



Toronto Neighbourhood Centres  
Community Development Renewal Initiative

Transferable Strategies & Case Studies  
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## Assessing Community Development in your Agency

### Issue:

To what degree is community development a part of your agency's activities?  
How can an agency assessment support making organizational changes for community development?

### Background:

Having a clear understanding of the current role of community development in an agency is an important first step when attempting to (re)ignite changes that support CD. Revitalizing interest and commitment to community development requires rediscovering what CD means for an agency and understanding which of its activities currently involve CD. Is there evidence of CD in the work of front line staff, coordinators, middle management? Are the senior management and the board executives committed to CD? Is CD engrained in the culture of every part of the agency, or only in specific program areas or initiatives?

### Solution:

Completing an agency assessment and a staff assessment can be effective for gauging the level of CD activity in an agency. If carried out at the onset of an effort to revitalize CD, these assessments provide important insight into where an agency is at, and areas of focus that hold promise in terms of a CD-related agency change process.

In TNC CD-Renewal workshops agency assessments were used to survey a core group of CD staff about the various types of CD activities done in their agency and investigate programs that integrate CD. This core group was ideally comprised of staff members who are involved in and aware of CD work and who completed the agency assessment survey as a group.

To create a point of common understanding for survey respondents, a CD definition (i.e., TNC CD-Renewal definition) was presented at the beginning of the survey. Assessment questions reflect types of activities that social service agencies may engage in based on their diverse programs and structure.

Some of the questions asked include:

- Does your organization engage in the following activities?
- Does your organization conduct any outreach activities?
- Does your organization have a leadership development training program?

Similarly, an broader assessment can be used with every staff person in an organization to initiate discussion about the relationship between CD and their work. This assessment does not require staff to be knowledgeable of CD, rather staff are encouraged to complete it regardless their level of involvement or familiarity with CD. Again, a CD definition is also provided at the beginning of the survey to create a shared understanding for respondents throughout of the survey. Some of the questions include:

- Would you say your work affects changes in any of the following which may create inequality and exclusion for community members?
- What types of activities do you engage in that you consider CD work?
- Do you have an opportunity to integrate CD into your work?

Both assessments can be used as baseline surveys and repeated periodically to measure progress in CD awareness, activity and integration throughout an agency's CD 'renewal' efforts.

## **Results**

Agency Assessments help to:

- Provide insight into the types of CD activities in which the agency is involved.
- Reveal program areas that have or do not have a CD focus.
- Highlight how staff view the relationship between their work and CD.
- Provide a baseline indicator of how staff understand and engage in community development in relation to their work over time.
- Identify the different ways that CD is integrated in agency activities.

## **Analysis**

Engaging in community development often means very different things depending on an individual's knowledge and experience in CD as well as the type of program they work in. Understanding these differences will assist in developing appropriate interventions for staff and making necessary changes to practices, policies and programs to enable an environment conducive to CD.

## **Resources**

Agency Assessment, TNC CD-Renewal Project.

Staff Assessment, TNC CD-Renewal Project.