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EDMONTON SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL



Community Consultations on Research Needs

Final Report

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Background

Purpose

In 2007, the Edmonton Social Planning Council determined that there was a need to more actively and more purposefully work together with community partners¹ to set research priorities for the Council. In order to increase the responsiveness of the ESPC to the Edmonton non-profit sector and to better support social service providers, the community consultations are designed as an ongoing project involving social agencies and community groups active in the Edmonton community. The consultations are designed for several purposes.

The main purpose of the community consultations is to seek input into the ESPC research agenda. As the ESPC aims to act in a leadership role on behalf of the non-profit community, it is important that this community has a voice in determining research priorities. Input was sought in order to identify social issues and trends that are newly taking root in the community, and to better understand how certain research projects might assist the non-profit sector in achieving a more socially just community. With participation from a diversity of organizations, the ESPC can be proactive in determining research projects, as opposed to reacting to the needs and opportunities as they arise. This is, in a sense, what social planning is all about.

A secondary, but equally important purpose of the consultation process is to promote better collaboration and communication between organizations by hosting discussions between and amongst social agencies and non-profit organizations in the community. The consultations are designed to enhance communication and collaboration, and to demonstrate the commitment of the ESPC to being part of the conversation. Hearing what agencies and organizations need, and facilitating an interdisciplinary discussion between different groups allows the ESPC to more effectively undertake its role in providing leadership to the non-profit sector in Edmonton.

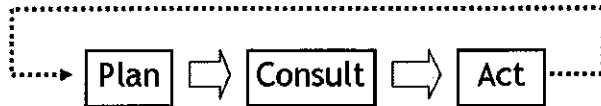
A final purpose of the consultations is to better position the ESPC to support the sector. Through opening the discussion between agencies, the ESPC can call for positive changes to social policy, and for changes that will enable agencies to carry out their work more effectively. Ongoing consultations lends credence to the advocacy work of the ESPC, which can serve to strengthen the entire sector as it continues to work towards a more socially just, healthy, and inclusive community.

¹ ESPC community partners are defined as organizations working in the Edmonton community to achieve a more socially and economically just community.

Methods

Structure

The consultations consist of 3 main phases, which are intended to repeat upon completion of each phase:



The planning phase consisted of background research, developing relationships, determining an appropriate methodology for consultation, and getting ready to do the consultation work. For the consultation phase, a round of community consultations utilized surveys, focus groups, and discussions with individuals in organizations across the sector on the topics of social issues and trends, and research solutions. The action phase will consist of implementing the recommendations of the consultation, and evaluating the progress to date. As the ongoing process continues to evolve, the steps taken in each phase will also evolve and change. One of the main considerations in all three phases of the community consultation process is ensuring meaningful and ongoing communication between the ESPC, participants, and the community. A diagram of the community consultation process is included in Appendix A.

Background Research

Background research for the community consultations consisted of research into two topics: methodological approaches to consultation; and the experience of other Canadian social planning councils in consulting the communities in which they work and determining research priorities. This background research informed the direction and methodology of the community consultations. The literature review and a summary of consultation practices of other Canadian social planning councils are attached as Appendices B and C, respectively.

In addition, the report author attended two Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association focus groups which examined gaps and trends observed by non-profit adult education providers in the community. One of the focus groups was attended by 'Community Issues' educational providers, and the other by 'English as an Additional Language' providers. The purpose of attending these focus groups was to gain insight into some of the issues and trends that might come up in the ESPC consultations, and also to learn from what works in terms of focus group methodology within the Edmonton non-profit sector.

Inviting Participation and Collecting Data

The data collection phase for this round of the consultations took place between April and August, 2008.

A survey was drafted and revised based on the comments of ESPC staff and others. The survey was then sent out to 25 organizations in Edmonton working with different mandates and client groups across the non-profit, social agency sector. The survey was accompanied by a letter explaining the purpose and expected results of the community consultations, and was followed up with a reminder email a week before the survey deadline. Only 5 surveys were returned. The survey is attached as Appendix D.

This poor response rate led to the modification of processes for inviting participation into the focus groups. Instead of sending out letters, potential participants were contacted by telephone or in person, and Executive Directors were invited to attend or to send a representative member of their staff to the focus groups. While the response rate for the surveys was disappointing, it was contrasted by a very enthusiastic response to the invitation to participate in one of two focus groups. Prior to the focus groups, confirmed participants were provided with a document outlining the intent of the community consultations, some questions to consider in advance of the focus group, and an outline of the role of the ESPC. Five participants attended the first focus group held in the ESPC Library on July 21, and ten participants attended the second focus group, held in the Family Centre training room on August 12. Both were within the target range for participation, which was 5-10. Two participants who were interested in participating but unable to attend either of the focus groups offered their input through a one-on-one meeting and a telephone conversation. A list of the participants is attached in Appendix E.

At the focus groups, participants were asked to brainstorm social issues and trends affecting their clients and their organizations. Their responses were recorded and later used to create groups and categories of the issues and concerns reported. The intent of this exercise was to engage in a collective analysis of the issues presented, as opposed to merely identifying trends and issues. Based on the discussion and preliminary analysis of the issues, participants were then asked to identify research solutions. In each focus group, participants were also asked to consider the following questions when proposing research solutions:

- Does the research project respond broadly to the key themes identified or target a specific issue?
- Does it build on existing research or address gaps in research?
- To what extent does the research project support the work of community organizations?
- To what extent does it build our collective, community capacity to organize and respond to change?

Evaluation + Ongoing Communication

At the end of each focus group, a short evaluation form was circulated asking for participants' feedback regarding the focus group itself, the community consultations more broadly, and any other suggestions that they might have. The evaluation forms from the first focus group were used to assist in the planning for the second focus group, and the evaluations from both focus groups will be used to assist in planning and implementing the 'next steps'. A compilation of evaluation form comments is attached in Appendix F.

In addition, a document summarizing the ideas presented was circulated to all of the participants to make revisions following each focus group. The edited version was distributed once again to participants, and posted to the 'Community Consultations page' on the ESPC's website. The focus group summaries are attached in Appendices G and H.

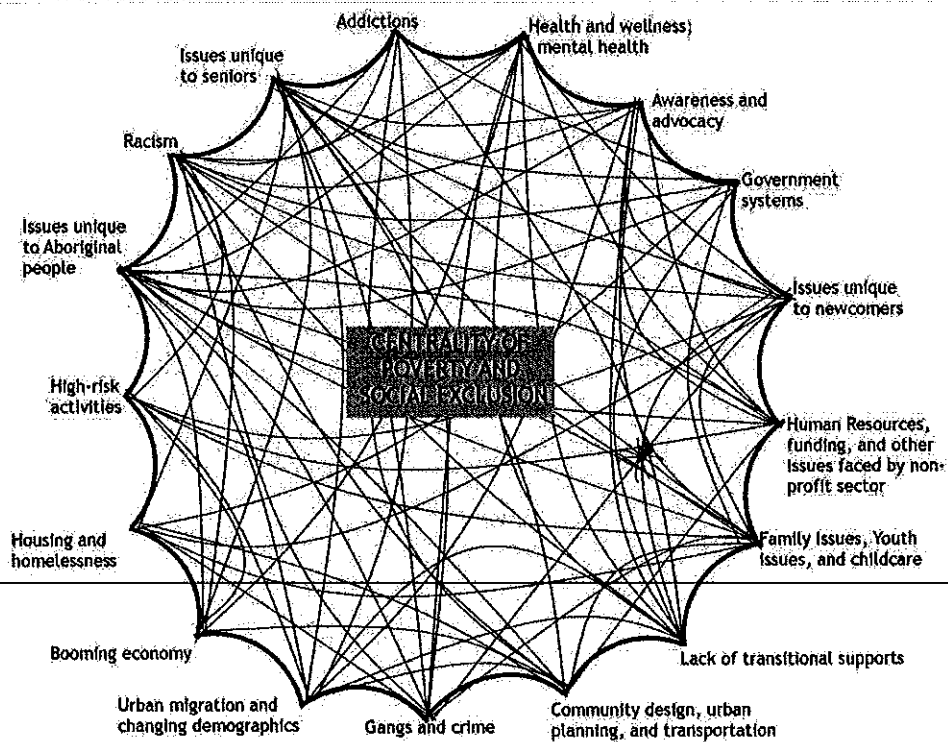
Results

Social Issues

One of the main purposes of the community consultations was to gather information regarding social issues and trends that are currently, or are predicted to affect the work of social agencies, community organizations, and the people that they work with.

This is a topic that solicited lively responses. Because of the diversity of experience among participants, there were different ideas regarding the 'most pressing' social issues or trends. In the focus groups, not only were the participants asked to identify these social issues, but they were additionally asked to analyse the relationships and connections between these various issues. The results of these collective analyses, by each group of unique participants, demonstrated that there are many different ways of understanding the issues. For example, in the first focus group, the participants classified the social issues and trends into the categories of social determinants of health; survival & quality of life; housing; the need for people centred policy; compounding barriers; the value our society places on social agencies and their clients; and resources. The second group, however, categorized social issues into four, broader categories: the historical causes of poverty and social exclusion; the contemporary causes of poverty and social exclusion; the manifestations of poverty and social exclusion; and factors affecting our ability to respond to poverty and social exclusion.

In both focus groups, it was recognized that all of the issues are related, and could be categorized in many different ways. One popular suggestion was that the social issues and trends discussed would be best represented as a web, as all of the issues are interconnected. A web of the main social issues and trends identified is below:



The key issues are outlined below in descending order, from most frequently referenced throughout the focus groups, surveys, and conversations, to least frequently referenced. Some of the main concerns and issues within each topic are listed².

Agency Issues, including funding and human resources:

- Increasing operating costs of agencies (due to inflation) is not being matched by funding dollars.
- Agencies are under continual pressure to expand mandates and/or operations; or to change programming to better fit funder requirements
- The administrative burden of the funding process diverts time and resources away from programming; often, administrative costs are not funded.
- Government/funder requirements and expectations do not respect the strengths and limitations of social agencies.
- The perception of service duplication is unhelpful, as there is currently a shortage of services. Additionally, service duplication to a certain extent is desirable, as it provides clients with greater choice and flexibility.
- Agencies are experiencing more and more difficulty in attracting and retaining staff due to the economic climate and funding constraints, compounded by higher worker turnover. This leads to poorer outcomes for clients.
- There is a growing disparity between pay rates in the non-profit and government/private sector.
- Some agencies experience difficulty accessing technological upgrades, and providing professional development opportunities for staff and volunteers.

Current economic climate and implications:

- The rapid pace of economic growth is causing growing disparity at all levels.
- A new demographic of people are experiencing poverty and homelessness because of inflation and increasing costs of living; for the same reasons, agencies are facing a resource crunch.
- Despite the belief that economic growth brings prosperity, high rates of growth have in fact created great hardships, specifically for groups that are already marginalized in some way.
- The level of awareness by the provincial government of the negative impacts of growth needs to be improved.
- The economic boom makes attracting and retaining staff more difficult for the sector, which in turn has many negative spin-off effects both for clients and for agencies.
- The economic boom intensifies the problems associated with other social issues and trends. Of particular concern are longer working hours and increased levels of stress in families, which leads to a host of other social issues.
- The economic boom is attracting workers and families from other provinces and other countries, and intensifying migration from rural communities and rural Aboriginal communities to urban areas. Agencies and other social services and supports have not been able to keep up with these changing demographics, creating a severe shortage of transitional supports and services.

² A complete listing of all comments grouped by category is available upon request.

Government:

- While municipal and federal government systems are also a concern, by far the majority of concerns expressed were relating to the provincial government.
- Government does not have a plan to deal with social issues in the face of social and economic changes.
- Government strategic planning is from election to election, undermining the capacity to plan over the long term.
- There is a lack of effective leadership. Many political and institutional leaders do not understand the issues faced by agencies and the clients they serve.
- Government systems for funding agencies are inadequate: they inhibit innovation and disregard the expertise that exists within the non-profit sector.
- Government systems – most notably the child welfare system – remain disrespectful toward Aboriginal families.
- The notion of “the common good” is seemingly contrary to the philosophy of the current government, and consistent re-election of the Progressive Conservative party serves to further entrench the prevalent “survival of the fittest” philosophy.
- Government underestimates the negative impacts of economic growth, and undervalues the work and role of social agencies.
- Government systems are reactive rather than proactive in nature, which is problematic.
- There is a perceived lack of transparency in our provincial government, and some agencies experience difficulty in navigating government systems, understanding the allocation of government funding dollars, collaborating with government stakeholders, and measuring/evaluating collaboration.

Lack of Services and Supports:

- Agencies simply cannot meet the demand for variety of services, bed and operating space, longer operating hours, etc. This problem is especially pronounced in programs targeting specific groups outside agencies’ main client base (i.e. mental health for seniors, family programming for newcomers).
- There is an acute shortage of transitional services and supports.
- There are too few supports and services for immigrants, the children of newcomers, temporary foreign workers, and refugees. In the case of newcomers, there are often disincentives to accessing services that exist (i.e. there is pressure to start work right away, as opposed to taking time to take language courses).
- The lack of supports for families and youth is leading to increased recruitment of youth into gangs, this problem is particularly affecting Aboriginal youth.
- There is a lack of services and supports for urban Aboriginal individuals and families.
- Access to education, literacy and economic literacy programs are key issues.

Poverty:

- Throughout the consultations, poverty was referenced as a central condition around which a number of other social issues and trends revolve, as discussed above.
- There is a lack of a unified plan for addressing social issues. As a result, the rising cost of living and growing levels of disparity are creating deepening poverty.

- The growing disparity between rich and poor keeps thousands of Edmontonians struggling to survive. This leads to greater issues of housing, problems with social cohesion, and lower participation rates in education, among other things.
- The cycle of poverty is becoming more exacerbated and more prevalent, but agencies simply cannot meet the need for services and supports (i.e. more families using the food bank, but the food bank can't supply diapers).
- Income supports are inadequate, especially in the context of the booming economy and inflation.

Housing and Homelessness:

- Many people who were housed and 'stable' prior to the economic boom are now having difficulty maintaining housing; there is a new demographic of homelessness, to which programs/services must be directed.
- There is a lack of available units for agencies to house clients, and an overall shortage of rental and affordable housing.
- In the context of the housing shortage, landlords can be choosier about who they rent to – racism impacts newcomers, people who speak with accents, visible minorities and Aboriginal people; those with addictions, mental health issues, and visible disabilities are also discriminated against in the rental housing market.
- Areas in the city where some of the highest need families are located are areas with the least amount of available spaces – both housing units for clients and program space for agencies.
- Migration into the city is not being matched by housing availability.
- The Not-In-My-Back-Yard attitude makes the establishment of affordable and supportive housing more difficult, and affects municipal planning decisions negatively.

Family Issues, Child and Youth Issues, and Childcare:

- Pressure on families is growing, especially single-parent families and families with one parent working away. With so much pressure to work more and longer hours, family issues become more difficult to resolve, which leads to a number of problems within families.
- Many of the youth that are accessing agency programming have a higher level of need than ever before. There are generational effects caused by the social issues and problems faced by children and youth.
- There is an acute shortage of childcare spaces, and an increasing demand for flexible, respite, and 24-hour childcare. Childcare subsidies are inadequate and inflexible.
- There is a need for more services and supports specifically for teen parents, Aboriginal families, immigrant and refugee families, parents with FASD and/or addictions, and families at risk of homelessness.
- There is too little investment in preventative and early childhood programming.

Awareness and Advocacy:

- Policy advocacy is a vital component of social justice work, yet there has been a decline in organizations dedicated to advocacy work over the past 10 years.
- Many agencies are limited in their ability and/or capacity to advocate on behalf of their client groups, and need support, funding or collaboration to be able to make advocacy work more robust across the sector.

- There is a lack of public awareness of the opportunity cost of not providing services. Not only is the general public largely unaware of the benefit of services, but government funders and policymakers are unaware as well.
- High risk activities (i.e. prostitution, drug use, gang involvement) are misunderstood by the public. The stigma associated with these and other issues (e.g. mental health) is problematic and makes the provision of programming, access to programming, and developing awareness in the community much more difficult.
- Longer term social problems due to declining participation rates and more difficulty accessing funding for post-secondary education needs to be addressed through public awareness and policy advocacy.

Health and Wellness; Addictions; Mental Health:

- Poverty, inflation, and the cost of living have direct effects on health and wellness. Not only are people experiencing more stress and working more, but families that are 'teetering' are becoming more vulnerable to poor health and wellness (e.g. nutritious food choices become a lower priority, and stressed and financially struggling parents turn to unhealthy fast food because of the perception that it is cheaper or more convenient.)
- Mental health issues across all groups are on the rise. This is partially linked to increasingly stressful environment, and is exacerbated by the shortage of services and supports, including longer-term counselling.
- The use of crack, which is particularly addictive and cheap, is on the rise and being used by a new demographic of people (i.e. seniors). Addictions overall are increasing in prevalence.
- The increase in chronic mental health issues and chronic addictions has caused the overburdening of treatment facilities, making it difficult for schools, agencies and individuals to refer to these centres.
- Health system restructuring is a concern.
- Community design (i.e. suburban sprawl) impacts health and wellness.

Issues specific to newcomers and temporary foreign workers:

- Language barriers and communication issues can prevent newcomers from participating fully in the community. Additionally, there is a lack of awareness and sensitivity in the broader community with regard to accepting linguistic differences and understanding language barriers.
- Deskilling (i.e. lack of recognition of foreign credentials) limits the ability of newcomers to participate fully in the community and negatively impacts newcomers as well as the wider society.
- There is a shortage of supports and services for newcomers, including language training and translation services; programming for temporary foreign workers to understand their rights; employment training, retraining, and bridging programs; and services to help newcomers access basic needs and services. Often it is the more specific programs/services which agencies have difficulty providing (i.e. translation skills for senior immigrants, mental health programming for refugee children, etc).
- There is a great deal of stress in families caused by migration. For example, immigrants or refugees from conflict areas may want to return home during times of peace, which can create tensions in families, across generations, and within cultural communities.

High risk activities; gangs; crime:

- Gang activities and membership is rapidly increasing. Gangs are actively recruiting youth as young as 11 –particularly Aboriginal youth. There is increased migration to Edmonton due to gangs.
- Increased participation in high risk activities is indicative of underlying social issues, such as poverty and the lack of services and supports. The failure to adequately address other social issues leads to an increase in crime and violence.
- Stigma attached to high risk activities makes it more difficult to provide the supports necessary.

Issues specific to Aboriginal people:

- Racism, systemic racism, disrespect for Aboriginal culture, and the legacy of the residential school system continue to negatively impact Aboriginal people and communities at all levels.
- Government programs and systems remain discriminatory against Aboriginal families (e.g. Aboriginal kids are taken into care for the same reasons that non-Aboriginal families would be given supports; over 60% of kids in care are Aboriginal).
- The urban Aboriginal population is unique and diverse; some agencies struggle to learn how to communicate with and provide services for this population.
- The rate of migration to Edmonton from rural Aboriginal communities is increasing, yet there are not enough transitional supports for incoming people.
- One participant noted that at least 20% of gang membership is identifiably Aboriginal at this point, and the figure is growing. There will likely be long-term, generational effects of this trend.

Racism:

- Racialized minorities are affected by racism, newcomers and those with accents even more so, and Aboriginal people are worst off when it comes to racism and discrimination in Edmonton.
- The effects of racism are multiplied by the rising cost of living and competition for housing – the experiences of Aboriginal and racialized minorities are different from the mainstream, white population.
- In schools, policing, the criminal justice system, and other institutions, there is resistance and systemic barriers, administrative barriers, and leadership barriers to dealing with racism.
- Many agencies struggle to access anti-racism and diversity awareness professional development opportunities for their staff and volunteers.

Seniors:

- With an aging population, the demand and need for services for seniors will continue to grow. As baby boomers retire and age, this trend will intensify as there will be even more reliance on the already overworked, underfunded, and understaffed human services and healthcare fields.
- The lack of savings and pensions, inadequate income supports, and senior's poverty levels are of growing concern.
- It is difficult for agencies serving seniors to demonstrate how senior's participation in activities lead to measurable health benefits and translate into financial savings in the longer term.
- There are gaps in senior's programming, as clients "age out" of programs (i.e. funding is no longer available for clients over a certain age in some cases). Notably, this is a concern with regard to senior's affordable housing and senior's mental health programming.

Community design; urban planning and transportation:

- Active lifestyles and walkable communities can contribute positively to a number of the issues identified. There is a need for more support for alternative types of community design.
- Transportation affects a number of other issues: the environment, mobility, access to services, and the cost of living. There is a lack of adequate transportation, most acutely for persons with disabilities.
- Donate-A-Ride and DATS programs are underfunded.
- The social mix of neighbourhoods is a concern, and NIMBY attitudes create problems in designing socially sustainable communities.

Research Solutions

Participants in the consultation process identified a number of creative and innovative research solutions to the social issues and trends faced by the Edmonton community. For some of the social issues and trends that were discussed, it was felt by some that additional research wasn't necessarily useful at this point but rather that more action and advocacy is required (i.e. housing). Some examples of the research projects proposed follow.

SROI and the Benefits of Prevention

- Show the social return on investment and long term benefits of early intervention and prevention programming and potential impacts to society without these services. Demonstrate how current social policies regarding social issues support, or are a detriment to healthy communities.
 - How and why does prevention work?
 - What is the long-term financial cost of inadequately addressing social issues – i.e. inadequately funding the services and programs provided by the sector, failing to support preventative initiatives, and inadequately supporting agencies in doing the work that they do?
 - Conversely, what are the savings that could be experienced by investing in early intervention and prevention programming? What other positive benefits would result from proactive social policies and adequate sector funding?

Social Planning in the Context of the Economic Boom

- Focus on the problems associated with our current economy and the long-term effects that we can anticipate.
 - What are the negative impacts on children, families, communities?
 - What are the implications of the growing gap between the rich and the poor?
- Examine how other areas manage growth, rapid migration, and social change while keeping the community in a social balance.
 - How can Edmonton best deal with regional planning concerns (i.e. the rural-urban fringe)?
 - Do a cross-jurisdictional report card regarding managing growth and models for collaborative planning and action. How does Edmonton compare to others?

- Research how other jurisdictions are engaging NGOs and working collaboratively to address social issues broadly in the community.
 - How can needs, resources, strategies and the implementation of a joint plan be initiated here in Edmonton, learning from examples from other jurisdictions, such as Calgary and Winnipeg?
 - What are the priority concerns, strategies to be utilised, resources required, and outcomes expected?

Agency Issues

- Investigate the long-term impacts be of the current funding regime.
 - What drives funding allocations and how can these decisions, and the funding system more generally, be influenced?
- A major theme of the research propositions related to agency issues revolves around communication with funders.
 - How do agencies communicate positive program outcomes as dollars or savings?
 - What are the best practices in advocating for positive social policy changes and funding for services, and how do agencies implement these and engage in successful advocacy work?

Other Topics

- *Social Inclusion*: Develop an 'Edmonton Inclusiveness Index' measuring the meaning of social inclusion in Edmonton for people living in poverty. It could include, for example, factors such as the number of meals served, evictions from public spaces, the number of people who are homeless, etc.
- *Housing*: Issues related to housing and racism; innovative ways to develop affordable housing and sustainable communities; the Housing First initiative; other housing alternatives and innovations such as co-operatives.
- *Family and Children*: Child poverty statistics; research that will increase the importance of children, youth and families in the province.
- *Temporary Foreign Workers*: Implications of migration, lack of services and supports, etc.
- *Addictions*: What types of addictions treatment programming have good outcomes, and why?
- *Health System*: Is health system restructuring the leading edge of wider system restructuring? What will be the implications of current restructuring projects, and potential further restructuring?
- *Seniors*: What is the state of savings, pensions and poverty for seniors in Alberta, and how will seniors' quality of life and financial security be impacted by changing costs in seniors care? How is the concept of 'Aging in Place' changing? What types of policies, practices, and resources are best suited to support seniors to remain in their community?

What Research is Used For

Knowing what research is used for, and in what ways it supports the sector can help the ESPC in the design and implementation of future research projects. In addition to identifying social issues and trends, and key research projects that might be helpful in addressing these concerns, respondents comments also reflected how research can be used. From these comments, six key functions of research emerged, and are described below.

Advocacy

- Advocacy functions of agencies and organizations require solid and accessible research from which to draw. There is a need for research that can be used as a tool that connects to broader advocacy efforts.
- There is a need to articulate social issues and solutions in a way that will give the public a voice to use in advocating on behalf of marginalized groups.
- Research must demonstrate how current social policies regarding various social issues support or are a detriment to healthy and socially just communities. Most useful is research that articulates what type of policies will best support the sector/clientele.
- Research that can demonstrate the benefit of programs and policies that support these programs by articulating the cost savings and financial implications of spending within the sector would be useful.
- Research is used to exert political pressure on our government, thus, it must be compelling in the face of a conservative provincial government, and an often unsympathetic or uninformed public.

Supports Agencies

- Clear and accessible research is a fundamental part of the funding application process. Good research is thus crucial to agencies' ongoing financial sustainability.
- Some agencies would like to use ESPC research expertise on an ad-hoc basis, for example, when completing a funding application regarding a specific agency project. The ESPC could serve as a 'go-to' organization to help dig up the facts and find the figures that would demonstrate need for particular programs or services to funders. Some agencies would find this type of support to be of great use.
- Research is needed that can support agencies navigate through the current human resources crisis – for example, best practices in recruitment and retention.
- Research that examines relationships between funders and agencies would support agencies in communicating with funders and developing better outcome and evaluation measures. It is often difficult for agencies, especially smaller organizations, to demonstrate the positive outcomes of programming.
- Research that illuminates how project-based funding, as opposed to sustainable, long-term funding, can negatively impact service users of social programs would support agencies in calling for a more sustainable sector funding regime.

Builds capacity of sector

- The sector would be strengthened by research that points to how other jurisdictions have developed processes to identify community priority needs, outline strategy, develop implementation plans, and act.
- Some community partners would use research to build agency capacity in terms of completing the groundwork steps required to implement best practices in a given area, be it communication with funders, recruitment and retention, or collaboration.
- Some agencies would like support in project management, including more knowledge about strategic planning and action planning, both within and across organizations.

Enhance Collaboration

- Although collaboration is recognized as vital, and is pursued by most agencies to a certain degree, there remains a desire to better understand how to make collaboration more effective and yield better results.
- Research can enhance collaboration by pointing to successful and unsuccessful models of collaboration. Other jurisdictions have engaged government, agencies, and the private sector in collaborative processes and Edmonton could learn from these experiences.

- Research that points to how success or failure in collaborative projects can be measured would be useful.

Promote Education and Awareness

- Solid and accessible research is a fundamental part of agencies' media relations work and is used in developing public awareness, community presentations, workshops and seminars, educational events, and committee work.
- Given the political climate of Alberta, agencies emphasize the need for research that draws out the hidden, invisible, or unpopular issues for the public, i.e. research that doesn't just 'preach to the converted', but can develop understanding and awareness among those who 'have their blinders on' or are otherwise not allies.

Informs work of the sector

- Community partners use research to develop staff and organizational knowledge and awareness. This step is important in and of itself, but also in positioning organizations as leaders and experts within the field.
- Research plays a key role in informing the work of agencies and organizations – in developing new programs, supporting community development initiatives, and gaining better understanding of the issues involved.
- Some agencies would like to see research that engages multiple stakeholders in collaborative needs assessment for the Edmonton community, which could be used to inform programming and service delivery.
- Research that demonstrates the barriers to wider systemic change can help agencies to re-tailor their advocacy, awareness, or service delivery components to be more successful (e.g. regarding racism in the rental housing market: why does the situation exist, how to navigate the barriers to change, etc).

Methodologies

Although not a subject which was directly addressed through the community consultation process, participants also gave ideas on methodologies and research perspectives that would be most useful in their work and needed in the community.

Taking Sides

- There is a lack of research that takes the vantage point of the experiences of poverty, exclusion, racism, and discrimination. There is a need for research that explicitly regards social issues and trends from these perspectives (e.g. what social inclusion means to a person living in poverty).

Best Practices

- Research that examines what works well for others – here in Edmonton, throughout the province, nationally and internationally – is beneficial to agencies.
- Research should take a broad lens, and examine best practices across geography (i.e. what works well with other populations, in other political climates, in other communities) as well as across time (i.e. the relationship between what has worked well in the past and what is working well now).
- Assessment of best practices should include the examination of new, innovative, uncommon, and groundbreaking initiatives.

Develop Models

- The process of developing models that might work in Edmonton should begin with envisioning a picture of excellence in Edmonton in a given subject area or concern (e.g. what an ideal Edmonton transportation system would look like).

- Research that includes models – either for social planning, community development, or pursuing social justice more broadly – would be useful, and ought to include recommended strategies, desired outcomes, and benchmarks for measuring success.

Qualitative and Quantitative Research

- Quantitative research such as statistics, indexes and figures that are specific to Edmonton is useful.
- Qualitative research, such as stories exemplifying challenges and barriers in the community and everyday experiences of some of the issues discussed is also useful.

Demonstrate Trends and Correlations

- Because of the interconnections between the social issues and trends, it is important that research demonstrates these correlations and shows how a single social problem affects a host of other issues.
- Similarly, research should demonstrate how, for example, one family's poverty or exclusion affects our societal well-being.

Next Steps

Ongoing communication with our community partners is an important part of the work of the ESPC. New research projects and any other outcomes of the community consultations must be communicated broadly across the sector. Soliciting evaluative feedback can help to ensure that these projects are best suited to the needs of the non-profit, social agency sector in Edmonton.

The community consultation process can serve as a systematic means of engaging in focussed and purposeful dialogue. A second round of consultations, carried out over the next year, could be used to focus in more closely on a particular area of research or with a particular segment of the non-profit sector, based on the outcomes of this round of consultations.

Research Recommendations

ESPC's finite budgetary and staff resources will play a role in determining the extent to which the feedback gathered by consultation participants can be fully acted upon. This document should be used to broadly guide the ESPC in research decision-making, and should be used to help identify priority areas for future major research initiatives. It can also be used to help to identify possible research partners – amongst consultation participants – for future research, advocacy, or other actions. The following recommendations are also made:

The ESPC should work to enhance communication with our community partners, such that they are aware of current and ongoing ESPC research that addresses research suggestions.

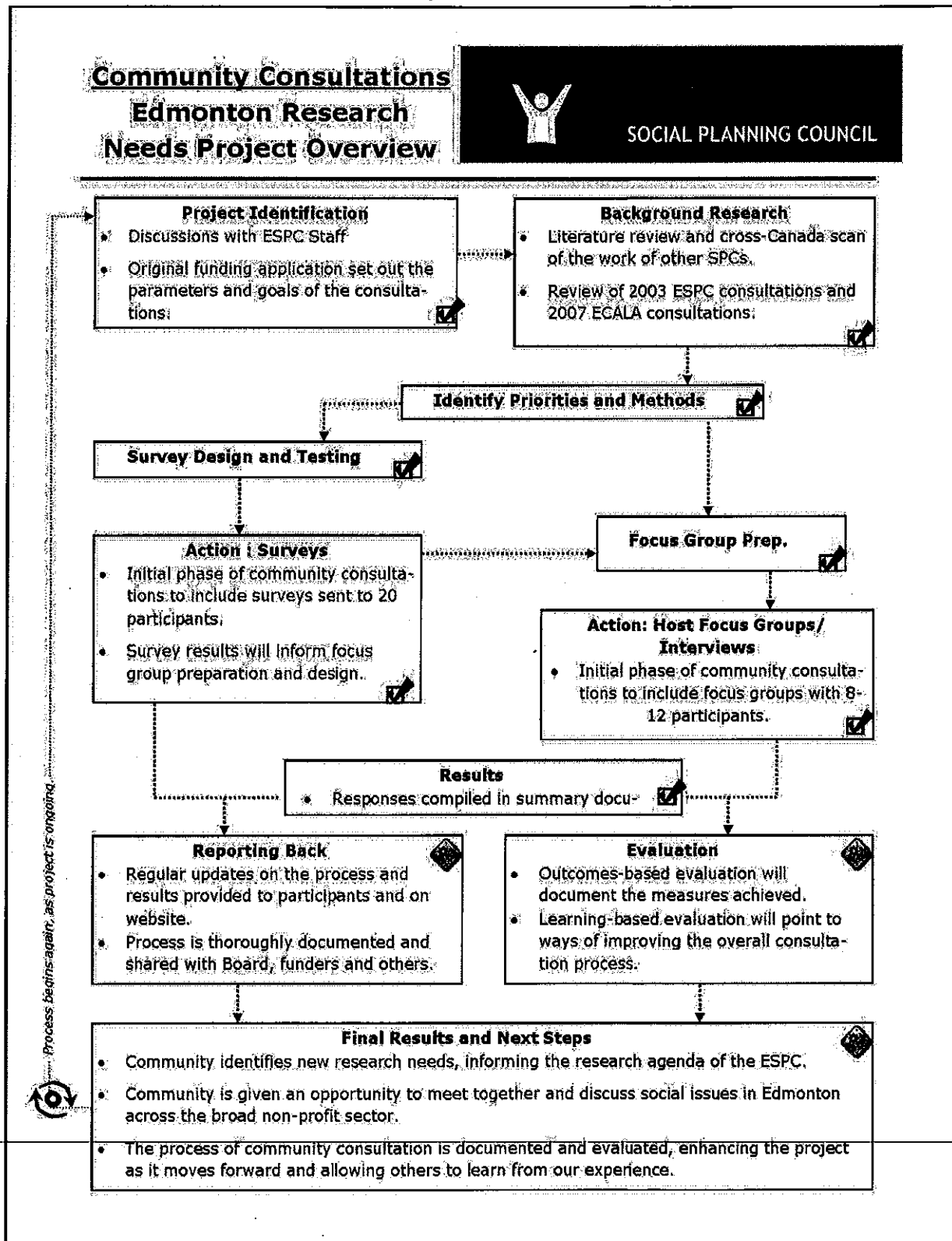
The ESPC should explore the possibility of incorporating a SROI component to existing or future projects, to help our community partners utilize research in advocacy and funding applications.

The ESPC should look at the feasibility of providing ad-hoc research services, on a smaller scale and one-time basis, to organizations in need of a particular type of information for advocacy functions and funding applications.

The ESPC should examine how community capacity in the areas of effective collaboration and policy advocacy might be expanded and enhanced, possibly through compiling and analyzing documented best practices.

Appendices

Appendix A: Diagram of Community Consultations Project Overview



Appendix B: Summary of themes presented in the literature

Community Consultations: Summary of themes in literature

Questions: What are some of the new trends emerging in literature regarding organizations such as the ESPC?

Three main trends amid the many, many debates on these questions are presented here:

- **Shifts in social policy advocacy over the years:** increasingly, we are seeing that social policies need to be couched in terms of the market in order to be successful. Rather than concepts of 'solidarity', 'responsibility', 'mutuality' – the hallmarks of the Canadian welfare state, we are mobilized by concepts of 'investment', 'asset building', and 'Social Return on Investment'. Inevitably, this affects the way that we conceive of our work, and the work that we do.
- **Professionalization of non-profit sector:** accountability is important, but the administrative burden that it places on the non-profit sector can sometimes be overwhelming. The need to be accountable has led to a whole trend of professionalization of the non-profit sector. This has led to:
 - More efficient financial, evaluative and management practises.
 - More collaboration, as small organizations seek out collaborative partnerships to get the organizational expertise they need (like the United Way and the ECVO).
 - We're seeing a lot more "branding" and marketing of non-profits than ever before.
 - Pressure to deliver measurable results, which is difficult for many organizations because of the nature of their work.
 - Much larger role of 'umbrella' organizations that can ease the administrative burden. Does this lead to the compromise of values and principles?
- **Emphasis on capacity building:** these seem to be the buzz words of the non-profit sector today. In terms of local communities, non-profit organizations, and social agency clientele, the focus on capacity building is a result of longer term planning and thinking of the future and of long-term sustainability. This might be a result of shifts in social policy advocacy, and of the professionalization of the sector.

Methodology

Questions: What are the best practises of conducting community-based research? How can literature on consultation and dialogue inform our community consultations?

There is a lot of research regarding best practises in consultation. It varies depending on the author of the research – for example, a community development facilitator will write differently on consultation than a market research analyst, even though both may seek to consult a particular community. A variety of literature on methodology was surveyed, from our own handbook on needs assessment to a document targeted at senior level bureaucrats for organizing and institutionalizing citizen engagement. While research methodologies need to be tailored to each unique circumstance, some trends and highlights emerged from the literature reviewed that will be helpful in constructing our own community consultations.

- **Clear communication** – One of the main themes found in all of the literature on methodology is the importance of clear, honest communication throughout the process. It is imperative, when working with outside groups, to clearly lay out the grounds of consultation beforehand. It isn't fair to expect people to dialogue if they do not fully understand the scope and implications of the project or their participation in it.
- **Choosing appropriate research tools** – A few of the works surveyed discuss different research tools and their strengths and weaknesses. In addition to the more common techniques of survey, interview, focus group, secondary research, etc., some creative methods are explored,

including citizen juries, citizen panels, consensus conferences, scenario workshops, deliberative polls, citizen's dialogues, and online engagement. Some of these methods might be interesting to revisit in the future. Methods for choosing participants are also discussed in some of the materials.

- **The devil is in the details** – Much of the literature focussed on the details that can make or break a project. Tips and strategies for successful planning cover almost every aspect of engaging in consultation, from being careful of language and jargon, to providing snacks, to developing pre-meeting informational materials. It doesn't make sense to review these tips here, but for the record, there are a lot of them...
- **Building in evaluation** – Evaluation will be more successful, and more useful, if it is built in to the entire process, as opposed to simply tacked on to the end of the project. At the outset, evaluation criteria and process should be established, but done so with the understanding that other evaluation criterion may become relevant as the project rolls forward. Good evaluation practice includes: a clear definition of what's being evaluated, evaluation built into dialogue process; involving participants; developing both qualitative and quantitative indicators; and balancing a learning orientation with an outcomes orientation.
- **Institutionalizing consultation** – One of the materials I looked at, a handbook on citizen engagement, brings up the concept of institutionalizing engagement in the context of government departments for whom consultation is viewed as integral to their policy making business. This is an interesting deviation from the majority of the literature that I surveyed, in which consultation was presented as a project with a particular start and end date. For organizations that want ongoing consultation to be a part of their planning processes, there are additional concerns that need to be addressed, such as resources, capacity building, continual learning, and ongoing evaluation. Some questions to consider are:
 - Are there adequate resources in place?
 - Will participation become a burden on community partners?
 - Are there mechanisms in place to take stock of the consultation periodically, as opposed to at the 'end' of the project?
 - Does the evaluation point to both ways to improve (learning-based evaluation) and what happened (outcomes based evaluation)?

Appendix C: Review of the Consultation practices of other Canadian social planning councils

The work of other Social Planning Councils

Questions: What are other social planning councils and similar organizations involved in across Canada? How do they identify research priorities within their communities? What types of community consultations do they engage in, and for what purpose?

The websites of 35 social planning councils across Canada were examined – most of them in Ontario, but also in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Manitoba, Alberta and BC. The work of social planning councils (variously named) differs greatly depending on the needs of the community and the extent to which the council is linked to other councils or networks, either locally, regionally, provincially, or nationally. Specifically, information was sought regarding 1) how social planning councils select the programs, services, and research that they provide and 2) what types of community consultations were held, and what the stated goals and outcomes of the consultations were.

What was found was that, in terms of what the ESPC is hoping to do, there hasn't been anything documented by other social planning councils. This isn't to say that they haven't sought input from community partners into their work, simply that it either: (a) hasn't been formalized into a process, (b) hasn't been adequately documented and made publicly available or (c) had a much broader or much narrower focus.

A couple of trends in the work of other social planning councils emerged:

Community consultation is definitely nothing new: consultation in a variety of forms is a key function of most of the social planning councils. Consultation is used on a variety of levels: to develop a community-wide social plan; to involve the entire community in identifying priorities and needs and engender action; or to discuss the implications of a particular social issue. What I didn't see is what we are looking at doing: involving community partners in identifying the research needs for the community. In a sense, we are asking our community partners to help us write our own job descriptions. One reason that this might not be documented by other SPCs is that it is taken for granted that the Board governance model will take care of the identification of priorities and research. Another reason for this might be that broader community consultation processes are used in an informal way to structure the work of SPCs. A final reason might be that SPCs, especially in smaller communities, simply do not have the resources to carry out this type of consultation.

Social planning councils work as conveners on community social issues: across the board, social planning councils are working in partnership with other organizations in their community. They may take the lead on some projects, but it's usually with support and/or participation of others. This may not seem like Earth-shattering news, but I think it validates the importance of these consultations. To enhance our role as a convener in Edmonton, we will be collecting that input in a systematic and more formal way.

One thing that comes to mind while reading about some of the ways that other SPCs consult with their communities is that in consulting with agencies, one assumes that they are able to best speak to social research needs of Edmonton. In the future, the ESPC may want to consider broadening this process to include others in order to see what other research priorities emerge; agencies are one type of expert, but not the only type of expert.

Some of the work that is similar in some aspects to what we are planning to do is summarized here:

- **Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries:** They are actively involved in community planning, and have used community consultations and 'visioning' processes to identify needs and priorities and engage in action on various issues in their community. In 1994, they hosted an 'Our Common Future' conference which involved community leaders, businesses and agencies in a visioning process to identify the needs of the community. More recently, they hosted 'Predictions

2020', another community needs assessment process which brought together human service providers and highschool students to identify what they wanted the community to look like in 2020, and how to get there. The difference between this work and ours is that while we are seeking input into the work of the Council, and can be responsible for implementing the results into action, these processes took a much broader focus, and there are fewer mechanisms for accountability. What is similar, however, is the use of community consultation to inform the work of the Council.

- **Community Development Council of Durham:** Their social research section regularly seeks community input in the form of surveys and online surveys to assess the needs of specific groups in the community. Recent examples include surveys targeted towards the LGBTQ community, agricultural sector labourers, clients of service agencies, and volunteers/potential volunteers of the Council. This is narrower in scope than our community consultations, as they have predetermined which issues require research and work by selecting particular groups to survey. The survey architecture and use of consultation as a means of needs assessment, however, are similar.
- **Community Planning Council of Prince George:** Their work in helping to develop the Prince George Social Plan involved a significant amount of community and neighbourhood consultation. This project, however, is much wider: they sought the input of the entire community in order to develop a community wide social plan for use by City Council and other organizations. The project had a fixed start and end date. But the results almost certainly fed into the future work of the Council, although how this might have occurred isn't documented.
- **Social Planning Council of Toronto:** One of the newer initiatives of the Toronto SPC is research forums and networks. From an annual research roundtable held in January 2008, they identified that there was a need in the community to bring together researchers working on social issues in Toronto on a regular basis to discuss their work. Since this roundtable, they have begun to host monthly research and policy forums. While the research and policy forums might point to new directions for research, new research is not the explicit focus on the forums. (The context is quite different in Toronto, as there is incredible capacity for social research already existing within the city. As such, the Toronto SPC perhaps doesn't see the need to focus too much on conducting social research, their research priorities are more directed towards the community sector. This is just my speculation, though.)
- **Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC):** SPARC seems to be a leader in hosting community dialogues on social issues. But they haven't documented anything on their website regarding how community dialogues feed back into the work of their organization. The community consultations that they do host take many different forms, and seek to involve the community in discussing a particular issue or theme with the intent of facilitating community development or action.
- **Social Planning Council of Kingston and Area:** They've done work similar to the Cambridge SPC, on identifying the needs and the priorities of the community through widespread community consultation. A recent Quality of Life Roundtable brought together leaders from different sectors across the community to identify a vision for Kingston in 2012, from which they developed 5 vision statements and Action groups to work on each. The project also has a coordination committee and is led by a Civic Leaders Panel. It started as an initiative of the SPC, but seems to have grown into its own organism. Thus, it's a bit difficult to know how this process of consultation fed into the work of the Kingston SPC.
- **Social Planning Council of Ottawa/Carleton:** They held a series of consultations with their community partners in 2006. The difference, though, is that these consultations were aimed at determining whether or not a unified awareness campaign for the voluntary sector would be beneficial for the collaborating/partnering organizations. Nothing to do with identification of research priorities, but one of the few SPCs that has well-documented work on consultation processes with community partners.

Other social planning councils reviewed include:

Social Planning Council of Peel (ON),
Social Planning Council of Sudbury (ON),
Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria (BC),
Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries (ON),
Community Development Halton (ON),
Community Development Council of Durham (ON),
Social Planning Council of Winnipeg (MB),
Social Planning Council of Kitchener/Waterloo (ON),
Peterborough Social Planning Council (ON),
PolicyLink NB,
Community Planning Council of Prince George (BC),
Community Development Council of Quinte (ON),
Human Development Council of Saint John (NB),
Centre for Community Organizations (QC),
Social Planning Council Toronto (ON),
Society for Community Development (Tri-Cities) (BC),
The Coastal Communities Network (NB),
The Community Services Council of Newfoundland and Labrador,
Social Planning and Research Council BC,
CRE de Montreal (QC),
Comox Valley Social Planning Council (BC),
North Okanagan Social Planning Council (BC),
Social Planning Council of Ottawa/Carleton (ON),
Brant Community Social Planning Council (ON),
South Peace Social Planning Council (AB),
Social Planning Network of Ontario,
Amherstberg Community Services (ON),
Community Social Planning Council of Kingsville and Leamington (ON),
Lakehead Social Planning Council (ON),
Lakeshore Community Services (ON),
North Bay Social Planning Council (ON),
Perth County Social Planning Council (ON),
Social Planning Council of Kingston and Area (ON), and
The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (ON).

Appendix D: Survey Questions

Name:

Organization:

Your organization's needs...

1. What are the key social policy issues that impact your organization and/or your clients?
2. Do you think that research can help to address these issues? Yes No
If yes, what kind of research?
3. Does your organization use social research in your work? Yes No
4. Have you used ESPC research and/or publications? Yes No
5. If you do use social research (either by ESPC or by others), what do you use it for?
6. What other functions of the ESPC might be able to help your organization deal with the most pressing social policy issues? **(check all that apply)**
 Leadership Collaboration Policy Advocacy Education and Awareness
7. Are there other ways that the ESPC can be more responsive to the needs of your organization?

Research Needs In Edmonton...

8. What do you think is the most pressing social issue facing Edmonton right now?
 9. Do you think that research is needed to tackle this issue effectively? Yes No
If yes, what kind of research? If no, why not?
 10. If it's not research that is needed, what functions of the ESPC might help?
 Leadership Collaboration Policy Advocacy Education and Awareness
- Tell us more about this:
11. Do you think there is a specific social policy issue that gets *too much* or *too little* attention (eg. a hot topic in the media that distracts from other issues, or an issue that gets ignored)? What makes you think this?

Moving Forward...

12. What do you think will be the most pressing social policy issue facing Edmonton in 5 years?
In 10 years?
13. What research projects are needed if we (as a community) want to be proactive, as opposed to reactive in dealing with these issues?
14. Is there anything else that we (as a community) should be doing *right now* to be proactive?

And Finally...

15. If you had complete control to set the **research** agenda for the ESPC over the next 1-3 years, what would you direct us to do?
16. Do you have any other comments for us

Appendix E: List of participants

Organization	Form of participation
Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton	Telephone conversation
Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations	Individual Meeting
HIV Edmonton	Survey
Gateway Association for Community Living	Survey
Public Interest Alberta	Survey
City of Edmonton Community Services	Survey
Terra Association	Survey
Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers	Focus Group
Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton	Focus Group
Edmonton YMCA	Focus Group
Canadian Mental Health Association – Edmonton Region	Focus Group
KARA Family Resource Centre	Focus Group
YWCA Edmonton	Focus Group
City of Edmonton Community Services	Focus Group
Boyle St. Community Services	Focus Group
Native Counselling Services of Alberta	Focus Group
Boyle McCauley Health Centre	Focus Group
Inner City Pastoral Ministries	Focus Group
Boys and Girls Clubs of Edmonton	Focus Group
Catholic Social Services	Focus Group
Bissell Centre	Focus Group
Edmonton YMCA	Focus Group

Appendix F: Summary of Evaluation Comments from Focus Group participants

Questions, comments, or Suggestions for ESPC Community Consultations

On the focus group:

- Excellent format; roundtable setup works well.
- Good group to work with.
- I found the focus group very mentally stimulating. Interesting that we come from diverse agencies but have very similar comments/issues.
- I think the original set of questions sent by email were good ones and we weren't able to get through them all.
- It was well facilitated – thanks!
- Not sure we answered all the questions in the original agenda. Might have spent too much time categorizing the issues question. But we landed on some good research suggestions.
- OK – would have liked to spend more time on Building Community Capacity and less time on our funding issues.
- Thank you for providing us with this opportunity! It was great to sit with others and discuss common issues. I was a little 'intimidated' to come; I wasn't sure I had enough knowledge or expertise to 'advise' you on social policy or research, but the discussion was much less 'academic' than I had feared.
- This kind of opportunity is useful for participating agencies to learn from each other the different issues affecting their work, clients, programs, and funders.
- Very interesting. Erin did a great job of trying to keep the focus group on the purpose. Good luck.
- Well done, appropriate process for our purposes and good facilitation.
- Well organized, good facilitation, and admin resource.
- Well-structured. Pre-session questions and info were helpful and kept discussion focused.

On the Consultations in general:

- Excellent move in approach and direction on the part of the ESPC. You have my support!
- Good idea to open communication with agencies.
- Good initiative.
- Good opportunity to get perspective of other groups.
- Hopeful.
- How do we get access to R&D from your agency?
- I was pleased to learn more about the ESPC and how it might help me at the agency level.
- I would like this info to be shared with others - e.g., online. If this is something you are going to do, it may be useful to talk about how info will be shared – e.g. will names be attached to focus group?
Individual comments?
- Provocative.
- This was a well run consultation. Thank you for the opportunity to share.

On anything else:

- Further consultation and collaboration would be helpful.
- Keep it coming...
- Thanks for this opportunity, it's useful.
- We have been here before.....with little outcome.....

Appendix G: Focus Group Summary July 21, 2008

Focus Group Summary – July 21, 2008

The focus group held on July 21 was the first of two occurring this summer, the results of which will complement feedback solicited through surveys and one-on-one conversations. The organizations represented at the first focus group were:

- Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
- Edmonton YMCA
- KARA Family Resource Centre
- Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton
- Canadian Mental Health Association – Edmonton Region

Social Issues and Trends

After brainstorming social issues affecting organizations and their clients, the group categorized the issues identified into groups. It was recognized that the issues could have been categorized differently and that some issues may have fit into multiple groups, or fit between different groups. After categorizing the issues, the group named the 4 categories in an effort to explain how the various – and sometimes dissimilar – issues were related. Read this way, the category labels serve as a first attempt at identifying the root causes of symptoms that were elucidated through the brainstorming process.

Social Determinants of Health; Survival and Quality of Life; Housing

- Housing is a barrier – even if it's possible to find suitable housing, it is often difficult to maintain housing, especially safe, affordable housing.
- Affordable housing for newcomers an issue.
- Youth and gang issues – gang involvement on the rise and youth underemployment are issues – Many youth are being sucked into the gang lifestyle, false promise of easy money. Parents at work means kids are often on their own. Youth coming through programs have higher levels of need than ever before.
- Temporary foreign worker issues: these workers are coming to Canada under special arrangements with employers. After an initial work period, it's up to the employer to renew their contract – often there are difficulties getting contracts renewed. Sometimes they are given false information before they come as to the level of payment, becoming a Canadian citizen, etc. Also problems with abuse of workers.
- Addictions issues, mental health issues and family violence are on the rise. The increase in chronic mental health issues and chronic addictions has meant a burden on the treatment facilities making it difficult for schools, agencies and individuals to refer to the treatment centers.
- Gaps in senior's programming: problem with people "aging out" of programs which leads to gaps in programming – one area where this is problematic is in seniors housing.
- Pressure on single parents growing – there are more single parent families, including families with one parent away for prolonged periods for work (eg. military, international work, oil sands, etc). Linked to this is a lack of awareness of parental rights.
- Supports for military families: military personnel place a service burden on agencies. This is a large population that is constantly in flux, and should come with federal funding for programming, but in reality they are accessing a variety of services (and they should be able to) that do not receive extra funding.
- Accessing flexible childcare an issue: 24-hour childcare is increasingly being requested . It is extremely difficult to find regular day-time childcare regardless if you are a staff or a client. This appears to be due to the staffing issues in our community. Not enough staff working in Childcare means that they cannot care for as many children.

- Longer term issue: People need economic education. There is a lack of financial literacy training and economic education, especially for young people. This trend is linked to, and exacerbated by a culture of materialism and the pressure to BUY things.
- Longer term issue: People choosing not to do post-secondary education because the current economic climate doesn't require it – what will happen when the boom is over and people are undereducated and with lifestyles requiring higher paying jobs? The social supports are not in place for this population. Infrastructure and social networks/supports, in 5 years, will be a problem, especially with an influx of those who today are working in tar-sands related industries.
- Lack of adequate transportation, cost of transportation is a significant barrier for many.
- Clients have difficulty accessing services – availability of services is an issue for many – hyper-economy is doing nothing to improve the availability of services.
- Nothing can be done until safety and stabilization needs of clients are met – often this in itself, meeting very basic needs, poses huge barriers to addressing the more complex needs of clients.

Need for People-Centred Policy

- Schools and teachers are overworked and stretched to the limit– programs are tough to run in schools, we need a more agency-friendly way of working in schools. Difficult both for agencies and for teachers: program requirements such as pre- and post- surveys, etc., are not realistic for teachers to complete. If not completed, there's a risk of losing funding for the program. After-school programs also present barriers: space availability, janitorial services, etc. There is also a need for training the teachers in the program curriculum such that they can reinforce the message.
- There is a need to build awareness/train teachers about the issues that agencies are presenting programming about (for example, sexual assault) such that they do not inadvertently undermine the agency programming.
- No flexibility currently in the childcare system – for example, subsidies. Respite care and short-term care are difficult for agencies to provide but necessary for clients.
- Childcare is at a crisis point.
- Pay-day loans, money lending industry is preying on clients!
- Involvement of Children's Services with families or children often creates headaches for organizations: More of the organizations resources are used, often results in poorer accessibility to programs, administrative burden.
- There is a need for funding for community leaders (in reference to cultural/linguistic communities) to continue and expand the important work they do. For example, for senior immigrants, language learning process is slower, causing a need for translation services and language programs that are appropriate for seniors. Connecting these people to agencies is important work and requires more resources.
- DATS is underfunded: Inadequate runs, irregular services, Not reliable, can't transport a child with the parent with a disability if child is not disabled, etc. There are barriers, broadly speaking, to accessible transportation in the City.
- Transportation is an issue for clients –tickets through Donate-a-Ride are not enough; almost not worth it to pursue program. Tickets run out after one or two months, and then agencies spend the rest of the year saying "no" to bus ticket requests. Not enough budget to cover mileage reimbursements.
- So many people are working that nobody has time to raise the kids—broad, societal issue and related to the economic boom and the cost of living. What are the long term effects of this going to be on the next generation?
- Wait lists are full, non-for-profits always end up taking the fall – as stated earlier, hyper-economy is not benefiting non-profits or their clients.

- Experiencing increase in crime and violence- there are generational effects of this type of trend (for example kids in gangs)– and a need for preventative programming. Crime and violence is more and more being perceived as key social concerns in Edmonton.
- People are choosing educational programs based on increases to student loan funding as the cost of living continues to rise. Often, they're not making educational choices based on the needs of the economy or what they want to study. Loan amounts are greater than other income supports so increasing in popularity. They come out of school with high debt load, unable to access further student loan funding in some cases, and possibly with an education not suited to their needs.

Compounding Barriers

- Many immigrants/refugees from conflict areas want to return during times of peace (more often the older generation that wants to return, younger people are more reluctant to leave). This can create tensions in families, across generations, and in cultural communities.
- Newcomers may be coming to Canada with mental health needs, there is some funding in this area.
- Temporary workers – or any marginalized group – often don't know their rights. For example, sexual assault in the workplace but being told that they shouldn't contact the police when they have the right to, etc.
- Communication issues and language barriers – Lack of resources for newcomers regarding language training, and a lack of awareness on behalf of the broader community, when it comes to acceptance of linguistic differences. Foreign workers may be talented and have the skills necessary, but for client-based services, there are additional language barriers.
- Retraining for employment – there are bridging programs to help newcomers make the transition, but more funding is needed.
- Economic upturn means that people that have typically had difficulty finding employment are being successfully employed or taking volunteer positions. Employers are more willing to take training and courses to understand this new group of workers better.
- Stigma issues- make provision of programming, access to programming, developing awareness in the community, etc. much more difficult.

Value our Society Places on Social Agencies and their Clients; Resources

- Continual pressure to expand mandate/scope of organization to include more programs, more client groups – although there is a need, agencies are constrained (financially and space).
- Lack of funding for programs targeting specific groups outside of the main client base (eg. mental health programming for seniors, or programming specifically for newcomers).
- Higher operating costs of agencies causing a resource crunch. \$\$ from the boom is not trickling down to agencies, funding for projects is often short-term.
- Operating of costs for NFPs increasing: Prices of leases are increasing, many agencies facing space issues as land is being purchased by developers and redeveloped. Few agencies can afford to secure long-term spaces through buying them. What will happen to the 'landscape' of non-profits? Additionally, areas where highest need families are located are the areas where there is the least space available for agencies to locate.
- Agency workers are leaving the sector for government and private sector jobs.
- Lack of volunteers: Volunteers are volunteered out! Trend for volunteers to do one project each year, competition for volunteers with larger events/organizations that have budgets to advertise for volunteers.

- The perception of service duplication is unhelpful – there are not enough services, never mind duplication. If there was duplication, it wouldn't be a bad thing, as it would give clients choice, especially when privacy is of greater concern.
- Pressure, both from funders and from clients, to expand services to evenings and weekends, but can't because of staffing (eg. Require at least 2 staff for safety concerns, staff must be able to access childcare as well, other factors increase cost of expanding hours beyond business hours.)
- Transporting clients to services is expensive but necessary in many cases (ie. cabs).
- Lack of staff! (human service fields and educational institutions are experiencing lower than needed rates of employees or students)
- Very little support for agencies to do multicultural training and diversity awareness among staff, although agencies recognize need for this type of training.
- Funding applications and reporting cause an administrative burden on agencies. Some funders recognize this barrier and the need for coordination (like the United Way), which is good. More need to get on board with this way of working.
- Worker turnover leads to a lack of consistency for clientele. Among some client groups this is problematic.
- Agencies need to harness technology to improve accessibility to their programming – for example, the use of audio clips on a website instead of print brochures.
- There is a real need for sensitive translation services (ASL and other languages). Often, translators who do not understand some of the issues or barriers faced by clientele may jeopardize the message if they do not understand why/how certain words are used in the way agency workers communicate with clients.
- Cost of school busses and staffing issues within bus companies means that field trip costs are increasing dramatically. This makes these trips more expensive both for the agency and the family.

Research Solutions

After brainstorming how research could help to address some of the issues identified and categorized earlier, we worked together to assess how each of the research themes suggested would be useful. Specifically, we answered 4 questions about each of the research projects:

- Does the research project respond broadly to the key themes identified or does it target a specific issue?
- Does the research project build on existing research or address gaps in research?
- To what extent does the research project support the work of community organizations?
- To what extent does the research project build our broader community capacity to organize and respond to change?

The suggestions were:

- Learn from the past – go through past research. Review what's been done, best practices in Canada. (Don't need to redo research that's already been done many times.)
- Compiling research on particular topics.
- One-time research support for organizations – eg. What information is out there on a specific topic (to help with funding applications of specific agency projects).
- Regarding Housing: there is a ton of research already on housing. It's time for action and social policy advocacy.
- Best practices on recruitment and retention.
- What are the behind the scenes things that need to be in place before we can implement best practices in a given area.
- How to convince up the line – how to advocate for social policy changes towards people-centred policy. How to best collaborate with other organizations on advocacy?

- Temporary workers in Edmonton. (Potential lack of information/research – eg. What services are available, etc.)
- Agencies access to research: online compilation of Edmonton based research – indication of interest in this service.
- Why prevention works. How prevention works.
- Research on how we measure outcomes and dealing with the tensions between what agencies need and what funders want. (Communicating with funders, coming up with better outcome measures. Evaluation tends to be funder-driven.)
- Who's getting dollars (in gov't)? What's driving departmental funding allocations?
- How to navigate jurisdictional / inter-departmental issues? (fed-prov-mun)
- Measuring successes when collaboration is happening between departments/levels of government.
- Early prevention/intervention: an analysis of how these types of initiatives save money in the long term.
- Research on how to express things in dollars: how do we speak in their language? (Balance this with people-focused analysis.)

Final Comments

- Agencies always have to bear the burden of proof (e.g. Proving that prevention works)!
- Access to information is important – agencies don't have time to do the research. More information is needed about the types of services that the ESPC provides in this regard.
- Ethical issue – There is always an ethical tension between providing the services that are needed and meeting funder requirements. How funds are used, how to report on that, how to best serve clients. Amount of resources going to reporting rather than focusing on service itself.
- Strategic planning vs. action planning – need more information around this.

Appendix H: Focus Group Summary – August 12, 2008

ESPC Focus Group Summary – August 12, 2008

The focus group held on August 12 was the second of two occurring this summer, the results of which will complement feedback solicited through surveys and one-on-one conversations. The organizations represented at the second focus group were:

- City of Edmonton
- Boys and Girls Clubs of Edmonton
- Boyle St. Community Services
- Inner City Pastoral Ministries
- Native Counselling Services of Alberta
- Catholic Social Services
- Bissell Centre
- Boyle McCauley Health Centre
- YMCA
- YWCA

Social Issues and Trends

The focus group started out with brainstorming and discussion in response to the questions: What are the social issues that are affecting your clients and your organizations? What are the new and emerging social trends?

After brainstorming and discussing the points that were brought up, we attempted to categorize the issues into a number of groups to represent the relationships between the various issues, and how they linked together. There was discussion throughout the focus group on how we may have done this differently, however, the issues ended up loosely classified into 4 general themes, which contained 13 subthemes. The four general themes were:

- The historical causes of poverty/social exclusion
- The contemporary/current causes of poverty/social exclusion
- The manifestations of poverty/social exclusion
- The capacity to deal with these issues

The group discussed whether or not 'poverty' was, in fact, the core issue underlying all of the various points that were discussed. Some felt that this was the case, while others felt that many of the issues would still be present even if poverty were not present. The group discussed how the term 'poverty' might be exchanged for, or supplemented by, the term 'social exclusion' in the above categories to give a better picture of the root causes of the issues identified. In the end, this question remained largely unresolved, but the conversation demonstrated the difficulties and tensions involved in naming cause to social issues.

After going through the categorization exercise, the group discussed whether or not the categories sufficiently addressed the linkages between the various issues. Many of the issues that were brought up fit into a number of the 'categories'. It was suggested that, rather than categories, a web would be a more appropriate method of showing relationships between the issues. The group discussed how a web might look, and how it could represent the issues that were discussed differently and perhaps more appropriately. We did not attempt to re-categorize the issues into a web, but again, this discussion illustrated how complex and interconnected these issues truly are.

The points are organized below by cluster:

The Historical Causes of Poverty/Social Exclusion

- Residential school system and effects
- Racism – systemic racism, not just tensions
- Racism and disrespect for Aboriginal culture

The Contemporary Causes of Poverty/Social Exclusion

CENTRALITY OF POVERTY

- Poverty touches all of these issues
- Racism – systemic racism, not just tensions
- Once you lose everything, it's really hard to crawl back up.
- Is it poverty, or prosperity that's causing the disparity here?
- Middle class is able to cope better with many of these issues. They can access support and treatment if they want.
- Addiction is a big issue – homelessness and addiction intertwined. People w/o resources are most affected and least able to respond to their addiction. Need for more support for people who really want to address their addiction problem.
- Cycle of poverty (becoming more exacerbated and prevalent): more reliance on food bank, yet it doesn't supply things like diapers, need more programs looking at poverty issues, need for life skills programming.
- Churches are struggling to learn how to communicate and work with urban native population. The urban native population different than rural Aboriginal communities. Diversity within urban Aboriginal community makes it difficult for churches to identify cultural leaders (Elders) – how to access elders as resources within churches? This is important because the idea of reconciliation is important within churches.
- Church leaders hesitate to identify First Nations as unique – we've seen a very distinct paradigm shift in the way the federal government is acknowledging First Nations (ie. The apology and truth and reconciliation commissions), but Church leaders haven't made the same changes – some are hesitant to identify First Nations as unique and distinct within our social fabric.

LEADERSHIP/LACK OF LEADERSHIP

- Government is unwilling to deal with social issues – they don't have a unified plan. The notion of the common good is gone.
- Problem underlying everything we're talking about today is the unwillingness by provincial and federal governments to deal with social issues with any plan/foresight/vision.
- How can we return to that ideal (common good) when consistently re-electing conservative government in AB, generation after generation? It seems that they get more determined NOT to look at the common good – to ignore all research.
- No plan for social issues, creating deepening poverty
- Survival of the fittest philosophy – need supports and life skills courses for people
- Need awareness and acknowledgement by government of the negative impacts of growth
- New group of homeless due to pace of growth (people who were housed and "stable" prior).
- Reveals how government values social service infrastructure
- From a research point of view, how do other jurisdictions handle this kind of unfettered growth?

- Pace of economic growth: economic growth doesn't bring prosperity to everyone – there's the belief that economic growth will trickle down, but in fact, high rates of growth have created great hardships. In a growing economy, landlords have control over who they take or keep out – they can "choose" not to rent to certain groups.
- Storefront Office for Foreign Qualifications was needed, Don Getty promised it before Klein came into power, but the government wasn't held accountable – the people that are most in need of that type of service are disempowered from calling for it (don't want to rock the boat).
- There are so many contributions in the workforce that newcomers could be making, but can't because they are stuck in labour jobs (due to deskilling).

EXPECTATIONS/PROBLEMS WITH 'THE SYSTEM'

- Both agencies and funders are responsible for the lack of cohesive, innovative responses to problems.
- Agencies have lost capability to envision due to doing same thing continuously over years:
 - We haven't done our job, as agencies, in communicating innovative ways of doing programming back up the line.
 - We've been quashed a bit.
 - I would love to bring some of that to government, but we've been doing what everyone's always done, it's an endless treadmill. Luckily, England and the States were coming up with innovative solutions that we were able to piggyback on and now have much more of a vision. We've lost our vision as well.
- Funders want demonstrated outcomes in preventative programming (also could be in the final category): Funders don't want therapeutic programming, they want preventative programming, and they want demonstrated outcomes of that programming in 5 sessions or something. That's impossible, especially when you're dealing with cultural issues, economic pressures families are under, PTSD, violence issues – they are not preventative in nature, but funding dictates preventative programming. So agencies shift their programming over to reflect that, and problems end up being missed. Programming dictated because of public purse, but flow of delivery hasn't been thought out, or they don't know what it is – government strategic planning is from election to election – and it has very much undermined the social fabric of Alberta in particular.
- The drive (by funders) not to duplicate services stovepipes agencies and prevents collaborative work – agencies have to carve out niche to obtain funding
- We can still do a better job of coordinating and collaborating. The funding pushes us apart. Calgary has done a better job at collaborating, in Edmonton, we're all going after the same pot of money. There's not enough of a step back to see what we could do together, what would benefit the whole city – we don't often have that kind of discussion.
- EGF and United Way have streamlined some requirements – i.e. annual report is enough (further elaborated below)
- Reporting functions: get all funders expecting the same reports on the same timeframe.
- Coordinate projects/direction between agencies – leave the government out of it
- Administration a roadblock in doing work; agencies have difficulty in getting funding for admin costs.

ADVOCACY

- Advocacy organizations: there is a lack of quality, established advocacy groups – there used to be more groups doing advocacy, but they are gone now, since the 90s.
- It's difficult to speak out against government – there is a real fear of speaking out – they are the funders.
- Don't bite the hand that feeds you
- 10% cap on budget for advocacy functions for all social service agencies (as per CRA), and that cap is presuming that you have the money in your budget and the capacity to be doing advocacy work to begin with.
- Need for public awareness of opportunity cost of NOT providing social services. A cost/benefit analysis – if you could illustrate the opportunity costs in terms of barrels of oil, then you might be able to get their attention.
- People will say it costs this much money to take care of these clients, but look at the costs if you don't do it – the impacts on society – the cost will be 3 times as much.
- They've done a good job of this in terms of public health – quantifying the dollars in on provincial, versus outcome, and what the cost would be if you didn't spend that money – so there are a lot of examples that we can look at, but it hasn't been done in this sector.

LACK OF TRANSITIONAL SUPPORTS

- More and more people are losing their connection to home and family – causes a lot of the symptoms that we're discussing.
- Things that we're talking about are all *symptoms* of underlying social issues.
- Gangs/drugs indicative of underlying issues
- We're seeing more and more people who no longer have a connection to their family, culture, homes.
- Increasing migration from rural to urban (Aboriginal) and the lack of transitional services
- Not enough supports for refugee kids in schools
- Children of de-skilled immigrants are now rejecting education because they see that it hasn't helped their parents. Their parents have ended up working in menial labour jobs instead of in their field, and the kids reject education b/c "look what it got you!" – backlash there.
- With kids coming from refugee situations who haven't had access to education before, there are many issues with education for them once they are in Canada, and there is a lack of support/skill development for basic education of immigrant children here.
- Language barriers: In the experience of some agencies, in hiring staff who are immigrants, immigrant barrier is not education (some hold 2 or 3 degrees), it is English speaking and comprehension.
- Financial pressures on newcomers make it necessary to start work right away – pursuing education is less of a priority. Some newcomers start out with debt – they have to pay back their airfare and cost of travel. So the priority is to work, not to get that language training.

- Newcomers stay at Reception House for 2 weeks and then they have to find a sponsor – but there isn't enough space and we end up putting them into hotels. They get very little money to start out their life in Canada with. They are forced to choose between either work and survive, or getting language training.
- Newcomer women marginalized – not encouraged/receptive to learning English in some cases because of their culture/traditions – priority given to men learning language.

The Manifestations of Poverty/Social Exclusion

YOUTH AND GANGS

- Youth gang connection to rapid urban native population growth – 20% of gang membership is identifiably Aboriginal at this point in time – and it's growing.
- Migration to Edmonton because of gangs
- Gangs are targeting youth as young as 11.
- Gangs: increasing violence, increasing property damage, kids are involved
- Youth and gangs: problems for the kids that attend our clubs. Gangs are recruiting members at Boys + Girls Club events and at the actual clubs.
- Mostly Aboriginal kids targeted by gangs.
- Agencies are trying to attract these kids before the gangs do.
- Poverty and the lack of supports leads to gang involvement (gangs are supportive)
- There's a strong correlation between what we've just been talking about (lack of supports for youth) and the increase in gang activity. For some youth there are no options, it is very difficult to stay on the good path, and gangs are very supportive – too supportive.
- Rapid increase in Aboriginal involvement in gangs – what are the longterm, generational effects?

CHILD WELFARE

- All of our Native moms were getting their kids pulled – they aren't getting any services or supports, they're just getting their kids yanked.
- There are no innovative ways to allow urban aboriginal families to stay together in the city, and yet (Social Services) can't give us stats to show us how/what they're doing with these families, why those families are losing their kids, and how much of that is related to housing issues, either inadequate housing or no housing. This is a huge issue – we're talking about a generational cycle if they keep going the way they're going.
- Questionnaire with homeless clients: one of the things we would have liked to ask is how many of them have kids who are with other family, or in care. What happened? What were the circumstances that led them to lose their kids? One circumstance could be lose kids, housing funding goes down, can't afford housing, become homeless, and then absolutely can't get the kids back.
- Over 60% of kids in care are Aboriginal.
- Ongoing migration from rural to urban by Aboriginal – and lack of supports – how to manage this migration better?

- Racism
- Aboriginal kids are taken into care for the same reasons that other families get support – it’s absolute and total disrespect for culture – not understanding what they’re seeing.

ADDICTIONS

- Type of drugs used – more crack, which is cheap and addictive, increase in usage, more widespread and different populations using it (for example, seniors).
- Makes it tough to engage people who “go that route”.
- Addictions – also make these other problems worse. Compounds the barriers.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

- Health + wellness → impacts of poverty
- Getting clients into long term counselling is a barrier – there are too few options, not enough service providers
- Poverty impacts health and wellness. Families that are ‘teetering’ are being pushed – choices they make around simple things, like food choices, get pushed down the tube. So they end up eating fast food because there is the perception that it is cheaper. So poverty affects basic things, even if there are no side issues like mental health or addictions.

AGING POPULATION

- Increased demand and needs for services for seniors – aging population, changing demographics.

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

- Homelessness/housing
- Affordable housing
- Landlords have choice of who to house in a hot economy – difficult for those with barriers to get housing (eg. those with addictions)
- Lack of physical bed spaces for clients – clients staying in hotels for lack of space
- The affordable housing system is problematic. It is designed to deal with crisis, as opposed to preventing crisis. The process of applying can be confusing for clients. If you’re on one wait list, you can’t be on another.
- The affordable housing system is crisis-oriented rather than prevention-oriented, which it should be.
- New groups of people becoming homeless, new demographic.

The Capacity to Deal with these issues

- Staff retention an issue, especially loss of staff to for-profits
- Demand for skills leads to turnover in front line government personnel and agencies: Because there is such a demand for skill in the province right now, we’re seeing a very high turnover, in the government, especially in the front line of services in the government. Caseworkers don’t know their own system anymore – it’s a perfect storm.
- Lack of consistency for clients – one family with 5 different workers in one year (child welfare –

government) – causes huge problems – nothing happened for that family.

- Pay rates for staff in agencies not keeping pace
- Disparity b/w have and have-nots (in terms of employers)
- Graduates are coming out of school with the expectation that their job will enable them to purchase their first home. This isn't happening – makes it hard to keep people in the sector – even if they are committed to the agency, they can't afford to work there.
- Administrative burden extenuated with one-off funding
- Fed/prov/muni funding requirements are extremely restrictive
- Funding is for service delivery only and doesn't take administrative costs into account. This sets up the imperative to cut programming – some agencies have experienced the situation where no donor dollars, for example, can be used in administration.
- NFPs not allowed to be innovative – they are having their programming prescribed to them – presents a huge problem – taking innovation out of it.
- Sustainability of funding in general – how the government perceives the social infrastructure – how are NFPs valued?
- Government throwing out RFP'S - if treating us like corporate sector, listen to us like corporate!
- Agencies need to communicate innovative ways to deliver service back up (Also could be in advocacy category)
- Some success: Funder originally wanted to give out bonuses late in the year if they end up under budget. That doesn't guarantee retention. So we asked to put together in the retention strategy a different way of using that money. It included an increase in technology, putting coordinators into community-based delivery (laptops) which reduces square footage that we need to pay for and maintain, and professional development. It was approved.
- Funding barriers necessitate the cutback of programs – for example, if a funder only wants a specific type of program, the agency needs to implement it, even if it's not the best fit.
- Administrative burden with reporting is worse with small, one-off funders that may run a different fiscal year – you have to reconfigure your entire internal financial reporting structure.
- There was also the discussion of the scramble for the same funding dollars – competition among agencies within the city.

Discussion

- Need to have “strings” (ie. Web of poverty) to show the connection between the issues – eg. Gangs connected to drugs connected to residential schools
- Is homelessness cause or symptom? Linked to gangs/addiction
- Funding/retention falls under umbrella of “ability to respond”
- Lack of leadership in senior levels of government around social issues
- Economic growth is mutually exclusive of leadership
- Lack of preparedness/foresight/leadership for infrastructure/boom – what about long period of boom? What will happen in the future?
- Billions of dollars in the coffers, but still cutting programs/funding – why?

- Aboriginal urban migration is both cause and symptom – all in-migration contributes to housing problem; no supports for any of these groups.
- Historical analyses have been done – do contemporary analyses
- Deinstitutionalization is historic cause (mental health system)
- Two overarching categories: mental health and poverty
- Racism is historic AND contemporary
- Lack of consistency falls under staff retention
- Lack of transitional services
- Store-front qualification office not being put into place shows lack of leadership and follow-through
- What is end result when you bring people in but don't support them?
- Aging population missing
- Leadership of institutions missing
- Apart what we have talked about today, what would not have been talked about 15 years ago?
 - homelessness wasn't as much of an issue 15 years ago
 - poverty is manifesting itself differently today
 - family/women violence would have been prevalent topics
 - urban migration settlement issue is new(-ish)
 - gangs/crack
 - refugee support
 - unprecedented prosperity
 - technological have and have-nots (have-not = impoverished)
 - government expects people to have/use technology to apply for programs – what if you no access/knowledge of? You're screwed.
- Government needs to understand we are experts in our area, rather than them dictating to us what services to provide
- 4 categories for "issues": historic causes; current underlying causes; current manifestation; factors affecting responses to poverty
 - For example, crack use can be a current manifestation of poverty
 - If a liveable income was given to everyone, would these issues evaporate?
- Relationship between all the issues is important – don't lump everything into categories, rather make a "web" to guide research
- Growth exacerbates social issues and alienates more people

Research Solutions

- Models of managing growth - examples from others:
 - What does it look like to manage in-migration/social change and keep our city in a social balance?
 - How do you deal with this trend of urbanization? The city is in flux; huge population growth; rural in-migration: how to manage that social change?
 - How does the city deal with issues concerning surrounding rural areas?
- Research that can draw correlation between some of these issues we've discussed (eg. drugs/gangs/homelessness/).
- Research that can be used as an advocacy tool.
- A cross-jurisdictional report card, comparing Edmonton to other jurisdictions in terms of managing growth, and models for collaboration and planning.
- An "Edmonton inclusiveness index", which could include factors such as:
 - how many meals served @ mustard seed?

- evictions from public spaces
- number people living on streets
- what would inclusiveness mean taking the perspective of those in poverty?
- Importance of Edmonton focused research: the city has specific challenges unique to Edmonton.
- Research that draws out the hidden, invisible issues for the public and raises awareness.
 - E.g. homelessness is NOT just on the streets
 - Open peoples' eyes who otherwise may have their blinders on
 - All issues affect quality of life of everyone to some degree – demonstrate that.
 - System doesn't have places to put large numbers of people
 - Making argument to people who don't get it
- What is the cost of NOT addressing these issues adequately? Now is good timing to put numbers (costs) to issues, as people are increasingly sensitive due to increasing costs of things like gas.
 - Show how it could actually put money back in their pocket
 - Give the public a voice to use in advocating on behalf of marginalized groups.
- Restructuring of health system: Is health care restructuring the leading edge of wider system restructuring? The extent of this restructuring is massive - and very frightening.
- How are other jurisdictions engaging NGOs? For example - Calgary and Winnipeg have done a good/excellent job at collaboratively planning. They might be models to look to.
 - The question is: how could a similar model work here in Edmonton?
 - How can needs, resources, strategies and the implementation of a joint plan be done here in Edmonton - collaboratively?
 - However, be aware that cookie-cutter solutions sometimes accompany collaboration and jeopardize the integrity of process.
 - What do we need to address from a priority view?
 - What are examples of good strategy?
 - How would we implement it?
 - Begin by identifying a "picture of excellence in Edmonton is..." and work from there.
 - Do these issues actually require more funding? Perhaps we just need to redesign the delivery of funding? What resources are actually needed?
- The collaborative assessment of needs and resources could then be mapped across geography/demography and correlated to other issues throughout the city (discussion about City of Edmonton and provincial mapping services).
- Start with a given 'cluster' or 'web' of issues (have to know where you are starting from), then move to assessing best practices in other jurisdictions, and then design a model which includes benchmarks for measuring improvement/success for Edmonton.
- Regarding the question about building on existing research or addressing gaps in the research – existing research may not be helpful; it may be that it is time for a paradigm shift in research/services. Is what we're doing addressing what we think we're addressing? Are we spinning our wheels? Important to consider this as well.

Summary comments:

- Recommended article for participants in focus group: "Whose Burden?", which appeared in *This Magazine*. (URL: <http://www.thismagazine.ca/issues/2008/05/whoseburden.php>)
- Continue dialog throughout decision making
 - keep everyone involved and strengthen relationship between ESPC and other agencies

