

Will Rogers once said, “*even if you are on the right track, you will get run over if you just sit there*”. So it is with community development processes. Many communities are on the right track creating innovative and responsive service ideas, only to have them run over by;

- Community conflicts
- Government, local organization and/or service provider rules
- Lack of human and/or financial resources
- A “we have always done it this way” attitude
- Lack of, or changes in, political will

Communities need to keep going despite these challenges - to be active participants in the change process. To do this, communities must build the skills to ensure that their good ideas actually move forward to influence public policy change and ensure responsive services and supports. In the CARS process we do this by using IEC – Information, Education and Collaboration.

Information

Information is power and power is mobilizing. The CARS process recognizes the importance of gathering information related to all aspects of the issue when trying to effect change. It is the ability to bring this information back to those working together – in a way that each partner and every participant understands - that facilitates the active participation of those working together for change.

For example, for many people, research is confusing and seen as only for academics. Many times research does not seem to apply to everyday life, relaying a message that rarely seems relevant to community people. During the CARS process, participants engage in the process of de-mystifying research – learning how to apply research and its findings to everyday life. Participants learn to understand research terms, and learn how to interpret and use research findings for their own purposes. Participants also learn how to do their own research, like developing, distributing and analyzing a community needs assessment.

When CARS participants learn how to utilize the research, data and information they have gathered from the broader community, including the results of their own needs assessment, they are able to create goals, objectives and activities that develop solutions which respond to community’s service needs. Participants begin to view research as a positive and effective tool in mobilizing community and in creating responsive services and supports.

Education

Public education is a collective effort in the CARS process involving two way dialogues within and between the community partners, including the government. In the end, you cannot influence public policy change without building relationships with actual policy makers, and this takes communication and education. To read information is one level of public education, however, to have the opportunity to discuss the information together facilitates increased understanding and ensures the opportunity for the information to be fully understood. Government and communities alike can be frustrated by the lack of opportunity to communicate with one another. It is impossible for public policy makers to be aware of and knowledgeable about all policy issues. For instance, many policy makers do not support community change, simply because their perceptions are based on inaccurate or outdated information. It is critical to make presentations to policy makers, have one on one discussions with them and invite them to community events and activities to help them understand the need for policy change.

At the same time, it is difficult for the community to understand the complicated world of public policy development. Both parties benefit from understanding one another. In the CARS process, community takes direct responsibility for public education of all its participants by creating opportunities for dialogue between participants and government representatives to ensure the development of responsive public policy for rural, remote, and northern residents.

Collaboration

To advocate is to participate in a democratic society. In CARS advocating for services requires collaboration with many members and many sectors of the community. Collaboration provides the impetus for social change in our communities. CARS strives to shine a light on the benefits of advocacy such as:

- Empowerment
- Civic engagement
- Development of responsive public policy

By collaborating together, communities can create increased government awareness of community concerns and give policy makers greater support when trying to influence public policy development. Gathering the information, educating the community, building support and collaborating with government to create viable solutions to policy issues, can raise the priority placed on community concerns and increase the likelihood of positive action. When communities use the positive power of advocacy to develop a united voice on common community issues, they move closer to the development of responsive public policy solutions.

