



Engage!

## **Rethinking the relationship between funders and their grantees**

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Positive engagement between funders and non-profit organizations must be built on respect. The inequality of power and resources often makes it difficult to create respectful relationships in which grant makers are able to learn from those they fund.

How do we illuminate the authentic voices of those living in the communities we serve and how can we deeply understand the characteristics of place?

There is a growing interest among funders and not for profit organizations to find space to have these conversations, to rethink the traditional role of funders and to help local organizations better understand a funder's needs.

Recently, a group of foundations met in Toronto as part of the Council on Foundation's annual conference to discuss the need to learn together about place-based philanthropy. Joined by representatives from the Annie E. Casey Foundation in the U.S., the group had an open conversation about their desire to learn more about place-based philanthropy.

With the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, Tamarack is co-sponsoring a Funders Network for funders of Vibrant Communities. The network will learn together how they might best support community visions toward community solutions.

## Related Links:

- [Community Visions, Community Solutions - Grantmaking for Comprehensive Impact](#)
- [Strengthening Nonprofit Performance - A Funder's Guide to Capacity Building](#)
- [Annie E. Casey Foundation's Place-Based Philanthropy Initiative](#)
- [Vibrant Communities Funders Network](#)

## Building vibrant communities...evaluating comprehensive community initiatives

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There are dozens of broad-based collaborations across the country using comprehensive approaches to tackle local issues such as poverty, crime and community safety and homelessness.

Sooner or later, all of them wrestle with the issue of how best to assess their progress and learning in their relentless effort to generate the best outcomes possible.

Evaluating and learning are tough at the best of times – it is particularly difficult with comprehensive community initiatives because:

- The issues are usually complex.
- There can be many players involved, each with unique ways of understanding the problem, possible solutions and what “success” means.
- The results of comprehensive efforts are often a long time coming and are frequently difficult to measure.
- It is difficult to determine to what degree – if any – the collaboration – rather than another factor – has made a difference on the issue.

Thankfully, there are communities and research groups that are exploring and experimenting with practical ways to deal with these important challenges. And

though their work is still in its “early days”, they have already made important contributions to strengthening the evaluation and learning component of comprehensive community initiatives.

### **Related Links:**

[Learning & Evaluation for Poverty Reduction](#) - This Caledon paper describes the experience of the Vibrant Communities initiative in evaluating and learning from the efforts of community collaborations trying to reduce poverty.

[Theory of Change](#) - The Aspen Institute is a world leader in finding ways that communities can capture the progress and learnings from comprehensive local efforts. Their [Theory of Change Website](#) describes their key learnings to date and provides some practical tools to help collaborations do a better job of evaluating and learning from their work. Check out an example of their work [here](#).

## **Opportunities Niagara launches**

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Community initiative aims to broker change, facilitate solutions, change lives

On Friday May 14, 2004, Opportunities Niagara, a coalition of community leaders, publicly launched an initiative that aims to help 2000 families and individuals out of poverty in Niagara.

At the launch, Opportunities Niagara, in collaboration with area United Ways, released a significant research study on the economic performance of individuals and families in Niagara with a particular focus on poverty indicators.



The event was held in the Council Chambers at the Regional Municipality of Niagara and featured remarks by Mary Turner, Vice-President of the Canadian Tire Foundation for Families and Jim Bradley, Minister of Tourism.

Though the launch marks the official presentation of the initiative to the community, much has been happening in Niagara in the last two years.

A community plan has been developed that articulates the initiative's intent to focus on issues related to the working poor, affordable housing and challenges associated with mental illnesses.

A community housing project in partnership with members of CAW Local 199 is also underway, as are other community development projects, and a Leadership Roundtable has been formed to lead the initiative.

Best wishes to all in Niagara as they start a new phase in their community-based effort to reduce poverty!

**Related Links:**

- [Opportunities Niagara in Vibrant Communities](#)
- [Community Plan](#)

**Definition of “vibrant community” focus of new Tamarack online workshop**

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How can we identify what makes a community vibrant? Are vibrant communities those that are thriving or also those that face substantial challenges? What is an example of a vibrant community in action?

These are some of the questions asked in Tamarack's new online workshop, What is a Vibrant Community? The workshop examines the case study of Cape Breton, and includes an inspirational video by Rankin MacSween, President of New Dawn Enterprises, the organization directing Cape Breton's Vibrant Communities' efforts.

Rankin speaks eloquently about the challenges Cape Breton has faced in the past and those it continues to experience, including out-migration of youth and

broken economic promises. Cape Breton faces some very real challenges and yet the people of Cape Breton continue to hope.

After more than a year of discussions involving hundreds of people from all sectors of the community, they have confirmed their vision for the community as "a self-reliant people in a vibrant community" whose mission is to "engage the community to create and support the development of a culture of self-reliance."

The enhanced version of the workshop including Rankin's text and other written and video materials will be available inside the Tamarack's Learning Community, scheduled to launch in the next few weeks. A mini version of this workshop is now available on the Tamarack website including clips from Rankin's speech, clips from a talk by Sherri Torjman of the Caledon Institute of Social Policy and written materials.



[Check out the workshop now!](#)

## **Leadership and diversity**

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On May 7, 2004 a group of energetic Canadians drawn from different regions of the country and varying sectors and fields, including government, business and the nonprofit sector, began a two-week intense leadership experience.



The [Governor General's Canadian Leadership Conference](#) brings together Canada's future leaders for a unique two-week experience aimed at broadening their perspectives on work, leadership, their communities, and their country.

The conferences began in 1983 as a means to help build Canada. They involve a unique process of examination, debate and discovery designed to broaden perspectives and enhance the leadership qualities of members. The theme of the 2004 conference is [Leadership and Diversity](#).

Paul Born, an alumnus of the conference, hosted a study tour for delegates in Waterloo Region this week. Participants visited an Old Order Mennonite community to explore the deliberate life choices of a community that has chosen to live simply without phones, electricity and cars relying on each other for support and insurance. The group also visited with more than a dozen faith groups in the Sikh Gurdwara to explore unity and diversity, tolerance and working together on behalf of the community. From there they visited with the Barrier Free Access Committee to hear how this group was taking leadership in Waterloo Region and to complete an experiential on "living with a disability."

The group [started](#) their journey in Winnipeg and will reconvene in Ottawa May 19-21 to present a report on their study tour's findings and insights to the Governor General.

 [the Conference website](#)

