Convening a Comprehensive, Multi-Sector Effort to Reduce Poverty: A Primer

A TOOL FOR VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

2nd Edition

TAMARACK
An Institute for Community Engagement

Founded in 2001, Tamarack develops and supports collaborative strategies that help people solve complex community challenges.

The Institute co-sponsors Vibrant Communities Canada, an initiative that has supported 13 cities to build community-wide collaborative poverty reduction strategies since 2002. In these cities, nearly 3,000 partners have worked together to reduced poverty for more than 147,000 people.

Tamarack also provides research and information to our 10,000-member learning community through online and face-to-face seminars, books, papers (aides for action) and strategic consulting. These resources make the effort of working together at the community level, easier and more effective.

ABOUT TAMARACK:

Our Vision: Tamarack exists to build and support vibrant and engaged communities in Canada. Our work results in more collaboration and less poverty.

Our Mission: To engage citizens in inspired action as they work and learn together on behalf of their communities to create and realize bold visions for the future.

Tamarack's Learning Community:
The Institute hosts three active learning communities where learners engage with each other and share knowledge and emerging practice. The co-generation of knowledge leading to community change is embedded in the design of the communities of practice which use emerging web-based and face to face technologies.

Seeking Community: The three guiding principles for Seeking Community are: enjoy each other, learn to care for one another, and work to create a better world. Seeking Community brings together people with diverse experiences and understandings of community into a dialogue about the importance of having a deepened sense of community. Access this community of practice at www.seekingcommunity.ca.

Tamarack CCI: Community change practitioners from different sectors advance their knowledge and skills in the Tamarack CCI Community of Practice. A wide variety of resources, podcasts, blog posts and tools are available on topics including community engagement, policy change, evaluation and collective impact. Access this community of practice at www.tamarackcci.ca.

Vibrant Communities: Imagine 100 Canadian cities with place-based community roundtables seeking to reduce poverty for 1 million Canadians. That is the vision of the Vibrant Communities Community of Practice. Building on the 10 year action learning experiment, cities across Canada are joining together to share resources, learn together, reduce poverty and influence policies at the municipal, provincial and federal levels. Access this community of practice at www. vibrantcommunities.ca.

Located in Waterloo, Ontario, Tamarack is incorporated as a charitable not-for-profit agency.
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ABOUT THIS PRIMER

This Primer is designed for people and communities of all sizes interested in developing and sustaining a long-term, local effort to reduce poverty.

The Primer describes the 'work' of a convening group – a new type of collaborative organization established to plan, manage and sustain a comprehensive, multi-sector effort to reduce poverty.

This booklet will give readers an understanding of the four key areas or building blocks of a convening group's work, the four different phases of unfolding a poverty reduction campaign, the key challenge a convening group might face in each major phase of its work and, finally, some of the environmental factors that will influence a community's work.

Much of the information in this booklet was initially influenced by our experience in the Opportunities 2000 project – an initiative in Waterloo Region, Ontario, from 1997-2000 that strove to reduce that community's poverty rate to the lowest in Canada. We played a principal role in Opportunities 2000 and, thanks to our work there, we learned a great deal about what it takes to mobilize a community to reduce poverty.

We know that our experience in Waterloo, however instructive, represents only one way to go about this important work. This booklet is, therefore, also based on research on other initiatives in the United States and Canada that are crafting community-based efforts to tackle poverty – or some other local issue – in more strategic ways. This Primer also reflects what we have learned from the dozen or more communities across Canada that have developed their own place-based poverty reduction strategies and participated in the Vibrant Communities Pan-Canadian Learning Community. In this newest version of the Primer, we are also including a section on Collective Impact as a framing approach for collaborative community change efforts. Collective Impact represents some of the newest thinking on comprehensive community change.

> We need to have a firmer grasp of the type of journey we are asking our communities to embark on and the type of organization we need to build to make that journey possible.

The booklet is NOT a detailed blueprint of how to go about this work. Rather, it gives the volunteers and staff of a convenor group a quick overview of the nature of the work before them as they launch themselves into the effort and an opportunity to check in on the big picture once they are immersed in the work. The last page of the Primer describes other tools and resources that will assist a convening group as they tackle the various phases and challenges of their local initiative.

This Primer is a work-in-progress. It represents the best of what we know right now about the important work of community-based poverty reduction. As the Vibrant Communities initiative continues to scale to 100 cities across Canada with poverty reduction roundtables, and its member communities experiment more fully with their own poverty reduction efforts, we will use these learnings to upgrade the knowledge in this Primer.

We also invite you to visit www. VibrantCommunities.ca to access the latest knowledge and creative approaches being tested in communities across Canada. This interactive learning community website contains the experiences of communities in reducing and eliminating poverty.

If we want to unleash the potential of local communities in an attempt to dramatically reduce poverty, we need to have a firmer grasp of the type of journey we are asking our communities to embark on and the type of organization we need to build to make that journey possible. We hope the second edition of this Primer is a helpful contribution to that effort.

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INTRODUCTION

On a beautiful spring afternoon in April 1999, nearly 100 people milled around the council chamber of Cambridge, Ontario's historic city hall.

They were a diverse group —low-income residents mixing with social workers, business people and officials — but they had something important in common. All lived in the same community and had worked together on a project called Opportunities Planning that was being recognized that day by the United Nations as one of the Top 40 Urban Community Development Projects in the world.

Opportunities Planning was a four-year initiative that ran from 1993-1997 and supported social assistance recipients in their journey from welfare to work. OP was a unique multi-sector collaboration that drew on the strengths of numerous community agencies, their clients and their funding partners. Most people on its management team were low-income residents, most staff had some experience living on welfare and managers played supportive, rather than authoritative roles.

It also proved to be a successful formula, helping 500 long-term unemployed people to find work or start their own business. When funding for Opportunities Planning expired, its supporters in the community regrouped and launched an even more ambitious initiative based on OP's partnership model — Opportunities 2000, a campaign to significantly reduce poverty in the region.

The crowd at Cambridge city hall that April morning quieted down when Nicholas You, Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, approached the microphone. After the presentation of a plaque and other formalities, Nicholas paused and said:

> *I want you to know that while we are very impressed with the results of your efforts – the 500 families — it is really only part of the reason you are getting this award. We were more impressed with the capacity you've developed in the community to address the problem of unemployment and poverty. If and when your community's local car plant leaves town, you will need to replace 2,000 good jobs. But your efforts to find ways to work collaboratively — to build a 'community problem solving machine' — means you will be better able to deal with big community issues. Keep up the good work and the best of luck with Opportunities 2000.*

Nicholas said what people working on community issues across North America have known for some time — that in order for communities to make a dramatic difference in addressing local problems, they need to create the organizational capacity to bring people and sectors together, to think and dream big, and to deal strategically with the root causes of things like poverty and unemployment. The organization that leads that vital effort is known as the *'Community Convener'.*

ABOUT VIBRANT COMMUNITIES: A NEW APPROACH TO REDUCING POVERTY

Vibrant Communities to began as an initiative involving over a dozen communities and three national organizations from across Canada that were relentlessly exploring how communities can dramatically reduce poverty.

These communities passionately believed that local residents and organizations could play a critical role if they could create a new culture of poverty and poverty reduction in their communities – a cultural shift that has five main components that move:

- Away from a culture that emphasizes alleviating the effects of poverty towards a culture that focuses on reducing poverty;

- Away from a culture that promotes quick fixes to reduce poverty towards a culture that thinks comprehensively about poverty and strives to address its root causes;

- Away from a culture of individual, isolated efforts towards a culture of multi-sector collaboration, weaving together skills, knowledge, resources and efforts;

- Away from a culture of blaming different people and sectors for poverty, towards a culture that recognizes that everyone is part of the problem and everyone is part of the solution;

- Away from a culture that emphasizes cautious, short-term responses to poverty towards one that emphasizes innovation, risk-taking and long-term change.

We learned that this cultural shift was already happening in many communities across the country. Initiatives such as the Quality of Life Challenge in Victoria, B.C., the poverty reduction work in Saint John, N.B., Opportunities 2000 in Waterloo Region and ECOF in Trois-Rivières are clear proof that there are new and better ways to get communities involved in reducing poverty.

Vibrant Communities partners became convinced, however, that this much-needed cultural shift could occur much more quickly and more effectively through the creation of Community Convenors – organizations that mobilize entire communities to create abundant opportunities for low-income residents and model this cultural shift in their day-to-day work.

As part of its mission to support local communities to mount broad-based, comprehensive efforts to reduce poverty, the members of Vibrant Communities realized it was important to assist potential local convenors to better describe and understand the work of this important organization.

> This much-needed cultural shift will occur much more quickly through organizations that mobilize entire communities to create abundant opportunities for low-income residents.

THE CONVENING FRAMEWORK

It is clear that at the core of any local effort to reduce poverty is a restless eagerness to reduce the depth and number of local people living in poverty, rather than just alleviating the effects of poverty.

What are the other shared elements of successful, broad-based, community-driven efforts to reduce poverty? Skeptics will argue that there are none – each community is so unique and each effort sufficiently distinct, they will say, that it is impossible to generalize.

What, after all, does a resident-driven neighbourhood group working hard at building a 'healthy community' in a low-income community in Montreal have in common with a group of high-profile leaders in Victoria, B.C., interested in reducing poverty as part of a Quality of Life campaign?

Plenty, as it turns out. In the short 10 years in which collaboration and convening work have been recognized as critical to solving community problems – particularly poverty and marginalization – a number of factors have emerged that are, for the most part, relevant to all convening groups:

- Successful convening groups do a good job in at least four areas or building blocks: strategic poverty reduction work, building a community base, building their own organizational capacity, and importing technical and financial resources;

- Local poverty reduction efforts – and the key tasks of a convening organizations – tend to unfold through a series of four distinct phases over time: exploring local interest, building local conditions for success, action-learning and change, and a phase of renewal or wind-down;

- The economic, policy and socio-cultural environment in which a convenor group operates strongly influences how it plans and manages its work.

> Woven together, these ingredients combine to provide a poverty framework for all convenor groups to plan, manage and steward their work.

Woven together, these ingredients combine to provide a poverty framework for all convenor groups – regardless of their community, unique poverty dynamics or leadership group – to plan, manage and steward their work. At the same time, the framework is flexible enough to help convenor groups understand and respond to their specific local context and circumstances.

The following pages describe the framework in more detail, how it might be used, and the likely impact it will have on the way convenor groups – and their supporters – understand and approach the work of mobilizing a multi-sector, comprehensive effort to reduce poverty.

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THE FRAMEWORK
for Convening Comprehensive, Multisectoral Local Efforts to Reduce Poverty
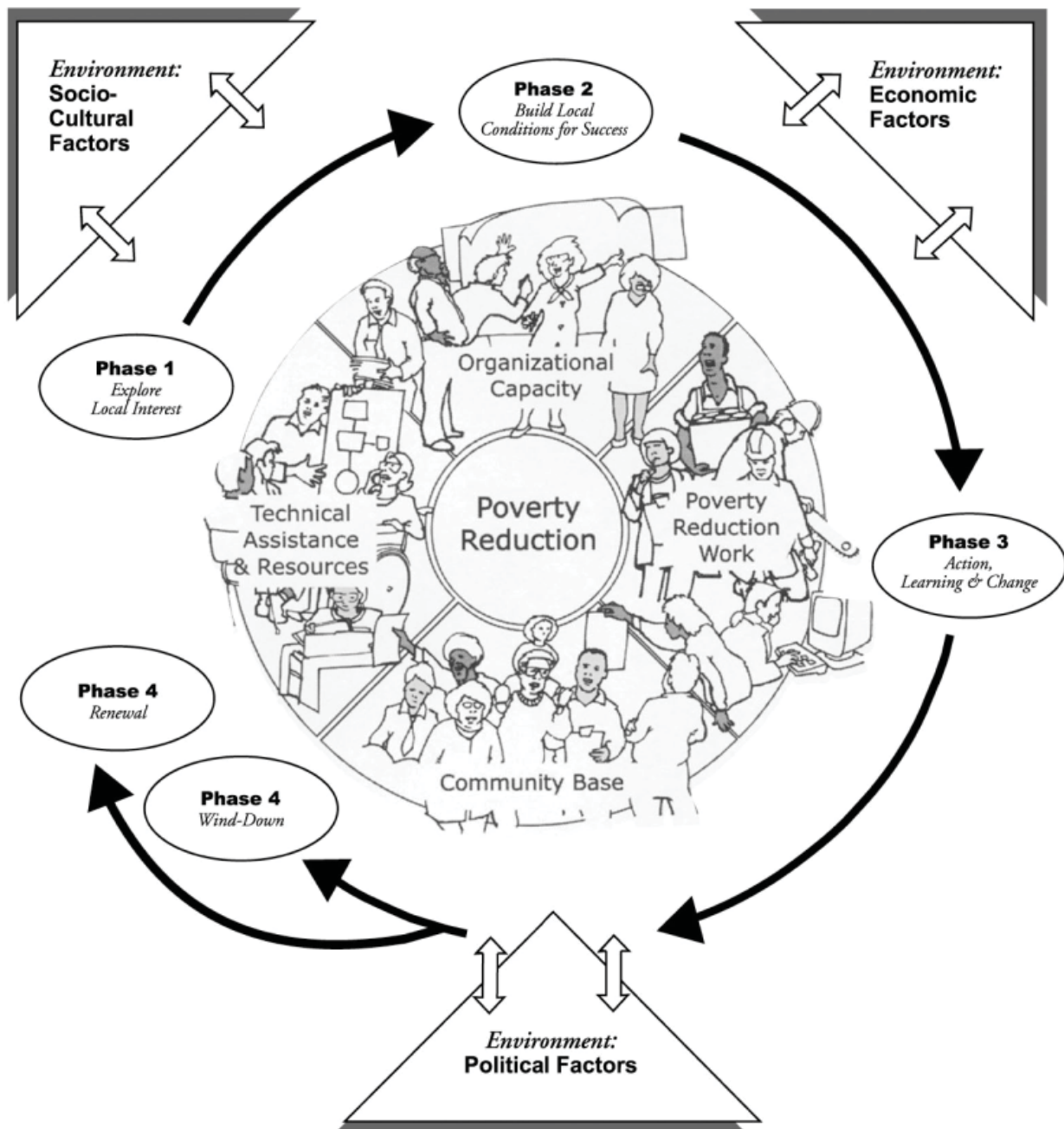
THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF POVERTY REDUCTION

If you sat down and interviewed the staff and key leaders of any convening group on a Monday morning about their tasks for the upcoming month, you'd likely come up with a to-do list of pages upon pages.

Yet, while there are hundreds of little things that a convening group must tend to, research into good and best practice makes us think that there are four big things — or building blocks — that convening groups must do really well in order for the work to result in a dramatic reduction in the number of local residents living in poverty.

As the diagram below indicates, these building blocks are:

• Strategic poverty reduction work

• Building a community base

• Building organizational capacity

• Importing technical and financial resources
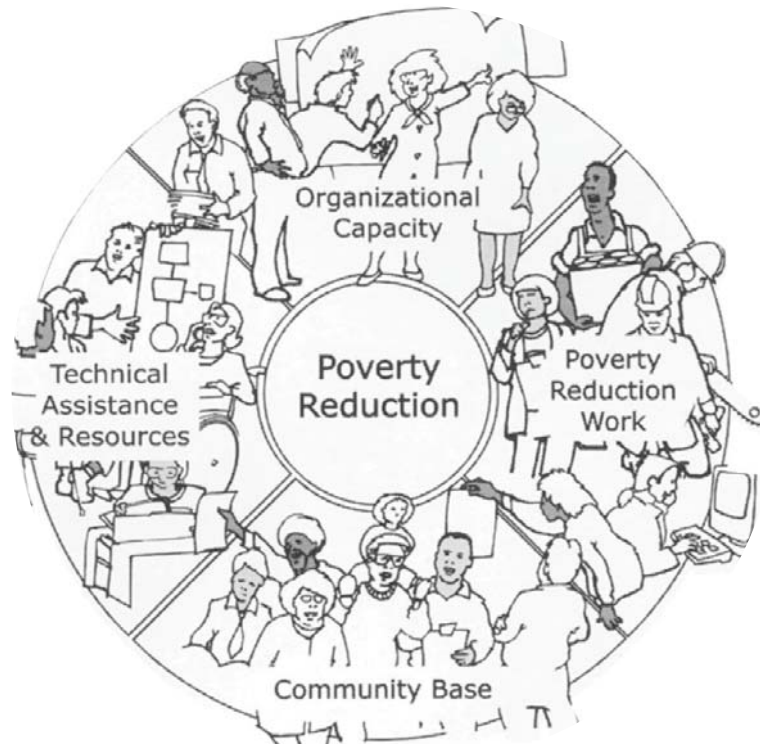
The work in these areas is inter-related – a convening group, for example, requires a strong base of support from the community in order to carry out a large scale poverty reduction campaign. Yet, each area is important enough that the group's volunteers and staff should devote extra attention to ensure they are performing well in each area.

BUILDING BLOCK 1

Poverty Reduction Work

In any community, there are scores – if not hundreds – of initiatives that assist people in their journey out of poverty.

The core mission of a convenor organization is to substantially improve the effectiveness and alignment – and if necessary the scale and number – of those efforts in a way that ensures that fewer local residents are living in poverty. Convenor groups carry out this mission through a series of key areas of work:

- *Helping the community* to better understand the extent and depth of poverty among different local groups as well as the root causes and dynamics underlying poverty;

- *Identifying and selecting opportunities* that are most likely to result in the reduction of poverty locally and sharing these opportunities with the community;

- *Facilitating* the creation of high-impact, comprehensive community-wide plans, strategies and initiatives to take advantage of these opportunities;

- *Supporting local organizations* as they develop concrete and effective poverty reduction initiatives through a variety of supports, such as technical assistance, brokering and coordinating activities, social marketing, improving access to funding, advocacy and special convenor-administered projects;

- *Tracking, analyzing and communicating* the results of local efforts, identifying lessons learned, and determining how to generate greater results in the future;

- *Pushing for systems changes at the local* – and non-local – level that will scale up innovative, proven solutions to poverty and result in a long-term, sustained reduction in the local poverty rate.

> A convenor group that is able to carry out all these tasks effectively is far more likely to expand upon and improve local efforts to reduce poverty.

Each one of these tasks alone adds value to a community's existing efforts to reduce poverty and should, by itself, result in a reduction, however modest, in the local poverty rate. A convenor group that is able to carry out all these tasks effectively, however, is far more likely to expand upon and improve local efforts to reduce poverty in ways that will lead to a dramatic reduction in the number of residents experiencing poverty.

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Community Base

No matter how 'smart' a convenor group's poverty reduction work, how committed its leadership group or talented its staff team, they cannot reduce poverty on their own. They need to mobilize a much broader local effort.

In Montreal, the organization Regroupement Economique Sud-Ouest (RESO), a successful convening group, captures this idea of leverage in the phrase 'faire faire', or, 'getting others to do'. We think we can add a subtle, though important improvement to that phrase – 'getting others to be willing and able to do' the work of reducing poverty.

A convening group must engage at least three groups of people and organizations to launch and sustain a successful local effort to reduce poverty:

• Organizations and leaders from all sectors, particularly low-income residents, that are willing and able to take on concrete projects to reduce poverty;

• The general public, whose support is required to maintain a long-term community-based effort;

• Organizations external to the community – federal and provincial policy agencies, funders, businesses with head offices outside the community, etc. – that are in a position to support local efforts to reduce poverty.

Building a community base for a long-term poverty reduction campaign truly does require convenor groups to weave together art and science. They need to be rigorous with the poverty reduction work described in the previous section. At the same time, they have to do it in a way that engages the passion and commitment of a broad and diverse group of organizations and leaders so they will invest their time, skills, networks and resources in a sustained poverty reduction effort.

In over ten years of practice, Vibrant Communities has learned that building a broad and connected community base is vital to the success and resiliency of poverty reduction efforts. The convener group can be instrumental in building this base. Members of the convener group can 'model the way' by showing how their involvement is transforming how their organization is engaged in poverty reduction efforts. The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction's report Leadership and Lessons is a good illustration of mechanisms to build the community base.

BUILDING BLOCK 3

Organizational Capacity

At the end of the day, the ability of a convening group to stimulate, launch and nurture a broad-based local poverty reduction effort rests on a number of key organizational strengths. These include:

• A clear sense of the organization's mission in creating the cultural changes in the community required to generate long-term, sustained reductions in poverty;

• A group of high-profile, committed and skilled leaders, representative of the community's diversity, that can influence the community to change;

• A competent and committed staff team with knowledge, skills and experience to manage and support the effort;

• A structure and process of decision making that allows the organization to be effective at strategic decision making, functional issues (e.g. fundraising) and the day-to-day work of helping the community to reduce poverty.

• Multi-year, diverse and sufficient funding to cover the core operations of the convening organization and – when appropriate – additional initiative-specific funding;

• Excellent planning, human resource, administration, communication and evaluation systems to assist leaders and staff to guide and manage their work.

• An organizational culture that reflects the key themes of multisectoral collaboration, comprehensive thinking and action, learning and change and an emphasis on community assets.

Despite its importance, staff and leaders in convening groups, as well as their funders, do not devote sufficient time, energy and resources to building and maintaining the convening group's capacity. Concrete projects, after all, are the things that will ultimately lead to people getting out of poverty. The temptation to focus on these things alone is often overwhelming – particularly when there are too many local residents living in poverty.

Groups that neglect issues of organizational capacity, however, run the real risk of ending up like the fabled goose that laid golden eggs: forced to keep producing at all costs, with little care for its health, the goose eventually became ill and unable to produce any longer. Convening groups that are serious about dramatically reducing the number of people living in poverty over the long term will make organizational capacity building and nurturing a high priority.

Technical and Financial Resources

Organizations that take on the important job of sponsoring and managing the work of a convening group will often have a wealth of financial and technical resources at their disposal.

Even the most skilled, high-performing and well-resourced groups, however, will find it necessary to import at least some extra support in these areas in order to carry out its community building, poverty reduction and organizational capacity building work.

This includes, first and foremost, financial resources to support the core operations of the convening group – in particular the expenses related to staff, facilities, and evaluation, as well as the range of miscellaneous expenses that accompany any community development work (e.g. travel expenses, research materials, etc.).

In some cases, convening groups will occasionally need to import people to assist with one or more specific pieces of work for which the group does not have the skills, knowledge and abilities, such as fundraising, multi-sector collaboration, or policy analysis.

While a convening group will certainly need financial resources to cover these costs, many can complement financial resources with an innovative array of in-kind contributions, including, among others:

• Free, or lower-than-cost, facilities and meeting spaces

• Secondments of talented staff persons

• Pro-bono, at-cost, or lower-than-cost media and marketing services

• Pro-bono, at-cost, or lower-than-cost administration support

Not surprisingly, these resources rarely just fall into the laps of the convening group. It must invest a good deal of time to identify and engage the organizations with the capacity to make them available, create win-win collaborative arrangements and nurture these relationships for the entirety of the effort and beyond.

Convening groups might be able to get away from managing this area of the work well, but the organization's overall effectiveness can be substantially improved by making this an ongoing priority and investing an appropriate amount of time and energy.

Convening groups that are able to secure resources from a diverse number of community investors are often more stable and resilient. The community partners that have bought into the success of the collaborative effort by providing financial, in-kind and pro-bono supports are more likely to also commit to its success. The Vibrant Communities experience over 10 years shows that an infrastructure of staff supports facilitates the success of the overall community change effort.

THE PHASES OF POVERTY REDUCTION

It is often difficult to pinpoint exactly where and when a broad-based local effort to reduce poverty begins. They tend to emerge out of the community's many ongoing initiatives – both big and small – to alleviate and reduce poverty.

Yet deliberate efforts to 'scale up' and dramatically improve local responses to poverty tend to have distinct stages or life cycles. In nearly every local initiative we've reviewed, the following four major phases have emerged:

- Exploring Local Interest

- Building the Conditions for Success

- Action, Leadership, Learning and Change

- Renewal or Wind-down

The dividing lines between each phase are often blurred and unclear. At the same time, in each broad phase, convening groups generally focus their attention on achieving a number of minimum milestones in each area of the four areas of their work. Our research tells us that the entire life cycle of a local effort can take four to ten years to unfold.

There is no guarantee, of course, that a convenor group will successfully manage to work through all of these phases. Some find that there is no local interest in mounting a broad-based local effort and choose to revisit the question later. Other groups are unable to develop the capacity required to implement a community plan. Still others complete the full cycle and choose to renew and to 'take their work to the next level'.

> How far a group can lead the local effort depends, in part, on its ability to complete the key milestones and manage a series of challenges in each phase.

How far and successfully a group can lead the local effort depends, in part, on its ability to manage the successful completion of the key milestones and manage a series of challenges in each phase.

PHASE 1

Exploring Local Interest

The seed of any broad-based effort to reduce poverty usually lies in the group of local leaders' restless dissatisfaction about the level of poverty in the community and the community's track record of reducing it.

Sooner or later, the adventurous group will organize itself to accomplish a number of key tasks to determine whether the community has the willingness and capacity to complement existing poverty reduction efforts with a new approach – one that results in a dramatic reduction in poverty. The major tasks for the group at this stage include:

Poverty Reduction Work
- Generate a general understanding of the extent and depth of poverty in the community;
- Understand the major themes and phases of a comprehensive, multi-sector effort to reduce poverty.

Community Base
- Explore the broader local interest in participating in a long term, multi-sector and comprehensive effort to reduce poverty;
- Develop an initial vision of what a broad-based local effort might accomplish and some of the key principles and values to guide the effort.

Organizational Capacity
- Establish a core group of diverse and committed leaders from each sector to 'steward' the work of the convening group;
- Understand the work of a convening organization, how it differs from traditional approaches, and how it might unfold in the community.

Technical & Financial Resources
- Identify and reach out to organizations that might be able to invest the extra technical and financial resources the convening group will require to carry out the work.

There is a wide range of techniques a core group of leaders can use to complete these basic tasks – e.g., focus groups, town hall meetings, one-on-one conversations. Whatever methods are used, the leadership group will want to know that there is a genuine willingness and capacity to mount a more ambitious local response to reducing poverty before the next, more intensive phase of building the conditions for a successful poverty reduction campaign.

PHASE 1

Possible Challenges in Phase One

Creating a Team of Champion Change-Makers

Like anything ambitious, a convening group will never get off the ground nor have people working towards the next stage unless there are a few influential, well networked, leaders – staff, volunteers and partners -- who are passionate and committed to reducing poverty and changing the community culture around poverty reduction. Finding these leaders early enough in the process is challenging for some communities.

Understanding 'The Work' of Convening Organization

Developing practical projects to assist people to exit poverty – such as employment programs – makes sense to most people. The mechanics of launching a broad-based, comprehensive and multi-sector collaboration, however, are less obvious and the initial leaders involved in a convening groups frequently struggle to clearly understand much of the work they are about to undertake. This makes it more difficult to plan the work and explain it to potential partners and supporters.

Overcoming Skepticism

Many people have participated in – or observed from the sidelines – community efforts that promised to change the community forever, yet failed to deliver on that promise. Others are eager to reduce poverty, but are skeptical that large-scale efforts will meet with much success. Convening groups must often work hard to overcome the inevitable skepticism of potentially key allies in order to get the effort off the ground.

Dealing with Competing Agendas

Local residents and organizations in vibrant and struggling communities alike will generally be working on a range of community issues and will want to be very careful about where they spend their time, energy and financial resources. Convening groups in development must be sure to present the strongest case possible for a community-wide effort to reduce poverty and introduce it strategically.

PHASE 2

Building Conditions for Success

If and when a group has determined that there is sufficient local willingness and capacity to undertake a comprehensive, multi-sector effort to reduce poverty, it will begin to focus its efforts on building the local conditions for a successful initiative.

There are a number of key tasks that a convening group should complete in order to ensure that their poverty reduction campaign enjoys a high probability of generating deep and sustained results once it is off the ground. These tasks include:

Poverty Reduction Work
• Clarify the 'working definition' of poverty;
• Achieve a better understanding of the extent and depth of local poverty;
• Identify areas where a community might be able to generate good results;
• Explore, if appropriate, good practice in poverty reduction from other community efforts;
• Develop a community-wide plan to guide the community's poverty reduction work.

Community Base
• Identify and engage a broad base of local leaders to develop a vision of what a local effort might accomplish, and involve them in the research and planning work of the convening group.

Organizational Capacity
• Expand the leadership group to lead the effort;
• Clarify the convening group's mission and operating principles;
• Hire, orient and train staff;
• Finalize the sponsorship arrangement for the convening organization;
• Create appropriate decision-making structures;
• Establish planning, management, communication, human resource and evaluation systems.

Technical & Financial Resources
• Secure the financial resources required to carry out the poverty reduction, collaboration and organizational capacity building work described above.

While these key tasks may seem straightforward, they are not always easily accomplished – they require careful planning, strategic thinking and a great deal of energy and persistence from a group of leaders who are respected in the community and are committed to seeing the poverty reduction campaign operate for several years to come.

There are a variety of tools and resources on the Vibrant Communities Canada (www.vibrantcommunities.ca) website to assist with the Building Conditions for Success phase.

PHASE 2

Possible Challenges in Phase Two

Sponsorship

As with any community initiative, deciding who administers and manages the day-to-day work of the convening group is almost as important as the work itself. Many organizations find sponsoring a convening group awkward – the work is complex, dynamic and at times political. Other local organizations often have strong preferences about which organizations should – and should not – be sponsors. There are at least a half-dozen sponsorship options for local efforts – none of them perfect – and groups often find choosing the option that best suits their community one of the most delicate decisions they will ever make.

Appropriate Structure

How and who makes decisions to guide community-wide poverty reduction efforts is critically important – it can make the difference between an organization that can tackle complex issues and make good decisions quickly and one that is unable to get even the simplest tasks completed with a great deal of effort. Research into 15 years of broad-based community efforts suggests there is no one 'right' make-up of working groups and a division of decision-making authority– groups need to create decision-making processes that are open, and flexible enough to change as the initiative unfolds.

How and who makes decisions to guide community-wide poverty reduction efforts is critically important.

Funding for Core Operations

Raising funds for specific, short-term projects to reduce poverty, is easier than mobilizing multi-year funds to support the operations of a convening organization. While the case for investing in social change is strong, convening groups need to be very strategic in preparing and sharing the case for investment in a convening group with supporters who frequently do not reserve grant funds for such purposed.

A Working Definition of Poverty

Many groups manage to avoid the difficult question of 'who is poor' in the early phase when people are eager to do something about poverty. Yet, once the work turns to identifying who should benefit from poverty reduction efforts, setting goals and plans to measure progress, this difficult discussion always comes up. There is no perfect definition of poverty – the issue is complex – but groups can get stopped in their tracks if they do not come up with even a simple working definition of poverty and who it affects to guide their efforts.

Balancing Process and Action

Much of the work in this phase is important process work – building partnerships, doing research and planning and mobilizing a community effort. Convening groups often struggle to keep a community's more action-oriented leaders and local organizations that are engaged and committed to the initiative until the preparations for the initiative is complete and the group can focus on more concrete poverty reduction initiatives.

PHASE 3

Action, Leadership, Learning & Change

Once a convening group has completed its conditions for success, it is tempting to think that the next step is to simply 'implement' the community plan. In practice, it rarely unfolds this cleanly.

The moment a convening group and its allies began to work diligently on the conditions for success described in the previous section, they set into motion a dynamic community process that results in a vibrant cycle of local action, leadership, community learning and change. New leaders and organizations emerge, presenting new opportunities and capacities. Local poverty dynamics may shift unexpectedly due to some internal or external shock resulting in pressures to shift priorities or approaches. Most importantly, the convenor group and its partners will gain new insights, skills and knowledge in their work that shape the way they move forward.

The community plan produced in the previous phase represents the community's best sense of how to proceed at the beginning of its community-wide effort. The community must be prepared to upgrade its approach continually in its drive to find solutions to local poverty. The key tasks in this phase include:

Poverty Reduction Work
- Assist groups to identify, develop and grow concrete poverty reduction initiatives, as well as supporting their efforts to track results, identify learnings and make improvements to their poverty reduction work;
- Seek new opportunities to reduce poverty through continual scanning of the local and external environment;
- Review and continually upgrade the convening group's strategy for supporting local organizations and leaders in their poverty reduction work.

Community Base
- Expand the number of local organizations, leaders and residents aware of – and actively involved in – local efforts to reduce poverty;
- Strengthen the willingness and capacity of existing partners to reducing poverty in the long term;
- Ensure frequent and effective communication with partners and the community;
- Celebrate successes, key milestones and learnings.

> This action phase is perhaps the most challenging and rewarding time in a community-wide effort to reduce poverty.

Organizational Capacity
- Upgrade the convening group's governance structure as required;
- Adapt management, planning, human resource and administrative systems as appropriate;
- Expand the group's financial resources, staff skills and leadership participation to suit new priorities.

Technical & Financial Resources
- Sustain and nurture relationships with existing funders and technical assistance providers;
- Identify and develop new relationships with funders and technical assistance providers as required.

PHASE 3

Action, Leadership, Learning & Change

This action phase is perhaps the most challenging and rewarding time in a community-wide effort to reduce poverty. It is full of successes, failures, hard work and unexpected twists that test the limits of a convening group's capacity to effectively steward a process of change that ensures far fewer local residents live in poverty.

Vibrant Communities Canada supports a Learning Community of practitioners actively engaged in community-wide efforts to reduce poverty. This Learning Community meets virtually each month by telephone, through virtual learning events, online through the Vibrant Communities Canada website (www.vibrantcommunities.ca) and in annual face-to-face gatherings. The Vibrant Communities Learning Community establishes a national agenda for reducing poverty across Canada.

PHASE 3

Possible Challenges in Phase Three

Building Momentum

As one community activist argued, "it's hard to drive a parked bus!" Some groups find themselves with an excellent plan, strong and numerous partnerships and sufficient resources but with little action to generate the energy required to launch a local effort to reduce poverty. Identifying, carrying out and profiling short-term results that demonstrate to the community what is possible is a tricky but essential exercise for groups struggling to build momentum. If the convening group has been successful at engaging a number of community partners in poverty reduction efforts, developing shared community outcomes can be critical to showing progress and building momentum.

Managing Growth

Once sparked, many initiatives 'catch fire' and groups find themselves with more partners, funds, projects and opportunities than they ever dreamed of. Convening groups often find it difficult to manage the workload and the complexity of decision-making, planning and communication that accompanies such growth. Managed poorly, these groups can find themselves spreading their efforts too thinly and generating weaker outcomes as a result.

Sharing Learning

As the number and diversity of projects and partners increases, so does the learning of what does and does not work. It is very important, yet remarkably difficult, for this learning to be shared with a wide group of leaders and organizations – not just a small group of staff persons and leaders at the centre of the convening organization – so

that the learning can be used to craft more effective poverty reduction initiatives and to improve management of the effort. The Vibrant Communities Learning Community can be a vital resource to both share learning nationally and also learn from other communities that have achieved success in moving the needle on poverty priorities.

Embracing Failure

Any initiative that encourages local organizations and leaders to come up with new and better ways to reduce poverty is guaranteed to witness initiatives or efforts that simply do not work out. This is the natural price of thinking out of the box and striving for dramatically greater results. Most communities deal poorly with failure and in some cases actively discourage it by avoiding risky – albeit highly innovative – initiatives or covering up things that don't work out. Convening groups must work hard to counteract this understandable, yet ultimately counter-productive instinct by modeling a culture that promotes continual learning and change.

Burn Out

The work of leading a local poverty reduction effort is demanding and many leaders and staff members of convening groups unintentionally 'burn' themselves out in the process. While many people are able to rebound after a short rest, the loss of their leadership – even if only temporarily – weakens the capacity of the convenor group and can result in less-than-anticipated reductions in poverty. Maintaining a healthy, productive and stable staff and volunteer team is perhaps one of the greatest challenges a convenor group will experience in their work.

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PHASE 4

Renewal or Wind-down

At some point during the initiative, once the community's work is well underway, and usually after three to five years, the volunteer leaders, staff, partners and even funders of a multi-year effort begin to ask, 'Should we continue with this effort or wind it down?'

Sometimes, the question is a practical response to the approaching end of the group's first community planning cycle or the convening group's core operating grants. At other times, it is born out of the frustration of influential leaders or organizations that the work to date has not made as much progress in reducing poverty as they hoped. Happily, sometimes the motivation for asking the question is rooted in the community's strong desire to take some time to reflect on how the effort can be scaled up for even greater results.

Regardless of the motivation, there are a number of key tasks a convening group must usually attend to in this very natural – and sometimes dramatic – phase in the local poverty reduction campaign. These tasks include:

Poverty Reduction Work
- Package and analyze the major accomplishments of the effort in: a) reducing poverty among local residents, b) expanding the willingness and capacity of local organizations to reduce poverty and c) creating a supportive environment for poverty reduction in the community and among external supporters;
- Identify the major lessons learned and ways the effort might be improved in the future.

There is a rich array of options for how a convenor group can renew itself to ensure the community has the capacity to continue reducing poverty long into the future.

Community Base
- Celebrate the group's accomplishments and acknowledge the contributions of key leaders and organizations;
- Provide plentiful and different ways for the community to learn about the results and lessons learned;
- Determine whether and how the community – particularly key leaders and organizations – would like to renew or wind down the community-wide poverty reduction work.

Organizational Capacity
- Bring on new staff and volunteers if and when required;
- Review and, if necessary, upgrade the mission and operating principles of the convening group;
- Review and, if necessary, restructure the sponsorship for the convening group;
- Review and, if necessary, upgrade the planning, management and evaluation systems for the group.

Technical & Financial Resources
- Publicly acknowledge the contributions of financial and technical supporters for their investment and participation;
- Engage current financial and technical assistance supporters in the reflection of the work to date and deliberations about the future;
- Review and, if necessary, identify and expand partnerships with other technical and financial supporters.

While the response to the question of whether or not to continue is a simple one – Yes or No – there is a rich array of options for how a community and convenor group can renew itself to ensure the community has the capacity to continue reducing poverty long into the future.

PHASE 4

Possible Challenges in Phase Four

Understanding What Just Happened

Many people have a hard time making sense of all the activities associated with a community-wide poverty reduction effort, what they actually accomplished and what was learned. Some people find it particularly difficult to understand the contribution of the convening group to the work and eventual results. While a group can minimize this fuzziness early on by developing a rigorous set of process and outcome indicators, an evaluation and and communication strategy, many convenor groups find they need to pay extra attention to packaging and sharing the 'story' of the community and the convening group in a way that is easily understood by diverse stakeholders.Over the past 10 years, Vibrant Communities Canada and the Caledon Institute of Social Policy diligently captured the stories of success, innovation, and challenge faced by Vibrant Communities. These stories can be found at www.vibrantcommunities.ca and www.caledoninst.org.

Resources for Core Operations

A community that chooses to continue their collaborative work to reduce poverty will likely require additional financial resources to support the core operations of the convening group into the next phase. Even wildly successful convening groups often find that their work is no longer as exciting to potential investors who have since became all too familiar with their work and/or have moved on to focus on other issues. Re-engaging potential supports – and identifying others – can prove to be an uphill battle.

Succession Planning

All key volunteers and staff eventually move on from community-wide initiatives. Convening groups often struggle to ensure the transition from the exiting leadership and new leadership occurs as smoothly as possible if the community and group determine that the effort should continue. Succession planning is one of the most important – yet often neglected – pieces of work for a convening group in the renewal phase of their work.

Maintaining Momentum

When a community decides to renew its work, it often risks spending a disproportionate amount of time and energy back at the drawing board, working to find ways to generate even greater results in the future. Some groups have found out the hard way that the entire poverty reduction effort can quickly lose momentum if they neglect to continue to work on keeping their partners – and broader community and external supporters – actively engaged in the poverty reduction work that has proven successful so far.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Convening organizations do not operate in a vacuum. On the contrary, what they do, how they do it, when they do it, and whether or not it gets done at all, is profoundly influenced by their environment.

At any given point in time, there are literally dozens of external factors – some more important than others – that directly and indirectly influence a convening group's work. These can be grouped into three inter-related areas:

Socio-Cultural Factors

Economic Factors

Political Factors
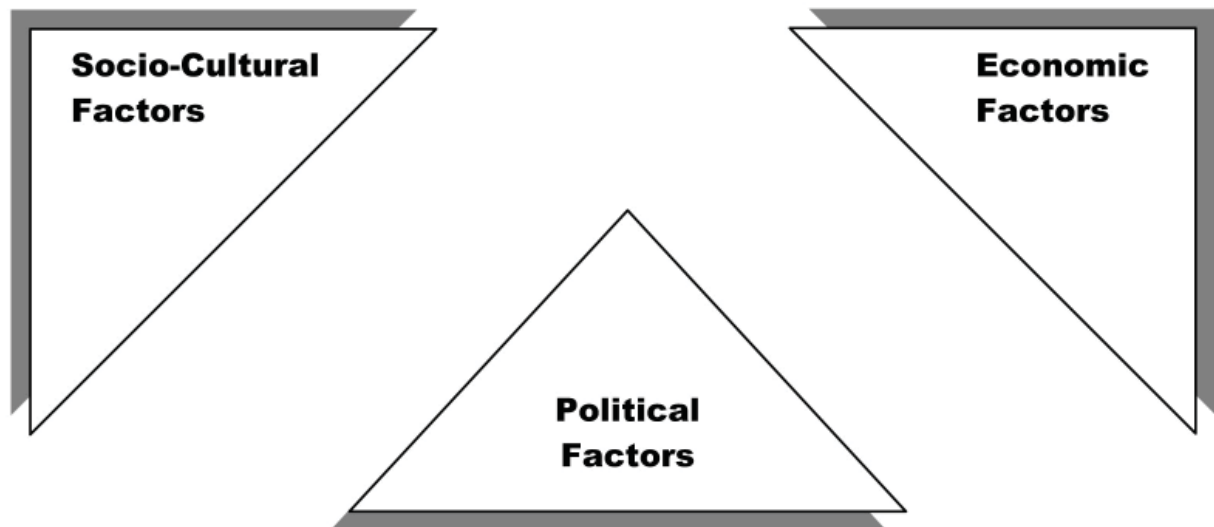
Convening groups serious about changing the culture of poverty reduction and mounting a deliberate campaign to reduce poverty will manage every aspect of their work with the environment in mind. The more successful ones scan the environmental constantly and respond to new opportunities and hurdles strategically as they arise, even if this means changing plans that have taken a lot of time and effort to prepare. Responsiveness in an ever-changing environment is critical to a convening group's success – and sometimes even its survival.

ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES

The environment can make the convening group's work easier or more difficult. Communities based in struggling regional economies will have to work much harder to create economic opportunities for low-income residents than communities in wealthier economic regions.

Environmental factors can even help and hinder the work at the same time. Convening groups operating in 'booming' urban economies, for example, may find that local businesses are more willing and able to become involved and invest in community initiatives, but find that the same business leaders wonder why there are 'poor people' amidst seemingly plentiful jobs and skills shortages.

The following eight, often interrelated, environmental factors tend to have the most profound influence on a convening group's work.

Economic Factors
- The current structure of the local economy (e.g. number and size of employers, type of industry, whether or not corporate offices are located in or outside the community, etc.);
- The long term and cyclical trends that continually shape the local economy (e.g. technological change, fluctuating commodity prices, recessions, etc.);
- Periodic or one time economic events (e.g. the shut down or arrival of a major employer).

Political Factors
- Government policies, practices and behaviours that impact local economies, communities, and low-income residents;
- The manner in which convening groups are funded by governments and philanthropic organizations and the regulations and legislation that directly impact the type of work a convening organization – and local players – can do to reduce poverty.

Socio-Cultural Factors
- The degree to which local residents and organizations identify with and feel part of their local community;
- The culture of participation and activism of local residents and organizations (e.g. collaborative versus conflictual approaches);
- Local attitudes regarding the issue of poverty and culture of poverty reduction (e.g. alleviation versus reduction, emphasis on personal versus systemic reasons underlying poverty).

While convening groups must adapt their work to "fit" the environment, they must remember that at the end of the day they are trying to "change" it as well – to create a new culture of poverty reduction that leads to community-wide changes resulting in dramatically fewer people living in poverty. In fact, convening groups will not generate any significant and sustainable reductions in poverty without changing some of the very systems that cause poverty in the first place.

> While convening groups must adapt their work to fit the environment, they must remember that they are trying to change it as well.

Environmental Influences

Again, this will sound completely absurd to some. How can a comparatively small group of people and organizations – albeit expanding all the time – hope to change the much larger, complex environment in which they work? Well, it may not happen often, nor to the extent people would like, but it does happen:

- In Saint John, N.B., the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative (BCAPI) was instrumental in encouraging the Provincial government to provide parents in high school a full subsidy and improve their prospects of finishing school and securing good employment.

- In local communities across the United States, there are hundreds of businesses signing 'living wage covenants' – voluntarily agreements that commit the company to paying wages well above the poverty line.

- In Waterloo, Ontario, a group of local funders and community leaders reviewed projects on behalf of the regional branch of Human Resources Development Canada to 'fund' non-profit projects that sought to assist low-income residents to exit poverty, not just to get 'any old' low paying job.

As a rule of thumb, the convening groups that have done the best job of engaging influential leaders from a wide range of sectors, tend to have the most success in influencing the environment – they have the very people who have the clout and credibility to change things

Convening groups that have done the best job of engaging influential leaders from a wide range of sectors tend to have the most success in influencing the environment.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

When all the themes of 'community convening' are combined, they provide a powerful framework to guide convening groups in their efforts to model the cultural shift to reduce poverty – and to inspire others to do the same.

The diagram on the next page illustrates the degree to which these themes are inter-related. No one element can be adequately understood without considering the others.

In order to establish appropriately ambitious 'stretch targets' for its work, a convening organization must acknowledge its current organizational capacity, the existing and likely future community base it might engage, as well as the environmental forces at play in its community. Similarly, an external funder and technical assistance team is advised to provide only as much support and resources as the convening group has the ability to absorb and effectively manage.

When coupled with the matrix on Page 6, the framework outlines the major tasks or milestones in each phase of its work. And while the framework does not provide a detailed step-by-step blueprint for a convening group to follow – each organization's circumstances and community are too unique for that – it does provide a critical 'big picture' of how to generate progressively better results as the organization evolves.

Viewing the work of a convening group in this way highlights the fact that successful convening groups are likely to spend a considerable amount of time balancing the immediate task of supporting local initiatives to reduce poverty with strategically managing the comprehensive elements of its 'stewardship' work.

Local organizations – and external funders, technical assistance providers and policy makers – interested in supporting a convening group in a way that allows them to generate long-term, sustainable results will appreciate this and upgrade their approach accordingly.

THE CONVENING FRAMEWORK

	Phase One Exploring Local Interest	Phase Two Building Conditions for Success	Phase Three Action-Learning-Change	Phase Four Renewal or Wind-down
Poverty Reduction Work	• Get a general understanding of the extent and depth of poverty in the community. • Understand the major themes and phases of a community-wide effort to reduce poverty.	• Clarify a working definition of poverty. • Get a firm grip on the extent, depth and dynamics of local poverty • Identify areas and strategies of possible high impact. • Create a comprehensive, multi-year community plan to reduce poverty. • Develop a learning and evaluation strategy.	• Support local efforts to reduce poverty. • Evaluate efforts and identify key efforts to reduce poverty. • Scale up efforts that work. • Continually reassess and, if necessary, upgrade community plan and approach.	• Review the outcomes of the initiative to date and the potential for greater impact in the future. • Review – and if necessary – upgrade working definition of poverty, framework for poverty reduction, and general approach.
Building a Community Base	• Explore broader local interest in a comprehensive, long-term multi-sector effort to reduce poverty. • Develop an initial vision and principles to drive and guide future work.	• Identify and secure broad-based sector partnerships to assist in developing and carrying out a community plan.	• Deepen the commitment and capacity of existing partners to reduce poverty. • Expand the number and range of organizations involved as appropriate.	• Celebrate the outcomes and lessons generated to date • Explore local interest and in continuing a broad-base local effort to reduce poverty.
Strengthening Organizational Capacity	• Identify and establish a core group of committed leaders from across sectors to 'steward' the process. • Understand the 'work' of a convening organization.	• Expand the leadership for the convening group. • Finalize the administrative sponsorship of the convening group. • Recruit skilled staff • Develop governance structure & process. • Create management, communication, financial & administrative systems	• Continually review and upgrade governance structure and process. • Adjust internal systems as appropriate. • Strengthen staff team through training and other retention measures.	• Review – if and when necessary – adjust sponsorship arrangements. • Review – if and when necessary - re-tool administrative systems if and when necessary. • Review – and if and when necessary – strengthen staff team.
Importing Technical & Financial Resources	• Identify technical resources (e.g. best practices, intermediary organizations) and funding organizations that might be accessed to support this work.	• Mobilize multi-year funding to support the work. • Identify and secure needed technical assistance.	• Sustain and nurture relationships with current technical assistance providers and funders. • Identify and expand technical and financial supporters as required.	• Engage current – and potential – technical assistance providers and funders fully in participating in learning and decisions on next steps.

THE FRAMEWORK IN PRACTICE

There is a rule of thumb in starting a business that success involves equal parts of planning, perspiration and adaptability. The same formula holds for convening organizations.

It is not at all surprising that a convening group's work rarely unfold as logically, systematically and seamlessly as the framework suggests. Any number of circumstances – both internal and external – may combine to make the process far more disjointed. Groups may already have an active convening group supporting different poverty reduction initiatives, but simply need to step back and upgrade their approach to think more comprehensively about their work. Key staff or volunteers may leave during the key implementation stage. As a result, convenor groups tend to master different aspects of the framework at different speeds, and in some cases, ignore certain components and steps altogether.

This does not necessarily result in a less effective organization – or, more importantly, fewer people living in poverty. There are examples, for instance, of convening groups that manage to create large reductions in poverty without having created a broad, multi-sector community base. While these groups do not benefit from the richer perspective on community needs and priorities, or the deepened community commitment that the term "broad-based" implies, their ability to make real changes in peoples' lives is not necessarily impaired.

Yet, groups that neglect to actively steward all the key components of the framework certainly run a higher risk of not assisting the community to reduce poverty on the scale it might hope. There is, for instance, a tendency among convening groups to skip steps and spend all their efforts dealing with the obvious' opportunities. They reason – quite rightly – that there are plenty of good opportunities that don't require extensive research to uncover

and understand – why spend the time and effort getting a thorough scan if there is plenty to do in front of them? While this is a very compelling case, these groups will often miss not-so-obvious opportunities to make dramatic impacts on poverty in their community.

There is no way to predict with any degree of certainty the opportunities and challenges a convening group will face as it goes about its day-to-day work. At a minimum, however, the Community Convening Framework can help a group become better 'stewards of community change' by identifying the key issues, phases, milestones and challenges they are likely to face in their journey.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT:
An Emerging Model for Collaborative Practice

In 2011, John Kania and Mark Kramer of FSG Social Impact Consultants published a game changing article called *Collective Impact* (http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective_impact) in the Stanford Social Innovation Review.

Collective Impact looks at collaborative community change efforts in an innovative way. FSG Social Impact Consultants, in reviewing a variety of community efforts in Canada and the United States, they identified three pre-conditions and five conditions for effective collective impact initiatives. *They found 'that large-scale social change comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organizations. Evidence of the effectiveness of this approach is still limited, but these examples suggest that substantially greater progress could be made in alleviating many of our most serious and complex social problems if nonprofits, governments, businesses, and the public were brought together around a common agenda to create collective impact'.* (http://www.ssireview.org/images/articles/2011_WI_Feature_Kania.pdf)

Kania and Kramer identify three preconditions:
• **Influential Leadership:** Identifying those leaders with spheres of influence who will help move the issue forward in the community
• **Urgency of Issue:** Using a combination of evidence and community experience to create a sense of urgency about the community's need to address the issue
• **Adequate Resources:** Ensuring that there are sufficient human and financial resources in place to support the community change effort.

Additonally, they describe five essential conditions of Collective Impact:
• **Common Agenda:** Develop a shared vision for change which includes a common understanding of the problem being address and the development of aligned change strategies and actions.

• **Shared Measurement:** Agree on and collect data which measures progress consistently across all partners and ensuring that these results are regularly communicated with the community.
• **Mutually Reinforcing Activities**: Identify partner activities which align with and contribute to progress on the shared measurement indicators.
• **Continuous Communication:** Ensure open and consistent communication that builds the trust and commitment of the many partners in the community change effort.
• **Backbone Organization:** Provide steering support to the collective change initiative through the development of a staffing and strategic infrastructure which guides and facilitates the day to day efforts of the partners.

The collective impact framework provides an interesting lens on community change efforts and aligns with the ideas presented earlier in this primer. Convening community change efforts as has been described, requires effective and influential leadership, sufficient resources and an understanding of the environment including the socio-cultural, economic and political factors which influencing poverty reduction efforts.

The five conditions of collective impact are represented within the building blocks and phases of poverty reduction efforts. Where collective impact adds value is the push to use the common agenda, shared measurement and mutually reinforcing activities as a means of determining how the efforts are impacting the community.

Collective impact is an emerging body of practice and since the publishing of the original article in 2011, there have been additional articles, videos and resources published which show collective impact initiatives in practice. **Convening Comprehensive, Multi-sector Local Efforts to Reduce Poverty** adds to the knowledge being generated by practitioners of community change efforts and provides practical steps for communities interested in a place-based approach to reducing poverty.

Tamarack Products and Services for Vibrant Communities – Cities Reducing Poverty

This Primer introduces you and your organization to the poverty matrix, just one of the many tools that Tamarack, Vibrant Communities Canada and its partners continually produce to assist you and your community with the hands-on work of developing, launching and sustaining a community effort to reduce poverty.

Resources that are currently available include:

About Vibrant Communities

- The Vibrant Communities Canada website (www. vibrantcommunities.ca) has a variety of articles, blogs, tools and resources for communities starting place-based poverty reduction efforts. A good place to start is the library section called **About Roundtables for Poverty Reduction** (http://vibrantcanada.ca/resource-library/about-roundtables-poverty-reduction). Here you will find many resources including Developing Multi-sector Collaborations, the Poverty Matrix and the Dynamic Community Engagement Matrix.

- The **Case Studies and Community Stories** (http://vibrantcanada.ca/resource-library/case-studies-community-stories) library section contains valuable case studies of comprehensive, poverty reduction efforts across Canada.

- The **Vibrant Communities Canada Learning Community** is a pan-Canadian network of practitioners and volunteers working together to reduce poverty. To learn more about the Learning Community visit http://vibrantcanada. ca/reduce-poverty or to join the Learning Community, access the membership brochure at http://tamarackcommunity.ca/downloads/index/ CRP_Brochure.pdf.

Comprehensive Thinking & Action

- Tools for **Comprehensive Thinking & Action** can be found at http://vibrantcanada.ca/resource-library/comprehensive-community-change on the Vibrant Communities Canada website and include Making Collaboration Work, Scaling Up and The Promise & Paradox of Community.

- The **Aspen Institute, Roundtable on Community Change** (http://www.aspeninstitute. org/policy-work/community-change/ publications) has published a number of community building resources which detail the achievements and challenges of community change initiatives in the United States.

- **Coaching and peer-to-peer supports** are available through the Vibrant Communities Canada – Cities Reducing Poverty Learning Community to help your location effort to reduce poverty. Contact donnajean@ tamarackcommunity.ca for more information.

Multisector Collaboration

- **Multi-sector Collaboration** resources can be found at http://vibrantcanada.ca/resource-library/multi-sector-collaboration and includes tools to effectively engage business, community and low income leaders.

- The Tamarack Institute, with the support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation published Approaches to **Measuring Community Change Indicators** (http://vibrantcanada.ca/resource-library/ comprehensive-community-change/approaches-measuring-community-change-indicators). This resource details more than 40 different approaches to measuring more community engagement, more vibrant communities, more collaboration and less poverty.

Tamarack Products and Services for Vibrant Communities – Cities Reducing Poverty

Operational Strategies for Convening Groups

- The **Tools and Techniques** section of the Vibrant Communities Canada resource library (http://vibrantcanada.ca/resource-library/tools-templates) contains useful tools for convening groups as they develop their initiatives. There are multiple resources drawn from a variety of community change organizations.

- Additional library resources include F**unding & Fundraising** (http://vibrantcanada.ca/resource-library/funding-fundraising) ; G**overnance & Leadership** (http://vibrantcanada.ca/resource-library/governance-leadership); C**ommunity Engagement** (http://vibrantcanada.ca/resource-library/community-engagement); **Evaluation** (http://vibrantcanada.ca/resource-library/evaluation); and **Advocacy & Policy** (http://vibrantcanada.ca/resource-library/advocacy-policy).

Additional Tamarack Resources and Learning Communities

- **Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement** supports three learning communities: Seeking Community (www.seekingcommunity.ca); Vibrant Communities Canada (www.vibrantcommunities.ca) and Communities Collaborating (www.tamarackcci.ca). Members of the learning communities participate in virtual, on-line and face to face learning opportunities and contribute to Tamarack's vision of the co-generation of knowledge for community change. To join a learning community, simply visit the learning community website and sign in. Learning community members experience a variety of benefits including the opportunity to participate in on-going learning activities and to share their knowledge.

- **Engage! Tamarack's online newsletter**, published monthly, includes articles and resources on the newest thinking about collaboration and community engagement practices. Sign up here for **Engage!** http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g3_emagazine_subscribe.html.

- Annually, Tamarack hosts a number of virtual and face to face Learning Events including **monthly tele-learning sessions** with multi-sector thought leaders on topics including leadership, community change, evaluation, community engagement and poverty reduction. Tamarack also hosts a signature week-long learning event called the **Communities Collaborating Institute** which brings together thought leaders and cutting-edge practitioners. Additionally shorter workshops on a variety of topics including collaborative governance, evaluation and community engagement are hosted. For more information about Tamarack's learning events visit http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g3.php.

Canada's Cities Reducing Poverty
MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

In April 2011, Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement invited nine cities and a small number of provincial and national network representatives together to discuss the power and potential of developing a learning network of cities collaborating together to reduce poverty. The cities included 5 Vibrant Communities partners and 4 other cities/regions with collaborative roundtables. At the conclusion of this meeting, they returned to their communities, shared the results of the discussions and formally affirmed their commitment to working collaboratively in the development of the Cities Reducing Poverty movement.

In May 2012, another eighteen communities from across Canada gathered together to affirm the direction of Cities Reducing Poverty and establish six priority areas to move forward at a national level. Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement, provides backbone organizational support to the Cities Reducing Poverty initiative.

While the focus is on a city agenda, it is recognized that the aspiration and action plan is applicable to all communities and regions interested in moving the needle on poverty, regardless of size. The communities engaged in this effort share the following characteristics:

- a focus on poverty reduction;
- a multi-sector community roundtable;
- viewing the issue of poverty from a comprehensive lens recognizing that there are multiple root causes and unique solutions;
- leveraging the assets of the whole community to drive community change and
- ensuring that the theory of change process includes learning and evaluation at every step.

The Aspiration:

Imagine…

100 cities reducing poverty

TOGETHER

Vision:
To create Vibrant Communities by significantly reducing the human, social and economic cost of poverty for Canadian cities.

Mission:
We will create a connected learning community of 100 Canadian cities with multi-sector roundtables addressing poverty reduction. Our goal is aligned poverty reduction strategies in cities, provinces and the federal government resulting in reduced poverty for 1 million Canadians.

Cities Reducing Poverty Learning Community

We are working together to actively recruit and engage multi-sector poverty roundtables in all provinces and territories in a way that respects the local priorities and approaches. By 2016, 100 cities with multi-sector poverty roundtables will be active members of the Cities Reducing Poverty Learning Community.   We will identify and measure effective practices and show concrete poverty reduction results in Canadian cities.

All cities that join the Cities Reducing Poverty Learning Community agree to:
• Actively participate in the Learning Community through regularly sharing knowledge, resources and progress with each other;
• Participate in the development of and sign on to a Cities Reducing Poverty Charter;
• Agree to a common evaluation framework and annually report on poverty reduction results;
• Regularly participate as a contributing member of at least one action team (Policy Agenda, Evaluation Framework, Charter, Business Case, Learning Community, National Summit, National Living Wage)
• Annually provide $1,000 toward the operation of the network.

As a Learning Community, we will invest in communities through the:
• Development of a business case and charter which frames the return on investment in poverty reduction efforts;
• A common evaluation framework which demonstrates a collective impact on poverty
• Development of an aligned policy framework to work towards reducing the human, social and economic costs of poverty;
• Advocacy for aligned municipal, provincial and federal poverty reduction strategies.

As a Learning Community, we will work towards shifting attitudes about poverty by:
• Hosting a National Cities Reducing Poverty summit in 2014;
• Engaging a multi-sector leadership team who will advise the development of the Cities Reducing Poverty network and advocate for alignment of poverty reduction strategies at a national level;
• Developing an effective community engagement and communications strategy.

Value of the Cities Reducing Poverty Learning Community
The value of participating in the Cities Reducing Poverty Network includes:
• membership in a professional network of cities/regions doing similar poverty reduction work;
• ability to participate in on-going learning including 10 tele-learning events and a National Summit on poverty;
• ability to join at least 3 – 5 communities of practice (living wage, evaluation, conveners of roundtables, small/rural communities);
• a weekly blog about Poverty in Canada, recent research, Cities Reducing Poverty and other learnings delivered to your inbox;
• discounted enrollment fees for Tamarack-sponsored face to face learning events;
• access to an on-line learning community containing resources, national views and profiles of poverty reduction efforts;
• Increased web presence through social media and your own profile at www.vibrantcanada.ca;

Be part of a collaborative effort that will see a reduction in poverty in Canada!

Over 40 communities are already part of this growing network!

Northern Canada: Nunavut
British Columbia: Surrey, Abbotsford, Victoria, Revelstoke
Alberta: Calgary, Edmonton, Red Deer, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Grande Prairie
Saskatchewan: Regina, Saskatoon
Manitoba: Winnipeg
Ontario: Windsor-Essex, Chatham-Kent, Brant-Brantford, Waterloo Region (Cambridge, Waterloo, Kitchener), Peterborough, Kingston, Halton Region (Burlington, Oakville, Georgetown, Milton), Peel Region (Brampton, Mississauga, Caledon), Niagara Region (St. Catharines, Niagara Falls, Welland, Fort Erie), London, Guelph – Wellington, Hamilton
Quebec: Lower North Shore, St. Michel, Trois-Rivieres, RQRI network
New Brunswick: Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, Charlotte County, Saint John
Atlantic Canada: Newfoundland and Labrador

Many more cities, regions and provinces are forming poverty reduction roundtables and joining together with Vibrant Communities Canada – Cities Reducing Poverty's growing network. Consider becoming one of 100 Cities Reducing Poverty together today!

To join this growing network of Canadian Cites Reducing Poverty simply **email donnajean@ tamarackcommunity.ca** to start the conversation.

Connect with us on Twitter @VC_Canada
Find us on Facebook at **www.facebook.com/ VibrantCommunitiesCanada**

Join Vibrant Communities Canada – Cities Reducing Poverty Learning Community!

Name of Collaborative: _____

Key Contact: _____ Email: _____

Telephone: _____

Send this information in an email to donnajean@tamarackcommunity.ca and we will be in touch about your membership in Cities Reducing Poverty

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