



Communities Achieving
Responsive Services

Fact Sheet #20

Getting To Know Public Policy

The CARS process involves creating a link for participants between local community development and the creation of government public policy. In rural remote and northern communities, even when we are able to create public policy successes, these successes are not effectively shared with other communities. We commonly refer to “good things happening in good places by good people” but the story often ends here. Rural remote and northern communities have been the recipient of numerous pilot projects and one-time events. Generally this is how government reacts to the diversity and individuality of rural remote and northern communities. As a result of our inherent lack of capacity to share knowledge and lessons learned with others, communities are forced over and over again to reinvent the wheel in responding to community needs.

Some communities have experienced some success in influencing public policy development accidentally through their efforts in responding to critical community need or in sharing community successes beyond their own community. They have not deliberately intended to contribute to public policy development; however they are pleased and surprised with their influence just the same. Once participants experience small successes in influencing public policy development they often feel empowered to do more. Participants often reach out to other partners to build public support to strengthen their cause. This diversity of support often increases the credibility and effectiveness of the community to affect public policy change and helps community members feel comfortable in providing feedback to government regarding public policy change. In the end, the success of responsive public policy really depends on deliberate strategies to create and keep an open dialogue between government and community members.

CARS, like many community development processes, focuses on building relationships, partnerships, and community resources into creative action plans that respond to community need. Unlike many other community development processes however, CARS does not stop at local community action. CARS intentionally expands the community development process to the level of public policy development and the pursuit of the larger common good. CARS links the work of a local community to the complexities of public policy development so that all communities benefit from the knowledge and lessons learned by local community efforts. In this way CARS uses the local development of responsive community services as a template for the exploration of responsive public policy for all. Creating responsive community services requires:

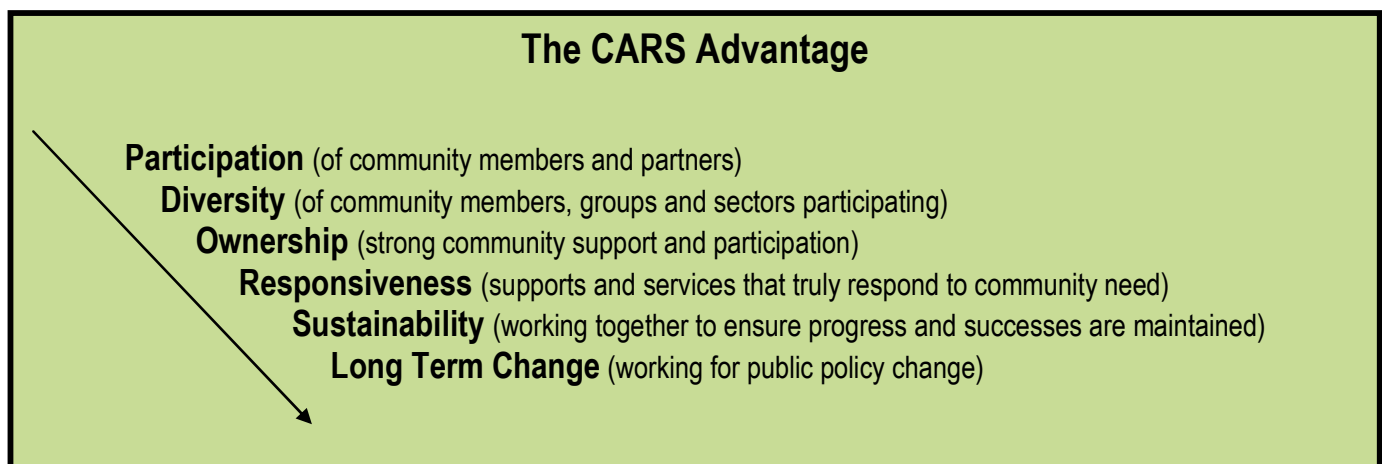
- Community development processes that are community directed
- Facilitation of community partnerships
- Collaboration between local participants, including users of a service, all levels of government, and service providers
- Opportunities to “think outside of the box” in describing and developing community solutions

The development of community services however, is greatly affected by current public policy. At the present time public policy:

- Often largely responds to an urban population and urban resources
- Is rarely flexible enough to respond to the changing needs of rural remote and northern communities
- Promotes fragmentation rather than integration of different service sectors, government departments, and/or local service providers
- Is reactive and rarely preventative in nature
- Is very susceptible to changes in political environment

For example, government funded services to rural remote and northern areas are currently unevenly available and generally delivered in separate “silos” that don’t connect with one another – the opposite of integrated services. This results in services that are not responsive to community needs. Only changes in policy can improve the situation. These changes in policy can only occur if collaboration exists between local communities and all levels of government.

Governments often define the parameters of service delivery. However, through years of experience many communities have learned that terms such as “accessibility”, “quality”, “affordability” and “inclusiveness” are not defined by political legislation, policies, or programs, but rather by a community’s willingness to recognize, value, listen and respond to each of its participants. Margaret Wheatly once said, “There is no power of change like a community discovering what it cares about”. It is this collective wisdom that drives the CARS process to focus on responsive” service development. It is the mix of community participation, government partnerships and the commitment to responsive service delivery that creates the opportunity for sustainable long term public policy change within the CARS process. Below is a diagram outlining the “CARS Advantage” for both service and public policy development.



There are many resources available which outline public policy in great detail. Many of these resources are linked to the CARS Web Site, or are used in CARS community training sessions. Visit the CARS Web Site for more information.