

**Policy Internships and Fellowships Program
Final Report**

**Evaluating the consultation and collaboration strategies used with the
Supporting Communities Partnership in Hamilton, Ontario**

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Introduction

Topic/Policy Area

The topic of this research project is the “Evaluation of the Community Consultation and Citizen Engagement Strategies and the collaboration models used in the implementation of the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative in Hamilton, Ontario.”

The Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) was designed to be a community-driven response to homelessness, which consulted with the community and fostered inter-organization collaboration. My interest in these areas stems from my experiences with both major and planned gift fundraising and with the organizational development of voluntary sector organizations. I have found that the building of relationships is a critical stage in successfully soliciting large donations because it is almost impossible to acquire a significant gift when the donor does not have a strong belief and level of involvement in the organization and its programs. As well, the capacity of organizations is enhanced through the engagement and involvement of other people and organizations.

Effective consultation helps to ensure that the information used to make decisions reflects the needs and views of the community being affected by a program or policy. It can help to increase the quality and effectiveness of the programs by building a sense of ownership in the process, among the stakeholders. It will also increase the breadth of options and the likelihood that, in the end, the program will be accepted by the community being served. To achieve success, collaboration with organizations in the delivery of programs on homelessness must focus on building relationships with the organizations and individuals delivering the programs and on fostering a spirit of cooperation.

Participant Background

My undergraduate degree is in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Waterloo. I initially worked for Transport Canada as a planner in the Ontario Region’s Airport Planning office for a year before pursuing an MBA degree from McMaster University, which included an International Management exchange and diploma from Boeki Kenshu Center in Fujinomiya, Japan. After completing the MBA degree, I worked as a Special Projects Officer for the City of Burlington before accepting a position with IDC Canada as a fundraising campaign consultant, where I progressed to the position of Senior Director.

My subsequent fundraising positions with Queen’s University, McMaster University and the Canadian Red Cross were focused on Annual, Major and Planned Giving. I then accepted the position of Director of Development with the Kidney Foundation of Canada.

Immediately prior to my participation in the Policy Internships and Fellowships (PIAF) Program, I worked at Volunteer Hamilton as Manager, TOTAL Non Profit Resources, for 2½ years. The purpose of this position was to enhance the organizational capacity of voluntary sector organizations, staff and volunteers. This was accomplished through the development of an online resource centre, consultations on organizational development, the provision of workshops and the conducting and presenting of research on strategies to improve the use of technology in the workplace.

As a result of my experience in the voluntary sector as a member of staff, a member of boards of directors and a volunteer with numerous organizations, I have acquired a deep understanding of how the sector is structured and its programs delivered, the capacities of voluntary sector organizations, and areas where greater knowledge is needed. In particular, throughout my

years of working in the voluntary sector, I have realized that most people in the sector did not know how public policy was developed and implemented or how they could become involved in the process. Consequently I thought that participating in the PIAF program would enhance my understanding of the federal government policy process, the role that voluntary sector organizations could play, and the most effective methods that voluntary sector staff and volunteers could use to become more involved in the policy process.

The PIAF Program

My original interest in the PIAF program was to use it as an opportunity to build on my previous research and work at Volunteer Hamilton on the development of knowledge transfer strategies for voluntary sector organizations. I also wanted to expand my knowledge of public policy development and policy learning models. Volunteer Hamilton was interested in my participation in PIAF as a way of increasing its organizational knowledge of public policy development and building and enhancing linkages with the federal government.

My placement began on August 19, 2002, almost immediately after completion of the PIAF summer policy institute, which was held at the University of Victoria. Initially, while I was still based at a home office, my work consisted of conducting interviews and research on the topic of policy communities, policy learning and the elements of successful knowledge transfer strategies. My office at Volunteer Hamilton continued to be used on an ongoing basis to access e-mail, the Internet and telephone and mail services. Regular meetings were held with Jan Potts, the Director of the Hamilton Human Resource Centre (HRC), and with other staff of Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC). This arrangement continued until late November, when office space at the Hamilton HRC became available.

The physical set-up of the two organizations is significantly different. While Volunteer Hamilton is a small community-based organization with a total of nine staff in two offices, it has made significant investments in technology, training and capacity building, in an effort to provide staff with a sufficient level of support to succeed in their jobs.

HRDC is a large department of the federal government. The main office of the Hamilton HRC occupies three floors of an office building and has 140 staff in several different business units. As with Volunteer Hamilton, a full range of technological support is provided. Other than the size of the offices, the biggest difference between the two organizations is that HRDC has in-house technical support and therefore does not have to contract these functions out to consultants.

My specific role at HRDC is to conduct research on the implementation of the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative of the National Homelessness Initiative, specifically the community consultation and the organizational collaboration models and strategies employed. A secondary role is to participate on a variety of committees dealing with SCPI and homelessness issues.

The PIAF Match

As a prospective PIAF participant, I initiated the match with HRDC. Some of the precipitating factors included:

- An existing relationship between Jan Potts, the Director of the Hamilton HRC, and Volunteer Hamilton;
- HRDC's high level of linkages, partnerships and social capital development in the community;

- HRDC's history of supporting the voluntary sector in the community; and
- HRDC's experience with knowledge transfer strategies and public policy development.

It should be noted that while the Director of the Hamilton HRC, Jan Potts, and I had met on several occasions, we had never worked together. However there is a history of collaboration between the Hamilton HRC and Volunteer Hamilton. A note of interest is that Volunteer Hamilton's Executive Director, Liz Weaver, was one of the resources in the community who were initially consulted in the recruitment of the SCPI Community Advisory Board (CAB).

Scope of Fellowship

The initial project focused on strengthening the transfer of policy development knowledge to the voluntary sector. The two principal components of the project were: 1) to improve the policy-learning capacity of voluntary sector organizations through the identification and development of policy learning models that can utilize online knowledge transfer strategies; and 2) to identify best practices voluntary sector organizations can adopt to enhance their policy knowledge, experience and skills.

The scope of the project, however, changed once it was underway. Early in the project, Jan Potts and I had discussed potential programs on which to anchor the fellowship project. In the Speech from the Throne on September 30, there was a commitment to continue SCPI. Based on that announcement, Jan indicated that SCPI would be a good program on which to focus the project – it had more than two years of history, it was currently operating in Hamilton and, with the Speech from the Throne announcement, there was a commitment to a future. As well, SCPI was implemented at the local level and had a high level of voluntary sector involvement. Consequently, the decision was made to alter the direction of the project. The flexibility of the PIAF program to alter the focus of a project has enabled me to concentrate on issues that are timely and relevant to both sectors. In the end, the ability to change the focus has greatly enhanced my learning experience.

The revised focus of the project is to study the SCPI implementation process, with a particular focus on evaluating the consultation and citizen engagement strategies and their impact on public policy development. A secondary focus is to evaluate: SCPI's use of collaboration and partnership strategies targeting federal government and voluntary sector organizations; and collaborations and partnerships between voluntary sector organizations.

Context

Prior to participating in the PIAF program, my areas of interest and focus were as follows:

Voluntary sector knowledge management strategies: The key issues considered and discussed in this area included: building organizational capacity through the implementation of knowledge management strategies; voluntary and involuntary turnover of staff and volunteers and the resultant loss of institutional knowledge; and the inter-relationship of human capital, relationship capital, and social capital in voluntary sector organizations.

The use of technology in the voluntary sector: The technology issues and concepts, which were at the forefront of consideration in the voluntary sector, were as follows: enhancing organizational capacity through the development of online learning strategies; developing strategies for the exchange and retention of tacit knowledge through the use of online

communities of interest and practice; and building the intellectual capital of voluntary sector organizations through the development of online repositories of explicit knowledge.

Fund development strategies: In the fundraising field, the key issues at the centre of discussion and research were: the development of comprehensive strategies on relationship fundraising; major and planned giving; and lifetime giving.

Volunteer Hamilton's key programs and issues

The mission of Volunteer Hamilton is "building community leadership through volunteerism." In addition to Volunteer Hamilton's ongoing support of community volunteerism and member agencies, the key programs and issues facing Volunteer Hamilton at the time of the PIAF fellowship were:

TOTAL Non Profit Resources: This is an interactive online resource centre for the voluntary sector. Through a combination of the Resource Library – an online repository of explicit knowledge – and the Volunteer Consultant Program – an online network of volunteer consultants – the staff and volunteers of voluntary sector organizations can access the knowledge and resources they require to effectively manage their organization.

Bay Area Leadership: This leadership program builds stronger, caring communities by developing leaders with vision and commitment who effectively serve the Burlington-Hamilton areas. Bay Area Leadership provides a diverse group of emerging and existing community leaders with opportunities to enhance their community knowledge, their networks and their leadership so as to effect positive community change.

International Year of Volunteers: 2001 was the International Year of Volunteers (IYV), and Volunteer Hamilton's programs and initiatives centred on this program in the years leading up to, during and following IYV.

Building a values-driven organization: The volunteers and staff of Volunteer Hamilton have been engaged in a process of renewal and development through the identification and confirmation of the core organizational values that are key to the work of Volunteer Hamilton. The following values will be reflected in all Volunteer Hamilton policies, processes, relationships and actions:

- Accessibility – accessibility and diversity are values that are celebrated and fully integrated into Volunteer Hamilton's work.
- Innovation – Volunteer Hamilton commits to being an innovative leader in the promotion of volunteerism. Volunteer Hamilton is responsive to the needs of the community.
- Responsible Relationships – The internal and external relationships and partnerships of Volunteer Hamilton are characterized as respectful, co-operative and empowering. Communication will be open, timely, productive and clear.

Related Issues Facing The Federal Government

The issues facing the federal government, which were related to my PIAF fellowship, were:

Voluntary Sector Initiative: The Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) was a joint undertaking between the voluntary sector and the Government of Canada. It provided the federal government with a unique opportunity to focus on the voluntary sector as one of the three pillars of Canadian society, equal in importance to the public and private sectors.

The long-term objective of the VSI was to strengthen the voluntary sector's capacity to meet the challenges of the future, and to enhance both the relationship between the sector and the federal government and their ability to serve Canadians.

Homelessness: Federal-level discussions about the issue of homelessness recognized that it is a significant problem in Canada and that a whole progression of support steps may be needed to help a person who is homeless. These support steps may range from making appropriate supportive services available to people in need, whether they live on the street or in risky housing situations through to the provision of accommodation and assistance in emergency shelters. The goal of programs addressing homelessness is to initially provide homeless persons with access to transitional housing, and ultimately to permanent housing and independence.

In some circumstances, long-term housing with continued support is needed. This progression could require continual support as individuals have different needs as they move from their vulnerable circumstances to more stable living conditions. This transition takes time and individuals will progress at their own pace depending on their own circumstances. Even once more permanent housing is obtained, continued follow-up support could be required to prevent a return to homelessness.

To date, no reliable method for counting the number of people who are homeless can be identified and Canada does not have any accurate national statistics. The very nature of homelessness has meant that counting the people affected is difficult. While homelessness seems to have increased in visibility in urban centres, no one is sure how many people live on the streets or in substandard shelter. Consequently, the federal government has acknowledged that the homeless population has no fixed address, is mobile and in many cases, hidden, and that the face of homelessness changes from community to community.

In order to reduce and prevent homelessness, the federal government recognized that it needed to have a better understanding of the situation, the underlying causes and the support systems that were needed. This resulted in the development of the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI).

The development of the National Homelessness Initiative represented a departure from past federal programs in that it focused on mobilizing the community's resources to identify and develop realistic solutions. This process began with the development of the Community (Action) Plan (CAP) as a vehicle to unite the community, to build a common understanding of the problems of homelessness and to set priorities among the potential solutions. The purpose of this step was to encourage a sense of ownership in the community, build on existing strengths and increase the capacity of the community to address the problems. By placing the proposal development and evaluation component in the hands of the Community Advisory Board, the NHI also empowered the community to take an active role.

Public Policies And Legislation Related To The Issue Of Homelessness

On December 17, 1999, the Honourable Claudette Bradshaw, Minister of Labour and Federal Coordinator on Homelessness, and the Honourable Alfonso Gagliano, Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada and Minister responsible for the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, announced an investment of \$753 million over three years in a strategy to facilitate collaborative approaches – among governments, the voluntary sector and the private sector – to address the challenges posed by the homeless throughout Canada. The National

Homelessness Initiative recognized that no one level of government or sector in Canada could solve the problem of homelessness alone.

The National Homelessness Initiative comprised the: Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative; Youth Homelessness Strategy; Urban Aboriginal Strategy; Shelter Enhancement Initiative; and Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program. The NHI also provided (financial) Assistance for Community Plans and Research, which the Government used to help community partners develop community plans and share best practices. The programs administered by HRDC are:

The Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative: This demonstration program was launched as the cornerstone of the National Homelessness Initiative. It was aimed at encouraging communities to work with provincial, territorial and municipal governments, and the private and voluntary sectors to address the immediate needs of homeless people. Funding for this program totalled \$305 million over three years. Eighty percent (80%) of this funding was targeted at the 10 cities in Canada with a documented significant level of people currently living without long-term shelter. Hamilton was included in this list of 10 cities. The remaining 20% of the funding was directed at smaller communities throughout the country that were able to demonstrate a homelessness problem.

The federal funding was contingent on the commitment of each community to provide matching funding - at least fifty percent (50%) of the total funds.

The Youth Homelessness Strategy: The federal government allocated \$59 million over three years to address homelessness among youth. This component was delivered in collaboration with the Youth Employment Initiatives of HRDC.

The Urban Aboriginal Strategy: In the third component, \$59 million was targeted towards the needs of Aboriginal people. While these funds were not tied directly to SCPI, there was a requirement that Aboriginal projects funded in a city receiving SCPI funding must be linked to the community plan to address overall homelessness.

Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative's Stakeholders and Constituencies

SCPI promotes two types of governance models to mobilize the community and develop an inclusive process for determining and addressing the needs of the homeless and those at risk of homelessness. The first is the "community entity" model, where the government contracts with a community organization or municipality to manage the program in that community. The community entity receives the SCPI funds and is accountable for their disbursement. The second is the "shared" model, where a community-based partnership body acts as an advisor to HRDC, to recommend which projects should be approved for funding. In Hamilton, the "community entity" model was adopted, and the City of Hamilton was selected as the organization to be responsible for the disbursement of the funds. Consequently, the principal stakeholders were Human Resources Development Canada, the Ministry of Labour, and the City of Hamilton. The various constituencies involved with SCPI can thus be classified into community partners, voluntary sector community service providers, the City of Hamilton, and HRDC.

The administration of SCPI centred on HRDC as the government department with responsibility for its implementation. HRDC spearheaded the selection of the City of Hamilton as the community entity, the formation of the Community Advisory Board and the ongoing evaluation of

the program. Staff of the Hamilton HRC (in HRDC) have been directly involved in the overall management of the program since it was launched.

As the community entity, the City of Hamilton and specifically its Social and Public Health Department is responsible for: making the final recommendations on SCPI funding; monitoring and reporting on the implementation and evolution of the Community Action Plan, including the disbursements; achieving success in filling the gaps in services; and developing new partnerships.

The community partners are those individuals and organizations who have participated in the development and ongoing overseeing of the initiative. The principal partners included the:

- Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton-Wentworth, which prepared the Community Action Plan, coordinated the community (consultation) forums and conducted the annual evaluation of the Community Action Plan and of the status of homelessness in the community.
- Community Advisory Board, which is the committee recommended in the SCPI guidelines to make recommendations to the community entity on the disbursement of the funds. The CAB consists of a variety of community partners - including private, public and voluntary sector organizations - with different levels of involvement in the homelessness issue. As well, members of HRDC and City of Hamilton staff sit on CAB in an ex-officio capacity. In Hamilton, a decision was made to exclude, from CAB, representatives of homelessness service delivery providers, in order to enhance the objectivity of the committee.

The community service providers are organizations that have submitted proposals in response to the CAB's Request for Proposals (RFP). In Hamilton, these providers are voluntary sector organizations such as the Good Shepherd Centre, Wesley Urban Ministries, Mission Services, Family Services, Living Rock and Food Share.

The involvement of these various types of organizations in SCPI resulted in an innovative and unique framework for the delivery of services. In this program, the federal government moved beyond the standard approach of simply contracting local organizations to deliver the services. In Hamilton, SCPI engaged the municipal government as the community entity to administer the program, empowered a volunteer board with decision-making responsibilities and contracted local voluntary sector organizations to deliver the programs and services, all under the HRDC management umbrella.

Summary of My Work

Fellowship Goals and Activities

As previously noted, the focus of my work was to evaluate the consultation and citizen engagement strategies used to implement the SCPI program and their impact on public policy development. A secondary focus was to evaluate the strategies used for federal government and voluntary sector organizations and, with respect to the voluntary sector and voluntary sector organizations, to evaluate collaborations and partnerships.

As a research project, the assignment has revolved around the gathering of information on the SCPI consultation and collaboration strategies. These research activities have consisted of three principal components:

First, interviews were conducted with individuals who have had different levels of involvement with homelessness and SCPI. These included: HRDC staff in Hamilton who were involved with

SCPI; the Director of the Ontario Region's Homelessness Directorate; former and current members of the City of Hamilton's Social and Public Health Services staff; members of the Community Advisory Board; senior staff of service providers who were awarded SCPI funding; members of local advocacy groups; and selected members of the academic community who have conducted research on community consultation and citizen engagement, as well as on inter- and intra-sectoral collaboration and partnership strategies.

Second, a review of related literature was conducted. This research examined the history of the federal government's homelessness initiatives, related legislation, program descriptions and evaluation reports. Other topics included community consultation and citizen engagement theory, research and processes, and models and theories of collaboration and partnership.

Third, selected forums, seminars and workshops on collaboration, consultation and homelessness issues were attended. These included, among others, the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association's (OMSSA) "Homelessness Action Planning Day", the City of Toronto's "Building on Successes Forum", and the City of Hamilton's "SCPI Showcase".

Research Overview

The National Homelessness Initiative and SCPI were conceived as a result of a consultation process. In the summer of 1999, the Hon. Claudette Bradshaw, Canada's Federal Co-ordinator on Homelessness, visited fifteen communities across Canada to observe the effects of homelessness first-hand.

Through consultations with Canadian communities it became clear that cooperation was needed between agencies and organizations that provide services for homeless people and those at risk. These consultations led to the launch of the NHI, which was designed to help governments and community organizations come together to alleviate homelessness. By encouraging innovative and progressive cooperation, this approach was designed to support local solutions for local problems.

Although homelessness occurs in areas all across Canada, the associated problems are quite different from one community to another. SCPI was designed to support local, community-based efforts to identify priorities and to plan and develop appropriate solutions. Its goal was to bring together all levels of government and private, non-profit, labour and volunteer organizations to plan and implement local solutions to homelessness. The stated objective was to reduce and prevent the underlying factors, with a focus on offering both long-term solutions and the provision of immediate care. This is consistent with the federal government's belief that public consultations lead to a better product by providing legitimacy and exposing the product to new ideas and alternatives. Consultation is seen to "facilitate the building of relationships between government and its stakeholders and can lead to the forming of partnerships" (Shepherd, 1993, p.24).

The community coordination aspect of SCPI was viewed as one of the most positive features of the program. The consultative process of bringing together stakeholders to develop the plan and strategy was seen to be very beneficial by most parties. As Paquet (2001) has observed, citizens now have a desire to be consulted; and most of government's partners and stakeholders want to have a say in the design of policies, programs and responses to issues that concern them.

The first stage in implementing SCPI in a community was the development of a Community (Action) Plan. It was intended to be the product of a consultative and inclusive process involving all stakeholders interested in addressing homelessness in their community. The *Guide to the*

Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative states that the community planning process should be guided by an inclusive and consultative approach that involves the participants and stakeholders. The community identifies services currently available (“assets”) and those that need to be developed (“gaps”). Based on local requirements, participants then determine priorities for preventing and alleviating homelessness.

In Hamilton, the Social Planning and Research Council (SPRC) of Hamilton-Wentworth was selected as the organization to spearhead the development of the CAP. The SPRC had released the *Our Homes and Our Streets* report on homelessness in 1999 and the Hamilton Human Resources Centre of HRDC decided that the best route for developing a Community (Action) Plan was to build on the work that SPRC had already completed. It should be noted that work on the CAP commenced prior to the release of the SCPI program guidelines.

To develop the CAP, the SPRC held two community consultations/forums in early 2000, followed by a series of presentations in the community on the scope of SCPI and the status of the CAP. These forums were attended by a large number of community organizations that dealt with homelessness issues, the three levels of government, some private sector organizations and associations and several interested individuals.

As a result of the forums, four priorities for action were established, and after subsequent discussions with the CAP’s parent committees, three additional priorities were added. To complete the consultations, a series of focus groups and key informant interviews were held with minority communities, including youth and Aboriginal groups. The results of these consultations were then incorporated in the CAP. It should be noted that the CAP consisted of a very broad range of recommendations and the Region of Hamilton-Wentworth was directed by the National Homelessness Secretariat to “tighten” the scope of the recommendations. The result of this work was the CAP Addendum, which focused (only) on those priorities that were eligible for SCPI funding.

CAB delivered SCPI funding in three phases and prior to the development of the first RFP, a community forum was held to seek input. Attendance at this forum was dominated by the community service providers; few individuals from the general community were present.

No community forum was held prior to the development of the second RFP and the CAB received negative comments, particularly from service delivery agency staff and advocacy groups, concerning this oversight. Consequently, a community forum was held in advance for the development of the third RFP. As with the first forum, this one was dominated by the service providers.

Several of the people interviewed commented that they were concerned about the lack of broad community representation at any of these forums. These comments came from both (the staff of) service providers and members of the CAB. The comments can be classified into two general groups. The first grouping of comments related to the issue of inclusion, indicating that the forums (both the CAP and the SCPI RFP community consultations) did not include a representative sample of the community, or consumers of the proposed services -- persons who were experiencing homelessness.

The second grouping of comments centred on the dominance of service providers attending the forums and skewing the commentary and responses. While some individuals who were not part of larger service delivery organizations did attend, the voice of the community in general on this issue was, to a large extent, absent from the discussion.

The larger service provider agencies (awarded SCPI funding) were on the whole very pleased with SCPI and HRDC. Many of the staff stated that the SCPI funding enabled them to deal with situations and problems facing the homeless in the community that they would never have been able to address without the program. Nevertheless, many did express concerns about the input provided by the general public or by the newer and smaller service providers. One area of concern was that since the larger agencies were the experts, their voices should have been given greater weight; they were perplexed as to why members of the general public with little or no expertise in the area were given an equal voice. Nevertheless, since the service providers represented the majority of people in attendance, their comments were central to the development of each RFP. It is interesting to note that some of the other attendees at these consultations thought it unusual that, while the service providers considered themselves to be the experts, they provided only anecdotal evidence and not any empirical evidence.

Another way to look at the turnout issue is that those who attended represented the principal agencies in the community that were working in the area of homelessness, as well as those individual citizens who were most interested in the subject. Consequently, their attendance ensured that the commentary was based on the experiences of the people and organizations closest to homeless persons. In this context, one could say that the process of documenting their experiences would provide an accurate depiction of needs and priorities. On the other hand, it could be said that their comments may be self-serving and reflect an organizational and not a community perspective, i.e., that they are making recommendations and comments (based) on what is best for achieving the goals, objectives and needs of their organization and not those of the community as a whole.

While the service providers were consulted on the RFPs, they (individually and collectively) made several comments around the issue that, as the experts, the service providers' commentaries should have played a more significant role in the development of the RFPs. They were disappointed that their opinions were sought only on a "commentary" basis, during the RFP development process.

Some other issues expressed by participants in the community consultation forums were as follows: the expectations for the consultations were not clear; and there was no reporting back to the attendees on how the information would be used or on the results of the consultations. People were not sure whether the purpose was to discuss the broad issues around addressing homelessness or whether they were to discuss the delivery of the SCPI priorities. Many considered the format of the consultations to be vague and felt that attendees had not been provided with sufficient background information before the sessions. Also several attendees commented that the consultation process did not seek to learn about the wishes of the community as a whole or of those "at-risk".

As a general rule, the participation of interested parties in consultations will help to guide decisions and generate more desirable results. However, there are several roadblocks (Bennett, 1994) that can hamper the effectiveness of consultations and a number were identified in the SCPI consultation process.

The first roadblock relates to unclear expectations; for public consultations to be successful, the expectations must be clear. As Bennett (1994) states, "no clear mandate, no clear outcome".

This roadblock was identified as an issue in the Community Action Plan consultation process and in some of CAB's RFP consultations. Due to time constraints, the SPRC began development of the CAP prior to the release of the SCPI guidelines and it presented a broad

discussion on the issue of homelessness with many recommendations that were not within the SCPI guidelines. Consequently, many of those consulted in the CAP development process felt somewhat disenfranchised when the CAP addendum was prepared, and since then have not been as supportive of SCPI as they otherwise might have been.

The first roadblock in the RFP consultations was a result of the participants not understanding how the information would be used. Many did not appreciate that the information gathered in the consultations was being used to guide the development of the RFP and that the “majority did not rule”. Consequently, they felt that their voices were being ignored.

A second “roadblock” is “unrepresentative consultation”. There is an assumption by many that consultations should reflect all of society’s interests on a topic and that the people attending the consultations should represent an interest or a group. Consultations can be ineffective if they do not have the proper representation. A further difficulty can arise when the government selects representatives who are not from the sectors or organizations that would be affected by the policy or who oppose the government’s intervention.

This is an issue which generated controversy. The most prevalent comment was that no matter how hard the organizers tried, there was little or no representation at the consultations from the client group, or those at risk of being homeless. Other comments centred on concerns that certain voices carried more weight than others and that the consultations seemed to be dominated by the service delivery providers. Finally, people interviewed seemed perplexed as to why the community in general was poorly represented and indicated that they would have preferred having greater numbers in attendance.

A third “roadblock” is the lack of review of the consultation process. There is much discussion about how the government needs to build trust in order to hold effective consultations. For the consultation to be effective, there has to be a commitment to incorporate (or at least consider), and a willingness act upon, any consensus that comes out of the exercise. If this is not done, the parties can feel that the process is wasting their time and resources and this will have a negative impact on their future participation.

As previously indicated, a group of people were frustrated that the majority of votes for a certain issue did not necessarily mean that the issue would be accepted, as voted upon. This relates not only to the issue of clear expectations, but also to the building of trust and to its role in engaging people in consultations. Finally, there were concerns expressed that there was no reporting back to the attendees on how the information would be used and on the results of the consultations.

In general, a credible, transparent and legitimate process (or at least the perception of one) can help to ensure an acceptable outcome of a community decision-making process. There are several strategies that can be employed in the future to improve the effectiveness of the consultations, to increase the likelihood of achieving a representative sample for a consultation, and to be more responsive to the needs and desires of a community.

The first strategy would be to adopt the International Association for Public Participation’s (IAP2) “core values for the practice of public participation” as the foundation in the development of the consultations. The IAP2 values were created for use in the development and implementation of public participation processes. The adoption of these values will help to ensure that the decision-making process that evolves from the consultations reflects the interests and concerns of those

(individuals and organizations) potentially affected by the decisions. The Association's core values are listed below.

1. The public should have a say in decisions about actions that affect their lives.
2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
3. The public participation process communicates the interests and meets the process needs of all participants.
4. The public participation process seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected.
5. The public participation process involves participants in defining how they participate.
6. The public participation process provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
7. The public participation process communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

The second strategy is to utilize some common techniques that engage citizens in genuine two-way dialogue. Commonly used strategies, such as focus groups, surveys and other types of polling, community issue groups and consensus conferences, can engage a representative sample of a community if sufficient effort is put forth to recruit more than just the stakeholders and interest groups with a vested interest in the results. The key to engaging people is to go beyond the simple tabling of "inflexible" points of view and to move to a more deliberative process. Incorporating generally accepted principles and strategies for the design of surveys would help to ensure broad community representation in the consultations.

A third strategy is to consider using some of the more innovative consultation and citizen engagement techniques. One technique is "study circles", which are designed to facilitate decision-making at the community level by recruiting groups of people to work on specific issues over a period of several weeks. A second technique to consider is "citizen juries". Citizen juries consist of a set of randomly selected juries of eighteen people to hear a variety of expert witnesses, deliberate on the issues, and then present their recommendations to the public. "Deliberative polling" is a third technique to consider. This process involves between 250 and 600 people who form a representative sample of the community. Initially, they are polled to obtain their preliminary views on an issue. The individuals then engage in small group discussions and pose questions to experts and politicians, and are then polled at the end of the process.

One of the principal benefits of using this third strategy is that each of these techniques involves a large representative sample of a community and, as such, they attempt to ensure that the results represent the best interest of the community. A second benefit derives from the fact that the key facet of each of the techniques is the intent to inform and educate the participants on an issue. Each process involves the "balanced" education of the participants on the specific issues by providing enough information so that the participants can receive an accurate and neutral overview of the topics. Having been given a "balanced education", participants can then make an informed judgement at the end of the process.

An overriding theme of the consultation and citizen engagement strategies should be the need to take a community perspective through the involvement of the community in general. Communities can and should play a vital role in addressing homelessness, poverty and other issues; and they have the capacity to reduce homelessness, and mitigate its impact on a community and society in general.

The government's approach to consultations is typically programmatic and practical – they are intended to improve policy development, design, and implementation processes. Consultations are not normally used to engage in a broad discussion and exchange of the values that underpin policy proposals. Citizen engagement is the term that is being used for this type of communication. As Phillips and Graham (1998) state, the concept of “public participation” at the level of local government has “fallen into disrepute” and they prefer the term “citizen engagement” to describe a process that involves two-way obligations on the part of local governments and their citizens.

Pal (2001) states that a shift from “consultation” to “engagement” seems to have occurred. He believes that this is the result of the continued lack of trust that citizens have toward government and dissatisfaction with the connotations of consultation. Citizen engagement “emphasizes the importance of a genuine two-way dialogue among citizens, and between citizens and governments.” (Phillips and Orsini, 2002, p.3)

A challenge associated with citizen engagement is the use of effective techniques. Consultations can be assumed to attract stakeholders and interest groups, but even in that context there is a question of how to go beyond the simple tabling of a variety of (potentially conflicting) views and to move to a more deliberative process. In terms of citizen engagement, some of the previously mentioned methods, including study circles, citizen juries, deliberative polling and the development of partnerships, were developed as a way to effectively bring citizens into a dialogue with government.

Homelessness is not reduced by accident or simply through the marketplace; it requires intentional acts by the community. A key step in harnessing the community to address homelessness should be to involve a broad spectrum of people. To be effective, members of the community as a whole and its various institutions need to be invited and involved. As Robert Putnam suggests in *Bowling Alone*, our community institutions must be revitalized. But they must be revitalized in ways that spread power across the community and not concentrate it among a few leaders.

Involving a broader spectrum of people is not an easy task. It necessitates the finding of a time and a place where people can meet, identify common goals and share resources. (Rice, Fay & Auton, 2003) It is also dependent upon building trust between individuals and organizations, having people bond together into social networks, and encouraging people to believe that working together is a worthwhile endeavour.

Misztal (1996) believes that trust performs three functions. First, it reduces social complexity. By this, she means that trust facilitates decision-making in everyday activities by enabling people to make (trusting) assumptions about others. Second, trust provides the conditions in which the bonds of solidarity can flourish. This form of trust becomes extended to others through social relations and creates feelings of obligations to strangers. Third, trust acts as a social lubricant. As such, trust fosters conditions of cooperation through the creation of personal bonds. The more connected people feel to others, the more they are willing to work together.

The service delivery agencies and advocacy organizations in Hamilton have been involved in the issue of homelessness for years, but the community as a whole has not yet embraced involvement in this issue. If community building is to address homelessness, it must be inclusive, i.e., it must engage people and organizations from across the community, and not have the involvement concentrated within small clusters of people and agencies. Developing a process to involve the broader community should begin with an inclusive consultation strategy.

Additional Activities

In addition to the research activities, I had the opportunity to participate on several committees related to the issue of homelessness:

1. **Community Advisory Board:** CAB provided overall direction to the SCPI fund in the City of Hamilton during the period from October 2000 to March 2003. Members of the committee, recruited by HRDC, represented a diverse cross-section of the community.

At the time I joined the CAB, as an ex-officio member, only the grant for the Family Shelter remained to be awarded. While I missed the community consultation forum at which the Family Shelter was discussed, I did have the opportunity to participate in the proposal evaluation and the selection process. Following the selection of the successful service delivery organization for the Family Shelter in February 2003, a process of self-evaluation of the CAB was undertaken.

2. **Food, Shelter and Housing Advisory Committee:** The purpose of this committee is to advise the City of Hamilton's Social and Public Health Services Volunteer Coordinating Committee on social and health issues and policies. The particular focus of the committee is on persons or communities facing barriers to income and food security and on access to safe, accessible and adequate shelter and permanent housing with appropriate supports (as necessary). The composition of this committee is predominantly the staff of service delivery organizations, with representation from the City of Hamilton, the Province of Ontario and HRDC. My role on the committee is as an observer.

3. **Prevention, Awareness, Choices, Education (PACE) Committee and Policy Sub-Committee:** With a focus on the prevention of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), PACE provides education for health professionals, promotes awareness of FASD to at-risk populations such as homeless youth and homeless persons with mental health issues, and advocates for policy changes.

I am working with other members of the Policy Sub-Committee to identify and implement strategies for the development of a municipal bylaw on FASD. The focus of this bylaw is on public awareness and education, through the posting of FASD warning signs and prevention messages in all establishments that sell and serve alcoholic beverages. This policy will be developed through a series of meetings with community stakeholders and will take into consideration the research on successful strategies in other communities.

4. **SCPI Evaluation (Progress Report) Committee:** The purpose of the Evaluation Committee is to oversee the development of a Progress Report on the Community (Action) Plan and Homelessness in Hamilton. The committee will accomplish its work by establishing a set of evaluation principles, goals and objectives and defining and monitoring the overall evaluation process. My role as a member of the committee has been fourfold: 1) review the evaluation data, findings and analysis and make recommendations on the presentation of the data; 2) discuss the implications of the material for the community; 3) participate in the development of a

written communication plan for the *Report Card*; and 4) participate on the sub-committee charged with developing and disseminating the executive summary of the *Report Card*.

Challenges Encountered

From the outset, the fellowship was intended to involve a stand-alone research project. Initially, the project had a broad focus on policy learning models and knowledge transfer strategies/issues and the challenge was to ensure that the project's report would be relevant to both the federal government and the voluntary sector. To fulfill the requirements of the fellowship required the development of a course to steer the direction of the project's research.

This challenge was addressed with the decision to focus the project on the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative. The modified objective to evaluate SCPI's community consultation and citizen engagement strategies provided the project with a clear direction and a focal point for the research.

An additional benefit of the new focus was that it provided an opportunity for on-site participation in the Hamilton Human Resource Centre's SCPI-related activities. This on-site involvement had the result of enhancing the overall fellowship experience by providing insight into the day-to-day operations of the office and the implementation of the SCPI policy. Being ensconced in a work station in the HRDC office environment provided regular opportunities for the easy exchange of tacit knowledge on the SCPI program and related issues, and access to the office's repository of documents.

In the early stages of the fellowship, work and research on the project were coordinated through a home office and the use of Volunteer Hamilton's Internet and e-mail system. In order to obtain information on SCPI, regular meetings were held with the Hamilton HRC staff. While this arrangement was effective in the early stages, being immersed in the HRDC culture on a daily basis greatly enhanced the overall learning opportunities.

Voluntary Sector-Public Sector Comparisons

The Way Work Is Accomplished

In comparing the way in which work is done in my home and host environment, an observation (whether it is true or not) is that in the voluntary sector (and my home organization), there is a much greater focus on the multi-disciplinary team approach. Working in (relatively) small organizations requires voluntary sector staff to frequently work on projects and tasks collaboratively with other colleagues in the same organization, whether or not they are from the same operational unit. Due to the collaborative nature of many activities, information is freely provided and widely distributed. This has the effect of developing a sense of ownership and a commitment to the organization's programs and projects.

The voluntary sector's perception of the federal government is that lower levels of collaboration exist. My observation is that there is little inter-organizational unit collaboration on programs and projects. People tend to concentrate on their areas of responsibility and "cross-training" does not appear to be present. I have found that the principal reason for this is that many of the job functions in HRDC are technical in nature and require specific operational training and this acts as a deterrent to the creation of "cross-unit" teams. The complexity of the work and changing policies, procedures and legislation also play a role. Nevertheless, future service delivery, human resources and labour relations issues, staff appreciation and recognition mechanisms,

and learning events, among other examples, will cross business unit lines. However, for the most part, staff (still) operate in separate silos due to the technical nature of their jobs.

It should be noted that a reason for this observation may be related to the role of the fellowship, i.e., there are no specific operational responsibilities or opportunities to work with people in different operational units. Other factors, such as the size, scope and hierarchical structure of this HRDC office, precluded me from being directly involved in activities outside of the homelessness initiative. Nevertheless, my role in the PIAF fellowship has enabled me to be exposed to a wide variety of initiatives related to SCPI and I am regularly provided with information on policy issues, SCPI and related subjects. The role has also provided me with the freedom to pursue research activities and topics as needed.

The typical (formal) exchanges of knowledge and information that occur in my home organization and in many of the larger voluntary sector organizations, such as inter-departmental meetings, cross-training and inter-unit task groups, have not been observed. In the Hamilton HRC, communication with staff typically occurs through quarterly meetings, extended management teams and management team meetings in which the main theme is integration. Discussion and decision making cover the full range of the organization. As well, it should be noted that information updates are regularly distributed to all staff in an effort to keep people “in the loop”.

The Decision-Making Processes

In most small and medium-sized voluntary sector organizations and in my home organization in particular, decisions tend to be made on a consultative basis. Staff and volunteers across organizational units and board members are frequently consulted for their input before the Executive Director or the Board takes a decision. This does create a sense of ownership in the organization and while it may slow the early stages of the decision-making process, it facilitates the implementation stage. People feel that their opinions matter and have at least been considered in the decision. This creates a sense of ownership of programs, projects and tasks and helps to foster a commitment to spend the effort and time necessary to make the initiative a success.

While I have not been part of the decision-making process for any project, I have observed that, as is the case in most large bureaucracies, the hierarchical decision-making structure exists. Decisions proceed along specified reporting lines, from the local level through the Regional Headquarters, to the National Headquarters. Accountability runs upward and authority downward. I must, however, note that while a consultative decision-making process does not exist to the same extent as in the voluntary sector, I feel that federal government staff nevertheless have a similar sense of ownership for (at least the SCPI) programs and a commitment to ensure that the initiatives are a success.

Other Cultural Differences

In attempting to identify cultural differences I feel that it is important to highlight the purpose and mission of voluntary sector organizations, as they are at the core of cultural differences. An organization’s mission (as reflected in its mission statement) is its *raison d’être*. Everything that an organization does - all of its decisions, initiatives and programs - must be based on the mission. This builds consistency in the organization and keeps it on a focused path. It enables staff activities to be grounded in common principles and consistently applied in all situations.

As Bart (1997, 2003) states, managers must be prepared to recite and continually repeat the organization’s mission statement. It is up to the leaders to translate the mission statement so

that it has personal meaning and relevance to the staff in day-to-day situations. For a mission statement to be truly meaningful, staff must understand why and how it has an impact on them and how it can improve the performance of their jobs.

The mission of most voluntary sector organizations is clearly defined. In Volunteer Hamilton and in many other voluntary sector organizations, the mission is regularly promoted to, and discussed with, staff, its relevance is reviewed, and it is used to justify programs and services. All programs are regularly reviewed to ensure their relevance to the mission and periodic reviews of policies and mission-related issues are undertaken, e.g., the recent evaluation of Volunteer Hamilton's organizational values. To offer a comparison, Volunteer Hamilton's mission is "building community leadership through volunteerism", whereas the mission of HRDC is "to enable Canadians to participate fully in the workplace and the community".

The different focuses of the respective missions affect how people interact with their communities. The voluntary sector has a strong community and external focus and is founded on the principle of service delivery. Voluntary sector organizations typically have cultures that are rooted in the community and frequently take a "grassroots" perspective.

While HRDC does have a community focus, its mandate in achieving its mission has changed, and continues to change, from a provider to a manager of public services. The culture of this organization is, as a result, more characteristic of an overseer, with a "top-down" perspective. The SCPI program is a good example of HRDC's mission in practice. In pursuing its goal of reducing the impact of homelessness, HRDC has tried, with success, to engage and empower the community to take ownership in the SCPI program. The department did not actually deliver the services but instead gave the community the tools it needed to develop the leadership to drive the program.

Underlying Assumptions And Biases

There are those in the voluntary sector who assume that all federal government departments are large and well resourced in terms of staff and funding. One of the benefits of this fellowship and my location in the Hamilton HRC office has been a greater understanding that although HRDC is large, it is not necessarily well funded for staff expenses. Budgets are tight and, as with voluntary sector organizations, must be closely monitored. Nevertheless, in comparison to voluntary sector organizations, the overall level of resources is much greater and, as a result, the organization does not have to operate on a "shoestring" as do most voluntary sector organizations.

Another voluntary sector assumption is that since the federal government is large, it operates in silos. This perception is frequently reinforced when voluntary sector staff encounter difficulties in finding information, people and resources. My observation is that, due to the technical nature of many functions, many public servants concentrate on their areas of expertise and do not cross business lines. The federal government has been evolving over recent years to a more centralized form of governance. Centralized governance needs to be supported by a hierarchical command structure and I feel that this causes government departments to operate in silos.

Federal government departments may perceive that the voluntary sector is fragmented and lacking in coordination of programs and services. There is a feeling that this lack of coordination causes competition for resources that limits true collaboration on projects. The delivery of the SCPI program is a good example. In Hamilton there has been informal communication over the years among agencies that deliver services to homelessness persons; however, there hasn't

been a coordinated approach to the problem of homelessness. As each organization saw a need, it developed and delivered its own programs and as a result, there was duplication of programs and competition for resources. Promoting community partnerships was an objective of SCPI and so it was a priority for the Community Advisory Board. Unfortunately the CAB encountered some challenges in fostering collaboration and achieved only limited success. The successful collaborations occurred when small organizations teamed up with others. The larger agencies, however, rarely collaborated with each other, even when collaboration was recommended.

3. **Conclusion**

The Voluntary and Public Sector as Partners in Public Policy

What Have You Learned About The Voluntary Sector's Role In Public Policy Development?

Currently, the voluntary sector has a nominal role in public policy development. The federal government has good intentions to involve the sector in the development of public policies but due to the time constraints inherent in the development of policy, the sector is not engaged in a meaningful way. To be truly effective, engagement and consultation of the voluntary sector must be built into the process from the start. They can't be included at the last moment, as an afterthought.

Interviews, studies, surveys and task forces, which involve representatives of the voluntary sector, frequently take place but these involvements do not equate to consultation. Consultation is more than simply asking for advice or an opinion. To be effective, it must focus on the operational and program level with an objective for the development and management of a policy or program.

With SCPI, the voluntary sector has not been truly engaged in the development of the next iteration of the program. While the federal government has undertaken and commissioned studies on the SCPI program to evaluate how it worked, the voluntary sector has not been fully consulted on the development of the programs and related policies. In Hamilton for example, the service delivery agencies were not "consulted" on what they needed and what they wanted the next phase of program to achieve. Assuming that this was the situation in other communities, those who are actually delivering the programs and will be the ones most affected by the structure of the next phase were not involved in the development of the program. The SCPI program was founded on the principle of consultation; however, the consultation appears to have taken place primarily at the implementation stage and not at the policy or program development stages.

This is not to say that the voluntary sector can't have a role. The sector's greatest impact has been on the implementation stages of a policy. In programs such as SCPI, which focused on communities driving service delivery, voluntary sector organizations can play an important role in working with governments to adapt programs to fit their communities. As well, the success of the SCPI program is having a "ripple effect" in other federal departments looking at ways of engaging the community. The challenge, however, for both the federal government and the voluntary sector, will be to develop a process that is participatory and engages the voluntary sector in the full policy development process.

The Voluntary Sector's Involvement In Public Policy Development

In the 1999 Cabinet Directive on Law-Making, a stated objective of the federal government is to engage the voluntary sector (or other stakeholders) in the public policy development process. This directive states that departments should, when deciding to propose a law or regulation to Cabinet “engage in consultation with those who have an interest in the matter...(and) may be affected by the proposed solution” (PCO, 1999).

While the objective is to involve the voluntary sector, I feel that it is unlikely that this will occur given the short timelines of the policy cycle and the political nature of many decisions. Using the current iteration of SCPI as an example, the local communities are supposed to drive the program and the services are to be delivered (primarily) by voluntary sector organizations. Assessments of the original program took place throughout 2002, and in the Speech from the Throne there was a commitment to continue the program. As part of the assessment, the personnel in various service delivery agencies were interviewed and surveyed by representatives of the national and regional offices. However, none of these voluntary sector staff have been engaged in policy development discussions in a meaningful way.

The voluntary sector can increase its level of involvement in the policy development process by building relationships with federal departments, preferably at the National Headquarters level, becoming part of a policy community and joining advocacy coalitions within that community. In particular, building relationships with officials working on specific policy issues or the drafting of Memoranda to Cabinet (etc.) may enable voluntary sector staff to provide input on issues.

A second approach is to engage federal politicians in the process of involving the voluntary sector. My perception of the situation is that, although there are directives and there is the intent to make the policy development process inclusive and consultative by involving the voluntary sector, time constraints often derail the process. With pressing demands and short timelines, people naturally try to expedite the process. Consequently, meaningful engagement can be compromised. A strategy to encourage inclusion could be to systematically involve politicians and educate them as to the benefits of including the sector. The ultimate goal would be to create an environment where the lack of meaningful engagement of the voluntary sector in policy development would be politically unacceptable. Of course, this type of strategy is “easier said than done”.

How Government Can Effectively Engage The Voluntary Sector In Public Policy Development

There are several actions that government officials can take to ensure that they effectively engage the voluntary sector in the public policy development process.

Before government officials can effectively engage the voluntary sector, there must be a broad understanding and appreciation of how the voluntary sector works. Unlike government, the voluntary sector does not have a hierarchical structure. There is no central organization that provides direction and coordination. The voluntary sector is a fragmented collection of predominantly small organizations, with over 80% of organizations having fewer than 10 members of staff (Sharpe, 1998). With a better understanding of the voluntary sector, government officials may come to the realization that speaking to a couple of representatives from major national organizations will not necessarily bring forward the opinions of the majority of the sector.

In engaging the voluntary sector, government officials need to look beyond the major voluntary sector organizations. As previously mentioned, they represent a small proportion of the

organizations and may not necessarily represent the sector as a whole or represent the best resource for the (development of the) policy. As well, national organizations based in Ottawa or Toronto, for example, may not understand what is occurring at the grassroots level in the other provinces. It is these community-based organizations that will be charged with the delivery of the existing and new programs and services. They have the closest ties to the clients, or consumers, of these services and consequently should be involved in the policy development process.

It is also important to understand that volunteers are the core of voluntary sector organizations. Governance in organizations is the responsibility of volunteer boards of directors and services are frequently delivered solely by, or in partnership with, volunteers. Due to the volunteer-based structure of these organizations, decision-making processes are often slower and consensus is frequently the method of choice. It is important to realize that the smaller the organization, the greater the likelihood that volunteers will play an operational role. Consequently, it is often the volunteers of an organization who may have the best connections in a community and the best input into the policy development process. To this end, it is important and frequently necessary to involve voluntary sector staff and volunteers from a representative sample of organizations in policy communities.

A final step to consider is to include consultation and engagement activities at an early stage in the policy development process.

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