant Communities Canada has recently published two papers which review different approaches to measuring '*less poverty in communities*' and '*more vibrant communities*'.

Each paper profiles a variety of different approaches to measuring community change through the use of frameworks, metrics and indicators. The papers also describe the common indicators and themes across the various profiled approaches and conclude with reflection questions for the reader to consider.

To engage further dialogue on the papers, Tamarack's Learning Centre hosted an audio conference which profiled Vital Signs Vancouver, a community report card initiative of the Community Foundations of Canada. On December 17, a second audio conference will be held profiling the Canadian Institute of Wellbeing's index.

These papers are published in draft form. We welcome your feedback, comments and suggestions about them to Liz Weaver at liz@tamarackcommunity.ca.

Related Links:

- [Listen to the *Less Poverty and More Vibrant Communities* online audio seminar](#)
- [Access the *Approaches to Measuring Less Poverty in Communities* paper](#)
- [Access the *Approaches to Measuring More Vibrant Communities* paper](#)
- [Register for the upcoming tele-learning seminar, *More Collaboration and Citizen Engagement*](#)

ALIV(e) Enlivens Opportunities Waterloo Region

By: Anne Makoul & Mary MacKeigan

Vibrant Community convener groups have experimented with models of inclusion and are aware that providing supports – such as food, child care or transportation – is only the first step to involving people living on limited incomes in their work. Recent successes experienced in Waterloo Region provide lessons for others to follow.

Awareness of Low Income Voices – ALIV(e) – was founded in 2007 by Opportunities Waterloo Region as a way to learn more about the issues, experiences and concerns of people living on low incomes. By necessity, the group grew only as quickly as scarce human and financial resources would allow. However, the slow pace of development allowed everyone sufficient time to accommodate to new

demands and initiatives, and ALIV(e) members are proud of both their accomplishments and their plans for the future.

The group's goals are to: increase membership from 15 in 2009 to 50 by 2011; become operationally and financially self-sufficient; increase civic participation; establish a media bureau to help local media preparing stories about poverty; increase the representation of people with lived experience of poverty to Opportunities boards and committees; and, to learn more about policy development and research.

Says one ALIV(e) member, "You leave [our meetings] and you feel good – you feel that you've done something. You may not be able to change the world, but you can work at that tiny little part that makes someone's – not necessarily yours, but someone's – life a little better."

Related Links:

- [Read Anne and Mary's full article](#)
- [Visit the Caledon Institute of Social Policy](#)

Community, Peace and the Environment *By: Paul Born*

I have been preparing for a gathering in the New Year at the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars in Washington D.C. where about 20 of us have been invited by the Fetzer Institute to talk and share our understanding of peacebuilding and the changing role of community in an age of environmental uncertainty.

I spend a lot of time thinking about community and, of course, like all of us am deeply concerned about the effects of global warming. However, what has been new for me as I have been reading papers in preparation for this gathering is an appreciation for the very real connection between environmental issues and peace. As more and more people are displaced by drought and flooding, the world we live in is becoming increasingly unstable. What might we do about this? What role will community engagement play? How might we create communities that are resilient in the face of natural disasters and able to engage the skills of collaboration and community mobilization to organize appropriate life affirming responses?

If this topic interests you I recommend the paper *Environmental Peacebuilding Theory and Practice* presented by EcoPeace/ Friends of the Earth Middle East. It is an easy to read and yet comprehensive. This paper does not specifically address the upcoming environmental issues facing our world but rather uses the environment as a focal point for understanding peace negotiations and peace building.

Related Links:

- [Access the EcoPeace/Friends of the Earth Middle East's paper, *Environmental Peacebuilding Theory and Practice*](#)
- [Review Paul's pre-forum presentation to the Woodrow Wilson Centre](#)
- [Visit our *Resource Library* for more resources on Community Engagement and Emergency Preparedness](#)

- [Read why Mike Harcourt thinks Canada's cities are hotbeds for climate action](#)

Peace and Joy By: Sylvia Cheuy

It feels like such a paradox to me that the pace of life seems to pick up its tempo as the holiday season approaches. And so, precisely when I am anticipating the peace and joy of being with friends and family, I am aware of how my own frazzled-ness undermines the very thing that I am most anticipating.

If any of this is feeling familiar to you, I would like to offer you a simple holiday gift that I recently discovered in a book entitled *The Seven Whispers* by Christina Baldwin. I call it *The Three Breaths*.

Christina writes,

"Inhalation leads to inspiration.

One breath to let go.

Let go of the list making, the squabbling, the confusion of priorities, the constrictions of the heart...

One breath to be here.

Be here in the moment and notice what is: the sensual reality of wherever I am standing.

Peace is all around me; my job is to bring my mind to peace.

One breath to ask now what?

Now what is trying to happen in my life? Now what might spirit say, if I say nothing more and just for a moment....listen.

I breathe. I whisper my request, "Please help me to maintain peace of mind."

From all of us at Tamarack, may the upcoming holiday season bring you much peace and joy!

Related Links:

- [More about *The Seven Whispers* at Christina's Peer Spirit website](#)

Engage!
to create vibrant communities

Engage! is published by Tamarack to bring you inspiration, ideas, and the skills you need to envision and create vibrant communities. Learn more about Tamarack at:

<http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g1s2.html>