

**Government Involvement in Place-Based Initiatives to Reduce Poverty:  
What have we learned? Where do we go?  
June 20, 2007**

Conversations with  
Caroline Andrew, Director, Centre on Governance, University of Ottawa  
Katherine Graham, Dean, Faculty of Public Affairs, Carleton University  
Russell Mawby, Director, Housing Branch, City of Ottawa

Commentary by Deborah Wilson,  
Director General, Community Development and Partnerships Directorate,  
Human Resources & Social Development Canada

***Katherine Graham in conversation with Caroline Andrew and Russell  
Mawby:***

*Having participated in this series, what are the significant, and potentially recurring, themes that have been apparent in this work? In particular, considering the roles for governments, the challenges in acting on these roles and thinking of potential solutions that we may have heard about?*

**Caroline Andrew**

The examples in this series have told us about the power of local government to be a catalyst who can start a process and bring the right stakeholders to the table. Local government people have often seen this as part of their mission and mandate, but senior government representatives have also come to see this as part of their role, as for example in St. John's where CMHC asked people to the table to find out what would be useful support.

The first role was often listening, followed by a second stage of support to community endeavours to increase and build community capacity. The final stage is give some distance to the community so that the community could continue to build their capacity.

There is an observable of cycle of support - from listening, to creative support, to allowing the community processes to work themselves out.

**Russell Mawby**

The question for me is -- why is this unusual? We know this is how we do place-based work, and the right people are always in the community -- so what is it about our systems that makes this process extraordinary?

And what allows it to happen? What change occurs to allow the people in the systems to accept the fuzziness, the risk of lack of control and uncertainty of

outcomes? How did we get buy-in - what are the conditions that made it possible?

I point to the example of SCPI program for housing that was so helpful because it helped us think about here the places will be in 10 to 30 years - far beyond the time frame of most programs.

### **Katherine Graham**

I noted that senior government people were often more 'on edge' than their locally based counterparts. Some reasons for this might be that the federal government thinks of themselves as the government of all Canadians, but it is hard to reflect the regional differences and diversity of Canada. The perceived role of local federal representatives is tangential -- it's not easy for them to be involved in policy areas. Representatives of different levels of government don't have the same agenda, for example in relation to the "communities agenda", and this affects the local representatives' ability to engage with communities.

Do we understand that there is locally-based policy making? Municipal governments have been seen as service providers, not a policy forum.

### **Caroline Andrew**

There is a need to recognize what is already going on and what needs to be supported regarding locally based policy issues. For example, urban aboriginal issues, immigrant integration, and poverty reduction are all driven locally, but we don't see it. We also have problems with the dynamic between the field and the centre. Other countries have initiatives to bring that dynamic into the policy making process.

### **Russell Mawby**

How do we make the case that this is the right way to work? We are constantly consulting communities, but communities tell us they are tired of the way we do it.

### ***Commentary – Deborah Wilson***

Thank you, Russell, Caroline and Katherine, for all each of you has done to help make this GLC series a rich learning experience for me. Regrettably I have not been able to 'attend' all of the calls, but it is a great way to learn about fascinating community collaborations, and the work of government officials within those collaborations.

My own Directorate at HRSDC, Community Development and Partnerships, is privileged to be involved with Vibrant Communities, via some financial support, but mostly because of our policy interests – we are keen to learn more about what is happening in 'place-based' policy approaches, and in particular the

implications for changing roles of governments, and changing behavioral and leadership models...when we work across sectors

Clearly the role of the national government has changed significantly over the past decade, as more programs and funding is devolved, and as other partners become the true experts in the design and delivery of health, education and social services. But we continue to be interested in knowing what happens on the ground – clearly there are important aspects of national well-being, that play out most powerfully in local communities.

So, for me, this chance to have an informal venue, for information-sharing and learning, across jurisdictional boundaries, is a great opportunity. It is why we have had a staff person working with Caledon on this project, including the site visits that produced the case studies and the ‘stories’ that have been shared on these calls.

Personally, I wanted to let everyone know that I am enthusiastic about the idea of carrying the GLC forward. For example, I would be willing to co-chair the development of another series of calls – and I can continue to invest some staff time in supporting this. I would be very happy to do this as a joint project with another official, perhaps someone from a provincial or municipal government?

But at the same time, we need to do some stock-taking. The questions we are asking include:

- Is there is a pan-Canadian appetite amongst government officials to talk about challenges, strategies and ideas related to community well-being and poverty reduction?
  - This can include looking at the ‘joined-up’, holistic, or integrated approaches to comprehensive community strategies, recognizing the connections between the economic, social, cultural and environmental factors that affect human well-being locally, a ‘place’ policy perspective?
- If so, what is the right approach? Conference calls? Face-to-face meetings? Newsletters?
- If we use the national conference call format, are you comfortable with the current approach, i.e. case studies with speakers, focusing on a theme per call?
- How do we make sure we meet the practical needs of officials, from all three orders of government, working on the ground?
- What do we need to do to reach more people? Optimal marketing strategies?

I would love to hear your thoughts on these questions. If you wanted some time to consider this, I could have Donna Troop, our Senior Policy Analyst who has worked with Caledon on this project, contact you afterwards with a sort of 'follow-up' survey, to try to gauge the appetite for moving forward. After all, we do not want to *'manufacture consent'* for something that is not actually needed.