

Consulting and engagement: Creating the next Poverty Reduction Plan in Manitoba

Make Poverty History Manitoba urges the completion of an updated poverty reduction plan as soon as possible. Completing this plan in a timely fashion should not however, be at the expense of thorough consultations and engagement. Towards developing an effective plan, we are putting forward our recommendations on effective consultations and engagement.

Consultation plays a critical role in developing an effective poverty reduction strategy. Good consultation improves outcomes by drawing on experience and expertise in the community. It also improves public/community buy in, without which the implantation of plans may be compromised. Moreover, consultation is an essential element in building transparency so that those impacted by decisions can have a role in designing solutions and understanding how those decisions are made. It is a part of democratic responsible government, building on the principle, nothing about us, without us.

Make Poverty History Manitoba's goal as stated in a letter to all MLAs in June 2016 is that we wish to work with the provincial government to co-construct a poverty-reduction strategy based on the *View from Here: Manitobans Call for a Renewed Poverty Reduction Strategy*, with targets and timelines to bring down poverty rates in Manitoba. Co-construction of public policy, when deployed upstream at an early stage, and can make public policy more democratic than when governments construct it all on their own (Vaillancourt, 2008). This offer to the province stands.

Make Poverty History Manitoba recommends that the Province of Manitoba adhere to the following as it develops the consultation and engagement process to update the plan to reduce poverty:

1. People with lived experience must be central to the consultations

The experiential expertise of Manitobans who live with poverty every day is key to developing this strategy. The consultations should focus on connecting meaningfully with people with lived experience as well as the people and community organizations that work most closely with them. It is important to create space to meaningfully listen to people's lived experiences. Multiple avenues of communication should be available as well, from small group work, opportunities to learn about people's experience in depth through case studies and also in community forums. People with lived experience of poverty use online methods but access to computers can be a challenge. The consultations should not rely too heavily on online methods.

Consultations should be designed in partnership with community-based organizations who can ensure that consultation sessions are located in places where people are

familiar and comfortable, at times of day that are convenient. Plain language should be used throughout so that materials are accessible to a diverse audience. The consultations must be accessible to people with physical and mental disabilities.

Logistical considerations are required as well: childminding should be available, healthy food to eat, the location should be accessible and located in a place that is easy to travel to by wheelchair, bike or bus.

These consultations should take place with consideration of Manitoba's geography, in rural and urban settings as well as Northern Manitoba.

Community partners would be willing to co-host these consultations. Some resources to aid in capacity should be available.

- 2. The consultations should integrate and build on community expertise and current reports with community consensus such as the *View from Here: Manitobans Call for a Renewed Poverty Reduction Plan*.**

The View from Here was updated in 2015 and has been endorsed by over 100 organizations. It represents the consensus of what needs to be done to reduce poverty in Manitoba. The policy recommendations in the *View From Here* should be integrated into the consultations, acknowledging the priorities that have already been identified and filling gaps.

- 3. The consultations should seek input on all elements of the provincial poverty reduction plan.**

The consultations should ask for input from Manitobans on the following:

- key indicators to track progress on poverty reduction and social inclusion.
- targets and timelines attached to the key indicators (e.g. how much and how quickly poverty would be reduced under the plan)key actions to reduce poverty and social exclusion, and ultimately end poverty in Manitoba

- 4. A draft of what was heard and of the strategy should be circulated to all who participated for feedback.**

All too often governments consult and then the final document is circulated without opportunity for feedback. Distributing a working draft allows participants to ensure their voices are reflected and to provide feedback on the responses developed by government to concerns/ideas raised. A transparent and accountable process should be established to do this, rather than simply releasing a 'what we heard' document.

5. Consultation and engagement should be ongoing

Those with lived experience of poverty, and who are dedicated to ending poverty, have expertise that governments require in order to coordinate the plan to end poverty. Consultation and engagement should take place regularly in order to improve policies and programs and ensure they are meeting the shared goals of government and community.

Here are some suggested resources for consultations:

National Standards for Community Engagement – Government of Scotland

<http://www.scdc.org.uk/what/national-standards/>

Community Planning Toolkit

<http://www.communityplanningtoolkit.org/sites/default/files/Engagement.pdf>

Vaillancourt, Yves (2008). “The Participation of the Third Sector in the Co-Production and Co-Creation of Public Policy”. http://emes.net/content/uploads/publications/ECSP-B08-15_Vaillancourt_.pdf