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Making an Impact
Screening and Selecting Opportunities
for Poverty Reduction

A TOOL FOR VIBRANT COMMUNITIES
Second Edition, Winter 2004





Tamarack is a charitable organization dedicated to helping Canadian communities take ownership of local issues by making use of proven strategies for community engagement. Community Engagement is commonly defined as citizens from different sectors of a community joining together and taking leadership, to address issues that affect them all.

Designed to promote community building across Canada, the institute's mission is to develop a process to help people create bold visions for the future of their communities, and work together to achieve those visions more easily and effectively.

Through work with local organizations, Tamarack seeks out and encourages committed citizens to build communities that are caring, prosperous and healthy. Citizens in these communities work together in a comprehensive, collaborative manner on projects that create effective systems and structures and result in good opportunities, good government, a clean environment, creative education, and peace for all people.

Located in Waterloo, Ontario, Tamarack is incorporated as a charitable not-for-profit agency. Founded in 2001 as a partnership between Alan Broadbent of Avana Capital Corporation and the Maytree Foundation and Paul Born, Tamarack receives core funding from the Maytree Foundation and secures contract funding for project specific work.

139 Father David Bauer Drive, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 6L1
Tel: (519) 885-5155 Email: tamarack@tamarackcommunity.ca
Web: www.tamarackcommunity.ca



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By Mark Cabaj



PREFACE

The Screening and Selecting Opportunities tool has been prepared by Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement as one of a growing mix of tools to support the work of local organizations (we call them “convenors”) that are facilitating and leading broad-based local efforts to reduce poverty.

The tool is meant to assist community-wide collaborations to be as strategic as possible in selecting the strategies and initiatives they would like to employ to substantially reduce poverty.

This concept of systematic screening and selection is not new. Governments often employ it when assessing and comparing different policy options. Large corporations and small-scale entrepreneurs work through defined selection criteria and feasibility studies when exploring business ventures. Many sophisticated non-profit organizations use it as part of their program development process.

A scan of community-wide collaborations in Canada and the United States by Tamarack researchers, however, flushed out only a few documented attempts of groups that approached the selection of their own strategies and initiatives in a deliberate and systematic fashion.

The Screening and Selecting Opportunities tool is based on observations of how collaborations in communities participating in Vibrant Communities – a Pan-Canadian initiative to reduce poverty through local efforts – have made decisions as to how and where to devote their energy. The tool also draws on material from the Venture Development Basics workbook, an excellent resource designed specifically to assist First Nations’ development corporations select business ventures. (See <http://www.cedworks.com/customer/product.php?productid=4066&cat=&page=1>).

Elements of this tool have been tested with the Opportunities 2000 initiative in Waterloo, Ontario and with the Anti-Poverty Coalition in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

The Screening and Selecting Opportunities tool is a work-in-progress. As community collaborations use the resource in their work, Tamarack will seek their feedback on what did and did not work and make the necessary adjustments to the document.

The tool is also just one of many emerging out of Vibrant Communities. The sponsors and communities involved in the initiative firmly believe that in their

search to find new and more effective ways to reduce poverty, they also have the responsibility of building and documenting a body of practice – the tools, techniques and learning generated by their work – so that others can learn from our work.

These resources will be made available at www.vibrantcommunities.ca.

INTRODUCTION

There are a growing number of community-wide collaborations in Canada devoted to reducing poverty.

These collaborations – with their member’s rich mix of perspectives, knowledge and resources - represent a remarkable increased capacity of a community to make a difference in the lives of low-income residents.

There are plenty of ways a group interested in “doing something” about poverty can make an impact. They might focus their energies on a particularly disadvantaged neighbourhood, a specific group of residents (e.g. lone parents, working poor immigrants), or even an issue (e.g. affordable housing). They could even choose to work on a number of different issues at the same time (see Exhibit 1).

The challenge for members of a collaboration is to determine how to spend their limited time and energy in order to create the greatest reduction possible in the number of people experiencing poverty and the depth of that poverty.

Unfortunately, many collaborations select a chosen poverty reduction opportunity for one or more of the following reasons:

- They feel compelled to focus on strategies or initiatives that address the greatest area of need - without much consideration as to whether or not they can actually make a difference.
- They are swayed by a charismatic leader or powerful local organization to pursue his or her pet idea.
- They settle on doing something that is politically acceptable to a broad number of people.
- They are excited about experimenting with a new strategy or initiative.

All of these factors are important and require consideration when deciding what to work on. However, a group that makes a decision in response to these pressures alone could be choosing to work on something that will not generate high impact improvements in the lives of low-income residents. An innovative new initiative may be exciting, but cannot generate the scale or depth of a well-worn, even dull, strategy.

The short-term cost of not properly screening opportunities is clear – less than expected (even mediocre reductions) in the scope and depth of poverty.

The long-term cost is higher. Collaborations that are serious about creating community capacity to reduce poverty in the long term need to develop a culture that strives for high impact and a set of disciplined processes for systematically flushing out, screening and selecting opportunities that have the greatest chance of impact.

Impact is what funders want. It's what low-income residents demand. And busy members of a community collaboration, upon reflection, should have it no other way.

EXHIBIT 1

FOCUS AREA	OPPORTUNITY	POTENTIAL STRATEGIES/ INITIATIVES
Lone Parents	Increase the employability of lone parents with low educational achievements and increase the retention rate of employment in their first job.	<p>Create Individual Development Accounts with local financial institutions, philanthropic organizations, and government to help fund education.</p> <p>Develop tailored program with local school boards to help parents secure a Graduate Equivalent Diploma.</p> <p>Seek out supportive work environments, including those with childcare facilities, for employment ready parents that require some workplace flexibility.</p>
Employer Wage Rates	Encourage employers to pay better wages in targeted low wage sectors.	<p>Develop a social marketing campaign that highlights case studies of successful local employers paying decent wages in low wage sectors.</p> <p>Encourage local government to adopt a living wage by-law that requires companies doing business with it to pay a living wage.</p>
A Low Income Neighbourhood	Make a wide range of supports available to <i>employment ready</i> individuals interested in jobs outside the neighbourhood.	<p>In partnership with a local health center develop a neighbourhood-based employment agency with job search counseling and placement services.</p> <p>Expand public transit to the neighbourhood during working hours.</p> <p>Provide a customized training program for the construction trade in cooperation with the local labour council and builders' association.</p>
	Help stretch the limited budgets of low-income residents.	<p>Establish a cooperative housing complex in cooperation with local labour unions.</p> <p>Expand the local car pool and car co-op programs.</p> <p>Create a series of purchasing clubs for food, clothes and education materials.</p>

SYSTEMATIC OPPORTUNITIES SELECTION

Screening and selecting opportunities is a process that a collaboration can use to systematically flush out the best strategies and initiatives from other, less promising, ones. It allows members of a community collaboration, faced with a number of options (see Exhibit 1), to focus their limited time and energy to exploring and, if appropriate, pursuing strategies and initiatives that will generate the most substantial, sustainable reductions in poverty for local residents.

Exhibit 2 uses the metaphor of a funnel to illustrate the strategy selection process, moving from general, rough options to specific, concrete opportunities. The top screen is quite coarse and holds back the less promising strategies and initiatives a collaboration might pursue. Successive screens become finer and finer, allowing through only the most viable strategies and initiatives. These screens are the priorities, research and decision-making processes of your collaboration.

People will attempt to avoid walking through a systematic strategy & initiative selection process for any number of reasons, including:

To Avoid Conflict

Any discussion about where to focus a collaboration's time will quickly highlight the different opinions and ways of looking at the world among the members of your group and can even lead to conflict. If this is not handled well, it can undermine and break the group's ability to work together.

It Takes Too Much Time & Energy

Being thorough takes more time and energy than "winging it." Gathering, analyzing and presenting the information a collaboration will need to answer the questions that come up through the selection process, coupled with the challenge of getting people together to review the information, can be a lot of work and takes time. The many action-oriented people in the group who simply want to 'get on with the work may become frustrated participating in a systematic and, let's face it, sometimes dull research and decision-making process.

It Can Be Confusing

If reducing poverty were easy, poverty levels would be a lot lower. Underlying poverty are many inter-related root causes that differ from person to person (for example, many of the root causes of poverty among seniors differ from those experienced by working poor immigrants). In your group's effort to be as strategic as possible, your collaboration members will certainly struggle with the complexity of the problem and the myriad of related issues, symptoms and potential solutions. If the selection process is not managed well, it can demoralize and slow a group down.

While the above may seem like good reasons to completing a thorough strategic selection process, there are even better reasons to embrace it whole-heartedly.

It Improves the Potential for Greater Results

A group that thoroughly screens each of the opportunities available to it is much more likely to choose strategies and initiatives that can generate the biggest impact and are in line with local interest and the group's capacity.

It Builds Commitment Among Members of Your Collaboration

Your collaboration members may be more inclined to put their back into the work when they fully understand and support the reasons for doing the work in the first place. Anyone that is able to answer all of the questions associated with a possible high impact pathway will have a firmer sense of what it is they are doing and why.

It Demonstrates Credibility

Your collaboration will often require the support – financial, political or even moral – of leaders and organizations inside and outside of the community. Your case for support will be stronger if your rationale for working on specific strategies and initiatives is well thought out and thorough and if you can defend your choices when challenged.

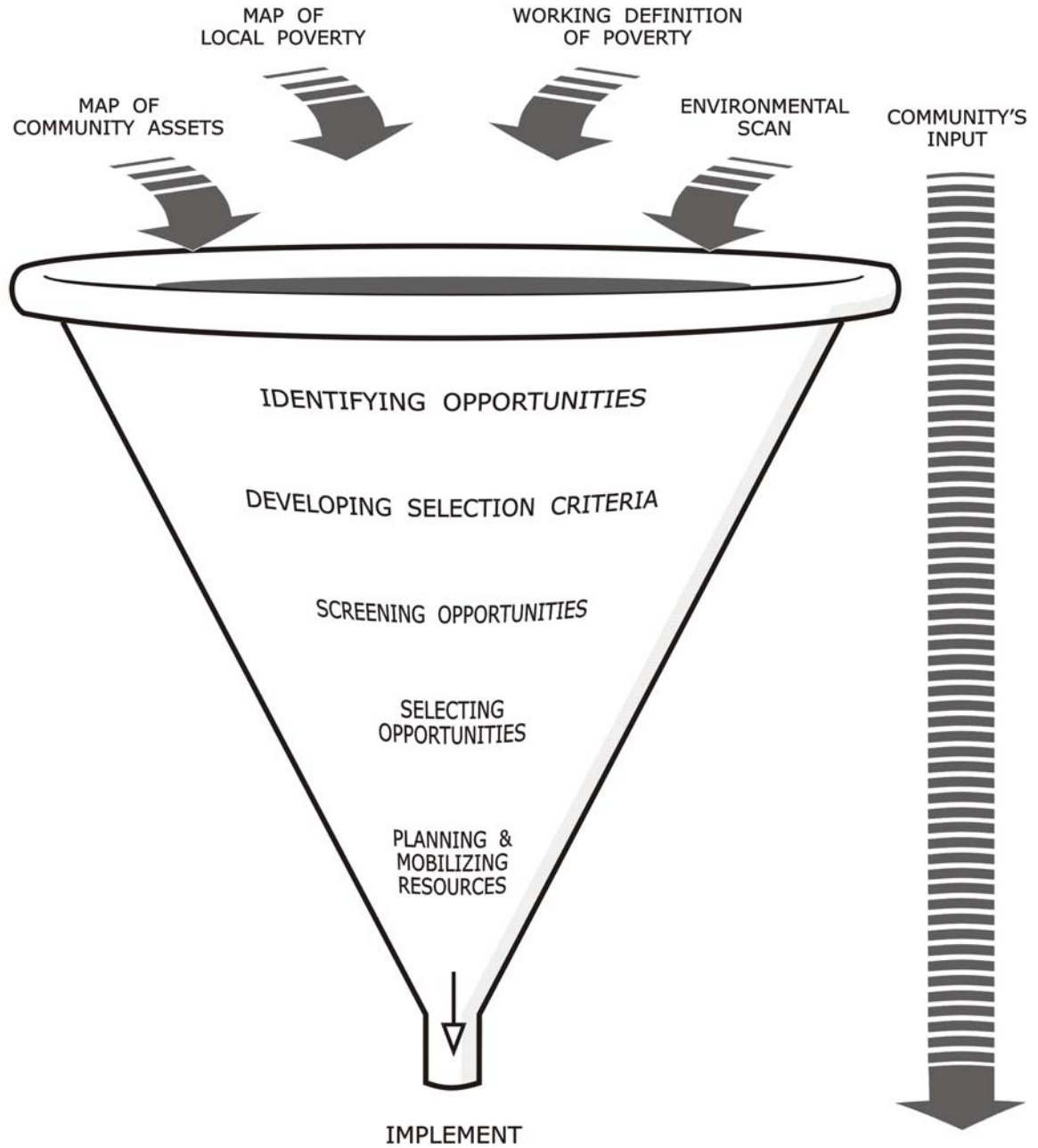
It Can Save Time

There is nothing worse than having to give up mid-way through the planning of an initiative, or have it fail to deliver significant results once implemented, because a group did not fully assess the merit of the opportunity in the first place. A return to the drawing board means a lot of wasted time, energy and local goodwill.

If members of your community collaboration are serious about strengthening the capacity of the community to make progressively greater reductions in poverty over time, they will roll up their sleeves and get to work on a systematic opportunities selection and screening process.

EXHIBIT 2

The Selection "Funnel"



This diagram adapted from The Venture Development Funnel
(*Venture Development Basics: A Workbook*, Port Alberni: Centre For Community Enterprise, 1992)

THE STEPS IN THE SELECTION PROCESS

The Screening and Selecting Opportunities process is a collection of five major steps, some with smaller steps within them, that collaborations can walk through as they pursue their poverty reduction work.

These steps are presented sequentially, but as the work unfolds a group is likely to move across the steps as they need to.

STEP ONE: CREATING A BASE OF INFORMATION

Any systematic selection process requires that your collaboration first do a bit of background work. Ideally, there are four pieces of research or decisions your collaboration will need to have in place before it starts to generate and review opportunities to reduce poverty.

i. A Working Definition of Poverty

Your group should establish a simple working definition of poverty to guide its work and make strategy selection a bit easier. There are many different ways of describing poverty – some definitions are purely based on income, others focus on financial assets, while still others include measures such as hope for the future. Don't try to get a perfect definition – it is difficult to get people from diverse backgrounds to agree on one – simply work to find one that enough collaboration members agree is a suitable working definition to guide the work for the time being. You can upgrade this definition over time. For more on definitions of poverty, see www.vibrantcommunities.ca.

ii. A Map of Local Poverty

If your collaboration's major focus is on reducing poverty, its members should have a fairly good understanding of the scope, depth and trends of poverty in your community. There are many information sources and frameworks for developing a profile of poverty in your community, including the Poverty Matrix, a tool developed in Vibrant Communities. Download the Poverty Matrix at http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/downloads/tools/poverty_matrix2e.pdf.

iii. *A Map of Community Assets*

Your community is undoubtedly home to many organizations and collaborations working with low-income residents or neighbourhoods on issues related to poverty (e.g. non-profit, collaborations on educational achievement, progressive Chambers of Commerce). Your collaboration needs to consider these assets when assessing whether or not there are additional alliances and partnerships it can develop to move a strategy or initiative further.

iv. *An Environmental Scan*

All community work takes place in a dynamic environment. A provincial government may be tightening up eligibility requirements for social assistance recipients and reducing the amount of income they receive. A major employer may have made it clear that they are struggling to find enough qualified employees locally and is open to partnering with community organizations to find the workers they need. The influx of new immigrants to Canada in your community may highlight a clear gap in supports to help them transition to a new life. Your group will need to scan the major political, social and economic trends in your community to ensure it understand the needs and priorities that will practically shape the feasibility of any strategy you choose to move forward on.

Your group may be able to pull together these four pieces of work quickly, but be prepared for it to take some time. Keep in mind that a lot of information is not necessarily helpful – your group simply needs to sort out what is and is not important in an effort to understand some of the major issues in each of these areas.

STEP TWO: IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITY AREAS

Once you have created your information base, your group will need to identify opportunity areas – those areas where you want to focus your efforts. Collaborations usually develop their poverty reduction strategies and initiatives around different theme areas in order to focus their work (see Exhibit 1). These can vary from different quality of life issues to particularly marginalized demographic groups or distressed neighbourhoods (see Exhibit 3).

There are two key pieces of work to complete in this step.

i. Sharing & Reviewing Research

The members of your collaboration and broader community stakeholders will want to get a picture of the community's situation before they begin to explore ways to reduce poverty.

Your collaboration's research group must package its research findings in a way that is engaging and easy-to-understand. Create some type of community event, be it a town hall meeting, retreat, or working group session, to review and discuss the results of that research.

Once your collaboration feels that its members and the broader community have a grasp on the big picture (though you may be asked to do more research or upgrade your presentation before this happens), you can move onto the next piece of work.

ii. Generating Ideas

This is clearly the most creative element of any opportunity selection process and the one that your group can use to engage members of your collaboration and the broader community in the selection process.

There are many ways you can generate ideas about how to reduce poverty, including:

- Brainstorming meetings with the community – most people like to share and explore ideas openly with their colleagues and neighbors and it can often result in innovative possibilities.
- Research into best practice – there is a lot of good research on the results of various strategies and projects related to poverty reduction (e.g. a research institute may have described some high impact strategies for creating affordable housing).
- Review local research reports – most communities have numerous reports and studies with recommendations on how to address different aspects of poverty (e.g. improving high school graduation rates).

Of course, your group may use more than one technique. You could, for example, review the results of key local studies and then brainstorm ideas soon afterwards.

Whatever process your group uses, experience shows that people are mostly easily able to assess the quality of ideas when they are as concrete as possible. Where and when possible, ensure that each idea is fully described. Improving employer wages, for example, is not very concrete. Developing a campaign with the chamber of commerce to promote good workplace practices among local employers, on the other hand, is easier to understand and evaluate.

EXHIBIT 3

Common Entry Points for Collaborations Interested in Reducing Poverty

Collaborations usually shape their strategies and initiatives around certain areas of focus that they deem require immediate attention and/or offer the greatest opportunities for making a difference. Some of the common areas of focus include:

Demographic Groups Experiencing High Incidences of Low Income

- Lone Parent
- Aboriginal
- Women
- Seniors
- Visible Minorities
- Single Males (45-60), etc.

Depths of Poverty Experienced by People

- At Risk of Poverty
- Working Poor
- Temporarily Unemployed
- Persistently Unemployed
- Dependant Poor
- Homeless, etc.

Issue

There are a number of building blocks or assets that people need on their journey to sustain a good quality of life and that marginalized people need to move from poverty. Some of these include:

- Housing
- Employment
- Employer Workplace Practices
- Childcare
- Education and Training
- Food Security, etc.

Neighbourhood

There are approximately 400 plus distressed neighbourhoods in Canada that experience a higher incidence of families with low income, high rates of unemployment, percentage of people drawing income from government income support programs, lower rates of youth attending school full times, and higher rates of families headed by lone parents.

For more information on these entry points, please see www.vibrantcommunities.ca.

Regardless of the process you use to generate ideas, your collaboration, with community help, will likely generate a large number of possibilities:

- The Opportunities 2000 group in Waterloo identified over 60 general themes areas the collaboration might work on during its Regeneration Year (2001/2002) many of which had related strategies and initiatives.
- The Core Neighbourhood Council in Saskatoon identified 13 priority areas with 62 related strategies.
- The Anti-Poverty Coalition in Saskatoon identified over 10 theme areas with many more associated strategies and initiatives.

Clearly, there is rarely a shortage of ideas in most collaborations about how to reduce poverty and improve the community's quality of life. The challenge is to sort through these options to find the ones that will have the greatest impact.

STEP THREE: DEVELOP CRITERIA & A SCREENING PROCESS

While some might argue it is better to develop the selection criteria before identifying opportunities, it is important to have a chance to review all of the possible strategies and initiatives your collaboration could pursue before deciding on a course of action.

There are three sub-steps in this part of the work.

i. Review & Select Criteria

Review the ideas areas generated in the previous step and identify key considerations to sort out the best of them. (The questions raised in Appendix A may help.) Have your collaboration members review and finalize the criteria they feel are most important in making a decision.

ii. Develop a Process for Screening Opportunities

Having criteria is one thing, but your group also needs to have a process that uses the criteria to make decisions. Communities participating in Vibrant Communities have used various different ways to screen opportunities:

- In Waterloo, a diverse group of people met and voted on over twenty themes under the area of working poor by placing sticky dots on the areas they felt would have the greatest impact (e.g. access to employment services, affordable transportation).
- In Saskatoon, the Core Neighbourhood Council gathered community residents in a community hall and used electronic polling (see example below) to vote on 13 priority areas and 60 related strategies.

Example: Core Neighbourhood Council Voting Result

Priority Area	Community Vote	Top Strategy Choice	Community Vote
Priority 3: All residents of the core neighbourhoods are able to access quality food at fair prices.	88%	1. Determine the feasibility of a centrally located grocery store and/or food cooperative.	88%
		2. Enhance access to community gardening through vacant land.	79%
<i>One of 13 "goal & strategy" bundles the Saskatoon Core Neighbourhood Council chose to focus on after a community-based voting process in November 2002.</i>			

- Members of the Anti-Poverty Coalition also in Saskatoon used a relatively simple process of working through a simple checklist of criteria and identifying through consensus which opportunities best fit the criteria of "high potential impact" and "feasibility."

Each of these approaches, of course, has its own strength and weakness. Determine which process best suits the work of your collaboration and community.

STEP FOUR: SCREEN OPPORTUNITIES

With some initial background research in hand and a set of selection criteria and decision-making process in hand, your collaboration is ready to start screening the various opportunities it has before it.

i. The First Cut

The purpose of this step is to exclude opportunity areas that have some merit, but clearly do not fully meet your screening criteria. This process should be transparent and, if possible, involve the broader community through some type of community meeting or event.

Try to limit the number of opportunity areas that emerge from this screening to ten to fifteen, but no more. Remember that your group will need to complete further research on each opportunity and the more themes that make it through this process, the more work and the slower the decision-making process.

This step should not require a lot of time. A well-organized two-hour meeting should be more than enough time to cut the opportunities that do not meet your screening criteria if people have a chance to review the materials in advance.

ii. *The “Quick Study”*

In this step, your group will want to gather, analyze and package the information to answer the questions raised about opportunities that made it through the first cut. More likely than not, this research will fall to the staff team supporting the collaboration, with input and guidance by collaboration members.

There will be a tendency among members of your research team and collaboration to try to answer all the questions as thoroughly as possible. Resist this pressure. You will explore the best options in more depth after the second cut. Based on the information you are able to pull together from existing information sources and quick interviews with people who understand this issue you should plan on developing two to four page profiles of each opportunity area.

As your research team prepares profiles on each opportunity, they should document questions they feel need to be answered with subsequent research should that opportunity area make it through to the next step.

iii. *The Second Cut*

The purpose of this step is to narrow down your opportunities to those that your collaboration members feel are promising and warrant more in-depth research.

You will use the same approach you used in the first cut: use the selection criteria to guide your thinking and strive to involve the broader community in a transparent decision-making process.

The only difference in this cut is that once you make your top selections, you will also need to spend some time identifying questions you would like the research team to explore.

For example, if one of the opportunity areas is organized around progressive workplace practices and a key strategy is to improve wages in low wage industries, your group may want to find out more about the experience and outcomes of other communities that have taken on such initiatives in order to get a sense of what you might be able to achieve locally.

Alternatively, your group may be interested in supporting young people at risk of experiencing poverty to finish high school, but is not sure that leaders and organizations in the local school boards are keen for your collaboration to become involved or even if they feel that some of the strategies brainstormed by your group are feasible.

It is critical at this stage that the key leaders and organizational partners in your collaboration and those in the community already involved in working on these opportunities come together. After all, they are the ones that will have to drive the strategies and be committed to seeing them through in the long run if they are to be successful.

While your collaboration may have been able to make the first cut in one short meeting, you may find that you have to meet several times to make the second cut as people struggle to make a decision and/or your members require the research team to pull together more information.

iv. The In-depth Study

Your group's research at this stage will be more intensive because your collaboration identified some precise research questions during the second cut. They will want to be confident that they understand what exactly it is that they are getting into when they make their final selections.

This type of research might take weeks or maybe even months – it all depends on the research questions your group identifies in the second cut and the depth and quality of information it requires to feel comfortable in making a decision.

Sometimes, however, the entire process can get hung up because of the extensive research effort required to better understand the potential of one or two opportunity areas. In that instance, you may want to consider

putting those opportunity areas aside for continued study and allowing your collaboration to move on to the next step with those opportunity areas for which you have in-depth information.

STEP FIVE: SELECT OPPORTUNITIES

The purpose of this step is simple: to decide which opportunity area(s) and related strategies and initiatives your group would like to focus its planning and mobilizing efforts.

Use your selection criteria and whatever decision-making method you have agreed upon to screen the opportunities (hopefully) one last time. At this point your group may feel that they would like to introduce new screening criteria.

There is no right number of opportunity areas to pursue - it depends almost entirely upon the capacity and ambition of your collaboration. However, there are two things your group should remember as it works through this final step.

First, your collaboration is deciding on both the general focus area *and* the specific strategies and initiatives in that area. You may therefore choose a general focus but decide not to pursue some of the strategies and initiatives that were bundled together in that group (e.g. choose to work on expanding affordable housing, yet elect to drop the strategy of lobbying the provincial government for investment into social housing because another group is working on that).

Second, the group choosing not to proceed with an opportunity area does not necessarily mean that the opportunity may never see the light of day again. You can certainly send it back for more study if that is required or act on it at a later time if the right conditions emerge.

STEP SIX: PLANNING & MOBILIZING RESOURCES

This step is straightforward and requires members of your collaboration to work together to more thoroughly plan the selected strategies and initiatives and raise the partnership and money required to move forward.

Thankfully, much of your work will already be done. The information generated in the in-depth study will provide a lot of what you need to pull together your plan. Your group's networking and consultation work will have already

engaged the relevant leaders and organizations to assess their interest in participating in various projects.

It is almost guaranteed that your group will flush out new strategies and initiatives in the planning phase. A person on the research and planning team will suddenly have a bright idea – a potential partner will bring a idea to the table that s/he was reluctant to share before. That's a good thing! Send the specific strategies and initiatives through the opportunity selection process once again – you'll be good at it by then!

OPPORTUNITIES SELECTION IN PRACTICE

The steps described in the Screening and Selecting Opportunities tool are not a blue print that your collaboration should follow step by step. There are simply too many factors to consider – when to use it, how to involve the community, the kind of research you might need to do, how quickly your collaboration wants to work – to come up with one-size-fits-all guide.

For example, you may decide to use the process at the beginning of a formal, community wide, research and planning process, and generate dozens of possibilities to meet local needs and priorities, in the hope that you can find the best three or four to work on. That is what the Saskatoon Core Neighbourhood Council did when they identified 13 priority areas and 62 related strategies after a yearlong research and consultation process.

Alternatively, you may use the process any time to assess a very specific opportunity. For instance, while members of Opportunities 2000 in Waterloo had already selected the opportunity areas of working poor and at-risk youth, they used a quick-and-dirty version of the process to assess a surprise opportunity to assist low-income seniors better access a federal government income support program.

The tool is simply meant to provide a general framework and series of simple steps that will help your group but which will need to be adapted to suit the needs of your community collaboration.

CONCLUSION

There is no guarantee that the strategies and initiatives that emerge out of the screening and selection process will lead to the substantial reductions in poverty your collaboration members want.

Your group can, however, dramatically improve its chances that its work will lead to meaningful results by using some type of systematic opportunities selection process – such as the one described above.

Attachment A - Some Selection Criteria

Poverty Reduction

- Does the opportunity clearly identify the target group it intends to benefit?
- Is the opportunity designed to reduce - rather than just alleviate - poverty?

Holistic

- Is the opportunity designed to address more than one root cause of poverty (e.g. housing, employment skills, financial assets)?
- Is the opportunity designed to benefit more than one demographic group that experience higher-than-average incidences or depths of poverty (e.g. immigrants, youth, lone parents)?
- Does the opportunity link up with other complementary efforts to reduce poverty?

Multisectoral

- Is the opportunity designed to involve organizations from more than one sector?

Inclusive

- Can the opportunity incorporate a chance for representatives of the target group to be actively involved in its design?
- Does the opportunity have barriers that make it difficult for the target group to participate?

Developmental

- Is the opportunity designed to increase the willingness of local organizations to become involved in poverty reduction?
- Is the opportunity designed to increase the capacity (i.e. skills, resources, knowledge and networks) of local organizations to reduce poverty?
- Is the opportunity designed to strengthen the policies and practices of organizations external to the community (e.g. provincial and federal agencies, business and trade associations, foundations, etc.) to support local efforts to reduce poverty?

Long Term

- Is the opportunity designed to generate results long into the future?
- Can the opportunity generate shorter-term results that will demonstrate its effectiveness and build support among stakeholders?

Learning & Change

- Is the opportunity rooted in the lessons learned of other similar initiatives?
- Can the opportunity incorporate an easy-to-implement plan to capture results?
- Can the opportunity incorporate an easy-to-implement plan for *all* its stakeholders to regularly review results and identify ways to improve the initiative?

Capacity

- Does the opportunity fit the vision, mission and principles of your collaboration?
- Does the opportunity fit your collaboration's overall strategy to reduce poverty?
- Does the opportunity strengthen your collaboration's capacity to reduce poverty?
- Can your collaboration take on this opportunity without undermining its ability to carry out its other work?

Risk

- To what degree, if any, would the failure of the opportunity leave the people it is designed to assist worse off than before?
- To what degree, if any, would failure of the opportunity weaken your collaboration's capacity and local profile?

Appendix B - Assessing High Impact Areas
 A Sample Checklist for Convening Groups
 (Using a Hypothetical Community)

Instructions:

1. Review all the potential 'high impact areas' for your convening group.
2. Review each 'high impact' area by answering of the following questions.
3. Be prepared to share your responses with the other people in your group.

Area: _____

	Question	Low	Medium	High	Comments
The Area	1. How <u>many people</u> does this issue or area likely affect?	< 1500	1500-8000	8000 +	
	2. To what degree will effective action on this issue or area likely reduce the <u>depth</u> of poverty?	A little bit	Certainly noticeable	A lot	
	3. What is the <u>trend</u> underlying this issue or area?	Decreasing	Flat	Increasing	
	4. How easy is it to <u>capture any changes</u> your group might make on this area or issue?	Very difficult	Achievable	Very easy	
Environment	5. How much <u>influence</u> do <u>local players</u> have on this area or issue?	Very little	Some	A lot	
	6. How <u>receptive</u> are <u>local players</u> on working on this area or issue?	Not very	Somewhat	Very	
	7. To what degree can your group provide <u>value</u> to the community's efforts on this issue?	Little	Some	A great deal	
"Fit" with Your Convening Group	8. To what degree does the work on the area fit your group's <u>mission</u> ?	Weak	Medium	Strong	
	9. To what degree does the proposed work on the area 'fit' your group's capacity - its networks, skills, time and influence?	Weak	Medium	Strong	

1. How highly do you rate this possible area for in-depth attention:
 - Excellent
 - Good
 - Poor

2. What are the major reasons underlying your support/lack of support for this area?

3. What are the implications for your group if it should take on this issue (e.g. need to develop a new set of networks or skills, manage expectations about results)?

4. Who in the community can make things happen in this area?

This booklet was developed by the staff of Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement as a part of the Vibrant Communities initiative (www.vibrantcommunities.ca). Vibrant Communities is sponsored by the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy and Tamarack.



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139 Father David Bauer Drive
Waterloo, Ontario N2L 6L1
(519) 885-5155
tamarack@tamarackcommunity.ca
www.tamarackcommunity.ca