

THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT HANDBOOK:

A TOOL TO BUILD COMMUNITY CAPACITY

**Written by Flo Frank and Anne Smith
for
Human Resources Development Canada**

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Copies of this handbook, as well as the related Community Development Facilitator's Guide, in both French and English, are available from the HRDC Internet website at <http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/community>

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INTRODUCTION

In order to understand community development it is important to understand that it means different things to different people in different places – and that our understanding about what constitutes effective or appropriate community development has expanded considerably in the past few years. What we do know is that it is founded on voluntary and healthy interdependence, mutual benefit and shared responsibility. In recent years, more often than not, community development has involved local people seeking and taking advantage of opportunities or working together to solve problems.

Our interest in community development is not new but something to which we are returning. And returning to it we are, with interest being generated in all sectors and by a wide variety of people in each sector. Along with this increased interest comes some confusion about what community development is and what it is not. While different approaches and a variety of ideas exist about community development, there remains an underlying assumption that it is familiar to us and that we have a part to play in it.

The fact is that, just as individual people vary, communities differ and no one approach will work in all situations. Therefore, a flexible process and general information are being offered in this handbook to be adapted to your own situation.

Why this handbook was developed

This handbook has been created by the Employment Programs Learning and Development Unit at Human Resources Development Canada to support the understanding and effective application of community development. Community development is one of several vital tools used in the building of the capacity in communities across Canada.

Community capacity is an important consideration in community development as the process of community development itself often results in increased capacity. Therefore, the two are interrelated but distinct. Combined or separate, they both have a great deal to do with developing potential and enhancing community living. This handbook was designed to look at community development, realizing that capacity building and other processes often get confused with it.

Who this handbook is for

This introductory handbook is not designed to be a textbook for practitioners, but as an introductory guide to community development and capacity building. It is designed primarily for those who have an interest in community development but who may not

have an in-depth understanding of the concept, the process or the resources available across Canada.

For those already possessing knowledge about the topic and/or experience in the field, this handbook provides a resource for exploring and initiating community development and reviewing the basics of the community development process.

What this handbook will do

This handbook is designed to spark, rekindle and reaffirm your interest in community development. To do this, information and tools are offered to assist in building common understanding and appropriate approaches.

By reading this book, you should be able to:

- define the terms “community development” and “community capacity building” and explain the link between the two,
- explain the community development process,
- explain the skills and knowledge needed to be effective,
- identify the most common problems experienced in community development and
- explain how experience tells us these problems may be overcome.

What this handbook will not do

This handbook cannot and does not provide you with all that you need to know to pursue community development in your own community. Reading it, and answering all of the questions posed, will not turn you into a fully-qualified community developer. Neither will it answer all of your questions. It is simply one resource that is available to you. If you are interested in learning more about these subject areas you will need to undertake further exploration by seeking out other resources and talking to individuals who have been active in the community development process.

Contents of the handbook

This handbook is designed to provide information, tips and questions about the basics of community development, which can then be applied to your own circumstances. Throughout, there are sections labeled “Lessons from Experience” and “Points to Ponder”.

“Lessons from Experience” provides quick points about various aspects of each section. The comments are from consultants, community service workers and others with extensive experience in community development.

“Points to Ponder” offers questions based on the information that has been provided in each section. The questions are designed to help generate thoughts about what has been read and how it might apply to your own situation. These can also be used to initiate discussion.

In addition, throughout this handbook, you will find stories that are based upon community development experiences across Canada. They are snapshots of different situations and are intended to be brief and to the point. In order to keep them short and simple, there is very little contextual background or detail provided. These types of situations happen every day in most communities and provide concrete examples of the many ways the community development process can be applied – as well as creating real-life stories upon which we can draw.

The content of the handbook is as follows:

- Section I focuses on defining community development and capacity building;
- Section II identifies the conditions that support community development;
- Section III outlines the community development process and how to apply it;
- Section IV explores the attitudes, knowledge and skills required to develop the capacity needed to effectively undertake a community development initiative; and
- Section V examines common issues and concerns as well as providing some possible solutions.

The handbook has been reviewed and validated by respected community development practitioners. A listing of their names can be found on the Acknowledgements page.

A Facilitator’s Guide has also been developed and is available through Human Resources Development Canada. It is designed to help facilitate learning and discussions about community development based on the contents of this handbook. A copy may be obtained as per the inside cover of this book.

A Word About Words

We have defined the term “community development” to mean the planned evolution of all aspects of community well-being (economic, social, environmental and cultural). It is a process whereby community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems (see Section I for further elaboration).

Other similar terms, such as community economic development and community-based economic development, are being used within communities and, often, they are used without a clear understanding of their meaning. There is a great deal of confusion about these terms because they may mean something slightly different to each person using them.

There are no absolute definitions and rarely does everyone agree on the precise wording of terms that are commonly used. There may be different and even better definitions than the ones provided, and they too may change over time. That’s the nature of working in the community with people and learning better ways of expressing ourselves.