Guide to Hosting a Community Conversation

What We're Doing

The Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario is reviewing Ontario's social assistance system. The Commission must submit recommendations and an action plan for reforming the system to the government by June 30, 2012.

The Terms of Reference for the Commission provide a vision of "a 21st century income security system that enables all Ontarians to live with dignity, participate in their communities and contribute to a prospering economy."

The Commission is seeking input from stakeholders and communities in two phases.

The first phase, which takes place from June to September 2011, will collect feedback on the *Discussion Paper: Issues and Ideas*. The goals of the first phase are to:

- Obtain people's views on whether the Commission has correctly identified the key issues in social assistance in Ontario;
- Identify issues that are missing or misunderstood; and
- Collect people's ideas on possible solutions.

The second phase, which will take place later in 2011, will seek input on options and possible approaches to reforming the social assistance system.

Your Voice Matters

The Commission wants to hear from you — people with lived experience of social assistance, First Nations, service deliverers, advocates, business, labour, faith communities and many more.

Commissioners Frances Lankin and Munir A. Sheikh encourage people in communities across Ontario to engage in a dialogue on the issues and possible solutions. Many organizations are experienced in bringing community members together to provide feedback and advice on issues of common concern.

This *Guide* is to help you facilitate a discussion within your organization, agency or community, and send the collective comments of the participants to the Commission.

There are different ways to get involved:

- **Set up a Community Conversation in your agency** to collect feedback from staff and program participants.

- **Set up a multi-stakeholder Community Conversation**. Here is a list of some of the people and organizations you may want to involve:

    - Employment services and other social services (e.g. subsidized child care, subsidized housing);
    - Business organizations, such as the local chamber of commerce or board of trade;
    - Municipal and provincial government employees who administer Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program;
    - Elected officials;
    - Local labour councils and unions;
    - Indian Friendship Centres;
    - Faith groups delivering services to low-income people;
    - Food banks; and
    - Community groups representing ethnocultural communities, newcomers, people with disabilities, women and other groups who experience higher-than-average poverty rates.

- If you have lived experience of the social assistance system, **host a Community Conversation with others you know with lived experience.** Invite people who live in your apartment building or complex, people in agencies you visit for support, and friends you know who have similar experience.

Tips for Organizing a Community Conversation

- You may find it useful to work together with other community agencies to form a local convening committee. The committee's role would be to discuss and plan the kind of Community Conversation you would like to have, and to decide how your community can actively participate in the social assistance review over the coming year.

- Involve people with lived experience of low income. One Community Conversation could include only people with lived experience of social assistance, to ensure that their views are heard in a setting that is comfortable, accessible and supportive. The meeting could be facilitated by someone with lived experience of low income, or by a community worker who is well respected by people who receive social assistance.

- Hold the meeting in a location that people are familiar with, such as a drop-in centre, food bank, or meeting room in a public housing building.

- Make sure the meeting location is accessible for people with disabilities and is close to a public transit stop and parking.

- Choose a date and time that will encourage maximum attendance, depending on the type of Community Conversation you are having.

- Think about how you can support child care needs and transportation costs. Provide snacks and beverages at your meeting. Depending on the kind of Community Conversation you are having, you may be able to pool resources across several agencies.

- If you expect a large number of participants from a particular language group other than English, arrange for an interpreter (possibly someone from that community) who can facilitate the group.

- Invite people to the meeting via networks and places that they may be connected to. For example, post flyers at community centres and agencies serving low-income people, food banks, drop-in centres, public housing buildings, child care centres, laundromats and women's shelters. Contact people by phone, email and through Facebook.

- Encourage interested participants to call/email a central contact person so organizers get a sense of how many people may participate.

Tips for Structuring a Community Conversation

- You can use the *Summary and Workbook* as a guide. It is a short version of the Commission's *Discussion Paper: Issues and Ideas*. Both papers are available at www.socialassistancereview.ca.

- Develop a meeting agenda that will allow participants from different backgrounds to discuss the issues and provide feedback that can be recorded in the time allocated for the meeting.

- The *Summary and Workbook* identifies five issues for discussion:

    - Reasonable Expectations and Necessary Supports to Employment;
    - Appropriate Benefit Structure;
    - Easier to Understand;
    - Viable over the Long Term; and
    - An Integrated Ontario Position on Income Security.

- Questions are provided for each issue to help guide your feedback. You may choose to look at all five issues or just a few. You may choose to focus on questions that you feel are most relevant to your community.

Sample Agenda for a Community Conversation

This sample agenda is to help you facilitate a two-and-a-half-hour meeting. Please adapt it to suit your own needs.

Set Up

- Set up a registration table so participants can sign in.
- Distribute a one-page handout listing the five key issues identified in the *Summary and Workbook.*
- Organize tables of 8 to 10 people. At the start of the meeting, identify one facilitator and one recorder per table.
- Make sure each table has one copy of the *Summary and Workbook.*
- Post the meeting agenda on the wall or on a flip chart.

Agenda

5 minutes **Welcome**

- Introduce the moderator and provide an overview of the agenda.

15 minutes **Setting the Context**

- Read an extract from, or make a slide presentation on, the key points in the "Message from the Commissioners" section of the *Summary and Workbook.*

- Identify the five issues for discussion:
  - Reasonable Expectations and Necessary Supports to Employment;
  - Appropriate Benefit Structure;
  - Easier to Understand;
  - Viable over the Long Term; and
  - An Integrated Ontario Position on Income Security.

- Identify the goals of the Community Conversation, which are to:
  - Obtain people's views on whether the Commission has correctly identified the key issues in social assistance in Ontario;
  - Identify issues that are missing or misunderstood; and
  - Collect people's ideas on possible solutions.

60-80 minutes **Table Conversations on Issues**

- Ask people to discuss at their tables the five key issues, using the questions in the *Workbook* as a guide. The recorder notes the comments in the *Workbook*.
- The facilitator at each table begins by facilitating a five-minute discussion to determine how much time the group wants to spend on each of the five issues. The group may decide to discuss just one or two issues, or to spend some time on all five. The group may decide to address all the questions under each issue, or only a few.

10 minutes **Break**

- The moderator checks in with the facilitators to find out which of the five issues were discussed most.

30 minutes **Report Back**

- Reports are delivered by issue (5-10 minutes maximum per issue). For example, Table 1 reports back their main points on the question they spent the most time discussing under Issue 1. Table 2 reports back their main points for a different question under Issue 1. After each table has reported back on Issue 1, they report back their main points discussed under Issue 2, and so on.

10 minutes **Wrap-Up**

- The moderator reviews the next steps in the Commission's work:
  - *Workbooks* and public input are being collected until September 1, 2011;
  - The Commission will then develop an Options Paper for public comment in late fall 2011; and
  - The final Commission report is due in June 2012.
- Thank participants. Ask all recorders to deliver the completed *Workbooks* to the moderator.

Sending Your Feedback

The Commission would like to receive your input by **September 1, 2011**, in order to consider it in the development of options and possible approaches in the fall.

Please mail your completed *Workbooks* to:

Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario
2 Bloor Street West
4th floor, Suite 400
Toronto ON
M4W 3E2

Please include the location and date of your Community Conversation, the number of participants and a contact person.

You can also submit the comments from your Community Conversation by completing the *Workbook* online at www.socialassistancereview.ca.

Thank you for your input.

Contact Us

Email:
socialassistancereview@ontario.ca

Phone:
416-212-8029
Toll free 1-855-269-6250