CREATING THE FRAMEWORK FOR A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR OUR STREET LONDON – AN ACTION-ORIENTED APPROACH

By

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Abstract

Greater public participation has been recognized in the socio-political sphere as a growing imperative and a recent phenomenon is a shift in governance towards the “politics of inclusion” at the local and in some cases, the provincial level. Democracy is fundamental to sustainable development because when people participate in the decisions that affect their lives, they are more committed to their implementation. Once community buy-in is garnered, people are empowered to engage in organized action and advocate for the causes they stand for which can affect the necessary changes in moving towards a sustainable community. Our Street London is a grassroots collective that supports alternatives to mainstream modalities of transportation such as biking, walking, and public transportation, as well sustainable urban form. My objective is to understand the richness and detail of the social constructions of the actors in the lived environment. My research explores successful community engagement strategies and how the knowledge generated through the inquiry process can benefit Our Street London members to mobilize group capacity, hence affecting the future directions of the group. My main method of data collection consisted of semi-structured, open-ended interviews with experts on community engagement. Participants consisted of academics, long-time practitioners, and employees of small to medium-sized sustainability/environmental and social justice organizations. This research does have an action-oriented intent to work with Our Street London beyond the scope of this project in translating recommendations into action.
Acknowledgments

The word for pistachio in Chinese translates to ‘fruits that open the heart.’ This process has been a labour of love that has opened my heart to a world of possibilities, as boundless as the imagination. I have many people to thank in my journey, which has truly been a process of self-discovery.

I wish to thank my family, who has showered me with a gentle feather rain of support and abundant love. Tony Lin, my life partner. Thank you for being my rock, my constant. Ann Dale who lifted me up through your relentless belief in me. You have been as much a mentor to me as a supervisor. Thank you for firing my synapses with ‘a-ha’ moments of insight and important life lessons along the way. Sherina Crier-Rahaman, my best mate. We have shared in laughter, tears, and glimmers of inspiration in person and through countless Skype conversations. Even though we were working independently, we shared in this journey together. Jen Chesnut, my kindred friend. Thank you for your beautiful spirit, sharp political knowledge, Zen sword editing skills, and teachings on how to bring poetic expression into the written word. Ryan Craven, fellow urban contributor and change agent. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to work on a project that truly resonated with me, so that I can be a change agent in my own community.

Lastly but not least importantly, I have witnessed the compassion of true strangers without which this thesis would not have been possible.
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Chapter One: Introduction

What am I doing?

I was approached by Ryan Craven, coordinator of a grassroots collective, in April 2012 to discuss a potential thesis project that involved engaging the community in shaping the directions and decision making of Our Street London, an organization that focuses on sustainable transportation and urban form. I decided to use this project for my research because it was applicable to real life and had value in that, if it was successful in achieving their goals of a community engagement strategy, it could create a more sustainable, desirable future in London, Ontario, that was driven by the citizenry in both bottom up and top down democratic change. Our Street London will be able to use the framework drawn from my research data to inform and contribute to a community engagement strategy. Through community engagement, residents will be empowered to contribute meaningfully to the process of creating a more sustainable community through participating in Our Street London. The synergies created from mobilizing connectedness and formulating relationships through the community engagement process have the potential to mobilize future community action and innovation.

Research Concern and Questions

My research concern is to study the subjective experiences and knowledge of experts – academics, practitioners, and employees of social and environment/sustainability related NGOs with respect to community engagement, applied to a particular case study in the community of
Creating the Framework for a Community Engagement...

London, Ontario. I would also like to understand the role that community engagement can play in sustainable community development. My research questions are the following.

1. What are successful strategies that have been used by experts in community engagement?
   a. What are the strengths and weaknesses of community engagement strategies?
   b. What are the barriers and challenges to implementing these strategies?

2. How does community engagement contribute to sustainable community development implementation?

3. How can these strategies be integrated into a community engagement strategy for Our Street London in London, Ontario.

4. Is there a relationship between community engagement and organizational effectiveness?

For the purposes of my research, I have defined community engagement as a social process that facilitates the mobilization of community action on sustainability and social justice issues. I have conceptualized sustainable development as the process of reconciliation of ecological, social, and economic capital (Dale, 2001; Robinson, 2004). “And equitable access to these three resources – ecological, social, and economic – is fundamental to its realization” (Dale, 2001, p. x).

Why am I passionate about this research?

We are living in precarious times in Canada and across the globe. The Harper government has permanently closed down community engagement offices (Participant N) and silenced scientists across Canada (O’Hara, 2010), an erosion of democracy. In 1987, the pivotal Bruntland Commission report, Our Common Future discussed desertification, acid precipitation, global warning and other environmental trends that threatened the ‘global commons’ and propelled a
growing realization of the global challenge of balancing a burgeoning world population and the consumption of finite resources (The World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Two decades later, these pressing issues have not been mitigated and are amplified as time progresses.

This calls for a renewal in what lies at the heart of community—people and their relationships. Social capital is “based on relationships, and is a property of groups rather than individuals” (Wilson, 2005, p. 34) and can be defined as “those features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti, 1993, p. 167). Dale and Onyx (2005) argue that out of the three capitals, social capital is the most important because the actualization of sustainable development is dependent on the mobilization of people in the identification of the problems we face and taking the necessary steps to address them. There has been a decline in civic engagement, so crucial to community life (Putnam, 2001), which has compounded the necessity for purposeful design in dialogue and community engagement to diffuse critical actions (Dale & Onyx, 2005). Engagement in communities is the first element on a continuum of reconciling social capital where the end result is the creation of a shared future (Dale & Onyx, 2005).

Community engagement strategies, if conducted properly, can be fundamental in building relationships in communities, which leads to greater community cohesion and social capital; thus, quality of life is enhanced for all those involved (Aboelata, Ersoylu & Cohen, 2011). Historically, there have been efforts at creating greater community involvement through community engagement but these strategies have been poorly carried out leading to diminished
credibility of those involved and producing detrimental effects such as undermining future community engagement efforts (Aboelata, Ersoylu & Cohen, 2011). Therefore, great care needs to be taken so that people can participate meaningfully and articulate the values and vision that shapes the communities in which they live.

These turbulent political, social, environmental, and economic problems that are rapidly reaching crisis points have placed great pressure on grassroots collectives, fundamental to civil society. Grassroots organizations are forces of innovation that use local solutions to address global problems (Roseland, 2005). Democracy is instrumental to sustainable development because when people participate in the decisions that affect their lives, they are more committed to their implementation (Roseland, 2000). Once community buy-in is garnered, people are empowered to engage in organized action and advocate for the causes they stand for which can affect the necessary changes in moving towards a sustainable community (Roseland, 2005). I passionately believe that through the mass mobilization of diverse groups of people, we will be able to gain traction on these issues, however, in light of all this turmoil, it is necessary to be strategic, courageous, and imaginative in our actions.

**Structure of my thesis**

Following my Introduction, in Chapter 2: Background, I argue that community engagement, as a piece of the cyclical process of deliberative democracy and social capital, is ever increasing in importance in light of Canada’s current political circumstances and all the wicked issues – complex social and environmental issues that are difficult to resolve because of complex interconnectedness and interdependencies (Head, 2007) – that we face today.
I present a background that synthesizes concepts from a diversity of writers that have provoked, piqued, and influenced my thought process through my research journey. In Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods, I offer the confluences of paradigm assumptions – the foundations of truth and the nature of reality – from my perspective. In Chapter 4: Discussion and Analysis, I present and analyze key findings, categories, and themes from my research. In Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations, I look at areas of opportunities where my research can inform Our Street London and other grassroots collectives. And I share key reflections that I have contemplated and internalized while writing this thesis.
Chapter Two: Background

Influences that have shaped my thought process

Three fundamental elements – economic, social and environmental imperatives – need to be reconciled in order for sustainable development to occur (Dale & Onyx, 2005), and to improve human wellbeing (Roseland, 2005). These authors argue that it is a lack of social capital that has undermined our ability to realize sustainable community development (SCD); it is only when this capacity is harnessed through collective action that the three imperatives can be reconciled (Dale, 2001; Robinson & Tinker, 1997). At the heart of social change, lies the capacity of people to become empowered through dialogue on common interests and values, which leads to greater engagement in collective action through the mobilization of social capital.

Dale and Onyx (2005), among others, make a distinction between bonding, bridging, and linking social capital. Bonding capital is characterized by personal trust and narrow self-interest that is exhibited in relationships amongst family members, friends, and neighbours (Dale & Sparkes, 2007). Bonding capital is important for the construction of social norms and rules but groups may demonstrate homophily, that describes the tendency of groups to resist change (Newman & Dale, 2007). Bridging social capital is characterized by horizontal links that transverse network to network and that are concretized with bonding capital (Dale & Sparkes, 2007). Bridging social capital provides access to resources in other networks that would not otherwise be available (Dale & Sparkes, 2007). Linking social capital provides ties outside of one’s own community to political and financial decision-makers (Dale & Sparkes, 2007), and is also referred to as vertical social capital. Catalyzing and balancing these capitals is conducive to
a sustainable community because bonding capital can act as social support within an immediate
group but bridging capital can provide inclusiveness and mitigate social isolation (Firth, Maye &
Pearson, 2011). The synergies created from building social capital can be an unintended
consequence of community engagement and this can mobilize future community action and
innovation (Wiseman, Williamson & Fritze, 2010).

One of the fundamental building blocks of community is ‘space’ for communities to engage
in shared moral dialogues defining collective values and addressing the complexity of issues that
to a community can foster a preservation of identity and shared sense of place. This connectivity
to sense of place can affect social capital formation as the stronger this connection between
individuals and place, the more the community will preserve that sense of identity making it
more resilient to perturbations (Dale et al.). Indeed, disconnections between communities and
between people in communities are greater than ever before and it is this disconnection from the
ecological, social, and economic imperatives that has contributed to unsustainable development
in the modern world (Dale & Onyx, 2005).

Democracy is instrumental to sustainable
development because when people participate in the
decisions that affect their lives, they are more committed to their implementation (Roseland,
2000). “Democratisation is about increasing the number of spaces where citizens can exercise
their rights on decision making on matters concerning them” (Bosselman et al., 2008, p. 32).
Greater public participation has been recognized as critical to the political sphere (Roseland,
2005) and a recent phenomenon is a shift in governance towards “the politics of inclusion”
(Roseland, 2005, p. 190). Government and governance can be discerned as government being
about “doing things” whereas governance is about providing leadership in society to articulate and espouse a common set of strategies and goals (Roseland, 2005). International organizations such as OECD and the United Nations have recognized the need for a transformation in participatory frameworks for achieving social benefits and resolving “wicked issues” (Head, 2007).

Governance not only describes the process and outcomes of participatory frameworks (Pierre & Peters, 2005) but that of the covenantal bond of citizenship, to contribute to the spaces we occupy (Bosselman, Engel & Taylor, 2008). Meslin, Palassio, Wilcox (2010) argue that our rights and privileges in the city are multifaceted, not homogenous in nature. Rights explicitly imply that we have individual freedoms that protect our common social, democratic, or economic interests (Bosselman et al.). Even though being a citizen enfranchises you to certain rights and privileges, there is also a relationship of a citizen to its city, civic engagement: in participating in the places in which we live (Meslin, Palassio & Wilcox, 2010).

Transformations can be made from being impacted and disconnected to having the agency in decisions involving the public and the environment (Inglis, 2011). Once community buy-in is garnered, people are empowered to engage in organized action and advocate for the causes they stand for which can affect the necessary changes in moving towards a sustainable community (Roseland, 2005). This brings into the equation the term “deliberative democracy” as defined by the Colorado State University as “deliberation is an approach to politics in which citizens, not just experts or politicians, are deeply involved in community problem solving and public decision making” (Center for Public Deliberation, n.d.). Citizen engagement fits into dialogue and deliberation and the interactions of collective inquiry to identify and address tough issues of
public concern while having a vested interest and accountability in the process (Inglis, 2011). In these deliberative processes, citizens from a wide range of perspectives come together in structured ways to dialogue on complex issues, consider various alternatives, and come up with a consensus to bring deliberation into practice (Verlaan, 2013). In this continuum, dialogue refers to thinking and talking together to share perspectives on a shared concern to broaden collective understanding of the matter (Verlaan, 2013). Whereas, deliberation refers to the generativity of insights that are drawn from the dialogue and the emergent actions for change (Verlaan, 2013).

**History of Our Street London**

The momentum for Car Free Sundays in London was created when an executive from 8-80 Cities came to London to deliver a presentation in summer 2009 at the Urban League annual general meeting. This initiated a conversation between the Thames Region Ecological Association (TREA), the Middlesex-London Health Unit (MLHU), and the City of London (the City) who collectively decided that a Car Free Sunday was needed in London. The City hired Ryan Craven as contract staff to organize Car Free Sunday in April 2010. The City was overwhelmed by the positive response from the community and as a result, decided to support the actualization of future Car Free Sundays with one caveat: the City wanted Car Free Sundays to be a community driven project, not a City led one. Ryan wrote a grant for $10,000 and it came back approved for $22,500. This showed that not only was there a need for Car Free Sundays, but that there were partnerships and funding available in the City. This provided the funds for three downtown Car Free days and five in the suburbs. Then Ryan met a program evaluator at MLHU who offered help in evolving the event into an organization. In January 2012 meetings
were held with four urban contributors to conceptualize *Our Street London*. The group envisioned *Our Street London* promoting the complete streets concept, where every type of user has the right to the street. This is similar to the home zone concept in Germany where pedestrians and motorized traffic share the road with priority given to pedestrian, cyclists, and playing children (Buehler & Pucher, 2011). In addition, the group wanted to advocate for the revitalization of urban form in the city, to create a sense of place in the built environment. They believed that the only way to create transformative change is if the citizenry became involved and part of the decision making to inform and guide these decisions in the city.

**Our Street London structure**

Ryan Craven is the current Chair for *Our Street London*. *Our Street London* is a grassroots collective but does not currently hold non-profit status. It operates under the umbrella non-profit corporation, London Fuse. London Fuse has recently become a member of the Urban League, which gives it charitable status. The Urban League is a member driven organization that serves as an umbrella organization for environmental and social justice non-profits in London. *Our Street London* has a mutual relationship with London Fuse; London Fuse does not drive the direction of *Our Street London*, however, *Our Street London* can apply for grants and funding under the London Fuse umbrella. *Our Street London* operates out of a shared workspace with Growing Chefs Ontario and London Fuse.

**Major Projects**

- **Bike Post Partnership.**
This is a locally made, locally designed concept where a design panel with representation from welding, public health, planning, community, and visual arts, will collaborate with faculty at UWO, and a student designer to select a bike post concept. A local foundry will manufacture the bike posts. *Our Street London*, the Middlesex-London Health Unit, the Urban League and the City of London will be working together to identify ideal locations for these bike posts. This project has been funded in part by the City of London (50%), the Urban League of London (30%), and the Middlesex-London Health Unit (20%). The City will be funding the installation costs.

**Our Street Day.**

Our Street Day is a celebration of active transportation, healthy living, sustainability, and community building. Our Street Day offers the opportunity for community residents to engage with over 125 buskers, vendors, artists, and organizations. A questionnaire is distributed to evaluate the success of the event and to garner feedback for improvements. This year, Our Street Day partnered with For The Love of Art and The Rag Bag Bazaar who helped animate Our Street London’s programing. The Rag Bag Bazaar is an outlet for local artists, crafters, and small businesses to showcase their products. Priorities are given to those whose products are handmade and/or environmentally conscious. For The Love of Art is an arts festival that was created to bring artists and the people together in a fun way. It is a collaborative endeavor with Habitat for Humanity, Gallery Group Painting, and City Art Centre, to bring arts to those struggling with mental health and social issues, and to others who may not have the opportunity to be involved with the arts.
**Wednesday night bike rides.**

Wednesday night bike rides was initiated as a social activity to forge relationships with new friends, meet old friends, and explore different neighbourhoods in the city, while engaging in light exercise. This group is self-organizing. It meets once a week on Wednesday nights at 7 pm. A bike leader that guides the ride emerges spontaneously each Wednesday.

**Walk London.**

Walk London started as a project from Car Free Day 2012. Funding was provided from Car Free Day’s budget to construct vinyl signs placed in the downtown core to communicate the walkability to landmarks in around and outside the downtown core. Simultaneously the City of London has a Walk to Shop funding program that supports projects in the local business districts. London Fuse, the City of London, and *Our Street London* are partnering for an integrated pilot Walk to Shop project in the Byron community.

**Pocket Park Rejuvenation.**

The Pocket Park Rejuvenation is a project where residents, the City of London, the Forest City Gallery, and Food Not Lawns engaged in a day of design charrettes to collaboratively design a new neighbourhood gathering place. This project was funded by a Sparks! Neighbourhood Matching Fund grant of $5,000 with an added bonus of $8,000 from the Parks department, as the City of London has decided to turn this spot into an official City Park. The Parks department is also making in kind donations from its operations area.

**Block Party in a Box.**
Block Party in a Box is a toolkit for creating a community block party. It contains a manual with step-by-step “how-to” information, and a collection of printable resources for outreach and to ensure a successful event, i.e. posters, checklists, games and activities. This project was funded with an Awesome London grant of $1,000. The community was invited to a day of brainstorming on April 27th. These ideas will be transformed into a resource kit that will be available on http://placeship.org to anyone in the London community.

Community Forum.
The community forum was a two-day event that focused on walkability. Walk Friendly Ontario from Toronto contacted Our Street London. Our Street London had secured $1,000 from a local grant to cover basic costs and Walk Friendly Ontario had additional funds to bring a reputable speaker from England that was an expert on walkability. This event was hosted at the central public library in London. On the first day, there were different presenters from London, Ontario, a panel discussion, and the walkability expert. Our Street London members wrote letters to high-level councilors to invite them to a leadership breakfast on the 2nd day where the walkability expert and the local panel presented at the breakfast.

Neighbourhood Events.
In 2011, six Car Free Days were put on by a partnership between the neighbourhood associations and Our Street London. The neighbourhood associations received funding from Our Street London to help connect these Car Free Days that took place in conjunction with the annual neighbourhood events all over the city in Westmount, Kipp’s Lane, Old East Village, Old North, and Old South.
Neighbourhood Guide.

The Neighbourhood Guide was created as a web platform for community residents to make enhancements to the built environment in their neighbourhoods. It is one of the collective ideas of the London Strengthening Neighbourhoods Strategy. The Neighbourhood Guide is a partnership between London Fuse, the City of London, and Our Street London. Currently, there is a contest where London residents can mark and like their favourite little gem in their neighbourhood. The little gem that gets the most “likes” will win an enhancement grant of $5,000 for their neighbourhood.

Partnerships

London Cycle Group.

The London Cycle group started off as a joint undertaking with two new community residents who felt the need for a community cycle group in London. Our Street London has supported them with resources and knowledge about the community. The London Cycle Group is currently organized as an advocacy group for cyclists and cycling issues. They have been active with hosting a Bicycle Valet Parking Station at various community events.

LTC Bus People.

The idea for LTC Bus People started when a newcomer to London, Amanda Stratton, was not pleased with the London Transit Commission. LTC Bus People was created to engage with citizens about public transit, which was perceived as lacking in the London community. Our Street London and LTC Bus People have created a partnership because of a shared vision of more non-motorized modes of transportation being available to the public. Members of Our
Street London and LTC Bus People are dialoguing with the LTC to create a better public transportation system for Londoners.
Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

Inquiry paradigms and where I fit

I’ve discovered that I don’t align neatly into any one inquiry paradigm, but rather that my belief system, the nature of truth and on what knowledge is based is a confluence of axiomatic strands from a social constructivist, critical theory, and participatory paradigm. I believe that knowledge is socially constructed and that reality is a dynamic process dependent from the interpretations of our interactions with the world (Oster, 2012) whether it is through interactions as individuals, in a group, or in a community. Here I depart from the constructivists because they do not address the “quality of the constructed outcomes” (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p. 18). Ways of knowing can be experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). For example, we can come to learn and understand knowledge through writing, observation, sources of authority, experiences, narratives, emotions, and intuitions. Even if an individual’s version of reality is accurately reflected, collective knowledge that has been co-constructed can change (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). Research can play a role in this process by liberating the oppressed through empowerment and social transformation (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). I believe that it is our job, as researchers, to challenge these deeply embedded assumptions of the power structures that exist based on privilege and oppression. Research can emancipate by providing participants with liberating opportunities to facilitate community action grounded in the democratization of knowledge (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). Theory and action can be reconciled by using the inquiry process to solve real life problems by testing these actions in an experiential environment (Greenwood & Levin, 2007).
Rationale for using action research as a methodology

Qualitative research enables the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the multiple constructions that individuals ascribe to a phenomenon as well as capture the richness and complexity of socio-political factors in the lived environment (Pierce, 2008). My objective is to understand the richness and detail of the social constructions of the actors in the lived environment, which have contributed to a diversity of successful community engagement strategies and how the knowledge generated through the inquiry process can benefit Our Street London members to mobilize group capacity, hence affecting or influencing the future directions of the group.

I have selected action research as the most suitable methodology to investigate my research questions. Action research is a valuable form of research because the researcher and participants go through an iterative process of evaluating theoretical knowledge in a real organization or situation (Avison, Lau, Myers & Nielsen, 1999). I have used action research as the overarching framework for guiding my study, however, I have not used action research in its ‘pure’ form. For instance, I was the one driving the research questions, conducting interviews, collecting data, analyzing data, and determining findings. Action research requires that these three elements: action, research, and participation, are included in the research process (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). Action and participation was used to the fullest extent possible, but my research can’t be accurately defined as action research according to authorities in this research methodology. I was approached by the Our Street London volunteer coordinator with a problem that had already been defined by members of the organization. Although I wasn’t involved in defining the overarching research concern, I developed the research questions that guided my research.
Information feedback loops can be integrated into the process to reflect the accuracy of events and ensure that changes are made based on the context of the present situation (Aboelata, Ersoylu & Cohen, 2011). Feedback loops were incorporated to produce meaning and reflection on the process, and to ensure that the current reality was always accurately represented. My research does have an action-oriented intent and my strategy is to work with Our Street London beyond my thesis timeline through praxis – translating recommendations into action.

**Methods**

**Data collection using interviews as a primary method.**

Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were my main method of data collection. This form of data collection is a robust balance between a structured and non-structured approach to allow more spontaneity through the interactions between interviewer and participants (Marvasti, 2004). This selection has the advantage of being focused enough to elicit in-depth responses from participants yet structured enough so that the conversation does not get off topic (Given, 2008). I also fully explore a participant’s story by probing for detailed information when necessary (Knox & Burkard, 2009).

I conducted my interviews by using Skype-to-Skype or using Skype to dial a telephone number. Skype was used for logistical purposes: time and financial constraints, as my participants reside in different cities across Canada. Ecamm Skype recorder ([http://www.ecamm.com/mac/callrecorder/](http://www.ecamm.com/mac/callrecorder/)) was used as a seamless way to audio record conversation as Ecamm is integrated as a Skype function (once it has been downloaded). Recordings were supplemented with minimal note taking. Ecamm automatically stored each
recorded call as a ‘saved call’ on my computer. Interviews ranged between 20 minutes to an hour and 45 minutes.

Participants were briefed with an interview script (see Appendix C). At the beginning of the call I provided an overview of the purpose of my research and the safeguards in place with respect to anonymity and the treatment of raw data. The interview protocol consisted of 18 questions that explored themes that had emerged in my preliminary literature review of the subject matter. The first question was easy to answer so that participants became comfortable with the interview environment (Dilley, 2000). Questions were grouped together based on themes and that provided flow from one question to the next (Dilley, 2000). Participants were prompted to expand on responses using non-directive follow up probes such as “Could you say something more about that?” “Can you give me a more detailed description of what happened?” and “Do you have further examples of this?” (Kvale, 2007, p. 13).

At the end of the interview, I debriefed participants by commenting on at least one main point that I learned in the interview and closed by asking, “Is there anything else you would like to bring up, or ask about before we finish the interview? Or “Are there any more things you would want to say before we end the interview?” I advised participants that I would be sending them an email with an attached report of the highlights of my findings and a link to my thesis. I ended the call by thanking participants for their cooperation and the time and effort they took to share their experiences with me.
Data collection at the CONFOR West conference.

I attended an Environmental Science and Natural Resources Management conference (http://conforwest.com) where I presented a poster on my research including preliminary findings from my interviews (see Appendix A). Feedback on my research was elicited through conversations while engaging in extra-curricular activities, breakout sessions, and during the poster presentation. I took notes of feedback and questions after each meeting, and compiled and summarized the data into a table format after the conference.

Data collection at Our Street London meetings and discussions.

Information from Our Street London members was gathered informally during discussions at the monthly meetings and formally in discussions with the volunteer coordinator, Ryan Craven, who also shared the history of Our Street London in an interview. Our Street London members were included in this process because they are the beneficiaries of the framework of this research and they are familiar with this organization’s work and the London community. Social systems are complex and contextualized; the same set of actions and conditions can produce a very different set of outcomes in different circumstances, therefore, local knowledge is crucial for a civic democracy where we are working with different realities based on a plurality of interests and values (Bartosh, n.d.).

Multi-stage sampling strategy using purposive and snowball sampling

I have used a multi-stage sampling strategy – purposive and snowball sampling – to select participants to interview. Purposive sampling is a robust sampling method to represent a broad
range of experiences because it targets specific elements to be studied in the population (Daniel, 2012). Snowball sampling is used as a technique to locate and gain participation of additional participants using a network approach (Daniel, 2012). I used snowball sampling to augment purposive sampling based on the premise that I would be able to access participants that might not have been accessible to me had I not been referred by the original participant. I used purposive sampling because my selection criteria required me to speak to people with expertise in community engagement namely: academics who have conducted research on community engagement; long-term (10+ years) practitioners who have worked in the area of community engagement; and employees of small to medium-sized sustainability/environmental and social justice non-governmental organizations. I wanted to maximize the heterogeneous variability of the sample by selecting individuals that were geographically dispersed across Canada, and from a diverse background of organizational ethos. i.e. people from NGOs that were centered on a wide range of sustainability, environmental, and social justice issues.

Based on my criteria, my thesis supervisor identified people that I should initiate contact with and those people made up the initial pool of participants in my sampling frame. My original sampling frame consisted of nine people. I emailed these potential participants inviting them to participate in my study, which included my thesis supervisor’s name (as they were familiar with her from previous contacts) and my justification of why I had selected them as a participant. When they responded, I emailed them with an attachment of the research consent form and followed up accordingly to set up a date/time to interview. I advised participants of my sampling criteria and asked for recommendations of additional potential participants to interview. I was able to connect with eight more participants using the snowballing technique. Neuman (2003)
describes theoretical saturation as the continuation of data collection, sampling, and/or looking at new case studies until it appears as if no new insights are being generated. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) emphasize that when using a grounded theory approach you can stop sampling once you aren’t eliciting new information regarding your research concerns. I capped my interviews at 17 participants because recurring themes started to become transparent in the data hence reaching theoretical saturation.

**Validity in qualitative research inquiry**

Creswell and Miller (2000) argue that the validity in qualitative inquiry should be contingent on the researcher’s inquiry paradigm. They further suggest that “thick, rich description, prolonged engagement in the field, and disconfirming evidence” should be provided to people external to the research so validity can be judged (p. 126). I was unable to use “prolonged engagement in the field” because of the time constraints of my thesis. Similarly, I was unable to use the procedure of “disconfirming evidence” because of my grounded theory approach in data analysis. Generalizability was not suitable for my research because my purpose was not to create or add to a universal applicable theory. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) have maintained that certain characteristics can be used to assert the validity of qualitative research that can be used to provide “thick, rich description” to the audience.

Data analysis must be *transparent* in order to substantiate claims about data (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). The researcher acts as an instrument in qualitative studies (Golafshani, 2003) so even though other researchers might arrive at a different interpretation of the data, the steps taken to justify a position must be transparent (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). I was clear in my data analysis by taking the audience through a step-by-step approach and delineating the
repeating ideas and emergent themes in an appendix. Please refer to Appendix B for further details. Delineating steps establishes consistency, trustworthiness, and rigor. Other researchers can examine the raw data, interpret and extrapolate the findings in another context (Golafshani, 2003).

Transferability is similar to generalizability except instead of being universally applicable; transferability means that theories and themes can be applicable to other people, other than the study sample (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). My study is transferable because I have developed the framework for a community engagement strategy – that is, the components that should be included in a community engagement strategy so that it is successful. Even though my ultimate objective is to eventually create a community engagement strategy for Our Street London, this framework has applicability in other settings and organizations as the study participants come from diverse backgrounds and communities in Canada.

Workability – the credibility of actions taken in the inquiry process and how it worked in a local context – can be used to judge the validity of action research (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). I won’t be able to judge the workability of my research at this point in time because the actual community engagement strategy and implementation is still forthcoming. This will require resource mapping of the London community, which is beyond the scope of this research. However, my research will be useful to the organization past the thesis deadline because of my planned follow-up actions. The workability will be tested at the implementation stage. Usefulness can also be judged from the collective action-knowledge capacity of the organization’s members.
Triangulation is a conventional research strategy typically used in qualitative research to converge or complement results in research (Flick, 2007). Triangulation provides us with a kaleidoscopic depiction of a phenomenon (Flick, 2007) so that reliability and validity is increased in our research (Golafshani, 2003). I have used two types of triangulation in my research. Data triangulation was used by engaging in conversations with multiple people encapsulated within each method. For example, I conducted interviews with 17 people; I collected feedback from 12 Our Street London members; I collected feedback from 5 colleagues at the CONFORWest conference. I also used methodological triangulation by integrating multiple methods into data collection. I used semi-structured interviews, and discussions with Our Street London members and conference participants to gather data.

**Data analysis using a grounded theory approach**

I transcribed each interview using Microsoft Word using verbatim sentences, changes in voice tone, natural transitions, linguistic connectors, and emotions. I felt that it was important to transcribe word for word (including emotional signals) to be able to identify themes when analyzing the data because of the techniques that can be used for data analysis as described by Ryan and Bernard (2003). I conducted transcription by listening to each movie file (.mov) and rewinding and fast-forwarding to ensure that I was capturing the data, word for word. I emailed participants for clarification if there was anything unclear in the transcript. Participants responded via email and I revised the transcript accordingly.

I had not conducted a thorough literature review at this point because I wanted to use an inductive approach to thematic development (Mayring, 2000). I used a grounded theory approach to analyze my data because it had been suggested by several authorities in social science research
as a common technique used to analyze data (Gibbs, 2007; Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). I had started off with a research concern not fully understanding the importance of this social phenomenon (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001) so I wanted to explore my research concern further so that themes would emerge from the data. Grounded theory analysis has been recommended as a good fit for my inquiry paradigm from a constructivist standpoint because of the co-construction of meaning and actions between researcher and participants, which suggests contextualization to as proximate to the data as possible (Gubrium & Holstein, 2011).

I used Dedoose (http://www.dedoose.com), a web-based qualitative research data analysis software to upload each Microsoft Word (.docx) document into the system. I used a sequential process in order to make the raw text more manageable. I wrote down my research questions so that I could choose “relevant text” of ideas related to my research questions (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 46). Dedoose automatically highlights each passage in a different colour so that the ideas can be sorted into a codetree and then hierarchical themes. I kept the following questions in mind as suggested by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003):

Does it relate to your research [questions]?

Does it help you understand your participants better? Does it clarify your thinking?

Does it simply seem important, even if you can’t say why? (p. 48).

Then I grouped relevant text that was similar into “repeating ideas” (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 54). I came up with a list of repeating ideas as well as a list of orphan text, which were ideas that didn’t get repeated. I organized the repeating ideas and orphan text into themes (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).
Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

But the arts do offer a way of building empathy that can sometimes short-circuit or can make their way around the more rational, linear ways of thinking. And we can, you know, access people’s hearts. And that I think is really important when we’re talking about how to make change… it can remove some barriers, it can generate more empathy (Participant C).

Creative strategies can be used to draw people in, compel them to care, and get them to act.

Creative strategies were revealed as a zeitgeist that change agents used to engage with an intergenerational audience. These strategies included bio-blitzes, music, rock concerts, documentaries, calendar production, Slam poetry, storytelling, and other fun events. Using youth as part of a creative strategy was especially important to engage with parents and grandparents.

Creative methods were used to build community by enabling a connection to a broader audience that would not have been accessible otherwise. This is especially true with “populations who are more oral-based cultures rather than literacy-based cultures” (Participant C). Creative methods unified people by touching people at the affect level so that we can open up the dialogue in a different way to allow for deep conversations.

The use of humour, music, and storytelling were identified as being especially important to draw the audience in deeper. An example of this is a shift from ad-hoc projects to segmenting projects based on geography, community, and sectors. When speaking about activism to protect the Boreal forest, Participant M said:

…we use the projects to highlight the issues. And we find that has captured people’s imagination in a more robust way where they can kind of grab it, and feel it, and understand it differently. And that’s been very successful.
The benefit of this approach was perceived as drawing from the collective wisdom through the collaboration of multiple stakeholders working together on a particular issue. This inspired the use of storytelling, in campaigning. Narrative threads were often woven together instead of presenting different facts or elements about an issue, so that people can feel involved and part of a movement.

Many participants alluded to the highly complex nature of wicked issues that can be challenging not only to communicate, but also to compel people to care. Reasons cited for this challenge was the negativity of environmental communication and feelings of disempowerment in the ability to take action. A lesson learned for some participants was to transition from using negativity or technical language, exacerbated by confusing messaging from mainstream media, to using messages of empowerment and hope so that people feel included and part of a community. Participants advised that negativity creates feelings of defensiveness whereas transformations were instigated when you provide people with alternatives and solutions.

This has important implications for using arts-based strategies in environmental communication, to get people to care and then act on the issues. Arts-based strategies can work through the deconstruction of our own assumptions, and to expand our worldview or “circle of compassion” as Participant A called it. Getting people to care also resonated when there was place-based connectedness in experiences tied to their identity. Sense of place appeared to build agency for social and ecological stewardship through a value frame that was deeply entrenched in the individual.

British Columbians are just like really attached to the B.C. coast…It’s really tied to their identity…In particular they have a very visceral reaction if you tell them that oil tankers
haven’t been allowed inside those inside waters and now they’re considering lifting a moratorium to allow those tankers inside those inside waters (Participant F).

In contrast, organizations used the strength of scientific evidence as a campaign tool to overcome over-emotionality, and transmit objectivity. However, it was used in a similar way to arts-based strategies by placing people in an experiential learning environment so that they can contextualize the issues by experiencing them. Participant H emphasized, “It’s very important especially when you’re trying to get people concerned about conservation, biodiversity, to open the doors into that world. Cause, the vast majority of people don’t have a clue, what biodiversity actually is.”

A few participants commented on the rigid nature of funding possibilities for addressing the complexity of sustainability, which was a challenge because, “if we solve one problem that relates to water issues, or we try to address a particular issue, we might miss other opportunities and cause other problems, if you will” (Participant L). However, creative strategies were used to mitigate this challenge by requesting, for example, a multimedia report in the form of a video, which had the added feature of being able to transmit the report immediately to supporters to show the impacts on the community. Organizations accurately reflected grassroots work by presenting the faces and projects of “real people and real places doing real things” (Participant M). This strategy, augmented by using storytelling to communicate issues, expanded funding possibilities by creating momentum and support for projects.

Creative strategies were not just observed in community engagement but as a strategic organizational approach in light of changing policies and a perceived attack to democracy that has created momentum for resisting the system and has garnered ever more support and action for grassroots activities.
And also since British Columbia has been under attack from the federal government…It’s really tapping into people’s kind of underlying values around democracy and fairness…Probably between 10-15% of British Columbians who didn’t really care before or who were kind of on the fence moved over to being opposed to the project in the last year based upon a combination of the things that the conservative government has said, the lack of fairness, and also some of Enbridge’s mistakes around like oil spills and deleting islands off maps. So combinations. But the opposition keeps growing and that’s what appears to be the key factors (Participant F).

This perception of the current erosion of democracy was identified as recent changes in legislation such as the Environmental Assessment Act, however, organizations are finding creative ways to campaign even under a more stringent legal framework concerning advocacy. An observation in the organizations was a shift away from protest models to policy matters and indirect advocacy. This shift spanned across organizations from building supporter lists in swing ridings to organizing action at MLAs’ offices. A challenge facing micro-philanthropy organizations is that grassroots groups do not have charitable status, which makes it difficult to operate within the legal framework. This shift could potentially be attributed to a combination of limited resources, the lack of continuity with funding, and fluctuations in the political climate, which has resulted in a more strategic and targeted approach as a reaction to this convergence. Participant E commented: “Yes, there’s very very strict rules and actually the Harper government has been trying to change these rules and make them even tougher. Cause they don’t want not-for-profits to have as much of a voice as they do.”

Anytime citizens experience engaging with the political system and actually making a difference, it is confirming of self-worth, it’s enormously empowering, it’s encouraging…So reversing a feeling of powerlessness to a feeling of being empowered, is a positive experience and that’s mostly what we do (Participant J).
Top-down and bottoms-up are both needed to create traction in community engagement.

A core value that manifested through these interviews was a belief that democracy is strengthened through grassroots engagement. Through mobilization, citizens could influence decision-making in government because “these changes and these different policies and directions don’t always come from the top” (Participant N). Although a few participants cautioned that it’s not just consciousness raising because “that sort of up-down information spreading doesn’t always inspire action” (Participant C) but “opening spaces for deeper dialogue where deep transformations and new kinds of action might be possible” (Participant C). This dialogue shouldn’t be manipulative but was more about “surfacing the values of people that highly motivate them” (Participant N).

To garner buy in, many participants advised that co-constructing a vision that is desirable, achievable, and successful, needs to be created with diverse members of the community. Participant L called this “building that shared intention so that it’s a picture that everyone’s excited to move towards.” In order to create that momentum, political will is also needed for community engagement to be successful. Participant C recognized that it is important for change agents to be involved in, “shifting the gaze upstairs to the people who hold power in some ways. And saying we’ve heard from these people that this needs to change so what’s stopping us from making change from further upstream.” A few participants experienced situations where power holders or groups in the community weren’t willing to surrender control, and it became a negative experience for people. Champions are needed because the current political state in Canada is not conducive to community engagement. The federal government “thinks it’s too
messy, it’s too costly” (Participant N). All participants said that it was very important to find community leaders from different levels of the social strata who can help in a wide range of capacities such as: name lending, or funding. There are champions at the executive level in cities and some hold positions of influence like the CAO and the finance department. It can help to find commonalities and speak another’s language to create a win-win situation. Ways to find community leaders were looking for people who emerged as being interested in the process, belong and are connected to multiple networks (i.e. member of the Rotary Club and the Chamber of Commerce). Some suggestions for piquing their interests were: to do research about them and discover what interests them, or to work through a common affiliation and invite them to an event as “you do way more for a group of people you know than for people than you don’t. That’s just the way it works” (Participant E).

To empower people, to motivate people, to have a positive experience, you have to motivate them to do something. Anything (Participant J).

**Capacity building is an important building block in community engagement**

Most organizations listed the goal of education as a key focus so that municipal staff, citizens, and employees can understand their function. However, it appeared as if informing was not enough to stir people to act. Training citizens to build capacity and be more engaged in their own democracy was essential. Participant J commented on the empowerment that goes along with learning to take action. The skills acquired by citizens that received activist training were: courage to step outside their comfort zone, power to transition from hopelessness to empowerment, voice on behalf of their future, and inspiring others to act.
Getting people to take action was a key reason for campaigns. Participants advised that letter writing could have a big impact on politics with the biggest difference being made in local politics as elected officials tend to pay close attention to their own constituents. However, there was mixed responses on whether citizens should be given talking points to write their own letters or fill in a prepopulated form letters. The strength of a personal letter was that each letter would be more meaningful because they were personalized with unique subject lines and personal information. The strengths of form letters were that it was easy to get people to take action on, and that campaigns might only need a certain threshold to gain popularity or to prove to local government that enough people are mobilizing on the issue.

..how do you move from these temporary engagement efforts whether they’re initiated by community organizers or by local governments? They tend to have the same strengths and weaknesses. And how do you go from that way of doing this kind of stuff to a more long-term approach, where you’ve got structures to get people involved? Which are meaningful, and powerful. Where people feel like their voices are heard. They can work on the things that they care about (Participant I).

We really do need robust governance structures for efficacy in community engagement.

Natural structures authentic to the people involved need to be built into the fabric of community to achieve the transformational changes that are needed in for sustainable community development. Participant D remarked that, “I don’t believe in citizen engagement as a technique or as a kind of process in which you’ve basically using gimmicks to get people to give their opinion and leave.” Community engagement is usually one-off time bound projects introduced by an organization. A few participants argued that there needs to be continuity, and collaborative efforts by a range of supporters so that community engagement can transition from short-term
projects to long-term structures. Collaboration can be supported through working with a diversity of groups, not in silos. Participant C suggested creating a community of practice so that people can diffuse ideas to each other. Participant D commented on how people are not going to be continuously engaged in the same issues, however, structures need to be established to accommodate this “willingness to participate.” The purpose of long-term structures are to build community by people gathering together with regularity (and interacting with family and friends), to be able to influence issues, and to address and discuss other meaningful issues. Participant I summed this up by saying, “…rebuilding community in a kind of knitting back together the kind of social and political aspects of community life.”

Current structures like those established for public consultations are antiquated yet they are the prevalent models used by communities. Participant I called this the “three minutes in a microphone format” where a public meeting is organized and requests are made for people to show up. The public goes because they are frustrated with the issue. Municipal staff is uncomfortable with the process yet go along with it because they have to under the pretense of ‘public consultation.’ Ideas are vocalized and shared, and the public criticizes them. This model has created poor experiences for both the public and decision makers. Sometimes it is tokenism, manipulation, and can often be experienced as a process lacking authenticity where possibilities have already been eliminated by government officials.

A few participants discerned the difference between community engagement and stakeholder engagement and how stakeholder engagement is already done in a robust way. However, community engagement includes not just the experts, but common citizens in society. If we just
engage stakeholders, “it would really miss so much of what was going on in society” (Participant N).

…it’s a social process and therefore it has the thickness and complexity of all social processes. And it should be approached as a social process. And the more you’re able to respect that quality, the better I think the outcome will be (Participant D).

**Community engagement is more of a social process than any one strategy.**

Time, space, and resources need to be invested into designing the process because community engagement centers on building trust and relationships. This can be time-consuming, costly, and “requires patience and coaching” (Participant K). Because the public participates when the activity, “relates to some tangible issue that people care about” (Participant I). The more you understand the individual, the more successful you will be in your initiative. Participant I commented, “If you want to understand how this stuff works and doesn’t work, it’s more important to look at things outside the room, things outside the meeting, than what’s happening inside the meeting.” Because the power of deliverative democracy is to help people meet their social needs not to get “involved in the big, fancy, complicated policy issues” (Participant I).

A few participants advised that whatever your purpose is for engagement, you should provide the community with the opportunity to achieve that purpose, and this should be stated in a very transparent way because, “there’s no engagement for engagement’s sake anymore” (Participant B). Once individuals have contributed their ideas, be honest about whether an idea will be implemented to build trust in the community. Because if people feel like they haven’t been listened to, they will not support a plan. In one wild scenario, community members defended a plan from public criticisms by people that did not participate in the process. Participant L said,
“That’s always a sign of success although you never hope to have people standing up pa pooing a plan at the end of it.”

Relationships were built not just through bonding social capital, but also through bridging social capital with organizations using networks to connect with other organizations that had a similar mission, mandate, or goals. The main purpose of networks was the widespread dissemination of knowledge. Another equally important purpose was to build capacity, by working with allies, such as organizations connected to other conferences, dinners, speaking engagements, and events. Participant K identified conferences as an ideal location to test out relationships to see if “there’s an opportunity for a more formal, direct relationship.” Many organizations tapped into groups or networks of people like professional associations that already existed. Diversity of players was deemed important for greater capacity and diversity of players with one organization to harness community power such as the bridging between academics and practitioners because, “big thinkers…helps grounds us all in the realities of what local leaders are trying to do” (Participant I). Some organizations worked in solidarity with other organizations to build coalitions to organize for mobilizing particular actions. However, there were challenges with leadership and with ownership over data collection.

A few participants suggested that working laterally with other community groups and sharing resources can build capacity. Analyzing the different dimensions of your issue can help you identify the community groups you should partner with. Relationships can be managed by attending each other’s meetings to transmit information and recruit people. Cross-pollination across groups involved activities like setting up a presentation table with literature and handouts, using online communications for updates, and seeking advice in important decisions. However,
this needs to be managed appropriately based on the level of collaboration. Participant H emphasized, “it can be a delicate balance of making them feel that they’re part of the process and without taking over the process.”

The social process also materialized through organizations placing a lot of focus on direct engagement through social events like workshops. A few organizations intentionally used events to discover likeminded organizations and coordinated events on a particular theme like water, for instance. One organization even took the initiative to create a calendar showcasing the social and environmental work that was happening in the city.

A few organizations also used the approach of taking the “process to the people” (Participant B) at events to go to places where people are already congregating. These organizations also added a social component to a formal process by implementing input channels at these events to harvest ideas that will get developed into outcomes. It was also suggested by some to use an “eat when you meet” (Participant H) approach for administrative or project-oriented activities. The benefit was that food created an alternative ambience so people could relax while contributing to a formal process.

You have to look at your community, and the idiosyncrasies, the unique factors that are there. Because to some extent, the generic stuff works everywhere. But to be successful, you need to really tailor it to what your community is, and what resources you have, what strengths and what weaknesses you might have. So I think that’s important (Participant H).

**Community engagement is not a one-size-fits-all approach.**

Many participants commented on the central need to understand the community you are aiming to engage. A diversity of approaches should be used in order to be successful because
there isn’t a cookie cutter approach that works in every community. Some tools will succeed and others will fail depending on the context of your situation. An exercise that might help with this is community asset mapping to identify important built and geographic assets in the community. Participant H also suggested examining the multiple layers in the community and analyzing what their reaction might be, and what people might need to support you in your project. Demonstration projects can be used to experiment with ideas before scaling up to capitalize on time and investment with projects, and to demonstrate achieving low hanging fruit to the community, especially to gain credibility from those who are results driven. An assessment of skills can be undertaken to capitalize on people’s expertise, talents, and interests.

Participants agreed that a combination of face-to-face and online engagement should be used because there will always “be a digital divide no matter what” (Participant I). These methods are complimentary, and can be weaved together to harness the advantages of both. As Participant I commented, “The power of social media and social networks to keep people engaged…there’s more potential than reality at this point.” A few participants agreed that the best way to engage, recruit, and build trust and rapport is face-to-face and then use online tools to support face-to-face engagement once a relationship was developed. Further, face-to-face can be time and resource intensive but people are more accountable when meeting face-to-face.

In some cases, better results were achieved face-to-face when the content was politically contentious because polarization became more likely in the online sphere. However, social media and email had the benefits of amplifying the message, especially to bring attention to written publications. Facebook was affordable and particularly useful for creating specific volunteer groups, local events pages, a forum for people to dialogue, posting petitions or linking to other
sites. A few participants felt that Twitter wasn’t as good for kick starting action, but was useful when you had a large following, and communicating breaking news, blog posts, or to get people to sign petitions. Email was also affordable but participants faced challenges with spam filters and people intentionally not opening their emails from being inundated by them.

I think it makes our communities better. I think it makes our organizations and local governments more transparent and accountable. The results, which are plans and processes, and projects and programs, are owned by the community because they were effectively engaged in their development. And that ownership is the key to making something work (Participant B).

The success of an organization is dependent on the ability of an organization to engage with people and the community.

The key contributors to organizational effectiveness were in this order: resources, communications and organizational structure. Funding was a priority because it affected the sustainability of the organization, the delivery of quality programs and services, the human resource capacity, and the technology available to serve the vision. However, participants felt that first and foremost, people were at the heart of the organization leading Participant E to say, “It’s more about the people involved than the process sometimes.” It was crucial to find dedicated people who understood and committed to the mandate and the vision of the organization. In terms of leadership, participants found it necessary to have people who can translate big thinking into action. Most organizations had a strong connection between the board and staff. The board conceptualized a strategic plan with annual improvements, board and staff operationalized the strategic plan, and a mission and vision statement was teased out through collaboration over time.
Not only was it crucial to find good people internally but also engage with others externally whether in a collaborative, advisory, or volunteer capacity. Some organizations had advisors that were the bridge between the organization and the community and in these cases it was key that “people in the know have a good sense of what’s happening and where some of the priorities are” (Participant M). A few organizations even engaged in hiring practices to ensure that employees represented diverse interests and were able to tap into networks of people.

Even though there are challenges organizing with volunteers, volunteers were crucial to the success of organizations because they bring multi-dimensional support to an organization. They bring financial support, networks, and greater organizational capacity. A volunteer base was recognized as being important because it can lead to the financial wellbeing of an organization. Examples: financial resources i.e. donations; human resources i.e. support from network of family members and friends; organizational capacity i.e. volunteers can transition into employees; community capacity i.e. volunteers can transition into community organizers. Strategies to organize volunteers were to interview people in the organization to determine what type of support was needed, and then grouping volunteers according to expertise and passion. The more volunteers felt like they had a sense of purpose and belongingness, the more they delivered on outcomes. Volunteer capacity could be harnessed by organizing letters and building up a profile of the different member groups.

I would say that the projects I worked on that were the most successful was the ones where we spent time looking at core values right at the beginning. And we wouldn’t get involved in an action or a project if it didn’t have the core values that we have (Participant E).
Values are at the heart of community engagement.

Community engagement was at the center of discussion whether it’s an organization’s approach or a specific event. However, a few participants felt that community engagement should be an underpinning of the values of an organization, not an actual strategy per se. It was crucial to identify core values at the beginning of a project with some participants recommending that values be expressed throughout the project right through to outcomes. Participant M said, “…particularly when you’re young and you’re new and there are limited resources, everything needs to align with your mission, your mandate, and your core values.” For some, core values really spoke to the success of a project. Participant K advised that if you are working with different groups of people, you might not share the exact same values, however, it’s crucial to have a shared understanding for coming together. Volunteers even intentionally selected organizations based on matching their own values to those of the organization.

The most common core values were diversity and accountability. Diversity was incorporated by including multiple perspectives in the engagement process, and to work across intergenerational groups and people with different belief systems. Many participants emphasized valuing marginalized people by paying attention to people who are not normally represented and the importance of accommodation because of the history of inequity and how marginalized people are easily discounted. Accountability was to be accountable to donors, stakeholders, organizations, and the community, and to be loyal to commitments. One organization even demonstrated reciprocity through a volunteer share program where once volunteer capacity was maxed in that organization, they would be directed to other organizations.
CREATING THE FRAMEWORK FOR A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT...

…it’s really about honouring the feedback that you receive and letting people know that they’re not just speaking in a token kind of way but that you are genuinely taking their opinions into your perspective (Participant C).

The more feedback loops are integrated into communicating with people, the more we can learn to refine the process.

A feedback mechanism should be incorporated so that you can evaluate effectiveness because “things don’t always go according to plan” (Participant L). Participant L suggested that it helps to have a receptive attitude to feedback so that lines of communication remain open. There appeared to be a relationship between evaluation and communication. Evaluation was recognized as being critical to success, however, there was a general sense of uncertainty with evaluation. When feedback loops are used in evaluation, there is a better understanding of where to prioritize communications. For example, if more people were using Facebook, then efforts should be prioritized there. Many organizations felt that it was necessary to have a feedback loop to the community to understand if progress was being made and where to concentrate efforts.

The challenge with current structures is that it is generally very easy to get immediate feedback, however, it wasn’t as linear for policy decisions because it was “much more difficult unless there’s a straight line between what you’ve been doing and say a policy decision at city council or something which rarely happens” (Participant H). And the challenge “is those wheels are churning all the time and it often takes months if not years for a policy decision to simply get made” (Participant I) and “by the time the decision finally comes before the Parliament or the City Council, people are nowhere to be found” (Participant I). A few participants found this challenge can be mitigated through the use of online tools to create transparency and
accountability with the process through tracking continuously and “putting other results of things up in a more visible way” (Participant I).
Chapter 5: Conclusion

Recommendations

In early 2012, the community was invited to attend monthly meetings to conceptualize the vision, mission, and values of the organization, however, the governance of Our Street London as it stands has not been fully fleshed out and is a large part of ongoing discussions. Our Street London has currently implemented a governance community or committee that will decide on the decision-making process, and organizational structure. I feel there needs to be urgent traction to prioritize governance for a robust democratic structure and to recruit the community support needed for organizational sustainability. The organization is structured as a project hub with committees structured around projects and leads are identified per project. Leads report project development at monthly meetings with input gathered from monthly meetings. There is a core group of members with community residents occasionally attending the monthly meetings.

A consensual decision-making model should be integrated into the organization’s structure.

There is a general understanding that there is some form of consensual decision-making and input being considered, that is happening within these project committees, and with applications for funding. However it has not been clearly delineated just how final decisions are being determined or how input is being considered. It should be transparent to the group how decisions are being made so people feel like they are being heard, valued, and to build relationships and
trust. How feedback is incorporated from the group should also be transparent when leads are making project reports. Power should be shared with the group so the group takes shared ownership of decisions. A democratic tool such as Dotmocracy can be used for group decisions and to accommodate individuals that may not be comfortable voicing their opinion at the meetings, and so that minority opinions are not suppressed by dominant voices or conformity to group think.

**Goal setting should be discussed with clarity around praxis of projects meeting the vision, mission, and values of the organization.**

The vision and mission have been conceptualized, however, values have been named without defining what these particular values mean to the organization and how are these values are grounded in the work that *Our Street London* does, for example, how are they going to exemplify the values through the actions that they will take. This is important so that individuals are able to match their values to those of the organization and so there can be reflexivity with values being expressed right through to outcomes. This is also to attract appropriate volunteers whose values reflect those of the organization. Goals should be created during project development so that committee members have a clear vision of deliverables and outcomes, with gaps identified so strategic actions can be taken to address challenges to overcome them. The vision, mission, and values should always be at the forefront of planning and project development to harmonize with created projects and synchronize in working partnerships or collaborative efforts.
More structure on group process is needed to provide continuity and flow with projects and meetings.

Currently the coordinator facilitates, decides on the meeting agenda, and emails a call-out to members for agenda items that need to be added. A call-out for more agenda items can be made at the inception of the meetings should time permit. The group recently decided that there would be a dedicated minutes keeper at the meetings to document progress, updates, and input. Minutes are documented using a computer but another option would be to use a whiteboard so that notes are visible and the group can keep up-to-date with where the discussion is going. However, there should also be a timekeeper, vibes watcher, and graphics artist to involve more people in active participation at the meetings. Roles can be rotated to give individuals the opportunity to experience different roles and to build individual capacity. The purpose respectively being to: keep track of the time to ensure that time is being dedicated appropriately between agenda items; to gage the emotions and provide a mechanism for conflict should it occur; to capture the conversation visually in real-time so people can follow the progression, and to accommodate visual learners. Ground rules should be collectively established to cultivate a culture of honesty and respect, to validate experiences and to build on ideas. Ground rules should be clearly visible and reiterated to set the stage at the outset of each meeting, and should be up for renegotiation if the group decides. Check-ins and check-outs can be used at the beginning and conclusion of each meeting to test the energy and enthusiasm of the individuals involved and as a thermometer for group engagement and buy-in. A parking lot can
be implemented so that ideas that need more deliberation do not disappear, and can be addressed at a later time. Committee reports can include progress meters for actionable items, to identify gaps where resources are needed, to solicit help from the group, and to achieve deadlines and provide accountability to the process. There should be clear expectations at the end of each meeting on responsibilities and what needs to be accomplished. Meetings should include food to add a social component to a formal process and set a relaxed atmosphere for people to contribute ideas.

**Develop a heightened awareness of London by identifying community assets to build capacity and networks.**

Our Street is a project hub and an events-oriented organization that brings people together in the spirit of community and celebration. The group should undertake a community mapping exercise to identify skills, knowledge, experiences, and talents of citizens, community organizations, community associations, networks, and other physical structures that may be useful in building organizational and community capacity. This activity should start off by assessing the skillsets of Our Street members, and then, recruiting other skillsets that have been identified to build capacity internally within the organization. Committees can be organized based on member talents and how they would like to contribute so members can take action and feel like they are supporting the organization. Our Street should also examine the multiple dimensions of the issues to unveil other potential partnerships or collaborations to augment current partnerships, and also to broaden networks. This is to provide more opportunity to work horizontally and cooperate with other organizations to share financial and people resources for events and
projects. This process would also entail researching background on political leaders and champions that can provide the critical momentum to move projects forward.

**Arts-based strategies should be incorporated to get the message across to different audiences.**

Our Street London should use creative strategies using music, storytelling, art, and experiential learning to engage citizens at fun events, and through communications on project websites, and campaigns. Real stories about real people can be used to draw people into a narrative thread so that they can relate to an issue or concern. Negativity should be avoided and positive messages of empowerment and hope should be used. This type of interaction can reach diverse voices to get them feel involved, and as a result, builds community through people connection. The option for arts-based strategies (such as multimedia formats) can be offered to funders as a way of evaluating a project, such as using video to show the deliverables that funding has provided. This also can create momentum around projects by disseminating any reports quickly through posting on social media and website channels.

**Keep all channels of communication open so that communications is effective.**

Our Street should implement feedback loops in all lines of communications whether it is open communications to the public, or to members. This is important so that people are kept-up-to-date on projects and so that there is a mechanism for people to provide feedback, and to be able
to honour that feedback. Feedback is also conducive for goal setting so that Our Street is able to adapt and adjust to complex realities. Our Street should also have clear lines of communication with partner organizations to prevent siloes from happening in the community. Approaches to get the community involved in shaping projects can include: opinion polling and message-testing to see what resonates with people, and surveying people on how they would like to participate or the kind of community action they are interested in engaging in. Our Street will be able to analyze success through anecdotal evidence in these feedback loops. Surveys have been distributed at events such as Our Street Day but there is no system in place for evaluating the feedback that has been provided. This survey can also be used learn about the people who are attracted to the events so that messages can be communicated to them. Technology can be used for keeping progress visible to the public, so that there is more transparency with decision-making.

**Use the process of dialogue to elicit action steps, possibilities, and recommendations.**

Dialogue can be used in working groups to define priorities, identify barriers and constraints, and to develop action steps and recommendations. Diversity in group composition should be a priority from early on in the process to create different angles for problem-solving strategies. Ideas attributed to individuals for projects can be placed into an appendix so that people can see that their idea has been acknowledged and is being considered. Collaboration and real-time tools can be taken advantage of to keep people up-to-date on the progress of project development. An example is Google documents, which can be used as a collaboration tool because many users can input information simultaneously, citizens can edit the document based on feedback received, and user modifications can be tracked. A neutral facilitator should be used in this process in the
event that conflict should emerge from a heated issue, to overcome differences of opinions and to accommodate minority opinions so people can contribute meaningfully to the conversation.

Use a combination of face-to-face and online engagement to harness the advantages of both.

Our Street should use a combination of face-to-face and online engagement strategies to capture a diverse audience and to capitalize on the power of online networks in disseminating messages. Face-to-face strategies can be used by engaging with people at events. Currently, the coordinator uses emails to organize monthly meetings and volunteers and uses a Doodle poll so members can indicate their availability. This process has been working well to inform members of upcoming meetings, so members can add items to the agenda, and for members to discourse on projects and ideas between meetings. A Facebook group page has been created, however, it is not being fully utilized to its full capacity, and there are no recent actions on the page. A dedicated group should be created to manage communications using Facebook and Twitter for creating specific volunteer groups, local events, and a forum for people to dialogue. There is also a website (http://www.ourstreet.ca) but it orients towards the festival, Our Street Day. There is greater potential for the website to be used to augment communications to the public, showcase projects, and to be used as a dialoguing tool between members, and the community.

Key Reflections

Throughout the interview process, there emerged a clear thread in commonalities of activist characteristics in the individuals that didn’t quite fit the scope of my research questions.
However, I feel that it is important to acknowledge these threads because it translates to sustainable behaviors. It crystallized my views on how individual actions and voice can have a sphere of influence in animating the lives of others by motivating and mobilizing others to believe and take action. A few participants had undergone transformations in their perception of activism over the course of being an activist from a separation to a unification of people. Some participants relayed their sense of deep compassion and interconnectedness to the planet and all sentient beings, and were guided by a sense of strong ethics. Most of the participants were visionaries. They had a long-term perspective and viewed societal change through a systems thinking lens. Some saw the mobilizations happening at the local level connecting to the global landscape. They expressed commitment to inquiry for what it means to be sustainable for future generations. This ability to see the big picture, in the context of passionate community, mitigated the sense of helplessness that was felt from feeling pressured by time. A few participants commented on the challenges of social change due to the complexities of the work, the cynicism that can be expressed by others, and the prevalence of activist burnout. Some viewed the work as a process of learning and developed the ability to adjust themselves, and accommodate according to the circumstances. A few participants emanated positivity and just said ‘yes’ to all opportunities that came their way which lead to beautiful experiences. This presents an opportunity for more research on the characteristics of activists or change agents to understand their life context and how that led to their transformation and agency.

It became apparent throughout the interviews that we are dealing with changing political circumstances in Canada that has propelled a shift in organizations engaging in more political activities. This targeted approach became very intentional in what appears to be greater
resistance to the system. This phenomenon needs further study, as this was not identified until data collection was completed. It is possible that only particular organizations that have experienced exogenous perturbations have changed strategies and become more resilient to external factors, for their organization’s effectiveness and sustainability.

**Closing Remarks**

Robinson argues that, “sustainability is a process, not an end-state” (Robinson, 2004, p. 381). This definition of sustainability is from a normative perspective, however, sustainability is based on values because the decisions that people make are values-based as people transcend the value action gap that translates into environmental behavior (Agyeman & Angus, 2009). Community engagement is the first step to engaging in discourse about the issues to create collective action for change. It is no longer us or them but we. Mobilizing people brings about transformative change. However, transformative change is slow to happen. Critical mass must form for transformative change to happen. But in order to get that critical mass, we need lots of people—diverse people to create the changes necessary for sustainable communities. Because these wicked issues operate at various scales and require interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary action to collaborate on these tough issues. Bottoms-up and top-down needs to operate simultaneously for change to happen. This was my greatest lesson learned from listening to the heartfelt expressions of my participants.

But how do we build momentum for change within an eroding democracy? As my research on community engagement progressed, it changed my perspective on what we need to do to move forward. This strategy was reflected through the narrative-based approach that I have used in my
current and will be using in my future work. That is, the strategy of arts-based methodologies. I have learned that this robust strategy will bring people together to create a shift in mindset that can create the collective, embodied knowledge needed for sustainable communities. It is my hope that this research has provided the framework for Our Street and can translate to other grassroots collectives in the intentional design of sustainable communities for future generations.
References


CREATING THE FRAMEWORK FOR A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT...


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Appendix A: CONFOR West poster

Creating the framework for a community engagement strategy
An Action Research Approach

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BACKGROUND
Our Street London is a grassroots collective of community residents that support alternatives to mainstream modalities of transportation, such as biking, walking and public transportation as well as sustainable urban form.

DEFINITION OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
The facilitation of mobilizing community action on sustainability and social justice issues.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS
- Use a diversity of communications strategies. Online and face-to-face approaches are complementary to each other. Face-to-face has strengths in solution-oriented conversations and as a collaboration tool. Whereas online can be used to advertise engagement or input opportunities.
- Don’t use a cookie cutter approach. To be successful, you should analyze your community, and examine the idiosyncrasies, the unique factors, and the strengths and weaknesses of community resources.
- Customize your approach by taking the process to the people by capitalizing on local events or gatherings that already exist.
- Be authentic and cultivate trust by being transparent in clarifying how people’s input will be used. Be honest and tell them if it doesn’t fit into the plan or that it will be considered.
- Use creative art mediums or strategies to elicit the affective realm so that people can identify with it in a tangible way.
- Do not sell fear by using negative messaging. People get into defensive positions when you tell them what they can’t do.
- The conversation should be about solutions or what people can do to support that.
- Include beneficiaries by making them a part of the project team or committee. That way, the voices are part of the development of the project direction.
- Create demonstration projects to build momentum in the community. Creating these opportunities for immediate action can be used to test out ideas before you scale up.

DATA COLLECTION
Semi-structured open-ended interviews with:
- academics who have conducted research on community engagement.
- practitioners who have worked in the area of community engagement for at least 15 years.
- employees of small to medium-sized sustainability/environmental and social justice NGOs.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS
1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of community engagement strategies?
2. What are the barriers and challenges to implementing these strategies?
3. How does community engagement contribute to sustainable development implementation?
4. How can these strategies be integrated into creating the framework for a community engagement strategy for Our Street London, in London, Ontario?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
- "But all in all, I am absolutely committed to community engagement. I think it makes our communities better. I think it makes our organizations and local governments more transparent and accountable. The results, which are plans, and process, and projects, and programs, are owned by the community because they were effectively engaged in their development. And that ownership is the key to making something work."
- "I like to say it’s about building shared intention. That we’re co-creating a future that is both desirable and eventually attainable. But we want to create it together. So you can’t create a community, a really good community plan that will be successful without engaging a diverse group of people—residents, members of the public, businesses, etc. And, you want to make sure again that you’re building that shared intention so that it’s a picture that everyone’s excited to move towards."
- "For us, community engagement is to elevate the issues that exist across our country so that so few people are connected to and understand. And, by communicating those from a grassroots perspectives, people are able to identify with them in a different way than the Globe and Mail in talking about climate change which can be very heavy and complex. Not terribly understandable. Where if you talk about it from the perspective of an arctic community in Nunavut, and the impacts that they’re seeing day-to-day, people can identify with that in a much more real way."
- "It’s very important especially when you’re trying to get people concerned about conservation, biodiversity, to open those doors into that world. Cause the vast majority of people don’t have a clue what biodiversity actually is. What it means to say you have X number of species living in your community. I mean that just doesn’t mean anything to most people."
- "So people have traditionally used the term consciousness-raising. But I don’t know if that’s the ultimate purpose. Ultimately, we’re looking at large-scale systems change, right? Whether it’s social, environmental, or hopefully both. Something that recognizes the inter-connectiveness of social and environmental challenges that we’re facing. And so the ultimate desire is to mobilize action for change. For some kind of positive, progressive change. But the community engagement is part of that strategy, right? So for me, consciousness-raising is part of it but once we are informed, what do we do?"

GREAT QUOTES!
Appendix B: Repeating Ideas and Emergent Themes

**Governance**

- organizational structure
  - current political and financial atmosphere too uncertain to do any sort of long-term planning
  - think-tank to help researchers and practitioners with challenges in the field
  - having vision/mission/overarching long-term goals and short-term goals
    - 5 year strategic plan and then annual plan
    - meetings to set mission statement
  - volunteer program on an ad-hoc basis
  - consulting role with the government
  - support community-based organizations
    - financially
    - conceptualize projects and take action on them
  - practical implementation oriented by working with city governments
  - project-based organization
    - but wasn’t working b/c sources of funding were no longer available
    - programs are complex b/c they require multiple sectoral representation and diverse population groups to be represented
    - profiling projects based on geography and community
    - transition to collaborating based on sector representation
  - campaign driven where campaigners will present goals and each department will work towards supporting these goals
  - awareness of the need and validity of participatory research methods at the university
  - strategy areas where community executes action plan
  - capacity building
    - tools and education to build skills like leadership
    - to empower citizens to make a difference

- decision-making
  - strong connection with board and staff
    - strategic planning exercise for X number of years
    - reports to board every quarter
    - iterative conversation
    - strategies at high level and staff creates an operational plan
    - respond to the policies that governments implement
    - board works out initiatives and campaigns that will be worked on
Creating the Framework for a Community Engagement...

- elects a new board (incl present) at every AGM
- moves from mission to programs
  - consensus decision making process
    - plans are vetted by different department directors
    - work mostly by consensus and rarely put things to a vote
      - so that decisions are supported by the entire group
      - everyone at the meetings are entitled to speak

- key contributors to organizational effectiveness
  - technology
    - have the systems in place for communications continuity
  - money
    - have the money to hire more people
    - to build capacity and technology
    - get funding from the government
  - resources
    - delivering quality programs and services with limited/small budgets
  - people
    - finding good people internally and externally
    - committed people
    - people who can see opportunities
    - people who can see what the organization stands for, has long-term dedication and what it wants to achieve
    - people who enjoyed being together
    - like minded in the sense that they wanted to make a positive impact on the planet
    - staff dedicated to community engagement
    - power with mobilizing a lot of people
    - strategic thinkers
  - goal setting
    - goal setting is important but need to understand the complexity of realities and be flexible and adaptable
    - taking strategic action based on those goals
    - set goals by department and then campaign
    - solid goals to achieve the long-term vision/mission
    - with staff for personal development
    - have clarity with goals
    - short term goal setting
      - having meetings every week to see where we’re at
  - community engagement
    - having policy language that is driven by community engagement
  - networks
    - building strong relationships
    - collaborating with people and organizations
CREATING THE FRAMEWORK FOR A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT...

- diverse set of people from different fields
- connection to professional associations
- having a good sense of the business plan
- communications
  - being inspiring to others through effective communication
  - with people external to the organization i.e. advisors
- strategy for winning a campaign
- doing good research
  - understand where your resources are
  - if you can get funding or not
- communications
  - have good communications within each group
- framework rooted in science
  - has been proven to work because it’s been used in many business, companies around the world
- market/timing
  - people much more open to the possibility of sustainability and what it presents
- credibility
  - speaking without any personal or financial gain
  - purely from the perspective of concern for humanity
  - build credibility through a relationship based on trust

- challenges in organizational effectiveness
  - communication
    - around roles
    - motivation for change (organizational)
    - between departments
    - internationally - working across different time zones, cultures, languages
  - internal resources to motivate staff
    - tools to make better decisions and to use community plan as a framework for decision making
  - governance structures that take advantage of the board and their expertise
  - funding
    - for human resources
    - operating within the legal framework because a lot of grassroots groups do not have charitable status
    - funders are not creative in addressing complex/multiple issues
      - change criteria to allow for deep thinking on sustainability issues
      - not enough resources to have a separate department
  - technology
  - staff capacity
  - assessment tools in choosing people to collaborate and partner with
  - problems are complex and work is difficult because there are so little successes
CREATING THE FRAMEWORK FOR A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT...

- institutional base at an academic institution so have more connections to students/researchers
- bilingual organization but struggle with translating materials in both languages
- community engagement
  - of the younger generation

- political will
  - if election is going on, community engagement can be looked at negatively because it takes up resources
  - need political support for community engagement
    - to have the opportunity for positive engagement
    - once you lose the political support, community engagement can become negative
    - especially at the executive level in cities
      - enter into agreements with mayors and council
  - need champions who have influence because the current political state in Canada is not conducive to community engagement i.e. community engagement offices being shut down
    - reasons: too costly, too messy
    - government has been attacking people who are against the pipeline and calling them environmental radicals

- actions
  - people writing to their local government to stop a motion or in support of an idea/cause
    - let them know where you stand and what you want them to do
    - can make a difference at the power level
    - form letters
      - asking people to send their own letter is less likely because people don’t know what to say
        - however, form letters aren’t worth as much as letters that people write themselves
      - give them talking points or have a pre-populated letter
      - might just need a certain number of names to push through a campaign
        - ask for first, last name, email, address, phone number, country
      - have their own unique subject lines
      - make the letter personal
      - be polite
      - can have a big impact on local politics
  - building supporter lists in swing ridings
    - that’s where supporter base is
    - need to look at people who skip over the middle
      - polling divisions
        - every riding has 250 polling divisions
○ can check voting data per division
  ■ narrow ridings that won by less by 10% of the vote
○ small organizations need to be very targeted/strategic because of limited resources
○ deploy canvass teams into ridings where we can influence an election
  ■ busy street corners
  ■ door-to-door
○ try to understand who (leaders) needs to be influenced
  ■ some MLAs have power and some don’t
○ target politically (either federal, provincial, municipal)
○ do a power analysis of your political support
○ apply actions at a grassroots level
○ organizing action at MLA’s offices in the afternoon
  ■ this doesn’t happen normally so people are surprised by it
○ draw attention to the policies and actions that are negatively impacting people and communities → also fits under training and education

● engagement with the political system
  ■ reverses hopelessness to being empowered
  ■ is a positive experience
  ■ highest engaged supporters have the experience of being engaged in their community

● people are competent and able to debate policy issues
  ○ do not underestimate the competence of ordinary citizens

● political leaders
  ○ working with political leaders can pressure leaders higher up
  ○ impacting the municipal level can be a robust strategy
    ■ the chief administrative officer and the finance department has a lot of power
    ■ speak their language
    ■ find commonalities so that it’s a win-win situation
  ○ pays more attention to their own constituents
  ○ can interest them
    ■ when it’s an issue that the public needs to get involved in
    ■ if there is momentum on an issue (lots of people involved) and it requires their buy-in (or not)
    ■ look at what drives them personally and what issues affect them

● public consultations
  ○ poor experiences with public consultations for both decision makers and the public
  ○ explain how your approach will be different
  ○ it takes time so limit yourself to situations where there will be a real impact on important issues
If you have the impression that it’s tokenism, why would you take the process seriously?

- same old people going to these sessions
- the public go because they are frustrated
  - same consultant or municipal staff leading it
- antiquated approach of organizing a public consultation meeting and asking everyone to go to it
- still the dominant approach used by communities
- planners go through the process because they have to
- municipal staff uncomfortable because they share their ideas and get criticised by the public
  - uncomfortable sharing power with the public
    - sometimes it becomes clear throughout the process that the decision has already been made or some of the options aren’t going to be available.

**Policy decisions**

- not communicated very well because of the length of time it takes for a policy decision to get made/implemented i.e. wheels of policy-making process turns very slowly
  - this is where online tools can help because it helps keeps thing more visible especially if there’s ongoing tracking
  - policy was decided on once people stopped being engaged
- very difficult to assess or to determine if you’ve been successful
- challenging to evaluate policy decisions because there isn’t a straight line with what you are doing and city council

**Communications**

**How to communicate environmental messages**

- do not use negative messaging
  - people get into defensive positions when you tell them what they can’t do
  - people are looking for alternatives and solutions, and a way to support that
    - give people a way to take action i.e. petitions
- provide people with hope, leadership, and mentorship
- do not bore people with statistics and details of treaties
- understand your audience so you know how to communicate with them
  - identify the various segments of the community
- communicate from a grassroots perspective so people can identify in a real way

**Develop communications materials**

- in multiple languages
  - can be a challenge if there are not enough human resources and money
  - might be a good idea to do message testing and polling first
  - get them to the community centres and religious centres because these are the strong hubs in the community
CREATING THE FRAMEWORK FOR A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT...

- very important in social change work whether it’s to inspire funders or individuals in public education
- working across cultures, time zones, languages can be difficult
  - things get lost in translation
- improve communications between departments
- communicate back to people the outcome of an action
- combine information and actions that people can engage in
- break down the silos in municipality so that there is communication between departments, and with the municipality and the public
  - big limitation to how engagement is conducted

- field theory
  - used to take huge amounts of information and condense it into a form that people can understand
  - used in art and data

- Local media
  - can be useful in disseminating information
  - they are always looking for a story
    - interested in people getting together and dialoguing with each other
    - can report on the one person saying outrageous things

- Educational Delegations
  - to visit communities in other countries
- Educational Speaking tours
  - to have citizens in other countries visit us here in North America
- Publications
  - writing articles to give the results
  - notices for advertising events
  - magazines, newspapers
- public speaking
  - identify segments of the community
  - ask if an organization would be willing to have a speaker come in to present/explain the issue
- interviews
  - television
- petitions
  - online
  - offline
- know that communication strategies aren’t working
Creating the Framework for a Community Engagement...

- if people fall off the map
- not doing enough
- not being consistent with communications
- making people feel like they’re not adding value

- use as many communications channels as you can that are relevant to your situation

Target Population

- target politically to gain supporters across a wide political spectrum
  - encourage people to get together in groups to meet with their MLAs
- target street corners so you get a wide diversity of people
- some organizations do not have a target population
  - presents the issues as human issues and affecting a wide range of the human family
- target North American population to get them to hold government and industry accountable for their actions
- can use social media to determine who your audience is and where they’re located
- start with people who are interested in the topic like naturalist clubs
- members of the organization
  - learn as much about them so that you can deliver messages to them
  - volunteers can sort through letters and build up a profile of different groups
- target the public who are involved in social issues
  - churches and community organizations
  - go to meetings and set up a presentation table with literature and handouts
- target university students by using billboards for major bus lines and at a major intersection

Outreach and Campaigns

- important to get people to understand your issue better → ties to training and education
- make campaigns active and fun
- get people to care by having a campaign where people have to deal with it every day of their lives
- really listen to the grassroots groups so projects can bubble up
  - material that is developed represents real people, in real places, doing real things i.e. quotes, etc.
  - ties to grassroots action because it’s accurately reflecting people’s work
- scientific evidence is a tool that can be used in campaigns
  - adds veracity and strength
  - can overcome people’s emotions
- can survey the community to get ideas on how to shape the campaign
  - ask them what they are willing to do, how would they like to participate
  - volunteer units when they get together to talk about the campaign
  - what kind of community action are people willing to get involved in?
opinion polling and message testing to see what campaigns resonates with people

Technology

shift our concept of what going to scale means because of the support of all our technologies i.e. online technologies, global networks

SMS
  ○ can text in your vote for a participatory budgeting exercise in Brazil

think about the technologies that people do have
  ○ don’t assume that just people are low income means they don’t have that technology

having the systems in place to ensure that technology is running smoothly, commitment to ensure that data is accurate, and to be able to test that system
  ○ i.e. drip campaign
    ■ someone who receives a drip campaign early can have an effect of 300-400% of their donations

Customer Relationship Management Tool
  ○ tracks relationships/interactions with people
    ■ if they have a interests or specialization
  ○ can segment people into different categories
    ■ i.e. supporter and cyber-activist

Collaboration Tool
  ○ Google Documents
    ■ input all the information
    ■ members can make modifications or updates according to feedback
    ■ data can be used in a number of different ways
  ○ real-time tools
    ■ use cartoon artists to capture themes and ideas real-time as a session is taking place
      ● can take this to a local café afterwards so people who didn’t attend the session can contribute their ideas
    ■ Place Speak
      ● survey-oriented online tool where people can provide input to a budget
    ■ Eco-portal
      ● use a website to build a plan and receive feedback
      ● are great because you can see the plan, direction, goals and where they’re at in the process
      ● big screens at the town hall meetings or citizens assembly
        ● can see how people’s perspectives changes
        ● has a really good feedback loop because you can see the progression as you’re going along
  ○ website
CREATING THE FRAMEWORK FOR A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT...

- to review policy statements
- if you have a big project, develop a project specific website

- social media
  - very helpful to expand the reach of any written publication
  - Facebook
    - can create specific Facebook groups for volunteers
    - forum for people to chat
    - local events to participate in
    - use it for petitions on the website
    - using posts and linking to petitions
    - very low cost
  - Twitter
    - good when you have a large following
    - talk about breaking news, blog posts, sign a petition
    - not good for taking action

- Email
  - combination of email and Facebook is the #1 way to get message across to your supporters
  - can be challenging because of spam filters and people not opening their emails due to being inundated

- Video
  - posting to YouTube

- Telephone
  - Telephone Town Hall
    - can be a good way to reach people who don’t have email
    - some people don’t like to be phoned by an automated answering system
    - 100 people ask questions of this board
    - interactive phone call

- radio
  - place ad in the radio

**Engagement Process**

- shared intention
  - co-creating a future that is desirable and achievable
  - creating this future with diverse members of a community
    - so that everyone is excited to move in the direction of this future
  - if you’re working with different groups of people, you might not share the exact same values but it’s important to have a shared understanding for coming together

- managing conflict
CREATING THE FRAMEWORK FOR A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT...

- important to let dissenters or minority share their opinion and ideas even though it’s not what the majority thinks
- hearing these challenging conversations can be important to people developing a plan
- at the front end, you remove it from the back end so people support the plan versus oppose the plan

- demonstrations projects
  - to demonstrate quick wins to the community
  - can test out ideas in the community before you scale up
  - so people can see the results of the engagement

- terms of engagement
  - state this in a very transparent way
  - whatever your purpose is for engagement, you should give the community the opportunity to meet that purpose i.e. feedback or input

- design the process properly
  - have a conversation early on in the process to garner support from the community
  - community will also know on the best way to engage with them
  - also allow you to reach a more diverse group
  - can also help you to develop materials and language before strategy is created
  - there are different ways for people to be heard and to be involved
  - be honest what you can do up front

- use a diversity of approaches
  - however, cheaper to use online methods
  - some tools will really work really well and others will fail in the community
  - offline
    - volunteer meetings where people can get briefed about campaigns

- social component to formal process
  - get people to come out through engagement at an event
    - Backyard Brainstorms
    - workbook
      - harvest ideas at an individual level and at a collective level
      - can be self-facilitated
      - input channel that has outcomes built into it
  - eat when you meet
    - potluck supper where everyone gets to contribute
    - everyone relaxes when eating then you have your meeting
      - sets the ambience
    - don’t overdo it - once a month or every two months
CREATING THE FRAMEWORK FOR A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT...

- to a lesser extent, cookies and snacks
  - have a party
    - people always will show up at parties
    - celebrations/events
      - get people to share food and laughter
      - start off with a celebration and end with a celebration i.e. BBQ
      - give people the opportunity to provide ideas for input development at a festival
      - provide opportunities for kids to be entertained
        - more inclusive of families
        - parents can update or design a program
      - kitchen parties
        - advisors can tell networks about different projects
      - events that orient on a specific theme
        - Earth Day
        - Boreal event
        - knowledge dissemination and knowledge transfer between organizations
  - projects
    - using projects as a way to extend the reach of the audience
  - workshops
    - partnerships with other organizations
    - draw from the wisdom that exists in the system

- face-to-face or online engagement
  - face-to-face
    - to build trust and rapport
    - best way to recruit people to an issue or campaign
    - the most effective technique for policy development and input development
    - electronic can support engagement but engagement is only possible when you’ve had the chance to build relationships through face-to-face first
    - most time and resource intensive but most successful
    - when designed well can give you valuable input to produce valuable output
    - more solution oriented
    - IAP2 scale - use face-to-face to collaborate and use electronic on scale to inform
    - even if it is to get people to get off their couch to meet others face-to-face, to learn how to respect each other, it’s better than nothing
      - social media
        - unaccountable channel
        - good tool to use to inform people of the conversations that are taking place
        - if concepts and content are too political, can be used in a negative way that’s conflict oriented
CREATING THE FRAMEWORK FOR A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT...

- if you need people that are going to monitor and facilitate conversation, then
  you might as well use face-to-face
  - online is promoted by people who believe that they work
  - not enough use of the online tools
  - the power of social media and social networks to keep people engaged has not been done
effectively yet
  - are complimentary; need to think about how to connect them so that you’re taking
    advantage of both
  - always be a digital divide; not everyone has the technology
  - different strengths and weaknesses

- dialogue
  - identify priorities, issues, and preferences
  - work through a process to decide what was most important collectively, not just
    individual ideas
  - define what is important to the community
  - use World Cafe
  - use a dotmocracy exercise to determine priorities http://dotmocracy.org/what_is
  - gathering data through surveys i.e. Survey Monkey
  - what are the barriers and constraints?
  - can create working groups to prioritize what should go into a plan
  - can stimulate a really heated conversation because people say what’s really important to
    them
  - identify issues and opportunities, develop shared community directions, develop policy, etc.
  - deliberate on ideas that are problematic

- beneficiaries shaping the direction of the plan
  - can include a committee group or steering committee that has complete authority over
    what gets included
    - sometimes this doesn’t work because the municipality isn’t willing to relinquish
      power
    - this can leave a bad taste in the committee’s mouth and create a lot of negativity
      for the community
  - doesn’t mean that these people can represent people in the community that vaguely look
    like them because all people have their own experiences
  - include the people that are going to benefit from the campaign
  - consultants writing up a plan is not as meaningful as having beneficiaries wrestling with
    the issues, directions, and challenges
    - but need to create the space and time to do this

- acknowledging people
  - saying “thank you”
can also spur more action because people feel valued
  • ensuring communications are supporter-centered
    ○ showing appreciation when people participate in research by something more than a letter or a report at the end
    ○ the researcher has a responsible to ensure that the voices of the participants are heard

• have the outcomes be project or process-oriented

• clarify how an idea will be implemented
  ○ to get buy-in support from people
  ○ if people feel like they haven’t been listened to, they will not support a plan
  ○ to build trust
  ○ community members standing up for the plan in relation to criticisms from people who haven’t participated in the process
  ○ be honest to people about whether something does or doesn’t fit into the plan
  ○ have a place to put information so that people know if their ideas are being considered
  • attribute ideas to individual
  • include ideas in appendix of draft report so people can see how their ideas fit into the process
  • explain why it’s not going to work and people respect that

• go out to people
  ○ different than government setting a meeting and demanding that people go to it
  ○ it’s easier to go where people are already congregating
  ○ how do you take the process to the people

• assessment of skills
  ○ capitalize on people’s expertise and what they are interested in i.e. creating the plan, hosting the session, drafting, writing
  ○ where do people fit?
  ○ some people like immediate results whereas others are comfortable working with an abstract future

• community asset mapping
  ○ identify important built and geographic assets of the community
  ○ understanding the local resources (human, etc). i.e. community gardens, whose backyard has food growing in it?

• analyze your community
  ○ look at your array of options and be selective about what will work for you
    • look at the idiosyncrasies, unique factors, strengths/weaknesses
  ○ different layers in the community i.e. your organization, the people you engage, the people that aren’t part of the organizing committee but who are interested in your project
CREATING THE FRAMEWORK FOR A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT...

- how will they react? what do they need?
  - not a cookie cutter approach i.e. cookbook approach is a recipe for disaster!
  - have a sense of some of the issues in the community
    - understand how people are framing the issues, don’t impose your own framing of the issues
      - because by framing the language a certain way, you can get people to support your cause
      - framing the question determines the scope, who’s involved, and how to get people engaged

- community is in-flux and changing
  - i.e. priorities, decision-makers, political climate, economy

- list of expectations to inform/guide a discussion
- living document
  - co-create the process
    - have the right people involved in co-creating the process
- flexibility in the process
  - things don’t always go according to plan
- monitor as a project unfolds
  - ongoing dialogue all the time so you know that everyone is on board with you
  - from quantitative perspective
  - takes a long time to build supporter lists online
  - effectiveness evaluated as you go along
  - need to adjust if a tool isn’t working for a community
- people feeling like a part of a movement
  - make people feel like they are participating and/or involved in something
  - can lead to more positive action in the future
  - we all contribute in our own small way
  - people want to know that their voices are being heard

Creative Strategies

- creative methods of engagement
  - Bio-blitzes
    - taxonomic experts and scientists who go out in a 24 hour period in a defined area to identify how many species you have in an area
  - public education
    - interaction with children and adults
      - links public to science so that the public can understand biodiversity and conservation issues
      - have tents so that people can interact with the items and ask questions about it, look at them firsthand
CREATING THE FRAMEWORK FOR A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT...

- coordination with local groups in order to implement this
- need tools like these to have an effective campaign
- people don’t usually have the opportunity to interact with scientists much so it’s a novelty--something that piques their interests
  - music
  - rock concerts
  - documentaries
  - calendar
  - Slam Poetry
  - storytelling
    - telling a story rather than present different facts or elements about something
    - makes people feel involved and a part of something
    - YouTube

- fun events
  - using youth as part of an engagement strategy in order to engage with parents and grandparents
  - engaging with youth by giving them tools i.e. video cameras
  - presentations/speakers around the country

- builds community
  - connects to a broader audience that wouldn’t be accessible otherwise
    - educating the public
      - bridges experts and the public
        - the public can understand these issues better i.e. shift in the way the public views nature
        - links science and the public
        - having high profile people conduct science experiments
      - connect to people who are alienated or marginalized
        - some cultures are oral cultures versus written-based cultures
          - “us and them” language; it’s about learning together
          - identify with a larger group of concerned citizens
    - can overcome resistance or fear by triggering the affective level
      - unification of people by working together not against one another
      - can shift the feeling of disempowerment by giving people hope
      - the use of humour
    - creates more of an experiential learning environment so people learn more about the issues by experiencing themselves

Volunteers

- group volunteers according to expertise and passions to create sense of belongingness
  - have good intercommunications within each group
● training volunteers to be more active i.e. transition into community organizers
● interview people in the office to discover what they need support with
● work bee in the office by adding a social component to volunteer activities i.e. playing music while stuffing envelopes
● if you don’t have the capacity for volunteers, they can be directed to other organizations building community capacity
● developing a volunteer base
  ○ can lead to financial well-being of an organization i.e. monthly giving, donations, legacy gifts
  ○ can lead to more human resources i.e. support from network of family members and friends
  ○ volunteers can self-select by identifying values that align with theirs
  ○ can also lead to greater organizational capacity because volunteers that transition to employees have already been trained
● even if you’re asking people to volunteer, that still equates to some monetary value
  ○ way to address this is to pay people to show that you value their time to show that you are valuing them for their time, passion, and energy

Community-based data

● stakeholder interviews
● focus groups
● workshops
  ○ interaction with people in the community
● survey/questionnaire
  ○ annual survey surveying the community on transportation, land-use, etc.
  ○ look at this information before developing anything else
  ○ information can then be taken to a focus group to ask more specific questions about how to move forward
  ○ first step in facilitated conversation
● polling
  ○ through third party pollsters
  ○ through phone or online
  ○ breakdown of the regions around the province i.e. voting data, patterns, opposition
    ■ to understand where it would be most conducive to spend time and effort
    ○ include questions about Canadians’ attitudes about various things
● Elders’ Council
  ○ meeting to give/receive information at the organization and to collect information in the community
  ○ people with expertise in different areas
● school events transformation programs
CREATING THE FRAMEWORK FOR A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT...

○ to get anecdotal evidence from the schools about what went well, what didn’t, and what mistakes to avoid in the future

● community workshops
  ○ to interact and contribute to the organization

● local grassroots members going to an organization and asking for help
  ○ is not a secondary thing of surveying the community

Values

● values touches on two areas
  ○ values upon which the engagement is based
  ○ values that are being discussed within the engagement process

● identify your core values at the beginning of a project
  ○ have it be expressed throughout the project right through to outcomes
    ■ good not-for-profit management
    ■ especially when you’re new, everything needs to align with your mission, mandate, core values

● values are at the centre of discussion whether it’s an organization’s approach or a specific event

● get people involved in a conversation that looks at a number of different possibilities
  ○ more democratic than pulling them along as followers to your cause

● consensus can give the public
  ○ sense of empowerment that they were participating in the process
  ○ strong incentive to take the process seriously
  ○ establishes faith in public institutions
  ○ don’t make decisions that aren’t supported by the whole group

● respect
  ○ respect even for people that you disagree with
  ○ active listening out of respect for the other person
  ○ being present

● diversity
  ○ get as many people from as many different perspectives to the engagement as possible

● integrity
  ○ be prepared to stand behind your beliefs

● belief and democracy
  ○ grassroots engagement
CREATING THE FRAMEWORK FOR A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT...

○ able to change the way that governments make decisions

● reputation
  ○ all you have is your good name
  ○ hold yourself to a high standard by ensuring information is accurate

● sincerity
  ○ not doing this for personal gain/benefits
  ○ detachment from any agenda
  ○ also related to credibility

● honesty

● compassion
  ○ include the world in circle of compassion
  ○ do no harm

● transparent
  ○ being transparent in actions

● reciprocity
  ○ “honouring and respecting in a reciprocal way, the human encounter”

● inclusive
  ○ recognize the importance of spirituality
  ○ people can bring inspirational quotes/readings/prayers to a meeting

● non-partisan
  ○ doesn’t mean that you don’t support or you’re opposed to a political party but that you orient around the issue
  ○ encourage all political parties to take a stand

● egalitarian - not better/smarter than the people you are serving

● shadow values
  ○ the values of being busy that are not personal values but that creep into your daily life

● working with intergenerational groups
● accountable to donors and to other organizations/community groups
● making commitments without waffling or dropping the ball
  ○ people who are committed are more effective

● marginalized people
CREATING THE FRAMEWORK FOR A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT...

- we have to care about marginalized people because they are easily discounted
- valuing people even if they are transient workers
  - "five minute citizen"
- even if you are trying to connect to them using social media speaking the same language, it's still really challenging
- getting people to the engagement that are underrepresented
  - child care for moms
  - translation services for people with language barriers
- pay attention to how people get to the dialogue that aren’t normally represented

- can also tie in with communications depending on how you are framing the language
- understanding your values and matching them to the people you’re working with
- core values speaks to the success of a project
- action or project needs to match to the core values of an organization
- leadership
  - personal commitments important because leaders can carry actions into other spheres
  - how can leaders lead in grassroots ways

- the difference between dialogue and spin
  - can manipulate people to understand your values or have true dialogue where you’re triggering the values that really motivate people

Evaluation

- qualitative
  - champions advised you that a decision got put through
  - follow-up with individuals
  - observations of continued engagement
  - if mainstream media is starting to address these issues
  - response from government about their policies
  - changes in corporations in the way they conduct business
  - easy to get immediate feedback
  - gauge success based on changes in legislation or a legal precedent was set
  - see the changes in opinions through opinion polls
  - video report
    - can send immediately to anyone who has supported or donated to the project (using a variety of channels)
    - can highlight the learnings in a multimedia format
    - appeal to a larger audience
  - demonstrations/protests of a lot of people mobilizing
  - gauge success if you are winning or losing a campaign
● quantitative
  ● create an engagement pyramid
    ○ how many new supporters were acquired
    ○ how many took higher level actions
    ○ how many converted to donors
    ○ track action online and offline
    ○ get points for different levels of action
      ■ get action kit
      ■ attend in person event
      ■ meet MLA
      ■ sign up for hearing
      ■ participate in a leadership role
      ■ participate on a committee

● drip technology
  ○ can create annual based from this evaluative tool
  ○ need to synchronize the technology a couple of times per week

● conducting surveys at events

● interaction with a website and social media
  ○ how many people signed a petition
  ○ open rates, click throughs
  ○ have this inform where to prioritize communications i.e. if more people are spending more time on Facebook, then invest more efforts there

● create appropriate indicators so that you’re able to measure progress
  ○ communicate this to the community so that they’re comfortable with the progress being made
  ○ create descriptions of success and then action items to implement descriptions of success
    ■ actions can be shared with other community organizations for adoption and execution
  ○ check indicators to see which are trending in a positive or negative direction

● conduct data analysis to understand background before engaging community

● comparing campaign-to-campaign

● municipality
  ○ how much of the recommendations are being used?
  ○ how much of the input are being used in the process?
  ○ how are decisions being made in the community?
CREATE THE FRAMEWORK FOR A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT...

○ has it been incorporated into the budget?

● organization
  ○ employee growth in the organization
  ○ splitting off into separate organizations
  ○ funding to pay for salaries and projects
  ○ monetary support from other foundations to train and hire people
  ○ having regular meetings

Sustainability

● highly complex
  ○ shift in the way we view nature
    ■ can get people to understand the importance of biodiversity by interacting with it
  ○ challenges are interconnected
    ■ requires buy-in of diverse people
    ● without which you won’t get effective implementation

● civil society
  ○ collective impact of what is happening in Canada and for civil society
    ■ all of the work that we’re doing is connected
  ○ placing the importance of the work in global issues, national priorities, political landscape
    ■ local to global connection
  ○ people having a voice in their future
    ■ empowering communities to have a voice in their future
    ■ communities coming to the understanding of how we are implicated in these issues and start taking action for change
    ■ build bench strength to influence decisions being made in the community
    ■ strengthen community organizations so they can defend community well being from further harm and suffering
    ■ people can actually make a difference
    ■ communities fighting for their rights is a positive experience
    ● can be negative if people can’t make a difference
      ○ if they don’t get a report back
      ○ lose faith in the system
      ○ not understand what the bigger strategy is
  ○ the ultimate goal is social and environmental change
    ■ community engagement is part of this strategy

○ transformation from war as a means to solve problems to people standing up non-violently against war
CREATING THE FRAMEWORK FOR A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT...

- making the connections between these small community-based projects and having relevance beyond being important for the community
- backcasting
  - go forward into the future to decide what the perfect scenario would be and work backwards from there
- not just consciousness-raising
  - opening space for deeper dialogue about challenging issues facing our communities/humanity
- changes in political atmosphere is going to place pressure on community-based groups which are important for civil society and democracy
  - important to highlight the issues that are going on today
- transformative change/mobilizing action
  - you have to have lots of people involved to get the momentum going
    - get a diverse group of people together
    - form relationships so that people recruit other people
    - large critical mass
    - online tools help to build the momentum quicker
    - artists community and private sector are the ones who can initiate this momentum
  - small group discussions of 8-10 people
    - to understand issue, talk about what can be done, whether taking action or recommendations to City Council, etc.
    - having an impartial facilitator is important
    - set up ground rules
      - so people can have meaningful opportunity to be heard
      - overcome differences in groups
      - come up with an action plan
  - make it open to a range of viewpoints
    - what are the different possibilities, why do we care, what are we willing to do?
    - don’t just invite people who might disagree with the framing of the question but who cares about the overall issue
      - decision makers and leaders engaged in these discussions, not just reacting to it
- bottoms-up
  - change/policies aren’t always driven by people on the top
  - when citizens organize to achieve a goal, anything is possible
- scale
  - dividing towns and cities into neighbourhoods because sum of the pieces is really effective
Community Engagement

- should be an underpinning of how the work is approached rather than an actual strategy “per se”
- meeting organizational goals is contingent on ability to engage citizens
- organizations and local government more transparent and accountable

- collaboration
  - collaborate with a diversity of groups
  - so people can support each other
  - spend time working in groups, not in silos
  - need to maintain collaboration and interaction, otherwise things will fall apart
  - can create a community of practice so that people are sharing ideas with one another

- results are ownership because the community is effectively engaged in the process
  - ownership key to making something work

- difference between community engagement and stakeholder engagement
  - people are good at stakeholder engagement
    - bringing in experts to talk to other experts
  - we need to move beyond stakeholder engagement to broadening the dialogue
  - community engagement involves other people in society not just the “experts”
  - if just stakeholder engagement, then it misses out on what goes on in society

- based on people caring about issues
  - people participate when it relates to a tangible issue they care about
  - put yourself in the shoes of someone else
    - why should they care?
    - how are you going to present a meaningful opportunity for them

- is a social process
  - if you want to understand how this works, you need to look at what happens outside of the meetings
  - how are people recruited? how are projects organized?
  - more important than the tools you are using when people talk to each other
  - the power of deliberative democracy is to help people meet their most immediate needs, not to get involved in policy issues
  - community engagement is not a particular technology
  - research conducted that the best approach is interacting in a group discussion, town hall meeting, citizen assembly
    - most efficient, cost-effective
  - the more you have real people interacting, the less important the tools are
  - has the thickness and quality of all social processes
CREATING THE FRAMEWORK FOR A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT...

- the more you respect this, the better your outcome will be
  - can’t expect that one process will determine the fate of a given issue/problem

- failures
  - tokenism; decision makers not interested in the process
    - or it’s manipulative
  - preaching to the choir, same people always show up
  - people who want to engage the community but don’t know how to

- structure
  - community engagement not a technique for people to give their opinion and leave
  - needs to be sponsored by a variety of sponsors
  - need to be done with regularity, not just a one-off thing
  - built into the fabric of community
  - community engagement is usually temporary projects initiated by an organization or individual
    - how do you move from temporary projects to long-term structures?
  - people aren’t going to be engaged in the same issues all the time
    - but we need to have the structures in society to be able to accommodate this willingness to participate
  - need to develop long-term structures that are conducive to community engagement done in a regular way
    - builds community
    - so that people can get together on a regular basis
    - can address and/or discuss other issues that people care about
    - weaving together social and political life
    - see your friends and family on a regular basis
    - make an impact on issues yet have fun at the same time

Activist Characteristics

- long-term perspective
  - all a piece of the picture → ties to systems thinking
    - when you’re working on the small pieces, you need to understand the big picture
  - removes anxiety from feeling time pressured
  - need to understand your environmental gap; know where you heading and what success means
  - 30-40 year sustainability plan
  - working for the good of humanity
  - look at this in theological time frames because human/social change is very slow
  - small changes can be made quickly
  - any changes are ephemeral because of external factors
CREATING THE FRAMEWORK FOR A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT...

- hope that parts of us that care about community versus individuality will evolve

- activist burnout
  - is this really having an impact?
  - take good care of yourself

- say “yes” to opportunities can lead to incredible experiences

- using full cost accounting to change behavior
  - anyone in a position of power should use this
  - CAO and finance department in the municipality

- people need to get into the habit of donating early or they won’t get into it

- can be challenging working on environmental issues
  - get cynical unless you work with other people that can see the big picture, have passion, and see the point in having a party or celebrating success
  - few successes
  - good to have a diversity of people in your organization especially younger people with enthusiasm and fresh ideas
    - long-term dedication to the ideas you want to accomplish

- opportunistic
  - opportunity arises and then take advantage of that
  - especially of partnerships if there is funding available
  - have conversations with people to understand what’s happening and priorities in your environment
  - part of goal setting
    - where can I get the funds?
  - not something that excites a foundation then you might have to forget that idea
  - must fit the framework in which you operate

- process of learning
  - not a negative experience but some elements didn’t work well and learned to adjust/refine

- sharing the stories with others

- rewarding to be able to change people’s perspectives on things
  - changed their minds or had an impact on government

Relationship Building

- Networks
broaden networks by working with allies (sometimes uncommon) to build capacity
broad dissemination of transfer of knowledge through networks
can bring in technical expertise that doesn’t exist in that community
sharing of lessons through the network
connect through conferences, dinners, speaking engagements
network with other organizations that have the same mission, mandate, goals
plug into groups/networks of people that already exist

• Organizations
  attending each other’s meetings
  open communications i.e. up-to-date and involving them in important decisions
  manage this appropriately based on your level of collaboration
  work horizontally across community groups
    • to share resources
    • can identify through the different dimensions your issue touches upon
  solidarity with other organizations to organize for a particular day of action i.e. Arctic
  Coalitions
    • depends on if greater manpower is needed or presence in an area
    • can lead to problems such as who’s leading? who gets the data collected?
  connection to professional associations can create diversity, strength, bridge practitioners
  and academics
  can test out relationships after meeting them at conferences to see if there is opportunity
  for a more formal relationship

• Champions
  identify champion
    • usually not an elected official
      • especially in small towns because it’s a part-time job for them
    • can be found in the municipality
      • focus on the people that are there day-to-day
      • speak their language
      • find commonalities so that it’s a win-win situation
      • allies in local government
      • position of influence
    • meet them at conferences
      • meet champions face-to-face
      • raise the flag by advising what your issue is

• community leaders
  identify community leaders
    • emerge as people being interested in the process
    • looking at who we need on board for progress to happen
CREATING THE FRAMEWORK FOR A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT...

- shift the gaze upwards i.e. who is preventing change from happening?/powerful stakeholders
- through nodes in social networks and social organizations i.e. member of Rotary Club, member of Chamber of Commerce
  - people that are connected to multiple networks
    - do research about what interests them
    - can help in different capacities i.e. lending name, giving money
    - different layers of community leaders
    - strategize who you need to know in the community and invite them to an event
    - work through a common affiliation/person
      - do more for people you know than people you don’t know

- First Nations
  - take the lead from First Nations

- advisors
  - vet the projects
  - meetings with them to discuss priorities
  - bridge between organization and community
    - really understanding the priorities and perspectives of the community
  - ensuring that they reflect Canadian diversity
    - hiring practices
      - hiring people who represent diverse interests and who have relationships with groups of people (including marginalized people)

- community associations
  - identification of different community associations in the community i.e. churches, environmental groups, political parties, schools/universities, elderly association, tenant association
  - can be the only way to reach people that are hard to reach

- community advisory group
  - youth advisory group
    - 16-18 school aged youth
  - can identify different key groups in the community

- building trust and relationships
  - can create successful plan implementation
  - provide space and time in setting up the process
    - otherwise plan won’t succeed in the long-run
  - can be time consuming, costly, require patience, coaching
    - but important because often engaging with people who aren’t used to having their voices heard
CREATING THE FRAMEWORK FOR A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT...

- need to show how input is going to be used
- honour the feedback that you receive
- get to know people by building rapport
- difficult to get a balance because often under funder’s deadlines
- can create large critical mass of people needed
  - social media can help with this
- the more you understand the individual, the more successful you will be with your initiative

**Systems Thinking**

- shift in mindset of fighting to we’re all in this together
- recognition that we’re part of the problem and solution

- feedback
  - immediate feedback through social media i.e. Facebook or Twitter
  - in a group happens to each other at all times
  - easy to get immediate feedback
  - being responsive to the community by working with those who are able to give good feedback

- responsive to reality
  - broad strategy doesn’t work
    - better to have a more focused strategy in a particular geography in a particular community
    - collective impact of the projects as a group of them
  - people should be able to improvise and be flexible when conducting research
    - community is “in-flux”

- helicopter management
  - when a helicopter is high enough it is able to see everything and how it connects together

**Training & Education**

- training of citizens can help them feel more engaged in their democracy
  - overcomes the fear of stepping outside their comfort zone
  - engagement of citizens with issues so they feel empowered
  - this has the effect of spreading to others
  - transition from people worrying about things to taking action
  - small actions lead to bigger actions

- training sessions
CREATING THE FRAMEWORK FOR A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT...

- explore the high level of sustainability so people can understand how it fits and function in their organization
- builds comfort and capacity
- sustainable procurement

- capacity
  - public and municipal staff
    - staff can correct any misinformation in the community
    - valuable for staff working on policy development to listen directly to citizens
  - for people in leadership positions at organizations by providing them with tools and techniques
    - what are the skills to do this?
  - need dedicated funding to build capacity and technology
  - can be challenging when you’re a nascent organization

- investment in education and capacity building so people can take a comprehensive approach in coming up with solutions
  - for: municipal staff, executive staff, and community members
Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Briefing

In this interview, I will be trying to understand your perceptions on:

- The strengths and weaknesses of community engagement strategies
- The barriers and challenges to implementing these strategies
- How community engagement can contribute to sustainable development implementation

This interview will be coded and analyzed for themes that will help me understand how to create and develop the framework for a community engagement strategy for a grassroots collective. To preserve your anonymity, only your initials will be included in the transcript of today’s conversation. Neither your names or your organization’s name will be included in any reports resulting from this research and only approved members of our research team which consists of myself and Ann Dale will have access to the raw data.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?

1. Let us start with some context. What is your role in your organization? What is your educational/professional background?

2. Please describe your organization or team’s goal process and important short/long-term goals of the organization/team.

3. What are the key contributors to the effectiveness of your organization/team?

4. What do you think would make your organization/team more effective?

5. How long have you been involved with community engagement?

6. Can you tell me about the community engagement activities undertaken by your organization/team in the last 5 years?

7. What was the purpose of the community engagement?

8. What kind of communication tools was used? What kind of on-line engagement strategies were used and how would you evaluate its success?

9. Did core values play a role in the campaign? How so?

10. How did you identify your target population?
11. What strategies did you use to reach diverse members of the communities you were trying to engage?

12. What kinds of strategies did you use to engage the existing networks and community leaders?

13. What kinds of ways did you use for incorporating community-based data into your engagement strategies?

14. How were the voices of community members included in plans and projects? How was this communicated to community members?

15. How were you able to evaluate that the strategies used had a real impact on decisions and outcomes?

16. What important lessons were you able to draw from these experiences?

17. Were they positive or negative experiences for the community? Why?

18. What do you think worked and didn’t work in your community engagements?

Debriefing

Comment on some main points that I learned from the interview.

I have no further questions. Is there anything else you would like to bring up, or ask about, before we finish the interview?

OR

Are there any more things you would want to say before we end the interview?

Okay. Thank you very much for your cooperation. I really appreciate the time and effort you took to share your experiences with me.

Prompts

• When would you do that?
• What would you use that for?
• Could you say something more about that?
• Can you give me a more detailed description of what happened?
• Do you have further examples of this?
If a theme has already been exhausted, I should state my understanding of the answer and then say “I would now like to introduce another question…”