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**Community Voices,
Perspectives and Priorities:**

Executive Summary

MARCH 2005

Report of
The Edmonton Civic Panel

Prepared By
The Edmonton Social Planning Council

ESPC

A partner of
Inclusive Cities Canada: A Cross-Canada Civic Initiative
<http://www.inclusivecities.ca>



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Overview

Far too many people in Edmonton face genuine and often painful barriers to feeling socially included. All too often institutional, community and personal barriers work against many Edmontonians feeling a sense of belonging, acceptance and recognition in their own city. People who are viewed as being different in some way – for example, people who are visible minorities, are openly gay, or have a low-income, face discrimination, personal abuse and institutional roadblocks. The resulting erosion of social cohesion in our city undermines the quality of life for all Edmontonians.

These are some of the findings contained in the report, *Inclusive Cities Canada: Edmonton Community Voices, Perspectives and Priorities*. Edmonton participated with four other cities in Inclusive Cities Canada, a national initiative examining social inclusion in Canada's cities. To explore how inclusive Edmonton is, over 200 people shared their personal and professional reflections and experiences with issues related to social inclusion.

Participants in Edmonton perceived that the area of Living Conditions presented the biggest challenge to Edmonton becoming more inclusive. (Living Conditions was the key dimension in all five of the cities participating in ICC.) This dimension includes issues such as income and employment, housing and community safety. These are complex issues that cross civic-provincial-federal jurisdictional boundaries and individual ministerial responsibilities.

The *ICC Edmonton Report* contains 19 recommendations with roles and responsibilities for various stakeholders. These recommendations provide stakeholders with direction about where to direct their joint efforts in order to build a more inclusive and prosperous Edmonton.

Based on research and participants' experiences, we know that inclusive communities

- Incorporate diversity into their institutional structures, functions and processes
- Value equity
- Provide accessible and culturally sensitive services
- Celebrate both the similarities and appreciate the richness of the differences among citizens.

As one local participant noted, "We are inclusive in theory and intent, but we have not mastered the practice."

Inclusiveness is linked to social health and quality of life, and this in turn is closely linked to economic prosperity. While Alberta has successfully eliminated its financial debt, an equally important social deficit remains to be paid off. Failure to take action on eliminating this social deficit will lead to further inequities in our province and undermine the prospects for long-term prosperity in Alberta.

Addressing such a complex issue as social inclusion in Edmonton requires a long-term, multi-sector commitment to building civic partnerships and fostering public engagement. The City of Edmonton must be the catalyst for collaborative efforts aimed at rebuilding the city's social infrastructure, sustaining civic capacity, and preserving social cohesion. These are the foundations of a strong, supportive and inclusive Edmonton.

Addressing social inclusion at the provincial and national levels requires a similar long-term commitment to creating horizontal relationships between jurisdictions, sharing good practices across communities, and sustaining a strong social infrastructure throughout Canada.

Context for Inclusion

In this report, social inclusion is defined as:

“...the capacity and willingness of our society to keep all groups within reach of what we expect as a society - the social commitment and investments necessary to ensure that all people are within reach of (close to) our common aspirations, common life and its common wealth.”

An inclusive community is one that provides opportunities for the optimal well-being and healthy development of all children, youth and adults. All members of the community potentially gain from social inclusion – those who are vulnerable for reasons of poverty, racism, or fear of difference – as well as the broader community that benefits when everyone is able to participate as a valued and contributing member. Population health research has taught us that inequality hurts everyone, not just those at the bottom. Similarly, while inclusion provides obvious dividends to individuals and groups who are marginalized, it benefits everyone – both in terms of the vitality a society derives when all its members fully contribute and by removing the liabilities associated with exclusion.

Inclusive cities and communities are critical not only to the well-being of individuals, but also to the social and economic health of nations. Cities are at a crossroads and are being challenged to either become more inclusive or to enter into decline. The Cities Alliance, an international initiative launched by the World Bank and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, expressed this challenge as follows:

The social and economic future of countries is increasingly being determined in their urban areas . . . Two alternative scenarios are emerging: one of cities characterized by increasing poverty, social exclusion and decline; the other of inclusive cities characterized by equitable and sustainable growth.

In Canada, social inclusion has the potential to act as a guiding framework for two inter-related creative projects: advancing the well-being of Canadians and urban nation-building. People’s well-being is closely tied to where they live. Therefore, it is in cities and communities across Canada that children, youth and adults first experience inclusion or exclusion. The quality of neighbourhoods and communities, the common public spaces where people interact and share experiences, and the adequacy of a city’s social infrastructure all contribute to creating environments that either welcome and include or reject and polarize.

Inclusive Cities Canada

Inclusive Cities Canada (ICC) was developed to focus public attention on the importance of social infrastructure for building inclusive cities and to ensure that community voices of diversity are recognized as core Canadian voices. A primary challenge confronting Canada is its ability to ensure that cities are able to effectively sustain communities of diversity for the mutual benefit of everyone, particularly people from diverse and vulnerable populations.

ICC is a collaborative venture of five social planning organizations across Canada and the social infrastructure sub-committee of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM). It is a unique partnership of community leaders and elected municipal politicians. The social planning partners are: Social Planning and Research Council of BC; Edmonton Social Planning Council;

Community Development Halton; Community Social Planning Council of Toronto; and Human Development Council of Saint John. Multi-year funding support is provided by Social Development Canada, with start-up funds from the Laidlaw Foundation.

During the first phase of ICC, Civic Panels were created in each city to coordinate and conduct local civic reviews on social inclusion. Civic Panels are made up of municipal and community leaders and are co-chaired by a municipal politician and a community leader. The Civic Panels provide local direction and help to analyse the results of the civic reviews.

A National Steering Committee, which is comprised of members from the partner cities, provides strategic direction to ICC. The National Steering Committee developed a common framework and methodology for conducting the local research. Building on previous research and community development work, the National Steering Committee identified five significant dimensions of social inclusion for review. Within each dimension, three specific areas of inquiry were highlighted. The dimension areas are:

- **Diversity:** An examination of how key urban institutions, such as local government, schools and the police, reflect and respond to the full diversity of the population.
- **Human Development:** A focus on the opportunities for everyone to develop their talents, skills and capacities of everyone through the availability of early childhood services, good public education, and access to recreation/arts/cultural resources.
- **Civic Engagement:** Strategies to promote the full engagement of people in civic life through the renewal of local governance, strengthening community capacities, and promoting inclusive public space.
- **Living Conditions:** A review of disparities in access to basic necessities such as income/employment, affordable housing and community safety in Edmonton.
- **Community Services:** The availability of adequate and culturally appropriate community services in areas of healthcare, crisis support and transportation/mobility.

Edmonton Consultations

In order to explore how inclusive Edmonton is, 12 focus groups, with a total of 84 participants, were held during the summer of 2004. Each focus group examined inclusion through one of five dimension areas: Diversity, Human Development, Civic Engagement, Living Conditions, and Community Services. During the focus groups, participants discussed the strengths and weaknesses of current practices in Edmonton within the three areas of inquiry under discussion. Participants were asked to share both their personal experiences and professional knowledge about inclusion in general, and these areas of inquiry in particular. Highlights from the focus groups were reviewed and analyzed and formative themes identified.

Based on this analysis, the Edmonton Civic Panel determined that further investigation with diverse and vulnerable populations was needed. To explore these issues and provide another way of obtaining information, a less formal and more interactive process called local soundings, was developed. Local soundings were informal sessions with existing groups and populations that directly experience exclusion.



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Edmonton Social Planning Council

Becoming an inclusive city: removing social and economic barriers

SUMMARY **March 2005**

These are some highlights of the findings of the **Edmonton Civic Panel** report: *Inclusive Cities Canada: Edmonton Community Voices, Perspectives and Priorities*. This report along with those of four other cities involved in this initiative are available on-line at www.inclusivecities.ca

Inclusive Cities Canada is a national initiative made up of five social planning councils across the country, including the Edmonton Social Planning Council. The Council organized consultations and dialogues in Edmonton and analysed the results. A Civic Panel made up of elected officials and community leaders was established to examine the results and develop recommendations. The Edmonton Civic Panel will present the findings to Edmonton City Council and other key civic and community bodies.

What is inclusion?

Social and economic inclusion is when all people are included and can participate meaningfully in our society's social and economic life.

An inclusive community is one that provides opportunities for the optimal well-being and healthy development of all children, youth and adults. All members of the community potentially gain from social inclusion – those who are vulnerable for reasons of poverty, racism, or fear of difference – as well as the broader community that benefits when everyone is able to participate as a valued and contributing member.

Inclusiveness is linked to social health and quality of life, and this in turn is closely linked to economic prosperity.

The issues

The quality of neighbourhoods and communities, the common public spaces where people interact and share experiences, and the adequacy of a city's social infrastructure all contribute to creating environments that either welcome and include or reject and polarize.

From a social inclusion perspective, both social and physical infrastructure are required to create strong and vibrant communities and cities.

Cities are at a crossroads and are being challenged to either become more inclusive or to enter into decline.

Far too many people in Edmonton face genuine and often painful barriers to feeling socially included. People who are viewed as being different in some way – for example, people who are visible minorities, are openly gay, or have a low-income – face discrimination, personal abuse and institutional roadblocks. The resulting erosion of social cohesion in our city undermines the quality of life for all Edmontonians.

Edmonton is becoming a more diverse community. As this occurs, political leadership, the media, and the larger public are challenged to move away from attitudes of fear, control and mere tolerance towards diverse groups. Together we need to adopt a more welcoming and supportive approach that embraces diversity for its contribution to a more vital and dynamic community.

The findings: How inclusive is Edmonton?

“We are inclusive in theory and intent, but we have not mastered the practice.”

Quote from one of 200 participants in Edmonton who shared their personal and professional reflections and experiences with issues related to social inclusion.

- Income and employment, housing, and community safety were given the lowest inclusive ratings by participants
- Health care, crisis services and mobility/transportation received the second lowest rating
- The basis for a more inclusive community does exist in several dimensions of the city's life – citizen engagement, community support services, use of public spaces and buildings – but it is threatened by a lack of strong and consistent support and public investment

The challenges

Addressing such a complex issue as social inclusion in Edmonton requires a long-term, multi-sector, multi-government commitment to building civic partnerships and fostering public engagement.

The City of Edmonton must be the catalyst for collaborative efforts aimed at rebuilding the city's social infrastructure, sustaining civic capacity, and preserving social cohesion.

Based on research and participants' experiences, we know that inclusive communities:

- *Incorporate diversity into their institutional structures, functions and processes*
- *Value equity*
- *Provide accessible and culturally sensitive services*
- *Celebrate both the similarities and appreciate the richness of the differences among citizens*

Recommendations (5 of the 19) that will make Edmonton a more inclusive city

- Institutional Readiness – Create an Edmonton Inclusion Office to actively champion inclusion, civic engagement and leadership development
- Income and Employment – Adopt a Living Wage policy to ensure workers can earn sustainable incomes
- Justice System and Crime Prevention – Revive community policing and strengthen police relationships with ethno-racial communities
- Quality of Life – Ensure that all public spaces and recreational facilities are accessible, affordable and are preserved for the public good
- Education – Build cultural competence among teachers and a culture of inclusion throughout the education system

Initial steps are already being taken toward being an inclusive city

- In January 2005, the City of Edmonton opened a Diversity and Inclusion Office within its Corporate Services Branch
- Since November 2004, about 20 ethno-cultural organizations have been working together, with support from the ESPC, on developing an inclusion plan and strategies

The sessions were intended to both test the results from the focus groups and gather first-hand stories and experiences about exclusion. During the summer of 2004, nine local soundings, with approximately 100 participants, were held. The following are the groups and populations: i) gay, lesbian and transgendered (GLBT) youth, ii) GLBT adults, iii) immigrants, iv) single mothers with low incomes, v) people labeled having intellectual disabilities, vi) youth, vii) formerly street-involved youth, viii) ethno-cultural arts groups, and ix) people with disabilities. Participants in the 9 local soundings largely affirmed the results from the 12 focus groups. In addition, they shared first-hand experiences with feeling excluded and offered suggestions for effecting change.

The Civic Panel reviewed the community findings and the current state of inclusion in Edmonton and identified social inclusion issues that were key to Edmonton becoming a more inclusive city. From these issues, the Civic Panel identified the 19 specific recommendations listed below:

Key Recommendations

1. Fostering Institutional Readiness

Outcome: Institutional change in Edmonton fosters inclusion.

Benchmarks: Institutions and organizations shift their philosophy and operations to implement inclusion principles. Edmonton Inclusion Office uses internal and external indicators to evaluate progress towards a more inclusive Edmonton.

Recommendation:

- Create an Edmonton Inclusion Office

2. Income and Employment

Outcome: All residents of Edmonton have a living income.

Benchmarks: Everyone working full-time will earn a wage that provides for their basic needs. Adequate income supports will be provided to those unable to work.

Recommendations:

- The Alberta government will adopt the Market Basket Measure as the low income measure in Alberta and the tool to set AISH, welfare, and minimum wage rates.
- Capital Health will adopt policies and programs and undertake advocacy efforts that address the key influence of income and housing on health.
- City will adopt a Living Wage policy for City employees and contractors.
- Diverse stakeholders will adopt strong policies and public education strategies to reduce employment discrimination for at-risk groups (i.e., immigrants, people with disabilities, sexual minorities, etc.).
- Professional associations will reform their foreign accreditation policies to optimize the opportunities and contributions of immigrants.

3. Affordable Housing

Outcome: All Edmonton residents have an affordable and physically accessible home.

Benchmarks: Everyone will live in housing that is adequate, accessible and suitable. This housing will cost no more than 30% of their pre-tax income.

Recommendations:

- Affordable housing supply will be increased through government partnerships with the private and non-profit sectors to meet the recommendations of the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing.
- 25% of new housing will be universally designed (i.e., wider doors, larger bathrooms, etc.) to offer housing choices to people with disabilities.

4. Child Development

Outcome: Edmonton is a child-friendly community in which all families have the capacity and supports to nurture their children.

Benchmarks: Edmonton is viewed as a child-friendly community. All families have access to child care that meets their needs and integrates early childhood development good practices. Parents have easy and affordable access to necessary family supports, parent training and respite parental care.

Recommendations:

- The Federal government will introduce and adequately fund a universal, high quality and affordable national child care strategy with Alberta government support.
- Diverse stakeholders will work together to create child-friendly workplaces in all work environments.

5. Public Transit

Outcome: Edmonton has a public transit system that is safe, accessible and affordable for everyone.

Benchmarks: Edmonton has an adequately funded public transit system with annual increases in ridership. People view transit as a practical alternative to private transportation.

Recommendations:

- A civic commitment to sustaining a safe, affordable, and accessible public transit system that reflects the value of public transportation over private.

6. Justice System and Crime Prevention

Outcome: Edmontonians have a justice system they have confidence in.

Benchmarks: Edmontonians feel the justice system is fundamentally fair. The integrity and effectiveness of the justice system improves as it integrates community healing and alternative measures into new justice models. There is a shift in attitude and resources to preventing crime through community policing and by addressing its root social causes. Through deliberate equity strategies, the Edmonton Police Service will reflect the ethno-racial population of Edmonton.

Recommendations:

- Edmonton Police will partner with the community on strategies to reduce crime.
- Community policing will be Edmonton's key policing strategy, with adequate resources.
- Improving relationships with ethno-racial communities will be a cornerstone of community policing.
- Integrate the practices and wisdom of Aboriginal culture into all aspects of the justice system.

7. Quality of Life

Outcome: All Edmontonians have a high quality of life in a community that is enriched by the arts, culture and recreation.

Benchmarks: The lives of all Edmontonians are enriched through an inclusive, well-funded and participatory approach to the arts, culture and recreation. All Edmonton communities are healthy and strong.

Recommendations:

- Directly support individual artists that are from diverse cultures and backgrounds and are at all levels of development.
- Renew civic commitment to ensuring that all public spaces and recreational facilities are accessible, affordable and are preserved for the public good.

8. Education

Outcome: All Edmontonians have access to a high quality education that meets their lifelong learning needs.

Benchmarks: All Edmontonians can access a high quality education that is inclusive and affordable, and meets their needs at different points in their lives.

Recommendations:

- The Alberta government fosters a sense of cultural competence among teachers and a culture of inclusion throughout the education system.
- Recognize that public schools and institutions are valuable community assets deserving of adequate supports and resources.

Next Steps

The relationships formed and the lessons learned during Phase 1 of the ICC initiative will help to support and guide the local follow up activities. During this next phase, the Edmonton Civic Panel, the ESPC, and other organizations will seek to build alliances with other key government, institutional, business and community stakeholders to implement the recommendations in this report. The challenge of creating a more inclusive Edmonton is too complex for a single stakeholder to take on. Consequently, this alliance building phase is a critical step in transforming these recommendations into policies, procedures and activities that will lead to a more inclusive Edmonton.

Progress has recently been made through our coordinated and collaborative efforts. For example, in January 2005, the City of Edmonton opened a Diversity and Inclusion Office and since November 2004, about 20 local ethno-cultural organizations have been working together on developing a vision of multicultural inclusion in Edmonton

Nationally, a cross-Canada report, highlighting similarities and differences between cities, will be produced and presented at a national roundtable in Ottawa in June 2005. The focus of the roundtable will be on the importance of engaging the federal government in building and sustaining a strong social infrastructure. In the fall of 2005, *Inclusive Cities Canada* will invite other municipalities and communities to become part of the cross-Canada initiative in building inclusive cities.

Copies of the full report are available from the
Edmonton Social Planning Council
(780) 423-2031
Website: www.edmspc.com

Copies of all five reports are available from the
Inclusive Cities Canada website: www.inclusivecities.ca