

# Community Development Policy Initiative

*Communities Talk: Results of Community Consultation Phase*



## **Introduction**

This document reports a summary of comments made at community meetings held throughout Nova Scotia during the consultation phase of the Community Development Policy Initiative. This phase took place in October and November of 2003, and occurred from one end of the Province to the other.

The comments expressed in this document are the opinions of the participants in the consultations and are not meant to represent independently verified factual information or government policy.

## **Background**

Opportunities for Prosperity, Nova Scotia's economic growth strategy, made developing regional capacity one of the Province's seven strategic priorities. The Strategy also promised to develop a comprehensive community economic development (CED) policy.

Nova Scotia's communities - large and small, urban and rural - are all confronting change, giving rise to the questions: Where are the best opportunities? The key challenges? What can communities do about them? How can Governments best help?

Government reviewed the work of several organizations actively involved in CED: the Regional Development Authorities (RDAs), the Sustainable Communities Initiative, the Coastal Communities Network, the Black Business Initiative, le Conseil de développement économique de la Nouvelle-Écosse, and others.

Three lessons emerged. First, Nova Scotia communities can successfully take charge of their own future. Second, communities want to lead community development but they do expect and need help and support from government. Third, the term "community economic development" should be replaced by a more comprehensive term – one that encompasses the social, environmental and cultural features of communities as well as their economics.

As a result, Government has begun to develop a Community Development Policy that will define government's role in supporting communities to increase their capacity to become sustainable.

To move work ahead, Nova Scotia has established an interdepartmental Community Development Advisory Group to prepare a policy defining Government's role in helping communities increase their sustainability. The Advisory Group includes 32 representatives from 24 Provincial Government Departments and Offices. The Office of Economic Development is the lead organization for the Initiative and handles the day-to-day requirements.

The consultations reported in this document have provided valuable insights and direction to the Advisory Group charged with preparing the new Community Development Policy. The starting point is Government's belief that communities themselves have the primary leadership role for their own development. The Government of Nova Scotia is committed to supporting communities and to providing them with the tools they need to develop their own capacity for prosperity over the long term.

Part of Government's commitment is to get out of the way – to ensure that Government's decisions and the way they are made help rather than hinder community efforts to increase their viability. Another part of the commitment is to work more collaboratively with communities and with our own Provincial Government colleagues to identify program and policy opportunities and work together to tackle challenges to community development across the province.

These are the main reasons for the community development policy initiative. The policy is not designed to cure all the problems communities face, but to help communities respond to whatever challenges arise. Government's role is to provide information, expertise, guidance and other resources as needed, community-by-community, because each is unique. We have a responsibility to coordinate our efforts – government-to-government, and government-to-community – so that communities are able to build the kind of prosperous and sustainable future they envision for themselves.

## **Process**

The Office of Economic Development worked with the Regional Development Authorities to organize regional meetings similar to focus-group sessions in communities across the Province (21 in total). The aim was to attract participants with a variety of experiences and viewpoints. Economic Development worked with the Development Authorities to ensure a wide cross section of opinions.

In addition to the regional meetings, there were also meetings with communities of interest, and various Government Departments. In total, approximately 500 people attended the sessions throughout Nova Scotia.

In advance of each meeting, participants received a copy of "A Discussion Paper on Community Development." The Government accepted a variety of written submissions from those who were unable to attend meetings.

Meetings opened with a brief presentation by Economic Development as background. Community members then considered a variety of questions relating to community development pertinent to their areas.

Each participant subsequently received a copy of the notes of the meeting they attended, to ensure that the flavor of the meeting had been adequately captured. Those notes form the basis of this document.

## **Principles**

The Discussion Paper listed a number of principles. The feedback at the sessions revealed the following views on the Principles:

### **Sustainability:**

- Some felt this was the most important principle.
- To others, this term signified maintenance rather than creativity or the ability to be entrepreneurial or take calculated risks, etc.
- Sustainability should be clarified to mean the continued creation and cyclical development of best practices.

### **Democratic Decision-making:**

- Some liked the idea that democratic decision-making assumes everyone is included, that citizens are actively engaged and involved in decision-making.
- Questions came up about what methods are in place for the community to measure accountability of the Government decision-making process? Communities find it hard to identify the source of decisions and cannot find an avenue to provide input.
- Community groups feel they spend a lot of time and energy being accountable and conducting evaluations. When they receive government funding, organizations often spend more time on the accountability requirements than on the community development project itself. While evaluations are important, processes need to be easier and more emphasis needs to be placed on the results achieved.

### **Partnerships:**

- Need to define what partnership means.

### **Focus on Community Assets:**

- Focus should not be exclusively on assets, as communities often have assets they have no control over (e.g. Community Colleges, etc).

### **Respect for Local Values:**

- It is important to respect the variety of local values within communities. However, in some cases, it is necessary to challenge local values and encourage new ways of thinking.
- Communities need to work toward a common vision and goals that are distilled into easy-to-understand components.

### **Social Inclusion:**

- A sense of belonging is important for all Nova Scotians and an important element of community development. Some participants said social inclusion must be active as opposed to token. Others wanted to ensure that everyone has the chance to take part in the development of their community, and therefore they called on Government to encourage inclusion actively, in its own processes and with its own stakeholders.

Participants recommended that the following principles be added, as they form important foundations of community development:

#### **Valuing Volunteerism**

#### **Local Management of Local Resources**

#### **Innovation**

#### **Commitment to Communication:**

- From Government to community, and between Government Departments.

**Adaptability:**

- A Community Development Policy should be flexible enough to be utilized by the many different communities in Nova Scotia.

**Bilingualism:**

- Should be seen throughout the community-development process.

Other notes:

- Some principles contradict each other. Consider an overarching principle to combat contradictions or simply recognize the diversity of opinions.
- Principles must acknowledge rural/urban divide. Nova Scotia does best on a balance of urban and rural.
- Many want to see Government's commitment to these principles in monetary as well as policy terms.
- Need to be careful of the vocabulary used. Try not to use 'buzz words'. Often people in Government will understand the terms used, but the larger community may not.

## **Role of Government**

**Conceptual**

Most communities identified the following as important roles for Government to play in community development:

Facilitators, helping communities through support and training; and Navigators, helping to show communities the way through many processes and procedures where Government has the expertise.

Communities identified the following as an important role for government NOT to play:

Managers. Communities believe management from the centre creates learned helplessness. Communities want development initiatives to come from them and believe that community members should be the managers of their own projects.

**Tangible**

In addition to conceptual changes, participants also discussed a number of concrete steps Government can take to improve the way it functions:

- Reduce red tape
- Speed up service delivery
- Develop a comprehensive strategy for in-migration through international immigration and domestic relocation, including a system where skilled immigrants would stay in small communities for a pre-determined length of time to qualify for Canadian citizenship
- Re-organize departments. For example, divide Municipal Affairs into Urban and Rural Affairs

- Conduct more and regular consultation on issues that concern communities, such as the Community Development Policy consultation process
- Include Deputy Ministers at consultation sessions, to ensure that Government fully understands the impact of policy decisions on different areas of the Province
- Use local data to a greater extent to truly reflect local conditions and supplement a general reliance on Statistics Canada data
- Establish a single point of contact \* a Department, Minister and Deputy Minister with responsibility for Community Development and a staff for community members to work with. Given that no single aspect of community development stands alone, change in one area of Government can positively or negatively affect different community organizations at the same time. Because government activities can have widespread and often differing effects, participants believe the need for a single responsibility centre is paramount.

Communities also felt it important for the Province to communicate its vision of the future and the role of communities within it, to make the job of communities easier when developing their own visions.

Participants indicated they would like Government to demonstrate increased openness to fresh ideas, and the flexibility to mold existing programs to today's circumstances. They also want consistency in any post-election transition from one administration to the next. Achieving long-term sustainability is difficult enough without dramatic shifts in approach that can accompany any change in Government.

Participants underlined the need for civil servants to clearly understand and consider all the ramifications of the policies they administer on the residents of particular communities. As an example, they said social workers should use consistent information.

Participants feel Government should advocate for communities with the Federal Government, seeing that as an important part of many Government activities.

## **Role of Community**

For the purposes of this document, the role of community has been broken down into two sections: *Taking the Initiative* and *Communication*.

### **Taking the Initiative**

One of the clearest messages coming from the meetings was the belief that community development must come from the community, not from an outside body. Because communities must feel a sense of responsibility for their own success, taking the initiative is vital. The community must communicate clearly, take responsibility, and lobby actively. It must identify gaps and develop clear goals to fill those gaps. It must provide action plans and explain clearly to Government what it needs. Leadership, vision and cooperation are critical components of taking the initiative.

Communities must grasp opportunities by taking stock of local assets, and finding ways to control and direct these assets into local, value-added production. For example, Nova Scotia is rich in natural resources, yet community assets can go elsewhere for processing even when the capability exists at home.

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Communities repeatedly mentioned the necessity for a long-term vision and suggested the task could be made easier with a better understanding of the Province's long-term vision. Participants believe it is the role of the community to ensure that all its members have an opportunity to contribute to the consultative process.

Some participants \* particularly students \* felt that if communities want power over their future, they must exercise it. They said Government would have power over community direction only if communities give it up.

By working together to keep local direction strong, communities feel they can integrate local knowledge in a way that makes their needs and strengths more apparent. Participants believe big business gets ahead because it is organized, goal-oriented and equipped with the tools to accomplish its objectives and they believe communities must learn to think and act the same way.

### **Communication**

Participants emphasized that everyone needs to speak the same "language" if good communication and understanding are to be achieved. Communities understand that differing roles will result in differing professional jargon and recognized the need to minimize the differences to understand each others' needs and abilities.

Communities understand that they need to keep residents aware of current events because a healthy community is an informed community. Participants suggested that the Welcome Wagon Program is an example of a community program that does a good job of welcoming newcomers and keeping them informed. Participants also suggested using more information outlets, such as bulletin boards in local grocery stores and community suppers, to get the word out about community events, etc.

Participants recognized communication as a valuable two-way street that extends beyond community to Government. Government wants to be kept up-to-date on the issues facing communities, along with their possible solutions. Communities must educate Government on the barriers they find within various policies that are impeding development and preventing communities from taking advantage of opportunities.

## **Working Together**

Communities want to co-operate with Government to develop plans that help communities reach their goals and say government can assist by allocating funding for the planning process. But before doing so, communities urge Government to make sure that somebody is not already doing the same work or dealing with the same issue.

Pride emerged as another consistent theme \* pride in community assets and the ability of community to be good financial managers and planners.

Participants believe communities and Government both have a role to play in encouraging local pride, through some of the following activities:

- Buy locally
- Invest in local businesses
- Increase awareness of how money invested in the home community stays in the home community for further investment and economic benefit to the area
- Teach local history in all Nova Scotia schools to strengthen knowledge about Nova Scotia culture
- Provide scholarships for mature students funded by Government and community groups
- Establish community fairs or trade shows, where communities could market their assets to increase visitation and cross-migration.

In calling on Government to show more teamwork, some participants identified the current Emergency Measures Organization structure as a good example of the kind of teamwork that works well, with three levels of Government in the same physical facility.

Communities feel teamwork will benefit the Province and the region, as opposed to a situation where Departments, Government or Provinces compete with each other. In summary, they expressed the view that cooperation is another name for community.

## **Challenges and Opportunities**

To understand how Government can be more effective in assisting communities, first there has to be an understanding of the issues communities are dealing with, both the challenges and the opportunities.

While enjoying the high quality of life mentioned at every meeting, Nova Scotia's communities face challenges similar in nature to those faced elsewhere in Canada. Many communities have developed unique solutions to their problems, while others have modified the solutions of others to fit local situations.

Participants called on Government to help them transfer information about these solutions. Many suggested a database to organize community-based projects and the inclusion of specific practical information on the failure or progress of each program or project. Community organizations also want clear information on opportunities. Another suggestion involved a directory of government programs and services that could include positive information about community successes.

Participants felt that as policies change and new developments occur, these should be communicated regularly to both municipalities and the Regional Development Authorities. Similarly, communities want to be kept abreast of Government's priorities on infrastructure, health, roads and transportation, education, recreation and arts and culture.

Government-to-government communication is important too. Participants think government departments should exchange ideas with each other regularly on their priorities, challenges and policy initiatives. They also supported the need for Government to promote the Province's assets to national and international audiences.

### **Bedroom Communities**

While population decline is a problem in most areas, others are facing dramatic increases. Rapid growth in communities presents a new set of challenges, often leading to the formation of "bedroom communities" from which people commute to work. Such communities have transient populations, which may lack strong attachments to their communities. Communities have an opportunity to develop a sense of belonging and ownership within new residents.

### **Immigration**

Some participants suggested immigration could be a possible solution for declining populations. Increased recognition of international credentials would encourage more immigrants to come to Nova Scotia. In turn, this would encourage more immigrants to choose to live here, as there would be an existing community from a similar background.

### **Environment**

The environment is an integral part of a community's ability to develop and sustain itself. Communities want to ensure that Government understands the importance of environmental sustainability. They want to see a commitment to the concept, including recognition that without a healthy environment all other aspects of development are diminished in importance. Some participants noted that water quality and quantity are challenges for many in rural areas while air quality can pose problems for those with environmental sensitivities.

### **Development**

Many of those who took part in the consultations believe Nova Scotia has rich and diverse natural resources, beautiful surroundings, and a variety of resulting employment options and opportunities. But not all communities are looking for the same kind of development, and not all the people within any given community share the same goals. Development and growth are the goals of many participants; others said they wish to maintain the peace and tranquility at the core of many Nova Scotia communities.

Within this general framework, some of the opportunities for development emerged as follows:

## Education

### *Halifax/Dartmouth Transportation*

In Metro Halifax, some residents voiced concern over the toll bridges and how they impede the free flow of traffic from Halifax to Dartmouth. Many felt Dartmouth would be more viable for development and growth if the bridges were free. They also felt a commuter train is part of the solution for those wanting to live in rural areas and work in the urban core, and that a train service would help cut down pollution.

### *Nova Scotia/New Brunswick Border Issues*

Some participants who live in the border area said service boundaries should extend into New Brunswick, and vice versa, health care being one example. Others believe border residents should be able to visit the closest hospital, regardless of whether it is in Nova Scotia or New Brunswick.

The Sunday shopping issue is another factor affecting the health and viability of border communities. Open stores on Sunday in New Brunswick have the potential to hurt stores in Nova Scotia border areas, which currently cannot open on Sundays. Nova Scotia citizens will decide this issue in a plebiscite in the fall of 2004.

A different but related opportunity is the Halifax/Moncton corridor. For those within corridor boundaries, the concept could provide opportunities for commercial development. For those Nova Scotia communities outside the boundaries, the challenge could lie in finding ways to connect their local economies with the main corridor.

### **A New Education Model**

Some participants suggested a model whereby students could learn through a variety of techniques that involve them in the creation and evaluation of projects and permit a greater sense of ownership of their work. This approach requires teamwork, in addition to the ability to create and complete individual tasks.

Teaching local values stood out as one of the most predominant recommendations to improve education in Nova Scotia. Values like supporting local businesses and offering leadership for the community-development process.

### **Community Involvement**

A number of participants suggested that community-development and leadership-development classes in all local schools would be a way for Government to ensure that students who graduate from the public-school system are meeting a variety of needs within the local community.

Participants talked about inclusion as another success factor in education. Communities said representation on school boards should reflect the cultural makeup of a school. They believe Government has a part to play in ensuring that happens.

### **Testing for Disabilities**

People in lower socio-economic brackets often feel their children are at a disadvantage. Some participants said a lack of disposable income prevents students from taking part in extra-curricular activities and that if these children feel left out, their interest in attending school and learning could suffer. A call was made for more accurate education testing to identify learning disabilities for those students who find themselves ill-suited to the mainstream educational system.

### **Technology, Counseling & Campuses**

Communities recognize that technology can help people get an education. Some participants pinpointed increased community use of the current technological education infrastructure as a way to deliver educational content.

They also targeted enhancements to career-counseling programs as a means to help students prepare for the future. These participants believed counselors need backup resources to help them get the most useful information to students. They said counselors also need to provide more in-depth information on the variety of options open to students, especially in the trades, and especially in students' home communities and through technology.

The participants offered the opinion that while some young people may want or need to leave their communities to get the education they seek, others might elect to stay if they knew their options. For example, satellite campuses and technology are paving the way for new methods of education.

### **Apprenticeships**

Communities in general are also calling for more accessible apprenticeship programs and changes to the community-college system that emphasize the vocational-school model, to help them meet the looming skills shortage. Participants believe vocational schools provided opportunities for students outside the mainstream who have the ability and desire for an education in the trades.

### **Nova Scotia History**

Many participants felt that schools and communities should do more to educate students on Nova Scotia's history and culture, to create a sense of ownership in our communities. They said communities have the power to instill a sense of belonging and pride in their young people, who in turn will create their own opportunities within their home areas.

There were concerns about the ability to achieve post-secondary education, given the high cost of tuition. There is a feeling that Nova Scotia universities should focus less on educating people from outside the Province (international students), and more on those who already live here. Some participants believed that bringing in international students who can afford to pay the large fees leaves less room for local students.

Some student participants noted that while they are comfortable at the high school level, they often feel left behind during the transition to post-secondary education, and that students from other areas are more prepared.

Most who try to re-enter the educational system as adults face a variety of obstacles, such as expensive child care (cannot take time off work) and limited means of transportation. Many cannot qualify for student loans; still more cannot pay them back.

### **Meeting Student Debt and Employment Needs**

Many students who do go on to attend post-secondary institutions graduate with high debt loads. Participants said this forces indebted students to go to work as soon as possible, which often means they must move to urban areas even many would prefer to stay in their home communities.

Communities understand they must offer many things to encourage youth to stay or return to communities. Some participants said that offering loan assistance might help some areas keep young people in their communities. This would allow them to take jobs that are lower paying than the ones they could find in larger centres but that would still be relevant to their skills and also allow them to meet their financial commitments.

### **Recruiting Graduating Students**

Some of the participating students indicated that the Federal Government runs a very active and attractive recruitment program. They said the Provincial Government has an opportunity to initiate a public service recruitment program which would actively seek graduates, fight the depopulation problem, and also work to combat possible gaps developed by a generation retiring from public service positions.

### **Educating Program-Delivery Staff**

The timing of acceptance into training programs also presents a challenge for students, participants said. Acceptance often comes too late to organize financial assistance. An opportunity exists to highlight these issues with program-delivery agents to ensure programs are as beneficial as possible and to change the ones that may be problematic.

## **Employment**

The community consultations confirmed that changing employment trends affect all communities in Nova Scotia. Some of the most dramatic changes are occurring in the natural-resource sector: new technologies mean job losses in some places but opportunities in others.

In many Nova Scotia communities the pool of jobs is small. Competition is stiff for higher-paying jobs, while there are few middle-level jobs for which to compete. Part-time employment exists, but these jobs are not ideally suited to families (shift work, etc.), and tend not to provide the income a family needs.

Participants want employers to understand how difficult it is to live on minimum wage. Some suggested that it makes more economic sense to receive social assistance than to work at a low-wage job. There are still many who work a variety of part-time jobs to make ends meet, and these people are not paying into pension plans.

Many Nova Scotians who have started their own businesses said they face numerous obstacles too. For example, small-business owners often have to put their personal finances on the line. Many spend the majority of their time keeping the businesses afloat, leaving little time for growth at the same time that they have to cope with factors like high insurance rates that heighten risk.

Small businesses dominate the business world in Nova Scotia. Most of Nova Scotia's businesses are classified as small or medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), with less than 50 employees. Some communities called for the Government to facilitate small-business transfers from older to younger business owners. Frequently, businesses close their doors when the original owner retires, rather than transferring the enterprise to someone else.

The business-occupancy tax is also an obstacle for business owners, one that participants said business owners in the rest of the country do not face. Downtown-versus-strip-mall competition is another problem for many small towns. Participants explained that businesses are setting up in malls, typically just outside town boundaries, because of more business-friendly tax rates than in the downtown area. The result is a struggling town core.

Community recognition of these taxation issues provides the opportunity to review taxation laws and discuss reconfiguring those which no longer meet the needs of the community as a whole. Specifically, communities called for Government to consider the elimination of the business-occupancy tax.

Communities also called for Government to provide more incentives to businesses interested in locating in rural areas. They would like to see provincial dollars invested in local companies, organizations and services.

## **Skills**

Many participants are concerned that Nova Scotia is on the brink of a skills shortage in industries such as forestry, fishing, agriculture, construction, trucking, etc. Shortages are already being felt. Customers and employers alike noted difficulty finding trades people in most fields.

Along with the looming skills shortage, participants noted drastic changes within the trades that have made them more technological than ever before. They said companies now look for those with specialized skills to operate expensive machinery. With these changes come challenges for those who have been involved in trades for many years and who may now find themselves in a position where they are unqualified.

There were also challenges noted for those who are entering trades courses. Training is expensive and apprenticeship programs can be difficult to complete. Many students who might do well in trades do not get the opportunity because they lack Grade 12. Participants said these people can fall between the cracks and end up using Government programs such as social assistance rather than achieving their potential.

A number of opportunities exist to bridge the skills gap. Increased training opportunities are letting more people take advantage of skills-development programs. The Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) is offering more courses and allowing room for more students. A commitment to the apprenticeship program lets students gain the valuable hands-on experience they need to work for many industrial companies.

### **Adding Value to Traditional Occupations**

Current opportunities exist in the traditional trades, particularly for trades in industries that are increasingly adding value to what they produce.

Traditional, resource-based jobs have long been the backbone of the Nova Scotia economy. While changes are taking place within their sectors, they continue to offer many opportunities. Agriculture is providing new options. Many small farms are vibrant and organic produce is becoming more popular. Nova Scotia is also close and easily accessible to American markets. Current opportunities exist in the traditional trades, particularly for trades in industries that are increasingly adding value to what they produce.

Those who have been working in these industries for years have vast amounts of knowledge. Communities would like to see Government combine local knowledge with that of specialists to fully understand the scope of current natural resources.

### **Smart Growth**

Government should place more regulation on land developers. Community members often feel that big businesses come into their communities and do whatever they like with available resources, not necessarily to the community's benefit.

### **Decentralization**

Centralization of services has often been blamed for forcing people to move into urban areas in search of employment. Communities recommend that civil service jobs be decentralized to a variety of communities. Technology can help civil servants work in remote locations, with the possibility of commuting to the main office on regular occasions.

This would encourage educated people to stay in rural areas because they could find gainful employment there. Relocation of jobs instead of people would provide spin-offs to communities, with levels of service-delivery becoming higher in rural areas than it is at present. Decentralization would bring other benefits, including the construction of Government buildings, creating direct employment for local trades people.

Communities feel that if Government is trying to encourage the private sector to settle in rural areas, then Government should lead by example.

### **Employment Opportunity**

For those in marginalized groups, there was a call for more employment equity programs to help them find employment. The InStep Program has been successful, but participants feel it needs more Government support.

### **Recruitment Incentive Program**

Communities would like to see Government trying to recruit and retain young workers, perhaps through an incentive program.

## **Tourism**

Tourism has always been important to Nova Scotia. Tourists come to Nova Scotia to experience the way of life, the engaging environment and the ability to combine closeness with nature, the sea and exciting cultural events. There are still many tourism opportunities that have not been discovered or acted on.

## **Aboriginal Issues**

Aboriginal populations have to deal with many of the same issues discussed at the consultations, as well as additional challenges. Race relations and internal politics were noted as two of the most pressing issues facing today's First Nations leaders and communities. They noted that while a change in attitude among Nova Scotians to embrace the First Nations people is the ultimate goal, their current short-term goal focuses on influencing policies affecting First Nations people.

Racial bias is still an everyday fact for many in First Nations communities. Racial divisions contribute to isolation from the external community, and work against community-development ideals.

Aboriginal representatives noted that substance abuse among youth is a major problem. Without a sense of being needed, youth turn to various substances to make themselves feel better. This causes strain on family and community. The move away from the Mi'kmaq language also contributes to a feeling of helplessness and disregard for the heritage and past of First Nations people.

Employment is another challenge facing First Nations. Most reserves are far-removed from towns, villages, or cities and their services. This makes it nearly impossible for people to live on-reserve and hold down a job in other communities.

Education is an important factor in any community, including First Nations. The University College of Cape Breton has taken great strides to include Mi'kmaq education in its curriculum. The presence of Mi'kmaq professors enhances the educational experience of many First Nations students.

## **Infrastructure**

Many roads, especially in rural areas, need upgrading or replacement. Bad roads affect business in some areas. Deteriorating roads put the lives of residents in danger, especially those who must make long commutes to and from work.

The lack of public transportation in many areas outside Metro Halifax limits the ability of people to live in rural areas while working in urban areas, and to take part in community development initiatives and activities.

Communities also believe they need to make serving the infrastructure needs of people with disabilities a priority so that they do not have to move to urban areas.

Communities recognize the essential nature of a variety of economic and social infrastructures to their success, and they were able to clearly identify their infrastructure requirements. They are looking for:

- Upgrades to roads, twinning in some cases, and possibly toll highways for a higher-quality infrastructure and also to free up money for other areas
- A consistent schedule for road maintenance
- Subsidized transportation for greater mobility of rural populations
- Accelerated expansion of broadband technology to provide more opportunity for those in outlying areas to use digital communications in their work
- Industrial and recreational infrastructure that helps attract new residents
- The infrastructure necessary for Government to deliver its programs and services equitably across the Province.

Prospective residents consider the availability of community infrastructure before moving to an area. Therefore, communities can take note of the available community assets and promote them within the community and to outside residents.

Technology has the ability to allow people to stay in rural areas, while still completing a variety of work-related tasks, either from their homes or from satellite offices. Many people use the Internet and email as primary functions in their occupations. If this option is not open to them, they will settle in another area. Nova Scotia is a Canadian leader in terms of the percentage of its communities that have access to high-speed network. An opportunity exists to build on this community asset and to use it to attract residents to rural areas.

If more extensive public transportation options were available, people living in rural areas would be able to commute from their homes and work in more urban areas. Some suggested the possibility of making different use of the school buses and the school bus system.

Many areas discussed recreational infrastructure, such as aging ice rinks or a lack or absence of same. There are schools in nearly every community, but most are closed after school hours and not available to community groups. People believe schools should be the centre of their community. Community groups should have more access to use the facilities at schools.

## Social issues

Traditional community economic development approaches do not always consider social issues. The move to a community development approach gives a high priority to social issues and their effects on people.

A healthy community needs more than just a sound economic base. People need to enjoy good health and a sense of well-being, confident that their community is a good place to live and raise their families. Given that participants shared this comprehensive view of community development, numerous social issues came up at the meetings.

Health care itself sparked less discussion than expected, although participants expressed concern about how difficult it can be to find a family doctor. They also expressed concern about reduced emergency services, especially in rural hospitals. The practice of referring patients to specialists in Halifax raised the issue of a lack of transportation and the need to have extended time off from work. Mental-health organizations often struggle to survive, providing little opportunity for preventive mental-health care.

Housing was important to low-income participants. People need affordable, safe and clean housing close to town centers. Many areas within town boundaries are expensive, forcing those with less income to move outside town. Living outside town makes it difficult to go to work and to take part in community activities, due to a lack of public transportation in rural areas.

Many apartment buildings will not accept children. For people on social assistance, the lists for assisted income are long and they do not know how decisions are made regarding who qualifies. Those who decide to live with relatives are unable to collect social assistance.

Seniors face many of the same issues. Often they must move out of their home communities entirely, to find a place in a seniors' home.

The current social-assistance program seems to cause disruption among those receiving it. Participants made the point that it often makes more economic sense to be on social assistance than to be working in a low-wage job. This encourages people to stay on social assistance and not make the move to employment.

It is often difficult to link people with the programs that can help them. This might include social assistance and other programs that could help people with a variety of skills and get them involved in community-development initiatives. Many people who could benefit from these programs are not aware of them. Many do not understand the benefit they could be to their communities, having been taught that trying to work and take part in the community is not in their best interest.

Participants said more flexibility and understanding are needed.

While many wondered what level of health care rural Nova Scotians should expect, they did acknowledge that local health boards have been very creative and community-minded, especially with the "determinants-of-health" initiative and approach to public health. More involvement with this initiative could assist policy makers.

Finding safe and affordable child care is a challenge for many families, especially those in lower socio-economic brackets. Families have to be receiving social assistance to have their child care subsidized. By contrast, people in PEI do not need to be on social assistance to receive subsidized child care; they simply need to earn below a certain amount of money. In PEI, there is also the potential to get reimbursed when family members baby-sit, and it is easier to find child care during “off-hours.” An opportunity exists to further examine the PEI example, and to search for best practices in other jurisdictions as well.

## **Youth**

Young people in communities have issues specific to them. For many, there are few places to go or few things to do, especially if there is little disposable income in the family.

Organized sports work for many families, but this is expensive and not an option for everyone. Some programs save spots for children on limited incomes, but these seats are often taken by families who are willing to pay extra.

Youth participants said that if youth are not involved in sports, there is even less for them to do.

Community youth centers need to be given adequate time to see if they work, and to iron out any start-up kinks. Community members said it seems that as soon as a centre starts working, it is changed or closed. Youth said there is a need to increase policing of drug and alcohol abuse at youth centres.

Participants said the community could look for ways to assist youth who want to complete high school by helping find accessible child care.

## **Cultural Activities**

Nova Scotia is rich with artists, who are playing increasingly important roles both economically and socially. The strong cultural industry in Nova Scotia is creating many spin-offs for Nova Scotians (retail, restaurants, hotels, etc.).

Still, the high cost of cultural activities makes many events inaccessible for a large number of people, while high costs can often force Nova Scotia theatrical companies to perform in other parts of the country.

Participants noted the many economic as well as social benefits from a thriving cultural sector. Artistic and cultural events and programs create an environment where people want to be, which helps to combat population decline.

Through cultural activities, communities have an opportunity to show off their best assets to youth, who want to be able to enjoy an active social life. They want to be able to share experiences with their peers while also learning from others.

As arts and culture industries become increasingly important to Nova Scotia, members of this particular community are looking for Government to help facilitate partnerships. Examples:

- A partnership between artists/companies and local businesses, such as restaurants and B&Bs.

## Volunteers and (NGOs)

- A medical plan for artists, many of whom are not covered because they are self-employed.

The importance of volunteers was stressed at nearly every meeting. The volunteer base is shrinking. Few young people are volunteering and existing volunteers are experiencing burnout. Nova Scotia's rural population as a whole is aging while young people are migrating to larger centres.

Youth are innovative and essential to building a community; therefore attracting and retaining youth is a critical challenge for volunteer organizations. This is a way for communities to make the connections that ensure the needs of all are met. Although they may lack experience and the ability to hold regular shifts, youth offer enthusiasm, creativity and energy.

Participants explained that the absence of multi-year funding is one of the most pressing problems facing NGOs. Project-based funding causes lost time, money and human resources and forces volunteers and employees to focus on funding rather than growth. A focus on obtaining core operating funds every year means inefficient planning and spending, often to the detriment of program goals.

NGOs tend to hold onto their money to make sure they don't run out, but at the end of the year when they find themselves with a surplus, they may feel obliged to spend it on things that aren't necessary, because it all has to be spent in one year to receive funding the next. This approach was termed "Flavor of the Month."

Many groups reported that they had to allocate one person to rework their mandate or projects to fit into the current Government criteria for funding, rather than the funding being made to fit the needs of the organization.

Communities want to see less emphasis on process, or paperwork for example, and more emphasis on service delivery and results. NGOs should be assessed on whether or not their program meets its mandate, rather than on whether or not it follows a specific accounting process.

The high cost of liability insurance is hurting volunteer groups. In some cases, the high cost has actually forced groups to eliminate programs or cancel events.

Participants identified a lack of public transportation in rural areas as a key factor in keeping many people from taking part in volunteer programs.

Less direct Government involvement in communities is another factor causing problems and contributing to volunteer burnout. Many organizations noted that as soon as they are established, Government expects them to be self-sufficient. Nova Scotia is one of two provinces without a Volunteer Resource Centre.

Communities and local businesses have an opportunity to actively recruit young professionals. By engaging these people while they are still students and informing them of the benefits of life in a rural area or small town, they will attract those who have not already settled in other areas.

Youth must be encouraged to take part in community development. One way is for communities to support those who develop their own enterprises and foster a sense of entrepreneurship. Participants said the Province needs job-makers in addition to job-takers.

Participants encouraged Government to help more people become involved in the volunteer sector. Their view is that courses in community development would not only encourage more people to get involved, but that training would increase the productivity of current volunteer groups and help attract youth.

Training for board members would help them fully understand their roles and responsibilities as well as the finer points of accessing Governmental funding. Participants felt that if volunteers are being asked to do more in their communities, it is fitting that Government should provide NGOs with the tools to do the job.

Affordable meeting space is equally important to sustaining volunteerism. Many spaces are very expensive and therefore inaccessible. Participants suggested that Government should facilitate the use of meeting infrastructure such as schools and community centers, for volunteer use.

Particularly at a time when the viability of volunteer organizations is under various pressures (e.g. funding, shrinking volunteer population, growing insurance costs), communities would like to see Government express its belief in volunteerism as a valuable community-development commodity that deserves recognition and support. Participants believe volunteers serve as a delivery mechanism for both Government and private-sector programs and services that add to a community's viability.

Participants want Government to conduct a study into the impact volunteers have on their communities and on Government – including the impact on society if no volunteers existed. Such a study would detail the economic and service-delivery impacts and also highlight the increased demands placed on Government programs and services should volunteerism lose its place as a force in the community.

Communities also want to see more value attached to volunteer groups that contribute to community sustainability but generally do not make an economic contribution. Transition houses and animal shelters are two examples cited by participants. Participants want attention given to the determinants of community health and benefit devised by the Genuine Progress Index (GPI).

Serving their communities increasingly costs time and money for those who do choose to volunteer, leading to volunteer burnout after a time despite the best of intentions. Tangible incentives are needed to keep the volunteer base healthy.

Not only must volunteers give up valuable time when they could be working or with their families, many actually have to spend money on transportation and child care to take part. These embedded costs of volunteering led participants to underline the importance of incentives like tax breaks and transportation subsidies.

Communities would also like to see tangible incentives provided to local businesses that support volunteer groups. Government could offer them tax concession or benefits when they assist the volunteer group(s) of their choice, which would allow various organizations to take advantage of the many opportunities within their communities (such as free or discounted use of meeting space).

Language is integral to understanding, and communities want Government to use language everyone understands. They caution against the use of “buzz” words or jargon and ask Government to define less familiar terms to ensure broader understanding. Furthermore, some people felt that more Government documents should be available in both English and French, given the dual linguistic heritage of the Province.

Many residents in rural areas sense an urban bias and believe that the economic strategy is too centralized. Others feel a lack of recognition for how policies affect genders differently.

A variety of NGOs reported difficulty when trying to get approval for a project. In some areas, groups have to visit up to three different municipal offices to get approval for the same project. Participants felt that many of these political boundaries, which may have been drawn decades ago, do not reflect today’s realities and result in invisible barriers to progress.

Over-representation at the municipal level was another concern expressed by participants. They believe it prevents efficiencies and leads to a lack of coordination, infighting and an inability to move ahead. Municipalities in many areas are facing shrinking tax bases, making it difficult to provide services to residents and commercial owners.

Communities called on Government to make sure that indicators of community sustainability, such as volunteerism and accessibility to arts and culture are taken into consideration in the development of the Community Development Policy. They also want Government to incorporate a rural focus to the policy, and to take regional differences into account when they craft all policies. It should be recognized that Government policies can have a variety of impacts on different communities.

Multiple Government processes cause stress for community members. Red tape slows things down, impedes communications between Government and small communities, and slows the growth of organizations.

Community members said the bureaucracy needs to understand that the winning political party will be the one to develop ideas acceptable to the public. Repetition of what has been done in the past will result in the outcomes of the past. Participants urged bureaucrats to try new ideas if looking for new results.

## **Conclusion**

Government believes that all sustainable development is local, even in a global era, maybe even more so in a global era. Decisions made in far-away places can affect our development for good or bad. This makes it all the more important to establish solid yet flexible local foundations that can respond to opportunities or challenges, however and whenever they arise.

The community consultations that this document represents are a solid beginning in helping government redefine how it can help ensure this kind of sustainable community development takes place throughout the length and breadth of this province.