

Appendix 15 – Best Practices for Supporting Community Councils

The Integrated Services Manager plays a key role in supporting a Community Council to be successful. The Manager and Council Chair work together to guide and support the Council in its work.

This Appendix covers areas of best practice and suggested strategies to support Community Councils and their members. Much of this will likely be familiar to Integrated Services Managers and their staff and be part of practice.

1. Informing and inspiring the Council Work Plan development

Councils should review and update their work plans once a year. One area Council work plans can focus on is supporting the work of the local CLBC office to strengthen or build welcoming communities. CLBC has a focus on inclusion that needs to be shared with Community Councils. To prepare for this

- Council must be informed and updated about inclusion related projects and initiatives which CLBC staff are working on
- Suggestions must be made on how the Council can support CLBC staff efforts
- Council members should be asked and encouraged to take part in supporting CLBC staff work
- Council members should be invited to share their ideas on enhancing support to local CLBC work
- Council must be provided with tools (resource people, skills, techniques) to facilitate Council planning or implementing work plans
 - ◆ remember to access provincial staff resources, for example CLBC's Executive Director of Communications and Stakeholder Relations, Self-Advocate Advisor, Community Relations Staff, [inCommon TV](#)

2. Providing updates on CLBC local, regional and provincial initiatives

Many Councils expect the Integrated Services Manager to provide an update at each meeting. This can enhance the Council members' experience of building a trusting relationship with the Manager. However, there are a few aspects of this report to keep in mind:

- Reports must be brief and should be provided in writing before the meeting and focus primarily on initiatives, policy questions, information related to inclusion and welcoming communities
- Avoid reporting on operations except briefly and at a macro level - topics on budgets and staffing must be avoided since they invite conversation and questions on issues unrelated to the Council's mandate
- Whenever information, input or advice on services or other operational issues is sought, a clear and succinct presentation of the issue or question and background information must be provided to guide the discussion – focusing discussion on how Council's input can contribute to people leading more inclusive lives provides a link to the Council's mandate

- Update reports must be placed at the end of the agenda so Council business is given focus and energy

3. Keeping CLBC staff informed about the work of the Community Council

Some Managers assign a facilitator to support Council work. Others invite staff to attend Council meetings periodically. It is important that staff is aware of, and understands, the work of the Council, so they can provide support to Council projects when appropriate, and / or assist with recruitment when asked. Managers may:

- Invite one or two facilitators to attend a Council meeting
 - ◆ Some Integrated Services Managers include this as part of new staff orientation
 - ◆ Some Managers rotate their staff so that each gets an opportunity to attend a meeting so each meeting has a staff member present
- Provide Community Council updates at each of your CLBC staff meetings
 - ◆ Distribute regular updates on Council initiatives and projects so that staff remain informed
 - ◆ Staff should know when the Council or the Managers would benefit from their assistance
 - ◆ Staff must report to the Manager on the results of their work on a Council project or a Committee activity

4. The importance of the Manager's relationship with the Council Chair

The Chair and Integrated Services Manager may check in and update one another every few weeks on current activities and information. The Manager may provide

- Support and advice to the Chair regarding upcoming tasks or issues
- Coaching on how to approach certain tasks or responsibilities

5. Appreciations and acknowledgements: Volunteer appreciation

Council members are volunteers who contribute their time, ideas and energy to help achieve the vision of welcoming communities that support good lives for all. Whether they are family members, individuals with developmental disabilities, service providers or community members, they are often driven to the work by their passion and their vision. Volunteers often derive satisfaction from their sense of influencing change, accomplishing goals, and the enjoyment of the relationships they share. Their experience is always enhanced when they know their efforts are appreciated and valued.

Managers can:

- Ensure others in CLBC acknowledge and appreciate the Council and members by notifying CLBC senior management about opportunities to acknowledge and appreciate the Council and / or individual members
- Acknowledge Council members at the Council meeting held in April of each year. April is National Volunteer Appreciation Month and this is a timely opportunity to thank members for their participation (appreciation through bringing a special dessert is a good example)

- Nominate the Council for a community recognition award if such awards are part of the community's culture and practice

6. The importance of networks in supporting the vision of more inclusive welcoming communities

Council members bring with them their social, business, professional, family and other networks. The Manager also brings his / her networks. Sometimes the goals and work of the Council and of CLBC can be furthered by drawing on these personal networks and professional connections.

Integrated Services Managers can support the Council to

- Tap into and use their networks when looking for information, promoting an idea or initiative, or seeking new volunteer members
 - ◆ this is often encouraged by asking such questions as “Who knows someone who ...?, who do you know that might ..., who do you know that might know someone who ...?”
 - ◆ if seeking a resource or a contact with local media, elected officials, health or recreation services, and so on, it is often helpful to name the person or system with whom the Council wants to connect, and then to solicit suggestions for relationships and opportunity
 - ◆ when recruiting new Council members, consider the grid developed by South Island Community Council that is available in this Community Council Handbook and on the Council website. It can help identify gaps in the demographics of the Council membership which can then be put out to members to explore through their personal networks
- Identify, learn about and initiate conversations with other community groups who may share some of the Council's goals, vision and concerns
 - ◆ allies and potential partners or groups willing to coordinate or collaborate their activities with the Council will increase the likelihood that Community Councils will positively impact attitudes and practices regarding inclusion

7. Community development: over a large geographic area

Councils represent a geographic area. For some, this includes towns and cities that may be a significant distance apart. Others may include a number of neighbourhoods that are quite different from one another and cover a wide territory even if they are close by. You can support your Council to

- Stay aware of the area it represents
 - ◆ provide a map or written details on the geography of your Council area, including identifying towns, neighbourhoods, and so on
 - ◆ Be intentional in identifying which areas are represented by current Council members and which are not identify one or two areas for recruitment or activities that are not currently represented by members

- are there any opportunities coming up in which you can profile the Council, for example the Chamber of Commerce, business improvement association, municipal council meeting, local or regional fair or celebration?
- is there an area which has identified a particular concern or opportunity regarding the community being more welcoming?; citizens from that area might be motivated to join the Council if the Council can help energize a local initiative
- Choose one new area in which to increase or begin to raise the Council's visibility
 - ◆ there may be a community event which Council members can support through volunteering and / or participating / attending
 - ◆ is there an area or a community / neighbourhood in which there has been a growth in the number of residents who have developmental disabilities
 - ◆ is there local media (newspaper or newsletter) that is regularly distributed to all residents which might be interested in sharing a good news story about the Council

8. Community development: Focusing on community assets

It is important for the Council and its members to share stories and information about positive examples of community inclusion.

- What people or organizations excel at offering hospitality and warmth to all, or demonstrate their passion about building an inclusive society?
- How can the Council and its members
 - ◆ support and promote these places, activities, and people and their good work in creating caring and inclusive communities?
 - ◆ help bridge connections between these people and organizations and others who are not yet aware of them?
- The Council might identify events and discussions about local community needs and ensure participation and representation of people with developmental disability in the discussion or an organizing committee
- Councils might bring community leaders together to see how they can collectively address issues, goals or concerns

9. The importance of well-run Community Council meetings

Your time and that of Council members is valuable. It is important that there is a good balance in the meeting between the business of being on Council (minutes, CLBC updates, member recruitment, work plans) and the work to achieve the intended outcomes of Council (strengthening community inclusion, sharing information with individuals with developmental disabilities and family members, providing input on CLBC initiatives and policy development). As you support the Council Chair, you can

- Review the agenda with an eye to achieving the balance described above
- At Council meetings encourage and support staying within assigned time limits and on topic

- Encourage different members to present or lead discussions on the agenda - increasing individual participation and adding diversity to the meeting is generally more interesting and engaging for all
- Support the Chair to start and end on time (and members to be present at the beginning)
- Encourage members to give feedback at the end of each meeting regarding participation, pace and flow of the agenda

10. What contributes to influencing decision-makers?

Councils often want to influence decision-makers in their communities to think about and act in support of strengthening and building more inclusive communities. There are several factors that contribute to successfully having such influence. They include

- Having a relationship with or connection to those who either make or influence decisions (this goes back to who are these people and who do you know that knows them or has a connection to them)
- Having accurate information about the issue. For example, if the issue is related to inclusive or welcoming local recreation facilities, it is important to gather accurate information about usage, limits, strengths, individual experiences. It is not sufficient to only be informed by a few people's experiences
- Having energy and time to invest. It takes time, and sometimes great patience, to pursue new connections, tap into existing relationships to gather accurate information, and get the ear of decision-makers. It is important for Councils to be realistic in designing strategies they can implement, and / or recruiting support from others who can help implement the strategies.
- Seeing opportunities that exist. There are times when the community is ready to examine its practices in a particular area and may be open to the Council's information and influence. For example, if the community is building or renovating a hospital or community clinic, planners may be open to hearing from individuals with developmental disabilities and families about their experiences and what would result in better service or a more welcoming environment.

11. Council meeting minutes create an important tool for moving the Council forward

Meeting minutes not only represent what was discussed and agreed to; they also frame the discussion and help keep members on track regarding commitments they have made to take on and complete tasks. The Manager and Chair can share responsibility for reviewing the minutes before they are circulated to ensure

- They reflect the meeting agenda and decisions
- They are written using respectful language
- There are no unnecessary comments
- They are circulated within one week of the meeting - this helps maintain momentum for the group, capturing what people need to do for the next meeting and what decisions have been made

12. Focusing on inclusion and welcoming communities

If Councils are going to contribute to creating a true spirit of community cooperation and collaboration to support good lives in welcoming communities, it is important that Councils see this as a goal for everyone who lives in the community, including people with developmental disabilities. This perspective includes some of the following ideas

- We need to find ways for everyone in community to roll up their sleeves and make community better; isolation affects us all, one way or another
- Councils can work with other individuals and organizations who care about creating hospitable and inclusive neighborhoods and communities for everyone, enhancing the likelihood that the interests and shared vision of many community groups and allies will succeed
- It is important for Councils to remember to engage in activities that foster belonging for everyone who lives in community and to provide focus and attention on how persons with developmental disabilities can participate in these activities and benefit from them