



Toronto Neighbourhood Centres
Community Development Renewal Initiative

Transferable Strategies & Case Studies
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Defining Community Development and Examples of Agency-Based CD activities

Issue:

Agencies may find it helpful to use an initial definition of CD to help clarify what is meant by the term “community development”. This document presents a “working definition” of CD and a list of Agency-based CD activities that were developed to support discussions facilitated by the TNC CD-Renewal initiative.

Background:

In speaking of “Community Development” during the TNC CD-Renewal Initiative, we wanted a definition that would refer to activities that built upon and moved beyond processes like community engagement, outreach, leadership development and promoting resident participation in service or program planning.

Community development can include all of these approaches and more, but we felt that it must also include some intentional focus on naming and addressing system-level issues that affect whole communities or groups of people.

A community development process may begin with the provision of services and opportunities for individuals to gain access to the supports they require. But CD occurs when an organization places these individual capacity-building interventions into a broader context, and actively supports community members to achieve personal empowerment and to pursue collective action.

This involves supporting individuals and groups to address the policies, practices and conditions that affect their lives – mobilizing the voice and power of those who are not typically included in decision-making.

Working Definition of CD:

CD is working collaboratively to create connections that mobilize people and resources to resist, reduce and end social and economic inequality. Through this activity, capacity is built continuously to improve collective well-being.

Five principles that we feel are critical to pursuing community development are that it be:

- **Group-focused:** Connects individuals sharing common concerns.

- **Bottom-up:** Engages those affected by challenges, ensuring they set and drive the agenda for change.
- **Inclusive:** Ensures community members of diverse backgrounds and capacities are able to participate in meaningful ways.
- **Empowering:** Facilitates an understanding about broader structures that people experience individually as exclusion and disadvantage.
- **Seeks System-Change:** Addresses root causes and systemic barriers that create conditions of inequality and exclusion.

Some Examples of CD Activity in a Community Agency Setting

- Develop policy papers on issues of concern to participants/clients/constituents
- Conduct research on issues of concern to participants/clients/constituents
- Provide Community Development training for board members
- Provide Community Development training for staff
- Provide support/assistance to community groups working on social issues
- Have a dedicated CD manager/leader within the organization
- Have board members who are/were clients of the agency
- Provide space for individuals or community groups to meet, network, organize
- Act as a trustee for a smaller organization that is just starting out
- Integrate CD perspectives into structures of an organization, including: Board/volunteer orientation; Fundraising events/plans for CD work; Interview questions for recruiting board/volunteers; Board, volunteer description of duties; staff job descriptions; work plans, strategic plan, agency goals and objectives; Staff orientation or ongoing training; hiring processes; Policies and procedures
- Link with dissimilar organizations in the community including radical/advocacy groups to address issues of social change
- Link with like-minded organizations in the community to address issues of social change
- Partner with other organizations to develop CD plans
- Organize community forums on issues of concern to clients/community
- Mobilize the voice to those who are normally unheard or ignored
- Give clients/staff brochures/information about relevant issues and campaigns
- Encourage clients/participants to become active in political issues
- Encourage client/staff participation in key campaigns on social issues
- Lobby MPs, MPPs and/or city councilors for reforms that reduce inequalities
- Facilitate clients' involvement in community boards, advisory committees etc.
- Hold focus groups/surveys with clients/participants to determine emerging issues
- Actively work to change root causes of discrimination & systemic barriers
- Actively address issues of diversity and marginalization (i.e. issues of race, class, sexism, immigration status, disability, sexual orientation etc)
- Work through an anti-oppression framework

Resources:

For other definitions of CD see TNC CD-Renewal summary of on-line definitions posted at <http://neighbourhoodcentres.ca/torontocd/index.htm>