

DISCUSSION PAPER FOR THE DIALOGUE

Looking Down the Road: Leadership for Canada's Changing Communities

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FOREWORD:

I leaped at the chance to write this paper on leadership for Canada's communities because nearly every social or economic issue I have explored at Canadian Policy Research Networks over the past decade has pointed to the importance of community and the resources it offers to its citizens. Questions of community capacity have persisted whether we were talking about healthy child development, population health, economic development, social justice, civic education, environmental quality or the overall quality of life.

Yet, when we listen to the public discourse in Canada, discussion of communities seems to get lost in the swirl of arguments about the power of markets, the risks and opportunities of globalization and climate change. These are important global issues, but they have huge consequences for communities. How communities adapt has overwhelming consequences for the quality of day to day life of most Canadians. It's time to recall the old saying "Think globally, act locally."

The paper builds upon on an earlier essay prepared for Community Foundations of Canada entitled: *Strategies for Social Justice: Place, People and Policy*. This version was designed to provide the background briefing for participants in a dialogue hosted by Community Foundations of Canada and The Calgary Foundation in Calgary on October 16 and 17, 2006. The dialogue was lively and packed full of rich experiences and ideas for the future. I made a number of changes to the text after the event in order to include important comments made by the participants. However, CFC took on the job of summarizing the outcomes.

Many thanks to Betsy Martin and her Steering Committee for giving me this opportunity, and also for their excellent advice as the paper developed. Special thanks to the Ford Foundation for their financial support in the development and distribution of this paper.

Judith Maxwell
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PART 1:

Introduction


"The old answers do not fit the new questions and challenges, so all of us who care about building and renewing community must begin with the premise that this is the biggest job in town and no one sector, no one government, no one industry, can mobilize citizens ... to create the new community, the inclusive community that embraces all its people." (Frances Hesselbein, p. 177)

Canadians take pride in their superior way of life and the quality of their cities, even as they grumble about smog, congestion, potholes and the lack of doctors and nurses. These problems seem inexplicable in a country where the economy has been expanding for a decade, where the incomes of middle class and well to do families are rising, unemployment and inflation are near their 30-year lows, and governments have restored order to their own finances, while reducing tax rates and cutting programs.

Surrounded by all this good news, Canadians have learned to step around the homeless people living on the streets. They have not yet come to terms with the root causes of congestion and smog, or with the need to conserve resources. They celebrate their rich ethnic diversity, but are oblivious to a widening cultural divide.

These challenges surface in their own way in each community and city. Each place faces its own combination of stresses. Some, like Abbotsford, B.C., are experiencing explosive growth, while others, like Chicoutimi-Jonquière, have seen the population decline. Each place has a unique set of assets in dealing with the challenges. And each will have limitations to overcome. National and provincial responses will always be needed. But what communities need, and do not have, is a strategic focus on place-based initiatives designed to create a sustainable quality of life for citizens.

This paper does not pretend to propose what those initiatives should be. It is focused first, on explaining what the challenges are, and, second, on provoking a wide-ranging conversation on how to develop communities' capacity to respond. It argues that communities' capacity to respond depends on the quality of leadership and the capacity of people and institutions to collaborate. In earlier times, the federal and/or provincial governments might have taken an active interest in solving a local problem. Today, this is less likely. Communities



will have to be the first movers in the next decade – defining the problem, mobilizing action, and creating opportunities for senior governments to become part of the solution.

Part 2 outlines five long-term structural changes creating immense pressure on communities. Part 3 examines the roles and responsibilities of public and private actors in Canada and describes the problematique in building leadership capacity. Part 4 links to the Dialogue on Leadership for Canada's Changing Communities in Calgary in October.

PART 2:

Long-term Structural Changes


Mapping the challenges facing the extraordinarily diverse communities from St. John's to Port Alberni to Inuvik is itself a daunting task. Human beings are usually the first to adapt but eventually institutions must re-examine how they function and what their goals should be. Communities are composed of both human beings and institutions. And many of the important institutions – including governments – are still clinging to the old ways of thinking.

This part of the paper examines five deep structural changes which have gained momentum over decades: competition and inequality, new patterns of human settlement, a widening cultural gap, emerging resource constraints, and shifting political structures and policy trends. Over time these changes have built up immense pressures in society.

Competition and inequality

Globalization of trade and investment combined with new communications technologies has intensified competition in recent decades. These competitive pressures have encouraged Canadian employers (public and private) to make their payroll costs more flexible – through variable compensation for well-qualified employees and a shift to casual and contract arrangements for lower skill workers. In effect, they are shifting more market risk to their workers.

Well-qualified workers in management and professional occupations enjoy good pay and benefits, job security and chances for promotion, and they can look forward to long years of comfortable retirement when they reach their 60s. But to control payroll costs, employers are cautious about adding new



professional staff. This restricts access to good jobs for younger, qualified workers, forcing them to make-do with contract or temporary jobs despite all their investment in education.

Another route to managing payroll costs has been to outsource production and services to lower cost producers either in Canada or abroad. Initially, this affected lower skill jobs, but even mid-level jobs in technology and administrative support are now moving offshore.

The overall effect is to break the old career pattern of starting at the bottom of the ladder and working one's way up to a senior executive role. There is no longer a direct line of promotion from low-pay to high-pay positions. People have to zig-zag from one employer to another and most pay for their own training to gain mobility in jobs and incomes.

Meanwhile, low-income Canadians have become a contingent work force. They work mainly in the service sector, especially in retail trade, food and accommodation, and personal services. They experience increasing economic insecurity through low earnings, unpredictable working hours, lack of supplementary health benefits and limited access to training. At a time when unemployment rates are at record lows, and there is much talk about labour shortages, Ron Saunders reports that about 2 million adult Canadians are working for low pay (less than \$10 an hour) and living from job to job. Only 13% have access to supplementary health benefits (compared to 77% of well-paid workers). In these situations, one worker cannot support a family.

The trend toward greater inequality is most prevalent in the largest cities with large service sectors. They attract immigrants and young people (including Aboriginals) migrating from rural areas because jobs are plentiful, but a high proportion of these jobs are insecure and low-paid.

These are powerful global trends. No community has the power to legislate them away. And senior governments have a clear responsibility to provide services and income support to all citizens, no matter where they live. But communities do have choices to improve the quality of life for all income groups: for example, affordable housing, public transit, land use and people-friendly public spaces for recreation and civic engagement. But how do communities mobilize to make these choices? Who should take the leadership roles? What kind of leadership will be required? And what help do they need from senior governments in Ottawa and provincial capitals?

New patterns of settlement


Growing inequality in the labour market has compounded the impact of new patterns of settlement in recent decades. Major cities are more racially mixed; rich and poor are living more separate lives; and rural and urban populations are heading in opposite directions. The overall effect is to increase the vulnerability of five groups of Canadians: recent immigrants, Aboriginals, lone parent women, people with disabilities and individuals aged 45 to 64.

Living in major cities is expensive because of the high cost of housing and transportation, with the result that the mixed neighbourhoods of the past have been transformed as older housing has been upgraded and many families have moved to the suburbs. Areas where housing is cheap (and of poorer quality) become the only option for the most vulnerable people. They congregate in neighbourhoods where housing is overcrowded, public services such as schools and health clinics are overtaxed, and environmental quality and personal safety are more likely to be at risk.

This spatial segregation of city living space into poor or well off neighbourhoods generates the problem of "poverty by postal code." It adds new layers of complexity to the challenges people face in escaping poverty and making a better life for their families. And, because different income classes do not attend the same schools, or walk the same streets, there is less day-to-day contact. This in turn leads to fewer opportunities for mutual support and eventually to a lack of empathy.

The immigrants arriving since the early 1990's have been much better educated than earlier arrivals, but they have not matched their economic success. A Statistics Canada study reports that the low-income rate among recent immigrants has risen from 25 % in 1980 to 35 % in 2000 at the same time that poverty rates have been falling for native-born Canadians (particularly the elderly).

The majority of *Aboriginal Canadians* now live in cities as well – with the highest concentrations in western cities. But, having left the reserves, they end up in the poorest neighbourhoods because of their low education and high unemployment rates. A recent report on *Work Opportunities for Saskatchewan Residents* reports that about 70% of the Aboriginals in the province have less than a high school diploma. Even those with university education face challenges in finding a good job. The result is that about 39% of adult Aboriginals who live off-reserve are not working.



Lone parent women are especially vulnerable to poverty and exclusion. These women have a high probability of working in low paid jobs (22% of women who work earn low wages compared to 12% for men), and yet they have the extra costs of supporting their children. The mother's poverty and lack of access to child care combine to create hardships for the children, who are the ones most at risk of reaching age 6 lacking the mix of cognitive and social skills essential for success in school. And this in turn has implications for their longer term success.

In contrast to the congestion and growth in the cities, *rural areas* are losing population, especially youth. This makes it more costly for governments and business to deliver services locally, leading them to consolidate schools, hospitals and offices in larger centres. Rural citizens therefore have to travel long distances to get to school, work, visit the doctor or a bank. Smaller towns and villages are facing a downward spiral as they lose their ability to offer opportunities to their young people and are unable to attract new business or new population. Even former regional centres such as Thunder Bay, once the transportation hub for east-west freight movements, have lost their commercial *raison d'être* and are becoming increasingly concerned about economic decline.

The combination of youth moving to cities and the retirement of the baby boomers means that some parts of Canada are aging quickly (Saskatchewan and Newfoundland and Labrador, for example). In general, the elderly tend to be concentrated outside the city centres – in smaller communities adjacent to cities or even further away in more distant rural areas. Wherever they live, community-based social and health care systems to support elders and their families are under stress.

No wonder then that many Canadians in both urban and rural communities are experiencing social and economic distress.

With growing restrictions on social programs by federal and provincial governments (to be described later), these vulnerable people (young and old) have nowhere to turn but to community-based organizations. These organizations are challenged to handle the volume and the complexity of the needs of the people coming to their doors.

To meet these needs and give people the resilience to cope with the risks they are likely to face in life, the most promising directions for service delivery will: "a) focus on the whole person (or the whole family), b) strive for early interventions which will open new pathways for personal development, and c) invest in cross-agency and cross-community learning about ideas that work."

(Maxwell, 2006, p. 13-14) Re-orienting community-based service delivery along these lines will require strong leadership capacity.

A growing cultural gap

The influx of immigrants from Asia and the Middle East in the past few decades has brought new energy, talent and diversity to urban life in Canada. Statistics Canada projects that in 2017, when Canada reaches its 150th birthday, more than 50% of the residents of Toronto and Vancouver will be racially visible. Historically, newcomers to Canada have put down deep roots in Canada within a generation. They and their children have become fully committed to Canadian society, even as they have continued to cherish their ethnic heritage.


While the majority of recent immigrants rejoice in their new citizenship, the situation has begun to change for a minority, who remain politically engaged in their home country. They are able to retain deep connections in their home country through the internet and frequent travel. Their children and grandchildren share those connections in a way that previous cohorts could not. And, if they do not acquire a strong sense of belonging to Canada, their commitment to their Canadian community will be weak.

The cuts in government support for early integration of immigrant children since the early 1990s have reduced language training and counselling services making it much more difficult for children to become socially at ease in school or community. Indeed, community leaders in British Columbia are worried about rising school drop-out rates among the children of immigrants and low rates of participation in post-secondary education. This is a striking contrast to the success stories of the many other immigrant children who lead their class.

Looking at the divide from the perspective of second and third generation young people, Verlyn Francis, a Toronto lawyer and activist, has identified the "colourization of work." Even those who are educated cannot find a career job. In their eyes, the labour market is blocking them from achieving full citizenship.

As values, expectations and cultural roots diverge, Canadian cities will be contending with a deepening cultural gap because some citizens define their citizenship differently from others.

A similar divide exists for Aboriginal people, who will soon account for more than half of the population in Prairie cities like Winnipeg and Regina. In contrast to other Canadians, this is a young population with high birth rates. They retain deep loyalties to their band and to a traditional way of life which exists only on



the reserve or in the open wilderness. Because school drop out rates are still shockingly high among Aboriginal children in urban settings, there is a growing population of under-educated young Aboriginals who have become accustomed to the materialistic life style but still hanker for the informality of life on the land. In contrast, those who are able to complete post-secondary education are able to adapt well to the city way of life and have become the essential cadre of teachers, nurses, police officers and community workers who work on the reserves and in the cities. They have the potential to build bridges across the cultural divide.


Canadians are proud of the success of the multi-cultural model and place the principle of respect for diversity at the core of Canadian citizenship. So the evidence of trouble on the horizon is difficult for them to acknowledge. Prevention efforts should begin now, and talented leaders on both sides are needed to get the process moving.

Emerging resource constraints

The economic and social success of Canadian communities has always depended to a high degree on the strength of the underlying resource base. Just think for a minute of the impact of the discovery of oil, the drought of the Depression years, or, more recently, the declines in fish stocks and the supply of accessible wood fibre. Looking to the next ten years, it will be environmental damage that forces communities and individuals to radically rethink their economic and social future. The two issues that are likely to challenge the way people live, industries operate and cities function will be climate change and the related issue of urban sprawl.

Climate change is the code name for the gradual heating of the earth's atmosphere caused by emissions of greenhouse gases, which are produced mainly when we consume fossil fuels. Cities and communities are responsible, directly or indirectly, for almost half of these emissions. Already, southern Canada has become warmer and wetter over the past 50 years, with the biggest effects in the West and North West. In contrast, the North East has been cooling and precipitation has dropped in the southern Prairies.

The average Canadian takes more from nature than do the residents of most other industrial countries, even those with cold, dark winters: In fact, Canada's ecological footprint is the third highest on the planet – behind the United States and United Arab Emirates. The core of the issue lies in energy use. It constitutes more than half of the resources consumed in each of 20 Canadian cities.



Canada will have to reduce emissions from burning fossil fuels either by conserving energy, increasing renewable energy supply or by using the fossil fuels differently. (The Quebec government estimated in its Planning Framework for the Montreal Metropolitan Region that each household choosing to reside near the Metro (subway) instead of in the suburbs would save 6000 kilograms of greenhouse gas emissions per year, on average.)

This revolution in energy use requires communities to take responsibility for the efficiency with which people and goods can circulate within the community. (Smog and congestion now cost Canada between \$2 and \$4 billion a year.) Basically, this boils down to new ideas about how to regulate land use. The clean, sustainable, live-able communities of the future will find ways to increase the density of the built environment, reduce commuting times and offer citizens a choice of good public transit.

Experts in climate change warn communities that infrastructure will be exposed to more extreme events, threatening roads, bridges, natural systems and in the process creating major strains on health and social care systems. And rising temperatures will cause smog, diminish air quality, and enable pests and diseases to multiply. On the positive side, warmer temperatures may create new opportunities for tourism and recreation, and reduce snow removal costs.

Cities and communities will each need to identify and rank both problems and opportunities. If, for example, water supplies are already at risk, major initiatives to conserve water supply are called for through appropriate pricing and robust regulation of water use. And clearly emergency planning and infrastructure maintenance programs should be strengthened.

There are many promising examples of community projects designed to meet these goals. But Canadians generally have been slow to respond to the emerging resource constraints created by climate change and urban sprawl for a couple of reasons. Some people simply do not believe that serious challenges are on the horizon. Others are deterred by uncertainty and the long time frames. Still others are reluctant to take responsibility for the fundamental changes outlined above, when so many other authorities or individuals also share the problem.

Still, cities and communities own at least half of the problem and citizens ultimately will own 100%. It is better to act sooner than later. The real question is who will take the leadership role, who will champion the cause, and who will become part of the solution?

Political structures and trends

Local governments in Canada function as dependents of the provinces. They have primary responsibility for the physical form and function of communities – roads, garbage, snow removal, water supply, land use regulation and so on. Most other decisions are made by the province. Local government revenues come primarily from the property tax, topped up by grants from provincial governments. These roles and responsibilities were defined in more agrarian times where communities were small and life was less complex. Pressure has been mounting over many decades to give local governments, especially those in larger cities, greater power to tax and to offer services to citizens. The trends highlighted so far – in employment and income inequality, in human settlement, in values and expectations and in resource constraints – have magnified the pressure for action at the local levels. How then have political systems and public policy responded?

The trends are somewhat contradictory and leave communities with a confusion of roles and responsibilities. Government roles have changed in three ways: local consolidation, provincial-to-local delegation, and provincial and federal cutbacks in their own programming.

Consolidation was designed to create greater administrative efficiency: Municipalities have been amalgamated, while hospitals and school boards have regionalized. In all cases, the goal has been to encourage integration of services and better planning of physical investments. But the trade off has been a decline in responsiveness to local needs and diminished visibility for neighbourhoods – each one of which has its own “ecology.” Elected and appointed officials must now look at the big picture, but at the risk of losing their connection to citizens. Citizens therefore feel out of touch and disempowered.

Delegation was intended to move responsibility from the province to either the municipal government or to non-profit community service organizations. However, provinces often delegated more spending than revenue in order to protect their own budget balance. This left municipalities, community service organizations and even some hospital and school boards with more responsibility and less money.


Cutbacks in federal and provincial spending occurred across a wide spectrum – closing military bases for example. But some of the most painful cuts for Canadians have been in social spending commitments. For examples, see the Box on the next page.

BOX 1:**Examples of Federal and Provincial Social Spending Cuts**

Eligibility rules for provincial social assistance benefits have been tightened to encourage people to work and to restrict access mainly to people with disabilities and lone parents with young children. Even lone parents are expected to work after their child reaches the age of two, and benefit payments for a lone parent fall well short of the income required to cover basic food, shelter, clothing and transportation needs (ranging from 48% of the Statistics Canada low-income threshold in Alberta to 70% in Newfoundland and Labrador).

Long-established programs, such as Employment Insurance, have become more targeted, forcing Canadians to meet tougher eligibility requirements to qualify for help. In Toronto and Ottawa, for example, only 22 to 23 % of working people would be eligible for EI if they were laid off. In addition,

- Minimum wages have not been increased in line with inflation, so that workers lost about 15% of their purchasing power over the 1990s.
- Responsibility for home care supports and some forms of skill training have been turned over to private producers – either business or non-profit organizations, where clients must pay for the service.
- Social housing has been turned over to private developers, who find it unprofitable to build new supply. Non-profits have been trying to fill the gap but are constrained by high capital requirements and regulatory barriers.
- Most provinces do not provide publicly-financed drug insurance, leaving many citizens to pay for their own or do without.
- Treatment and support services for adults with mental illness fall far short of the need. Governments have closed most of the large institutions, with the idea that these people would be better off in community care. Those who cannot find adequate and sustained care end up in homeless shelters or in prison. Corrections Canada reports a dramatic increase in the number of inmates requiring mental health services.



Overall, then, governments have been shifting responsibility back to families and individuals. For many at the low end of the income scale, the only choice is to do without food or shelter. The result is that food banks and homeless shelters now report a new clientele – the working poor. And community-based organizations have, by default, acquired much greater responsibility for achieving social justice.

The bottom line is that cities and communities face a confusing future. The big cities are lauded as engines of economic growth because of their central role in knowledge development, research, production and trade. Together they generate a very high proportion of Canada's employment, exports and tax revenues. They must also cope with the environmental and social repercussions of their economic success.


Smaller communities face their own contradictions. Some are concerned about the lack of growth in population and the aging of the population. Many others are losing employment and population, yet face growing concerns about environmental, social and cultural outcomes. They must search for a new vision of their future – a change in industrial structure or a new *raison d'être*.

Local governments therefore face all the complex challenges and opportunities of the 21st century but are forced to operate with the legislative and fiscal powers of a 19th century constitution. In these conditions, their only hope is visionary leadership, a fully engaged citizenry, and responsive senior governments. They need the kind of leaders who can make change happen – leadership not just in local government but across the community – in business, education, non-profits and in citizens and community groups.

Summary of what has changed

Part 2 has highlighted five long-term structural shifts which pose new challenges for cities and communities.

- Globalization and new technologies create both good jobs and bad jobs, leading to an increase in income inequality;
- Immigration and migration from rural areas concentrates the population in the largest cities, while settlement patterns within cities have also shifted from city centre to suburbs. This increases congestion and smog as commuters drive long distances every day;

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- These employment, income and settlement trends contribute to “poverty by postal code” as disadvantaged people cluster in poor neighbourhoods;
 - Some of the new arrivals in the cities – immigrants and Aboriginals – bring different loyalties, values and expectations. They define their citizenship differently from others; and
 - The risks associated with climate change and urban sprawl will impose new environmental constraints on the urban quality of life.

In short, Canada faces a long list of “wicked” problems – problems that are complex, deeply-rooted, and for which many different authorities hold part of the solution. To address them, communities need place-sensitive, holistic approaches.

The challenges they face are interactive: “bad” jobs make it harder for people living in poor neighbourhoods, especially newcomers to Canada, to escape poverty. Weak community infrastructure, climate change and urban sprawl compound the disadvantage. People are adapting to these pressures as best they can. But public, private, and even non-profit institutions are not responding to the degree they must if communities are going to sustain their quality of life.

Communities will need to generate leaders from public, private and non-profit sectors. They must build consensus across barriers of jurisdiction, class, gender and race. Despite common threads across all communities, many of the solutions will be place-based, forcing each community to chart the course that will meet the current and future needs of its citizens. What works for Abbotsford will not be the answer for Thunder Bay, though they can certainly learn from each other.

To bring about these broad, systemic changes, citizens and their leaders must make common cause, building broad coalitions to achieve common goals. They must raise public awareness, reshape the public discourse, and mobilize resources to address the root causes of economic and social insecurity. This will require action within communities as well as on a provincial or national scale.

PART 3:

Shared Responsibilities

By now, it should be clear that there are many actors who hold part of the response to the great challenges facing communities in the coming decade. No one actor – even the largest government – can do the job on its own. In this situation, the natural tendencies are to a) sit on the sidelines, waiting for others to take the lead, or b) to jump into activity which contradicts or overrides the efforts of others. The biggest challenge is to figure out how to get many independent actors aligned so that their contributions reinforce each other in a positive sum game.

Part 3 has two sections. The first is on roles and responsibilities, and the second on strengthening the collective leadership capacity of communities.

Roles and responsibilities


"The history of most community organizing and great social change movements can be traced back to ... conversations among friends and strangers who discovered a shared sense of what was important to them."

(Margaret J. Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers, p. 18)

Each Canadian citizen pays taxes to three levels of government – local, provincial and federal. In return, he or she receives essential services or benefits from all three – pensions, child benefits, public education, health services, garbage removal, policing and so on. But the powers of the three levels of government are interdependent. They do not operate in water-tight compartments. The activities of one will reinforce, complement, duplicate or even nullify what others are doing. Each one holds a piece of the communities agenda.

Other public institutions – schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, the police force and many others – also have a keen interest in the health of the communities they serve. The trouble is that governments have trouble managing this interdependence. Sometimes they act unilaterally, at other times, they don't act at all in order to avoid conflict with other jurisdictions. The result is poor coordination of place-based policies and gaps in services to citizens.

Private and nonprofit actors also own a piece of this agenda. Businesses have a deep interest in the well-being of the communities where their employees and



their consumers live. They are increasingly aware of their need to be seen as good citizens, as fully engaged partners in community affairs.

Non-profits, especially community-based organizations, are deeply embedded in their communities. They are typically the first responders to emerging community ills. Their mission is to serve the community through human services, recreation, or cultural activities. As advocates for disadvantaged people, they provide a voice for people who feel powerless, and they offer many citizens their first chance to exercise their own citizenship by helping the community.

None of these actors in the public, private or nonprofit sectors can handle the community challenges on their own. They do not have the depth of leadership or financial resources to carry the ball on their own, but all have key contributions to make. The Box on the next page outlines the strengths and limitations each of these actors brings to community action.

Sadly, few of these actors have a strong track record in collaboration. Businesses stay focused on the bottom line, foundations create their own program silos, and community-based organizations compete with each other for resources. Federal-provincial-local discussions are preoccupied with tensions over money. As Susan Phillips points out, governments in Canada have limited experience with collaborative initiatives based on shared governance, mainly because of their pre-occupation with accountability, control and reducing the cost of programs.


The situation is difficult but not hopeless. If governments have been slow to practice shared governance, communities are showing the way: forming broad community coalitions like the Vibrant Communities initiatives, the Toronto City Summit Alliance, the Hamilton Poverty Roundtable and Leadership Calgary.

Many other examples have been reported by Neil Bradford for CPRN (Cities and Communities that Work), and Sherri Torjman for the Caledon and Tamarack Institutes (Vibrant Communities and Action for Neighbourhood Change).

In most cases, senior governments have been drawn into these change-making initiatives to make very specific contributions essential to their success. But in every case, it has been the community itself which has defined the common purpose, mobilized local, provincial and sometimes national contributions, and directed the overall initiative. In other words, there is a role reversal here. Local people lead and senior governments follow.

BOX 2:
Strengths and Limitations of Community Actors

Actors	Strengths	Limitations
<p>Public sector actors</p> <p>Local</p> <p>Provincial</p> <p>Federal</p> <p>Public institutions (schools, hospitals etc)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsive to local need • Planning and local delivery • Power to convene community • Mandate to serve all citizens • Financial, technical, information, regulatory tools • Some delivery capacity, esp. health, education • Mandate to serve all Canadians • Financial, technical tools • Information sharing • Demonstration projects • In-depth knowledge of community & needs • Ability to participate as partner with in-kind contributions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow span of control • Limited policy capacity • Reluctant to differentiate one place • Less responsive to local need • Experience with only 1 or 2 large cities • Limited local delivery capacity • Distance from local experience • Reluctance to differentiate by place • Limited span of control
<p>Private and non-private actors</p> <p>Business</p> <p>Unions</p> <p>Community-based organizations</p> <p>Foundations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong management and problem-solving skills • Can mobilize own workforce • Financial and in-kind resources • Strong organizing and mobilization skills • Know community needs • Access to voluntary help • Ability to engage most excluded groups • Power to convene • Capacity for local delivery • Capacity to bridge class, culture and sector • Power to convene broadly • Financial scope to take risks • Scope to collaborate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not the principal mandate of the firm • Limited financial resources • Limited financial, technical resources • Usually small scale • Limited staff resources • Program silos • Limited collaboration with others




The biggest hurdle is to get the community started, and here, the secret ingredient is dialogue and deliberation. In simple terms, a local champion has to call a wide cross-section of citizens into a dialogue to identify a common purpose – to establish common ground. The dialogue has to be open-ended so that people can bring their hopes and dreams, their worries and frustrations. It has to be receptive to the best technical knowledge and the simplest forms of experiential knowledge. It takes careful planning and the leaders may want to involve trained facilitators. And it has to be sustained over time. There must be ongoing conversation to report on progress, to identify emerging problems, and to begin to imagine what the next project should be. (Dialogue tools can be found at the Public Involvement program at www.cprn.org.)

“We don’t need more public hearings. We need much more public learning, in processes where we come together and commit to staying together long enough to discover the ideas and issues that are significant to us ... as soon as people realize that others around them, no matter how different, share this sense of significance, they quickly move into new relationships with them.” (Margaret J. Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers, p. 18)

It is important to distinguish dialogue from the typical town hall meeting or public hearings where people come to rant about their grievances or to defeat an idea. Dialogue sets off a chain reaction. It builds trust and mutual respect, as people learn from each other. Dialogue identifies the common purpose. Dialogue triggers engagement as people begin to understand how they can make a difference. That engagement brings in local partners who can then begin formal project planning, solicit contributions, and establish communications plans. And once the coalition is formed, it has the political clout to attract partners from outside – governments, foundations and both technical and financial intermediaries.

Leadership and capacity-building

“All three sectors are indispensable as they join forces and build and renew the community ... Moving beyond the walls – in powerful partnerships that can build and heal and unify – leaders are called to manage the dream of a country of healthy children, strong families, good schools, decent housing, and work that dignifies, all embraced by the cohesive community. It is the dream that lies before us.” (Frances Hesselbein, pp. 181-2)




In the 1960s and 1970s, a cadre of young leaders was formed through their participation in government programs like the Company of Young Canadians, Opportunities for Youth and New Horizons. They were recruited to “make a difference” in Canadian communities (and in developing countries). They gained confidence and developed their leadership toolkits by working with communities. And they in turn have mentored another generation of leaders.

Today, governments are no longer the sponsors of such programs, yet the challenges look even greater than in the 60s and 70s, for many reasons:

- As Canadian society becomes more ethno-culturally diverse, it is essential that the leadership cadre in all sectors become representative of that diversity.
- Much of the developmental focus on leaders in Canada in the past decade has not been on leadership but on management skills – the capacity to ensure accountability, strategic planning, and manage human resources.
- Turnover in leadership is high not only in community-based organizations but also in schools, hospitals, businesses, and government departments. There is a “war for talent” with all sectors competing for those rare individuals who can go beyond being good stewards of an organization to “make change happen.”
- Complex challenges lie ahead, and such “wicked problems” place extraordinary demands on leaders. The issues are large, intractable and shared. They are systemic challenges with deep roots. Communities need leaders who can step forward from many walks of life, ready to share the burden and the glory.

As a result, the very notion of leadership is being redefined. At one time, the view was that leadership is found in individual attributes or certain positions on the organizational chart. Now the focus is shifting to collective leadership – a form of leadership that exists within groups (work teams, communities, neighbourhoods). “Collective leadership involves facilitating participation, understanding divergent perspectives and drawing upon the collective wisdom of the group. It is an approach to problem solving that reflects a deeply democratic ethos.” (Hubbard, p.11)



Some private foundations have made significant investments in grooming community leaders. The programs have often been targeted to one segment of society or one city. But even these foundations would agree that Canada is still on the early part of the learning curve when it comes to recruiting and developing new leadership talent for communities.

The community-wide coalitions mentioned earlier have shown that there is a way forward. They demonstrate that each community initiative will be unique – shaped by what citizens need and by the unique strengths of that community.

To get started, the community has to initiate a broadly based dialogue – including all income groups, sectors, and ethnic groups. The dialogue is needed to identify a common purpose and to mobilize energy and commitment. It is an opportunity for public learning and careful listening. It can build the trust and respect needed to carry the initiative forward.

PART 4:

The Calgary Dialogue

The Calgary Dialogue hosted by Community Foundations of Canada and The Calgary Foundation in October was an outstanding opportunity for a diverse group of leaders from across the country to explore the kinds of leadership our communities will need to respond to the challenges and opportunities they face and the role community foundations might play in offering and supporting that leadership. I look forward to seeing where this rich dialogue leads the community foundation movement and, hopefully, to the emergence of a new vision for resilient communities and inspired community leadership in Canada.

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