

REPORT

A RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR OTTAWA'S COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTRES

Submitted to:

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1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 *Approach to Community Development*

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is an approach to development that is not focused on providing services, but rather on strengthening the inherent social capital in communities – the resources and capacities of groups and individuals, groups, associations and organizations – as well as the connections between them.

The ABCD approach says that long-term, sustainable development in any community – the capacity to be resilient and to deal with any issue that comes along – is dependent on how well communities can build and mobilize their inherent capacities. Communities with a high degree of social capital are ones that can anticipate and respond quickly to issues because they are well connected, and there is a high degree of trust between members.

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is a term coined by John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann at the [ABCD Institute](#) in Evanston, Illinois - a key Coady International Institute partner. ABCD is an approach that recognizes the strengths, gifts, talents and resources of individuals and communities, and helps communities to mobilize and build on these for sustainable development.

By focusing on assets and capacities rather than needs and deficiencies, energy is directed toward opportunities at the community level, while remaining conscious of how the policy environment could be changed to further strengthen citizens' capacity to drive their own development.

At its core are the various assets (human, social, financial, natural and physical) that already exist in the community, especially the formal and informal associations that mobilize assets and strengthen the social relationships that are important for bridging local initiatives to external opportunities.

From <http://www.coady.stfx.ca/themes/abcd/>

ABCD does not discount the need for important services, and it is not a substitute for services. This is especially important to note in the rural context since communities often experience more difficulties accessing services for a variety of reasons. But it speaks to the way in which these services should be delivered – they should be provided in a way that responds to local needs and helps build local capacity, rather than undercutting it. ABCD can help rural communities advocate for services with a strong, united voice.

Community Development (CD) has always been important in a rural context. Rural communities were built on a tradition of active civic engagement, mutual cooperation and volunteerism. This level of mutual support was absolutely essential during the days when the

local economy was largely agrarian, and led to the development of a wide range of religious and social organizations, many of which still exist today. Community development was necessary for rural communities to survive and to thrive; although the political and social context has changed, the need for rural community development has not.

1.2 CD Work in Rural Ottawa

The rural reality in Ottawa is quite unique. It is one of the biggest rural areas of any municipality in Canada and yet is difficult to compare to other rural settings that are not located close to a major City with all the services a city provides. There is very little research on CD practices in such a context.

One of the unique features of this type of rural reality is the impact on travel patterns. For example, rural residents don't necessarily use services that might be placed in nearby rural communities. Instead the easiest and more effective route might be to a service in Ottawa (or in some cases to larger communities outside the Ottawa municipality). Most travel patterns are routed to and from the City and this is supported by the flow of public transportation including ParaTranspo.

When the Carp primary care practice closed their Constance Bay satellite location, patients were offered service in Carp. But most residents of Constance Bay looked for a new health team in Kanata or Arnprior as this was more convenient for them.

CD IMPLICATION: *The best solution to locating a service needs to take into account the travel patterns and supports available in a community. The practicality of these solutions should be verified with local residents, and not assumed.*

The culture of rural Ottawa is complex with many different and overlapping identities. Some have been there for generations and others are newcomers moving into Estate lots or new developments, which may be next to, but not connect well to existing rural villages. These different identities and history can lead to some "clannishness" and it can take a long time to be accepted as a "real" rural resident. There is a long memory for perceived "past wrongs".

CD IMPLICATION: *The Community Development workers (CDers) need to know the community and its history. Being introduced to the community by someone who is viewed as a long-term resident can speed up acceptance.*

There were four identities noted for Vars – French, English, farmer, and city worker.

But it will still take time and being visible/available to become a trusted player. CD work also needs to recognize that there are many different potential groups/ allies in any community, and that these are not necessarily connected. Involving any CRC staff (as well as other service providers) that are active in rural communities as potential sources of information and connection is crucial.

All residents chose to live rurally for a reason and many recognize it will likely mean reduced services, e.g. limited or no public transit, no local school. Some people interviewed in the development of this paper mentioned that, in this sense, rural residents are not demanding and you have to dig to get an understanding of the real needs. For many rural residents, the sense of

rural community that comes through events like community fairs and recreation activities is as important as the physical rural environment they value.

Notwithstanding the different rural identities, there were some recurring traits among rural residents (although these may be changing as more newcomers arrive):

- Self-reliant - desire to solve own problems rather than having answers/solutions imposed
- Generosity to each other in times of need and willingness to come together to get things done
- They want decision-makers, planners, etc. to come to them and see things first-hand. Coupled with this is the desire to have their knowledge of their rural area recognized and used in planning and development processes.

CD IMPLICATION: *Relationships are key to CD work in any context but this is heightened in the rural areas. Community expectations of CRCs and CD work are often modest; communities are not looking to CRCs to be bringing in big projects. Building on the local interest, capacity and knowledge is key. Given the self-reliance tendency, there is less risk of creating dependency on CDers or CRCs in rural communities if community players are engaged from the start.*

Finally many rural communities are experiencing (or are scheduled to experience) significant change in the next decade. For example, towns like Richmond and Manotick are expected to double in population over 10 years and there is conversion of huge areas of farmland into suburbia. The support services to meet the needs of a growing population are not in place and the new developments are not necessarily well-integrated into the fabric of the existing community.

The proportional scale of change is huge and many people/communities are feeling a lack of control over changes. These feelings have intensified post-amalgamation, and many rural people feel their voices and concerns just don't carry weight in the overall decision-making at City Hall.

CD IMPLICATIONS: *Some rural communities have their hands full trying to deal with the big changes coming at them. There may not be much energy left over for other issues. Making the CD experience fun for participants may help combat this. Energy for new things might be found in unusual places, e.g. a local book club, rather than limiting the focus to established entities like the Community Associations that can have their hands full or have taken on specific roles.*

Don't start what can't be sustained. There have been many "pilots" that have petered out and left communities jaded about future efforts. Building support/relationship with key decision-making bodies such as the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee will be important.

SO WHAT'S UNIQUE ABOUT RURAL CD?

Although community development is a similar process in both urban and rural areas, doing this work in a rural context brings a particular set of challenges and opportunities:

- Personal relationships may be even more important in a rural context because that is the way things have worked historically. Service providers, agency staff and politicians are less anonymous than they are in urban areas. As such, factors such as history, relationships and connections are especially important and may take longer to establish.
- Leveraging the culture of self-reliance that exists within many rural communities provides an opportunity to build local ownership and sustainability.
- Need to use all potential sources of information to connect across rural identities and identify needs/issues that may not be surfacing
- Travelling to, from and around the rural areas takes time and resources. This has operational and resource implications
- The numbers of those participating will usually be less than numbers that can be garnered in the city, just because of the realities of population; success, therefore, should not be based on numbers alone.
- The pace and proportional scale of change for many rural communities, particularly those targeted for growth, is dramatic and has the potential to impact the core nature of the community and its capacity to leverage opportunities and assets for positive change.

1.3 *The Role of Ottawa's Community Resource Centres*

Ottawa's Community Health and Resource Centres (CHRCs) provide a wide range of health and social services to local communities across the City of Ottawa. These organizations are well-established (with some having been in place for over 30 years) and strongly community-based; each organization serves a defined catchment area. Each is directed by a Board of Directors elected from the communities served by the Centre, to ensure the Centre is responsive to local needs. In addition to their independent work to serve the needs of their particular catchment area, the Centres frequently work together in a coordinated way (on an ad hoc basis with other Centres, or through the Coalition of Health and Resource Centres¹) to address issues that might affect the entire city, or a particular region of the city.

Although the Centres serve the entire community, they place particular emphasis on serving the needs of the community members who are most vulnerable or at-risk. Although the Centres provide many of the same services, they are able to tailor their approach to meet the specific needs of their communities. An important part of their work is to support community development, which helps to build connections and resilience in communities, building social capital and strengthening their ability to mobilize their own resources to address issues. This approach works best when it is part of a preventative strategy, to intervene in communities

¹ Coalition of Health and Resource Centres website: <http://www.coalitionottawa.ca/>

before a situation becomes a crisis. This work also enables communities to mobilize their own resources to respond to crises much more effectively (e.g. as seen during the Ice Storm).

One of the reasons the Centres are successful in the roles described above is the considerable experience and expertise they have developed in forming and sustaining partnerships. The CHRCs have developed an extensive range of partnerships, both formal and informal, with governments, funders, non-governmental organizations and community groups. These partnerships help to mobilize resources and expertise to address the unique challenges facing their individual communities, and this expertise has proven to be very valuable in rural areas where relationships are critical.

Within the larger group of CHRCs, the Community Resource Centres (CRCs) largely perform the same role as Community Health Centres, except for the provision of primary health care.

The majority of the rural territory of the City of Ottawa is served by four of the CRCs² (although their catchment areas are mixed, including large suburban areas as well). These CRCs have identified a number of challenges associate with properly serving the rural areas, including:

- Vast distances and widely-separated communities
- Relatively small population base, compared to the suburban areas
- Hard to maintain effective contact with key groups and organizations over such a vast area
- The resources available to the four CRCs to do rural community development are very limited, and have not kept pace with population growth. Here are some statistics³:
 - Total Ottawa rural catchment population served by the 4 CRCs based on 2011 Census is 85,400. This represents 9.67% of the total Ottawa population.
 - In 1991 the proportion of rural population versus total Ottawa population was 9.55% and it is expected to rise to 9.95% by 2031. The percentage of the rural population will continue to grow at a higher rate than the urban and suburban Ottawa population.
 - The 4 CRCs providing services to the rural Ottawa population have a total of 7 FTEs Community Developers to support their community. Because of the need and services required to support our urban and suburban communities only 1.1 FTEs are specifically dedicated to the rural community. Of this 1.1 FTEs, .8 FTE is funded by United Way with non recurrent funding which will soon end.

² Western Ottawa CRC, Orleans-Cumberland CRC, Eastern Ottawa CRC and Nepean Rideau and Osgoode CRC.

³ <http://ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/get-know-your-city/statistics-and-economic-profile/data-handbook/population/9-population>
<http://ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/get-know-your-city/statistics-and-economic-profile/data-handbook/1-population-sub-area>
<http://ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/get-know-your-city/statistics/population-and-households-occupied-dwellings-estimates-sub>

2.0 PRINCIPLES AND APPROACHES TO SUPPORT RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN OTTAWA

2.1 *Principles for Community Development*

- CD is a catalyst for building social capital and community capacity. It is a strength/asset-based approach that is responsive to community needs and issues. The community developers and the management of the CRCs need to be clear about how their work initiatives will contribute to these areas.
- Equity and social justice are important values guiding CD work. CD recognizes that some groups are systematically marginalized and disempowered, and seeks to give priority to the needs of these groups.
- CD is about building a strong network of relationships and connections – both personal and institutional (since the relationships need to persist even after individual personalities change). These relationships should not all run “through” the community developer, since that person will change from time to time; it is more effective for the community developer to help build relationships between community players.
- CD is about building capacity and sustainability. Sustainability should be built into all of the CD work of the CRC. The implication is that community developers should not be “running” programs or doing their own outreach over the long term, but helping other groups/organizations/volunteers develop the capacity to sustain these activities.
- Another important aspect of CD is the maintenance of relationships. Although CDers should not be running programs over the long-term, and working towards sustainability, they also need to spend some time to maintain the relationships they have developed, checking in and monitoring them. A change in leadership or the departure of key members can be a major event for a group that had previously been self-sustaining, so the group might need some extra help for a period of time to rebuild its capacity.
- Advocacy can be an important element of CD work. The CD approach should be to help individuals, groups and organizations to develop the capacity to organize and advocate effectively for themselves, rather than to “advocate for”.

2.2 *What Would Successful Community Development Look Like In Our Communities?*

Successful community development initiatives could produce some/all of the following outcomes:

- Residents will know where and how to access services, and how to begin to address barriers to accessing service;
- Residents will see the CRC as a gateway for reliable information and access to a wide range of services;
- Residents will have a greater feeling of connectedness to services and other community supports;

- Residents will have more “touch points” for CRC in community – directly with CRC staff, but also through others - e.g. services providers; recreation groups;
- Residents will have more “trusted connections” with service providers (i.e. means not just a “service connection” but having service providers in place long enough for community members to develop relationships);
- Communities are able to initiate and sustain more of their own activities, e.g. play groups, community kitchens;
- Key community organizations (e.g. community associations) are stronger, more representative and can work more effectively;
- There is less stigma associated with accessing some services. Using a strength-based approach can be important, in contrast to an approach based on deficits;
- There is more civic engagement from residents, and more diversified ways for residents to engage;
- There are more effective connections between residents and organizations across communities;
- There are more effective connections between organizations.

2.3 Approach to Community Development

CRCs occupy a unique role with respect to the rural communities; they have a local mandate, and they are the main providers of a wide range of social services. They are directed by Boards made up of community members, and they already maintain a great number of relationships with groups, organizations and other service providers.

Although service provision will always be an important part of the work of CRCs, many of the issues faced by the communities they serve will never be (and should never be) solved by providing services. Communities have a great number of assets and community development seeks to build the social capital that allows communities to be more resilient and dynamic.

CRCs are in an ideal position to help communities through doing community development. Community development, however, is not just a job that gets done by CDers; rather, it is an approach, a way of working, that all should be embodied in the work of all staff and Board members.

ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPER

- The focus of the work is on building relationships and social capital in the communities in which they are working
- As such, the CDer takes an asset-based approach to her/his work, focusing on building the capacity of key assets (e.g. community associations, church groups, service clubs, associations) to work effectively and to connect with each other.

- Recognizing and – where necessary, responding to community opportunities and issues may be a particularly important part of establishing relationships and credibility.
- Flexibility includes the scheduling and location of the work – it is important to be available to meet community groups and stakeholders where and when they are available.
- CDers should be able to show how their activities are consistent with the CD principles, and what the desired impacts will be (in terms of building social capital)
- Sharing promising practices among community groups (e.g. innovative approaches to communication/outreach, use of social media, etc.)
- Connecting service providers and community groups (to help break down silos in service delivery)
- Leveraging other support for rural issues (e.g. Rural Affairs Office, Councillors’ offices, CDF)
- Working in collaboration with rural counterparts.
- Supporting other CRC staff to deal with community development issues and concerns.

ROLE OF THE AGENCY LEADERSHIP (ED AND BOARD)

- Affirming the CRC’s organizational commitment to serving the rural communities, and to the rural CD approach.
- Acknowledging the need for a different organizational approach to support rural CD, and challenges associated with this work (e.g. travel, different critical mass for activities, etc.).
- Developing strategies for more regular ongoing “presence” of CRC staff/programs in rural communities.
- Supporting the CDer when they need to work in locations or at times outside the normal CRC operations (including support for travel time and expenses).
- Nourishing culture of collaboration within and between the CRCs.
- Advocating to stakeholders for approaches and resources to better meet the needs of rural areas.

ROLE OF OTHER CRC STAFF

- Every CRC staff member working in the community is viewed by community members as a representative of the Centre. This does not mean that the staff member needs to know everything about all of the Centre’s programs or community resources available, but s/he should be in a position to help community members to connect to the most appropriate resource.
- CRC staff working in the community, no matter what their job, are often in a position to hear about community issues and concerns. These staff should connect with the CDers whenever these issues come up so that the CDer is aware of them.

ROLE OF MANAGERS

- Helping CDers to identify priorities for their work in building social capital
- Supporting CDers by allowing them to focus on their role in building social capital
- Helping CDers to evaluate impact of their work on building social capital
- Working in collaboration with managers from other CRCs on rural CD issues

3.0 OPERATIONALIZING THE APPROACH IN FOUR CRCs

3.1 *What Does Success Look Like For CRCs?*

- Greater recognition by community of CRC and its role
- Coherent rural strategy and consistent approach across the four CRCs that we can communicate well and others can support
- Consistent approach to CD that allows us to compare and maximize our leverage while still having space for flexibility of tactics and building on the strengths of the individual CDers
- CDers have base of support/network they can leverage; They can rely on other staff who are programming in rural communities to collect information and share intelligence about needs, issues and potential connections
- There are ongoing mechanisms to support the collaboration of the four CRCs, e.g. managers and rural CDers meet regularly; it is a regular item at ED meetings
- Systems (including metrics) in place to compare trends, needs and delivery models to build synergy and leverage each others' experience and knowledge; Share successes and failures
- Collaborative funding initiatives to share resources- equity planning
- Joint advocacy and impact in CRC network around rural issues, with CDF, and the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee of Council
- Gives us some structure for decision-making (setting priorities) and gives some consistency for staff who may be shared across CRCs, whether CD or service-oriented staff
- Common measurement and metrics that helps us learn and demonstrate success
- Increase in numbers/percentages –increased usage of programs and uptake from rural areas
- Greater resources to do the work

3.2 Using a Collective Impact Approach

There has been considerable, recent research in assessing key factors necessary for entities to collaborate effectively for collective impact. This work identified five conditions⁴, four of which seem particularly relevant for the CRCs and are provided below.

OUR CONDITIONS FOR COLLECTIVE IMPACT	
COMMON AGENDA	All participants have a shared vision for change including a common understanding of the problems and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.
SHARED MEASUREMENT	Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable.
MUTUALLY REINFORCING ACTIVITIES	Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action
CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATION	Consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation.

The rural CD work of the four CRCs would benefit from a collective impact approach and some of the pieces are already in place or can be enhanced based on existing structures and systems, e.g. continuous communication. Additional work would be needed to:

- Develop shared metrics – What are the impacts we want to achieve through our CD work? What are the indicators that will help us to assess our progress? Can they be shared between the CRCs?
- Establish mutually reinforcing activities, e.g. through establishing areas of focus (see below)
- Shared work planning across rural CDers, e.g. 1 person liaising with Rural Affairs Office and committee
- Ensure that rural CD is a priority for the agencies and, as such, has the support of the EDs and the Board allowing for dedicated time from CDers and Managers and formal mechanisms for managers and others as needed to coordinate efforts around rural CD.

⁴ Channeling Change: Making Social Innovation Work, Stanford Social Innovation Review By [Fay Hanleybrown, John Kania, & Mark Kramer](#) | 20 | Jan. 26, 2012

3.3 Selecting Areas of Focus

One of the key challenges of rural CD work in Ottawa is the size of rural Ottawa. With the combination of severely limited resources with the expected longer time frames required for impact, having agreed-to criteria for determining priorities of where to focus CD work will be critical. These could be issue-based or geographic areas of focus. These might include:

- Synergy - link/connect efforts or issues in different CRCs, e.g. new development challenges; youth; seniors
- Potential for impact – sometimes it may make sense to put more resources into one CRC than another in order to maximize impact or chances for success
- Importance of issue
- Energy/sparks – given that rural CD work is fostering capacity for communities to develop and sustain their own initiatives, it makes sense to go where there is energy. However, a butterfly approach (flitting from one thing to another) won't work either given the time needed to build relationships and connections and the principle of sustainability. There needs to be some ability to be flexible in resource allocation across the four CRCs so can take advantage of the community energy at the right moment.
- Interests and strengths of the CDers themselves
- Priorities of funders

The success of working with the community of Manotick on the fentanyl issue it was facing is an example of where following a spark has led to a well-linked network of community players interested in the issues of youth, both in Manotick and other communities. It is a success story that leveraged the resources of many, rather than requiring a significant amount of money from CRCs.

In making choices about what to do and focus on, the four CRCs will need to determine if they are making collective choices or whether each centre make choices within its own budget. The collective impact model suggests centres should come together around these choices, given the recognition that there are shared issues across the rural area.

3.4 Resource Sharing

There are a number of questions to be worked through in the determination of resource sharing for rural CD work across the four CRCs. These will be influenced by agreed-to criteria as well as the parameters around collective impact. Some considerations include:

- Is there a tipping point between level of impact and level of resource available in CRC? i.e. is there a minimum amount of CD work required before can reasonably expect impact of kind being sought? What implications does this have for how resources might be shared?
- How do we balance a principle of equity with the desire for impact and the flexibility to shift resources to maximize potential impact when the community energy is high?

- What weight is given to the needs of the CDers themselves, including a quality work-life where they can achieve successes within a context of long-term effort?
- How is agency support translated into the allocation of resources – for managers, for CDers, for other staff working rurally?
- If there are only limited resources, is there a strategic advantage to focus resources in one area or on one issue to demonstrate success and build support to expand the work more broadly? Should this be aligned with the priorities of others, and if so, who, e.g. funders, politicians?