

Background: Working Towards Sustained Impact

You may be a member of a local collective or initiative, a director of a community-based organization or association, or a Board member in any of these environments. Wherever you happen to stand in that picture you are there because of your commitment to making a difference in our community. In the course of pursuing that commitment you have undoubtedly wondered at some point in time, "How much of a difference are we actually making? How does it all fit together? Who is accountable for all of this?" This experience of trying harder but making less progress than we would like, of striving to work together but in the end still feeling fragmented is not uncommon in the course of a community's efforts for improvement. While many communities try to respond by doing more of the same (more committees, more projects, more resources), other communities begin to ask basic questions that challenge their current models of supporting and organizing their work. These communities experiment with small, incremental changes that begin to shift people's perspectives and level of engagement, changes that help people both see and understand the bigger picture more clearly while at the same time focusing energy on efforts that produce impact by addressing the root causes of the community's challenges. The establishment of the Community¹ Support Team is one of the first steps towards making a significant, real and sustained difference in our community's well being.

What is the Community Support Team?

The Community Support Team (CST) is a group of individuals drawn from and supported by various human service organizations. This group intentionally functions as a team developing a shared work agenda and is supported in the pursuit of and the delivery on that agenda by the resources of the organizations from which each member is drawn, primarily the member agencies that form the Regina Regional Intersectoral Committee (RIC). Through their shared work the CST supports, facilitates, informs and coordinates the community's efforts for improvement within a Determinants of Community Well Being framework. Its primary focus is on strategies and initiatives that bridge across multiple organizations and sectors of the community to address root causes.

What does the Community Support Team do?

There are three main **initial** action strategies which contribute to the CST's overall goal of ensuring citizens and systems act on a shared vision of community well being within a Determinants of Community Well Being framework:

1. To cultivate community and sector readiness, energy and commitment for collective action on the Determinants of Community Well Being
2. To construct an operational infrastructure for collective action on the Determinants of Community Well Being
3. To create supportive environments for collective action on the Determinants of Community Well Being

The kind of work in which this team engages may include, but is not limited to:

- convening cross-sector/cross-organization meetings, community forums and representative groups to promote and foster partnerships, community-level decisions, and policies that address the Determinants;
- identifying and raising awareness about the root causes or determinants of specific community issues;
- connecting research services to community groups and collaborative networks;
- tracking systems-based outcomes data and advocating for local information management systems;
- working with funding sources to better enable the community to do its work;
- serving as knowledge brokers;
- functioning as a facilitator amongst community initiatives and government representatives;

¹ For the purposes of this document community is defined as: a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action within the geography of Regina and surrounding area.

This team functions as a resource to the community but does not deliver direct service and does not run programs.

Resources Required

The primary and most significant resource requirement of the CST is human resources. Meeting space that is conducive to group processes is also important. It is anticipated that as strategies are identified additional resources including financial, physical, technological, research, and sectoral expertise will be required. In the long-term the CST will only be as effective as the resources invested to support its work.

Location of Team

Team members work primarily from within their individual organizations, meeting regularly as a group to ensure timely communication, coordination, planning and implementation of the CST work plan.

Time Requirements

The intent of the Community Support Team is to be inclusive and enable participation from as many organizations and individuals as wish to be involved, recognizing that there will be variations in the commitment individuals can make relative to organizational priorities and mandates. Core team members come from organizations that are able to offer enough time to ensure that a consistent, cohesive group is able to provide strategic leadership to the overall Team and its activities. At the minimum, this involves attendance at bi-weekly meetings and dedicated time to contribute to the annual work plan tasks (which may align with their sector-specific work).

The Team also requires a degree of fluidity, where some individuals are involved for short but intensive periods of time while working on a specific initiative, but are not an ongoing member of the core team over the longer-term. These individuals comprise part of the “second ring” of involvement – those who are unable to participate more regularly, but with whom regular communications and a connection is maintained. Finally, there are those whose involvement is more sporadic, perhaps only once or twice yearly and who participate in larger community meetings where input or feedback on an issue or proposed strategy is required.

What are the benefits for the community?

- A more comprehensive shared strategic focus across a broader range of organizations, sectors, and initiatives in the community.
- Increased community capacity to respond to emerging issues and prevent their escalation as well as to pursue and implement significant initiatives with greater efficiency and broadened connectedness.
- A broader perspective, insight and learning being brought into the team member's host organization, other organizational environments, and the community.
- Greater efficiency, less duplication of effort and increased capacity to leverage and mobilize resources.
- Increased accountability and ability to inform future strategic choices based on a comprehensive and regular status report on the community's well being.
- Engagement and leadership across a broad range of organizations and sectors.
- Improved quality of life and long-term sustainable community well-being