GUIDE | 10 WAYS LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAN PROPEL POSITIVE SOCIAL CHANGE

JILL ZACHARIAS, TAMARACK INSTITUTE

TREMENDOUS PRESSURE FOR GOVERNMENT ACTION

Daunting is one word that comes to mind when contemplating addressing social change. For municipalities with limited capacity and resources, it seems an impossible feat. Local governments are experiencing 'ground zero' as communities face increasingly complex social challenges – from pandemic outcomes to lack of affordability, to climate emergencies. The role and responsibilities of each level of government are not as clearly defined as they once were.

The possibilities are endless when local governments and active partners are at the table.

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Yet, there is tremendous pressure to act. What's more, the possibilities are *endless* when local governments and active partners are at the table.

This guide was built for local government representatives and senior staff, community partners, and individuals who wish to deepen their learning and find guidance on how they can be a game-changer in propelling positive social change.

USING THIS GUIDE WILL HELP YOU:

o Better understand the **social role of local governments**
o **Connect** with the foundations of effective community development
o Build capacity and **leadership** to address **complex social issues** that no one sector is equipped to address on its own.

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OVERVIEW

A changing world and uncertain future represent a call to action. There is opportunity to work better, together with others, to be proactive and focus on upstream prevention; to improve resilience – for both individuals and whole communities. There is opportunity to find strength, inspiration, and build upon the good work already happening on the ground as communities pivot to address influential factors and experiences. There is a need to change the way we work together to make the work easier and more effective for everyone involved.

Within Canada, each province and territory have different legislative and operational mandates in advancing social issues. This guide will explore common avenues and tools within local government jurisdiction to help civic leaders and staff better understand and embrace their social role and show what is possible when municipalities actively collaborate for positive social change.

Tools and examples are linked throughout the guide to take your learning further.

THREE FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS

ONE| SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

A first step is understanding the importance of social sustainability in relation to civic functions. Of all aspects of sustainability, 'social sustainability' is, perhaps, the least understood. Above all, social sustainability is about people.
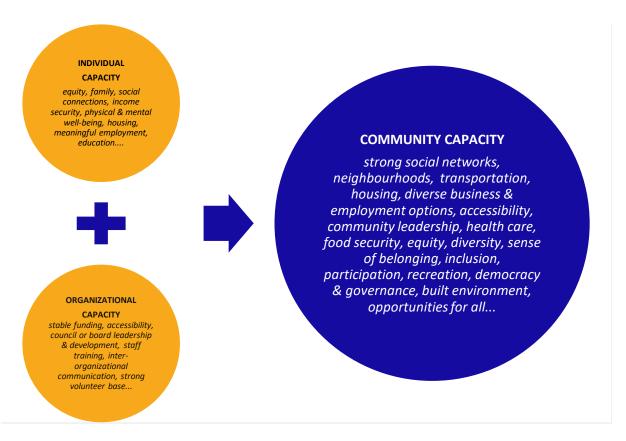
Social sustainability is much more qualitative than it is quantitative. It addresses the ways in which members of a community live their lives and interact with each other. It intertwines the maintenance of basic human needs along with the exercising of political, economic, and social freedoms. Think of it as the difference between a surviving society and a thriving society. In a surviving society, people have enough food, shelter, and water to meet their basic needs; whereas in a thriving society, these needs are supplemented by nutrition, education, freedom, and other factors that improve the society's health and well-being.

-City of Maple Ridge

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Different elements include:

- **Place** - geographic boundaries define the setting that contains both public and private spaces, specific to a particular place. Sense of place and belonging are linked to geography and the experiences that occur within these spaces. Places, spaces, and neighbourhoods are foundational to the inclusion, safety, connectedness, and accessibility of our communities.

- **Networks** - formal and informal processes, systems, structures, and relationships exist and form a network that define community. Organizations and community groups, volunteerism, conversations, engagement, advocacy, knowledge transfer and empowerment depend on healthy, vibrant, functional networks supported by both relationships and infrastructure.

- **Capacity** - the ability of individuals, organizations, neighbourhoods, and community to function well, all works together to contribute to the overall health and well-being of the entire community.

INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY
equity, family, social connections, income security, physical & mental well-being, housing, meaningful employment, education....

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY
stable funding, accessibility, council or board leadership & development, staff training, inter-organizational communication, strong volunteer base...

COMMUNITY CAPACITY
strong social networks, neighbourhoods, transportation, housing, diverse business & employment options, accessibility, community leadership, health care, food security, equity, diversity, sense of belonging, inclusion, participation, recreation, democracy & governance, built environment, opportunities for all...

Social sustainability is a complex system that depends on both the function of each part as well as the inter-relationship between everything. If place, networks and relationships, and capacity are disrupted – economic, environmental, and cultural sustainability are directly impacted.

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Social sustainability and local government

The overarching vision of most local governments speaks to a vibrant, healthy, and safe community where all citizens have opportunity to thrive.

Of all levels of government, municipalities and districts are considered 'closest to the people'. Local governments see the effects of poverty and other issues on individuals while trying to deal with the related social problems or symptoms that undermine the health, safety, and prosperity of the communities they govern.

Local governments have a say on critical issues such as affordable housing, rental bylaws, transportation, policing, and access to leisure and cultural programs – these are all things that can impact individuals, organizations, and the whole community. Municipal and district governments can affect change in their community. They can create or nurture spaces and networks and contribute to building capacity. When the entire community is taken into consideration, local governments have an important role.

EXAMPLE

The **TOWNSHIP OF LANGLEY'S SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY** outlines a vision for the future and priority areas for collaborative action, in partnership with community organizations and groups. While goals and priorities have been endorsed by Township Council, extensive community engagement over 2 ½ years ensured a whole community approach.

TWO | COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Collective Impact is an evolving process for positive community change based on the idea that collaborative, outcomes-focused, place-based, comprehensive action is a requirement to effectively address complex issues. It is one way of working together that has shown results.

In Collective Impact, meaningful community engagement builds towards shared aspirations or goals. Relationships are integral to mutually reinforcing activities that *over time* can effect positive change. It is a process, built on ongoing measurement and evaluation and transparent, continuous communication. All sectors – including the social sector, business, local governments, funders, passionate citizens, neighbourhoods and people with lived and living experience of the issue – work together. Collective Impact is based on the principle that those closest to the issue are best placed to come up with solutions.

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Collective Impact is different from other cross-sector, community focused efforts in that, together, participants:

- Aspire to change conditions at scale
- Are aware of their outcomes and how far different groups are from it
- Consistently measure and reflect on progress

Within this framework there is a need for coordination and infrastructure to support building relationships and collaborative action. Collective Impact 3.0 describes how the important role of 'backbone support' is more of a 'container for community change', yet it is critical to success.

Collective Impact and local government

When thinking about the role of local governments in Collective Impact, the following considerations are important:

- Supported infrastructure and coordination, and often focused resources, are needed to bring people together
- Whole community data measurement and trend analysis is a common local government role
- Work across organizational and sectoral boundaries cannot be done 'off the side of the desk'
- A strong 'container for change' amplifies and leverages the diverse commitment, voice, experience, leadership, skills, and assets of all participants so that the 'sum of the whole is greater than its parts'

The challenge is to support a framework for change without being prescriptive, and to help create conditions for safe and equitable participation, dialogue and consensus. The way forward is found through mutual support and contribution.

EXAMPLE

TORONTO'S REGENT PARK: A STORY OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT is an example of how a group of citizens initiated a successful urban renewal project and positive 'city-building' using a collective impact approach

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THREE| ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Another process foundational to understanding how local government can contribute to community change is Asset-based Community Development (ABCD). True ABCD is citizens connecting with citizens. There is opportunity for local governments to help build capacity for action as partners in the process,

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rather than pre-determining process or outcomes. ABCD celebrates and builds on the tremendous amount of good work already happening on the ground in communities.

The concept of mutually reinforcing activities is central. Community-based activities and movements that strengthen neighbourhoods are foundational to proactive community development. The concept of 'doing with' rather than 'doing for' encourages mutual support and positive, productive relationships.

Asset-Based Community Development and local government

ABCD entails letting go and shifting power and responsibility to ensure a more even distribution of the work load. There is no need for local governments to travel this road alone. The community will step up to the plate and support the work of local government as in turn, local governments support the vital, creative energy of the people and communities they serve.

Initiatives informed and designed by residents not only encourages participation but also helps co-create a sense of ownership and strengthens the relationship between citizens and local government. All too often, local governments experience a divide between city hall and the community at large. When everyone has a seat at the table, when municipal staff and elected leaders participate as neighbours, help to remove barriers, and really listen to the voice of citizens while at the same time contributing time, expertise, and support, a new landscape is created where the work becomes easier and more effective.

> *Example*
>
> *LONDON'S STRENGTHENING NEIGHBOURHOODS STRATEGY*
> *demonstrates what is possible when neighbourhoods are empowered,*
> *connected, and involved in decision-making over time.*

10 WAYS LOCAL GOVERNMENTS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO POSITIVE SOCIAL CHANGE

Local governments are well-placed to contribute to and coordinate Collective Impact as partners in the process, because of their community-wide mandate and overarching vision. To step up to the plate and help address the impacts of complex social issues, it is necessary to stretch traditional boundaries. There is no need to stretch far, just a little deeper.

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Local governments are in a position to promote awareness of the pressing social needs in the community and of the importance of social investment. They can foster a sense of responsibility for social well-being among all sectors including business, community groups and other levels of government. They can help build relationships among the diverse organizations and sectors that comprise the community… More specifically, there are several roles that local governments can play in creating vibrant communities. These include exemplary employer, service provider, investor, leader and champion, convener, and partner.

-Torjman & Leviten-Ried, The Social Role of Local Government. Caledon Institute of Social Policy

Many of the following roles are familiar. It is when they are combined – firmly in the centre of a dedicated staff person's desk – that they become something more. Targeted investment of time and resources can reap tremendous return.

ONE| Planning

Targeted planning helps communities understand community needs, gaps, and common priorities. This involves conducting and contributing to overarching community-wide consultation and research on social issues and collecting data, including analyzing trends and evaluating impacts of efforts and mitigation strategies. Community priorities are identified through grassroots Collective Impact processes, co-creating the conditions for common understanding, partnerships, buy-in and support for actions that move community priorities forward.

It is important to consider that most community partners - including community-based organizations, businesses, and people with lived and living experience of the issue - do not have the mandate or resources to conduct planning on behalf of the whole community. Yet, co-creating a community plan around the issue at hand is a first step in implementing proactive, collaborative solutions.

TOOL: COLLECTIVE IMPACT SELF ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING TOOL

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EXAMPLE

The CITY OF RICHMOND 2021-2031 COLLABORATIVE ACTION PLAN TO REDUCE AND PREVENT POVERTY IN RICHMOND is the result of community engagement, data analysis, and collaborative identification of priorities and actions, guided by a multi-sectoral approach.

TWO| Convening

Convening is a subset of social planning and Collective Impact, and involves providing, coordinating, and creating safe spaces for conversation and networking, while creating opportunities for partnerships and building relationships. Amazing things can happen when people are brought together around a common issue.

The mechanics of convening involve time spent organizing meetings that are inclusive and accessible, setting parameters for equity and respectful dialogue, and creating processes for communicating outcomes to those who provide input.

TOOL: BACKBONE STARTER GUIDE

EXAMPLE

The CITY OF VICTORIA 'MY GREAT NEIGHBOURHOOD' COMMUNITY VIRTUALS offer regular 'lunch and learn' opportunities, convening people around topics of interest to help build strong, connected neighbourhoods.

THREE| Community Engagement

Community engagement is foundational to equitable planning processes and must involve everyone. 10 – A Guide for Deepening Community describes the importance of utilizing innovative engagement techniques to include diverse members of the community – newcomers, people with disabilities, BIPOC, LGBT2SQ and other marginalized peoples.

Authentic community engagement can improve civic participation and sense of belonging, as well as strengthen outcomes.

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Meaningful community engagement includes a diverse range of options, a concerted attempt to decrease barriers, and inevitably entails more time and resources. But at the end of the day, it is worth the effort. Citizens and neighbourhoods are empowered and engaged as part of the process.

TOOL: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLANNING CANVAS

TOOL: IAPS'S PUBLIC PARITIPCATION SPECTRUM

EXAMPLE

The COMMUNITY ACTION NETWORK (New Westminster and Kelowna) training empowers people with living experience to engage in issues that are meaningful to them. New Westminster partnered to ensure that graduates of the program are directly engaged to provide input to City processes and policy development.

FOUR| Communication and Raising Awareness

Communication and raising awareness are needed to break down silos, engender relationships, improve efficiencies, improve understanding of community-wide issues, 'bust myths' and create healthy community development conditions.

This includes inside city hall, where ongoing inter-departmental communication is vital to align strategies and resources, and cooperatively apply social or sustainability 'lens' to policy, program and service development and delivery.

Transparent, open communication lets the community know that local governments are responsive and working on behalf of – and in partnership with – the community at large. Communication can break down barriers and help address 'us vs. them' patterns of community-wide behaviour. Communication can be open and yet tailored to specific audiences that likely are diverse, with opportunity for difficult issues to surface, be discussed and addressed. Citizens see themselves and their priorities as being part of, rather than separate from, city hall.

Particularly in the context of traumatic impacts of externalities like the pandemic and climate emergencies, continuous communication is vital for the mental and emotional well-being of citizens, organizations, and businesses. Good communication can offset feelings of being overwhelmed as well as misinformation.

Continuous communication is part of the Collective Impact process, where data is combined with stories that animate the numbers. It is important for people who have been engaged to have the results of that engagement communicated back so they know that what they've said has made a difference and see

themselves are part of the process. This is critical to developing a community aspiration or common agenda over time and creating a sense of ownership for both process and outcomes.

When externalities like the pandemic come into play, it's important to take the time and provide additional resources to understand and address barriers to open communication so they can be overcome.

Sometimes local governments fear open communication. Yet closed communication can contribute to silos, barriers, and misunderstandings and further entrench divisions that may exist between city hall and the community at large. Conversely, open, continuous communication co-creates trust and community dialogue, and can engender new ideas and collaborative solutions for moving forward.

TOOL: THE 4 M'S OF CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATION

WEBINAR: COLLECTIVE IMPACT: CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATION

EXAMPLE 1

Launched in 2021 in response to the opioid crisis, the CITY OF DELTA'S END THE STIGMA CAMPAIGN utilizes partnerships, existing communication channels and available resources to bust myths, address stigma and promote community resources for residents affected by substance use.

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EXAMPLE 2

ABBOTSFORD'S EMERGENCY RESPONSE COMMUNICATIONS during the flooding emergency in November 2021 won a National Award of Excellence from the Canadian Public Relations Society for positioning the City as a trusted source for information and making their website a hub for information, among other key, impactful strategies.

FIVE| Social Policies

Social policies are developed using a variety of 'lens' that ensure local government programs, services, initiatives, and actions directly promote the social sustainability of the communities they serve.

For example, local governments are called upon to consider equity, BIPOC, age- and dementia-friendly, family-friendly, and other 'lens' when developing policy to ensure policies decrease barriers and reflect the diverse needs of the whole community. There are many areas where local governments can

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implement social policies that show leadership and represent significant contribution to community, *including but not limited to* the following:

Affordable Housing

From promoting secondary suites, waiving DCC's for non-profit housing, and contributing land, to inclusionary zoning, affordable housing policies represent one of the most foundational social policy contributions within local government jurisdiction.

> Example
>
> New Westminster affordable housing strategies include setting policy, establishing regulations, using resources, entering into partnerships, promoting quality design and innovation, advocacy, and a commitment to ongoing leadership on housing.

Social Procurement

Local governments spend millions each year and resource allocation is one of the most powerful levers at their disposal. Social procurement policies direct spending to public good.

Resource: The BC Social Procurement Initiative provides a network of peers, training, tools, and support for local government procurement policies that fosters social, environmental, cultural, and economic impact.

Equity and Social Inclusion

From barriers-free design to inclusive civic engagement to the provision affordable services, ensuring all community members can access city spaces, services and processes is critical to the overall health and well-being of people and community.

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Example

The City of Vancouver Equity Framework recognizes the need to address injustices and inequities experienced by a broad cross-section of society, showing leadership to create a unified vision and shared understanding of equity across City departments. The framework seeks to fill a basic knowledge and coordination gap in the City's equity work, invigorate efforts and meet expectations.

Child Care

From zoning land to the contribution of child care spaces, policies that support parental leave for employees, and the provision of child care during events and civic engagement, local governments can help ensure the economic and social participation of families in community life.

Example

The City of Richmond recognizes that child care is essential, convening the Child Care Development Advisory Committee, undertaking planning, developing partnerships and policy, and supporting access to resources and grants from higher levels of government – all to create more child care spaces in the community.

Living Wage

While minimum wages are slowly increasing across the country, a living wage is the real hourly wage a family needs to meet basic needs. Local governments that implement a living wage policy pay all direct and contract staff the living wage rate for their region, recognizing their contribution to reducing poverty, investing in long-term economic prosperity, and leading as exemplary employers.

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> ### Example
>
> There are currently <u>14 local governments in BC</u> who are certified living wage employers

Transportation

From the provision of transportation infrastructure to ensuring transit is accessible and affordable, local governments play an important role in ensuring that people of all ages and abilities can get where they need to go. Active transportation is an ever-increasing priority as it links directly to health and well-being.

> ### EXAMPLE
>
> The <u>City of Vancouver Reduced Fair Transit Pilot</u> shows how access to low cost transit benefits the social determinants of health.

Food Security

From leading planning to creating zoning for urban agriculture and community gardens, local governments have an important role to play to promote collaborative action that promotes local food security.

> ### EXAMPLE
>
> The <u>City of Revelstoke Backyard Chicken Bylaw</u> responded to food security advocates by allowing residents to raise chickens throughout the community.

RESOURCES: <u>PLANH HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICY</u>

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SIX| Public Spaces

Public spaces bring people together, offering safe, accessible, inclusive places for fun, recreation, learning, celebration, ceremony, and connection each other and to place. Being intentional about their development and use can catalyze new things and help address a myriad of social priorities from food security to promoting health and well-being.

TOOLS: HEALTHY NEIGHBOURHOOD DESIGN

EXAMPLE

EXAMPLE: CITY OF MEMPHIS – BRIDGING WHAT DIVIDES US - enacts strategies for bringing diverse people together through parks and recreation.

SEVEN| Program and Service Provision

Program and service provision typically entails overseeing community facilities and related programs and services. Particularly for smaller local governments, most social services in community fall to the non-profit social sector. So, within the services that local governments do provide, decreasing barriers and promoting equity can be an important contribution to reducing poverty.

EXAMPLE

The CITY OF HAMILTON RECREATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM provides residents living with low income opportunity to participate in sports and recreation programs.

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Social Planning Service

One of the most important contributions local governments of all sizes can make toward addressing complex social issues is through the provision of **social planning service**. Increasingly, issues referred to Councils or Boards are social in nature. To be effective, this work cannot be done 'off the side of the desk' of staff with multiple portfolios.

A social planner or social development coordinator can take the lead to:

- Convene, coordinate, and lead planning and engagement
- Collect, collate, and analyze relevant data
- Liaise with community groups and key stakeholders
- Activate and create space for partnerships
- Apply for and leverage funding
- Undertake project management
- Develop policy, and
- Lead communication both with other departments as well as the community at large.

Even for smaller communities, investment in human resources can pay long-term dividends and help ensure local governments are actively striving towards social goals as outlined in an Official Community Plan and Community Charter.

EXAMPLE

EXAMPLE: POWELL RIVER REGIONAL SOCIAL PLANNING SERVICES shows what is possible when regional local governments pool resources.

EIGHT| Capacity-Building

Capacity-Building is a complex, collaborative process that strengthens the ability of individuals, organizations, and the whole community to function well, adapt and thrive in an ever-changing world. While all activities described in this guide contribute in one way or another to building capacity, two additional components can be pulled out:

Funding:

- Provision of funding – for example, providing grants (larger local governments) or grants-in-aid (smaller local governments) to support community non-profit organizations helps local agencies to do their part in addressing community needs

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- Acquisition of funding – for example, accessing funding to which only local governments are eligible to apply, improving access to a variety of funding sources by supporting smaller organization to apply or write grant applications, applying on behalf of community-based projects or innovations, and/or writing letters of support
- Grant management / administration when smaller community-based organizations are 'ad hoc' or do not have the administrative capacity to do so

> EXAMPLE
>
> EXAMPLE: The CITY OF REVELSTOKE COMMUNITY INITIATIVES PROGRAM (now the Resident Directed (ReDI) program) coordinates local funding adjudication and management on behalf of a regional funding body.

Training:

- Coordination of inter-departmental training for local government staff on social issues, equity, justice, diversity, inclusion and reconciliation
- Coordination of local or online co-learning opportunities for community partners

RESOURCE: SAN'YAS ANTI-RACISM INDIGENOUS CULTURAL SAFETY TRAINING PROGRAM

RESOURCE: CANADIAN CENTRE FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

RESOURCE: TAMARACK INSTITUTE VIBRANT COMMUNITIES MEMBERSHIP

NINE| Advocacy

Local governments are well-positioned to communicate and amplify the voice and experience of citizens to higher levels of government, both individually and in concert with other communities. Part of understanding the social role of local governments is clarity on what, when and how higher levels of government can and should lead and/or contribute as part of the solution. As well, local governments

can assess the direct impacts of higher-level policy on citizens. A healthy society is one where citizen voice is empowered, and governments respond.

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> UNION OF BC MUNICIPALITIES RESOLUTION PROCESS

TEN | Innovation

Tamarack's co-founder, Paul Born, often has said "If what we were already doing was working, we would have ended poverty by now". Inherent to this concept is a need to do things differently if we are to succeed. There is opportunity to question the status quo, think outside the box and explore new ideas, while having a clear vision of the end goal.

We are in a time where complex social issues are impacting the ability of individuals and organizations – including businesses – to function. There is opportunity to *be brave*, consider new ways of working and test potential solutions. In some cases, there is no need to reinvent the wheel but rather learn from innovations being tested on the ground in communities across the country. The key is to be open, and not let conventional ways of working become a barrier to moving forward.

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> DISTRICT OF TOFINO PROVIDES INNOVATIVE SOLUTION TO LOCAL CHILD CARE SHORTAGE: A small local government can make a big impact by supporting an upstream solution.

KEY FACTORS FOR PROGRESS AND SUCCESS

- Social sustainability lens
- Collective Impact and ABCD approach
- Investment in social development coordination staff
- Evidence-based collaborative planning and evaluation
- Comprehensive approach – both multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional

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- Partnerships – willingness to work together openly, pool resources, provide both expertise and other contributions
- Relationships and communication – based on meaningful engagement
- Strong co-leadership – citizen-led
- Having a champion in city hall – either staff or elected official
- Resourcefulness, flexibility – being responsive and open to new ideas and solutions
- Broad support for the work – engendering dialogue in community
- Access to a variety of resources and assets – including people, organizations and grass-roots movements
- Being open to learning
- 'Wins!' – success itself

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this guide is to help local government and staff **manage expectations**, feel more **comfortable** stepping into the social realm, and **navigate how to contribute** much-needed capacity for effective community change. It is also for other sectors and organizations to better understand how to work together with local governments as partners in the process. Positive, systemic social change is the result of the combined efforts or interventions of everyone effected by the issues. The contribution of local government as outlined above is multi-faceted and critical to build resilience to external factors beyond our control, as well as co-create healthy, vibrant communities.