



GUIDE | BUILDING YOUR CASE FOR A NEIGHBOURHOOD STRATEGY

Every city builds neighbourhoods with sidewalks, roads, houses, parks and arenas. Municipalities across Canada are realizing that it's not just about pavement and buildings, it's about the people who live, work and play in each neighbourhood. Cities are now developing neighbourhood strategies that help guide the departments, organizations and residents to work together to build healthy vibrant neighbourhoods. This guide is for municipal staff or community groups interested in building the case for the development of a neighbourhood strategy.

BACKGROUND

Over the past three decades, there has been a fundamental decline in informal social ties, tolerance, trust, political and civic engagement in our communities. Research shows that our actual experiences of being involved in a community have been steadily declining since the 1960s. This is particularly true for post-secondary students and older Canadians who are increasingly describing themselves as "lonely" and "dissatisfied" with life. The effects of isolation are not solely mental-health related either. The physical impact of social isolation has been likened to smoking 15 cigarettes a day, extreme loneliness can be twice as deadly as obesity.

SO WHAT DO WE DO?

Strengthening social ties creates the necessary foundation for positive community change, contributes to community resilience and, positively impacts individual health and well-being. A recent 3-year study conducted by the [Community Foundations of Canada](#) focused on the issue of belonging and its link to community. It concluded that people's experience of belonging is directly correlated to their subsequent willingness to contribute "to the common good" or to be engaged in the life of their community through activities such as voting and volunteering. The research also recommends that a deliberate and intentional effort was needed to relearn the skills of how to build neighbourhoods.

Why Develop a Neighbourhood Strategy?

"The whole exercise is that residents sit at the table alongside councillors, alongside municipal staff, and work through the issues together."

Johnson, the Hamilton City's director of neighbourhood development strategies

This guide will provide step-by-step instructions for bringing together your municipality, neighbourhood service organizations, local retail and residents to build a [common agenda](#) to create a healthy, vibrant and happy neighbourhood. Developing a neighbourhood strategy will help to guide programs, initiatives and construction within each neighbourhood so that it builds a greater sense of community.

BUILDING YOUR CASE

The purpose of a neighbourhood strategy is to align municipality, organizations and groups with residents' vision, values, gifts and assets. The important aspect of a neighbourhood strategy process is not to have a finished plan but to have and maintain a framework for the paths that should be followed to ensure the future of the community (1). A great neighbourhood strategy focuses on:

- Engagement,
- Visioning, goals and objectives,
- The planning process (not the plan itself)

The final product will be a collection of focus/theme areas, along with action steps and objectives of how to achieve these focus/theme areas.

This guide helps guide you in the first step to develop a neighbourhood strategy-building the case to your neighbourhood city staff, residents and Council. To build the case for a strategy there are four areas that will help to shape the “why” the neighbourhood needs to come together and develop a neighbourhood strategy.



DETERMINE YOUR VISION (WHAT'S A NEIGHBOURHOOD FOR?)

Determine why a community needs a neighbourhood strategy, what is the motivation behind wanting to have a strategy? Have issues precipitated the need? Remember that although there may be front of mind issues, that the strategy remains focused on all that the neighbourhood is responsible for. By answering these questions, you will engage your residents/stakeholders and help to inform those to whom you may need to ask for support or assistance. The first step is to figure out what the specific purpose(s) is for developing a strategy? Is it to get:

- Neighbours to know each other, to build community or social capital
- Residents participating in municipal community development decisions (increase power from the neighbourhood or “collective efficacy”)
- Citizens more involved in civic society (for example, increase voter turnout)/more residents using their gifts, skills and experiences to enhance the competence of the neighbourhood.

TOOLS:

- [Community Vision for Change](#) - This tool is helpful for collective impact initiatives. Although the leadership of the neighbourhoods will be the “Backbone Organization”, it helps develop a strong shared vision which creates a sense of commonality, builds trust amongst people and agencies and gives coherence to diverse activities.
- [Community Context Tool](#) - This tool will enable you to gain greater clarity about the issue or opportunity you are trying to address.
- [Refining Your Idea](#) - This Tool will help you clearly articulate your ideas, identify key benefits or features for specific stakeholders or audiences

Process for Engaging Influential Champions



COMMUNITY SCAN

Doing a community scan allows you to talk to residents in the neighbourhood, organizations, and groups to determine the scale of the strategy and if there support and potential champions are available. Find out as much about the residents, aspirations and issues and related issues as possible – including understanding any opposition to the issues.

1. Research the local data - talk to local groups and organizations.
2. Gather research on why building neighbourhoods will solve your problem and why something needs to be done.
 - [Canadian Community Foundation-Belonging](#)
 - [Social networks as important as exercise, diet across the span of our lives](#)
 - [Loneliness and social isolation are just as much a threat to longevity as obesity](#)
 - [Community Food Centres Canada Social isolation and the Value of Community Connection](#)
 - [Calgary Strong Neighbourhoods](#)
3. Talk to residents, groups and organizations about what they know and see as the possibilities for the neighbourhood.

Ways to Communicate Your Message

- One on one talk over coffee
- Get the agendas of community groups
- Participate in local festivals
- Create a fact sheet
- Websites, social media
- Host community conversations
- Develop presentations

4. Create a 1-2 page document that outlines what you learned that you can use as a communication tool.

TOOLS:

- [Infographics](#) - are a great way to share information and make it easier to understand. Here is a sample infographic.
- [Digital Storytelling tool](#) - This tool will help you develop your own digital storytelling to empower community members, educate stakeholders, and evaluate change.
- [Common Agenda](#) - This tool will assist in clarify shared issues that need to be addressed by using various strategies, factors, and outcomes.

ENGAGING NEIGHBOURS, CHAMPIONS OR PARTNERS

The next step is to understand the level of resident support for the potential neighbourhood strategy and clearly communicate why it is important to have a strategy. You will need to think about different neighbourhood stakeholders, champions or partners whose opinions on the issue are important. To be successful in gaining support, you will need to communicate your message effectively. You will need to think about the different perspectives and common challenges so that you can frame your communication to each target.

- Council member
 - Council may have differing views on what neighbourhood development is and the development of a common definition will need to be established.
 - Council may have little to no understanding of what neighbourhood development is and why it is important.
 - Have a political understanding of neighbourhood development and what it means for the city.
- Municipal Staff
 - Staff may have differing views on what neighbourhood development and the development common definition will need to be established.
 - Start to build relationships with each department and help to make the link between what they do and how it builds neighbourhoods - start with Community Development Staff, Planning, Recreation and Public Health.
- Presentation to neighbourhood groups and associations
 - Develop and use a block level communication and inclusion strategy. “Block Captains or Connectors” the point people. Need to build resident will and find the champions who understand and are willing to advocate to build the neighbourhood.
 - Work with those who show up, they will help to bring the message to leaders and hold them accountable.

This chart below outlines some of the main stakeholders you may want to connect with, the challenges they may face and opportunities to communicate with them.

Stakeholders	Barriers to Involvement	Opportunity
<p>Neighbourhood residents</p> <p>Changes in modern society are causing an increase in self-reported loneliness. We live in isolated family units, often living large distances away from our extended family and friends. There is also a growing reliance on social technology to connect with people rather than face to face interaction.</p> <p>Neighbours provide are an important source of connection that has been vital to human flourishing as long as friends and family have. Humans are social creatures and with the lack of human connection with family, friends and neighbours our lives suffer.</p>	<p>May not feel connected to the community - have never been personally asked to participate.</p> <p>Lack of time and lost skill to connect with neighbours</p> <p>Lack of knowledge on how to build community - Don't understand the current state of the local community and how to address issues</p> <p>No opportunity to participate - our streets are built with roads, sidewalks and houses. Unsure how to get involved or make a difference</p>	<p>Website/Social Media/Neighbour Data Collection to build awareness and understand what is the current knowledge and attitudes in the neighbourhood.</p> <p>Community Conversations - To build relationships and identify assets and aspirations in the community and develop a plan on what changes are needed in the neighbourhood to make it competent.</p> <p>Factsheet - Have a "benefits of neighbouring or neighbourhood" doc. to encourage people to get out and meet their neighbours and have fun.</p> <p>Coffee talks - Having coffee with identified block and neighbourhood champions.</p>
<p>Service organizations and providers</p> <p>Non-governmental organizations implement activities at the regional or city-wide level aimed at (relieving neighbourhoods of their responsibilities are often toxic to neighbourhood building) bringing about the desired improvement in the social wellbeing of individuals, groups and neighbourhoods.</p> <p>Community organizations are thought of as the context experts and take part in community planning, community action and mobilization and ultimately can have influence within larger systems.</p>	<p>Turf wars - organizations might compete more than collaborate.</p> <p>Lack of knowledge on their role in neighbourhood development- Don't understand the current state of the neighbourhood and how to address issues.</p> <p>Activities don't align with what is needed- community groups have limited resources and may not know what is needed in the community.</p>	<p>Presentation at meetings - To build awareness and provide examples where there is opportunity to work together and gaps that they could address.</p> <p>Website/Social Media to build awareness and understand why building neighbourhoods is important and the role organizations and groups play.</p> <p>Factsheet- Have a call to action to encourage groups to support residents to build community.</p> <p>Coffee talks - Having coffee with identified champions.</p>

<p>Community organizations are usually made up of residents who volunteer their time and may not have the skills for neighbourhood development.</p>		
<p>City/Municipal Departments</p> <p>Cities set local development priorities and allocate public funds for community development initiatives. They decide on the budget and overall planning for the regions. They oversee the disbursement of land, housing, and other city-owned resources. There are many departments that carry out the work and often work in silos.</p>	<p>Lack of knowledge - don't understand the impacts of loneliness and how the city could play a role.</p> <p>Lack of collaboration among departments and citizens - Staff and departments don't see link in what they do and how it affects neighbourhood development and the role citizens play in planning.</p> <p>Policies that hinder or prevent activities from happening - The development of policies that prevent or hinder neighbourhood development such as no street closures or the process is so difficult that it's hard to apply.</p>	<p>Presentation - Present to council the research and solutions to building neighbourhoods and outline the benefits of supporting the community.</p> <p>Workshop - to bring together the city departments and council together to present the results of the open space conversations and educate around community engagement and how to work together.</p> <p>Coffee talks - Having coffee with staff. Talk about what great work they are doing and how to support them in making better neighbourhoods.</p>

TOOLS:

- [4 M's of Effective Communication tool](#) - This tool is designed to help map out the most effective approach to continuously communicate your efforts.
- [Community Reference System](#) - This is a process to allow a community to determine the participation of its own members. The Community Reference System is an effective way to build awareness and “buzz” about your gathering.
- [Conversation Café](#) - The Conversation Café offers an opportunity to share our humanity through simple conversations so that we can understand one another better. It is a simple but wonderful tool for hosting fantastic and meaningful conversations.

FORM A LEADERSHIP TEAM

Now that you have momentum and people on board, who is going to lead the process? Is it the City, an Association or group? There needs to be a lead to provide leadership and support in the early stages of putting together a neighbourhood strategy (meeting space, clerical support, etc.). A leadership team will play a key role to oversee the planning process. The key to a successful leadership team is to form a diverse group consisting of individuals that have the trust and respect of others in the community. Make sure you have representatives from city staff, municipal government, organizations, groups and

residents who can commit the time to develop the strategy. Once you have formed your team you will need to work on:

- Purpose of the team
- Roles and responsibilities
- Common Language

TOOLS:

- [Collaborative Government Framework](#) - This tool will help you to understand the core elements of leadership.
- [Planning Your Backbone Support](#) - This tool is designed to help you assess and further develop your Collective Impact initiative's backbone support infrastructure.
- [Sample Terms of Reference](#)
- [Gives and Gets](#) - This tool will help each individual of the team fully explore and articulate their personal needs and potential benefits in a constructive way to ensure that the hopes and needs of each team member are heard.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THOSE WHO HAVE DEVELOPED NEIGHBOURHOOD STRATEGIES

Cities across Canada have engaged in neighbourhood strategies and here are some of the lessons learned based on their experience:

- You need to be flexible, creative and resilient as the process can be very organic and dynamic depending on the voices involved. What works in one area may not work in another.
- Build relationships internally and externally- this brought out new people and relationships
- Be very realistic about expectations- Resident driven- they figure out what needs to happen and who can make it happen
- Reality vs perception - ask for input at every step of the way and this will help to build trust
- Be clear about expectations about the work and involvement. Identify roles and responsibilities as well as expectations of involvement as well as process – e.g. Does the planning team actually speak for the entire neighbourhood or their interests?
- Have departments on board before going to the community. City staff need to embrace collaboration across departmental teams, as resident-led initiatives are rarely bound to a single department's expertise.
- Municipalities are governed by legislation, municipalities do not have influence over provincial or federal policy and funding decision. Municipal staff want to assist residents in community

change but have to do it within their boundaries and may need to get council approval and there are some things staff cannot change.

- Citizen advocacy to get an endorsement from the Council - residents lead the deputations and the ask for the project. However, residents need to understand that staff report to the Council and not to the residents and that Council is the decision makers.
- A firm commitment to work together, be flexible and collaborate to find solutions is essential – for both residents and City staff – to achieve a resident-led, City supported approach to neighbourhood development.
- “Not for us without us” – ensure openness, transparency and ensure residents are involved wherever possible through the process.

RESOURCES

- [Developing a Community Strategic Plan - a Guide for Local Officials](#)
- *The Loneliness Epidemic*, The Independent, by Rebecca Harris, March 30, 2015
- *One Neighborhood At a Time*, New York Times Op-Ed by David Brooks, May 17, 2016
- *How Social Isolation is Killing Us*, The New York Times, by Dhruv Khullar, December 22, 2016
- *All the Lonely People*, UC Observer, by Andre Picard, June 2016
- [Exploring Belonging](#), Vancouver Foundation

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