



PO Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Item No. 3

**Halifax Regional Council
August 4, 2009**

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Dunphy".

Paul Dunphy, Director of Community Development

DATE: June 26, 2009

SUBJECT: Benchmarking for Community Relations and Cultural Affairs

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

Staff

BACKGROUND

Community Development plays a key role in building strong communities throughout the municipality. Within Community Development, Community Relations and Cultural Affairs (CRCA) focuses on empowering and organizing communities, fostering active civic engagement and building community pride (CD Business Plan 2008/09). This is greatly influenced by the degree of citizen engagement in all aspects of civic life. The sheer size of HRM and its broad range of diverse communities means that HRM must engage its citizens in a variety of ways, including effective outreach, communication, involving communities in identifying what is important to them and empowering them to act.

Council asked in the past how the impact of CRCA's activities and strategic initiatives in local communities can be measured. While specific programs and activities are often evaluated on an ongoing basis, broader community outcomes are more difficult to measure because community social, economic and cultural development occurs over time and is subject to many variables. The purpose of outcome measurement in community development therefore is not to produce indisputable data but to develop a few key indicators of change¹ linked to community development's strategic outcome areas. This report provides a summary of survey results conducted by Corporate Research on behalf of HRM in February 2009.

¹ Madan, R. 2007. Demystifying Outcome Measurement in Community Development. NeighborWorks America and Joint Center in Housing Studies of Harvard University.
<http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/publications/communitydevelopment/w07-5.pdf> Accessed June 2009.
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DISCUSSION

HRM currently has a fairly comprehensive approach to community development aimed to increase community organization, promote voluntarism and social inclusion, increase community cohesion and civic pride among others. These strategies should, over time, make a measurable impact on the sense of community and quality of life of HRM residents. The 2009/10 Community Development's Business Plan includes a number of strategic goals, including:

- **Implement the Regional Plan** through Community Visioning, a community-led engagement process designed to build consensus among local residents in Regional Plan's priority growth centres about future vision and priorities for their communities. The communities are prioritized on the basis of demographic, socio-economic and land use criteria. These relatively short-term community engagement processes provide foundation for secondary planning and produce a community profile, a vision and an action plan.
- **Implement a community wide partnership approach to support youth** - this includes the Youth Advocate program and partnership with Heartwood and McConnell Foundation to improve the ability of youth to participate in their communities and become successful.
- **Implementation of the Cultural Plan** - The Cultural Plan, adopted in 2006, outlines the strategic and investment framework to achieve this over the next ten years. The focus for 2008/09 is to develop a new governance model, including multi-sector partnerships, and introduce new cultural events and festivals that celebrate and promote local identity.
- **Increase the involvement and capacity of local volunteers and citizens to foster stronger communities** - In addition to training and recognizing local volunteers, HRM must also foster a local culture that is welcoming to newcomers and volunteers and create more opportunities for residents to feel connected to their community and its issues. Key outcomes here include the implementation of the Volunteer Management Strategy (including the Volunteer Centre), implementation of the Community Engagement Strategy, an update to the Immigration Action Plan, continuation of the Good Neighbour Great Neighbourhood social marketing campaign and enhancement of grants and contributions to better serve the volunteer community.

Corporate Research was commissioned to survey residents across HRM about their knowledge of various CRCA initiatives, their satisfaction with information they receive from HRM as well as their overall level of engagement in the local community. This report provides a summary of survey results which will be updated every two to three years to track changes in key outcome areas. Some of the results may also be applicable to other business units, particularly those that frequently engage the public.

The survey was conducted in February 2009 with a sample of 407 residents over 18 years old, representative of HRM’s geography, age, gender, education and income level. The following discussion provides a summary of key findings. More detailed tables are available from staff upon request.

Satisfaction with information received from HRM

Residents were asked about their level of satisfaction with information received from HRM about public meetings, volunteer opportunities and how to get involved in their local communities. Between 55% and 57% of respondents were either completely or mostly satisfied with the information they receive. A significant opportunity exists to improve how HRM communicates with its residents, particularly youth and young adults.

Table 1 Satisfaction with information received from HRM

Satisfaction with information received on:	Completely Satisfied/Satisfied (%)
Public meetings	55
Volunteer opportunities	57
Ways to get involved in local community	57

Awareness of Key Initiatives

Residents were also asked about general awareness of key HRM initiatives led by CRCA. It should be noted that the initiatives listed below represent a wide variety in terms budget, exposure, length of time in progress and target audience, and cannot be easily compared. It should also be noted that it was not possible to survey youth under 18 years of age through this survey, and it is possible that in some cases respondents may not have distinguished between initiatives led by HRM and those of other levels of government. The information however provides an indication of the relative reach of the various initiatives.

Table 2 Awareness of CRCA initiatives

Prior to today, have you heard of any of the following HRM initiatives:	Yes (%)
Welcoming Community for Newcomers	39
Youth Action Teams	34
Youth Advocate Program	34
HRM Youth Advisory Committee	31
GNGN	28
Hrmyouth.ca	23
Volunteer training	21
Community art	19
Public art	19

Prior to today, have you heard of any of the following HRM initiatives:	Yes (%)
Community Visioning	9
Volunteer Conference	7

Community Engagement

Residents were also asked whether they feel that they are provided with opportunities to provide input on local issues. As indicated in the table below 59% of respondents said that they are provided with opportunities to provide input on local issues. Individuals living in Bedford/Sackville and in Dartmouth were more likely to feel positive about opportunities to provide input, as were older individuals (55+ in age) and those who graduated from high school.

When asked about volunteering with community organizations, 47% said that they volunteered in the last 2 years and out of those who volunteered, 77% said that their community group or organization has taken action to improve the local community. In general, residents living outside Halifax had higher volunteering rates, as well as females, those who were 35 years of age or more, as well as those with higher education and higher income levels. Some of the barriers that prevent individuals from volunteering included lack of time (34%), health problems or physical disability (10%), lack of interest (4%), transportation (4%) and not knowing how to get involved (3%). It should be noted that 30% answered “don’t know/no answer” to this question. In the future staff may explore ways to get a more complete indication of what prevents residents from volunteering.

While many residents may not commit to a structured volunteer assignment, other ways in which residents said they participated in the life of the community included: helping a neighbour in need (86%), attending civic events (67%) and cultural presentations (52%), signing a petition (36%) and contacting local political representatives (33%).

A relatively small proportion of the population seems to be attending public meetings - only 4% of the respondents attended a municipal council meeting and 17% attended a town hall or other community meeting, yet residents find other ways to participate and get informed about their community. For example 11% (mostly from the under 55 age group) participated in an on-line blog or forum on local issues. HRM should explore innovative options in on-line participation as well as opportunities to promote relatively short-term and easily accessible volunteer opportunities.

Table 3 Community engagement

Community engagement	Yes (%)
Have opportunity to provide input on local issues	59
Volunteer with any community organization	47
Community organization taken any action to improve the community in the past two years	77
In the last 12 months	
Assisted a neighbour in need	86
Attended a local community festival or civic event such as Natal Day, or Bedford Days	67
Attended a cultural presentation, such as a theatre production, or gallery in HRM	52
Volunteered in your local community	48
Signed a petition	36
Met with, called or sent a letter or e-mail to any local politician	33
Attended a town hall or other community meeting	17
Attended a public hearing	13
Participated in an on-line blog or forum on a local community issue	11
Worked with HRM or a local Councillor to advance a local initiative	11
Participated in a community art project	9
Joined a protest or demonstration	5
Attended a municipal council meeting	4

Conclusion

The results of the survey indicate that a significant proportion of HRM residents participate in civic and community life in a variety of ways, ranging from assisting a neighbour in need to attending civic events and community meetings. A significant proportion however (53%) do not volunteer in a formal way and do not feel that they have opportunities to provide input on local issues (41%). This presents both a challenge and an opportunity to continue to build and support the community's voluntary capacity, to encourage and carefully plan effective public participation programs, to ensure inclusion and accountability in community engagement, and to acknowledge those who are actively participating in HRM's civic life.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

None.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

ATTACHMENTS

None

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.html> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

Report Prepared by : Kasia Tota, Community Developer, 490-5190

Report Approved by: 
Andrew Whittemore, Manager, Community Relations & Cultural Affairs, 490-1585