

# The Good News from Manitoba

*How one provincial government has evolved into a leader in CED policy & programming*

BY GARRY LOEWEN

In most respects it was an ordinary January afternoon in Winnipeg. The cold Manitoba wind was swirling through the intersection at Portage and Main. The blue sky was clear, huge, and full of sun. People of privilege were looking forward to their southern vacations. The less privileged (or otherwise inclined) were wondering how to survive until May.

We were seated in the grand old legislative office of the provincial Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs. The circle of people was large. It included five senior cabinet ministers, some political staff, a few eager bureaucrats, and a host of leaders from community-based organizations.

The ministers had called the meeting. Over the past few years they had accomplished much. They had played a key role in developing a core funding program for community development corporations. They had contracted with a range of community-based organizations to implement an affordable housing program. They had pioneered a “CED Lens” that encouraged all government departments to align their programs with CED principles. They had co-hosted forums to increase the skills of local volunteers and practitioners, enacted regulations so resident groups could clamp down on slum landlords, and generally provided neighbourhood leaders with a lot of access to the halls of power.

Now the Ministers had called this meeting because they wanted to know what they should do next.

No, I’m *not* making this up. It really happened. Indeed, the relationship between the Government of Manitoba and the CED community continues to flourish.

How did this come about? Not overnight, rest assured. The history of CED programming in the Province of Manitoba is a long one and inevitably subject to the ideological bent of passing provincial administrations. Yet despite this changing political climate, the resilience, determination, and solidarity of the CED community itself has remained steady. When government has come around, practitioners have been there waiting, ready to build the relationships on which informed, innovative policy depends.

## A Long History of Support

Manitoba’s support for initiatives in community-based development can be traced back to the late 1950s when the provincial government issued “A Study of the Population of Indian Ancestry living in Manitoba.” Its modest title notwithstanding, this report heralded the onset of “a new approach to the Indian and Metis question” – an approach that addressed whole communities, rather than just individuals. In the 1960s the Province instituted the Community Development Services Division within the Department of Welfare. It was an experimental program to focus service on Indians, Metis, and the urban poor – “a powerless poor group of people of Manitoba: Less than full participants in and less than full beneficiaries of the education, economic and social systems of our province.”

The program described “community development” not only as a social and economic process, but more importantly, as a process of *engaging* and *empowering* the identified groups. The division was to “win the confidence of local people; help people identify their needs; prepare them for action; help them to use local resources; co-ordinate work of other government services, identify people’s readiness for action” – and help predominantly non-aboriginal communities understand the challenges faced by aboriginal citizens and communities.

The Community Development Services Division initially operated with a high degree of flexibility and autonomy. Attempts were made throughout the 1960s to co-ordinate a variety of community development efforts across several departments but this proved very difficult to sustain. The director of the division expressed frustration with “frequent in-action and lack of support from other units in the department and across government.”

Other departments were busy attempting to address the challenges of the day, however. Regional Development Corporations (RDCs) were established in the mid-1960s. Originally they were intended to encourage economic development in rural Manitoba. While RDCs made (and continue to make) important contributions to the social and economic life of each region, their mandate does not specify the goals articulated by the Community Development Division. Urban and rural groups have differed significantly in their definitions of “commu-

nity development”, “community economic development (CED)” and “local economic development”.

Throughout the 1970s community development programming appeared to spread across government, albeit in a piecemeal fashion and with an emphasis on broader service delivery. While much of the programming expressed the values of CED, the lack of a policy directive hindered program improvement and integration.

A “Communities Economic Development Fund Act” was passed in July 1971 to address the difficulties faced by remote and northern communities in accessing capital. Its provisions made loans and management advice available to businesses and helped communities to obtain service, tourist, and manufacturing facilities. Still ticking along today, the Act has been expanded to include a microlending program.

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CED in Winnipeg received a significant boost in the 1980s. Two tri-level Winnipeg Core Area Initiative agreements brought a total of \$196 million to projects aimed at revitalizing Winnipeg’s inner city.

The 1990s saw a shift from a “community” focus to a “local” focus for economic development. A new Department of Rural Development and threw significant support behind many of the stronger rural communities. Many flourished with the help of Regional Economic Development Initiatives programs, Community Grow Bonds, and Community Works Loan Programs. These programs were less accessible to northern communities and vulnerable communities in the south, however.

Winnipeg’s CED community also experienced some tough times in the 1990s. The provincial government drastically cut back spending on services it deemed inessential. Government programs to address poverty focussed on moving people off the welfare rolls as quickly as possible. Neighbourhood-based solutions were not a priority. The core values of community development that had been integrated into programming in the 1960s were virtually eliminated. Despite this lack of government support, many community-based organizations found ways to incorporate CED principles in their programming and continued to advocate supportive policies.

## Current Programming

In 2004 the Province of Manitoba continues to “experiment” with its role in support of CED. In fact, it can be said with some degree of confidence that provincial government support for CED in Manitoba has never been stronger. This resurgence of a CED focus in government can be attributed to a number of factors. There has been a strong lobby from the community. There are Ministers and political staff with a strong background and belief in community development. When the Canadian CED Network (CCEDNet) was developing its national policy framework in consultation with groups across the country, the Province of Manitoba was able to participate and integrate a greater knowledge of community into the government policy process

The lack of direction in CED programming is finally getting addressed. The provincial cabinet passed a CED Policy Framework and a CED Lens in 2000 to act as guidelines and tools for the integration of CED principles in existing and new policies and programs. It is also the first time there has been central policy direction to look at CED as an important component of a provincial economic strategy.

The challenge to engage departments across government remains. To address it, the co-ordination of CED has been assigned to the Community and Economic Development Committee of Cabinet. This structure ensures that the responsibility for CED is not marginalized within a single line department. Instead, all departments are expected to find ways to integrate the principles of CED into their work and improve upon their relationships with CED practitioners, especially in those communities that are most vulnerable.

Here are a few of the most important CED programs that are currently in place in Manitoba.

### Neighbourhood Development Assistance Program (NDAP)

This program provides long-term core funding to five neighbourhood renewal corporations. Three are in Winnipeg’s inner city, one is in Brandon, and one is in Thompson. The program recognizes that often the best ideas for neighbourhood revitalization come from the community itself. It creates the capacity for the corporations to engage the residents and other community stakeholders in the development and implementation of strategic plans for renewal. Much more than a funding program, NDAP is essentially an agreement between the Province and the communities to work together on locally directed, locally controlled, multifaceted community development strategies. The communities and the Province meet regularly to share knowledge, plan evaluations, and discuss new opportunities.

### Neighbourhoods Alive!

Neighbourhoods Alive! provides financial support to the renewal projects of a wide range of community-based organizations

(including neighbourhood renewal corporations) in designated neighbourhoods.

### **Strategic CED Initiatives**

The Province of Manitoba recognizes that a range of capacities is required to address the complex of barriers that disadvantaged communities face. It has provided core funding to organizations that are instrumental to achieving CED objectives. Core funding is currently being provided to:

- Social entrepreneurship organizations such as SEED Winnipeg, Community Ownership Solutions, and the Inner City Renovation Corporation.
- Community loan funds such as the Jubilee Fund.
- Affordable housing corporations such as the North End Housing Project.
- A training intermediary that will upgrade the CED/CD skills of 450 practitioners and community members over the next three years.
- A Northern Forest Diversification Project.

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### **The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry Child Welfare Initiative**

The AJI-CWI is a joint initiative by the provincial government and three of Manitoba's largest aboriginal organizations to restructure the province's child welfare system. The AJI-CWI is committed to the development of a child welfare system that is community-based and culturally appropriate. Under the restructured system, Aboriginal people will be making decisions for Aboriginal children and families. The development of an aboriginal workforce within the child welfare milieu is an important component of the initiative. The commitment to provide training, education, and professional employment opportunities for Aboriginal people will make a major contribution to the social and economic lives of First Nation and Metis communities.

### **The Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative (WHHI)**

Through the WHHI the municipal, provincial, and federal governments work in partnership with the community to increase the availability of affordable housing, using approaches that place

housing development within the broader context of building communities. Residents are heavily involved in setting program priorities. There is an attempt to maximize the access of local residents to the employment opportunities created by housing renovation. Safety and other social programs are implemented in collaboration with physical housing redevelopment. Through partnerships with neighbourhood renewal corporations, community groups, and private developers, WHHI expects to play a role in the building of an estimated 2,500 more affordable housing units over the next five years.

### **The CED Tax Credit**

In response to the call of CED organizations for greater access to capital, the Province of Manitoba introduced the Community Enterprise Development Tax Credit Program in 2003. The program provides a 30% tax credit to qualifying investors on investments that do not exceed \$30,000. Investments may be made either directly in Manitoba community enterprises, or indirectly, in the community development investment fund pools that serve community enterprises. This permits investors to choose how specifically they wish to apply their investments.

### **The Community Choices Program**

This program supports the formation of community round tables that bring together local leaders to define a community vision, priorities, and a development strategy.

## **The Importance of Relationships**

To a great degree we owe the positive environment for CED that has developed in Manitoba over the past four years to strong relationships between community practitioners, bureaucrats, and elected officials. Most of the recent literature on economic development suggests that innovation is key to the attainment of economic and social goals. Innovation thrives where there are high levels of interaction and collaboration among a wide range of stakeholders. When government, community-based organizations, neighbourhood leaders, businesses, and institutions collaborate to leverage local assets, processes, and relationships in support of the development of a community, innovation happens.

The election of an NDP government in 1999 dramatically increased the range of interactions between the government and the community sector. Many of the new ministers had been deeply involved in the community sector. In particular, the Ministers of Finance, Family Services and Housing, and Intergovernmental Affairs had been pioneers of CED activity in Winnipeg. Many of their aides and policy advisors (some of whom are now members of the civil service) were hired from the community sector.

This multitude of relationships has been instrumental in enabling CED practitioners to obtain frequent and regular access to the halls of power.

Binding together the many different communities of interest has been Dr. John Loxley. A nationally respected economist at the University of Manitoba, John has been active in CED for at least 30 years as a consultant, a teacher, on the board of a number of local CED organizations, and in international projects. He has also been an advisor on economic development issues to the current provincial cabinet. People like John do much to legitimize the intellectual basis for CED policy development and open doors for grassroots practitioners to meet with public policy-makers.

Working together on a range of projects has greatly strengthened relationships between practitioners, academics, policy makers, bureaucrats, and funders in Manitoba. In November 2003, for example, representatives from the Community and Economic Development Committee of Cabinet, the Manitoba Department of Intergovernmental Affairs, the United Way, and some local foundations and community-based organizations sponsored a conference to prepare a strategy for the advancement of CED in Winnipeg. Many of these same people have attended CED conferences and workshops together. They have worked together on advancing CCEDNet's policy agenda and on projects, like the national CED conference in Winnipeg in the fall of 2002.

Clearly the quality and multiplicity of relationships among CED stakeholders in Manitoba, and especially Winnipeg, has been a major contributor to the favourable policy environment that now exists. There is no substitute for the familiarity and trust that those relationships bring.

## Conclusion

While CED has long had a presence in the programming of the Province of Manitoba, the extent and focus continues to change.

The look of CED at any given time can be attributed to many things. A critical component has been a tenacious CED sector

that has creatively implemented CED programs and ceaselessly advocated for supportive government policies. The ideology of the political leadership of the day has been a significant factor, but still more significant has been the presence of high-ranking officials and other government staff convinced of the importance of CED and committed to its practical application. Another factor has been the emergence of key leaders – “champions” – in the CED community itself with the personal commitment and energy to drive the CED agenda forward. The movement has benefited from an intricate web of structured and unstructured relationships between a wide range of stakeholders. And it has been greatly strengthened through its connections to CCEDNet and other practitioners across the country.

CED in Manitoba right now is mostly a “good news” story. But it is not Nirvana. There are still the inevitable tensions between the various ideological and methodological camps in Manitoba. Not everybody who does community development work feels equally included and empowered by the Province's recent initiatives. There are still issues of scale and sustainability to address.

But the progress to date has been strong and is deeply rooted. The community of people and organizations committed to a developmental approach to poverty reduction is large and growing. There is widespread recognition that community renewal and individual empowerment are inextricably linked. CED activity is already playing a large role in the attainment of this province's social and economic goals. We are hopeful that in the years ahead it will ensure that Manitoba is a good place for *all* its citizens to live, work, and play.



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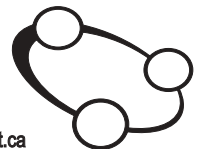
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