

Strategic Evaluation Plan 2013

Niagara Connects is a Niagara-wide network of people who work together to plan, learn, innovate and lead community action toward a stronger future for Niagara.

Mission: Generating knowledge that drives community action

Guiding Principles:

- Community strengths, research and evidence are linked in order to plan for a stronger future for Niagara;
- Different interests are engaged to work together mobilizing for change; and
- Research and activities are guided by communities.

Background: In 2011 the Niagara Connects Council established a strategic plan for sustainable growth.

Methods: In 2013, an evaluation study was completed by Jennifer Boyko, PhD, to better understand the progress Niagara Connects has made in helping to build a stronger future for the community of Niagara. Two data collection methods were used:

- (i) gathering and reviewing documents and resources prepared by Niagara Connects as part of its development and on-going organizational processes; and
- (ii) interviews with stakeholders involved in the development, or on-going implementation of Niagara Connects' strategic plan.

Results: The evaluation results demonstrate that Niagara Connects has developed a foundation for gathering the Niagara-wide community to plan together for a more vibrant future. This planning occurs within and across 12 Living in Niagara Sectors. The work of Niagara Connects aligns with the backbone support organization function outlined in the Collective Impact model articulated by Kania & Kramer in the Stanford Social Innovation Review, February, 2011.

Niagara Connects partners with Healthy Living Niagara to host community leaders, researchers and stakeholders November 28, 2013.



Recommendations:

1. Build on Niagara Connects' success in enabling evidence-informed planning for the socio-economic future of Niagara by:

- Regularly publishing the Living in Niagara report, a snapshot in time of quality of life, across 12 Sectors that align with the social indicators of health;
- Continuing to strengthen the Niagara Knowledge Exchange (NKE) tool by engaging the community in sharing relevant, reliable information and data to support the planning requirements of the community; and
- Helping to build Niagara's capacity for finding, utilizing and understanding relevant and reliable evidence, data and community expert opinion through the NKE, Living in Niagara report and other sources.

2. Focus on Resources and Communications by:

- Strengthening financial sustainability through Subscriptions, Sponsorships, and Facilitation;
- Expanding our team of Research Associates and Knowledge Brokers; and
- Communicating the value that Niagara Connects brings to the community by articulating examples of the work of Niagara Connects.

3. Establish a common understanding and motivation for evaluation among players in the Niagara Connects network by:

- Updating the Niagara Connects evaluation framework;
- Supporting ongoing quality improvement and reporting through performance measurement; and
- Engaging the Niagara-wide community in strengthening the overall quality of evaluation activities and data for Niagara.

