

Learning Themes

Leading to Enable: Government Engagement in Vibrant Communities Saint John

A number of issues emerge from the story of government-community collaboration through Vibrant Communities Saint John (VCSJ). These issues are likely not unique to Saint John. When applied to other contexts, they may point to helpful lessons and important questions. The following are a few issues for further exploration.

Collaborative leadership presents new opportunities for achieving big objectives.

- What are the appropriate and value-added roles for public servants and elected representatives in forums like VCSJ's Leadership Roundtable?
- What factors are most effective in bringing public servants to collaborative tables? Are there differences at the federal, provincial or level levels?
- Who is best situated to support the mechanisms and forums for collaborative relationships to be sustained, both across government organizations and with the community?

Leaders within the public sector are key to supporting community change. What are the dynamics around working with and for elected representatives?

- In Saint John, elected representatives at all levels have played significant roles in contributing to VCSJ's and others' efforts towards poverty reduction. What are the implications of this engagement for the role of public servants in working with the community?

How might public servants balance their roles as individuals and participants of collaborative approaches, while also being neutral representatives of the organizations with which they work?

- A commitment to collaboration and shared governance is required in order to ensure success. But active participation by public servants, including acting as champion of a community effort, often is perceived within government as overstepping mandates or loss of neutrality. Can the two apparently contradictory roles of active participant and neutral supporter be reconciled?
- What are some ways of listening to the community while representing governments?

Practising innovation can help organizations better achieve complex objectives.

- Public servants can be active partners in ensuring policy and program structures respond to community priorities, enabling community members to achieve their goals. Is project funding an appropriate tool for supporting community visions? What other tools might public servants have to pursue both community visions and government mandates simultaneously?
- Various partners around VCSJ's Leadership Roundtable are practising co-ownership of neighbourhood-level work (e.g., provincial investments in local police or municipal support for housing). What are some effective approaches to organizing government interventions at the neighbourhood-level?

