

# Municipal Government Representatives Community of Practice - Notes

Monday, July 9, 2018

## Attendees

1. Leena Sharma Seth, Vibrant Communities Canada (Chair)
2. Kimberly Little, Leeds Grenville Poverty Reduction Alliance
3. Linda Lalonde, Ottawa Poverty Reduction Network
4. Marc Todd, Niagara Poverty Reduction Network
5. Deb Peckham, London Child and Youth Network
6. Natasha Pei, Vibrant Communities Canada

**Regrets:** Lorna Morin, Prosper Canada

## Sharing Experiences in Community Engagement

- Leeds Grenville Poverty Reduction Alliance (which the municipalities participates in)
  - Goal: gather lived experience voices & engage citizens to inform the goals/priorities of the poverty reduction alliance work
  - Process: OW managers interviewed clientele – challenges associated with making ends meet, what’s helpful, what can be more helpful, etc.
  - Lessons learned:
    - Case Managers at Ontario Works (OW) should be comfortable asking about poverty, but many were not. There was resistance.
    - They’re not promoting what’s available well enough – eye opener that there are services/benefits that managers could connect clients with, but didn’t know it was an issue/clients didn’t know to ask
  - Kimberly will share the survey
- The Niagara Poverty Initiative (NPI) is a funding initiative, providing 1.5M in funding through RFP that goes out annually to the community for projects that address poverty.
  - 362 projects led by 84 agencies and groups have been funded to date
  - Each year they have a different focus for funding, but always poverty place-based related (ex. improving neighbourhoods)
  - Engaged residents to on their top priorities for ending poverty
  - 8 information sessions held across 12 municipalities; distributed surveys to champions (agencies, groups) around the region. 300 surveys came back plus discussion notes from sessions.
  - 4 priority areas were identified for the 2018 RFP - housing, health (mental health, dental, and food security esp.), employment & social enterprise, and investment in community hubs

- It was a good exercise to raise awareness about NPI, what they're doing and trying to accomplish, and what they fund
- Lessons learned:
  - Wish they had more time to do it
  - Use channels of communication/engagement that already exist

### Round Robin: Community Engagement Related to Voter Turnout

- Ottawa has an a community engagement initiative bringing together 25-30 organizations across the city – right now focused on the municipal election (but also engage around provincial/federal elections).
  - City staff can't participate in it, but there are linkages between the city and community through the project. (They do all federal and province). They had the highest turnout of all ridings during the federal election in Ottawa Centre, where they had focused their energy – indicating their efforts are working
  - They share pamphlets on big issues of the election and how you vote
  - Engagement mainly done through the community centres
  - Learning: During an elections period, community members can adjust their meetings so municipalities can leave early/come late without a conflict of interest
- What hasn't worked well?
  - Leeds Grenville – the same focus interviews were given to agencies to conduct that have different rules and limitations (levels of bureaucracy). Wish they had anticipated how long ethics would take for each of the partners to get approval
- What assets have *supported* strong citizen engagement?
  - The Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy (and other strategies) is a platform/opportunity for citizen engagement, but doesn't improve *how* they do community engagement
  - Asset: Strong existing pathways – a strong advisory group/people already talking about the issue(s)
- Known platforms for engaging citizens
  - Many staff members go to community meetings to keep an ear to the ground
  - City Councilors in Ottawa host open cafes in their wards

### Closing Announcements

- If you are interested in becoming the next Chair for the Municipal Government Representative Calls, please send an email to [leena@tamarackcommunity.ca](mailto:leena@tamarackcommunity.ca).

**Save the date: Our next Municipal Government Representative Convenor Call is scheduled for September 10, 1:00 – 2:00 pm ET.**