



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

## Community-Government Collaborations on Policy: A How-To Manual

By: Anne Makhoul



©istockphoto.com/  
Victor\_Maffe/Stuart Burford

There has been growing interest in recent years in place-based interventions and their unique contribution to tackling complex issues. Place-based strategies seek to achieve a desired objective through interventions in the neighbourhoods and communities where people live. Increasingly, however, place-based interventions are also trying to influence relevant public policies.

To better understand how communities and government could collaborate on policy, the [Caledon Institute of Social Policy](#) hosted a year-long community of practice focused on this issue with the support of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

The purpose of the Community of Practice was twofold: to develop an effective policy monitoring process that could be undertaken regularly by communities, and to create an information-rich guide to successful collaboration on policy. Because the members' collective experience was most closely associated with the issue of poverty reduction, it was the lens through which they viewed collaboration on

### *In this Issue:*

- Community-Government Collaborations on Policy: A How-To Manual - By Anne Makhoul
- Strategic Drivers: A Technique to Support Working Comprehensively in a Manageable Way - By Mark Cabaj
- Weave the People: Threading Healthy Communities - By Sylvia Cheuy
- Building Communities and Changing Lives through the Arts: The "Spark of Brilliance" Story - By Sylvia Cheuy with Judith Rosenberg
- Massive Inspiration: A Gift of Wings - By Paul Born
- Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction wins the Canadian Urban Institute Awards - By Paul Born

policy. The lessons presented in the manual, however, are equally applicable to any complex or 'wicked' problem.

The learning, tools and experiences mined from this Community of Practice have been synthesized in *Collaboration on Policy Manual*, a newly-released manual developed to help guide community practitioners and government officials in working to design policy solutions to complex problems.



The timeliness of this work is evidenced by recent presentations by two Vibrant Communities Canada partners – [Hamilton](#) and [St. John](#) – along with Ontario Minister Deb Matthews, Chair of her province's poverty-reduction strategy to [the Senate Subcommittee on Cities](#) exploring the Federal Government's role in poverty-reduction efforts.

Community of Practice members included five community partners: City of Red Deer Social Planning Department, Community-University Institute for Social Research (Saskatoon), Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, *Santropol Roulant* (Montréal) and the Community Services Council Newfoundland and Labrador (St. John's). It also included university professors from the Kroeger College of Public Affairs at Carleton University and the Department of Social Sciences at the University of Ottawa as well as occasional participation from students at University of Ottawa, McMaster University and Concordia University.

The *Collaboration on Policy Manual* created from this process is a practical resource for those interested in multi-sectoral, place-based policy answers to complex questions such as poverty reduction. In order to assist would-be collaborators, the manual was organized into six chapters: assembling a community of practice, collaboration basics (e.g., types, governance), benefits and challenges of collaboration, specific applications to policy work, creating an enabling environment for policy development and lessons learned.

Each of the manual's 33 sub-sections is framed around three key lessons on collaboration. Supporting articles, websites, story vignettes and references are provided to allow readers to explore best practices and current knowledge on collaboration on policy. Termed a 'living document,' the manual was posted to the

internet with an invitation for collaborators in the field to submit other examples of successful (and unsuccessful) work in policy development.

The Manual is just one example of Caledon's ongoing role in supporting the community-government collaboration on policy which also includes:

- The recently released *Community Roles in Policy* paper by Caledon Vice-President Sherri Torjman, [Torjman 2009] details ten entry points communities might consider when engaging in policy work. It further explores the elements presented in the Manual's chapter "Charter a better course: policy work." Both publications offer rich food for thought and practical lessons on how communities of practice can begin to collaborate on policy; and
- The Community of Practice's Policy Indices – posted monthly to Caledon's "Special Projects" area – summarize major policy and program announcements in several areas including: income security; early childhood development and child care; labour market adjustment, training and employment; housing and homelessness; and disability supports. Indices report significant changes at the federal and provincial/territorial levels; and
- A *Companion Guide to the Collaboration on Policy Manual* developed specifically for college and university instructors by the Community of Practice university partners (forthcoming - due Fall 2009)

#### **Related Links:**

- [Download the \*Collaboration on Policy Manual\*](#)
- [Read Sherri Torjman's paper on \*Community Roles in Policy\*](#)
- [Access an online learning session focused around community-government collaboration](#)
- [Visit the Caledon Institute of Social Policy and view their \*Special Projects page – Community-Government Collaboration on Policy\*](#)

## Strategic Drivers: A Technique to Support Working Comprehensively in a Manageable Way By: Mark Cabaj

---

The case for adopting a comprehensive approach to reducing poverty is strong: There are multiple root causes underlying poverty and it is difficult to generate deep and durable improvements in the lives of people if we address only a few of them.

The practice of comprehensiveness is not as strong. Many groups become overwhelmed with all the things that need to be done: housing, income, child care, economic development, community safety – and eventually elect to only address a small piece of the puzzle. Courageous groups that do develop wide reaching efforts often stumble when the volume of work becomes difficult to coordinate and/or the resources to sustain such an effort are insufficient.



©istockphoto.com/  
Tavrov Konstantin/Andres

Happily, there is a way to work comprehensively in a manageable way. It's called building around 'strategic drivers.'

The newest technique to emerge out of the Vibrant Communities initiative was developed by Garry Loewen to help groups in the planning stage of their work. The idea behind the technique is simple: groups can start with something that they are already doing or feel has great promise – i.e. the 'driver' – and find natural links to other strategies that address more than one root cause of poverty.

A housing renewal initiative, for example, can be designed and implemented in a way that creates financial assets for home owners, strengthens the connections between neighbours, creates jobs for neighbourhood residents and expands the sales for local construction companies. These connections can be identified and anticipated 'up front' in the planning process.

The process of building around strategic drivers is ongoing and organic. Groups can also add new elements over time as their capacity increases and new opportunities for linking strategies reveal themselves. An integrated strategy for workforce development in a neighborhood, for instance, might eventually be in the position to

help shape a city-wide strategy to improve transportation links from inner city neighbourhoods to the growing number of jobs on the edge of the city.

The concept of strategic drivers is not new: the idea has been around in business, public sector and community change circles for quite some time. The technique described in this resource, however, can help many groups put this simple idea into practice with its straightforward step by step process.

#### **Related Links:**

- [Download \*A Comprehensive Approach to Poverty Using Strategic Drivers An Aide for Action\* by Garry Loewen](#)
- Access the online seminar [Strategic Drivers for Comprehensive Approaches](#)

### *Ideas we're following...*

#### **Weave the People: Threading Healthy Communities**

**By: [Sylvia Cheuy](#)**

---

In 1995, the St. Luke's Health System – a hospital with a 90 year history serving residents of Phoenix Arizona – began a “journey of conversion and learning.” Initially this took the form of transitioning from a hospital to a community grantmaking agency. Over time however, St. Luke's has increasingly evolved towards becoming a resource for communities to help themselves build their capacity for greater resilience.

In 2003, St. Luke's released [Resilience: Health in a New Key](#) an issue paper presenting key concepts that emerged from an exploration of the question: *How can communities build upon their resources and assets to strengthen their ability to bounce back from adversity and thrive in a world of turmoil and change?* Their latest paper, [Weave the People: Threading Healthy Communities](#) captures and shares the insights that have been learned through five years of working to translate the concepts and ideas of community resilience into action. These have been distilled into sixteen emerging lessons on community building which can you read [here](#).

*Weave the People* does a masterful job framing many of the paradoxes, challenges and opportunities of working comprehensively at the community level and is an inspiring “must-read” for anyone doing place-based work.

**Related Links:**

- [Read \*Weave the People: Threading Healthy Communities\*](#)
- [Read \*Resilience: Health in a New Key\*](#)
- [More about St. Luke’s Health Learning Journey](#)
- [Visit the St. Luke’s Health Initiative website](#)
- [More resources on Health](#)

**Building Communities and Changing Lives through the Arts:  
The “Spark of Brilliance” Story** [By: Sylvia Cheuy with Judith Rosenberg](#)

---

“Lives are turned upside down through adversity,” says Judith Rosenberg, Founder and Director of Spark of Brilliance, an organization that began in Guelph, Ontario whose mission is to build strong communities and enrich lives through the expressive arts.

Spark of Brilliance offers quality, community-based arts programming to people who would otherwise be isolated by offering them the opportunity to share in the joy of creativity; develop new skills; and, to experience socialization and acceptance in ways that support them in re-entering society in meaningful and constructive ways. It is a program that embodies the belief that within each of us lies a creative core that when manifested will brighten the darkness to bring new meaning to life. When lives are lifted, through collective recognition and celebration of the gifts and talents of all its citizens, communities are strengthened.

Rosenberg’s commitment to Spark of Brilliance and its philosophy is deeply personal. In 1997, her son, then a promising university student, “descended into a dark and desperate psychosis.” Through this journey, she has learned that this twist in mental health and coping mechanisms can be experienced by anyone.

All too often poverty, mental health issues and illnesses, adversity and loneliness cause individuals to drop out of society and out of life. Families are affected as their loved ones deal with despondency and lack of motivation. Communities falter

when families, who are the backbone of society, are unable to function and contribute to the development and vibrancy of its culture.

“The best and brightest minds are lost to their communities when souls are lost to themselves,” Rosenberg says. “Communities suffer similarly as those who are living the experience. Society must pick up the slack when lives are halted. Hospitals and psychiatric facilities cannot accommodate the needs of our times and people who need care and a safe haven for treatment are often wandering our streets without purpose and without dignity.”

#### **Related Links:**

- [Visit the Spark of Brilliance website](#)
- [Email Judith Rosenberg](#)
- [More resources on Innovation Ideas](#)

### **Massive Inspiration: A Gift of Wings** By: Paul Born

---

Carl Hiebert had a passion for adventure sports, from under the ice scuba-diving to sky-diving. Then a freak hang-gliding accident put him in a wheelchair.

After two months in recovery, he placed a ‘Gone Flying’ sign on his hospital door and, with the help of a friend, made his way to a farmer’s field, where a single-seat ultralight aircraft was waiting. “As I buzzed the field and saw my empty wheelchair, I was overcome by this serendipitous moment. Even if I couldn’t walk, I could still fly!”

Five years later, Carl astounded Canadians by being the first person ever to fly an open-cockpit ultralight aircraft 5,000 miles across Canada. When he landed in Vancouver, he achieved what many people said was impossible – he transformed an agonizing obstacle into an inspirational achievement and made a mark in aviation history. His best selling book “Gift of Wings” is a stunning photo essay of this remarkable achievement.

Carl has taken on many other adventures since, and is now closing in on another personal goal — to raise \$1 million for charity. A huge friend of Tamarack – Carl has donated the use of his photos in *Engage!* for the past seven years.

## Related Links:

- [Learn more about Carl Hiebert](#)
- [Carl was featured on \*Behind the Camera\*, a Bravo Television series. Watch the video here!](#)
- [Visit Carl's website to learn more about his books, and how to book him as a speaker at your next event](#)
- [Read Paul Born's journal of his flight with Carl](#)

## Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction wins the Canadian Urban Institute Awards **By: Paul Born**

---

Congratulations to the Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction for being recognized nationally at this year's Urban Leadership Awards (ULA) which are awarded to individuals, groups and organizations that have made significant contributions to improving the quality of life in Canada's cities and urban regions.

The Roundtable received the David Crombie Award – which recognizes people or initiatives that work collaboratively on solutions for complex urban problems – for its proven success in not just slowing poverty rates but actually reducing them by almost two percent in less than a decade. “By tackling poverty and making a difference the Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction has taught us all a lesson that is respected far beyond the Golden Horseshoe,” said CUI President and CEO Glen Murray.

This victory deserves celebration not only because it reflects the hard-earned achievement of hundreds of dedicated people and organizations across Hamilton, but also because it is a significant victory for each and every individual and organization across Canada who is actively working to pioneer coordinated poverty-reduction efforts in their community or neighbourhood.

At the recent *Reducing Poverty in Ontario* gathering in Waterloo, Mark Chamberlain, Chair of Hamilton's Roundtable on Poverty Reduction reminded us that “poverty can be eradicated by refusing to accept arguments that helping poor people doesn't make economic sense.” Just as a successful business entrepreneur must be “unreasonable” and refuse to take no for an answer from investors, anti-

poverty advocates “should invoke the same stubborn determination with government,” he said.

Hamilton’s victory is a victory for us all because it provides a powerful example that we can all point to when confronted by skeptics and cynics who believe that what we are striving for is not possible.

**Related Links:**

- [Learn more about the Hamilton Roundtable and its work](#)
- [View the Hamilton Spectator article featuring Mark Chamberlain, Chair Hamilton Roundtable](#)
- [Visit the Hamilton Roundtable website](#)
- [More about the Canadian Urban Institute’s Urban Leadership Awards](#)



*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>