Mid-Ontario Rural CoP

**Attendees**

1. Pam Hanington, Poverty to Prosperity Huron-Perth
2. Jennifer Rojas, United Way Perth Huron
3. Lyn Smith, Child Poverty Action Network Renfrew County
4. Jill Umbach, Bruce Grey Poverty Task Force
5. Karen Roundpoint, Eastern Ontario Health Unit
6. Elaine Capes, Dufferin County Equity Collaborative
7. Natasha Pei, Tamarack Institute

**Round Robin: Plans for municipal elections by poverty reduction collaboratives**

Note: Explore the [Advocacy Strategy Framework](https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/publication/the-advocacy-strategy-framework-3/), by Centre for Evaluation Innovation

* Can adapt the audience categories for any advocacy campaign, including municipal elections. Will help organizers plot and visualize what tactics are being used for each category of audience to shift them from becoming aware -> committing to act differently -> behaviour change (ex. voting)
* [See an example here](https://f.hubspotusercontent20.net/hubfs/316071/GTI%20Module%202%20Appendix%202020.pdf?utm_campaign=VC_CoP&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-97iWRYv4vj_gGJsNgryzMUg0dyD2UArU9ZyMVvpKk8s9X8gQxodEHxTe6lqierD39c_0DP) (page 1-2)

**Cornwall, SDG & Akwesasne** – 16 electoral districts in total. All smaller groups pushing their own agendas. Ideally would like to bring them all together under the poverty reduction umbrella to form a municipal elections campaign.

**Dufferin County** – Government is two-tiered with Upper (County) level and Lower (town/community) level. The main priorities for the lower tier governments are roads – the source of most complaints and the biggest budget item.

Public education is physically challenging in their rural area. They are trying:

* Chamber of Commerce listing questions/responses from candidates that people can see in their own time
* Citizen group hosting an all-candidate debate
* Will use the Advocacy Strategy Framework to look at what messages/asks are in front of people, focusing on DCEC priorities: employment, housing and health equity

**Renfrew County** - Need to educate lower-income individuals about how powerful their vote is.

Most don't bother to vote because they think politicians don't care about them, and vote by face/name recognition. They don't understand which level of government does what and how their choice impacts Social Assistance rates, etc.

Would like to see someone put questions together that organizers can take to low-income voters to survey what they’d like to ask of candidates and what council should do for them.

And facts on which levels of government do what – especially municipal.

The Association of Ontario Municipalities has an [overview of municipal jurisdiction](https://www.amo.on.ca/about-us/municipal-101).

**Huron-Perth**: Pam & Jennifer will circulate a Municipal Election Toolkit that Joelle put together. It will be interactive and support the candidates with issues they’re responsible for, research and recommendations in key poverty areas such as income, homelessness, equity & diversity, safety and wellbeing, and mental health and addictions.

They’ll also do community engagement informing voters about trends in the democratic process (voter decline) in the last several years. People don’t see themselves as much in municipal politics and voter turnout tends to be even smaller than provincial, which was at its lowest in the past election.

Pathways to Prosperity officially includes Perth as well as Huron. Members will take individual candidates out for coffee. They’ll will identify who they think is most likely to win in their area and talk about anti-poverty issues from the coalition’s perspective. Relationship-building.

**Bruce Grey:** Figuring out how to adapt their Basic Income provincial election campaign. So far, they are using the phrasing “enough to thrive” and looking at how they can get municipalities to *reduce the cost* of living. They’ve been advised this is the best municipal-level tactic.

They’re also meeting with groups that are trying to bring more left-leaning candidates into municipal politics, as there are a lot of right-leaning candidates. It’s too partisan to support, but they are talking.

Won’t do it this time because of competing priorities with the opioid crisis, but previously Community Voices (people with lived/living experience) would do a version of coffee chats, inviting individual candidates to the table and asking them prepared/researched questions.

**Discussion:**

* We should be asking/informing voters of:

a) What issues you should/can be voting on

b) Your power as a voter

c) What your elected officials can do

* Need to engage young voters
* Best election resources:
  + AMO – [How Local Government Works](https://www.amo.on.ca/about-us/municipal-101/how-local-government-works) and [Municipal 101](https://www.amo.on.ca/about-us/municipal-101)
  + [OMSSAA](https://omssa.com/)
* The Canadian Index of Wellbeing lists “Democratic Engagement” as a factor of wellbeing
* Municipalities should be accountable/transparent – they should list candidate responses to election questions
* Public health practitioners should be lobbying harder on issues that affect health equity – but it’s seen as biting the hand that feeds you. There is a new report in 2021 from Canada’s Chief Public Health Officer that encourages this. <https://nccph.ca/projects/reports-to-accompany-the-chief-public-health-officer-of-canadas-report-2021/strengthening-community-connections-the-future-of-public-health>
* Most candidates are visible on social media and in local papers (no one reads the paper anymore). Especially young candidates, who are running environmentally friendly campaigns
* Are there any limits on what charities can do politically?
  + “As long as the public policy work you do is in furtherance of your charitable purpose as accepted by the Canada Revenue Agency, there are no longer government-imposed limits on how much of this work you do. As long as your board, donors, and other funders are with you, public policy work is one of the tools you can use to achieve your purpose.
  + <https://imaginecanada.ca/en/node/19269#:~:text=As%20long%20as%20the%20public,of%20this%20work%20you%20do>