

# **Assessing Self-Help Community Development Planning Tools**

Final Report  
March 2001

ACOA Project No. 100-4774

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## 1. Introduction

There is increasing interest among those involved in community economic development in the notion of “community capacity building.” This involves developing the skills and abilities of individuals and the community collectively to plan for the future. Within a community development planning process, the idea of building capacity is often addressed by a range of facilitative processes, from the hiring of an outside “expert” to assist the community in the process (often resulting in very little transfer of knowledge and skills to the community), to the community doing it themselves and learning as they go (often with the assistance of guides or toolkits). There is also a large middle ground of activities which may be part of the process, including training workshops, education, health promotion and illness remediation, and much more.

From a public policy perspective, there has been growing interest in understanding more about how government, professionals, and community organizations can play a role in community capacity building. To this end, we have witnessed the proliferation of materials geared to building capacity, from university workbooks to self-help guides produced by federal and provincial government departments. For the most part, however, we know little about the relative contribution these materials make to effective community development planning, including community capacity building.

Many questions remain unanswered. How are the resources being used? Are communities finding them too simple or too complex? Is facilitation required for some or all of the process, or in the use of the tool(s) themselves? Is a community training or orientation component required to help launch a community development planning process using one or more “self-help” tool(s)? Are there gaps in the type and availability of self-help tools?

## 2. Project Objectives

To address these questions, the Rural and Small Town Programme at Mount Allison University carried out a research project in the fall of 2000. The overall objective was to assess how communities and organizations in Atlantic Canada have made use of self-help planning tools for community capacity building, and the usefulness of such tools in developing community action plans.

Specific objectives included:

- ! Understanding the extent to which community groups were aware of and were using self-help community development planning resources. In particular, community groups were asked which specific tools they were aware of and which ones they had used; for what purposes; and how the tools or resources were used.

- ! Understanding the contribution of self-help community development planning tools or resources to the development and implementation of a community plan. Community groups were asked to comment on particular tools they had used for strategic planning: how the tool was used; whether a plan was developed and implemented; what the outcomes were; and how useful the tool was in achieving these outcomes. Community groups were also asked about what skills and knowledge were gained by using these tools; and how the tools contributed to the community development process.
- ! Soliciting constructive feedback for enhancing the effectiveness of existing and new self-help community development planning resources. Community groups were asked which aspects of particular tools were most/least helpful; and if there were other types of self-help community development planning tools that would be useful and of interest to them.

### **3. Approach and Methodology**

A three-phase approach was used. In phase one, four reasonably well-known self-help tools were identified to form the starting point for community groups to assess the utility of self-help tools. These tools were chosen through an informal consultation process within the research team's various community economic development networks. The selected tools were:

- ! **The Community Development Handbook** (Human Resources Development Canada)
- ! **Stepping Forward** (Rural and Small Town Programme)
- ! **Building Communities from the Inside Out** (Kretzmann and McKnight)
- ! **Community Capacity Building for Economic Development** (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador)

Appendix A contains contact information for these four tools, as well as tools identified by the project participants and others.

A contact list for community economic development (CED) groups was compiled. We attempted to identify a very broad range of groups, ranging from economic commissions or their equivalent, health care organizations, those involved in social justice, environmental community groups, and many others which fall under the broad definition of CED.

A simple one-page information sheet was developed. It was distributed as a fax-out/fax-back form in both official languages was sent to approximately 300 community development groups across Atlantic Canada to inquire about awareness and use of self-help tools and resources. The form was also made available as a downloadable file on the Internet at <http://www.mta.ca/rstp>. The fax-back elicited responses from 54 groups. A copy of this form is included in Appendix B. The information obtained through the fax-back results formed the basis for phase two.

In phase two, interviews were carried out with 28 groups, more than half of which reported using such tools, to obtain a more in-depth understanding about how the tools were used; the strength and/or weaknesses of particular tools; how community groups did strategic planning if they were not making use of such self-help tools; and if there were particular types of tools that would be useful to community groups. The interview guide can be found in Appendix C.

Of the 28 groups interviewed, four were Francophone groups. We also contacted seven First Nations groups, including one which had responded to the fax-back, in an attempt to ensure Aboriginal participation. Unfortunately, we were unable to carry out interviews with any of these groups. A complete list of all non-response organizations is included in Appendix D.

In phase three, the data was input and analyzed using SPSS and WordPerfect, and a final report was prepared.

There are several limitations of the methodology employed. First, the process allowed for community groups to self-select their participation. While the faxed form included a cover letter inviting participation, that participation was completely voluntary. Second, the potential existed for mis-interpretation of what is defined as a self-help tool or community capacity building, despite these being defined in a cover letter. Some groups may have opted not to respond if they did not understand these terms or did not feel that it was something they were using or doing.

#### **4. Profile of Fax-back and Interview Respondents**

Over 300 questionnaires were faxed to community groups throughout the Atlantic region, in the appropriate official language. Fifty-four responses were obtained. Some re-faxing was carried out, in an attempt to increase the response rate. We attribute the low response to some or all of the following: community organizations are short-staffed and/or simply too busy with their day-to-day operations to take the time to fill out questionnaires; many organizations may not use self-help tools; and organizations may not be aware of self-help tools or feel they do not apply to their particular group.

Tables 1 through 3 present a profile of groups responding to both the fax-back questionnaire and the telephone interview. As Table 1 illustrates, the largest percentage of respondents (42.6% of those who faxed back, 32% of those interviewed) were from community-based groups. The second largest type of group was the economic development commissions, boards, zones or authorities (15% of the fax-back group; 25% of the interviewees).

**Table 1 - Profile of Respondents, by Organization Type**

	fax-back		telephone interview	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
community-based group	23	42.6	9	32.1
econ.comm/board/zone/authority	8	14.8	7	25.0
network of community groups	7	12.9	2	7.1
municipality	5	9.3	3	10.7
professional	-	-	3	10.7
other	11	20.3	4	14.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Broken down by sector, for the fax-back, the largest percentage of respondents worked in the health sector (43%). Another 35% identified their sector as community economic development (CED); 15% work in the social sector, and 11% in environment. Almost 19% listed themselves as “other,” a category which included literacy, agriculture, and many others.

Of those interviewed, the greatest percentage were CED groups (52%), followed by groups in the health sector (30%). For both fax-back and interview respondents, some groups reported working in more than one sector.

**Table 2 - Profile of Respondents, by Sector**

Sector	fax-back		telephone interview	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
health	23	42.6	8	28.6
CED	19	35.2	15	53.6
social	8	14.8	5	17.9
environment	6	11.1	5	17.9
planning	4	7.4	5	17.9
tourism	3	5.6	2	7.2
Other	10	18.5	2	7.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>100.0</b>

For both the fax-back and the telephone interview, the greatest response came from groups in New Brunswick (61%), followed by groups from Nova Scotia.

**Table 3 - Provincial Distribution of Respondents**

Province	fax-back		telephone interview	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
New Brunswick	33	61.1	17	60.7
Nova Scotia	15	27.8	7	25.0
Newfoundland	4	7.4	3	10.7
Prince Edward Island	2	3.8	1	3.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## 5. Fax-back Results

### 5.1 Familiarity and Use of Tools

Respondents were asked if they were familiar with four particular self-help tools or guides (listed in table 4, below) and, if so, if they had used any of these four. Respondents were also asked to list “other” tools or guides that they were familiar with and/or had used.

Table 4 shows that, of the four documents listed, the greatest percentage (46% or almost half of the respondents) were familiar with **The Community Development Handbook**. Thirty-two percent were familiar with the **Stepping Forward**; another 28% were familiar with **Building Communities from the Inside Out**; and 13% were familiar with the **Community Capacity Building for Economic Development**. Another 15% listed other self-help tools or resources that they were familiar with.

**Table 4 - Respondents’ Familiarity With Self-Help Tools**

Resource or Tool	Frequency	Percent
The Community Development Handbook	25	46.3
Stepping Forward	17	32.1
Building Communities from the Inside Out	15	27.7
Community Capacity Building for Economic Development	7	13.2
Other	8	14.8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Of the 54 respondents, 18 (33%) were not familiar with any of the four tools listed, nor had they used other documents. In total, only 31 of the groups (57%) reported using any self-help tool. Of the 25 groups familiar with **The Community Development Handbook**, only 15 reported that they had used it (Table 5). Of the 17 familiar with **Stepping Forward**, 14 reported using it. Table 5 demonstrates that while many groups may be familiar with particular tools, that they do not necessarily use the them in their work.

**Table 5 - Respondents' Use of Self-Help Tools**

Resource or Tool	Frequency	Percent All Groups (54)	Percent Groups Familiar With Tool
The Community Development Handbook (25)	15	27.8	60.0
Stepping Forward (17)	14	25.9	82.4
Building Communities from the Inside Out (14)	10	18.5	71.4
Community Capacity Building for Economic Development (7)	3	5.6	42.9
Other (8)	8	14.8	100.0

Respondents were also asked to rate the usefulness of the tools they had used on a scale of one to five (where one was least useful and five was most useful). As Table 6 illustrates, of the specific resources listed in the questionnaire, the **Stepping Forward** kit was reported to be the most useful (by 61.5% of respondents who had used it), followed by “other” documents rated as most useful by 63% of respondents.

**Table 6 - Usefulness of Self-Help Tools**

Resource or Tool	% Least or Not Very Useful	% Neutral	% Very or Most Useful
The Community Development Handbook (15)	33.3	26.7	40.0
Stepping Forward (13)	15.4	23.1	61.5
Building Communities from the Inside Out (10)	10.0	50.0	40.0
Community Capacity Building for Economic Development (3)	66.7	0	33.3
Other (8)	12.5	25.0	62.5

Respondents were also asked for what purposes the tools were used, and whether the tools were used internally or with the help of an outside facilitator or consultant. A total of 21 (68%) of the 31 groups using self-help tools reported using them on their own without the help of an outside facilitator. Table 7 shows that they are mostly used as a reference tool. Rarely are they used for capacity building, for developing projects, or for implementing plans.

**Table 7 - Internal Uses of Self-Help Tools**

<b>Internal Use</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent of All Groups (54)</b>	<b>Percent of Those Using Internally (21)</b>
reference	13	24.1	61.9
work with communities	7	12.9	33.3
to develop strategic plan	6	11.1	28.5
individual reading	5	9.3	21.8
capacity building	2	3.7	9.5
projects	2	3.7	9.5
implement plans	1	1.9	4.8
other	7	12.9	33.3

Five groups (16% of those using tools) reported using self-help tools with the help of an outside facilitator or consultant, for the purposes shown in Table 8.

**Table 8 - Facilitator Uses of Self-Help Tools**

<b>Facilitator Use</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent of All Groups (54)</b>	<b>Percent of Groups With a Facilitator (5)</b>
capacity building	2	3.7	40.0
to develop strategic plan	1	1.9	20.0
other	3	5.6	60.0

Based on information presented in Tables 7 and 8, we can conclude that less than half of the groups responding used self-help tools within their groups, and an even smaller percentage use such resources with the help of an outside facilitator. Of the 21 groups reporting that they used the tools themselves, only six said the tools were used to develop a strategic plan. Of the five groups using the tools with the help of an outside facilitator, only one said it was to develop a strategic plan.

## **5.2 Need for Other Tools/Resources**

Respondents were asked if there are particular tools or resources which would be useful for their group. As Table 9 illustrates, there were almost as many “no” responses as “yes,” with 11% saying that they didn’t know. This question was re-asked in phase two of the project, with more interesting results.

**Table 9 - Community Groups' Needs for Additional Tools/Resources**

<b>Need</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes	25	46.2
No	23	42.6
Don't Know	6	11.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Of the 25 groups which said there were particular tools or resources which would be useful for them, 42% said specific planning tools would be useful; another 33% identified directories of one kind or another; 20% said resources on technology or sector specific areas (such as health or the environment) would be useful. (Table 10) Again, this question was pursued in more depth in phase 2 of the project.

**Table 10 - Specific Tools/Resources Needed**

<b>Tool or Resource Needed</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent of All Groups (54)</b>	<b>Percent of Groups Needing Tools (25)</b>
planning specific	10	18.5	40.0
directories	8	14.8	32.0
sector specific	5	9.3	20.0
technology	5	9.3	20.0
personal development	4	7.4	16.0
government related	4	7.4	16.0
legal resources	5	9.3	20.0
other tools	16	29.6	64.0

### **5.3 Fax-back Summary**

In summary, a significant percentage of groups responding to the fax-back reported that they were not familiar with self-help resources. Of the 54 groups responding to the fax-back, 18 (one-third) said they were not familiar with the self-help tools listed, nor did they list others with which they were familiar.

The other two-thirds were familiar with various self-help tools, and almost half (21 out of 54) reported using such resources themselves within their group, of which six said they used the tools to develop a strategic plan. Five out of 54 groups reported using the tools with the help of an outside facilitator, and of these, only one group did so to develop a strategic plan. Groups which used particular tools reported a high level of satisfaction with them.

## 6. Telephone Interview Results

In phase 2 of the project, 28 interviews were carried out to obtain a more in-depth understanding about how self-tools were used as well as the strength and/or weaknesses of particular tools. We targeted groups which reported being involved in community economic development. Interviews were also carried out with some groups not familiar with any self-help tools to ask how community groups do strategic planning, in the absence of self-help tools or resources. All groups interviewed were asked if there were particular types of tools that would be useful.

The interview guide was divided into three sections. Section I was addressed to all interviewees, and asked about the purpose of using self-help tools: whether it was to develop a strategic plan; for internal education for members; as general reference or background materials; or for any other reasons not mentioned.

Section II focused on the resources mentioned by the interviewees in the earlier fax-back, looking at strengths and weaknesses of particular resources, and skills and knowledge gained by using the resource. This section was addressed to the groups reporting that they had used a particular tool.

Section III was directed to all groups including those reporting that they hadn't used any self-help tools, and asked questions about if and how the group did strategic planning; how strategic planning was done in the absence of any self-help tools; if there were particular reasons why a group didn't use self-help tools; and if there would be specific tools or resources that would be useful for the group.

### 6.1 Use of self-help tools

Of the 28 groups interviewed, 15 reported they had used self-help tools or resources in their work. Of these, six (40% of the 15 groups) reported using the tools for strategic planning. Another nine said they did not use the tools for strategic planning.

Most (11 of 15) said they used the tools for internal CED education for members. (Table 11) Developing capacity for conducting meetings was the other major internal use of self-help tools.

**Table 11 - Specific Internal Education Uses**

<b>Specific uses of tools:</b>	<b>Frequency (15)</b>	<b>Percent of Users</b>
CED education	9	60.0
Developing capacity for meetings	7	46.7
Developing leadership skills	3	20.0
Education on other topics (e.g. financial planning)	3	20.0
Other	5	33.3

Most of the groups interviewed (13) used these tools as general references or background materials for group members and/or clients. Six groups identified other uses of self-help tools, including to develop: a strategic tourism plan; a seniors' community action plan; a caregiver workshop; and a "complete community diversification plan."

## 6.2 In-depth Use of Identified Tools

The 15 interviewees who had used a self-help tool were asked to assess the particular tool they had used or were most familiar with. Of these, three chose to talk about **The Community Development Handbook**; four chose to talk about **Stepping Forward**; one chose to talk about **Building Communities from the Inside Out**; and one chose to talk about the **Community Action Pack** (Health Canada). Six of the interviewees chose not to assess a particular tool.

Respondents were asked how the tool was used, whether a community plan was developed and implemented, what the outcomes of the plan were and how important the tool was in achieving outcomes.

**The Community Development Handbook** was used by one of three groups to develop a community plan, with HRDC staff playing a strong facilitating role. Outcomes included better communication and direction among people in the community and job creation. "The CD officer hired helped us understand our problems were not unusual." The other two groups used the tool for internal education.

**Building Communities from the Inside Out** was used, in one instance, to develop a proposal for a project and a plan which was developed and implemented. Ten individuals were trained in community development, and others attended a skills workshop.

The **Community Action Pack** was used by one group for needs assessment, and for developing an evaluation guide.

The **Stepping Forward** kit received the most comments. Three out of four groups used it to develop some kind of action plan. Two groups used it to develop a community strategic plan, and a third for a watershed development plan. One respondent said the tool was useful in bringing "process" to every meeting. Another said that "outcomes were positive, (the tool) gives direction, keeps us on track; lots of step-by-step phases; helped us work better with volunteers; keeps process moving; allows us to tell people what the process is in advance; keeps us focused."

When these nine interviewees were asked about the importance of the tools in the community planning process, three respondents rated them as "important" and two as "very important."

We note that although respondents reported using particular tools, most were not able to recall enough specific details about a given tool to respond to the remaining questions in this section. Rather, their responses tended to focus on self-help tools in general.

For example, when asked about which aspects of tools were particularly useful for the interviewee and his or her group, comments included:

- ! the asset mapping material is very useful, and provides ways to recognize all facets of a community;
- ! materials that have an attractive layout, in point form with graphics, that are user friendly, “woman friendly”;
- ! materials that are organized by topic, for example, how to recruit volunteers; how to develop leadership skills, consensus building; how to get “buy-in” from the community; how to empower people. Materials where you can pull out and use a particular section. Helps people focus, doesn’t waste time;
- ! materials which include worksheets, with “how-to” methodologies, e.g. for financial planning.

When asked whether there were aspects of the tools that were not used, most respondents had few comments. One group said that they did not use the survey component of the **Stepping Forward** kit because it was too expensive to purchase and implement. Another said they did not use the program planning section in **Building Communities from the Inside Out** since they do that as a separate process.

When asked if there was anything else the respondent would have liked to see in the tools which wasn’t there, most respondents seemed satisfied with the tool(s) that they had used. “It seemed to cover our needs,” ... “it seemed pretty complete,” ... “no, it was very user-friendly” were some of the comments. One respondent would have liked to see more of a step-by-step process. Another suggested that the biggest challenge is how to actually write a strategic plan: groups need to know what should be in it and how to write it. “Concrete examples of finished plans would be useful.”

Respondents were asked what skills and knowledge were gained by them and/or their group through using the tool. Several suggested that the tools broadened their knowledge about CED in general. “It validated the importance of grassroots involvement, based on principles of sustainable development.” Some also suggested that it improved their ability to work with volunteers; it developed their “people skills.”

Several respondents suggested that such materials are useful for keeping meetings organized and on track, helping people focus. “People started to understand better what their role was,” one respondent said, “what they saw for their community. The process allowed everyone to have a say, and helped get the vision of where people wanted the community to go down on paper.” For some, the tools reinforced their respect for community, and their faith in the ability of people in communities to plan for their future. The tool helped “to develop vision, it instilled pride in community and fostered more communication within members of the community.”

Overall, it is clear that those groups which used self-help tools found them very useful; that the tools improved their ability to do the work they are doing, and validated a number of principles

that people sometimes take for granted (for example, that ordinary people, given a chance, are able and willing to work for the betterment of their community).

There were few suggestions for how particular tools could be improved upon or made more effective, other than one comment about the cost of a particular tool. Another commented that such tools are not easily accessible: “We had to search for them.” This points to the need to do more promotion and marketing of existing tools.

### 6.3 Use of Other Resource and Tools

Of the 28 groups interviewed, only 11 (39%) said that they do strategic planning. As noted earlier, six of the 28 groups reported using the tools in their strategic planning process, which means that while groups may do strategic planning, they do not necessarily use any resource materials or self-help guides to do so.

When asked how strategic planning takes place if the group does not use self-help tools, some groups mentioned that their board members have extensive experience in CED and don’t necessarily rely on step-by-step manuals to do strategic planning. Some interviewees said they have on-going action plans, based over one or several years, and that the plan was developed before they were involved with the group. Several groups acknowledged using outside facilitators who, because they are professionals, are not necessarily using any defined self-help tool. Others said that their group does not have a lot of money to hire consultants, and does the best planning it can with monies available.

Table 12 summarizes the reasons that groups identified for not using self-help tools. The largest percentage do not use tools because they are not aware of them or have no interest in using them.

**Table 12 - Reasons for Not Using Self-Help Tools**

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Frequency (28)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Don't know about tools	12	42.9
No interest in tools	12	42.9
No time to learn tools	6	21.4
Tools too costly	2	7.1
Other reasons	5	17.9

“Other reasons” included that group members have extensive experience in CED and/or planning, and that they feel comfortable with the process without relying on manuals or guides. One group mentioned a financial concern, that group members wanted to put their money into projects, not planning.

Another suggested that, especially in rural areas where the literacy rate may be low, it is not particularly effective to give people a guide or self-help tool because they will not use it. A lot of people who have been involved in their communities for years, even decades, do not necessarily take the approach of relying on books.

Interviewees were asked if there are other self-help tools or resources, including subject-specific tools, that would be helpful for their group. Eleven of the 28 respondents had no suggestions or no answer. Of those who had ideas or suggestions:

- ! eight said a how-to guide on marketing and promotion for non-profit organizations is needed;
- ! seven suggested a guide on how to be a board member, including topics such as roles and responsibilities of volunteer board members; how to run meetings; role of board member versus staff;
- ! six suggested community groups need information on how to do financial planning;
- ! six suggested materials on community economic development generally, including community capacity building and how to do it;
- ! five suggested a guide on report writing for government, including how to do self-evaluation;
- ! three suggested a guide on “how to function with government,” that is, how to deal with the bureaucracy, how to lobby, how to access funding for particular issues etc.

Other subject areas for needed self-help tools or guides included policy development (4), management training/education (1), leadership development (1), environmental assessment (1), how to hire a contractor or consultant (1), and how to write proposals (1).

Several suggested that guides and resources must be: written in plain language; clear and concise; and “user friendly,” especially given the low literacy rates in some parts of the Atlantic region.

Although it was not part of the objectives of this project to identify and assess which tools and resources were in fact available in the marketplace, it is quite likely that many of those identified above are in fact available in some form or another.

Within this context, one respondent said that volunteer burnout was a serious problem, and that government needs to find a way to make monies available so that groups can hire community animators. Several suggested that there has been an increasing expectation placed on communities and community groups to do their own economic development, although it is difficult to access money for help. One interviewee suggested that governments, particularly in Nova Scotia, have invested in CED training programs at both the community college and university levels, so that there is an increasingly sizeable group of CED trainers available. However, monies are not available to hire these people.

Interviewees made the following final comments about the needs of community groups in relation to self-help tools and resources:

! Several suggested that there is already a proliferation of self-help tools or resources available but that they are not widely marketed or promoted, so that community groups are not necessarily aware of them.

! Some groups believe that people don't understand what community economic development is. Others think that "strategic planning" is a dirty word. There is a need for resources that put such concepts on an understandable level. CED as a concept also needs to be more widely marketed.

! There is a need for local materials (not American) with concrete examples from Canada and Atlantic Canada.

! Some people think that because you're a non-profit group, you should be "broke" all the time. There is a need to re-think this notion. A non-profit status should not mean a community group cannot make money.

## **6.4 Interview Summary**

Of the 28 groups interviewed, 15 reported that they had used self-help tools in their work. Of those, six said they used the tools to develop a community plan. Eleven groups said the tools were used for internal education; 13 used them for general reference only.

Of the 15 groups that reported having used a particular tool, comments about the tools' effectiveness and usefulness in the community development process were very positive. Such tools helped groups to focus; to have clarity when developing a community vision; to learn to work with volunteers; to understand and appreciate the fact that everyone has something to offer. Groups in general were satisfied with the resources, although several groups suggested that such tools are not easily accessible and need to be more widely marketed.

Of the 28 telephone interviews, 11 groups said that they do strategic planning but only six said they use self-help tools to do so. This is evidence that groups may do strategic planning but not use self-help tools. A variety of reasons were given, including that group leaders/board members tend to have a lot of experience in community development and thus do not necessarily rely on manuals; that in areas of high illiteracy, people tend not to rely on books; and that some groups focus more on projects than planning.

## **7. Discussion and Conclusions**

### **7.1 Discussion**

The intent of this study was to look at how self-help tools and resources contribute to the ability of community groups to develop and implement community plans. We wanted to know how such tools contribute to capacity building within communities, and what are the gaps in terms of needed resources.

In the interview phase of the project, we made an effort to carry out interviews with groups which consider themselves “community development” groups. We found that many groups are involved in what could be considered CED, although they do not necessarily develop or work from an overall strategic community plan. Many groups are project or task-oriented. They operate on a short time-frame, within which they might have project-specific needs for particular resources. This is evident in the “wish list” of resources that groups would find useful to have (for example, a directory of government programs or a manual on how to write a proposal for project funding). At a specific point in time, a group may need a particular resource for a given reason, although it is not necessarily a resource that would be used on an on-going basis, over a period of time. We also found that only a small number of groups used self-help tools with the help of an outside facilitator. This, we believe, is a reflection of the financial state of most community groups (that is, that their resources to hire outside facilitators are extremely limited).

In terms of how self-help tools contribute to community capacity building, we think it is fair to say that such tools contribute more to individual than community capacity building. Groups interviewed seem not to focus on community capacity building as an objective. Rather, it is often a secondary product or outcome for a group that is trying mainly to accomplish a task or carry out a project. Many groups report not having enough time to focus on capacity building although it may be an unintended outcome of the exercise.

On the other hand, self-help tools are making an important contribution to individual knowledge and skill development, in particular of group leaders. Many groups reported using tools for internal education or general reference, or to learn how to carry out a community process. The real value seems to be in making such resources available to community facilitators or animators on a “train the trainer” basis. For example, several groups noted that the HRDC community development handbook, with its accompanying facilitator’s guide on how to use the handbook, is a useful kind of document for community groups.

In terms of capacity building, some groups noted that capacity is being built in the region through CED programs such as those offered at the community college and university levels in Nova Scotia. However, bringing that capacity to the community level is challenging because of the lack of resources to hire these people.

The intent of the study was not to create a detailed inventory of all self-help tools and/or resources available, although we did ask respondents about types of resources that would be useful, that presently do not exist. Our findings suggest that there is a wide range of desired tools that groups are looking for, that either do not exist or that people do not know about. It is obvious that there is a need for better promotion of existing tools, so that groups are aware of what is available. For those groups involved in the development of a community plan, some suggested that it would be useful to have either some good quality examples of community plans or a “template” for developing a strategic community plan, showing what kind of information should be included.

## 7.2 Conclusions

*For developers of self-help tools and resources...*

Community groups appreciate a format where there are discrete components of a manual, for example worksheets, which groups can pull out and use. There needs to be a balance between sufficient “how to” detail and the size of a document, so that people have time to go through it, and use it without feeling overwhelmed at the extent of the material. It is important to keep in mind that most community groups are already extremely busy.

Community groups like the idea of a companion document (such as the Facilitator’s Guide accompanying **The Community Development Handbook**), with instructions for facilitators on how to use a resource tool.

It is, of course, extremely important that self-help tools are prepared using plain language, are easy to read, in a “user friendly” format.

There is an obvious need for a marketing and distribution plan for existing as well as new materials produced. Groups will not use self-help tools if they are not aware of them.

*For government departments/agencies with a CED mandate...*

The need for promotion and marketing of existing materials is extremely important. Many groups reported not using self-help tools because they were not aware of them. Target marketing could be done, using publications that focus in particular on community groups and their activities. We reiterate that, in cases where groups did use self-help tools, they reported high levels of satisfaction with the quality of the tools. Government departments and agencies with a CED mandate can play a role in helping to facilitate awareness of existing resources.

Very few groups reported using self-help tools with the help of an outside facilitator, mainly because most groups do not have the resources to hire one. Comments were made about the availability, particular in Nova Scotia, of people with CED skills. Some groups said it would be extremely useful for them to be able to access such facilitators, not necessarily on an on-going basis, but to help their group do strategic planning. ACOA has invested a significant amount of money in CED training in Nova Scotia, and could consider ways to make these people available to community groups. Several models exist already. For example, there are now publicly-funded CED field workers in PEI. Connect NB Branché has a number of field workers to work with community groups, facilitating their development of community development applications and projects in local community access centres. The small business counseling programs, launched under the Pan-Atlantic Entrepreneurship Development Program, is a comparable idea that could be replicated in the field of CED.

Of all the ideas for self-help tools or resources that are presently not available, a template (or some good examples) of how to do a strategic community plan seems to be particularly pertinent.

It could be similar, for example, to ACOA's existing brochures on how to do a business or marketing plan.

*For community groups involved in CED...*

From the point of view of groups interviewed, the evidence seems to suggest that those groups which were aware of particular self-help tools and made use of them in their work were very positive about the usefulness of the resources. Respondents suggested that such documents helped guide the community development process, helped to clarify and keep the process on track, and helped the community to develop a collective vision of where it wants to go. This suggests to us that wider promotion and marketing of such tools, again, might encourage other groups to make use of such resources.

We recognize that many community groups today are time-strapped, lack resources, and depend on volunteer efforts to a large extent. They often do not have the time or skills needed to seek out appropriate self-help tools or resources. There is also a recognized need among groups interviewed for training and skills development, for both leaders and volunteer members, that could be done if groups had the resources to hire community facilitators.

Finally, we would like to thank all those groups and individual members who took the time to participate in this study. We appreciate their contributions, and hope that this exercise will ultimately be useful to the people working at the grassroots level in the Atlantic region to make better communities for everyone.

## Appendix A - Self-Help Tools for Community Development

### Identified for Assessment in this study:

Human Resources Development Canada  
**The Community Development Handbook**  
<http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/community/menu/index.shtml>  
In English or in French

Government of Newfoundland and Labrador  
**Community Capacity Building for Economic Development**  
<http://www.cedresources.nf.net/>

Rural and Small Town Programme, Mount Allison University  
**Stepping Forward**  
<http://www.mta.ca/rstp>

J. P. Kretzmann and J. L. McKnight  
**Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets.**  
ACTA Publications 1 800-397-2282, fax 312-271-7399

### Identified by Community Groups:

Health Canada  
**Community Action Pack**

Human Development Council, Saint John  
**Good Neighbours: Building A community-based Economy: A Guidebook**

Lachance, Roger et Morisset, Martine, Le Réseau québécois de Villes et Villages en santé  
**L'obsession Du Citoyen. Vade-mecum Pour Villes Et Villages Où Il Fait Bon Vivre**

Gillian Kaye et Tom Wolff, le Réseau québécois de Villes et Villages en santé  
**Concertation Locale: Les Clefs Du Succès. Une Traduction De From the Ground up**

Gillian Kaye and Tom Wolff, AHEC/Community Partners  
**From the Group Up. A Workbook On Coalition Building and Community Development**

### Other Tools of Interest:

Human Resources Development Canada  
**The Partnership Handbook**  
<http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/common/partners/partner.shtml>

Centre for Community Enterprise  
**The Community Resilience Manual**  
<http://www.cedworks.com>

Centre for Community Enterprise  
**Local Action to Fight Poverty: A Strategic Guide for Community Organizations**  
<http://www.cedworks.com>

University of Kansas  
**Community Tool Box**

<http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu/>

Robert Schneider and Pierre Colletterte  
**Le Pilotage Du Changement, Une Approche Strategique Et Pratique**  
<http://www.uquebec.ca/puq/puq.html>

Community Building Resources  
**OurBook is yourbook**  
[http://www.cbr-aimhigh.com/Resources\\_pub/references.htm](http://www.cbr-aimhigh.com/Resources_pub/references.htm)

United States Department of Agriculture - Rural Development  
**Development Ideas That Work**  
[http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ideas/idea\\_menu.html](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ideas/idea_menu.html)

Government of Western Australia, Department of  
Commerce and Trade  
**Community Wise Tool kit**  
<http://www.communitywise.wa.gov.au>

David Schwartz  
**Who Cares**

David Schwartz  
**Crossing the River**

Rocky Mountain Institute  
**Economic Renewal Guide**  
<http://www.rmi.org/store/p385pid2121.asp>

## Appendix B - Cover Letter and Assessment Form

October 5, 2000

The Rural and Small Town Programme at Mount Allison University is conducting a survey among community-based groups in Atlantic Canada to understand what resources and self-help tools are currently being used and how effective these tools are.

The objective of the study, which is partially funded through ACOA, is to understand the contribution of self-help community development planning resources to community capacity building, and also to identify if there are gaps in information, resources or self-help tools that should be addressed.

The one-page questionnaire, which is page 2 of this fax, asks about your familiarity with and use of particular resources, and how effective these resources have been for you and your group. It also asks if there are particular types of guides or self-help tools that you would like to see developed.

**We ask that you fill out this fax and fax it back to us by October 31st.** To thank you for taking the time to complete this form, we offer you the opportunity to win a complete set of *Stepping Forward* manuals in either English or French. Each person who completes and returns the form by October 31, 2000 will be entered in the draw.

We would like this questionnaire to reach as many groups as possible. If you are a network of groups, we would ask that you forward it on to your members. (The form is also available on-line at [www.mta.ca/rstp/rstpmain.htm](http://www.mta.ca/rstp/rstpmain.htm)). Once the results are in, we intend to follow up with more in-depth interviews with at least 40 groups.

Please return the form by fax to (506) 364-2601. If you have questions or wish to speak to someone about this project, please call 1 800 461-1977 and ask for David Bruce or Gwen Lister. We appreciate your help, and hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely

David Bruce /Gwen Lister  
Mount Allison University

Sue Calhoun  
Calhoun Research & Development