

*Mobilizing Communities  
Using the CARS Process*

The CARS process requires many opportunities for the broader community to participate in small group and large group activities. Listed below are some of the possible events and activities that could occur in your community as a result of the CARS process. The events and activities support the steps of the CARS process as indicated below.

**1. Knowledge and Network Event**

This session is focused on bringing community leaders together to introduce them to the concept of working in partnership to build responsive, integrated community services and supports. This is where you will set the stage as a “facilitator” of a community process, as opposed to someone who is going to solve the issue or do all the work. It is also a time to review a broad description of the services issue you are going to address and to re-enforce the importance of the community’s participation in building a community driven solution to service challenges.

At this event, the importance of “gathering community voices” is introduced. With participants of this meeting you will brainstorm the difference types of community groups that might be comfortable meeting and talking together about the service area. The Knowledge and Network Event is held to gauge community interest in developing service delivery solutions, and to identify emerging leaders for the cause. This event supports step one of the CARS process: Identifying Leadership.

**2. Gathering Voices**

To prepare for the development of a collective community vision and values you must gather the voices of past, present and future users of services and supports. You must also provide opportunities for service providers and government representatives to identify their perceptions of service issues, challenges and successes. Communities are made up of many types of groups (youth, parents, seniors, service providers, government people, committees, etc...). To ensure that we are building the CARS process on a solid foundation of trust and respect we initially gather people in homogenous groups (group of stay at home parents, group of working parents, front line workers, etc....).

Trust occurs when community members feel an openness to share ideas and feelings. Respect occurs when there is a willingness to listen to the ideas and feelings of other. Without trust and respect the CARS process breaks down. By allowing community groups to hold discussions in “safe” environments we are building both trust and respect in a slow and steady manner. We then take the voices of a homogenous group and add it to the voices of other homogenous groups in the community during the Fact Finding Forum. When we do this, community members begin to see the similarities between groups instead of the differences. It is these similarities that move the CARS process forward to collection vision, action and change.

Not everyone will be able to attend scheduled meetings or events. To ensure as many community members as possible have an opportunity to participate in the CARS process, small gatherings or kitchen table meetings, one to one discussions with community members or getting on the agenda of a committee or group that meets on a regular basis seem to be the most effective way to “gather voices” in the community. These activities supports step two of the CARS process: Setting the Stage.

### **3. Fact Finding Forum**

This session builds a vision and operational values for the development of responsive community services. It is the beginning of ensuring a “*made in the community*” approach to service delivery that is responsive to the particular community’s needs. This is a critical part of the CARS process. The Fact Finding Forum introduces participants to the messages and themes gathered during the “gathering voices” activities. These messages and themes help participants complete step three in the CARS process: Creating a Common Community Vision and Values.

### **4. Community Needs Assessment**

Once you have a vision, you may want to gather more objective and formal information regarding service needs in your community related to your vision. You may do this by distributing a community needs assessment or survey. You can develop your own needs assessment or survey, or you can use one that has already been developed for your issue area. Needs Assessments will help you gather further information on what services community members need and what these services should look like. This information could greatly assist your group in moving forward with a community strategy for developing responsive services and supports in your community.

In addition to your own needs assessment of the issue area, you may also review other research that may apply to your community and to the service issue you are addressing. The CARS process helps participants understand research, and assists participants in interpreting and using research findings to create effective strategies and actions.

### **5. Community Strategy Session: Moving Forward**

This session builds on the vision and values of the Fact Finding Forum to create a strategy for developing services in your local community. The session includes planning for action through the development of goals, objectives and actions. And session also sets up the framework for evaluating your progress as you move forward. This meeting covers steps 4 and 5 of the CARS process.

### **6. Community Strategy Session: Mobilizing Partners**

This session maps the resources and partners needed to move ahead with the community action plan you have created. The part of the process also includes building the community's capacity around proposal writing and the development of non-traditional partners to support the achievement of the community vision. This session covers steps 6 and 7 of the CARS Process.

### **7. Working For Change**

As they progress in their work, many community groups begin to realize that what happens in at a community level is linked to policy development at all levels of government. Sometimes public policy is preventing you from moving ahead, and sometimes your creative ideas or critical issues, if presented to government officials and politicians, could improve and change public policy in your service area. In this session we explore the link between community service development and the creation of public policies at all levels of government. The session focuses on building strong, effective partnerships with government representatives and reviews ways to get your issues, challenges and successes into the public arena, for the betterment of all rural remote and northern communities. The session looks at using IEC (Information, Education and Collaboration) as a means to initiate responsive public policy change through community action. This session covers steps 8-10 of the CARS process.