

**Vibrant Communities BC's Capital Region:
The Quality of Life CHALLENGE:
Leadership – Bottom-up and Sideways
May 2, 2007**

Conversations with
Laurel Gordon, Service Delivery Manager, Citizen & Community Services,
Service Canada, Southern Vancouver Island
Nancy Taylor, Project Manager, Victoria Agreement, City of Victoria
Commentary by
Russell Mawby, Director, Housing Branch, City of Ottawa

Interview with Laurel Gordon

Tell us a little bit about how you (and Service Canada) became active in the work of the Quality of Life CHALLENGE. What drew you to the work, and what does it mean to you to be involved in this initiative?

We became involved in this work through the work of Joe Artibise who is now retired. He was Labour Market Services consultant – he would go into the community and identify areas where there was a need for our department to play a role in community issues. Service Canada has long been involved in community.

For governments, it always presents a bit of a challenge in terms of what our role should be in relation to these initiatives. Until recently, our role has been related primarily to employment services. With Service Canada, our role is broadening as the access point to federal services and benefits. As we evolve as an organization, defining that role can be challenging. It is the community that owns the issue. We see our role as a catalyst, facilitator or connector. We try to look at whether our programs and services are an appropriate response to a community issue.

We have two program areas – job creation partnerships and labour market partnerships – that were appropriate for assisting the work of the Quality of Life CHALLENGE in employment related initiatives.

What are the challenges that have come with working in this way? And what are the unique opportunities?

We have had to examine our role as funder vs. our role as community support, and how to define that clearly for ourselves, our staff, and the communities and organizations we engage with. There are many conflict of interest issues that need to be considered. In our community, we have identified the types of issues we want to be involved in. If organizations come to us to request funding for

community development, my first question is whether they are collaborating with other organizations that may be doing that type of work.

When you don't have collaboration, you get organizations competing for funding and providing duplicative services. As a funder, it is difficult to tell if you are having the best results, or if you are helping one organization at the expense of another. We encourage collaboration.

We also try to be clear about our mandate and the types of things that are appropriate for us to be involved in. Within the Service Canada centres, we are responsible for delivering federal employment programs. We don't want to be seen as coming to the table with a bag of money – our role has evolved so that we can be a catalyst in bringing organizations together around a need. We help things come together, connecting the different sides of the labour market together, or acting as an information broker in the community.

We also need to consider fairness. If we are working closely with one organization, how do we determine where we invest our time and effort? Broad based initiatives like the CHALLENGE, where key leading organizations are involved, are places we have seen it as appropriate to invest time. In this instance, Joe Artibise sat on the Steering Committee, but his role was as a liaison and information broker, and he did not have anything to do with funding requests. We kept those roles separate.

Interview with Nancy Taylor

Your work around intergovernmental collaborative work has been with regards to the Urban Development Agreement. How did the discussions on a Victoria Urban Agreement begin?

Our downtown is the business core for the entire region. We are also home to 80 plus service providers – many services for our most vulnerable citizens are in the downtown area, which is seven square kilometers. We have a high percentage of injection drug users, high HIV and Hepatitis C infection rates, and about 800 homeless in the downtown.

About four years ago, the city looked for assistance from the federal and provincial levels in better addressing these issues. Western Economic Diversification highlighted the value of Urban Development Agreements in Winnipeg and Vancouver, and through discussions with them and the Ministry of Community Services we began developing plans for working on an intergovernmental basis.

We developed a series of priorities to address issues identified by the community, and we developed a formal agreement. Canada's new federal

government has said they believe that communities are to be addressed more by the province, and that Urban Development Agreements as formal mechanisms are not high on the list of initiatives they are looking at. So we are stalled on the formal level, but are continuing to work with federal and provincial partners on the issues.

What was able to be achieved through the collaborative arrangement that would not have been able to be achieved in the absence of this type of structure?

We needed a more formalized way to rally our efforts around issues that we needed to work on together. We began to have conversations and to build facilitated discussions with federal and provincial colleagues. We were then able to gain access to information and guidance. We had some good examples of conversations that led to opportunities for pooled funding for projects. By building a credible working relationship, we were able to be less bureaucratic than in the past. We attracted funding for a number of initiatives through exchanges of letters rather than through formal grant proposals.

We found that we were able, as bureaucrats, to take greater risk when the risk was shared among the levels of government. Leadership started to pop up in all kinds of places. By working more effectively together at the administrative level, we were also able to help our political leaders to be more accountable to constituents.

One of the open questions is, without a formal agreement or MOU, we are wondering if we will be able to maintain that level of risk taking. Another challenge is, because we were moving towards something concrete, there was a sense that people had the authority to use their discretionary power to support problem solving with community. That discretionary authority seems to be diminishing at the federal and provincial levels. Allocation of dollars is taking place at a more centralized level. This makes us wonder if we can be as effective and as agile at working across levels of government as we'd hoped, and whether the ability to provide financial support will still be there.

Commentary, Russell Mawby

We recognize that community needs to own the issues, but that can sometimes mean that government withdraws.

Being a facilitator is an important role, but does that mean that things turn to issue response rather than having government as a long-term, sustained partner at the table?

Accountability for outcomes is what we are all asking for, but outcomes are complex, hard to measure, and hard for governments to be accountable for given the increasing centralization. It is interesting that Western Economic Diversification pops up as a catalyst - they have a looser mandate and are able to be opportunistic about the roles they play in a community. Government is still somewhat caught between the desire to be flexible and the drive for accountability, which pushes us more towards an outputs approach.

We have to keep reminding ourselves that the process is more important than the programs. It is important that we ask our community partners for collaborative approaches, but we also need to model that behaviour. Citizens expect us to work like this all the time. They have complex, interconnected issues, and they aren't separated by program.