

The Vision, Values and Goals of the Strategic Social Plan

The Vision

Our vision for Newfoundland and Labrador is of a healthy, educated, distinctive, self-reliant and prosperous people living in vibrant, supportive communities within sustainable regions.

The Values

*Self-reliance
Collaboration
Social Justice
Equity
Fairness*

The Goals

Vibrant communities and regions in which people actively participate in their collective well-being

Sustainable regions based on strategic investment in individuals, families and communities.

Self-reliant, healthy, educated individuals and families living in safe, nurturing communities.

Integrated and evidence-based policy development and monitoring as the foundation for the design, delivery and evaluation of social development programs and services.

Executive Summary

The Strategic Social Plan (SSP) entitled ***People, Partners and Prosperity: A Strategic Social Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador, 1998***, represents a significant social development initiative of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. This report entitled, *A Learning Study*, provides analysis of changes occurring in the way government is conducting its business in implementing the SSP goals. It is intended as a learning, or formative study, to guide further development and approaches, procedures and monitoring systems required to ensure SSP implementation success. The Learning Study focuses on the SSP's first three goals. The fourth goal is the focus of separate work that will be undertaken at a future date.

It was understood that implementing the goals of the SSP involved a process that would bring about fundamental changes in the way government operates, creating expectations for partnership with community agencies and decentralizing both the provision of services and choices around delivery. In order to accomplish this, fundamental changes in the way government operates would be necessary.

This Executive Summary provides a synopsis of the process undertaken in this study. It includes a description of the major thematic areas that were explored and the key findings relating to the Learning Study's objectives. Recommendations are made relating to the SSP's design, implementation and strategic investment.

Methodology

A Document and Literature Review (available as a separate document) was undertaken to determine whether organizational and philosophical changes as articulated in the SSP were reflected in the planning documentation, minutes and reports of government departments and regional steering committees (RSCs) from the period leading up to the Learning Study.

A total of 119 individuals were interviewed as the basis for assessing the extent of changes in the way government is conducting its business as envisioned by the SSP. These interviews occurred as follows:

- Context Interviews were held with eight key individuals who had been involved in the early design and development of the SSP. These interviews served as a foundation for future explorations with those who are engaged in the SSP's implementation;
- Interviews were then held with 21 representatives of nine government departments, followed by interviews with each of the six RSCs. A total of 24 RSC representatives participated in these telephone and in-person interviews. These structured interviews explored SSP progress under major themes embedded in the SSP;
- In-person interviews were held with eight representatives of community-based agencies in St. John's as a basis for understanding how these agencies perceive progress in the SSP's implementation; and

- Finally, eight Learning Discussion Groups were held in four regions (Northeast Avalon, Central, Cormack-Grenfell, and Labrador) and involved 58 individuals. For each group, 25 individuals were invited with the expectation that not all would be able to attend. Four Learning Discussion Groups were held with regional representatives of provincial and federal government departments and regional boards. Representatives of community-based agencies attended the remaining four Learning Discussion Groups. These Learning Discussion Groups focused primarily on participant suggestions for the future successful implementation of the SSP.

Seven major themes were explored in interviews and form the basis of this report. These themes are embedded in the SSP and include:

Partnerships

Within the SSP, partnership approaches are significant, embracing the integration of social and economic policy, harmonizing programs and services, harnessing stakeholder and community involvement, strengthening channels for regional input in policy development and decision-making, and implementing regional strategies on a coordinated, client-centred basis. These partnerships were meant to be fostered between, and among:

- Different provincial government departments;
- Government and regional boards including, health institution boards, health and community services boards, school boards and regional economic development boards (REDBs);
- Provincial, federal and municipal governments; and
- Government and the community.

Prevention and Early Intervention Strategies

This refers to a process for identifying regional and community social and economic problems in a proactive manner and developing programs and services that address root causes. Strategies at the local or regional levels are intended to more effectively achieve social development through policy and program/service redesign. Successful prevention and intervention strategies have a number of hallmark characteristics:

- A flexible framework which allows service delivery to be highly adaptive to meet local or individual needs;
- A policy framework which permits decision-making to occur at the delivery level;
- The involvement of a broad range of service providers working in partnership to consider the multiple issues and to achieve a holistic response that best serves the immediate and long term needs of the recipient;
- Coordinated provincial, federal and municipal investments; and
- The coordination and placement of these services to permit participation by the broadest range of beneficiaries.

Access Standards and Quality of Services

In the SSP, government envisioned that departments would break down or eliminate barriers to needed services, particularly for vulnerable populations such as children, women, persons with disabilities and the elderly. This goal speaks to the importance of equity as a value in the SSP – there is an assurance of equitable availability of services for all people in the province. More specifically, the SSP's implementation would ensure:

- Developing standards to ensure adequate levels of service for health, education, justice, housing, social services, recreation and employment; and
- Working with regional and community officials to eliminate the barriers to service where regional issues impact on both access to and the quality of service.

Community-Based Service Delivery

This refers to a way of delivering programs and services through community agencies, thus achieving greater flexibility and effectiveness and developing shared responsibility for well-being. The intent is to move from institutional and direct delivery approaches within government to a community-based delivery model. Through this process, community capacity is enhanced.

Integration of Social and Economic Development

Employment is viewed as a fundamental link between social and economic development, underscoring the development of business and industrial opportunities in communities. This requires:

- Investments to address the root causes of problems that create barriers to education, training, health and wellness;
- Ensuring that choices are available for youth and that opportunities for a highly-skilled labour force exist, and
- Ultimately, re-designing the income support program to focus more on active support for moving people to employment while continuing to meet their basic needs.

Coordinated Investments

Coordinated investments were envisioned between the provincial government and its federal and municipal counterparts and with regional and community-based organizations to achieve the outcomes identified in the SSP. In addition, coordinated investments with the federal government were desired to achieve social and economic development, consistent with long-term regional and provincial economic plans. Of particular emphasis was:

- The creation of an employment program in the community-based sector to provide new employment opportunities;
- Matched federal/provincial economic development agreements and programs to create employment consistent with REDB economic plans;
- Coordinated social and economic development objectives; and

- Continued focus of the Labour Market Development Agreements on local labour market and business development needs.

Labour Market Development Strategy

This strategy was intended to address regional labour market development issues by:

- Identifying emerging private-sector employment opportunities and the long-term development strategies being pursued in REDB strategic plans;
- Identifying the range and extent of employment creation opportunities within the community-based sector and how these opportunities could be enhanced; and
- Developing a human resources strategy for preparing people to participate in long-term development for each region, both as entrepreneurs and as employees.

Key Findings

Significant achievements in the way business is conducted within government have been recorded. Working partnerships have been established within RSCs and a culture shift is felt to be occurring within government departments, some more than others. The Departments of Human Resources and Employment (HRE) and Health and Community Services (HCS) were cited as making significant strides in modeling the SSP, while others such as Justice and Education were felt to be lagging behind other departments. Partnerships are enabling a focus on the SSP's vision, values and goals. Clear examples exist of new initiatives that are achieving prevention and early intervention goals; providing equitable access to services; and using integrated approaches to social and economic development. Unique solutions to regional and community issues are being identified and pursued. This is an evolving process, one that is gathering strength as RSCs further develop their partnership capacity.

Through the process of the Learning Study the following major findings were identified:

- Progress is evolving more slowly than envisioned by the SSP. This is especially so for government departments and less so for RSCs.
- Departments and RSCs identify insufficient resources as an impediment to meeting the complex needs in communities and regions. Given the province's current fiscal position, an increase in resource allocation is unlikely, therefore an increased focus on coordinating investments among government departments, and between the provincial, federal and municipal governments will be necessary. In addition, government departments must work more collaboratively to enable joint investments based upon more integrated business planning, both at the provincial and regional levels.
- The province has been highly adept at leveraging federal initiatives with targeted funds for the development of programs and services consistent with the SSP goals. It is through these funds that many of the successes identified in this report have been achieved. Indeed, of the

indicators of success identified through the Learning Study, many are the result of federal funding. Other frequently cited initiatives, such as the Individual Student Support Plan (ISSP) and the Violence Prevention Initiative, pre-date the SSP. Clearly, there are opportunities to further strengthen focus on cross-departmental initiatives.

- Stronger accountability is required to ensure government departments are conducting business consistent with the SSP's vision, values and goals. Clear expectations for departments must be continually communicated and actively monitored. In addition, recognition systems must be introduced that provide an incentive for achievements and best practices to be realized.
- While the RSCs have undertaken projects to achieve early wins, more significant efforts are now required to address systemic social and economic development issues in regions, consistent with regional priorities, by using solid evidence as a basis for planning. Government departments must ensure that they are actively connected with, and supportive of this work.
- Community-based agencies, a key partner envisioned by the SSP, highly endorse the SSP's vision, values and goals. However, they desire much more inclusiveness as further implementation unfolds and require greater funding supports to deliver community-based programs that are responsive to individual client and community needs.

The SSP is a mere five years old and is attempting to bring about fundamental changes in the way government conducts business. The changes envisioned by the SSP are transformational versus incremental. All this considered, incremental changes achieved to date are remarkable, especially when one considers that some of the issues being addressed generally require multi-generational responses.

Has government started to use partnership approaches as a way of conducting business consistent with the SSP? The answer is a qualified "yes" though changes have only begun and much more coordinated effort is required. The following recommendations are intended to spur the changes in the way government conducts business consistent with the SSP.

Recommendations

SSP Design

1. That government's Committee of Deputy Ministers take a more active leadership role in creating a stronger accountability focus for government departments by establishing expectations for departmental business planning, policy development, program design and development, and annual reporting that is aligned with the SSP's vision, values, goals and actions.
2. That the Social Audit also focus on the sufficiency of accountability measures for program outcomes within government departments and for initiatives undertaken with its partners, including with community-based agencies.

3. That cross-departmental partnership approaches be supported by standard memoranda of understanding that, at a minimum, document the expected contribution from each partner and their roles and responsibilities for policy development, program design, delivery, implementation and evaluation.
4. That clear links be established between the soon-to-be established Joint Government/Voluntary, Community-Based Sector Committee and RSCs as a basis for building coordinated efforts and partnership approaches with the community-based sector as envisioned by the SSP.
5. That the SSP Office and the RSCs develop communications strategies aimed at generating greater awareness of the SSP's vision, values and goals and of progress being achieved, for staff of government, regional boards, partner organizations and community-based agencies.
6. That recognition systems be developed to acknowledge the efforts of government departments, regional boards, partners, community-based agencies and volunteers for significant contributions to implementing the SSP.
7. That government departments and their regional partners significantly intensify their efforts to develop access and service quality standards for regional services, as there is little evidence, other than within the Departments of Health and Community Services and Human Resources and Employment, that plans are underway to address access and quality service standards in an integrated manner; a key driver of the SSP's design.

SSP Implementation

8. That stronger communication and mutual accountability links be established between government departments and RSCs as a foundation for evidence-based, coordinated investment decisions in prevention and early intervention strategies.
9. That the Literacy Branch of the Department of Education seek active involvement with the RSCs as a basis for supporting their efforts in making strategic regional investments in literacy programs.
10. Recognizing that RSCs are still in the infancy stage of development, that new time-limited targets be established between RSCs, regional boards and government departments to conduct comprehensive regional assessments of volunteer capacity, resources for social development, gaps in community capacity, and barriers that confront vulnerable populations.
11. That a formal process for RSCs to bring forward items for action to government departments be developed that enables timely communication of what processes and actions are being pursued to address regional issues.

12. That consideration be given to developing a training program on “best SSP practices” as a means of improving government staff capacity for working together to develop integrated approaches in service design and delivery.

Strategic Investment

13. That government pursue the option of developing a single integrated social and economic plan for the province as a basis for achieving the level of coordinated investment decisions envisioned by the SSP. A timeline for achieving this goal should be determined with the input of RSCs.
14. Recognizing that long term investments in prevention and early intervention strategies may not reap benefits for some time, that strong evidence-based decision-making be the accepted basis for these investment decisions. This will also require that wherever possible, project funding be replaced by core funding to enable strategies and goals to mature.
15. That a user-driven, coordinated model for service delivery be developed for families, seniors, persons with mental illnesses, and other vulnerable groups who must interface with multiple organizations to access needed services.
16. That while Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) regional staff are key partners in RSCs, RSCs also consider the merits of expanding federal government involvement, both through broader HRDC representation, and through other federal government departments such as Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Health Canada, Industry Canada and Agriculture Canada.
17. That RSCs, while having identified priority areas for action, might also take a more active role in coordinating long term development strategies as a basis for investment decisions for regional services and infrastructure. Such plans might also serve as a basis for monitoring progress in social and economic development.