



BACKGROUND

About Inclusive Cities Canada

Inclusive Cities Canada is a unique participatory research project designed to strengthen the capacity of cities to create and sustain inclusive communities for the mutual benefit of all people. Its goals are to:

- Promote social inclusion as key to the development of a Canadian urban strategy
- Support civic capacity to build inclusive communities in which all people are able to participate as valued and contributing members
- Secure a stronger voice for communities in national social policy
- Ensure that community voices of diversity are recognized as core Canadian ones

Participants

Inclusive Cities Canada is a unique partnership of five social planning councils in association with the Standing Committee on Social Infrastructure of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM).

The social planning councils are:

Edmonton – Edmonton Social Planning Council

Burlington – Community Development Halton

Toronto – Community Social Planning Council of Toronto

Saint John – Human Development Council of Saint John, New Brunswick

Vancouver and North Vancouver – Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia

National co-chairs of the initiative are Dr. Joey Edwardh, Executive Director of Community Development Halton and Councillor Michael Phair, City of Edmonton. Christa Freiler is the national coordinator.

What is Social Inclusion?

Social inclusion is both a process and an outcome. As a process, social inclusion promotes the open, welcome and supported participation of all people in social planning and decision-making affecting their lives. As an outcome, an inclusive city is one that provides opportunities for the optimal well-being and healthy development of all children, youth and adults.

Social inclusion has been identified by international policy makers, including the United Nations and World Bank, as key to the “equitable and sustainable growth”¹ of nations. Social Development Canada includes the promotion of social inclusion in its mandate and the federal government incorporates the concept in its *New Deal for Cities and Communities*.

Practical expressions of inclusion are: universal access to meaningful opportunities in education, the arts, culture, and recreation; relevant health services, school curricula adapted to specific needs and strengths, family support services and respite, safe streets and parks, and responsive governance on all levels.

Research Process

Inclusive Cities Canada builds on previous research and community development work undertaken by the Laidlaw Foundation and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, including a series of local soundings in 10 cities.² Based on this research and a review of Canadian and international literature, ICC defined five dimensions of inclusion as central to building inclusive cities and communities. These include: diversity, human development, civic engagement, living conditions and community services.

¹ The Cities Alliance. "City Development Strategies: The Cities Alliance Perspective," [undated] <http://www.citiesalliance.org/citiesalliancehomepage.nsf>

² The findings and recommendations are in the 2003 report, *Building Inclusive Communities: Cross-Canada Strategies and Perspectives* (www.inclusivecities.ca).

A National Steering Committee comprised of members from the partner cities provided strategic direction. It developed a common framework and methodology for conducting the local research, using the five common areas of inclusion, each with three areas of inquiry as outlined in the following table.

Dimensions of Inclusion	Cross-Canada Common Areas of Inquiry		
Diversity	Local Government	Publicly Funded Education	Policing & Justice System
Human Development	Early Childhood Education	Publicly Funded Education	Recreation/Arts/Culture
Civic Engagement	Local Government	Public Spaces	Community Capacities
Living Conditions	Income & Employment	Housing	Community Safety
Community Services	Healthcare	Crisis Services	Transportation & Mobility

Each social planning council established a Civic Panel comprised of elected municipal officials and community leaders, including members of the police, health, ethno-cultural, business, labour, education, culture, community service and faith communities. The panels provided leadership and coordination of local civic audits on social inclusion.

A common focus group process was used across cities to gather the knowledge and experiences of various key informants to discuss the dimensions of social inclusion, as well as proposals for change.

Based on the focus group findings further community soundings were held with community members and service providers familiar with the conditions of the population. While the number and composition of the soundings varied by city, they included discussions with: new immigrants; aboriginal peoples; the homeless; persons with disabilities; youth; women; seniors; and, the gay, lesbian and transgendered community. In addition, community feedback forums were held to corroborate and enrich the research findings.

In total over 1,000 participants took part across the five sites. The analysis of the findings from the focus groups, the community soundings and feedback forums are presented in the community reports along with their recommendations.

Next Steps

Representatives of the five participating communities will meet at a national roundtable in Ottawa on June 2, 2005 to discuss a cross-Canada report that highlights similarities and differences between cities and makes recommendations to the federal government.

Funding

Social Development Canada has supported the work of Inclusive Cities Canada with an annual-year grant of \$250,000 over three years. Supplementary start-up funds were received from the Laidlaw Foundation, a private Canadian foundation.