



***Learning and Evaluation for
Vibrant Communities Trail Builders:***

The Pan-Canadian Process

July 24, 2008

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I. Introduction

The following document provides an overview of the Pan-Canadian learning and evaluation process for Vibrant Communities Trail Builders. It is intended as a general guide; a separate package of materials will provide a more detailed set of tools to support various aspects of the work.

This document:

1. Briefly reviews the learning and evaluation process used in Vibrant Communities 'Chapter One' (2002-2006)
2. Describes the purpose and principles behind the learning and evaluation process for 'Chapter Two'
3. Outlines the roles of key partners
4. Presents a conceptual framework and a set of research questions that underpin the learning and evaluation work
5. Describes the key components of the process.

II. Purpose and Principles

The overall purpose of the learning and evaluation process is to build knowledge about comprehensive, multisectoral approaches to poverty reduction. Specific goals include:

1. Contribute to answering a series of research questions important for advancing the work of poverty reduction.
2. Support the local planning efforts of Trail Builder communities.
3. Communicate the nature of such initiatives – the different ways they are put into practice, as well as their strengths, challenges and lessons learned – to others, including prospective supporters such as funders and policymakers.
4. Identify evidence that helps make the case for comprehensive, multisectoral approaches.
5. Continue to elaborate the conception of poverty and poverty reduction underpinning the Pan-Canadian initiative.

The learning and evaluation process will be pursued in ways that:

1. Complement – rather than replace – the learning and evaluation efforts of individual communities
2. Build on the techniques that community partners have found useful in their work to date while continuing to test innovative approaches
3. Reflect a broadly shared conceptual framework for poverty reduction (discussed below)
4. Explore a common set of questions while allowing maximum flexibility in how these

questions are answered

5. Ensure clarity of expectations for all partners by providing minimum specifications for the design and delivery of learning and evaluation ‘deliverables’
6. Adapt flexibly to the evolving understanding of the work on the part of all partners
7. Support Vibrant Communities collaboration with other national and provincial organizations working in the area of poverty reduction
8. Address the unique needs of different ‘users’ of the learning and evaluation findings
9. Require a level of effort proportional to the benefits generated.

III. The Upgraded Process At a Glance

Key features of the upgraded learning and evaluation process are:

- A. A more fully articulated conception of poverty and poverty reduction

A conceptual framework is presented that depicts poverty and poverty reduction in terms of:

- Multiple asset areas (personal, social, human, financial and physical)
- Multiple spheres of activity (e.g., employment, housing, transportation and child care)
- Multiple sectors (business, government, nonprofit and low-income)
- Multiple levels of action (individual and household assets, community capacity building, and wider policy and systems change).

- B. A set of major research questions

A research agenda is identified that explores three basic questions:

- What are the different manifestations of a comprehensive approach for achieving deep and durable outcomes? What are the strengths and limitations of each approach?
- What are the principles, processes, techniques and capabilities required to do comprehensive, multisectoral work well?
- What is needed to create a more supportive environment for local poverty reduction?

- C. An expanded set of outcomes and indicators

A working set of outcomes and indicators are specified at three levels of action:

- Enhanced community capacity for poverty reduction
- Improvements in individual and household assets
- Changes in policies and systems.

D. Three streams of work

The learning and evaluation work is organized into three key components:

- Frameworks for Change – An evolving account of the key ideas guiding local initiatives
- Change Profiles – Documentation of the outcomes being achieved by initiatives
- Reporting – Mid-year updates and End-of-Year reports prepared by communities.

Table One provides an overview of the work to be done.

**Table One –
Learning and Evaluation Overview**

<i>Components</i>	<i>Elements</i>
<i>Framework for Change</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Framework for Change Statement</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepared during Phase Two (Building Conditions of Success) 2. <i>Framework for Change Story</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submitted with Phase Three (Action Learning) proposal 3. <i>Evaluation Plan</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Included in Phase Three (Action Learning) proposal 4. <i>Framework for Change Reflection Session</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertaken annually 5. <i>Upgraded Framework for Change Story</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed at end of three- to four-year cycle or when major adjustments are made in the Framework for Change
<i>Change Profiles</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Brief Descriptions of Poverty Reduction Strategies</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One two-page story for each strategy updated when notable changes occur in the strategy or outcomes 2. <i>Basic Outcome Tracking</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome tracking at three levels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Enhanced Community Capacity for Poverty Reduction – Improvements in Individual and Household Assets – Policy and Systems Change • Contribution analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A brief on-line survey and internal assessment of the group’s contribution to the change. 3. <i>In-Depth Case Studies</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One per community

<i>Reporting</i>	<p><i>1. Mid-Year Update</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statistical report (following Basic Outcome Tracking template) • Submitted May 1 each year <p><i>2. End-of-Year Report</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Update on framework for change based on annual reflection session – Key goals and activities planned for the year ahead – Administrative report • Statistical report (following Basic Outcome Tracking template) • Submitted November 1 each year
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IV. Trail Builder Learning and Evaluation in ‘Chapter One’

Designing learning and evaluation processes for comprehensive, multisectoral initiatives is notoriously difficult. As presented in the chart below, the reasons are related to the defining features of these initiatives.

**Table Two –
Challenges Evaluating Comprehensive Community Initiatives**

<i>Defining Features of Comprehensive, Multisectoral Initiatives</i>	<i>Evaluation Challenges</i>
<i>Pursue broad and multiple goals</i>	The sheer scope of their work poses challenges in terms of the amount of time and energy that learning and evaluation may require.
<i>Encourage innovative partnerships</i>	Attribution issues arise due to the number of partners involved and the range of factors that influence the outcomes achieved.
<i>Seek to bring about change in different spheres and levels of action</i>	The ideas guiding the change process are often implicit making it difficult to assess their validity.
<i>Are intentionally flexible, developmental and responsive to changing local conditions</i>	Learning and evaluation processes need to be highly flexible in recognition of the emergent nature of the process.
<i>Pursue some combination of community participation, empowerment and capacity building</i>	Outcomes in these areas are integral to these initiatives, but are often difficult to define and measure.
<i>Recognize the long-term nature of fundamental community change and employ relatively long-term time frames</i>	The long-term nature of the work must be reconciled with the need to track progress in the near- and mid-term and make appropriate adjustments along the way.

In Vibrant Communities ‘chapter one,’ a Trail Builder learning and evaluation process was designed with these challenges in mind. Inspired by the concept of developmental evaluation, its purpose was broad: to support partners in exploring the potential of comprehensive, multisectoral approaches to poverty reduction. The process consisted of three streams of activity:

Stream One – Theory of change stories and annual reflection sessions were used to capture the key ideas guiding the work of each Trail Builder, as well as the lessons learned and adjustments made as the initiatives evolved.

Stream Two – Specific poverty reduction strategies were documented in brief stories describing the challenge addressed, the strategy employed and the outcomes achieved.

Stream Three – Semi-annual statistical reports tracked progress meeting partner and household targets. Annual narrative reports elaborated more fully on the overall development of local initiatives, including efforts to build community capacity and impact wider systems related to poverty. Community stories, annual reflection papers and other synthesis reports prepared by national partners examined overall patterns and lessons learned, and shared these with Vibrant Communities partners and others interested in the initiative’s work.

On the whole, this design served its purpose. It allowed the complexity and diversity of local initiatives to be documented, supported ongoing learning and planning, tracked progress toward basic outcomes, and allowed the experience of local initiatives to be communicated effectively within Vibrant Communities and beyond – all the while, keeping the demands on time and energy (more or less) in bounds.

At the same time, near the end of Chapter One, Vibrant Communities partners identified a number of important areas in which improvements could be made or where adjustments were required to meet the evolving purposes of the initiative. Major changes sought were:

- A more fully articulated understanding of poverty and poverty reduction
- Focussed attention on a series of research questions emerging from the first round of Vibrant Communities’ work
- A more robust set of tools to assist communities with various aspects of the learning and evaluation process.

Developmental evaluation is particularly suited to “innovative settings where goals are emergent and changing rather than predetermined and fixed, time periods are fluid and forward looking rather than artificially imposed by external deadlines, and purpose is learning, innovation and change rather than external accountability or getting ready for external accountability.” In this approach, “evaluators are part of a team whose members collaborate to conceptualize, design and test new approaches in a long-term, ongoing process of continual improvement, adaptation and intentional change.”

- Michael Quinn Patton

While the initial design provides a good foundation from which to build, there is now a need to upgrade it in these ways. This document outlines the revised learning and evaluation process.

V. Partners and Roles

The key partners in this learning and evaluation process are Trail Builder communities, Tamarack and Caledon.

Leadership and support for the overall process will be provided by Tamarack but all partners will share in its governance. Communication and decision-making related to the learning and evaluation work will take place through a variety of mechanisms including convenor conference calls, discussion within the Learning and Evaluation Community of Practice, and ongoing contact between national and local partners as the work unfolds.

Table Three – Roles

<i>Partner</i>	<i>Role</i>
<i>Trail Builder Communities</i>	Each community will undertake its own learning and evaluation process designed to serve its local needs. These local designs will integrate the key elements of the Pan-Canadian process described below. Each Trail Builder is responsible for putting in place the human and financial resources necessary to support its learning and evaluation activities.
<i>Tamarack</i>	In addition to serving as the overall lead for the learning and evaluation process Tamarack will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Provide hands-on support to communities as they undertake various facets of the learning and evaluation process – Identify or develop specific tools that assist communities in the conduct of their work. – Facilitate community driven learning through the Learning and Evaluation Community of Practice – Assemble and disseminate results and themes derived from mid- and end-of-year reports submitted by Trail Builders – Join with Caledon and other partners as appropriate to prepare synthesis papers pertaining to the major research questions being addressed
<i>Caledon</i>	The Caledon Institute will work with Tamarack and community partners to write reader-friendly stories about various aspects of Vibrant Communities’ poverty reduction efforts, including local ‘frameworks for change’ and in-depth case studies on selected initiatives (both discussed below). Caledon also will provide editorial support to Tamarack on research papers, and will disseminate these reports through its network of community and government contacts.

VI. Foundations for the Learning and Evaluation Process

Two products from the first round of Vibrant Communities' work underpin the proposed learning and evaluation process: a more fully developed conception of poverty and poverty reduction, and a set of research questions intended to deepen our understanding of comprehensive, multisectoral initiatives.

A. The Vibrant Communities Poverty Reduction Framework

In the first phase of Vibrant Communities, national sponsors put forward a minimal definition of poverty and poverty reduction. There were three main reasons for this approach:

1. It gave communities the flexibility to go beyond these minimum specifications as they saw fit.
2. It allowed Vibrant Communities to speak to a broad audience about a widely shared notion of poverty and poverty reduction.
3. It avoided spending endless time and energy debating the meaning of poverty, allowing the understanding of all involved to develop as the work evolved.

While this approach served the initiative well, a variety of issues gradually emerged about how best to conceptualize poverty and poverty reduction. In particular:

- Some participants felt that the initial approach tended to overemphasize matters of income and employment at the expense of other important dimensions such as empowerment and inclusion.
- Some participants perceived that the community capacity building and systems change aspects of Vibrant Communities were not adequately incorporated within the initial conception.
- Some participants felt that the language of 'poverty' and 'poverty reduction' was not as positive and inclusive as various alternatives.
- Many participants observed that there had come to be an array of ideas about poverty and poverty reduction at work in the overall initiative making it difficult for both participants and observers to know precisely what was meant when those terms were used.

To address these issues, a learning series on poverty and poverty reduction was held near the end of Chapter One. The following framework is the eventual outcome of those discussions. As much as it represents a more fully elaborated notion of poverty and poverty reduction, it remains nonetheless a work in progress.

Whereas the approach taken in round one of Vibrant Communities was 'minimalist,' the current approach is 'maximalist.' It scopes out a comprehensive framework within which individual communities can position themselves as appropriate. The hope is that this approach will better capture the full range and complexity of the

issue as collectively understood by partners, retain the flexibility each community requires to chart its own course and facilitate collaborative learning as distinct initiatives help fill in various pieces of the big picture.

The following table presents the key ideas behind the proposed conception of poverty and poverty reduction.

**Table Four –
Vibrant Communities Poverty Reduction Framework: Underlying Ideas**

Aspect	Features
Working Definition of Poverty and Poverty Reduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty is a state of material and social deprivation that prevents people from participating in social life in a manner comparable to others in their society. • The causes of poverty lie in economic and social arrangements that fail to provide people with the resources and opportunities they require to realize their potential, and share in the challenges and rewards of community life. • Poverty reduction is the process of re-working economic and social arrangements so that they enable all people to build the assets required to meet basic needs, develop their abilities and participate in shaping the lives of their communities.
Key Propositions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Poverty is a complex problem</i> – There is no single root cause of poverty and therefore no one ultimate solution. Rather, poverty results from a wide range of factors that continually shape and re-shape one another. As a result, it can only be addressed effectively when a wide range of partners, each involved with different aspects of the issue, work together to adjust and re-adjust how they impact one another through the decisions and actions they take. • <i>The search for new ways of doing things begins with shared aspirations</i> – Re-working economic and social arrangements requires people to step outside of their familiar ways of doing things. Hope for a better future brings people together to explore new possibilities. • <i>Local communities are vital sites for innovation</i> – The face-to-face contact possible in local communities enables people from diverse backgrounds to build relationships of trust and respect. Such relationships facilitate the sharing of information about factors contributing to poverty and allow people to work together in new ways for poverty reduction. • <i>Local efforts are strengthened when communities have opportunities to learn from and with one another</i> – The work of poverty reduction is as much an art as a science. Like any craft, it involves learning how to apply general principles to particular circumstances. Through collaborative learning, communities are able to help one another build the base of knowledge that supports their efforts and explore the different ways in which this knowledge can be applied in different contexts. • <i>The combination of local action and Pan-Canadian learning can fuel the culture shift needed to achieve large-scale and sustained reductions in poverty</i> – Local poverty reduction initiatives deepen understanding of poverty, build support for poverty reduction efforts and generate practical innovations. Pan-Canadian learning stimulates local thinking, allows lessons to be derived from their experiences and shares those lessons with others

	across the country. The result is a groundswell of energy, ideas and action that shifts the way individuals, organizations and institutions work together to counter poverty.
Scope and Dimensions of Poverty Reduction Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple asset areas (personal, social, human, financial and physical) • Multiple spheres of activity (e.g., employment, housing, transportation and child care) • Multiple sectors (business, government, nonprofit and low-income) • Multiple levels of action (individual and household assets, community capacity building, and wider policy and systems change).

The accompanying diagram provides a visual representation of the Vibrant Communities Poverty Reduction Framework. It depicts the work in terms of several key components:

i. Pan-Canadian Learning

The upper portion of the diagram represents the process of Pan-Canadian learning. Trail Builder communities from across the country share their insights and experiences with one another and, in collaboration with national partners, help build a body of knowledge related to comprehensive, multisectoral approaches to poverty reduction.

ii. Local Action

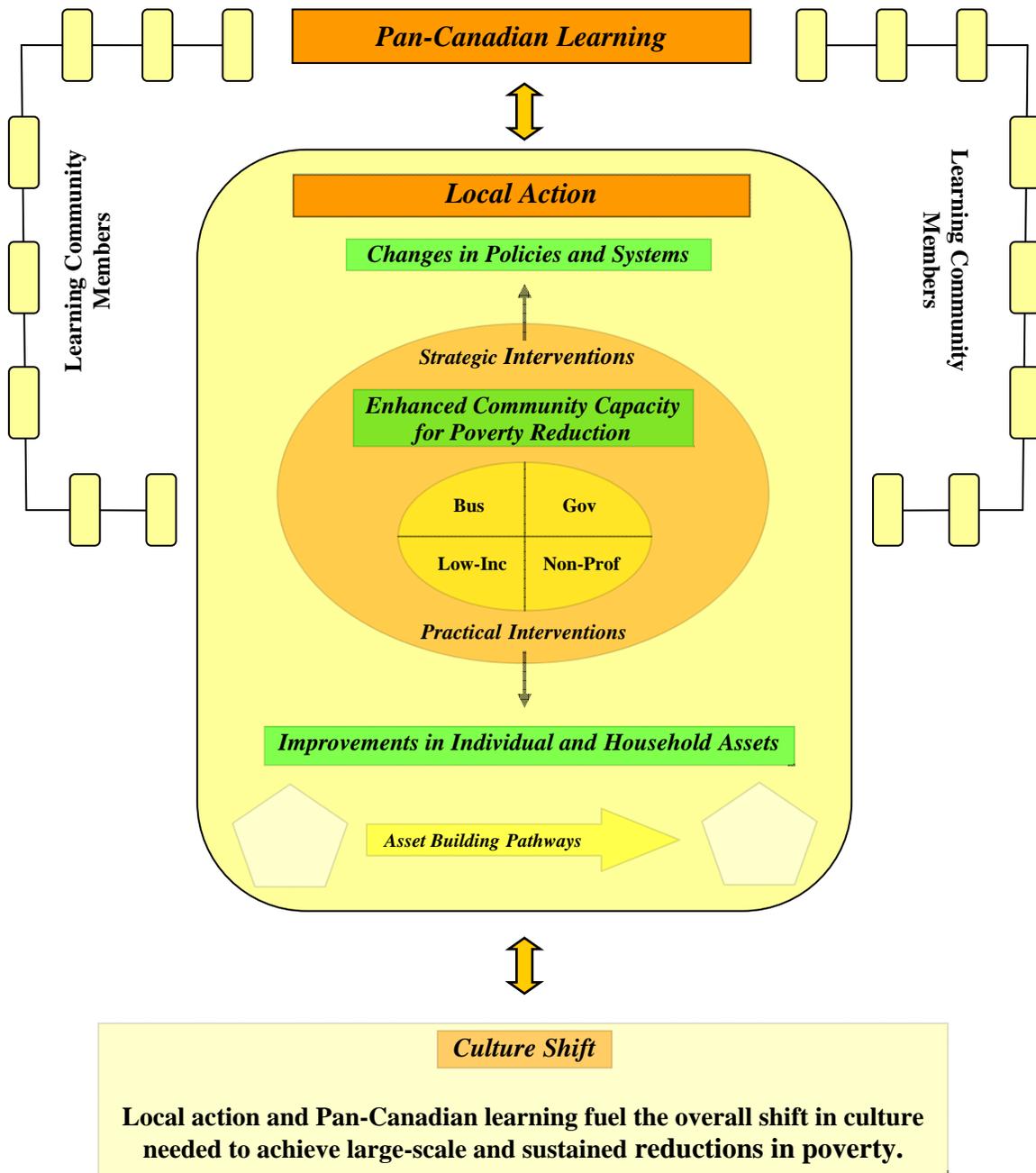
In its local setting, each Trail Builder pursues its own poverty reduction strategy combining activities in three main areas:

- a. Community Capacity Building – Enhancing the ability of diverse individuals, organizations and institutions in the local community to combine their energy, knowledge and resources in support of poverty reduction efforts. A key aspect of this work involves creating a process of collaborative governance through which diverse sectors (business, government, non-profit groups and low-income residents) can work to reduce poverty.
- b. Strategic Interventions for Policy and Systems Change – Efforts to address environmental factors that impact local poverty reduction efforts. Particular attention is given here to creating a more supportive institutional context including public policies, service and support systems, and funding.
- c. Practical Interventions to Strengthen Individual and Household Assets – Specific projects or strategies to strengthen individual and household assets (personal, social, economic, human or physical). Activities in this area may address a wide range of issues including education and training, employment development, financial literacy, affordable housing, and the developmental needs of children and youth, among others.

iii. Culture Shift

Overall, Vibrant Communities helps to fuel the sort of culture shift needed to achieve large-scale and sustained reductions in poverty. It does so by building a body of knowledge about comprehensive, multisectoral approaches to poverty reduction, demonstrating what can be done in tangible terms, and creating a critical mass of individuals and organizations actively engaged in innovative poverty reduction efforts.

**Diagram One –
Vibrant Communities Poverty Reduction Framework**



B. Major Research Questions (2006-2011)

In addition to further developing this conceptual framework, another major purpose of this learning and evaluation process is to contribute, along with other Vibrant Communities’ learning and research activities, to answering a set of key research questions.

In Vibrant Communities Chapter One much of the research undertaken was reflective in nature. We observed different approaches to poverty reduction, and to the development and management of comprehensive, multisectoral initiatives, in an effort to discern patterns and lessons emerging from the work of communities. In this next round, a more deliberate research agenda will be pursued in order to deepen knowledge in three key areas of interest (see Table Five).

**Table Five –
Research Questions**

Stream	Questions
<i>Stream One: Comprehensive Strategies for Deep and Durable Outcomes</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do comprehensive strategies look like in practice? 2. What are the challenges and opportunities for unfolding such strategies? 3. What kind of impacts can they have on the depth and durability of poverty – and changing the systems underlying poverty?
<i>Stream Two: The Process of Comprehensive, Multisectoral Work</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the principles and elements of working in a comprehensive and multisectoral way on a complex issue like poverty? 2. What are the key tasks and challenges for each stage of such an effort? 3. What are the operational competencies members of a comprehensive, multisectoral initiative require to carry out such an approach? 4. What are the emerging strategies and techniques?
<i>Stream Three: Building an Enabling Environment</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What policy and investment infrastructure have been and still need to be established to make comprehensive, multisectoral approaches feasible for more communities? 2. How do funders support these collaborative processes? 3. What are the substantive changes in investment patterns to solve poverty in such areas as income security, child benefits, employability and affordable housing?

VII. Components of the Learning and Evaluation Process

The learning and evaluation process consists of three major components:

- A. Frameworks for Change
- B. Change Profiles
- C. Reporting

Each of these components will be detailed more fully in the sections that follow.

A. Component One – Frameworks for Change

Each Trail Builder is asked to develop a ‘Framework for Change.’ This Framework will serve as a planning, evaluation and communications tool throughout the life of the initiative.

More than a summary account of the community’s plan of action, the Framework is meant to surface the guiding ideas behind the initiative so that they can be critically examined as the work unfolds: Are the community’s key ideas about poverty reduction being borne out in practice? Based on the initiative’s practical experience, in what ways does its thinking need to be revised?

By making its ideas explicit from the outset, the community establishes a foundation for its own learning. The lessons it draws from its experience will help build the body of knowledge for the wider field.

Key deliverables, anticipated roles and timeframes are described below:

i. Framework for Change Statement

The first step in the process is to prepare a Framework for Change Statement. The Statement is simply a response to a series of basic questions about the initiative: its understanding of poverty and poverty reduction, its goals and strategies, and the indicators it will use to gauge its progress. The questions to be addressed are presented in Table Six.

**Table Six –
Framework for Change Questions**

<i>Area</i>	<i>Questions to Address</i>
<i>Framing the Issue</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does your collaboration define poverty? Why this definition and not another one? • What does your collaboration see as the key factors or root causes contributing to poverty in your community?
<i>Aspirations and Outcomes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your group’s aspirations (e.g. Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise A Child)? • How many low-income households do you expect to benefit and in what ways? In what timeline? • Will you be seeking to assist any specific target groups? If so, which ones and why have you chosen to focus your efforts in these areas rather than others? • What concrete changes in the community’s willingness and capacity to reduce poverty, and in the systems and policies underlying poverty, do you hope to make?
<i>Approach</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the leverage points or drivers around which you will focus to bring about change? • What specific strategies will your initiative pursue in order to achieve these goals? Why have you chosen these strategies rather than others? • How will your collaboration contribute to the work of poverty reduction in your community? What are the key roles that your collaboration will play? • What does your collaboration mean by ‘comprehensive,’ and why is this approach important for achieving substantial, deep and durable reductions in poverty? • What key principles or beliefs will guide you as you work on this approach?
<i>Capacity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is involved in your collaboration? How representative are they are of the different sectors in the community? How are they involved in your collaboration? • To what extent do your partners have the commitment, resources and influence required to successfully unfold your framework for change? • What are the financial, technical and human resources required to assist your collaborative group? To what extent are these in place?
<i>Signs of Progress</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will you know if you are making progress? What are some key indicators of progress that you anticipate seeing as your initiative unfolds? What would be signs that your initiative is not making the progress you desire?
<i>Summarizing the Overall Approach</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stepping back from the details of your plan, how would you sum up in a phrase or two the essence of your approach to generating substantial, deep and durable poverty reduction in your community? • Is this description accurate? Compelling? Reflect a realistic approach?

The Framework for Change Statement will be prepared during the Building Conditions for Success planning phase. Communities will determine their own process for completing the statement. However, a draft version of the statement should be discussed, revised and approved by the full collaboration in order to ensure there is a high degree of shared thinking among partners as the initiative enters its action phase.

Tamarack will provide resources to support communities in building their Frameworks for Change and community coaches will be available to assist in the development process.

The completed Framework for Change Statement will be signed off by the chairperson of the Trail Builder's leadership group and by Tamarack's Vibrant Communities (VC) Learning and Evaluation Coordinator.

ii. Framework for Change Story

Based on the Framework for Change Statement and other background materials provided by the community, the Caledon Institute will work with the community to prepare an initial Framework for Change Story. This story should be completed for submission with the community's proposal for Phase Three funding.

The story is intended for both local and wider audiences. It is meant to make the work of the local initiative accessible to local participants, Vibrant Communities partners across the country and other interested groups, including funders and policy makers.

The story is also meant to serve as a tool for planning and evaluation purposes. As a result, it is important that it define clearly the key ideas guiding the initiative at its outset so that they can be re-examined at later stages in its development. In effect, the initial Framework for Change Story provides a conceptual baseline against which new insights can be identified.

With the support of the community's Core Coach, Caledon will work with the community to draft the story. The process for producing the story varies depending on the preferences of the community. Typically, Caledon staff will meet with a small working group to review the Framework for Change Statement. Then Caledon will draft a story for the group's review and revision. Alternatively, the community may choose to draft the story itself. In this case, Caledon will suggest revisions to ensure that all of the issues are addressed and that the story is similar in content and style to those of other Trail Builders. In either case, the draft will be revised until both partners are satisfied that it meets its intended purpose.

The draft story will be reviewed and approved by the community's leadership group and signed off by the VC Learning and Evaluation Coordinator.

iii. Evaluation Plan

Included in the Framework for Change Statement is a question about the indicators the collaboration will use to assess the progress of its work. These signs of progress are meant to provide high-level indications as to whether the Framework for Change is playing out as the collaboration anticipated. They typically would include indications of individual and household outcomes, community capacity building, and policy and systems change.

As part of its proposal for Phase Three funding, the community will submit an evaluation plan outlining how it will monitor and evaluate progress in pursuing its Framework for Change. This scope of work should include the indicators to be tracked, the method to be employed, who will be responsible for gathering the needed information and the human and financial resources allocated to support the learning and evaluation process. While it may include activities for tracking specific poverty reduction strategies, this evaluation plan should be geared specifically to monitoring and evaluation of the overall Framework for Change.

The evaluation plan will be submitted with the community's proposal for Phase Three funding. It will be signed off by the VC Learning and Evaluation Coordinator.

iv. Annual Reflection Session

Each Trail Builder will hold a Framework for Change Reflection Session on an annual basis. The purpose of this session is to critically examine the collaboration's Framework for Change in relation to the practical experience of the initiative. The basic questions to be explored are:

1. Is progress being made as anticipated?
2. What has changed in the environment in which the collaboration works – or in its internal capacity – that affects the group's work?
3. Are the key features of the framework for change being borne out in practice?
4. What lessons have been learned during the year?
5. What adjustments, if any, are needed in the initiative's Framework for Change?

The community's Core Coach and the VC Learning and Evaluation Coordinator will work with the initiative's lead staff person and others as appropriate to design the session. While the session may be combined with other planning activities of interest to the community, it must include a focus specifically on the Framework for Change. Depending on the desires of the community, Reflection Sessions may take anywhere between two hours and a full day.

Participants in the session should include a broad cross-section of local partners. To facilitate reflection, a brief report on progress to date and lessons learned should be prepared in advance and shared with participants. This report can be based on the Evaluation Scope of Work.

The local initiative will be responsible for documenting the session. Summary notes will be submitted to the VC Learning and Evaluation Coordinator.

Tamarack proposes to test different processes for conducting these sessions and will recommend possible designs. A sample set of questions for structuring the session is provided in the chart below:

<i>Area</i>	<i>Questions to Address</i>
<i>Changes in Context Since Outset</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What has been the rate and depth of poverty in your community? 2. What changes have occurred in the major environmental factors that affect poverty in your community? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The economy ○ Federal, Provincial, Municipal policies ○ The ‘social’ or ‘cultural’ context ○ Other
<i>Contribution to Change</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How many households has your initiative assisted – directly or indirectly – since its inception? What was the role and contribution of your collaboration in making those changes? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The number of households affected? ○ In what areas of their lives (e.g., income, housing, etc.) ○ How deep and durable are those changes? To what extent has the poverty of households been reduced? 2. What are the changes in systems and policies underlying poverty? What was the role and value of your collaboration’s contribution to those shifts? 3. What are the changes in the community’s willingness and capacity to reduce poverty? What was the role and value of your collaboration’s contribution to those shifts? 4. How much time and energy has been invested in your initiative since the outset (re: budget and volunteer hours)? 5. To what extent does this pace and scale of change reflect your expectations of progress in your work? Do you feel the outcomes have warranted the investment?
<i>Framework for Change Reflection</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the lessons learned about addressing poverty through this approach? 2. What elements of the framework still feel relevant and useful? Which ones do not? 3. Given the changes in the community’s environment, emerging

	<p>lessons and shifts in the collaboration’s capacity, is the group’s framework for change still useful, or, do some (or all) elements require upgrading? If so, which ones? What types of adjustments are needed?</p>
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v. Upgraded Framework for Change Story

The Framework for Change Story will be upgraded at the end of an initiative’s three- to four-year planning cycle or when major changes are made in the community’s approach to its work.

As with the initial Framework for Change Story, the upgrade will be written for both a local and a non-local audience. Its purpose is to capture the community’s insights about the approach it has taken to poverty reduction: In what ways has it played out as anticipated? In what ways has it not? What changes have occurred in how the collaboration understands what is needed to bring about substantial, deep and durable reductions in poverty?

Modifications in the community’s Framework for Change may occur at a variety of levels. The initiative may alter its basic understanding of poverty and poverty reduction, or its understanding of the context in which its work takes place. In this case, the core ideas guiding the initiative may change dramatically. On the other hand, the community may find that the basic ideas shaping the initiative remain valid but that adjustments are needed in the specific strategies identified or in the tactics through which the strategies are implemented. In many cases, adjustments in the Framework for Change will involve refinements at various levels of its work.

Ultimately, the upgraded Framework for Change Story is meant to help the community articulate for itself and others how its understanding of comprehensive, multisectoral approaches to poverty reduction has evolved. The story will be written in a format that helps to put the ongoing work into context: This is how we were thinking about our work at the outset, this is what we have learned from our experience to date, these are the adjustments we are making for the period ahead.

The upgraded Framework for Change Story will draw upon the observations generated through the annual Reflection Sessions and other written material as appropriate. Again, it will be prepared through a collaborative effort involving a small working group from the community, the community’s Core Coach and the Caledon Institute.

A draft of the story will be reviewed and approved by the community’s leadership group and signed off by VC Learning and Evaluation Coordinator.

B. Component Two – Change Profiles

Each community will prepare a Change Profile documenting the type and extent of change being achieved through its poverty reduction efforts. The Change Profiles will be developed through three streams of work:

- i. Brief descriptions of strategies and projects
- ii. Basic outcome tracking
- iii. In-depth case studies.

i. Brief descriptions of strategies and projects

To help organize outcome-tracking efforts and communicate about the substantive work of local initiatives, communities will develop brief descriptions of their specific poverty reduction strategies. The descriptions will cover three key points:

- The challenge or opportunity being addressed
- The strategy employed (including measures used, partners involved and the role played by the collaboration)
- The anticipated results of the strategy.

With support from Tamarack, these basic descriptions will be developed into two-page stories to be shared with a general audience. Stories will be updated periodically as they complete their work or make notable progress.

ii. Basic outcome tracking

This section will describe activities to track immediate outcomes from local initiatives as well as a method for determining the contribution local collaborations make to such initiatives.

outcome tracking

All communities will be asked to document the immediate results of their poverty reduction strategies. Regular documentation of these results will substantiate the work being done by communities, allow all involved to determine progress meeting targets and provide a picture of the variety, scale and scope of results being achieved across the Vibrant Communities initiative.

Basic outcome tracking will occur at three levels of action:

- enhanced community capacity for poverty reduction
- improvements in individual and household assets

- changes in policies and systems.

The charts below provide an initial breakdown of outcomes and indicators to be tracked at each level. Communities and national partners will work together to refine and elaborate this list as the initiative evolves.

These outcomes and indicators are intended to be descriptive, not prescriptive. The intent is not to imply that each local initiative should be working to produce outcomes in each area. Communities should report only on those outcomes and indicators relevant to their local poverty reduction plans.

For some activities, outcomes may be reported under more than one indicator, depending on the context or purpose of the activity. For instance, depending on its design, a strategy pertaining to transportation to employment may be reported under all three levels: asset-building for individuals (in more than one area), capacity building for the community and policy/systems change.

Based on the charts below, Tamarack will provide communities with user-friendly forms for reporting Basic Outcomes Tracking.

Level one: enhanced community capacity for poverty reduction

Community capacity for poverty reduction refers to a community’s ability to mobilize support for poverty reduction efforts, and work collaboratively to solve problems and realize opportunities that contribute to poverty reduction. Enhanced community capacity for poverty reduction will be documented according to four areas: convening capacity, multisectoral leadership, collaboration and community awareness.

<i>Level One: Community Capacity for Poverty Reduction</i>	
<i>Convening Capacity</i> Specialized local infrastructure to facilitate and support multisectoral collaboration for poverty reduction	<i>Infrastructure</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convening body in place • Resources in place to support its core operations

<p><i>Multisectoral Leadership</i></p> <p>Individuals and organizations from four key sectors – business, government, nonprofit and low income – committed to working for poverty reduction</p>	<p><i>Governance Structure</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership body in place <p><i>Multisectoral Engagement</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and type of partners* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Business – Government (federal, provincial, municipal) – Nonprofit – Low Income – Other interested citizens • Types of involvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Core Mechanism (participation in governance, funding) – Project (participation in specific poverty reduction strategy) – Connection (participation in occasional activities) <p>*In most cases, ‘partners’ refers to <i>organizations</i> substantially involved in the initiative’s Core Mechanism or Projects. With respect to the categories ‘Low Income’ and ‘Other Interested Citizens,’ the term ‘partner’ may refer to individuals who are involved in these ways.</p>
<p><i>Collaboration</i></p> <p>Diverse partners combining their energy, knowledge and resources to reduce poverty</p>	<p><i>Collaborative Activity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared vision and plan in place • Number of multi-partner poverty reduction strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Completed – In Progress – Intended
<p><i>Community Awareness</i></p> <p>Increased profile of poverty as an issue of local concern and appreciation of its causes and possible solutions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications campaign <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Website – Newsletter – Reports Disseminated • Extent of media coverage • Number of learning events

Level two: improvements in individual and household assets

Individual and household assets refer to resources, capacities and entitlements that individuals and households can draw upon to meet their ongoing needs and aspirations. Improvements in individual and household assets will be documented according to five asset areas: personal, social, human, financial and physical. In combination, these asset areas describe a wide range of pathways that individuals and households may follow in their journeys out of poverty. They also address different stages in this journey including: entrance into asset building, securing foundations, making transitions, consolidating gains and achieving sustainability.

<i>Level Two: Individual and Household Assets</i>	
<p><i>Personal Assets</i></p> <p>Inner resources such as self-esteem and self-confidence</p>	<p><i>Inner Resources</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased self-awareness • Enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence • Improved hope and motivation
<p><i>Physical Assets</i></p> <p>Basic material goods and services such as food, shelter, transportation and child care</p>	<p><i>Emergency Supports</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtained temporary shelter • Secured protection from violence • Prevented eviction or utility shut-off • Received emergency food assistance <p><i>Food</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased food security <p><i>Housing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtained safe, affordable rental housing • Attained home ownership <p><i>Transportation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtained access to reliable transportation <p><i>Child and Dependent Care</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtained care for child or other dependant
<p><i>Social Assets</i></p> <p>Relationships and networks</p>	<p><i>Civic Participation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-income people are engaged in their community through regular participation in community groups and activities • Children and youth participate in activities that support their growth and development • Senior citizens participate in services that promote active, independent living <p><i>Networks</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced personal support network • Enhanced information network

<p>Human Assets</p> <p>Skills, knowledge, education and health</p>	<p><i>Health</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtained needed health services (medical, dental, mental health) <p><i>Life Skills</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced life skills <p><i>Financial Literacy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased ability to manage income and accumulate assets <p><i>Education</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed high school or high school equivalency • Completed post-secondary education program <p><i>Employment Skills</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtained employment skills
<p><i>Financial Assets</i></p> <p>Income, savings and sources of financial security including government income security programs</p>	<p><i>Employment Income</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployed and attained a job (include self-employment) • Employed and obtained an increase in employment income • Achieved living wage employment and benefits (as defined by the local initiative) <p><i>Non-Employment Income</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased income from non-employment sources (for instance, by accessing benefits, tax credits, or subsidies) <p><i>Savings and Capital Assets</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built financial asset • Obtained capital asset (computer, car, home) <p><i>Reduced Debt/Costs</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced costs • Reduced debt

Level three: policy and systems change

Policy and systems change refers to adjustments made in the institutional context in order to better support poverty reduction efforts. Changes at this level of activity will be documented according to four areas: public policy, service and support systems, resources and community-level assets.

<i>Level Three: Policy and Systems Change</i>	
<p><i>Public Policy</i></p> <p>Government policies, programs and procedures related to</p>	<p><i>Working with Partners External to the Community</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linkages are made between local initiatives and external agencies, e.g., national/regional policy institutes or advocacy groups, in order to help address policy issues local communities cannot tackle effectively on their own.

<p>poverty reduction</p>	<p><i>The Policy Process</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanisms are created for multisectoral collaboration in the development of public policies • Opportunities are created for low-income residents to influence policy development • Changes are made in the way departments and levels of government coordinate their efforts in support of poverty reduction. <p><i>Substantive Policies</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desirable changes are made in substantive policies related to poverty reduction, e.g., employment, housing, income security.
<p><i>Service and Support Systems</i></p> <p>Programs, services and other supports intended to assist people in poverty</p>	<p><i>Collaborative Process</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific mechanisms beyond the initiative’s leadership body are created to facilitate collaboration in the design and delivery of services and supports, e.g., multisectoral task force on child development, multisectoral forum on affordable housing <p><i>Inclusive Decision-making</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities are created for low-income residents to influence the design and delivery of services and supports <p><i>System Design and Operation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substantive changes are made to create a more flexible, responsive and integrated system of services and supports.
<p><i>Material Resources</i></p> <p>Funding and other material resources needed to undertake poverty reduction efforts</p>	<p><i>Funding Process</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measures are taken to improve the way funding is directed to poverty reduction efforts, e.g., collaboration between funders and fundees, support for core processes of multisectoral collaboration, longer-term time frames, coordination of funding streams, streamlining of reporting requirements. <p><i>Levels and Use of Resources</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing resources are allocated in new, more effective ways to support poverty reduction • Additional resources are mobilized to support the work of poverty reduction.
<p><i>Community-level Assets</i></p> <p>Community resources that benefit different individuals and households in poverty over time</p>	<p><i>Community Assets Related to Poverty Reduction</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living wage jobs created • Safe and affordable housing units created or enhanced • Child care or dependent care placement options created or enhanced <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Number of resources created – Number of individuals or households benefiting • Transportation resources created or enhanced <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Number of resources created – Number of individuals or households benefiting • Commercial services in low-income communities created or enhanced <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Number of resources created – Number of individuals or households benefiting

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community services to increase public health and safety created or enhanced <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Number of resources created – Number of individuals or households benefiting • Financial services are created or enhanced <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Number of resources created – Number of individuals or households benefiting
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contribution analysis

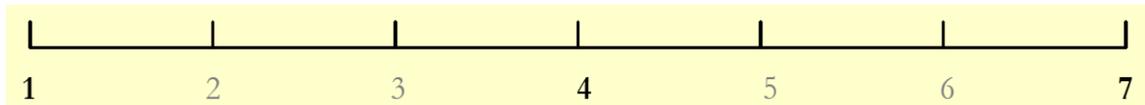
In addition to reporting specific outcomes achieved, communities are asked to help determine the contribution their local collaborations have made to achieving these outcomes.

Contribution analysis is a way to address the attribution challenges encountered by comprehensive, multisectoral initiatives. For the purposes of Basic Outcome Tracking, an abbreviated form of contribution analysis will be used. For more substantial learning purposes, a somewhat expanded form is highly recommended.

The abbreviated form involves completion of a brief on-line survey. When a specific poverty reduction strategy has reached an appropriate point in its development (i.e., significant outcomes have been achieved), the collaboration will ask partners in the strategy, and other key informants as appropriate, to participate in a brief on-line survey. With their permission, the collaboration will provide e-mail contact information to Tamarack who will then administer the survey. Results from the survey will be automatically tabulated by the on-line survey system and a report will be provided to Tamarack and the participating community.

The contribution analysis survey will consist of the following questions:

1. Please briefly describe the role that you or your organization played in [name of poverty reduction strategy].
2. Which of the following roles were played by [name of local poverty reduction collaboration]:
 - Convened partners
 - Participated in the design of the initiative
 - Helped secure funding or other resources
 - Conducted related research
 - Promoted necessary policy or other systems change
 - Administered the initiative
 - Facilitated collaboration
 - Led learning and evaluation process
 - Other (please describe)
3. Using the scale below, how would you rate the contribution of [name of local poverty reduction collaboration] in advancing this poverty reduction strategy?



1 = **Minimal** — Project would have proceeded the same way without the assistance provided.

4 = **Substantial** — Project would have proceeded without the assistance but not as quickly or at reduced scale or quality.

7 = **Vital** — Project would not have proceeded without the assistance provided.

4. Please provide any additional comments related to the rating you provided.

This bare bones survey will provide basic information about the contribution that collaborations make to local poverty reduction efforts. It is also easy to administer and allows input to be provided by partners on a confidential basis.

On the other hand, the survey in itself does not create an opportunity for partners to exchange their thinking with one another and generate new insights about how they may best support one another's work. Where supported by local partners, we strongly encourage that some form of project review meeting be organized in which the following sorts of issues are explored: the roles played by various partners, the significance of these roles for the success of the joint initiative and alternative ways of supporting one another in future initiatives. This could be done prior to individual partners completing the on-line survey.

iii. In-depth case studies

Whereas basic outcome tracking will provide a regularly updated picture of the results being achieved by local communities, in-depth case studies will be used to consider more closely the dynamics of comprehensive, multisectoral initiatives, and their ability to generate deep and durable outcomes. The case studies will examine specific poverty reduction strategies, e.g., Niagara's Job Bus, Surrey's Project Comeback.

The aim of the case studies is twofold:

1. elaborate Vibrant Communities' understanding of the ways in which specific comprehensive strategies can be pursued, the strengths and limitations of these different approaches, the challenges they encounter and the ways in which these challenges can be addressed
2. determine the depth and durability of results that comprehensive strategies are able to achieve.

Approximately 12 in-depth case studies will be undertaken over the next four years, one with each Trail Builder. The studies will be designed and implemented jointly by local and national partners in Vibrant Communities. A lead researcher with the national initiative will guide the overall process and support the efforts of local

researchers. The research design, e.g., outcome indicators, data collection methods, will be customized to suit the specific circumstances of the poverty reduction strategies being considered.

While the overall focus is on poverty reduction strategies that employ ‘comprehensive approaches,’ cases will be strategically selected to allow a variety of issues to be addressed. To an extent, the case studies will be conducted on a sequential basis so that insights and questions emerging from earlier studies can be used to inform the selection, design and analysis of other cases.

strengths and limitations of case studies

While case studies are often seen as a ‘soft’ form of research, properly designed case studies are highly rigorous and possess significant explanatory power. Case study design is particularly recommended in situations that involve a small number of cases and a large number of variables, and where it is important to consider parts of the phenomenon in the context of the whole. Case studies are valuable in these circumstances because they consider a wide range of factors and assess both the relative importance of various causes and the way in which different causes interrelate.

One weakness of case study research is that it cannot make ‘statistical generalizations’ (generalizing conclusions from a sample to a wider population). However, it can make ‘theoretical generalizations’ (confirming or rejecting the validity of specific theories or theoretical propositions). Its rigor is not based on the logic of samples and probability but of replication: testing a theory in different situations to see how consistently it holds true and to refine understanding accordingly.

In both these respects, case study design is an appropriate tool for examining the theory that comprehensive, multisectoral approaches to poverty reduction are effective for achieving deep and durable results.

case study process

The case studies will consider a series of theoretical propositions and a variety of influencing factors. These propositions and factors will be described in a separate document provided to communities. The section below presents the overall work plan for the research process.

In the first year, two case studies will be undertaken and the groundwork laid for additional studies.

Each case study will be conducted as a joint effort by a lead researcher with the national initiative and a local research team. The lead researcher with the national initiative will guide the overall process and support the efforts of local researchers. Local researchers will lead the design and implementation of local data collection and

prepare summaries of the research findings. The lead researcher will lead the process of analyzing the findings and preparing the written report. Local researchers will help shape the analysis and the report.

A rough outline of the research process is presented below:

<i>Steps</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Preliminary discussion about possible case study</i>	National Researcher and Community Contact	Explore the case study idea: purpose and logistics, including local resourcing required; determine interest; identify and obtain existing information/data on the project; set a time for an orientation phone call with research team
<i>Draft scope of work</i>	National Researcher	Review existing documentation about the poverty reduction strategy, including available data, and customize the case study design to suit the local initiative
<i>Orientation call</i>	Lead: National Researcher Support: Local Research Team	Discuss the draft scope of work and identify adjustments to be made. This will include a review of the case study's purpose as well as various design issues: roles and responsibilities; questions to be examined; available data and data to be gathered; data collection methods; timelines etc.
<i>Revised scope of work</i>	Lead: National Researcher Support: Local Research Team	Make and confirm revisions to scope of work
<i>Design and Implement Local Research</i>	Lead: Local Research Team Support: National Researcher	Develop and implement local data collection process; prepare summary reports of data/findings
<i>Review of local research findings</i>	National Researcher	Review the findings and prepare preliminary notes
<i>Exploration of findings</i>	Lead: National Researcher Support: Local Research Team	Explore findings with local research team
<i>Draft case study report</i>	National Researcher	Prepare draft research report
<i>Review draft report</i>	Lead: National Researcher Support: Local Research Team	Conduct phone meeting with local research team (and other selected participants) to review draft report and identify necessary revisions.
<i>Revise report</i>	National Researcher	
<i>Support Caledon in preparing case study story</i>	Lead: National Researcher Support: Local Research Team	Caledon will draft a case study story based on the research report, input by national researcher and limited additional comment from local sources as needed; local research team will review the draft story and provide feedback.

C. Component Three – Reporting

On an annual basis, each Trail Builder will submit a Mid-year Update and an End-of-Year Report. Based on these submissions, Tamarack will prepare synthesis reports summarizing the outcome data from Trail Builder communities, and identifying major themes arising from the reports.

These reports serve three main purposes:

- They will be used to update national and local partners in Vibrant Communities about the progress Trail Builders are making with respect to their numerical targets and about the evolution of their Frameworks for Change.
- They will contribute information and insights that contribute to answering the major research questions presented above and to ongoing development of the national initiative’s conception of poverty and poverty reduction.
- They will assist the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation in its review of annual funding requests from communities.

i. mid-year update

The Mid-Year Update will consist of a statistical report only. It will address the Basic Outcome Tracking elements identified above. Tamarack will provide communities with a user-friendly template to be used in submitting this information.

ii. end-of-year report

The End-of-Year Report will include both a narrative component and an updated statistical report. The narrative portion of the report will consist of an update on the community’s Framework for Change and a brief discussion of plans for the year ahead.

The Framework for Change update will simply summarize the results of the community’s annual reflection session. The four key questions to be addressed in the report are:

1. Is progress being made as anticipated?
2. What has changed in the environment in which the collaboration works – or in its internal capacity – that affects the group’s work?
3. Are the key ideas guiding the work being borne out in practice?
4. What lessons have been learned during the year?
5. What adjustments, if any, are needed in the initiative’s Framework for Change?

The description of the year ahead will highlight the goals and activities that will focus the work of the initiative in the year to come.

The report will also include an administrative section including:

- a financial report from the previous year
- funding secured for future years indicating both the source of funding and the amount
- staffing or other organizational adjustments made or intended.

VIII. Conclusion

Learning and evaluation is typically a challenging aspect of community work. It is all the more so in the case of comprehensive, multisectoral initiatives and doubly again when conducted with multiple communities across the country. Flexibility and resourcefulness will be needed to adapt the process outlined here to different local contexts while continuing to build a body of knowledge that supports the work of all involved.