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Connecting the Power of People to the Power of Place:

How Community-Based Organizations Influence Neighbourhood Collective Agency

Jessica Carrière, Rob Howarth,
and Emily Paradis

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Executive Summary

Neighbourhoods, and the community-based organizations that serve them, are at a crossroads. Economic changes and austerity policies are causing increased inequality, polarization, and segregation within and between neighbourhoods. Residents must juggle multiple responsibilities under intensifying pressures and with access to fewer resources and supports. With the retreat of the state from ensuring adequate income security and services, community-based organizations are left holding the bag, trying to meet the basic needs of their communities with unpredictable and insufficient funding.

We undertook this research to explore the ways in which residents and local community organizations can work together to address rising inequality and diminishing resources at the neighbourhood level.

Neighbourhood collective agency is a dynamic capacity that responds to these conditions on multiple levels. It strengthens the optimism, pride, belonging, and connection that are eroded by inequality; it brings neighbours together to improve their immediate local conditions of daily life; and it is a powerful force for demanding systemic change. We define neighbourhood collective agency as:

> *Residents' desire and capacity to work together to improve daily life and promote equity and social justice in their neighbourhood.*

In this report, we ask how collective agency emerges in neighbourhoods, and how community-based organizations may promote or inhibit it.

Neighbourhood collective agency connects the power of people to the power of place. The organizations whose work we examined recognize the power inherent in the communities they serve, and aim to foster this potential at all levels of their work. The information they have shared through this research can be of use to other community-based organizations that wish to promote collective agency in their neighbourhoods.

Neighbourhood collective agency is an important response to the broader trends of growing inequality in our society. While incomes and amenities in some neighbourhoods are steadily increasing, many neighbourhoods are experiencing a decline in average incomes, and deterioration in the quality of housing and services. These conditions threaten residents' well-being and limit their access to opportunities.

Neighbourhood collective agency is what enables residents to come together to respond to these trends. Responses may range from neighbours sharing support and resources, to groups working together to demand change. This capacity is especially important in neighbourhoods where the economic system and public policies create hardship for individuals and families.

Therefore, we are trying to learn more about how community-based organizations can help foster collective agency in Toronto neighbourhoods facing such hardship.

Neighbourhood collective agency connects the power of place with the power of people, and leverages local experiences to contribute to larger-scale system changes.

The power of place

People care about the places where they live and are affected by the conditions they experience there. Things like housing quality, transit connections, recreation opportunities, walkability to local services, schools and businesses, as well as a sense of safety and security, are all part of people's experiences of where they live.

The power of people

Neighbourhoods are one important place where people can work together to make change. Residents can make important local improvements together, and attract additional resources and investment to their communities. This is good in and of itself. But as importantly, residents can build upon these collective achievements and support calls for system-wide changes that improve conditions for others as well.

Community-based organizations contribute to system change

To achieve justice, equity, and opportunity for all will require things like more affordable housing, a labour market that provides better jobs and employment security, improved income support programs, reduced discrimination, and improved access for all to health and social services. Neighbourhood collective agency has the potential source to generate widespread demand for systemic changes needed to reach these goals.

Community-based organizations are committed to improving community conditions. This is an explicit part of their mission statements, and a strong motivation for the dedicated people who work and volunteer in them. Many of these organizations have realized that, even though they deliver important services each day that improve the lives of many residents, conditions in their neighbourhoods are worsening.

Many community-based organizations continue to view leadership development and community capacity-building as an integral part of their efforts to provide day-to-day program supports for individuals and families. But over the past 30 years, these community development practices have not been effectively profiled or championed as an essential function of community-based organizations.

This report is intended to re-focus attention on this realm of community-based organizations' impact, which remains poorly articulated and understood. We hope to present community-based organizations and interested funders with a strengthened case for augmenting service-delivery activities with strategies designed to facilitate residents' own capacities for action.

We believe there is considerable urgency to this effort. There is growing concern within the community sector that an over-reliance on service provision may inhibit collective agency and sustain the very systems that fuel deteriorating conditions in neighbourhoods.

In the long run, efforts to address inequality and exclusion in our society will be difficult to sustain without intentional practices and dedicated resources focused on supporting residents' desire and capacity to work together to improve daily life and promote equity and social justice.

Research findings

This report draws upon three key sources:

1. more than two years of discussion and analysis by a working group of community practitioners and scholars;
2. a broad review of the literature;
3. interviews and focus groups with staff and community leaders in three community-based organizations in Toronto.

Through this research, we learned how local agencies have set a goal to enhance agency in their communities; the barriers they encounter and the enablers that assist them in this work; the agency-promoting objectives they pursue; the specific everyday practices that put these objectives into action; and the indicators that help them to recognize when these efforts are successful within their organizations and in the neighbourhood as a whole. Examples of agency-enhancing organizational practices identified in the report include:

Stories, values, and assumptions

- Promoting a workplace culture centered on learning and community capacity-building.
- Promoting non-hierarchical language to encourage power-sharing, such as the use of the term 'residents' versus 'clients.'
- Sharing stories of achievements and spreading the word when an initiative is successful.
- Creating opportunities to identify, popularize, and celebrate narratives of community members as active participants in making change in their community (e.g., leadership awards and profiles).

Individual-level practices

- Acknowledging the structural determinants of individual struggles and developing solutions that account for systemic barriers to individual and group advancement.
- Providing an inclusive environment in which diverse cultures and traditions are honoured and discrimination is recognized and challenged.
- Providing information about opportunities, networks, activities, and campaigns to program participants and removing barriers to participation.
- Expecting reciprocity and providing opportunities and expectation that participants will contribute their skills and insight.
- Providing concrete leadership opportunities, whereby active community leaders and partners are able to lead and make decisions within the organization and in their communities.

Group-level practices

- Initiating group activities in response to emergent crises, events, and opportunities in the neighbourhood.

- Devoting space, resources, and staff time to social and cultural events and community markets to inspire increased resident engagement and connect resident leaders.
- Intentionally fostering connections and understanding across differences.

Intra-organizational practices

- Providing agency support for advocacy and social action committees.
- Establishing and maintaining programmatic flexibility and power-sharing practices in order to support community ownership.
- Hiring members of the communities served and ensuring that the staff team reflects the diversity of the community.

Inter-organizational and neighbourhood-level practices

- Ensuring organizational commitment to inter-agency planning, collaboration, capacity-building, and action.
- Promoting staff participation in and support for neighbourhood networks, including service providers, businesses, community groups, and resident leaders.
- Providing outside groups with access to meeting space and administrative supports.
- Positioning the organization within a broader ecology of community resources and networks, as one point of connection, not the only centre of activity.
- Conducting frequent and diverse outreach activities—such as door-to-door canvassing, community walk-arounds, community meetings, community asset mapping, participatory research, and information tables in community gathering places—that enable staff to connect with residents to understand their issues and interests and connect them to other people and opportunities.

Local improvements and systemic-change practices

- Raising awareness about how program participants, local residents, and community conditions are affected by public policy choices and by systemic barriers to improvement.
- Supporting and strengthening resident-led actions to identify and advocate for policy reforms needed to improve community conditions.
- Providing space for community organizing and hosting community meetings on critical local and systemic policy issues, to establish the organization as a conduit for collective action in the community.

Implications for neighbourhoods and organizations

This research has shown that neighbourhood collective agency operates at many levels: individual, group, organizational, neighbourhood-wide. The work of community-based organizations also takes place at these levels. This means that organizations can influence collective agency not only directly—through activities that promote group action and policy advocacy—but also indirectly, through programs and services, organizational structures and policies, and inter-organizational and neighbourhood networks. This opens up opportunities for community-based organizations to shape their work at all levels to foster collective agency.

Collective agency appears to be enhanced when community-based organizations and their funders commit to achieving impacts across multiple levels. While stand-alone efforts to empower individuals, support group cohesion, and advocate for system changes are all worthy activities in and of themselves, connecting these efforts more intentionally within a neighbourhood can create and sustain collective agency over time.

However, when an organization's work is shaped by short-term activities, limited scope of analysis, a focus on individual change, and a reluctance to take action for social change, its activities may impede the development of neighbourhood collective agency. Without an overarching commitment to neighbourhood collective agency as an organizational goal, the everyday activities and practices of organizations are less likely to promote it.

The scale of the obstacles facing neighbourhoods can be overwhelming. But our research suggests that simple, concrete practices and everyday interventions can cumulatively help to shift the dynamic.

A good first step for organizations intent on promoting collective agency is to take stock of where agency-enhancing practices are already happening in their work. Also helpful is to look for examples of collective agency in the neighbourhood, and consider how the organization can support, align with, and learn from these. We hope that this report, and the practical mapping tools found in the Appendix, can assist in these explorations.

Authors

Jessica Carrière is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Waterloo, where she explores the social and structural impacts of UberX and the sharing economy. She has worked as a policy researcher with the Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership and the Wellesley Institute, and continues to research and publish on topics of neighbourhood change, community organizing, and urban social movements.

Rob Howarth has worked in and with a number of Toronto's non-profit community organizations for the past 30 years. He is currently the part-time Executive Director of the Toronto Neighbourhood Centres (TNC), and a private consultant providing research, facilitation, writing, and policy supports to a range of non-profit stakeholders. His work with TNC supports the collective capacity-building and policy efforts of an association of 28 multi-service community agencies across the city. Rob is also a policy advisory committee member of the Ontario Non-profit Network's policy committee and a founding board member of Canadians for Tax Fairness. Rob has been an active participant in many multi-stakeholder initiatives, including the City of Toronto's *Social Development Plan* (2001) and *Community Partnership Strategy* (2009/10), and the City Summit Alliance/United Way Toronto's *Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force* (2005). Rob has most recently been engaged in Ontario-wide initiatives (via the *Community Social Services Campaign*, and the *Ontario Nonprofit Network*) promoting the value of a more robust and intentional relationship between the provincial government and Ontario's non-profit sector. Through this work and his varied community research, facilitation and mobilization activities Rob is particularly interested in the various ways in which community members may be supported to play a central role in creating a more equitable and inclusive society.

Emily Paradis is Senior Research Associate, Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto. Her activism and scholarship focus on how marginalized communities claim spaces and rights in the city. A researcher, advocate, and front-line service provider on issues of homelessness for 25 years, her research has examined homelessness among women and families, the human rights dimensions of homelessness and housing, community-based research and action, and participatory interventions to address socio-spatial inequalities between and within urban neighbourhoods. She uses a feminist, anti-racist, and decolonizing framework in these interventions. She is research manager of the Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership; adjunct faculty in the Urban Studies program at Innis College, University of Toronto; member of the Right to Housing Coalition; collaborator on the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness; and founding ally member of the Lived Experience Advisory Council. She received her PhD in 2009 from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto.

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1. Introduction: Why we are doing this research

We undertook this research to explore the ways in which residents and local community organizations can work together to address rising inequality and diminishing resources at the neighbourhood level. Specifically, we are interested in something called *neighbourhood collective agency*, which we define as:

> *Residents' desire and capacity to work together to improve daily life and promote equity and social justice in their neighbourhood.*

Let's break out this definition in more detail.

1. Neighbourhood collective agency originates with **residents**, from the ground up. While it can be fostered or inhibited by outside factors, it relies on residents for its existence.
2. It is rooted in residents' individual and collective **desire** to work together, which includes elements of trust, belonging, caring, confidence, and attachment to the neighbourhood.
3. Neighbourhood collective agency depends on residents' **capacity**. In order to work together effectively, residents require *resources* (such as time, space, and the fulfillment of basic needs), *skills* (such as how to organize a meeting or lobby an elected official), and *knowledge* (such as an understanding of how individual struggles are linked to social and economic structures).
4. Collective agency is manifest when residents **work together**. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts: many individuals working separately do not have the same potential as collective work to address neighbourhood issues.
5. Neighbourhood collective agency is often expressed and cultivated through collective efforts, both formal and informal, **to improve daily life** by meeting basic needs, creating and enhancing community spaces, and advocating for services and investments.
6. We are interested in instances in which collective agency promotes **equity and social justice**. Neighbours may also work together to limit access to resources, to exclude certain people, or to increase the wealth and influence of already-wealthy and influential neighbourhoods, but these kinds of collective efforts are not of interest here.

7. Finally, it is based **in the neighbourhood**. Though collective efforts may address broader issues and call for policy changes at the municipal, provincial, or federal levels, they are situated in the neighbourhood and aim to improve neighbourhood conditions.

In this report, we ask how community-based organizations can promote neighbourhood collective agency. In particular, we are interested in Toronto's low-income neighbourhoods, and the role that multi-service organizations might play in fostering collective agency in those sites.[1]

We consider neighbourhood collective agency to be an important response to the broader trends of growing inequality in our society. We view inequality as a predictable result of a global economic system that puts profits ahead of people and the environment.

Instead of helping mitigate the impacts of this economic system, many government policies have transferred its costs and risks onto individuals, families, and neighbourhoods. In Canada, government policies on taxation, trade, immigration, education, housing, labour market regulation, and income security have changed in the past 40 years. As a result of these policy shifts, Canada is now experiencing one of the fastest rates of growth in income inequality of any OECD nation.

This rising inequality is plain to see in our city's neighbourhoods. While incomes and amenities in some neighbourhoods are increasing, many neighbourhoods are experiencing a decline in average incomes and deterioration in the quality of housing and services. These conditions threaten residents' well-being and limit their access to opportunities.

These widening gaps between neighbourhoods are linked to other dimensions of social inequality. Non-racialized, Canadian-born, English-speaking Torontonians are over-represented in high-income neighbourhoods, while immigrants and refugees, members of racialized groups, woman-headed households, and persons with disabilities are over-represented in neighbourhoods where average incomes are low (Hulchanski 2010).[2]

Neighbourhood collective agency is what enables residents to come together to respond to these trends. These responses may range from neighbours sharing support and resources, to groups working together to demand change. This capacity is especially important in neighbourhoods in which the economic system and public policies are creating hardship for individuals and families. Therefore, we need to learn how community-based organizations can help foster collective agency in Toronto neighbourhoods where conditions and opportunities are declining.

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1 In this report we mainly refer to "community-based organizations." The terms "multi-service organizations," "neighbourhood organizations," "neighbourhood centres," and "agencies" could also be used to describe our sites of interest. In all cases we are referring to *non-profit organizations* that are *based in and serve* a defined neighbourhood or set of neighbourhoods, and that *provide multiple kinds of social services* (including, for example, settlement assistance, employment counselling, literacy tutoring, housing help, and services for specific populations such as older adults, youth, women, and families). While multi-service agencies are key neighbourhood-based service providers in Toronto, and their place-based mission often includes formal or tacit roles of community development and community organizing, many face particular challenges with regards to funding and evaluation systems that may tend to limit these roles. These challenges will be discussed later in this paper.

2 Data and map on over-representation of persons with disabilities based on analysis of 2006 PALS, on file with author.

1.1 The value of neighbourhood collective agency

We view neighbourhood collective agency as a potential that connects the power of place with the power of people, and leverages local experiences to contribute to larger scale system changes.

1.1.1 The power of place

People care about where they live and are affected by the conditions they experience there. Things like housing quality, transit connections, recreation opportunities, walkability to local services, schools, and businesses, as well as a sense of safety and security, are all part of people's experience of where they live. Our neighbourhoods are places for connecting with others, celebrating and learning together, understanding each other's similarities and differences, creating meaning, and grappling with conflicts.

1.1.2 The power of people

Neighbourhoods are one important place where the power of people working together to make change can be experienced. Other important sites include workplaces, places of worship, and cultural associations. People working together in neighbourhoods can achieve important local improvements together, and attract additional resources and investment to their communities. This is good in and of itself. But as importantly, they can build upon these collective achievements and support calls for system-wide changes to improve conditions for others as well.

1.1.3 Contributing to system change

Achieving justice, equity, and opportunity for all will require more affordable housing, a labour market that provides better jobs and employment security, improved income support programs, a reduction in discrimination, and increased access to important health and social services. At present, governments are not using their powers of taxation, public investment, and market regulation to achieve these goals. Neighbourhood collective agency is a potential source of demand for systemic change, from the bottom up in our communities, informed by the trust, connections, interests, creativity, and experiences of neighbours working together to improve their lives.

1.2 How did we get here?

In recent years, we have heard a lot about the concentration of wealth into fewer and fewer hands: "the 1 percent." It is readily apparent that the growth and prosperity of our economy are not shared by all.

This drive to concentrate private wealth necessitates the constriction of public control over assets. This takes the form of increased demands for doing more with less, cutting taxes, finding efficiencies, reducing government investment, and removing democratic controls over more and more parts of our economy (Porter 2013, 1–2). The championing of these measures, along with people's day-to-day experience of hardship, has helped reinforce a widespread sense that scarcity is an inevitable reality. This constriction of public resources and the discourse of scarcity are together known as "austerity" (Bramall 2013).

The impacts of austerity are experienced as intense pressures for restraint that ripple outwards across society, from the individual, to the family, community, local organizations, public institutions, and governments. At each level, this pressure is both felt and responded to in complex ways (Oxfam 2013).

Austerity does not affect all people equally. Cuts to services deemed "non-essential" have the effect of shifting the cost of those services onto those who need them the most. Groups already facing injustice and exclusion—including racialized and Indigenous peoples, immigrants and refugees, women, people with disabilities, youth, older adults, LGBTQ people, psychiatric survivors, and socially isolated individuals—are disproportionately affected.

At the same time, mechanisms for recycling accumulated wealth into the broader economy have been hobbled. Canada's tax and transfer systems are less effective at redistribution than they once were. Union formation and bargaining strength has been limited by various reforms. And our governments impose fewer requirements on private firms to return some benefits to the community (Procyk 2014, 12–13).

These dynamics of economic inequality manifest themselves in concentrated geographies of privilege and poverty. In Canada's urban centres, the past 40 years have witnessed a shift from the prevalence of mixed-income and middle-income neighbourhoods to a significant increase in neighbourhoods where average incomes are very high or very low (Hulchanski 2010).

1.3 Why neighbourhoods?

Resident groups and local community organizations working to help people navigate this terrain of poverty and isolation, find housing and employment, settle in a new country, improve local conditions, and build more hopeful futures, have unique vantage points with regard to these trends.

Neighbourhoods can be sites of connection and belonging as people build upon their day-to-day patterns, familiarity, and a sense of attachment. Informal networks of support can emerge and be built upon to address immediate needs, create opportunities for celebration, and mount efforts to improve local economic, environmental, and social conditions.

Resident-generated initiatives can be sustained over time with the creation of more formalized community organizations that provide services, local employment, and capacity-building. When residents succeed in joining with others to achieve local improvements, or resist unwanted change, they experience neighbourhoods as sites of refuge, mutual support, and possibility, even amidst the realities of hardship and restraint.

With austerity policies, governments are increasingly shifting the work of service delivery to community-based organizations, where lower wages, volunteers, and fundraising reduce the cost of services. In some respects, this is good for communities: neighbourhood organizations can adapt generic public service models to suit unique local realities. Many community-based organizations have grown in scale to take up these opportunities.

But government funding of community organizations is often inadequate to sustain effective efforts over time. Short-term project contracts and governments' unwillingness to fund the core capacity of most multi-service organizations have led to uncoordinated programming and an in-

creased reliance on precarious employment models. Meanwhile, tighter regulations and new audit regimes limit incorporated charities' efforts to advocate on matters of public policy.

Canada's public policy and economic systems thus coalesce at the neighbourhood level in ways that present residents and their local organizations with contradictory opportunities. Neighbours' shared efforts to respond to the devastating effects of austerity may help generate new local capacities along with growing demands for systemic reform. Or they may reinforce the apparent inevitability of and continued competition over declining opportunities. Our research on neighbourhood collective agency investigated the factors influencing resident and organizations' actions under these circumstances.

1.4 What this means for community-based organizations

Community-based organizations are committed to improving community conditions. This is an explicit part of their mission statements, and a strong motivation for the dedicated people who work and volunteer in them. Many of these organizations have realized that, even though they deliver important services each day that improve the lives of many residents, conditions in their neighbourhoods are worsening. Though services are important, they are not reversing disturbing trends of increased poverty, exclusion, and inequality.

Many neighbourhood organizations continue to view leadership development and community capacity-building as an integral part of their efforts to provide day-to-day program supports for individuals and families. Creatively shaping program models and bending service-delivery funding to include these community development practices has been an historical feature of those organizations that draw their inspiration from a social justice and empowerment framework.

Over the past 30 years, these community development practices have not been effectively profiled or championed as an essential function for community-based organizations. Today, where resources to support this work have been sustained, they exist as incidental activities, not highlighted as central project deliverables.

In part, this is a result of organizations trying to maintain some capacity to support residents' civic engagement, claims-making, and dissent within a government-funding context that now actively discourages such efforts. In a funding context governed by quantitative and efficiency-focused outcome measures, organizations have also struggled to articulate the value of their community-building efforts in ways that would compel funders to recognize these roles as an essential complement to service delivery.

Multi-service organizations have experienced a persistent reluctance on the part of government funders to support the full costs of administrative systems and program development required to operate effective and responsive organizations. Governments more readily take on this administrative funding role for single-service organizations. While there are a few examples of governments funding the core functions of multi-service organizations (for example, Ontario's Community Health Centres and the City of Toronto's city-funded community centres), this is not a widespread practice. Where the full costs of delivering community programs are not provided by government, multi-service organizations are pressured to direct funds received from foundations, the United Way, and donors towards system infrastructure demands. These pressures

have made it increasingly difficult for multi-service organizations to safeguard their more flexible non-program-delivery funds to sustain important community development functions.

This report is intended to re-focus attention on this activity by community-based organizations, which remains poorly articulated and understood. We hope that this report will offer community-based organizations and interested funders a strengthened case for augmenting service-delivery activities with strategies that are intentionally designed to facilitate residents' own capacities for action.

We believe there is considerable urgency to this effort. There is growing concern within the community sector that an over-reliance on service provision may inhibit collective agency, and may even sustain the very systems that are fuelling deteriorating conditions in our neighbourhoods.

In the long run, efforts to address inequality and exclusion in our society will be difficult to sustain without intentional practices and dedicated resources focused on supporting residents' desire and capacity to work together to improve daily life and promote equity and social justice.

1.5 This report

In Part 2 of this report, we describe our project and introduce the three organizations we visited during our research.

Part 3 presents what we learned about how community-based organizations influence neighbourhood collective agency. We describe the broader neighbourhood context for collective agency, and the place of community-based organizations within that. We next turn to the social, economic, and political conditions that affect both residents and agencies and the implications of these conditions for efforts to foster agency.

Drawing upon what we learned from the organizations we visited, we then consider the specific ways in which they foster neighbourhood collective agency:

- what conditions may act as enablers or barriers to agency;
- what objectives organizations pursue in their agency-enhancing efforts;
- what specific practices promote agency at each level of the organization's work;
- what signs they look for to know whether their efforts to enhance agency are successful, and to identify spaces where agency is flourishing in their neighbourhoods.

In Part 4, we consider the implications of these learnings for community-based organizations, funders, and residents. In the current social, economic, and political context, how can organizations shift the focus of their work from mitigating the impacts of inequality to targeting its root causes? How do systems of funding and evaluation need to change in order to support this shift? And finally, how do we get started?

2. Methods & context: What we did and where

Our research did not aim to exhaustively document the emergence, evidence, and impacts of collective agency in neighbourhoods. Instead, we sought to better define its elements, and in particular, to understand the role that community-based organizations play in fostering or inhibiting it. Through this project, we have developed tools that can be used by groups, organizations, and researchers to conduct deeper investigations into the operations of collective agency at individual, group, and neighbourhood levels; the interplay of multiple actors in producing and sustaining it; and the transformations it brings about.

2.1 Methods: What we did

This report draws upon three key sources: more than four years of discussion and analysis by the Collective Efficacy Working Group, a literature review (Carrière 2016), and a number of interviews and focus groups with staff in three community-based organizations in Toronto.

2.1.1 The Collective Efficacy Working Group

Our research was initiated by the Collective Efficacy Working Group,[3] a community-university collaboration involving University of Toronto researchers, West Neighbourhood House, WoodGreen Community Services, Public Interest Strategy and Communications, United Way Toronto, and Toronto Neighbourhood Centres.

The group was established in 2012 as part of a long-term program of research called the Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership (NCRP). One of the key goals of the NCRP is to examine place-specific effects in mitigating or exacerbating processes of socio-spatial inequality. Our project fits within this broad research objective, exploring the role that neighbourhood level policy and program interventions can play in reducing inequality. Community-based organizations, funders, and policy makers require a better understanding of the role of collective agency in neighbourhood outcomes.

3 At its inception, our project employed the term “collective efficacy.” For reasons we explain below, we have revised our terminology to *collective agency*.

2.1.2 Literature review

We undertook a literature review as part of the initial stage of the research process. The aim of the review was to survey existing theory and research in order to establish a framework for our own research.

The concept of "collective efficacy," first articulated by sociologist Robert Sampson and his colleagues in their studies of Chicago neighbourhoods, seemed a useful starting point for our project (Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997). Sampson defined collective efficacy as the ability of neighbours to cultivate mutual trust, generate shared expectations, and exert informal social controls in their neighbourhood.

In reviewing the literature on collective efficacy, however, we learned that this concept is closely linked with the theory of "neighbourhood effects," which suggest that neighbourhoods themselves exert a significant effect on residents' life chances, independent of larger economic, social, and systemic factors. Proponents of this theory tend to focus on neighbourhood-level phenomena—including what Sampson refers to as "social disorganization," the opposite of collective efficacy—to explain neighbourhood problems such as crime.

A number of observers raise concerns about this theory. In their study of social infrastructure in Scarborough, for example, geographers Deborah Cowen and Vanessa Parlette (2011) explain that neighbourhood effects theory locates the origins of social problems within the neighbourhood and assigns responsibility for these problems to the people who live there, thereby disregarding broader structural factors such as disinvestment and discrimination. Policy interventions grounded in a neighbourhood effects framework, they suggest, have limited impact, because they focus on changing the neighbourhood rather than on addressing the social, political, and economic determinants of neighbourhood-level problems.

In order to distance ourselves from the problematic origins of the term "collective efficacy" and emphasize the importance of residents' collective action to address structural inequities, we have adopted the term "collective agency" to describe the phenomenon we are examining.

Our literature review also underscored a lack of scholarship pertaining to the role of community-based organizations in influencing collective efficacy and supporting residents to develop their own capacities for collective action. While recent literature has examined the influence of local community factors and interpersonal networks on organizations, there is a gap in academic scholarship with regards to the role that organizations play in shaping community outcomes.

This report will address this disparity, focusing on the service-delivery and advocacy efforts that organizations engage in to foster and sustain capacity for neighbourhood collective agency, and to leverage that capacity toward larger-scale system changes.

2.1.3 Research questions

This report is animated by two key questions:

1. What are the impacts of community-based organizations (particularly those in low-income and disadvantaged neighbourhoods) on neighbourhood collective agency, beyond their outcomes at the individual and household levels?

2. What strategies can community-based organizations use to foster and sustain capacity for neighbourhood collective agency?

2.1.4 Interviews and focus groups

In exploring the contributions of community-based organizations to collective agency, this research aims to move beyond a description of social capital, or community-based social "resources," in order to describe and identify the work that community-based organizations *actually do* to create and sustain collective agency in neighbourhoods (Putnam 1993).

Two members of the working group spoke with staff and residents in three community-based organizations—West Neighbourhood House, Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, and East Scarborough Storefront—to learn about the participants' day-to-day activities, and how these might relate to collective agency in the organization and in their neighbourhood. About 40 people participated. Focus groups reflected a mix of agency staff, volunteers, program participants, and administrators of the three organizations, as well as community leaders from the broader neighbourhood. The discussions were selectively transcribed, and analyzed using grounded theory methods through which themes and categories emerged from the data.

These discussions provided information on the practices and roles of community-based organizations in promoting or diminishing neighbourhood collective agency. The focus groups and literature review also informed the development of tools to enable in-depth assessments of neighbourhood collective agency: an inventory of agency-promoting practices and a tool for mapping neighbourhood networks (see the Appendices).

2.2 Context: The neighbourhoods and organizations we visited

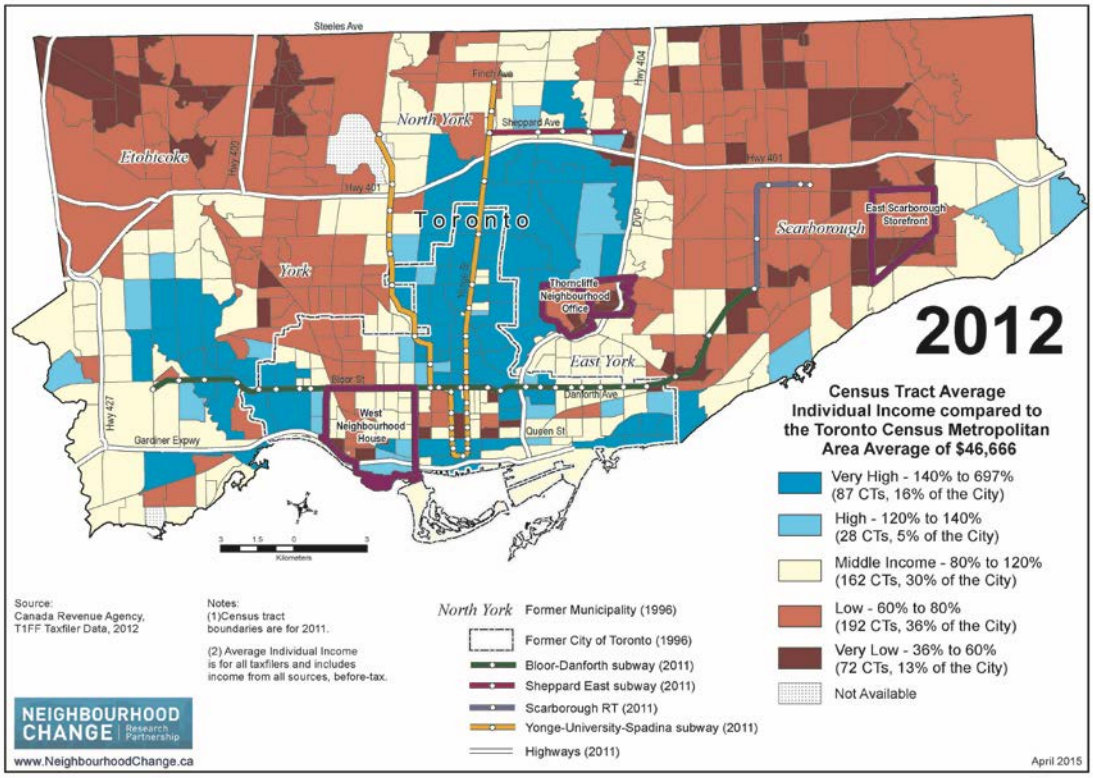
The three organizations that provided information for this study—West Neighbourhood House, Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, and East Scarborough Storefront—serve three very different neighbourhoods across the City of Toronto. Their catchment areas, in relationship to neighbourhood average individual income, are shown in Figure 1.

These agencies' histories, mandates, models, and services are as distinct as the neighbourhoods they serve. Together, they provide a sense of the broad range of community-based organizations in Toronto. Information about the organizations and the neighbourhoods they serve is summarized in Tables 1 and 2.

2.2.1 West Neighbourhood House

Known to staff and residents as "the House," West Neighbourhood House (formerly St. Christopher House) was founded in 1912 and is one of Toronto's oldest community-based organizations. It serves a cluster of seven neighbourhoods in west-central Toronto, bounded by Bloor to the north, Bathurst to the east, Roncesvalles to the west, and Lake Ontario to the south, with a combined population over 110,000, by far the most populous catchment of the organizations we visited. West Neighbourhood House is a large, multi-service agency with an annual budget over $10 million from a range of sources, principally various provincial government ministries and the City of Toronto, as well as United Way Toronto, the federal government, and donations.

Figure 1: 2012 Average individual income in Toronto and the three catchment areas



Long a stable area of working-class immigrant neighbourhoods, the House's catchment area has undergone rapid gentrification in recent years. As long-time residents age in place and their homes are eventually sold, high-income families move into the neighbourhood's century-old single-family houses and young professionals occupy newly built condominiums. These zones contrast sharply with a very low-income sector of deteriorating private rental buildings, social housing, and rooming houses in the area's southwest corner, Parkdale. The area's poverty rate remains higher than Toronto's at 29 percent.[4] Residential gentrification has been accompanied by commercial change, with several main streets shifting in character as locally owned small businesses serving local ethnic communities are replaced by bars, restaurants, and galleries that draw younger upper-income patrons from across Toronto.

In 2006, 45 percent of residents of this area were born outside Canada, most were of European origin, and just over one-third of residents belonged to "visible minority" groups.[5] Portuguese is the leading non-English language, spoken at home by 7 percent of the population. The House's large catchment area is diverse, with Portuguese, Chinese, Italian, Tibetan, Vietnamese, Tamil, Roma, and Polish communities. Nevertheless, in contrast with the other two neighbourhoods we visited, the area has a lower proportion of immigrant and racialized residents than the City

4 Based on Census 2006, persons in private households below the Low Income Cut-Off before tax.

5 Throughout this report we use data from the 2006 census for variables such as immigrant and "visible minority" (racialized) status, because the 2011 National Household Survey's methodology has been found to be unreliable, particularly in relation to under-represented groups at a small geographic scale, and the results of the 2016 census are not yet available. To learn more, see http://neighbourhoodchange.ca/homepage/nhs/

of Toronto as a whole, and its role as a major settlement area for new immigrants and refugees has declined in recent years as housing costs in the area have risen.

West Neighbourhood House was founded as part of the Settlement House movement, and retains that movement's emphasis on community organizing for social justice. From its seven locations throughout its neighbourhoods, the House offers a broad array of programs focused on settlement, employment, literacy, and the needs of women, children, youth, and seniors. The balance of these services is shifting as the area's population changes. For example, while it continues to offer vital assistance to the area's large population of older adult homeowners who are aging in place, the House also serves a population of young families that is growing as the older adult population declines. In 2014 it changed its name from St. Christopher House, in order to better represent the diversity of its community.

Table 1: Organization characteristics

	West Neighbourhood House	Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office	East Scarborough Storefront
Year established	1912	1985	2001
Neighbourhoods served	Seven	Two (mainly, though no catchment area)	One
Type	Multi-service neighbourhood centre	Multi-service neighbourhood centre	Community development organization and service hub
Locations	Seven	Four (plus three satellite programs in other neighbourhoods)	Two (bringing together services from 35 agencies)
Annual Budget (2013–14)	$10.9 million	$6.3 million	$1.4 million
Main funding source (and secondary)	Provincial (City, United Way, federal, foundations, donations)	Federal (provincial, United Way, foundations, donations)	Provincial (City, United Way)
Organizational structure	Incorporated charitable non-profit	Incorporated charitable non-profit	Project of Tides Canada, a national shared platform.
Governance structure	Board of Directors	Board of Directors	Tides Canada holds legal and fiduciary responsibility. An advisory committee of resident leaders and agencies oversees activities.
Model	Settlement house	Community development	Community backbone organization

2.2.2 Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office

Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, or TNO as it is known in its neighbourhood, has no official catchment area, but mainly serves residents of Thorncliffe Park and Flemingdon Park in the former City of East York. The area has a population of almost 40,000, most living in Thorncliffe Park. TNO was founded 30 years ago and has since grown to include four local offices, as well as satellite programs in three other areas of the city. It is a multi-service agency with an annual budget of over $6 million, a large proportion of which comes from federal funding, with smaller amounts from the province, the United Way, foundations, and donations.

Thorncliffe Park is a dense planned community of high-rise private rental apartments developed in the 1960s and 1970s. Built to house 12,500 people, these aging buildings are now home to between 20,000 and 30,000 residents, one-quarter of whom are children under 14.[6] Always an immigrant settlement area, Thorncliffe Park began as a middle-income neighbourhood but, along with neighbouring Flemingdon Park, has seen a steep decline in average income in the past two decades. In spite of the residents' high rate of postsecondary education, 15 percent of its working-age adult population is designated as "working poor," and 30 percent as "non-working poor."[7]

In the 2006 census, more than two-thirds of the residents of Thorncliffe and Flemingdon identified themselves as immigrants, many of them newcomers who had arrived in the previous five years. More than three-quarters belonged to a racialized group. While more than 40 percent of immigrant residents are of South Asian origin, predominantly from Pakistan, the area's population is very culturally diverse, including sizeable groups with origins in Europe, the Middle East, and the Philippines. More than 12 percent of residents speak Urdu at home, and Farsi, Gujarati, Tagalog, and Tamil are also commonly spoken.

TNO was founded in 1985 to provide settlement services, employment assistance, and language training within a community development model. It currently offers child and family support services, English-language training for children and adults, employment supports, assistance for newcomers, and specialized programs for seniors and youth. Its innovative programming aims to address the barriers residents face on the basis of their race, immigrant identity, and/or gender. For example, in response to the exclusion of internationally educated workers from the Canadian labour market, TNO has developed an internship program to provide Canadian workplace experience, as well as the Association of Professionals in Thorncliffe and a study group for doctors who seek to establish their credentials in Canada.

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6 Population estimates for Thorncliffe Park vary. TNO's website puts the population at 30,000, with one-third of these children and youth (http://www.thorncliffe.org/about-thorncliffe/). Census data is considered to be inaccurate because of the high number of residents with precarious status who are unlikely to respond to the census.

7 Data on file with author. Based on Canada Revenue Agency T1 Family File for 2012. Drawn from the research that led to J. Stapleton, 2015, *The working poor in the Toronto region: Mapping working poverty in Canada's richest city.* Toronto: Metcalf Foundation. The definition of "working poor" is based on the working-age adult population who earn at least $3,000 per year from employment and whose income is below the Low Income Measure. The rate of working poverty based on this definition is different from the more general "poverty rate" for a neighbourhood, which shows the proportion of all persons (children and adults) living in households in which the income is below the Low Income Cut-Off.

2.2.3 East Scarborough Storefront

Established in 2001, East Scarborough Storefront is the youngest of the organizations we visited. The Storefront, as it is known locally, was created to bring a wide range of social supports to the Kingston Galloway–Orton Park neighbourhood in East Scarborough. Unlike the other two organizations, the Storefront does not provide services directly, but operates as a community hub, helping networks of residents, social service organizations, academic institutions, businesses, planners, and architects engage in meaningful discussions, run programs, organize events, share learning, and participate in a wide range of activities effectively and collectively. Its annual budget is about $1.4 million.

Its catchment area, bounded by Ellesmere Road to the north, Morningside Road to the east, Kingston Road to the south, and Scarborough Golf Club Road to the west, has a population of about 26,500.

Developed during the 1950s to 1980s, Kingston Galloway–Orton Park has a mix of high-rise and low-rise private rental buildings, single detached houses, and social housing projects including a large Aboriginal housing co-op. It is an isolated suburb originally designed for automobile access that now houses a predominantly low-income, transit-dependent population. Its proportion of immigrants is 51 percent, about the same the city of Toronto, while the share of its population belonging to racialized groups is 62 percent, much higher than Toronto's rate. Residents are from very diverse origins, with significant groups from South Asia, Europe, the Caribbean, the Philippines and South America, as well as Canadian-born residents of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and a large and visible Indigenous community.

Recognizing the lack of services in the neighbourhood, the Storefront's founders established a hub in a local mall. In 2005 the hub moved into a former police station that had been renovated for this purpose. The innovative hub model, now being replicated across Toronto, provides a single point of service at which residents can access a range of programs offered by 35 agencies whose primary locations are elsewhere.

Its activities are overseen by an advisory committee made up of resident leaders and representatives of the agencies that offer services at the Storefront, and its model is that of grassroots community change. Unlike the other two organizations in this study, the Storefront is not an incorporated entity with its own board of directors, but a project of Tides Canada, a national shared platform that holds legal and fiduciary accountability for the work while supporting neighbourhood-based decision-making and leadership. It functions as a "community backbone organization" that brings together diverse stakeholders and resources to improve community conditions.

These three distinct sites provide a range of examples to help us better understand how community-based organizations foster neighbourhood collective agency.

Table 2: Neighbourhood characteristics[8]

	West Neighbourhood House	Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office	East Scarborough Storefront	Toronto
Catchment area population, 2011+	110,700	41,400	26,500	2,615,100
Socio-economic status				
Average income† (percentage of Toronto average)	$44,488 (94%)	$27,755 (58%)	$29,444 (62%)	$47,476 (100%)
Poverty rate* *(see footnote 4)*	29%	43%	33%	25%
Working-age adults designated "working poor"**	10%	15%	12%	11%
Working-age adults designated "non-working poor"**	16%	30%	26%	17%
Adults with university degrees*	38%	42%	24%	39%
Race, immigration, and language				
Aboriginal *	0.9%	0.3%	1.0%	0.5%
Racialized*	35%	76%	62%	46%
Immigrants*	45%	67%	51%	49%
Top three regions of origin for immigrants*	Southern Europe Eastern Asia Southeast Asia	Southern Asia West Central Asia & Middle East Southeast Asia	Southern Asia Caribbean & Bermuda Southeast Asia	Eastern Asia Southern Asia Southern Europe
Non-official language spoken at home+	24%	47%	22%	28%
Top three non-official languages spoken at home+	Portuguese Cantonese Tibetan languages	Urdu Persian (Farsi) Gujarati	Tamil Tagalog Bengali	Cantonese Other Chinese Mandarin
Household status and age				
Lone-parent families+	8%	13%	22%	12%
Children and youth aged 0 to 17+	13%	27%	25%	19%
Older adults aged 65+	11%	11%	13%	14%

+ Source: Census 2011
† Source: Canada Revenue Agency, Taxfiler T1FF, 2012
* Source: Census 2006 (these variables are also included in the 2011 National Household Survey, but the methodology for that survey is not reliable – see footnote 5)
** Source: Statistics Canada, custom tabulation, T1FF taxfiler data, 2012 (see footnote 7)

8 Catchment areas do not always line up perfectly with census tract boundaries. Organizations may have different boundaries for specific programs. Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office has no official catchment area; we have presented data for the area of Thorncliffe Park and Flemingdon Park, the two key neighbourhoods it serves.

3. Findings: What we learned

3.1 Neighbourhood context and the dynamics of collective agency

We have defined neighbourhood collective agency as "*residents' desire and capacity to work together to improve daily life and promote equity and social justice in their neighbourhood."* Collective agency is a potential that becomes reality when residents take action together.

A comprehensive mapping of collective agency within a neighbourhood would require exploring its origins, the formal and informal sites within which it is formed and expressed, and the local events connected with it, as well how all of these intersect with each other. While we are aware of this complex context, in this study, we have focused our attention on how community-based organizations can promote the desire and capacity for collective action.

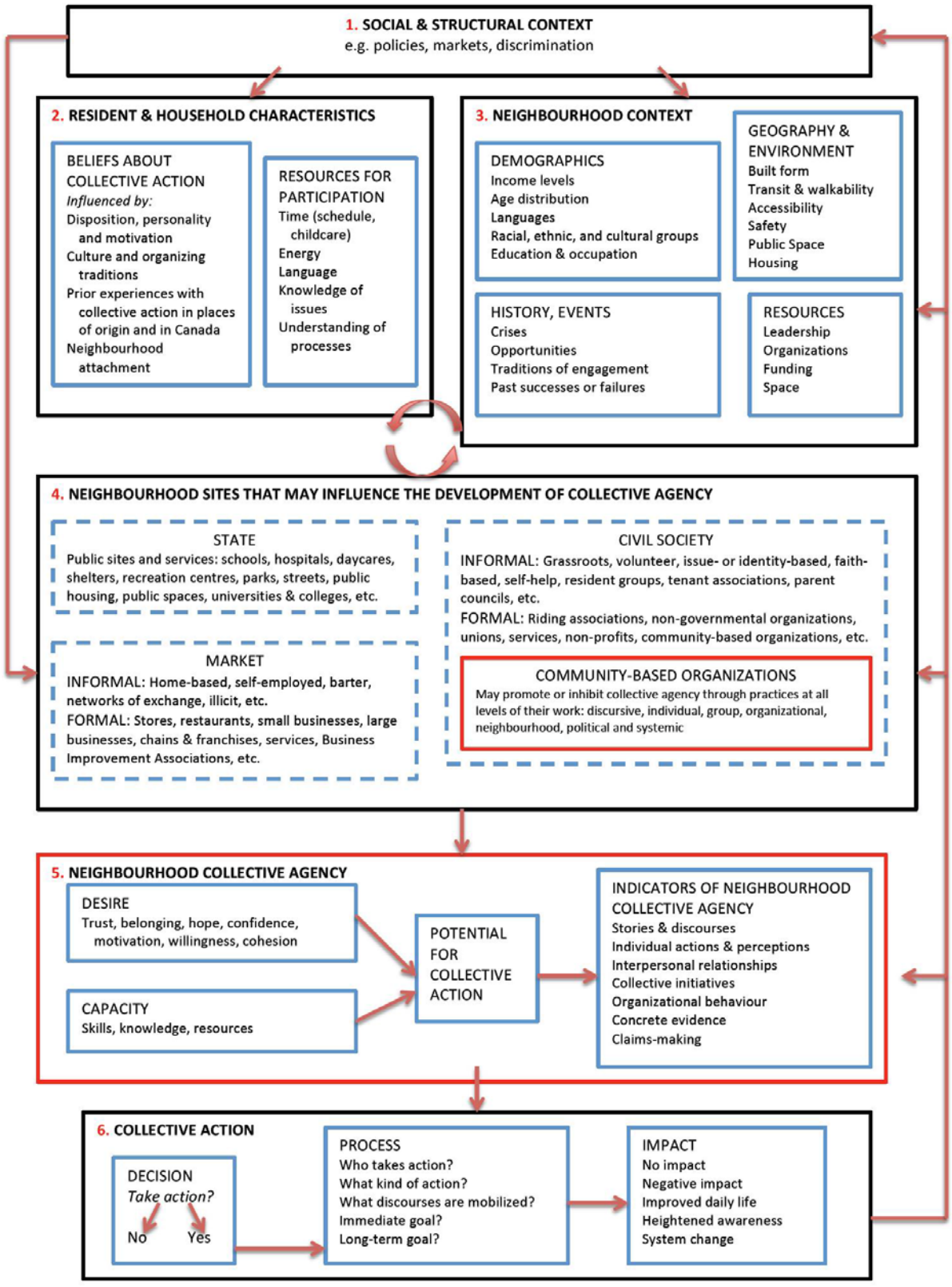
Before we focus in on this question, it is helpful to consider neighbourhood collective agency in its broader context.

As shown in Figure 2 below, neighbourhood collective agency **(Box 5)** includes individual and collective dimensions such as hope, confidence, trust, belonging, skills, resources, and knowledge. Together, these constitute the potential for collective action. The presence of this potential is revealed by indicators in seven domains:

- the stories, values, and assumptions that circulate in the neighbourhood;
- individual actions and perceptions;
- interpersonal relationships;
- collective initiatives;
- the behaviour of organizations (and in particular, the extent to which these share power with residents);
- "concrete" evidence such as community spaces that residents have advocated for and helped build;
- collective claims made by residents upon local organizations, all levels of government, businesses, and other powerful actors.

As Figure 2 illustrates, neighbourhood collective agency is formed through the interaction of four key factors. The arrows in Figure 2 depict the *influence* that each of these factors exerts on the others – not a linear sequence of events or hierarchy of importance.

Figure 2: Neighbourhood context and the dynamics of collective agency



First, the social and structural context **(Box 1)**—including government policies, housing and labour markets, and relations of power such as discrimination—exerts a strong influence on residents' and households' resources and beliefs, neighbourhood conditions, and the formal and informal sites in the neighbourhood. This context, in turn, is often the target of residents' collective action for social justice and equity. Many neighbourhood problems require solutions that transcend the neighbourhood scale.

Though shaped by this broader context, neighbourhood collective agency begins with residents and households **(Box 2)**. Residents' beliefs about collective action are formed through their backgrounds and traditions, as well as through their direct experiences in Canada and elsewhere. Their resources for participation, meanwhile, may broaden or limit the extent of their interest and involvement in collective efforts.

Neighbourhood context **(Box 3)**, too, plays a role in collective agency. The neighbourhood's geography and environment mediate opportunities for interaction, and shape the spaces in which collective initiatives unfold. Resident demographics—including levels of poverty and inequality, age distribution, racial and cultural identities, languages, educational backgrounds, and occupations—influence the development of solidarity, approaches to organizing, and the identification of issues deemed to be priorities for action. Neighbourhood resources to support agency also play an important role. Finally, the neighbourhood's history and ongoing events can also affect collective agency. For example, a crisis may bring residents together to respond, or a successful campaign may inspire further organizing. High levels of residential turnover may also affect these dynamics.

Collective agency requires places—physical and virtual—in which people come together. Neighbourhood sites where residents gather **(Box 4)** include public settings such as parks and institutions; private businesses such as stores and cafés; and perhaps most importantly, civil society settings, including both informal groups and formal community-based organizations. As shown by the dotted lines, it may sometimes be difficult to distinguish state, civil society, and market domains; examples of "grey areas" of particular significance to collective agency include social enterprises, city-owned but locally operated community centres, and institutions of higher learning. Virtual gathering spaces such as online social networks, meanwhile, operate within, through, and across these sites.

These three domains—the household, the sites where residents gather, and the neighbourhood as a whole—are mutually influencing, and contribute in complex ways to one another's' characteristics and changes. In this complex context residents develop the desire and capacity to work together that we call neighbourhood collective agency **(Box 5)**.

Sometimes, this potential gives rise to collective action **(Box 6)**. The conditions through which agency becomes action—including the decision to act, the process by which action takes place, and the impact it may have—are areas of interest for future research.

When residents take action to improve daily life and promote equity and social justice in their neighbourhoods, they may direct their collective efforts to various levels: creating or changing community-based organizations and other local sites; addressing aspects of their neighbourhood context; and/or working to influence broader social and structural factors that shape their

neighbourhood. Residents' collective action might give rise to local events that may, in turn, enhance agency or discourage it.

In choosing to focus on community-based organizations, we do not mean to suggest that these are the only, or even the most important, influences on neighbourhood collective agency. But because we believe local agencies are well-positioned to promote collective agency, we are interested in their contribution to this broader dynamic. We ask, how does 4 (community-based organizations) work with 2 and 3 (resident characteristics and neighbourhood context) to promote 5 (neighbourhood collective agency)? And further, how does 4 (community-based organizations) help turn 5 (neighbourhood collective agency) into 6 (collective action)? In the next section, we explore these questions in more detail.

3.2 Neighbourhood collective agency and community-based organizations

As we discussed in Section 1, our current "age of austerity" poses specific challenges to neighbourhood collective agency for both residents and community-based organizations.

Residents are under increasing pressure brought about by inadequate wages, precarious employment, rising costs for basic needs, and the downloading of caregiving responsibilities onto households (particularly onto women and girls). People's time and energy are often depleted by the demands of everyday life, leaving less room for coming together with neighbours and taking action for change. Dominant messages and values—such as the idea that individuals should be independent and take care of their own needs first—may influence people to focus on their own comfort and advancement ahead of shared community concerns. Members of groups that have been devalued and excluded may internalize those experiences, or anticipate that they will face discrimination in collective settings. And with Toronto's growing neighbourhood divisions along lines of race and class, there are fewer opportunities to form social bonds between people and groups who are benefitting from the current economic and social system and those who are harmed by it.

Community-based organizations, meanwhile, are under pressure to do more with less. Those providing services directly are faced with the task of mitigating the impacts of inequality while contending with reduced or unpredictable funding. Their work has changed dramatically in the past two decades, with the downloading of service delivery onto them from government, and the imposition of fiscally oriented accountability structures. Project-based funding requires demonstrable change in a limited period of time, placing organizations into a cycle of defining and applying for new projects while the larger issues facing their communities remain constant. Quantitative evaluation measures encourage organizations to treat their "clients" as numbers whose progress on externally imposed objectives is a precondition for ongoing funding. Regulations governing charitable status and organizations' reliance on government service contracts severely restrict multi-service organizations' direct participation in policy advocacy and social change work.

These factors make it challenging for service-delivery organizations to sustain ongoing work to promote neighbourhood collective agency; they also shape workers' and administrators' understanding of the purpose of the organization's work. Under these conditions, without an overarching commitment to neighbourhood collective agency as an organizational goal, the every-

day activities of organizations are less likely to promote it. In fact, when organizations' work is shaped by short-term activities, a limited scope of analysis, a focus on individual change, and reluctance to take action for social change, their activities may even impede the development of neighbourhood collective agency. (Even so, residents may still find ways to come together to work for change, perhaps drawing upon the organization's resources in the process.)

All three of the organizations we visited have a goal to promote neighbourhood collective agency, and we wanted to understand how they implement that goal in their everyday work. We learned from them, and from the literature, that neighbourhood collective agency is not only influenced by organizational activities that bring residents together for the purposes of political action.

In fact, organizations' work at every level affects collective agency. Even the language that organizations use, their understandings of the purpose of their work, their explanations for neighbourhood problems, and the kinds of stories they tell, all influence the extent to which their work promotes residents' desire and capacity to act together for change.

Organizations' individual-level work—such as counselling, literacy tutoring, or employment coaching—can contribute to residents' sense of empowerment. Through their group-level work, organizations provide opportunities for residents come together, potentially setting the stage for the development of collective agency. At the organizational level, the policies, power structures, and allocation of resources and staff time may promote or inhibit collective agency within the organization. At the neighbourhood level, organizations may contribute to local networks and resident initiatives. And finally, organizations at times go beyond a focus on service delivery to address the structural-level determinants of neighbourhood conditions. In describing how community-based organizations influence neighbourhood collective agency through their everyday work, we have paid attention to each of these levels. A tool to assist organizations in identifying their agency-promoting practices at each level of their work can be found in Appendix A.

The sections that follow summarize what we learned from the participating organizations about barriers and enablers to collective agency (section 3.3); the specific objectives that focus organizations' agency-promoting work (section 3.4); the organizational practices that foster neighbourhood collective agency (section 3.5); and the indicators that can help organizations to assess their contributions to agency (section 3.6).

3.3 Enablers and barriers

Many organizational, neighbourhood, and structural factors set the conditions for organizations' work. What are some key conditions that enable organizations' work to support community mobilizing efforts, and what kinds of barriers can interfere?

Drawing from the interviews, we have identified some of the organizational supports, resources, and policies that can help create and sustain successful initiatives, as well as some of the challenges and barriers that hinder this work.

3.3.1 Enablers of agency

Listed below are some key factors and preconditions that were found to enable organizations in their work to promote collective agency, and to help transform residents' motivations and capaci-

ties for involvement. These conditions help organizations to build on the power of place and power of people.

Organizational enablers

- Collective, cooperative, or participatory management models.
- Intentional policies and practices promoting resident empowerment and organizational power-sharing.
- Flexible organizational structures and mandates that can be nimble in responding to emergent opportunities and needs.
- A high profile of the organization among residents and the presence of staff in local networks and initiatives.
- Organizational models that can focus more exclusively on neighbourhood networking and community organizing and that coordinate services rather than delivering them directly. Such models may enable organizations to work as partners with residents, since they do not have to navigate the same power relationships that can emerge in the context of service provision and client-based programs.

Neighbourhood-specific enablers

- Prior experience of collective neighbourhood response to threats and opportunities.
- Acts of neighbouring (mutual assistance and support among neighbours).
- The emergence of resident leaders and leadership.
- Neighbourhood projects that engage across differences, while acknowledging how power is unevenly distributed across those differences and putting first the interests of groups in the neighbourhood who face marginalization, poverty, and other forms of exclusion.
- Built form that facilitates inclusion and connection among residents.

Structural and systemic enablers

- Meaningful, holistic outcome measures that help focus, rather than hinder, agency-enhancing elements of service delivery and other organizational activities.
- Active and engaged municipal councillors and political representatives.
- Strong connections between those in the neighbourhood who have power and resources with campaigns that support the interests of those in the neighbourhood who do not.
- A history of activism in the neighbourhood.
- Vertical connections to systems and decision-makers outside of the neighbourhood, including local, provincial, and federal jurisdictions.

3.3.2 Barriers to agency

What are the key barriers that need to be addressed and overcome to realize the potential of agency-enhancing initiatives? It is important to note here that many of the barriers listed below are preconditions that are not easily influenced by the work of an individual organization and require significant collective effort and multi-sectoral cooperation to be resolved. Nevertheless, an awareness of these barriers can assist organizations in circumventing them or taking them into account.

Organizational barriers

- The downloading of responsibility for social service provision to community-based organizations without sufficient funding, which may result in an overemphasis on direct service provision and individualized program models, staff fatigue, and a decrease in organizational capacity to provide support for community-led, action-oriented initiatives.
- Rigidly prescribed work structures, commitments, regulations, and roles.
- Lack of intentional organizational policy and practice focused on collective agency, resident empowerment, and organizational power-sharing.
- A low profile of the organization among residents and local networks.
- Accountability structures that emphasize risk reduction, which can limit creativity and spontaneity.
- Social service training that separates clinical and direct-service work from community development and organizing.
- Hiring and staff training processes that emphasize professional credentials over direct engagement in and lived experience with local issues; this may lead to a staff team that is less reflective of the communities served and less invested and engaged in local issues.
- Budgetary and salary constraints, which coupled with rising housing costs may contribute to a lower number of staff members who can afford to live in some neighbourhoods, resulting in a decrease in staff presence.

Neighbourhood-specific barriers

- Neighbourhood stigma and the influence of place-based narratives that negatively affect the way that local residents and organizations view themselves and their neighbourhood.
- Social divisions, such as those between homeowners and tenants, that make it difficult to connect across disparate interests.
- Communities with a high number of newcomers, which may be faced with language barriers that make it difficult to merge organizing efforts.
- Neighbourhood changes and trends that erode or dismantle pre-existing networks (such as the replacement of locally-owned businesses by corporate franchises) and that decrease local economic prosperity.
- Built form that reinforces dispersed neighbourhood patterns and isolation.
- Economic and social divides within neighbourhoods and across the City.
- Uneven commitment to agency-promoting frameworks across organizations and actors in the neighbourhood.
- The stretching of residents' personal capacity to meet day-to-day challenges.
- Lack of prior experience and/or current examples of collective responses to neighbourhood challenges.
- Lack of spaces in which residents can gather.

Structural and systemic barriers

- Exclusively quantitative, efficiency-focused evaluation and funding frameworks.
- Regulations governing charitable status that discourage political dissent and organizational power-sharing.
- Risk management models that do not allow for the kind of programmatic "slack" needed to foster and support resident action.

- De-credentialing and other barriers to employment for immigrants and refugees that lead to a loss of pride, loss of hope and feelings of helplessness amongst residents.
- People's preoccupation with securing an income and meeting basic needs, so that community engagement becomes difficult and confidence is decreased.
- Government, institutions, and organizations that are not seen as allies, due to the ways in which their activities have inhibited agency, and also due to residents' lived experiences of state and institutional violence in their neighbourhood or in place of origin.
- Decades of cuts to funding and services, with few positive results from advocacy campaigns and consultations, that have left many feeling despair that collective action can have any impact.
- Messages or language used to justify harmful policies such as social assistance benefit cuts or racial profiling; such discourses may be internalized by residents and may constrain organizations' recognition of residents' strengths and skills. Examples include "poor-bashing" messages implying that poor people are incompetent to take action on their own behalf or anti-immigrant messages that suggest refugees are attempting to "take advantage" of Canadian services.

3.4 Objectives that support neighbourhood collective agency

Within this broader context of structural, neighbourhood, and organizational preconditions, an organization may set a goal to promote neighbourhood collective agency. To be achievable, this overarching goal must be translated into particular, concrete objectives. While the objectives of individual organizations vary considerably—reflecting their missions and the unique dynamics of the neighbourhoods they work in—a few core objectives driving agency-enhancing work were identified in this study. We identified agency-promoting objectives at all levels of organizations' work: individual, group, organizational, neighbourhood, and structural.

At the level of stories, values, and assumptions, organizations aim to tell stories that invigorate residents and staff: stories about who they are when they work with others, stories about positive change and what needs to be done to achieve that change. For example, drawing from our interviews, we found that East Scarborough Storefront aims to counter the negative stories around youth violence and poverty in the Kingston-Galloway neighbourhood by displaying posters that profile local community leaders, their stories, and their contributions to the community.

At the individual level, organizations strive to foster empowerment, cultivating individuals' sense of hope, trust, and possibility, and increasing the types of individual skills and capacities that help sustain the momentum of community-based initiatives. As one interviewee noted "I'm seeing a lot of peer-to-peer work within the community. And those residents in turn do peer work with other groups, lifting each other up."

Through their group work, organizations aimed to convene effective resident groups: well-functioning, productive, inclusive, and diverse groups with shared expectations and goals, possessing the resources and the autonomy to work towards their collective goals. For example, Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office takes steps to ensure that ethno-specific seniors' groups in their neighbourhood are supported to mount shared community celebrations and outreach ef-

forts. “Our partners feel supported enough to know that sharing is not going to compromise their identity.”

Another key objective relates to sharing power at the organizational level, whereby decisions about activities and resource allocation reflect resident priorities. For example, for many years the East Scarborough Storefront supported residents to fundraise and administer a Neighbourhood Trust fund, providing small grants to enhance community leaders’ projects, like purchasing materials for their after-school programs.

Meanwhile, at the neighbourhood level, organizations aim to foster strong neighbourhood networks that link interests across the community. Strong neighbourhood networks are reflected in cooperative relationships among community-based organizations and local social service agencies, university research partners, faith groups, and political representatives. For example, in West Neighbourhood House’s community a rooming house fire provided the catayst for generating complex networks that were sustained for years beyond the crisis itself. “Local business owners in Parkdale were mobilized alongside low and middle income neighbourhood residents around issues of housing affordability... Many relationships with local business owners were sustained and many new connections were established across social stratas.”

Finally, at the political and structural level, organizations strive to advance social justice and equity through effective, resident-led activism. As one respondent recounted, “A while back a group of our residents brought up the need for a city bus in this neighbourhood. So they contacted their local councillor and they went down to City Hall and did a deputation to the TTC committee. They were very proud; they were very charged up. We don’t have that bus yet, but it doesn’t matter. What does matter is that they felt great about it. And that they had the confidence to participate at that level.”

Put simply, organizational objectives frame the work that organizations do. Organizations achieve their agency-promoting objectives by scaling their activities toward change. What organizations actually do will determine their capacity to enhance collective agency: generating a sense of confidence in residents to create change in their community and beyond.

3.5 Agency-promoting practices in community-based organizations

Organizations’ activities and their implementation—which we refer to as “practices”—may be shaped by the barriers or enablers discussed in section 3.3. Nevertheless, within that broader context, organizations can exert considerable influence over their practices. The activities of organizations and how these activities are implemented may inhibit or enhance collective agency among their program participants, the communities they serve, or neighbourhoods as a whole.

The organizations we visited aim to promote collective agency through their practices at all levels of their work: individual, group, organizational, neighbourhood, and structural. These domains are not discrete, but intersect and build upon each other to strengthen and expand neighbourhood collective agency. While stand-alone efforts to empower individuals, support group actions, and advocate for system changes are all worthy activities in and of themselves, it is through intentionally connecting these practices that community-based organizations can help create and sustain neighbourhood collective agency over time.

3.5.1 Stories, values, and assumptions

How does the language that organizations use shape the relationship between staff and community members, ways of understanding and participating in change, and the sense of shared destiny, possibility, or purpose when problems and opportunities emerge that affect the whole neighbourhood?

> *"We promote counter-narratives supported by community residents and agency staff that talk about the safety and resilience of the community, rather than emphasizing persistent vulnerability."*

- Promoting a workplace culture centered on learning and community capacity-building.
- Framing staff training materials to convey that the work being done is part of a larger community development effort.
- Promoting non-hierarchical language to encourage power-sharing, such as the use of the term "residents" versus "clients."
- Sharing the good stories and spreading the word when an initiative is successful.

3.5.2 Individual-level practices

How do individual services—such as clinical counselling, employment services, skills training, and family services—enhance residents' desire and capacity to work together for social justice and equity in the neighbourhood?

> *"Our role is the facilitator to help residents find the right pathway to help themselves. They will figure out the answers if given the support to do so."*

- Acknowledging the structural determinants of individual struggles and developing solutions that account for these systemic barriers.
- Identifying and building upon people's unique assets and connecting them with people who have complementary skills.
- Providing an inclusive environment in which diverse cultures and traditions are honoured and discrimination is recognized and challenged.
- Working to promote and sustain relationships of reciprocity/acts of neighbouring among community members.
- Meeting basic needs such as food and child care to free up residents' time to engage in collective initiatives and develop their individual skills.
- Fostering individuals' leadership.
- Providing opportunities for emerging community leaders to lead and make decisions within the organization and on issues that affect their lives.
- Making other opportunities (including people, activities, and information) easily discoverable and working to remove any barriers to participation.
- Recognizing the itinerant nature of community work and meeting residents where they live.

3.5.3 Group-level practices

How do organizations promote the formation of groups of residents and support existing groups to provide mutual support and work together on shared issues and opportunities in their communities?

> *"It's only when groups are mixed together that one can help the other… we have to find a way to have opportunities for everybody to come … things that are attractive to [different] people."*

- Acting as a "desk" for resident leaders and grassroots groups, providing a home base and practical support for their initiatives, such as use of phones, computers, and photocopiers.
- Helping community members write their own grants, and providing them with the knowledge and tools to connect to local political actors.
- Intentionally fostering connections and understanding across differences.
- Adapting group sizes to the purpose of a specific initiative: small groups for active engagement on a specific issue; larger groups and events to build networks among residents.
- Initiating group activities in response to emerging crises, events, and opportunities in the neighbourhood.
- Making group initiatives appealing, fun, restorative, and "friendly" to diverse groups.
- Devoting space, resources, and staff time to organizing social and cultural events such as street parties and festivals, and sponsoring community markets, to inspire increased resident engagement and connect resident leaders.

3.5.4 Intra-organizational practices

How can the structure, resource allocation, and administration of organizations help strengthen residents' capacity for action?

> *"There has to be space within your organization where staff can let go of power, because that's when the pedal hits the metal, when you transfer power to residents."*

- Making information about local and broader campaigns available to program participants.
- Providing agency support for advocacy and social action committees.
- Scaling back if funding constraints arise and connecting the resources that are available with the people who will make the best use of them.
- Appointing community members to the organization's board of directors.
- Establishing and maintaining programmatic flexibility and power-sharing practices to support community ownership.
- Incorporating community input into the design and construction of organizational spaces, reflecting a capacity to achieve common goals.

3.5.5 Inter-organizational and neighbourhood-level practices

How do organizations partner with other groups to address local issues, and to leverage and strengthen their neighbourhood's organizational networks and assets?

> *"We bring all of what we believe and what we think and how we act and our own connections with us, our philosophies and our sector connections and local change-maker connections – and by engaging in that way, we identify learning opportunities. If we create a platform for social service agencies to work together in the neighbourhood, connect people to the local economic system, create a platform for resident organizing, broker university-community connections, and we also bring all of our sector connections and local change-maker connections, then it will result in outcomes."*

- Committing time and resources to inter-agency planning, collaboration, capacity-building and action.
- Maintaining a consistent and committed staff presence in the neighbourhood, for example by shopping in local businesses, and holding meetings in different spaces across the community.
- Participating in and supporting neighbourhood networks, including service providers, grassroots community groups, and businesses.
- Intentionally linking groups with shared interests and agendas, and helping to resolve conflicts among groups and organizations that may undermine local capacity for collaboration.
- Conducting collaborative research and advocacy activities in support of local community issues.
- Providing neighbourhood groups with access to meeting space and administrative supports.

3.5.6 Local improvements and systemic-change practices

How do organizations support strategic resident-led action capable of improving local community conditions and advocating for broader system change?

> *"We want to engage those who aren't only directly affected, because we're hoping that others will engage because of political interests, and that we can direct their efforts and mobilize them toward broader goals."*

- Identifying how program participants, local residents, and community conditions are affected by systemic barriers and public policy choices.
- Naming and opposing injustice and exclusion on the basis of race, gender, income, immigrant status, Aboriginal identity, age, disability, sexual orientation, and other factors.
- Supporting and strengthening resident-led actions to identify and advocate for policy reforms.
- Releasing public statements about local impacts of policies and other local concerns.
- Leveraging the organization's influence to champion structural change within neighbourhood networks, and with higher-level actors and partners such as elected officials, city staff, funders, and sectoral networks—even when it is risky to do so.
- Channelling learning and engagement from activities at other levels (individual, group, organizational) into political change and advocacy work.
- Connecting residents to local elected representatives and then following up to ensure that representatives responded to their request.
- Conducting door knocking campaigns and community sweeps when organizing around structural issues that require broad community engagement (such as poverty initiatives, housing affordability issues), to bring out "unusual suspects" who would not otherwise become involved.
- Providing space for resident organizing, and hosting community meetings on policy issues, to establish the organization as a conduit for action in the community.

Some organizational forms may not be well-suited to building collective agency themselves, such as those whose services are narrowly prescribed by funders and designed to deliver individual client outcomes, or those that do not engage residents in setting organizational priorities. But such service providers can still help strengthen neighbourhood collective agency through

participating in neighbourhood networks and supporting groups that can take on the roles of building residents' collective capacity to make change.

3.6 Indicators of neighbourhood collective agency

> *"We've seen the change […] it's proved itself with a lot of partners, where they see the results of this kind of collaboration happening in the neighbourhood. People see the success in the projects we're working on and they want to be part of it."*

How can community-based organizations know when efforts to promote neighbourhood collective agency are successful? And how can we recognize manifestations of collective agency in our neighbourhoods?

Indicators that demonstrate an organization's success in fulfilling its agency-enhancing objectives can be identified at all levels: individual, group, organizational, and in the neighbourhood as a whole. In some cases, these indicators may not be directly linked to organizations' work; however, it is important for organizations to identify signs of collective agency in order to contribute to the initiatives and collective goals of residents in their neighbourhood.

Drawing from interview data, we have identified six inter-related domains of indicators of collective agency. They are:

1. Stories, values, and assumptions
2. Individual actions & perceptions
3. Interpersonal relationships
4. Collective activities (informal, formal, inter-organizational)
5. Environmental evidence
6. Claims-making (community-led campaigns and political organization)

Indicators can be identified within the organization, and in the neighbourhood.

3.6.1 Indicators within the organization

Within the organization, the circulation of stories about individual successes or the success of a resident-led initiative can help to sustain a sense of hope and possibility around the impact of the organization's work. These stories may indicate a shared vision or destiny amongst individual staff members, program participants, and community leaders. Similarly, agency may be present if the organization is regularly hosting events that are well attended by members of the community and residents have a clear leadership role in this work (such as hosting events, sitting on boards, leading committees).

The organization may also be playing a role in agency if it is providing accessible, trusted spaces that are regularly used by community members to hold meetings, organize activities and events, and resolve conflicts among local groups. Support for resident-led activism, business networks, and informal economic activities and the existence of funding earmarked for community organizing activities may also indicate that the organization is playing an important

role in supporting strong ties and cooperation between residents from a range of income levels, and cultural and ethnic backgrounds in the neighbourhood.

Organizations can document and measure the agency-related outcomes of their work in a number of ways. A first step is simply to take note of the presence, frequency, and intensity of the practices described above. Staff, volunteers, and administrators can:

- assess the extent to which their practice with individuals and groups reflects agency-enhancing objectives;
- determine whether organizational policies, roles and resource-allocation decisions advance or inhibit agency;
- document their neighbourhood networking and policy advocacy activities.

A second step is to measure the effectiveness of these initiatives. If a meeting is held in response to a neighbourhood issue, for example, how many residents attend and is attendance reflective of the diversity of the community? Is communication in the meeting multi-directional, with input from many residents and representing diverse viewpoints, or is it uni-directional or dominated by a particular subset of attendees?

A third approach is to delve into individual and group perceptions: do staff and residents report a sense of belonging, attachment to the neighbourhood, trust, connection, concern for each other's well-being, a belief that change is possible, and confidence in their collective ability to improve local conditions?

Finally, organizations can observe individual and collective behaviour: do staff and residents participate in events, take action to improve conditions, make claims on the organization, and communicate individually or collectively with decision-makers?

With each of these approaches, it is also informative to capture change over time. As organizations move to intentionally implement agency-enhancing practices, are changes apparent in effectiveness, perceptions, and behaviours? For example, does meeting attendance increase, are previously under-represented groups more involved, does communication become more multi-directional, do participants report feeling more confident that they can make changes, and do more people take action?

3.6.2 Indicators in the neighbourhood

Beyond the level of the organization, indicators of collective agency can be found in the neighbourhood as a whole. For instance, at an individual level, residents may advocate on behalf of their neighbours, engage in peer-to-peer networking and referral, or support one another through informal relationships of reciprocity. Individuals may express a sense of hope, trust, belonging, and confidence in their ability to work with their neighbours for positive change.

Strong ties and cooperation between neighbours may lead to more formal indicators of collective agency, such as the existence of block groups, tenant organizations, community gardens, community events, and locally based informal economic activity, such as well-attended neighbourhood markets. These kinds of initiatives, in turn, help to further foster residents' commitment to working together.

Environmental evidence of collective agency in the neighbourhood may be visible in the form of resident-led urban planning initiatives or public spaces planned and designed by residents. A politically active local citizenry is also indicated by active voter participation, engaged and responsive elected representatives, and the presence of electoral or issue-driven organizing.

The long-term goals of collective initiatives include enhanced well-being and opportunity for residents, improved material conditions, greater power and influence for community members, and relationships of respect—but these kinds of changes are influenced by multiple and complex factors. It is usually difficult to trace the origins of social change, and it would be even more implausible to attempt to link such large-scale outcomes back to the agency-enhancing work of a single organization. On the other hand, it is also important to keep in mind that neighbourhood collective agency may be successful without producing measurable changes in population-level indicators such as mortality or average income at the neighbourhood level. While aiming for equity and social justice, organizations can set achievable goals and learn to recognize and measure the small but significant transformations that result from collective efforts.

4. Key learnings and next steps

Neighbourhood collective agency is complex and operates at many levels. At the individual level, it includes dimensions of confidence, trust, motivation, and willingness to take action. It is rooted in experiences and lessons learned over a lifetime in one's family, community, and culture of origin. It requires not only the perception that collective action is possible, but also the availability of time, energy, skills, and knowledge to dedicate to it. At the group level, collective agency relies upon a shared sense of connection, belonging, and mutual reliance, the recognition that problems facing community members are shared, the belief that residents' collective action can bring about solutions, and resources to support collective efforts. At the neighbourhood level, collective agency finds its expression in initiatives large and small, formal and informal, and it flourishes in the connection between these initiatives so that they contribute to common goals of equity and social justice.

Neighbourhood collective agency connects the power of people to the power of place. The organizations we visited recognize the power inherent in the communities they serve and aim to foster this potential at all levels of their work. Through our discussions, we learned

- how these community-based organizations have set a goal to enhance agency in their communities;
- the barriers they encounter and the enablers that assist them in this work;
- the agency-promoting objectives they pursue;
- the specific everyday practices that put these objectives into action;
- the indicators that help them to recognize when these efforts are successful within their organizations and in the neighbourhood as a whole.

We hope the information they have shared through this research can be of use to other community-based organizations that wish to promote collective agency in their neighbourhoods.

In addition to the practical learnings above, this research has also helped us better define and understand neighbourhood collective agency in general. We have begun to sketch a picture of how it operates in organizations and neighbourhoods; the barriers that current funding and evaluation structures present to its development; the ways in which it differs from other practice models; and the challenges and opportunities posed by the economic and political environment. These learnings raise broader questions we hope to explore in the next phase of this research.

4.1 Key learnings

4.1.1 Neighbourhood collective agency is neighbourhood-specific

The three organizations we visited taught us that neighbourhood context influences how organizations interpret collective agency, how they seek to foster it, and the barriers and enablers they encounter. The power of place comes to the fore in neighbourhood-specific collective efforts.

For example, West Neighbourhood House operates in a gentrifying neighbourhood, where lower-income residents are being displaced due to rising costs. The House is working to build a sense of unity and shared commitment to common goals between residents whose interests and experiences may diverge significantly. One important aspect of this work is to create opportunities for upper-income residents to learn about and take action on the issues facing lower-income residents. A long history of local activism among lower-income tenants and the political influence of some of the area's newer high-income residents are two local resources The House draws upon in these efforts.

Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, on the other hand, operates in a context in which many residents are highly educated and skilled, but often underemployed. This situation not only presents barriers to collective agency in terms of residents' material circumstances and time, but also diminishes the confidence required for collective agency. Therefore TNO works to build up confidence, while providing for residents' basic needs to enable their participation. Residents' advanced training and professional skills, along with their shared critical analysis of the racial and gendered exclusion they face in the Canadian labour market, provide a strong foundation for TNO's initiatives. The dense geography of the neighbourhood, meanwhile, fosters close ties and makes it easy for residents to gather at local events.

The Kingston Galloway–Orton Park neighbourhood has been stigmatized as "unsafe" in the media and a significant group of residents are deeply impoverished and have little formal education. To promote neighbourhood collective agency, East Scarborough Storefront has cultivated a sense of individual and neighbourhood pride, while fostering residents' skills in policy advocacy. In the process, Storefront has learned from residents' well-developed informal practices of mutual support and claims-making, finding novel ways to channel these into more formal organizing. The Storefront model focuses on planning and networking practices that create community connections among residents, organizations, and institutions. This connecting role dominates the organization's culture and practice, in part as a result of the intentional decision not to take on direct service roles.

These examples suggest that while neighbourhood inequality and segregation share common structural causes, their manifestations differ across neighbourhoods. So, too, do the local resources on which residents and organizations can draw in working together for change. Effectively promoting collective agency requires a deep knowledge of and respect for the neighbourhood's histories, cultures, and other specificities. In turn, agency-enhancing work helps to highlight these specificities and strengthen residents' attachment to their neighbourhood.

4.1.2 Neighbourhood collective agency is multi-faceted, and more than the sum of its parts

This research has also helped us to understand that neighbourhood collective agency operates at many levels: individual, group, organizational, neighbourhood-wide. The work of community-based organizations also takes place at these levels. This means that organizations can influence collective agency not only through activities that directly promote group action and advocacy, but also indirectly through their programs and services, within their organizational structures and policies, and via their inter-organizational and neighbourhood networks. This opens up many opportunities for community-based organizations to shape their work at all levels to foster collective agency.

At the same time, we learned that organizations' work is more likely to foster collective agency when there is an overarching goal to do so. Collective agency appears to be enhanced when community-based organizations and their funders commit to achieving impacts across multiple levels. While stand-alone efforts to empower individuals, support group activities, and advocate for system changes are all worthy activities in and of themselves, connecting these efforts more intentionally can create and sustain neighbourhood collective agency over time.

4.1.3 Neighbourhood collective agency is not well-supported by current funding practices

Community-based organizations' efforts to work in this way are not easily sustained by current funding practices. Increasingly, government funders prescribe program and evaluation models that focus on efficiencies and individual outcomes. This focus makes it more difficult for agencies to integrate activities that promote collective agency into their service-delivery interventions. Under these conditions it has become harder to shape services that respond to the specific interests of participants and that connect individuals with group activities and collective actions in their neighbourhood.

In addition, a greater reliance on short-term project funding undermines the stability of relationships between residents and program staff and can limit the sense of trust needed to support collective agency.

While foundation funders are more able to support activities that enhance neighbourhood collective agency, their impacts are typically constrained by a reluctance to fund successful efforts beyond initial project or pilot periods. Their desire to promote innovation and generate evidence of broader systemic impacts can also make it difficult to build upon more modest programmatic interventions already in place.

These dynamics are also shaped by governments' retreat from funding the full costs of programs, including adequate support for core administrative functions in multi-service organizations. Foundations periodically reorient their funding priorities to ensure that their funds are not being used simply to backfill the costs of underfunded public programs.

And finally, regulations governing charitable status explicitly limit policy advocacy by organizations. Lack of clarity about regulatory requirements and increasingly zealous scrutiny of charitable organizations' advocacy activities have contributed to advocacy "chill" in which many community-based organizations have retreated from community organizing activities.

In adapting to this more constricted political and economic context, many organizations have been unable to sustain dedicated resources and staff time to participate in local organizing and active dissent. Where some aspects of this practice have been sustained, they have, for the most part, been stripped of any intentional efforts to generate resident-led demands aimed at changing broader systems.

Where multi-service community-based organizations were once more able to integrate community-building functions into their own creatively designed services, this is getting harder and harder to do under the current funding structures. In this regard, newer organization models such as The Storefront—which can more exclusively focus on sustained relationship-building within and beyond a local neighbourhood, and are less encumbered by restrictive service-delivery structures—may offer a promising response. However there are few resources available to support non service-delivery efforts in neighbourhoods, in whatever form they take. At this moment it is not clear that organizations wishing to sustain community-building roles as their core focus can readily find the resources to do so, particularly on a scale that would support such efforts within the many low-income neighbourhoods in Toronto.

4.1.4 Neighbourhood collective agency is not well-supported by current practice models

Our definition of neighbourhood collective agency draws upon practice models that explicitly aim to generate residents' collective power to make changes that promote equity and social justice. Historically these models have been described as "community organizing," "local empowerment," and "community development." Neighbourhood collective agency builds upon these, but it is called upon to address new challenges presented by austerity, including increased inequality and segregation, a growing culture of individualism, and diminishing faith in democracy.

Current models that intentionally support organizations' impacts beyond the individual level may incorporate some elements of neighbourhood collective agency. However, many practice models that have gained in popularity over the past decade fall short of promoting the conditions for collective resident action to demand social change.

With its emphasis on trust, belonging, and informal networks, neighbourhood collective agency bears some resemblance to theories of "social capital." In social capital theory, however, civil society is not seen to include social movements and grassroots groups that present challenges to the prevailing consensus (Putnam 1993). In fact, social capital theory sees some social movements as based in pathological distrust and representative of narrow group interests. In contrast, the framework we present here for neighbourhood collective agency embraces social movements as important actors in the achievement of social change (Putnam 1993).

Echoes of collective agency can also be found in current "resident engagement" programs. Such initiatives typically involve convening residents to identify community concerns or participate in government-led consultations on planned interventions. But while these engagement efforts can generate valuable local improvements, such as recreation spaces or community gardens, their scope is usually limited and they do not generally spill over into the kind of leadership development and organizing work that would build residents' power and strategic focus to advance a grassroots-defined agenda for more expansive change.

Similarly, "collective impact" practices that are promoted within the community and government sectors focus on improving the alignment and coordination of existing programs and resources, but stop short of building resident-anchored demand for the significantly increased public investments required to make real progress in areas such as accessible child care, affordable housing, or income support.

Likewise, current enthusiasms for "social innovation" and "social enterprise" urge organizations and residents to harness "private money for public good" in ways that effectively discount any prospect of increased democratic control and public investment as a means to address the collective challenges that communities face.

With their message that efficiencies, collaboration, private investment, and resident engagement can compensate for massive reductions in government funding for basic services and infrastructure, these models risk supporting an austerity agenda, rather than bringing citizens together to challenge it. In doing so, they diminish the power of people to make significant changes to the systems and structures that affect their daily lives.

4.1.5 Neighbourhood collective agency must contend with "networked governance"

These concerns are connected to a broader trend that some analysts call "networked governance"—or a move from "government" to "governance"—whereby traditional bureaucracies and elected local authorities no longer take on key roles in social service delivery systems (Wellstead, Stedman, and Lindquist 2009). Instead, a complex and decentralized network of non-governmental institutions, organizations, volunteer groups, and private actors are now responsible for delivering social services to communities and their residents.

On the positive side, these processes have increased the horizontality of local decision-making processes, presenting opportunities to bring together diverse resources and actors to achieve gains that might not otherwise be possible. On the other hand, they bring systemic challenges involving a lack of secure and long-term funding and inadequate funds for both the coordination and administrative supports needed to sustain social service provision.

One example of this comes from our own research. East Scarborough Storefront brought together a number of partners and funders to create a youth-designed Sports Court for residents. This achievement was the result of 15 years of relationship-building between and among residents and people with perceived or real power so that the power dynamic could shift in small and big ways.

While this initiative demonstrates the agency-enhancing possibilities of collaboration, it is significant to note that its creation was enabled by relationships with influential partners that not many impoverished neighbourhoods or small organizations have access to, or the time and capacity to generate. For many neighbourhood groups, the organizational conditions and funding partnerships that enable effective networked governance may be out of reach as they become overburdened with the financial and administrative responsibilities that accompany new roles in localized social service delivery (Mayer and Künkel 2012).

The current model of networked governance presupposes equality of opportunity and equality of access to the tools that organizations can use in developing their capabilities. The model does not sufficiently account for neighbourhood-based challenges and organizational funding

inequalities. In response to this problem, a recent analysis concluded with an appeal to Canadian governments to adopt an "equality of outcomes" approach to social policy—a policy framework with greater customization of available programs and services to account for inequalities as they exist in place (Hicks 2015).

A more customized approach could incorporate local "bridging opportunities": for example, a well-established neighbourhood organization might receive funding to connect local groups and facilitate relational exchanges between organizations in the neighbourhood. Ideally, this would create new, localized service delivery networks with the potential to evolve into strong, complex, and rich ties which can then drive local, provincial, and national agendas (Miller and Nicholls 2013).

4.1.6 Funding collective agency: Designing an alternative policy approach

A more customized, flexible, and efficient approach to local organizational funding and evaluation will require a collaborative reworking of governmental decision-making powers, leadership roles and objectives. Ideally, an alternative funding model would be tailored to meet the dynamic, place-specific needs of the neighbourhoods it aims to serve and the organizations that support change. Responsive, open-ended delivery structures have the potential to address new challenges posed by "networked governance" and decentralized local service delivery by way of horizontal decision-making processes that foster trust among mutually interdependent actors, and participatory stewardship of public resources (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003). Collaboratively generated funding and evaluation models can support more than service-delivery efforts by

- allowing organizations to define their own objectives;
- building in indicators and measures aimed at equity, diversity and collaboration;
- addressing structural challenges and barriers at the level of implementation.

A promising shift in funding delivery is suggested by the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care's (2012) *Community Health Links* model, delivered through a collaborative group of providers and agencies that coordinate individualized services for local high-needs patients across nine designated neighbourhoods in Toronto.

The Community Health Links model incorporates flexible evaluation measures that go beyond traditional quantitative data sets, allowing community partners to submit qualitative evidence in the form of stories that enrich policymakers' understanding of complex outcomes. Funding decisions are supported by small teams of policy actors, health care practitioners, and organizations operating at the community level.

While unique, the Health Links model provides some evidence of increasing openness to more flexible funding that incorporate qualitative outcome measurements and recognition of community-based actors as experts and collaborators in the policy process.

4.2 Questions for further research

In this report we have focused on describing neighbourhood collective agency, and examining how community-based organizations can work to foster it. But as shown above, collective agency is complex and dynamic, influenced by a range of factors from individuals' backgrounds

to current neighbourhood conditions. It is a capacity that flourishes in many neighbourhood sites, from kitchen tables to places of worship, and it manifests itself in ways that may be sudden, unexpected, and contradictory.

Further research can build upon this understanding of collective agency and how community-based organizations influence it, to examine how agency develops and operates in neighbourhoods as a whole. Questions to be explored include:

- How does collective agency develop and change in a neighbourhood?
- What signs point to a potential for neighbourhood collective agency?
- What factors help it to flourish?
- How does it lead to action and what role do local events and actors play in this action?
- Which residents are engaged in collective efforts, are any groups excluded from participation, and how can greater inclusion be promoted?
- What have been the successes and failures of collective efforts in various neighbourhoods, and what learnings from these can strengthen the work of residents and organizations across the city for equity and social justice?

Several more complex questions have emerged from our discussions with partners and scholars in the preparation of this report, which are also of interest for further research. These include:

- How do neighbourhood demographics affect collective agency? For example, does collective agency function differently in neighbourhoods where most residents have lower incomes, than in “bi-polar” neighbourhoods with a mix of lower-income and higher-income households? In what ways do “ethnic enclaves” influence collective agency?
- How do residents of Toronto’s predominantly immigrant and racialized neighbourhoods draw upon their diverse traditions of informal mutual support, community organizing, and activism in neighbourhood initiatives? How do residents negotiate differences in values and approach? What role can community-based organizations play in drawing out and mobilizing these diverse forms of skills and knowledge?
- What role does attachment to and identification with the neighbourhood play in collective agency? In particular, what is the significance of neighbourhood attachment for individuals and groups facing marginalization and discrimination in the broader society? How do residents and organizations respond to neighbourhood stigma?
- What strategies are community-based organizations and other neighbourhood actors employing to promote neighbourhood collective agency in the face of austerity?
- What kinds of organizational forms seem most able to sustain neighbourhood collective agency in our current context?
- What kinds of funding and evaluation approaches can support agency-promoting practices in organizations? What are some existing examples?

The appendix of this report includes two tools to assist researchers and organizations in examining some of these questions. The inventory of organizational practices in Appendix A can be used to document agency-promoting practices and indicators within organizations, while the

network mapping tool in Appendix B offers a starting point for documenting the ecosystem of informal and formal groups that may be contributing to agency in a neighbourhood.

4.3 Where do we go from here?

Neighbourhoods, and the community-based organizations that serve them, are at a crossroads. Economic changes and austerity policies are causing increased inequality, polarization, and segregation within and between neighbourhoods. Residents must juggle multiple responsibilities under intensifying pressures and with access to fewer resources and supports. With the retreat of the state from ensuring adequate income security and services, community-based organizations are left trying to meet the basic needs of their communities with unpredictable and insufficient funding.

Neighbourhood collective agency is a dynamic capacity that responds to these conditions on multiple levels. It strengthens the optimism, pride, belonging, and connection that are eroded by inequality; it brings neighbours together to improve their immediate local conditions of daily life; and it is a powerful force for demanding systemic change.

The scale of the obstacles facing neighbourhoods can be overwhelming. But our research suggests that simple, concrete practices and everyday interventions can cumulatively help shift the dynamic. Community-based organizations have an important role to play in this shift. Their multi-dimensional work at the individual, group, organizational, neighbourhood, and policy levels is ideally suited to fostering collective agency in all its complexity. Community-based organizations can act as important allies and resources to support residents' advocacy for equity and social justice. This, in turn, may heighten recognition of community-based organizations' value for the neighbourhood.

Our research suggests that a good first step for organizations intent on promoting neighbourhood collective agency is to take stock of the agency-enhancing practices already happening in their work. They can also look for examples of collective agency in the neighbourhood and consider how the organization can support, align with, and learn from these. The tools found in the Appendix can assist in these explorations.

In our age of austerity, sustained and vigorous public dissent is a vital tool to compel governments to adopt significant social and economic reforms that can address inequality and exclusion in our neighbourhoods, our city, and society. This effort will require renewed leadership by organizations, practice models focused on promoting collective agency, and sustained funding mechanisms that amplify the demands of residents most affected by worsening conditions. Together, residents and community-based organizations can champion the equity and social justice reforms needed to alter these trends.

Appendix A: Inventory of practices to promote neighbourhood collective agency

Purpose and Description

This assessment tool draws upon our research into the kinds of practices that organizations may undertake to generate, support, and strengthen collective agency – that is, residents' desire and capacity to work together for equity and social justice in their neighbourhood.

The activities of community-based organizations, and how these activities are implemented, may inhibit or enhance collective agency, among their program participants, communities they serve, or neighbourhoods as a whole. In turn, organizations' practices may be influenced by factors both within and outside the organization.

We believe that community-based organizations can augment their service-delivery and advocacy efforts in intentional ways that would contribute to more fundamental impacts in their neighbourhoods and in society as a whole.

This tool can be used to identify how community-based organizations might act more intentionally to support residents to develop their own capacity for collective action.

This tool is not offered as a completed product, but rather as a draft framework that organizations can adapt to document and assess their own practices as they relate to strengthening neighbourhood collective agency.

We have categorized examples of organizational practices into six inter-related domains of activity. These have been labelled according to the contribution each domain makes to strengthening neighbourhood collective agency, as follows:

- Stories that invigorate (stories, values, and assumptions)
- Empowered individuals (individual-level practices)
- Effective resident groups (group-level practices)
- Organizational power-sharing (intra-organizational practices)
- Strong neighbourhood networks (inter-organizational and neighbourhood-level practices)
- Effective, resident-led activism (local improvements and systemic-change practices)

These six categories are not discrete, but intersect and build upon each other to strengthen and expand neighbourhood collective agency. While stand-alone efforts to empower individuals, support group actions, and advocate for system changes are all worthy activities in and of themselves, it is through intentionally connecting these practices that community-based organizations can help create and sustain neighbourhood collective agency over time.

Using this Tool

For each of the six domains, we have included a list of practices that relate to that domain's central objective. These are examples of practices emerging from our research. They are not intended to represent an exhaustive or complete list. For each domain we also suggest examples of indicators that can be documented in different ways: through evaluation of programs' effectiveness, surveys of resident and staff perceptions, direct observation of behaviour, and the measurement of changes over time.

The practices and indicators listed can be used as examples that you can change and add to, as you reflect upon and then take inventory of your organization's practice. You may also want to add practices and indicators to each section that reflect the unique objectives of your organization.

We hope that the tool will help to spark new ideas for your practice, and identify areas of activity that organizations can focus on or add to if their intent is to strengthen residents' desire and capacity to work together for equity and social justice in their neighbourhood.

1. Stories that invigorate (Stories, values, and assumptions)

How do the language that organizations employ, and the stories we tell, help shape the relationship between staff and community members, their ways of understanding and participating in change, and the sense of shared destiny, possibility or purpose when problems and opportunities emerge that effect the whole neighbourhood?

"We promote counter-narratives supported by community residents and agency staff that talk about the safety and resilience of the community, rather than emphasizing persistent vulnerability."

Examples of organization practices	In your organization this practice is …			Examples of indicators to focus this work
	Not present	Present	Strong	
• Promote a workplace culture centered on learning and community capacity-building. • Ensure that materials used to train staff help them understand that the work being done is part of a larger community development effort. • Ground the organization's work in a critical analysis of the structural determinants of residents' struggles. • Stay aware of injustice, barriers, and harms residents may face on the basis of race, gender, disability, immigrant status, Indigenous identity, class, age, sexual orientation, and other factors. • Employ non-hierarchical language to encourage power-sharing (e.g. use the term "residents" or "members" instead of "clients"). • Name and challenge expressions of sexism, racism, ableism, poor-bashing, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination. • Share the good stories and spread the word when an initiative works. • Create opportunities to identify, popularize, and celebrate narratives of community members as active participants in making change in their community (e.g., through leadership awards and media profiles) • Inform media stories that emphasize neighbourhood strengths instead of deficits				Effectiveness • Learning opportunities are frequent, well-attended and well-evaluated Perceptions • Staff and volunteers understand their work to be part of a larger community development effort • Community members feel pride in the agency and neighbourhood Behaviours • Expressions of discrimination and stigma are challenged Change over time • Stories of disempowerment and stigma decrease; positive perceptions increase

2. Empowered individuals (Individual-level practices)

How do individual program interventions enhance residents' capacity to work together social justice and equity in the neighbourhood?

"Our role is the facilitator to help residents find the right pathway to help themselves. They will figure out the answers if given the support to do so."

Examples of organization practices	In your organization this practice is …			Examples of indicators to focus this work
	Not present	Present	Strong	
• Identify and build upon people's unique assets and connect them with people who have complementary skills and interests. • Engage residents as active participants in programs, not passive recipients of service (e.g., build individuals' confidence and skills for solving their own problems and finding the supports they need). • Expect reciprocity. Provide opportunities and expectation that participants will contribute their skills and insight. • Support local entrepreneurship and peer support networks that respond to basic needs (food security, childcare provision, income). • Provide concrete leadership opportunities, where active community leaders and partners can lead and make decisions within the organization and in their communities. • Acknowledge the structural determinants of individual struggles. Support individuals to see where their personal challenges have systemic roots, or are linked to injustice and inequities based on race, gender, ability, immigrant status, age, and other factors. • Encourage peer leadership and networks that involve people in decisions and problem-solving that affect their lives. • Support community ambassadors and emerging leaders to create the mechanisms through which word is spread. • Create spaces of retreat and refuge where people can escape from day-to-day pressures and relate in new ways.				Effectiveness • Community members return to the agency after their first contact; become involved in other areas or programs Perceptions • Staff see their role as allies and partners to program participants, not custodians • Program participants feel supported and in control Behaviours • Staff and volunteers link participants with opportunities Change over time • Increase in the number of individuals who become active in other programs after their first service contact with the agency

3. Effective resident groups (Group-level practices)

How do organizations promote the formation of groups of residents and support existing groups to provide mutual support and work together on shared issues and opportunities in their communities?

"Once people have their basic needs met, they feel more inclined to participate. But also, one doesn't stop so that the other can begin. People can be participating and using services but also participating in community development initiatives"

Examples of organization practices	In your organization this practice is …			Examples of indicators to focus this work
	Not present	Present	Strong	
• Connect people to new opportunities (existing groups, activities, information) by making them easily discoverable and by removing barriers to expanded participation. • Position the organization within a broader ecology of community resources and networks, as one point of connection, not the only centre of activity. • Foster groups' autonomy, and dedicate resources and staff time to resident-led group initiatives (e.g., assist community members to fundraise for initiatives, including writing their own grants, and trustee funds to support their efforts). • Encourage staff to engage with resident groups as participants to support their activities. • Provide information residents need to effectively interact and advocate with institutions, political actors, and decision-makers that influence their lives. • Foster connections and understanding across differences (class, ethnicity, age, ability, etc.) as well as spaces in which members of specific groups can connect with each other on shared experiences. • Adapt group sizes to the purpose of a specific initiative (e.g., small groups for active engagement on a specific issue; larger groups & events to build networks of "weak ties" among residents). • Initiate meetings and group activities in response to emergent crises, events, and opportunities in the neighbourhood. • Make group initiatives appealing, fun, restorative, and "friendly" to specific groups. • Build on a collective sense of pride.				Effectiveness • Meetings and events are well attended, with active participation by diverse attendees Perceptions • Staff consider engagement in local initiatives to be part of their job, and make time for it • Members of resident-led groups see the agency as a resource for their work Behaviours • Community members take on leadership roles in collective initiatives supported by the organization Change over time • Attendance at group activities increases, becomes more representative

4. Organizational power-sharing (Intra-organizational practices)

How do organizations share their resources in ways that strengthen residents' capacity for action?

"There has to be space within your organization where staff can let go of power, because that's when the pedal hits the metal, when you transfer power to residents."

Examples of organization practices	In your organization this practice is …			Examples of indicators to focus this work
	Not present	Present	Strong	
• Establish and maintain program models that have the flexibility in their design and content to respond to participant-defined priorities and interests (e.g., drop-ins, open space). • Hire members of the community you serve and ensure that the whole staff team reflects the diversity of your community. • Appoint members of the communities served to the organization's board of directors and advisory groups. • Make information about local and broader issue campaigns available to program participants. • Conduct collaborative (participatory) research and advocacy activities in support of local community issues. • Provide resident groups with access to meeting space and administrative supports (photocopy, computers). • Provide agency support for advocacy and social action committees. • Commit to maintaining agency-enhancing activities alongside direct services, even when funding constraints arise. • Expand professional development resources to include support for both staff and resident leaders/volunteers.				Effectiveness • Staff find time and resources to support emergent activities Perceptions • Staff and volunteers are flexible and responsive to community needs • Community members feel a sense of ownership of the organization and confidence that the agency will support their endeavours Behaviours • Administrators and staff devote time, resources, and expertise to supporting resident-led groups and initiatives • Residents' groups approach agency for support Change over time • Increase in resources dedicated to resident initiatives

5. Strong neighbourhood networks (Inter-organizational and neighbourhood-level practices)

How do organizations partner with other like-minded groups to address local issues, and to leverage and strengthen their neighbourhood's organizational networks and assets?

"It's only when groups are mixed together that one can help the other… We have to find a way to have opportunities for everybody to come. But things that are attractive to people."

Examples of organization practices	In your organization this practice is …			Examples of indicators to focus this work
	Not present	Present	Strong	
• Lend facilitation and secretariat capacity to create and sustain local networks of agencies, resident groups, and other stakeholders (including local businesses, faith community groups, and institutional partners). • Ensure that structures are in place so that these networks are accountable to local community leaders and ownership, and place residents at the centre. • Conduct frequent and diverse outreach activities (e.g., door-to-door canvassing, community walk-arounds, community meetings, community asset mapping, participatory research, information tables in community gathering places) that enable staff to connect with residents to gather an understanding of their issues and interests and connect them to other people and opportunities. • Speak out. Be a strong voice in your neighbourhood for racial justice, gender equity, disability justice, economic equality, and for the rights of immigrants, refugees, older adults, children, LGBTQ+ communities, and other equity-seeking groups. • Act as convenor or intermediary to support dialogue and resolution when conflicts arise between stakeholders in the neighbourhood.				Effectiveness • The organization is strongly connected with neighbourhood networks. Perceptions • Others in the neighbourhood see the organization as active, engaged, and relevant. • Staff are knowledgeable about neighbourhood networks. Behaviours • Others call upon the organization to host/support/join neighbourhood initiatives. Change over time • Increase in coordination of activities and resources across the neighbourhood.

6. Effective, resident-led activism (Local improvements and systemic-change practices)

How do organizations support strategic resident-led action to improve local community conditions and / or participate in efforts to achieve broader system change?

"We want to engage those who aren't only directly affected, because we're hoping that others will engage because of political interests, and that we can direct their efforts and mobilize them toward broader goals."

Examples of organization practices	In your organization this practice is …			Examples of indicators to focus this work
	Not present	Present	Strong	
• Analyze how program participants, local residents, and community conditions are affected by systemic barriers and public policy choices and share this knowledge within the agency and in the community. • Connect residents to groups organizing broader campaigns for systemic change (e.g., efforts to improve working conditions, living standards, access to housing and child care, etc.). • Support and strengthen resident-led actions to identify and advocate for policy reforms needed to improve community conditions. • Channel learning and engagement from organization activities into policy advocacy. • Speak truth to power. Leverage your organization's influence and connections to champion equity, social justice, and structural change within neighbourhood networks, and with higher-level actors and partners such as elected officials, city staff, funders, and sectoral networks—even when it is risky to do so. • Release public statements about local issues or concerns. • Partner with groups that can build local leadership and organized capacity to carry out strategic actions so that residents can make concrete change in their local neighbourhood and help advance demands for changes in broader systems, policies, and practices that generate inequality and exclusion.				Effectiveness • Others see the agency as a champion of change. Perceptions • Staff and administrators are aware of the structural determinants of neighbourhood conditions, and of local and broader campaigns for change • Residents leading campaigns believe they can count on the agency's support Behaviours • Staff, administrators, and volunteers are active on local campaigns. • Community members make claims on the agency and decision-makers Change over time • Local improvements (e.g., parks), more responsive elected officials

Appendix B: The ecology of agency: Mapping your neighbourhood's networks of collective agency

Neighbourhood collective agency is often expressed and cultivated through collective efforts to improve daily life by meeting basic needs, creating and enhancing community spaces, and advocating for services and investments. The range of informal groups and formal organizations involved in these efforts creates a kind of "ecology of agency," unique to each neighbourhood.

We have created an interactive table to help users begin to "map" the informal and formal social organizing happening in a neighbourhood, and consider their own organization's role within these networks. This tool is available by request – contact Emily Paradis at e.paradis@utoronto.ca.

The first step is to identify sites in your neighbourhood in which residents are already working together to improve conditions and promote equity and social justice, as well as any organizations or institutions that may be influencing collective agency through their programming and activities. Gather as much information as possible about each of the formal and informal groups on your list.

Some of the information on the table—such as budget, location, years in operation, and number of staff—can be found using secondary sources such as websites and annual reports.

Other information is best gathered through discussions with people directly involved with the group or organization. Interview questions can be based on the variables on the table, such as, "What shared values or beliefs inspire your organization's work?"

Finally, some information can be identified through observation. For example, organizations may not wish to acknowledge negative relationships in an interview, but these may be evident in observing behaviour at network meetings.

The table will be most useful if you use the variables provided, or consistent terminology and syntax, when completing each section. This will make it possible to group the organizations on the list by variables (for example, to see a list of all the groups that employ a pressure group approach). There is space for extra details, and important information that doesn't fit into any variable, in the columns at the end of each page.

Specific instructions for completing each page of the table are below.

PAGE 1: INVENTORY OF LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

This page documents empirical information about sites of agency producing an at-a-glance summary of the social organization of a neighbourhood. Items include:

- location
- budget and sources of funding
- number of members, staff, and volunteers
- number of years in operation
- mission, purpose, and goals
- key activities

This section also offers an opportunity to document not only the "what" and "where," but also the "how" of neighbourhood collective agency. These differences can influence the extent to which the group or organization promotes or inhibits collective agency in the neighbourhood.

These qualitative dimensions include:

- whether the group or organization is formal or informal
- its bases of organizing
- its constituency and / or issues of focus
- its level of community involvement
- its target and theory of change
- its values, beliefs, and practice model
- which other groups on the list it works with and does not work with

The definitions below will help clarify these variables. **Definitions can also be found on page 3 of the table.**

Informal groups and formal organizations

Sites of collective agency can range from small, informal collective efforts—such as a group of mothers who meet each week in the laundry room so their children can play together while they do laundry and discuss maintenance issues in their building—to large, formal organizations in which staff, volunteers, administrators, and other residents engage in a broad range of activities. Agency manifests not only within such sites, but in the connective tissue between them—shared initiatives, common agendas, residents involved in multiple collective efforts, and even histories of disagreement and friction become part of a web of collective agency in a neighbourhood.

Examples of local informal associations and groups:

- volunteer groups
- issue-based or identity-based advocacy groups
- organizing committees of neighbourhood events
- faith groups and congregations
- co-working groups
- self-help and mutual support groups
- ethnic and cultural groups or associations
- tenant and residents' groups
- parent councils
- youth groups
- arts collectives
- informal networks of neighbourhood businesses

Examples of formal institutions and organizations that may influence collective agency:

- multi-service centres and other non-profit community-based organizations
- municipal services such as recreation centres, libraries, police departments, and daycares
- constituency offices of local elected officials
- health centres
- public schools
- institutions such as hospitals and universities
- Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) and other formal business networks
- local offices of city-wide, provincial, or national organizations
- locally active unions
- foundations or charities

It may not always be clear whether a site is formal or informal. Organizations may begin as informal efforts and formalize over time. Some indicators that an organization is formal include incorporation; ongoing funding; paid staff; and a permanent location in a site owned or leased by the organization.

Basis of organizing

A group's basis of organizing is the way it identifies the focus of its work, and who is included. This table identifies four bases of organizing, drawing on the work of Speer and Perkins (2002):

- **Union** organizing is based in the workplace.
- **Community** organizing is based on location (such as a neighbourhood).
- **Constituency** organizing is based on common characteristics or circumstances (such as gender or being a tenant).
- **Issue** organizing is based on issues rather than common characteristics (e.g., a campaign to stop a diesel train line from being built through a neighbourhood).

Level of community involvement

Many scholars and organizers believe that the level of involvement of community members is a critical factor in determining whether a group or organization's work promotes collective agency. On this table we identify five levels of community involvement, drawing on the work of community planner Sherry Arnstein (1969):

1. Little or no community involvement—professionals or officials are in control.
2. Community members are informed or consulted on plans or decisions already made.
3. Selected community members are included in planning, decisions, and implementation.
4. The community is democratically represented. Community delegates represent the community's wishes in planning, decisions, and implementation.
5. The community is in control. The project is initiated and carried out by the community, perhaps with the assistance of professionals and officials.

Target/mechanism of change

This section of the table refers to how a group or organization identifies the target of change, and the mechanism by which change comes about. Our first three categories are based on categories developed by political scientist Janice Perlman, cited by Speer and Perkins (2002):

- **Individual:** The focus is on changing individuals (for example, helping individuals find employment). The goal is not to change society, but to adapt individuals to current conditions.
- **Electoral:** The focus is on changing programs and policies through the electoral/political system, such as lobbying elected officials, or voting for candidates who support desired changes (for example, writing a letter to an MP to support new labour market policy). The goal is social change, but that change is brought about through the existing power structure in a "top-down" approach.
- **Pressure group:** The focus is on changing the structural/systemic context by putting pressure on those considered responsible (for example, boycotting employers that rely on precarious labour). The goal is social change, initiated through "bottom-up" organizing that builds power among communities directly affected.
- **Hybrid:** Many groups and organizations use a combination of the above approaches. For example, an organization might combine bottom-up community organizing with casework to help improve individuals' immediate situations; or a campaign may include both electoral and pressure group approaches.

Theory of change

In addition to the general types of organizing above, many groups and organizations guide their work in accordance with a theoretical model for understanding their own domain of community practice.

Social worker Jack Rothman (1968) identified three models for community organizing that have been very influential in community practice for several decades. Our categories are based on his:

- **Democratic**: A participatory and democratic model of organizing, based on the belief that community members must be directly involved in planning, implementation, and evaluation of initiatives.
- **Technical**: A model in which social problems are assumed to be best solved by a deliberate, planned, and technical approach, usually undertaken by professionals and experts.
- **Activist**: A model based on the belief that members of disadvantaged communities must organize to demand systemic change to bring about social justice and equity.
- **Hybrid**: Community practice usually reflects a combination of Rothman's models.

Values, beliefs, models

The work of groups and organizations may also be influenced by a range of other theories or the shared beliefs and values of their members. Too numerous to define here, these may include feminist, socialist, Christian, Africentric, humanist, Indigenous, communitarian, co-operative, Muslim, and many others.

A group's values or theoretical framework might be explicit in its mission statement, but often they are implicit, conveyed in how those involved understand the purpose and goals of the group, the activities they undertake, and the language they use to describe their efforts. The best way to learn what model, beliefs, or values inform a group's work is to ask a member.

PAGE 2: YOUR ORGANIZATION'S RELATIONSHIPS

This page provides space to document an organization's relationships with the formal and informal groups identified on Page 1. Community-based organizations may use it to trace their role in neighbourhood networks. It could also be completed by multiple organizations, to map not only the sites of agency in a neighbourhood, but also the complex relationships between them.

Networks of local informal groups and formal organizations are a vital component of neighbourhood collective agency. For example, when local informal organizations share interests and agendas, they may form networks of support, and bridge ties between like-minded individuals and groups within a neighbourhood. Networks can also function to resolve conflicts among local groups and organizations that may undermine local capacity for collaboration. Strong relationships between local groups, organizations, and institutions create a platform for social service agencies and community-based organizations to work together in the neighbourhood, connect people to the local economic system, support resident organizing (financially or through the provision of space), and broker connections with public institutional assets (such as universities, public schools, libraries, recreation centres, and parks).

The table gathers information on the frequency, depth, and types of collaboration between groups, as well as the nature of their relationship. These variables are defined below, and on Page 3 of the table.

Nature of relationship

An important determinant of the functioning of neighbourhood networks is the extent to which groups' and organizations' relationships to each other are generally positive or negative. While conflict and debate can be productive, frequent antagonism or competition between im-

portant groups and organizations in the neighbourhood can interfere with residents' efforts to name common concerns, agree on solutions, and take effective action together. This table defines five kinds of relationships:

- **Antagonistic:** In ongoing conflict about fundamental values, important issues, and/or approaches to change.
- **Competitive:** Often compete against each other for resources, members, legitimacy, or attention.
- **Neutral:** Co-exist without strong negative or positive relationship.
- **Supportive:** Support each other's work. Generally agree on fundamental values, important issues, and approaches to change – or have agreed to disagree.
- **Symbiotic:** Extremely closely aligned, could not exist without each other.

Frequency of collaboration

How often groups collaborate is captured in a three-level scale:

1. **Occasional:** Have collaborated a few times over the years.
2. **Regular:** Collaborate on some projects, and/or on the same activities annually.
3. **Frequent:** Collaborate on many projects throughout the year.

Depth of collaboration

How deeply groups collaborate is measured with a five-point scale:

1. **Informing:** Let each other know about plans and projects.
2. **Consulting:** Get each other's input on plans and projects.
3. **Coordinating:** Carry out separate but complementary plans and projects.
4. **Partnering:** Share plans and projects where each organization plays a separate, defined role.
5. **Joining:** Share projects that are planned and implemented together.

Types of collaboration

Collaboration between groups and organizations may take different forms. In part this may depend on whether the collaborators are both informal groups, both formal organizations, or one of each. The definitions on page 3 of the table suggest some ways community-based organizations might collaborate with informal groups and with formal organizations.

Ways community-based organizations might collaborate with informal groups:

- providing use of space and equipment
- trusteeing funds
- joint planning and implementation of projects and events
- coordinating services
- lending staff, resources and other supports
- planning new community initiatives together
- participation in networks together

Ways community-based organizations might collaborate with formal groups:

- sharing information about service recipients
- coordinated planning

- “collective impact” initiatives
- joint planning and implementation of projects and events
- planning new community initiatives together
- participation in networks together
- service partnerships
- sharing space
- receiving funds from (for example, in the case of foundations)
- joint staff training / professional development
- seconding or sharing staff

This list is far from comprehensive. Users of this tool should feel free to add other kinds of collaboration not listed here.

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