

Income Polarization and Participation in Community Organizations in Calgary: Summary Report

Aimee Benoit and Ivan Townshend

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Executive Summary

In recent decades Canadian society has experienced rising income inequality and income polarization. There has been a spatial parallel to this, as cities across Canada have become increasingly polarized into wealthy and disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Since 1970, Calgary has become Canada's most unequal Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) based on individual income, and the second most unequal CMA, after Toronto, in terms of neighbourhood income (Townshend et al. 2018; 2020).

This document reports findings of the “Income Polarization and Participation in Community Organizations in Calgary” study, which examined the potential role of community-based organizations in addressing these socio-spatial inequalities, and in providing opportunities for individuals to participate in positive neighbourhood change.

The “Income Polarization and Participation in Community Organizations in Calgary” project involved a partnership between the University of Lethbridge, the University of Calgary, the Federation of Calgary Communities, and United Way Calgary and Area. It used a qualitative case study design, drawing on interviews with leaders and residents of eight Calgary communities. Analysis of interview data confirmed uneven patterns of participation across the communities, and a range of views about what participation means. Formal modes of participation, such as stepping up and helping out, speaking out, and addressing needs, involved working through a community-based organization, usually the community association (CA), to improve the neighbourhood environment and residents' lives. Formal participation also included showing up—simply taking part in community programs or events. More informal modes of participation that emerged through thematic analysis of interview data included neighbouring, networking, caring, reciprocating, working together, watching out, and getting out.

Community leaders tended to think of participation in terms of CA activities and programs, and were often disappointed by low levels of engagement. Yet individuals with less social power faced barriers, such as a tendency for leaders to undervalue their potential contributions, intimidating organizational cultures, or more systemic challenges such as accessing affordable housing or having to work multiple jobs. In contrast, the informal modes of participation that residents described, especially diverse forms of mutual cooperation, offered important means by which residents worked to improve their neighbourhoods and lives.

The study affirmed the importance of community-based organizations in enabling positive neighbourhood change—but also their potential role in exacerbating socio-spatial inequalities. Based on the key findings, this report recommends three broad strategies for helping community-based organizations in Calgary to become more equitable, inclusive, and effective in addressing the consequences of socio-spatial inequality and income polarization. These include using liaisons to expand the breadth and depth of participation in community organizations; encouraging collaboration between community organizations, service providers,

and municipal services; and connecting residents with one another and with services they need. These strategies are followed, in Appendix 1, with a compendium of recommended practices that participants themselves suggested as means to achieve more inclusive community participation.

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1. Introduction

According to the 2016 Canadian census, Calgary has the highest average household income of all Canadian Census Metropolitan Areas. However, superficial interpretations of the data mask growing disparities among residents (Graff McRae 2017). A major economic downturn in recent years has had significant impacts on individuals and families in Calgary—for example, greater dependence on social assistance, soaring debt, and high levels of vulnerability in numerous communities within the city (Community & Neighbourhood Services 2010; Eremenko 2018). Research that drills down into income distribution shows that Calgary has the highest levels of income inequality between individuals and the second highest neighbourhood income inequality in Canada, after Toronto (Townshend, Miller, and Cook 2020). Townshend, Miller, and Evans (2018) document a steady erosion of middle-income neighbourhoods from 1970 to 2006 and a striking increase in income polarization, manifested spatially in growing concentrations of both low- and high-income neighbourhoods.

Social agencies in Calgary link income inequality with the city's "depth of poverty" (Patmore 2018) and growing social and geographical fragmentation (Secretariat of the Calgary Poverty Reduction Initiative 2013). They suggest a need to strengthen disadvantaged or "tipping point" neighbourhoods to avoid problems linked to spatially concentrated poverty (Cooper 2013). In response, the City of Calgary and various community partners have implemented place-based interventions designed to address inequities by fostering social inclusion, active participation in civic life, and a sense of belonging within neighbourhoods (City of Calgary 2018a). Together these programs aim to strengthen neighbourhoods to increase both individual and community well-being, and reduce the spatial concentration of poverty and disadvantage (Secretariat of the Calgary Poverty Reduction Initiative 2013). Although they are supported by a combination of City departments and social service providers, the programs are primarily resident-led, following a community development framework focused on capacity building. A major goal is to increase the social inclusion and meaningful participation of all residents in community life, and to remove barriers that lead to isolation and exclusion (Cooper 2013).

The "Income Polarization and Participation in Community Organizations in Calgary" project is part of a broader national-scale research project that investigates socio-spatial disparities in Canadian metropolitan areas. Collectively, the national project is titled the Neighbourhood

Change Research Partnership (<http://neighbourhoodchange.ca/>), and researchers affiliated with the latter have documented growing income inequality and socio-spatial polarization trends in eight different Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs).

This Calgary study examined the potential role of community-based organizations in addressing the effects of socio-spatial inequalities, and in providing opportunities for individuals to participate in positive neighbourhood change. It sought to illuminate the enabling and inhibiting factors in meaningful participation, the forms that community participation takes, and how these various forms of participation relate and interact. The goal of better understanding this system is to enable community-based organizations in Calgary to become more equitable, inclusive, and effective in addressing the consequences of socio-spatial inequalities arising from income inequality and income polarization.

2. City of Calgary Context

As context to the findings presented in this report, this section outlines Calgary’s neighbourhood governance system. It begins with a brief description of neighbourhood programs in the city, followed by an overview of the key actors involved.

2.1 Neighbourhood Programs

One of the key strategies intended to decrease spatially concentrated disadvantage in Calgary is the Strong Neighbourhoods Initiative. A partnership between the City of Calgary and the United Way Calgary and Area launched in 2010, the program uses a resident-led community development approach to build neighbourhood capacity through increased sense of community, commitment, and access to resources (Cooper 2013). It targets eight neighbourhoods, where residents work with City staff and partner organizations to identify and reach specific targets over a 10-year period. Ultimately the goal is to mobilize residents to advocate for sustainable social change (City of Calgary 2018b). As one City employee explained, the program is meant to help residents

be aware of the issues that are surrounding the community and help them to build the capacity to be able to address those needs in the community—whether it be through social action, advocacy, or just awareness.

Ideally, at the end of the 10-year timeframe the community has the tools and skills it needs to **“mobilize people to make a difference.”**

Another initiative, called This is My Neighbourhood, is a City-facilitated engagement process to better align municipal resources with residents’ desired neighbourhoods. Selected neighbourhoods work with the City over a period of two years to formulate a community vision, around which a variety of programs, services, and minor infrastructure improvements are then developed. One City employee described the program as an **“in-depth engagement with residents to identify gaps in their programs or amenities.”** Once potential projects or programs are selected the City helps **“build momentum for the communities so they can carry it forward.”** Some examples of completed projects include the placement of bicycle parking, improvement of green spaces, free live entertainment events, and summer recreation programs for children (City of Calgary 2018c).

The City of Calgary also works with other agencies to encourage positive, long-term neighbourhood change. The United Way Calgary and Area, for example, has a Neighbourhood Strategy team that contributes to the Strong Neighbourhoods Initiative, and has partnered with the City and Rotary to develop a series of Community Hubs. The latter project supports a broader community-based poverty reduction strategy called Enough for All, which is stewarded by Vibrant Communities Calgary (Vibrant Communities Calgary, n.d.a).

The Hubs initiative is based on data showing, first, that poverty in Calgary is clustered within certain neighbourhoods; and further, that lower income residents tend to experience higher rates of loneliness and isolation. It therefore aims to increase residents' sense of belonging by establishing inclusive gathering places in six priority communities, where residents can connect with each other and access support services and resources (United Way Calgary and Area 2018).

Collectively, these place-based initiatives are premised on the philosophy that “when neighbourhoods thrive, the people who live there also thrive” (City of Calgary 2012). This is attributed not only to the influence of neighbourhood context on individual wellbeing, but also to the belief that stronger and supportive communities enable people to work together to find solutions to economic and social challenges (Vibrant Communities Calgary, n.d.b).

2.2 Key Actors

The City of Calgary's neighbourhood-based programs and services are delivered through a business unit called Calgary Neighbourhoods. The unit incorporates a Neighbourhood Services division with a mandate to ensure the availability of social and recreational opportunities throughout the city (City of Calgary 2018d).

The City of Calgary is divided into a network of formally recognized neighbourhoods called Community Districts (CDs). These CD boundaries typically represent the same boundaries as community association areas, although in some cases two or three community districts are part of a single community association area. Each community association area is assigned one of 24 Neighbourhood Partnership Coordinators (NPCs) to assist the community association with organizational development, financial management, engagement, programs and services, lease agreements, and facility maintenance where relevant (City of Calgary 2018e). As one NPC told us:

We want these groups to be successful because we kind of consider them to be a partner in delivering programs and services to Calgarians.

In addition, Neighbourhood Services staff manage the Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) funding program, a cost-sharing partnership between the provincial and municipal governments. FCSS programs in Calgary support community organizations within two priority areas: increasing social inclusion and strengthening neighbourhoods (Cooper 2013). Other neighbourhood supports include Community Social Workers (CSWs), whose role is to address the unique social needs of vulnerable Calgarians within priority neighbourhoods. Unlike NPCs, who liaise with community associations (CAs), the CSWs work directly with residents.

Calgary also has a well-developed system of more than 150 volunteer-run CAs that complement the services provided by the City itself. The earliest CAs in Calgary were formed in 1908 and in the 1920s, and the first CA was legally incorporated under the provincial Societies Act in 1930. Following the Second World War, the number of grassroots CAs expanded significantly, and Calgary has since developed one of the most active CA networks in western Canada.

Membership in CAs is voluntary and open to all residents within the neighbourhood catchment area, for a modest fee, which results in considerable variation in CA populations and geographical sizes (Davies and Townshend 1994). Although each CA operates as an independent legal (typically non-profit) entity, the majority have also chosen to join the Federation of Calgary Communities (FCC)—a not-for-profit umbrella organization incorporated in 1961 (Davies and Townshend 1994). The FCC provides governance support and workshops, financial advice and accounting services, urban planning, and other programs and initiatives to assist and to represent CAs in municipal affairs (<https://calgarycommunities.com/about-us/>).

Unlike many CAs in American cities that episodically function around land-use conflicts, Calgary's CAs typically focus on providing ongoing recreational and social activities to local residents, in part by establishing and maintaining a community centre and other recreational amenities (Davies and Townshend 1994). The programming varies broadly between organizations but can include sports programs, community gardens, language classes, and a range of other services intended to enhance residents' lifestyles and surroundings (Federation of Calgary Communities 2018). When surveyed, a majority of Calgarians demonstrated an awareness of their CA and valued its role in providing meaningful services. However, only three in ten respondents were actually members of their CA and only a quarter of households participated in community association activities (Das and Duncan 2016).

This finding is suggestive of underlying pressures that may be limiting CAs' potential reach, such as limited funding, aging infrastructure, and volunteer burnout. CAs have also experienced competition from a growing number of residents' associations (RAs). The RAs are part of a governance structure associated with what is known as Common Interest Developments (CIDs)—typically associated with some form of privatization of communities or amenities within a community (McKenzie 1994; Townshend 2006). They also provide recreational and maintenance needs in the community, using mandatory fees collected through restrictive covenants and encumbrances on homeowners' properties (Conger, Goodbrand, and Gondek 2016). RAs are generally initiated by a land developer long before the community is "built out", and eventually transferred to the residents of the area. In some of the newer areas of the city the type of bottom-up CA described above has not been created, and RAs function as a form of surrogate for community association. As a result, the mandate of CAs has become somewhat blurred, leading Conger et al. (2016) to suggest that CAs are facing the "looming threat of irrelevance due to the erosion of their roles" (p. 16).

CAs have traditionally had an important function as the key geographical and social unit for engagement around proposed land-use changes or area redevelopment plans (Davies and Townshend 1994). Through their involvement in planning activities, CAs have served as a "critical quasi-institutional fourth level of government for Calgarians" (Conger et al. 2016, p. 1). Most CAs have planning committees that review applications for re-designation, subdivision, and development permits. Although they have no formal authority, these committees have significant

influence because of their insight into local experiences (Conger et al. 2016). However, the role of CAs in local planning issues came under scrutiny between 2016 and 2018 as part of a broader Council-mandated review of stakeholder engagement, led by a Community Representation Framework Task Force.

Initiated in 2016, the Task Force proposed the development of “district forums” to bring together representatives of various community organizations, including CAs, RAs, and a range of other groups, to represent community interests in planning processes (City of Calgary 2018f). The Task Force has concluded its work and pilot projects are currently under way; however, it remains unclear how new planning and engagement processes will affect the role of individual CAs in community-building issues if representation and consultation upscales to a more regional level than that of CA boundaries.

3. Methodology

To understand a range of lived experiences of participation and inclusion in Calgary, this study used a qualitative, multiple case study design. Eight communities were selected using a mixed-methods sampling strategy.

First, based on data analysis carried out for the national project using 2006 census data and tax-filer data geocoded to census tracts, maps of two key variables were produced for Calgary's census tracts. The variables were (a) an Income Ratio, measured as the average individual income (population aged 15+) of the CT relative to that of the CMA average, and (b) level of income diversity/inequality within each tract, as measured by the within-tract Gini Coefficient or Gini Concentration Ratio (Walks 2013). The CTs were then classified on both variables simultaneously, i.e., based on a 4 x 4 cell rubric, defined by quartile values of each variable. The extremes are represented in Figure 1 by groupings in Q1Q1 (low income and low diversity), Q1Q4 (low income and high diversity), Q4Q1 (high income and low diversity), and Q4Q4 (high income and high diversity).

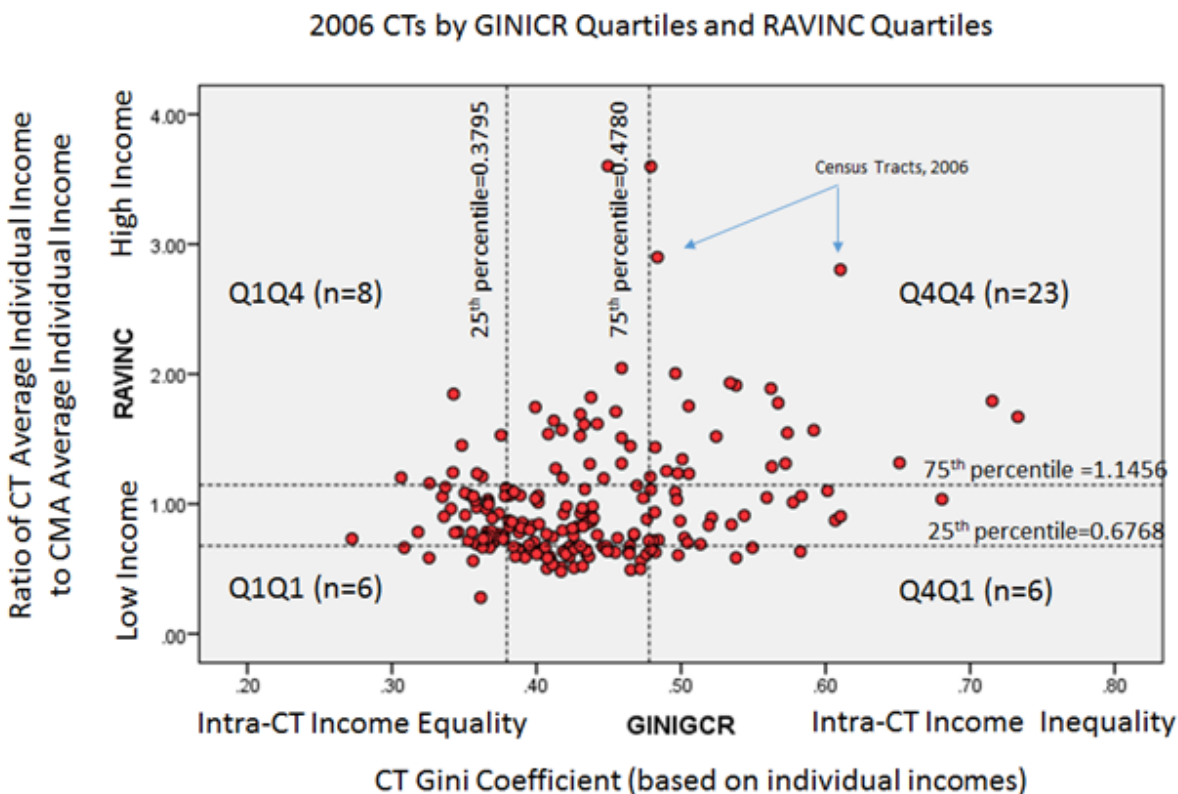
Finally, a more qualitative purposive sampling strategy was used to select two communities from each of the four extreme categories (e.g., two from Q1Q1, two from Q1Q4, etc.). This involved selecting census tracts that closely matched with administrative community association area boundaries and engaging the knowledge of the project's two community partners (the Federation of Calgary Communities and the United Way Calgary and Area) to select cases that were likely to yield rich results. The cases selected include Mount Royal, Chinook Park/Kelvin Grove/Eagle Ridge (CKE), McKenzie Towne, Hawkwood, Bridgeland-Riverside, Capitol Hill, Dover, and Martindale (see Figures 2 and 3).

The "Income Polarization and Participation in Community Organizations in Calgary" project involved two phases of interviews. The first phase, completed between May and September 2016, involved interviews with 28 community leaders, including CA presidents and/or vice presidents, City of Calgary Neighbourhood Services employees, and leaders of other community-based organizations.¹ This phase was designed to generate an understanding of how

1 Names, communities, and other identifying information has been omitted to protect participants' confidentiality.

community leaders perceive residents’ participation and social inclusion/exclusion in Calgary.² The second phase of interviews aimed to explore residents’ experiences. It was completed between October 2016 and August 2017 and included 32 participants. These were selected using a maximum diversity purposive sampling approach (Mason 2018; Seale 2012) to achieve variation in experiences of community participation, as well as diverse age, gender, income, housing tenure, household composition, and ethno-cultural characteristics.

Figure 1: 2006 Calgary Census Tracts by Gini Coefficient and Ratio of Average Individual Income (selected quartiles shown)



All interviews followed a semi-structured format. They were recorded and transcribed verbatim, then sent to participants for review. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring ideas or emergent patterns across the textual data set in order to understand how people made sense of their experiences (Riger and Sigurvinsdottir 2016). Separate within-case results were analyzed for each community, followed by a comparative analysis meant to produce “cross-contextual generalities” (Mason 2018, p. 245) that could generate insights of potential use by neighbourhood policy makers and community-based organizations to develop beneficial practices and interventions.

2 This report makes an analytical distinction between community leaders and residents. However, this distinction breaks down in practice because residents flow in and out of leadership positions and may have influence even without formal leadership status.

Figure 2: Map of Calgary showing case study communities by community association areas, and 2006 CTs by quartiles by Gini coefficient

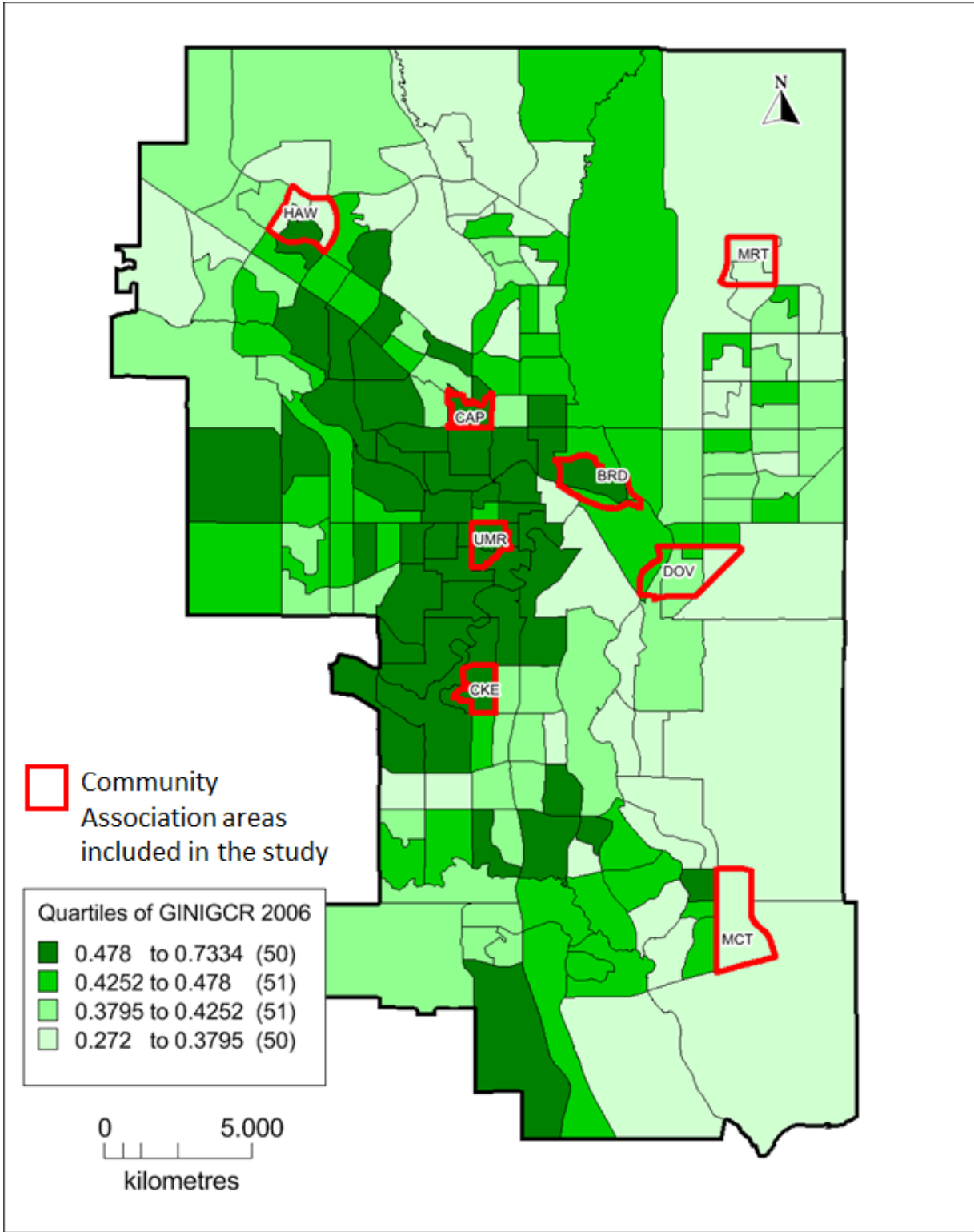
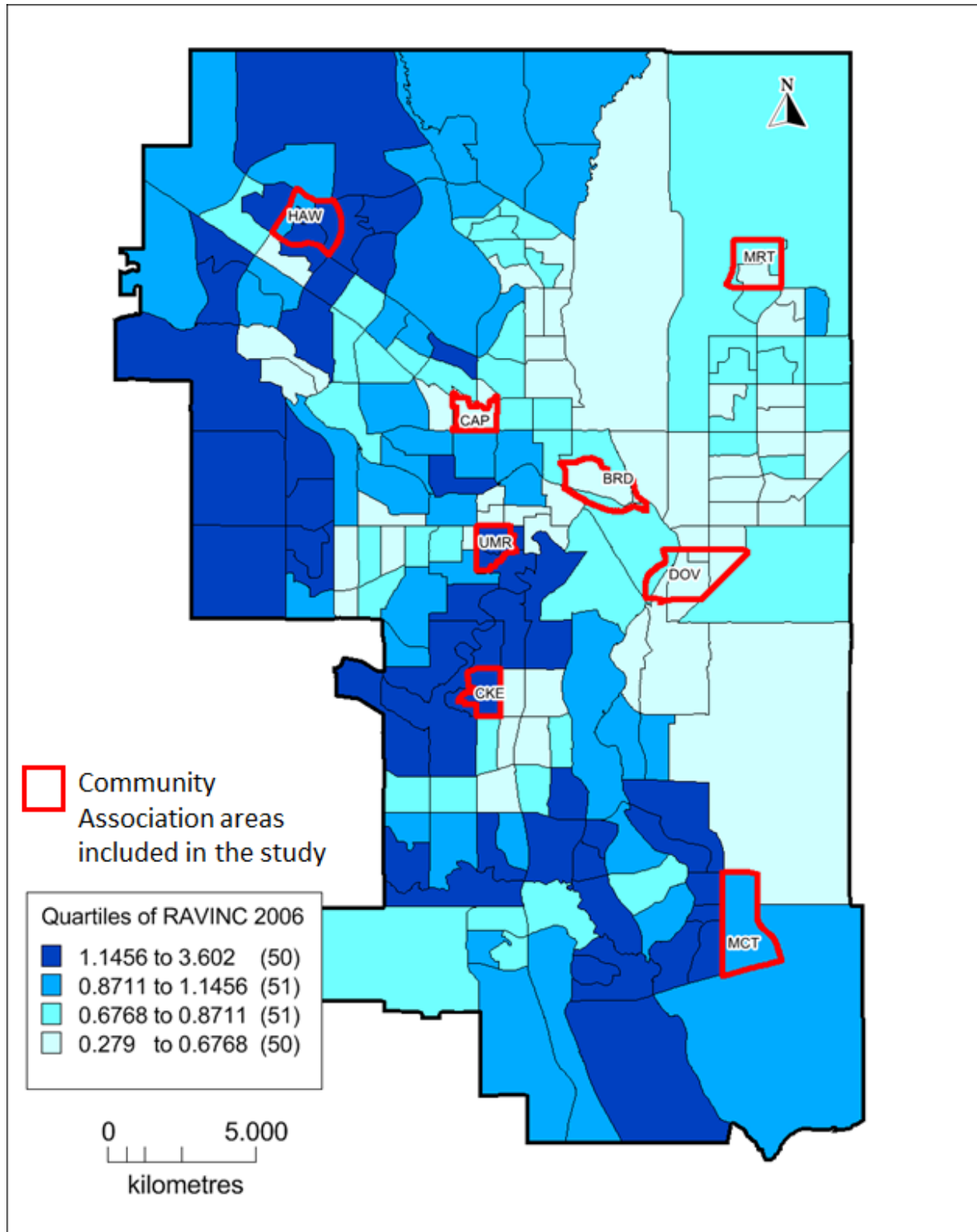


Figure 3: Map of Calgary showing case study communities by community association areas and 2006 CTs by quartiles of ratio of average individual income (population aged 15+)



4. Key Findings: Formal Participation

In the qualitative interviews, both community leaders and residents were asked to define what participation meant for them. Their diverse responses illustrate that participation can take many forms, which can be grouped into formal and informal modes following a framework proposed by Swaroop and Morenoff (2006). This section describes formal modes of participation that emerged in thematic analysis of interview data. As mentioned above, numerous community organizations, social agencies, and government departments work within Calgary neighbourhoods. However, CAs are the focus of this discussion as the primary organizations that operate across the city with an explicit neighbourhood mandate.

4.1 Stepping up and helping out

As interview participants told us, formal neighbourhood participation involves taking a leadership role through volunteer board or committee work, usually with the CA. This work varies depending upon the organization itself, the nature of its responsibilities and resources, and the characteristics of the community. Most CAs plan neighbourhood events such as barbecues, Easter egg hunts, or community clean-ups; or more ongoing programs such as soccer leagues or garden clubs, all of which depend upon the involvement of volunteers. The CAs in Dover, Bridgeland-Riverside, Mount Royal, CKE, and Capitol Hill maintain community halls. These facilities serve as important gathering places within the neighbourhood, except when they are rented out for private functions. However, they also tend to divert the energy and attention of CA boards toward operational issues involving building maintenance or ensuring the organization's sustainability. Although some CAs employ a staff person to help with administrative tasks, maintaining a facility can place significant demands on volunteers. As one CA board member said,

It's been nothing but renovations. And it's like, is that really what I wanted to volunteer for—taking care of a building? It's like a job, right? It's unfortunate, but it has to be done.

4.2 Speaking out

Most board volunteers also play a critical role in advocating for their residents and communities broadly. Thus, formal participation involves having influence and a voice within the community on behalf of residents. CA planning committees expressed mixed feelings about their role in providing input into City land-use decisions. On the one hand they valued the opportunity for

self-representation. However, they also felt residents and municipal leaders had unfair expectations of volunteer boards or committees, while recognizing the limitations of their capacity:

Some councillors would love it if communities would deal with development permits entirely. I don't know if we're equipped. You really do need planners and experts. [Having] laypeople weigh in on design and construction—yes, this is a criticism; I don't know if that's probably the best thing. It's emotional.

Based on the interviews, neighbourhoods like Mount Royal appear to have an advantage in terms of influence because residents are well-connected within city administration or governance. One official commented that CA members in Mount Royal

know how to navigate the City...they go right to the person that would maybe be the decision-maker or have more power for decisions.

On the other hand, Dover and Martindale residents often described their communities as being “neglected” by the City. For example, a Martindale participant felt that because of poor outside perceptions,

We have had the worst representation on city council for the last—well for as long as I've lived in Martindale... And we have two level train crossings in residential areas inside of Martindale; I wonder how that happened... I think outside perception of us is very “Oh, they're poor, or they're this; or they're immigrants, or they're that.” There's a bad impression of us.

A Dover CA member similarly felt her neighbourhood was a low priority for the city, commenting that her block had streetlights out for 147 days, and only after she contacted city council was the problem fixed.

Residents can thus have an influential voice as members of the CA. However, across many communities, participants noted the potential danger when CAs represent the interests of the few rather than the community broadly. Again, participants noted the demanding work involved in volunteering on a CA board:

There's only so much the remaining members of the board want to take on, and I get that, because a lot of it will fall on my shoulders and I don't have the time, I don't want—I already do a lot, so enough is enough.

Yet board members often felt obligated to continue in their role for fear no one would step up to replace them. This can lead to the dominance of a clique or “core group” within the CA. As one resident reflected, **“the people that are involved in the community give it their best. But it's always the same people that are doing the work.”** Because of this cycle, boards may not be representative of their broader communities. As one community social worker wondered,

I don't know if they do a good job of making sure that people really have an opportunity to get their voices heard, or if it's just the few voices within the community association making decisions.

4.3 Addressing needs

The theme of “addressing needs” took different forms across communities, but it generally involved both seeking out help and finding ways to meet others’ needs. A single mother shared that when she arrived in Calgary as an immigrant, she did not know where to go for help with childcare or work; she commented that **“people turn to community for help, especially when they are in need, when they are not in good times.”** In her experience, however, the CA did not adequately fulfill that role; **“I was in trouble and I didn’t know where to go. I didn’t know who to talk to.”**

The reason could be, as another resident speculated, that the efforts of CAs often address the perceived, rather than the actual, needs of the community. Several participants felt that CAs therefore needed to work harder to learn more about their residents, while residents also needed to engage more with CAs to help articulate their needs. On the other hand, one participant questioned whether this was the role of a CA, or whether it was the state’s responsibility to provide “the professionals that are needed.”

Other interview participants defined participation in terms of meeting needs using one’s own talents and interests—more of a grassroots approach. For example, a Dover resident offered yoga lessons and peer counselling in order for neighbours **“to learn how we can be a resource for each other.”** Another resident of Capitol Hill wanted to mentor others so that they felt confident sharing their own knowledge and life experience with neighbours. However, she suggested there were limited opportunities to take a leadership role outside the scope of formal organizations, because of the need for a physical space and some sort of compensation to make it viable. She felt the ideal situation would involve:

someone from the community association meeting me in person, finding out the skills and abilities that I have that might benefit the community, and inviting me to provide those to the community, for pay.

These sorts of opportunities were enabled in some communities through micro-grants under the Strong Neighbourhoods Initiative—but were beyond the usual means of CAs to facilitate.

4.4 Showing up

In addition to leading community activities, formal participation also includes taking part in community programs or events, or consuming the services offered by community organizations. Typically, this involves what participants described as either “coming out” or “showing up”:

I understand that not everyone wants to be on the board or wants to be on the committee, but even participating and showing up to the events that we host, or like the farmer’s market, the festival we hold, the soccer program, that kind of stuff.

Another community leader agreed with this broad view of participation:

Whether you register for a program or stop by for a special event or drop your garbage off at the community cleanup day—just whatever they offer, if you take advantage of that.

Although one participant was adamant that participation entailed a physical presence at community events, others made allowances for more passive ways in which people might participate by reading the community newsletter, following the CA's social media pages, or simply taking an interest in neighbourhood goings-on.

With some exceptions, community leaders felt strongly that relatively few residents were engaging in the programs offered. They commented about seeing the same people at every event and felt discouraged by the difficulty of reaching new members. As one CA board member asked, **“You try to do these things, and then you get no one coming, so it’s like, why are we doing this?”**

Higher rates of participation in some areas might be explained in part by strategies employed to recruit new members, such as an annual door-to-door canvassing program that has helped generate high membership rates. Success in recruiting members also depends to some extent on what one participant called the CA's **“value proposition”** or the perceived return on invested time or effort. Moreover, as several participants noted, the benefits of having a CA (such as beautification projects or access to outdoor skating rinks) often flowed to all residents regardless of their membership status, thereby disincentivizing formal involvement or membership.

5. Key Findings: Informal Participation

While community leaders emphasized the more formal modes of civic engagement described above, residents also spoke of various neighbourhood-based social ties, day-to-day interactions, and mundane spatial routines they viewed as forms of participation. Several themes were identified in the data and are described here: neighbouring, networking, caring, reciprocating, working together, watching out, and getting out.

5.1 Neighbouring

Neighbouring is a broad category of place-based interactions that has been summarized as “the activities engaged in by neighbors *as neighbors* and the relationships these engender among them” (Keller 1968, p. 29). In this study, most participants strongly valued knowing their neighbours and having friendly relationships, even among strangers within the community. They associated neighbourliness with a greater sense of safety, potential business opportunities, the comfort of having someone close by with whom to socialize or turn to in an emergency, and with “**a feeling of belonging...of being part of a place.**”

However, the interviews also highlight tensions. Some participants in this study described incivilities and a feeling of distrust that they observed around them. One Bridgeland-Riverside condominium owner felt excluded when she would “**say hello to someone with a big smile and they just look at you like they don’t know how to respond.**” A longer-term Martindale resident felt that as the community diversified people had started to “**shut themselves off**”; they were less willing to reach out to others, were ruder and “**not respecting their neighbours’ property [or] parking.**” While these examples are from diverse lower-income neighbourhoods, participants in more homogeneous and higher-income neighbourhoods also shared frustrations around parking, garbage, traffic, and a general decline in friendliness.

Many of these perceived incivilities suggest a failure among certain residents to meet dominant white, middle-class, “Canadian” norms of neighbourly behaviour based on friendly, if superficial, interactions—a clash in expectations sometimes framed in terms of decline. However, tensions were also evident among participants from ethnic minority backgrounds based on competing normative value systems. For example, one resident critiqued the superficial nature of interactions in Martindale compared to her former home in India, where,

I can just knock the door and just give something for the neighbour, maybe something that I cooked. And then sit and talk and interact on a daily basis, no matter what. And that, I don't experience in Canada in ten years. It's not like that. We have a good news or we have a bad news on the channel, or we are listening to some news, we'll just knock the door and talk to each other, and say hey, what is this going on? You know? Just somebody you can connect right away, whether you're happy or sad, whatever it is, right? That's not how it is in Canada.

As this example illustrates, a range of different norms influence ideals of “good neighbouring” (van Eijk 2012), and underpin a sense of frustration when those ideals are not met. They also serve to rationalize a certain distancing between social “others.”

Furthermore, interviews strongly support van Eijk’s (2012) observation that neighbouring involves a balance between proximity and privacy. Although some participants described neighbours as genuine friends, it was more common for them to differentiate between the two roles. One resident of Dover spoke about a close neighbour:

We're not in each other's pockets—don't get me wrong. But if I pick up the phone and call [her], she'd be over in a second.

Another participant in Hawkwood said she knew her neighbours reasonably well, but added,

We're not inside of each other's houses or anything like that, but certainly when you're out in the summertime you stop and chat.

As this last comment illustrates, neighbouring often takes place through casual encounters in outside public spaces rather than inside private homes—at least until deeper friendships have formed. As van Eijk (2012) has stressed and this study bears out, these sorts of bounded relations between neighbours are common across all types of neighbourhoods, not only the so-called “deprived” or “problem” ones.

5.2 Networking

The theme of networking highlights ways in which individuals come together by using—and thereby consolidating—informal social networks within their neighbourhoods. A common thread between participants from Mount Royal, Hawkwood, and McKenzie Towne was the incidence of block parties organized between homes in a defined area. As one Mount Royal resident described:

It's not a community-sanctioned thing; it's our block. And we have a block party every year because we all feel it's really important—plus too, our kids play together, we go across our backyard and chat over the fence, we go to our neighbour's house for drinks on a sunny afternoon... There's myself and two other neighbours. So three houses, out of I guess, I think there's about 16 total on our block? So three of us just get together and send an email to everybody. And one lady kind of hosts it mainly in her backyard and garage; and then the other guy goes around and canvasses all the neighbours, and we do up a little flyer with all the information on it. And then people who are coming contact me, and I organize the food and babysitters and things like that.

As this example illustrates, these sorts of social events depend upon existing relationships, but they also help to expand the network of connected neighbours. They can also inspire other initiatives, as in this experience of a Hawkwood resident's annual Halloween gathering:

All the neighbours are invited to come over and we bring out the fire pit and just come and sit and have hot chocolate or whatever. And it's sort of grown from there, where somebody else this summer for the first year organized a block party and we had about 50 people from our little area come and join us. Which was amazing, you know. You just have to put yourself out there to meet your neighbours.

Informal social gatherings can thus have a sort of ripple effect—a “**growing, extending reaching out**”—that impacts the broader neighbourhood as well.

Similar neighbourhood-based networks can also serve residents looking for support. For example, one participant described her own pivotal role within Mount Royal's “nanny network,” connecting mothers of young children with information about childcare or things to do in the area:

I just really work hard to talk with people, quickly get to know them, and always keep them in mind when I'm approached with an issue or something that needs to be done, or something where someone is looking for help ... I'm a networker.

The networking activities described by participants in this study were often intertwined with community organizations and shared a common motivation to build a sense of trust and cohesion among neighbourhood residents. Like more formal community events, they also depended significantly on mobilizers—individuals who were willing to take a leadership role, and who may participate simultaneously in informal activities as well as their community association or other volunteer organization. However, in comparison to community-wide events, these informal activities occurred at smaller and more intimate scales; they also required a much less sustained engagement, allowing individuals to participate in ways and to the extent they wished, without the commitments involved in more formal volunteer roles. Moreover, as with community-organized events, these activities helped build relationships between residents, giving them a stronger feeling of connection; as a Bridgeland-Riverside resident noted, “**the more people you know, the more you feel you belong.**”

On the other hand, smaller-scale social gatherings may be more limited in terms of who is invited to participate. A block party would be limited to residents of a defined street or block, compared with a community-wide barbecue with individuals from across different socio-economic or ethno-racial pockets of a neighbourhood; the networks are thus more selective and exclusive. Furthermore, the block parties and smaller gatherings that participants described in this study typically occurred within privately owned spaces such as a resident's backyard, rather than a shared public space to which everyone has access. This has important implications in terms of who feels comfortable within those spaces, and ultimately who benefits from the networking activity: the host, immediate neighbours, the local block or the neighbourhood as a whole.

5.3 Caring

The theme of caring and related aspects of mutual aid comprises everyday acts through which residents take care of both human and non-human entities within their neighbourhoods. A resident of Hawkwood recalled:

The lady across the street from us lost her husband a few years ago, and when he was sick, you'd go over and help her out or take her a casserole.

In Dover, a resident of a low-income seniors' residence took care of two struggling neighbours by **"being a good listener,"** offering them food and occasionally taking them out to a movie. Meanwhile, a resident of Bridgeland-Riverside gave bottles and blankets to a homeless man she regularly encountered near her building. These sorts of caring practices often took place between individuals who were not close friends, but neighbours who could recognize when someone needed help because of their proximity, attentiveness, and frequent day-to-day interactions. As Mee (2009) found in her own research, caring bonds such as these between neighbours contribute significantly to a sense of belonging.

Some participants also talked about shovelling snow and taking care of their yards or gardens as a form of neighbourhood participation. However, the majority of examples in which participants spoke about care involved caring about, or taking care of, shared public spaces. For example, a Bridgeland-Riverside resident "adopted" a park next to her building after noticing weeds taking over the flowerbeds. She said,

I never liked to weed my own garden but this is different, I don't have to. So I started weeding and just making it nice and making sure that things don't die.

Other participants fed birds or squirrels, or reported graffiti, an overflowing garbage can, or something else that needed attention—a form of participation that involved caring enough about one's neighbourhood to contact police or file a 311 (municipal services) report. These latter sorts of caring practices illustrate ways in which residents actively worked to create an ideal neighbourhood environment in which they took pride. They also set a standard to which everyone in the neighbourhood was expected to adhere; as one CA member pleaded:

All I ask is that they just mow their grass, pick up the garbage; that's it... I just want people to love [the neighbourhood] as much as we do, to make it better.

5.4 Reciprocating

The theme of reciprocity relates to sharing, lending, or helping practices that neighbours exchanged with one another. Participants described instances where they shared a loaf of bread with a neighbour, who later reciprocated with lettuce or carrots from their garden; where they offered food and in turn used a neighbour's television to watch a show; or where neighbours with either Costco memberships or vehicles banded together for a weekly "shopping caravan." A senior citizen in Dover gave a jar of homemade antipasto every year to a few "lucky people" who had helped her out, including **"the fellow who comes up every week, cuts my grass in the summer and shovels the snow in the winter, for nothing."** Another

elderly resident of Bridgeland-Riverside occasionally ordered cakes for social events at her facility, but was unable to pick them up; as she explained,

I went over and asked one of the chaps that I knew very well, would he drive me over? ... And he said, "I can't lift things, and there's many things I can't do, but I can drive a car. So anytime you need to be driven anywhere I will do it."... So if you have somebody like that, that's a tremendous help... And you see, it gets him out of his room; now he's coming to coffee.

As this last quote illustrates, many of these reciprocal acts fulfilled mutual needs between the neighbours and thus served an important instrumental role, in addition to sustaining friendly relations.

One particular participant offered insights about the ways in which reciprocity differed between two neighbourhoods in this study. While he lived within the more exclusive Uplands area of Hawkwood, he had also spent considerable time renovating a home in Dover. He characterized Dover residents as more open, friendly, and approachable:

You have guys a few houses away that look, like honestly, like little gangsters. But once they just approached me; I was outside, and they just approached me and asked me to boost their car. So I just drove over to their house and boosted their car. And since then we're kind of—[it's like] we're best friends; they say hi all the time and they smile at me, and they just kind of ask, if I move things around, they always ask if I need help... While I am in Dover, I know that these guys, they are standing in front of me and there is nothing behind... like whatever they say to you, they mean it.

In contrast, Hawkwood residents were more guarded and private:

To be honest, this is why I like this area, is that people don't come over and people don't start talking to me. I really appreciate my privacy. I really appreciate my life inside of my house. In Dover it's the same, but you feel that life around is ready to get into your house as soon as you open the door... I wouldn't go to my neighbours over here to ask for some tool if I need to use, if I don't have it; I would probably go to Rona or any other store like this and buy it. In Dover, though, I can always go to the neighbour next to me and ask for something. I can always go over there and ask them to help me to move something.

This is only one individual's experience; however, it resonates with how other participants spoke about reciprocal networks, particularly in Dover and Martindale, and to some extent Bridgeland-Riverside and Capitol Hill.

5.5 Working Together

Participants spoke about working together on shared projects with neighbours, through which they developed a sense of connection and understanding. A resident of Hawkwood shared that he and a neighbour had worked together to build matching platforms for their garbage bins, through which they learned about their common experiences: **"You see how a person works, you see how he's helping, and yeah, he opens up way more. He tells his stories, I tell him my stories."** In other examples of working together, neighbours needed to

collaborate to resolve specific issues. For example, a Dover resident spoke about the difficulty of removing snow on his block:

We have two slivers of land on either side of our driveway, and we said, pile the snow as high as we can and pack it down; that way we can all get out. Because if you push it back into the middle of the road, nobody gets out.

Parking issues were more contentious and difficult to resolve. A resident of an inner-city neighbourhood described her unconventional “community house environment” in which she and several friends shared a duplex. Their frequent social gatherings involved “**coming and going that creates traffic and need for parking.**” When tensions arose with neighbours over parking, she tried getting in touch with them by leaving notes and a telephone number; instead of contacting her directly, however, one neighbour reported her to City authorities. This propensity to appeal to a higher level of authority was common among many residents in this study, who said they would likely use 311 (the City of Calgary’s municipal service number) or contact the community association if they encountered problems in the neighbourhood, rather than attempting to resolve things more directly themselves.

Sometimes neighbours worked together in larger groups to bring attention to shared concerns. A Mount Royal resident related that when a shrub disease was discovered in their community, neighbours were “**quick to get together and form their own little block watch, and their own little way of communicating. Just to look after each other’s property, basically.**” Eventually they got the CA and the City involved in helping to control the outbreak. A resident of Hawkwood shared a similar example of neighbours working together to advocate for a berm to help screen traffic noise from a nearby thoroughfare. They recognized that they needed to align with the CA for their concerns to be taken seriously:

When we dealt with the City they were quite happy to deal with us. The folks across the street in Edgemont did kind of the same thing without getting the community association backing. The City wouldn’t talk to them.

These examples illustrate ways in which residents worked together, but also through the CA as an established and legitimized channel, to advance their interests.

5.6 Watching Out

Although sometimes a more passive form of participation than the other themes discussed thus far, participants in every case study community spoke about watching out for one another. This theme includes the small, everyday ways in which residents kept an eye on one another’s properties or wellbeing, as well as the more intentional forms of social control through which they monitored crime and safety in the neighbourhood.

Many residents talked about sharing the responsibility to watch out for their children. This often involved collectively creating a space, as an extension of the home, which was perceived to be safe for children to play. One father living in Capitol Hill told us:

We’ve got five or six kids who play on our lot; one of the parents is out making sure, while the other ones are making dinner. It’s kind of nice that we share that; it’s not

really official, just out making sure that the kids are doing what they're supposed to—which is just staying on our side of the street, maybe not going around the corner.

A Martindale participant recalled the close friendships she had developed with three other stay-at-home mothers from different ethno-racial backgrounds on her block:

On my list of, you know [really good friends], I think four? Four or five, all came from being neighbours in Martindale. And again, all different races, all different backgrounds—doesn't matter... So, I was a stay-at-home mom and, yeah, I think we were all stay-at-home moms. You know, we hung out during the days and whatever else. But we met, basically, through our kids... When the kids were out playing, if one parent was outside and you needed to run in and start dinner or whatever you'd just say, "Okay I'm running in, I'll be twenty minutes," and it was never a problem—you could always just run back in.

In this example, the bonds between mothers developed around the rhythms of their parenting and household responsibilities, which over-rode their social differences. Watching out for each other's children offered a reason to socialize and repeated encounters over time, which helped build trust and eventually friendships between them.

"Watching out" also involved monitoring both public and private spaces for unwanted behaviours, as a form of social control. A homeowner in a more affluent neighbourhood kept an eye on the amenities outside her building:

I mean, we pay—we're paying our \$89 or whatever it is per month. So, I also feel in a sense we are owners of that centre. So yeah, I do feel quite as if that's my property, and if I see somebody on a skateboard go on the tennis court, I'll certainly ask them to move.

While this participant recognized a need for dedicated facilities for youth, she also lamented her homeowner association's decision to open the tennis courts to the broader community, which she felt had resulted in **"more cars coming into the parking lot...and you know, drug deals [going] on quite regularly."** She said, **"I certainly tried to do what I could to interfere. But it's meant we had to post all kinds of signs up saying, you know, private property, etc."**

This example clearly illustrates how individuals enact spaces of inclusion and exclusion within neighbourhoods by signalling who, and what sorts of activities, are permitted within those spaces. It is also one of several examples in this study that entangles notions of criminality and youth, exposing particular ways in which age can structure spatial exclusion. After referencing an incident where she chased away children misbehaving outside her home, for example, another participant concluded, **"it's up to you to maintain a certain status of acceptable lifestyles."**

At times, concerns around safety overlapped with the networking activities described above, as residents made use of their connections to share information with neighbours. An informal residents' group in one community used social media to report criminal activity to neighbours. As one participant shared:

[The members] are almost excited to report, like I saw someone jaywalking, or my house was broken into. And I think it's part wanting to be part of the community—is it gossip? It's probably gossip too, but gossip is part of wanting to be part of the community.

As this last comment suggests, watching out for one another included a form of participation that two individuals characterized as being a “nosy neighbour.” A homeowner in Dover said:

It's important to be able to know who you're surrounded with and being able to rely on them, just in the very sense of just knowing that, you know, I'm out of town, or I don't know, my kids are here. It's that idea of the nosy neighbour. I want nosy neighbours; I want people to know that somebody's in my backyard that shouldn't be there.

Despite the common desire for some amount of privacy, as discussed already above, participants also valued knowing there were “**eyes on the street**” to regulate disorder and activities they deemed undesirable, from break-ins, to drug activity, to adolescents loitering without apparent purpose.

Of all forms of neighbouring discussed herein, however, this sort of informal social control has the greatest potential to create powerful exclusions, particularly for members of racialized communities. Participants across the case studies spoke about fears over safety, though two particular examples illustrate the “sticky perceptions” (Sampson 2009) and stereotypes circulating behind such fears. As one younger second-generation immigrant in Dover said:

I feel fairly safe in my community. I didn't at first; I used to carry a knife in my backpack. But now I realize that's ridiculous. I've been walking it for six years now and nothing has ever—I've never even seen anything suspicious... Although, I've gotta say, other residents sometimes [have] a perception that it's a very dangerous neighbourhood.

Another man from a minority community spoke about a safety meeting he attended, in which others spoke about being afraid to walk on the streets or be out at night. Never having felt threatened himself, he realized during the meeting that it was members of his own community that were perceived as dangerous. As he described:

Those are the signs that show you, that tell you that, yeah, the whole community doesn't look at each other as, “Oh yeah, good people, yeah”; there is kind of some judgment around, Who are those? What colour are they? ... There are those kinds of judgments based on background, colour of skin.

Although this individual recognized the racist discourse that excluded him from feeling welcome in public spaces, he shared that his own sense of safety stemmed from knowing fellow members of his community personally; “[**even**] if I don't know them by name, they are family to me.”

5.7 Getting Out

The final theme of “getting out” involves ways in which residents described participating in their community by walking, biking, gardening, or simply being outdoors. Walking is important to the ways in which people use and navigate everyday spaces within their neighbourhoods.

The act of walking can encourage a strong connection to place, as illustrated in this new Canadian's experience:

I used to walk around, walk to the bus stop, walk to church, when I was brand new. So this is the first place that I know in Calgary, so I think there's that connection. That I feel this is my home.

Although this participant focused on positive outcomes, walking was not a matter of choice for him, but of financial necessity. This resonates with an observation made by another participant who had retired to Dover from a middle-class suburb, that because people in Dover were walking, biking, or waiting for buses, there was more interaction on the streets. Participants in inner-city neighbourhoods gave many more examples of walking or biking as part of their day-to-day commutes or routines, in comparison with those living in more suburban areas, who tended to bike or walk primarily for leisure. Nevertheless, both situations offered a deeper level of engagement than what one person termed the “**car capsule**” experience.

Walking or biking can also be a way for people to expand the boundaries of “their” neighbourhood by moving through a wide range of places, or to discover commonalities with individuals they might not otherwise interact with. As one Mount Royal resident said:

A lot of the people that I've met that live in those big homes... a lot of them have young families. So their concerns are the same as mine. And they'll stop and say hi on the street when you're out with your kids and you're walking your dog.

As this comment also suggests, walking with dogs and children can provide a “safe” opening for strangers to interact. At the same time, by making residents more visible to one another, walking can strengthen existing relationships through chance encounters that allow neighbours to interact in a casual way that nevertheless keeps social boundaries intact.

Finally, participants also spoke about simply being out in their yards as a way of connecting with others in their neighbourhood. A Dover homeowner mentioned frequent daily interactions with neighbours because “**people are outside working on their yards, or cutting their lawn, or shovelling their walks.**” Another resident of Capitol Hill summed up the three things that invited interaction on his street as “**the kid and the dog, [and] that we're smiling on our porch.**” As he suggested, having a public-facing private space and the willingness to engage with passers-by were important factors in providing opportunities to interact. On the other hand, these opportunities were also circumscribed by the highly seasonal nature of “getting out.” As a McKenzie Towne resident commented:

It's so funny, because when I have the block party on our block, we always have it in the spring. And people come out of hibernation; they say, hey I didn't see you for the last six months, or four months, right? Because it's just too cold to have community outside in any way.

While people do continue to walk, bike, and care for their yards in winter months, these sorts of routine outdoor activities are heavily curtailed by inclement weather, adding to the cyclical rhythm of community life.

6. Key Findings: Factors Influencing Participation

This study identified several factors that influenced whether and how individuals participated in community life. These factors can be grouped into three categories: personal circumstances, over which individuals may have some influence or choice; contextual or structural factors that are largely beyond an individual's control; and the characteristics and actions of community organizations. This section describes each of these categories, with particular attention to instances where the perceptions of community leaders differed significantly from those of residents who participated less often in formal neighbourhood organizations.

6.1 Personal circumstances

Personal circumstances are conceptualized here as factors over which individuals have a high degree of choice or control. Thematic analysis generated five types of personal circumstances that had an important role in influencing residents' formal participation, four of which served to motivate participation: life transitions, ideological motivations, the desire to protect one's stake, and feeling needed. A fifth factor, having other priorities, generally discouraged participation.

6.1.1 Life transitions

Life course transitions can represent important shifts in the propensity to engage or participate. Many residents who participated as volunteers in their communities talked about the importance of life transitions in sparking their interest, such as having a child and wanting to ensure there were local amenities for them, having their children start school or move away from home, or retiring. One CA president shared that he joined the board when he moved into his present community with pre-school children: **"I thought, okay, this is going to be our life; we'll be hanging around home not doing a lot [so] this is the time to sort of engage in that."** Another participant began helping with community events after she retired, commenting:

You do re-examine your values, because you have time to do it—because there aren't other competing things. Like, my children are grown, I don't have grandchildren, so I don't need to; my time isn't taken up that way.

While major life events such as illness can also limit how actively individuals are able to participate, transition points in general appear to represent important opportunities for engaging residents in community life.

6.1.2 Ideological motivations

Participants also had ideological reasons for becoming involved in their neighbourhoods, including a desire to improve their own and the broader community's wellbeing. For example, a volunteer with a residents' group in Martindale said,

I just saw so much of the segregation [between ethno-cultural groups] and I don't want that; I think people need to understand each other more. And so, I was hoping that it would bring people together and open up those channels.

In addition to wanting to make the neighbourhood a better place to live, ideological motivations also included a general wish to contribute or give back. However, some residents had a more specific desire to intervene in what they perceived as negative change:

I want to like where I live...When we first moved there it was very different than it is now and I just—I don't know; the stuff that I see is not making me happy. So even just with, whether it be the garbage, whether it be people leaving grocery carts everywhere, whether it be people not keeping their yards clean, whether the City isn't coming and mowing and cleaning the weeds where they're supposed to or emptying the garbage cans [...] I don't want to see it anymore.

6.1.3 Protecting one's stake

On a related note, residents sometimes became involved in community organizations to protect their own property values through “place maintenance” practices (Benson and Jackson 2012)—a motivation that was, in the words of one participant, “**tied to dirt.**” Sometimes individuals banded together to voice opposition to a proposed development they felt would negatively impact them, such as a bike lane or rapid transit route. In other cases, they resented broader changes they perceived as decline. One long-time Dover resident, for example, felt the community was “**under attack**” by developers and newcomers, and therefore worried about its “**moral fibre and values.**”

An official in Mount Royal similarly observed that residents were “**very protective... of what they bought into [and] want to make sure their place of living is secure, and exactly the way they came in. Keep it the same.**” On the other hand, residents who did not own property sometimes felt excluded from having a voice, especially when communications about planning issues were sent to property owners, many of whom did not even live in the neighbourhood. Indeed, the planning director of one CA admitted that when talking with neighbours about proposed developments, “**I don't go to a tenant's house, because they can't have a say; they don't pay taxes.**”

Overall, homeowners were often strongly motivated to be involved in community organizations as a means to protect their investment and the value of their homes—a finding that McCabe (2014) has documented elsewhere as a form of “Not in My Backyard” (NIMBY) activism. However, several participants in this study agreed with McCabe's view that myopic NIMBY attitudes

are a form of participation that is inconsistent with the ideals of civic engagement. They saw it as a negative way of participating in community life because it centred on individual rather than broader community interests: **“Some people feel that they’re very privileged and they should get what they want.”** This desire to protect property values can bring residents together in opposition to what they perceive as negative change. However, it can also favour the interests of more socially powerful individuals, and privilege narrow economic goals over broader social goods (see discussion in McCabe 2014).

Being involved in community life to protect one’s stake can therefore create powerful exclusions by amplifying already dominant voices, while silencing others. It also reinforces assumptions that renters are not as invested in neighbourhood life, justifying the role of homeowners as “gatekeepers” over neighbourhood decision-making (Hoekstra and Gerteis 2019, p. 211).

6.1.4 Feeling needed

An important factor that influenced participants’ choice to become involved as CA volunteers was the feeling of being needed, or that their skills could benefit the organization. One participant with a legal background got drawn into his community organization because of a particular planning issue, through which he discovered that **“the CA was in a gong-show of a state of governance.”** Another stepped up as CA president after he attended his first board meeting, observed a general lack of organization, and felt his background in management could help.

In a similar vein, volunteers tended to remain involved because of a feeling of responsibility, or fear that their initiatives would fall apart without them. As one fourth-year board member commented, **“You almost feel motivated or obligated to stay on and make sure everything keeps going.”** This feeling of responsibility was compounded by the difficulty of recruiting for board positions and the possibility that if volunteers did not continue, the society could cease due to lack of participation.

6.1.5 Other priorities

In addition to motivating participation, personal circumstances could also make residents less inclined to participate. Many community leaders speculated that apathy was a significant reason why residents did not engage. Lack of interest was indeed a factor for some residents, along with not perceiving any personal benefit to being involved. For example, one resident of McKenzie Towne with older children admitted she never attended community meetings because, **“most of [the issues] personally haven’t concerned me that much—like, I don’t really care for the most part.”** Others wanted to avoid the **“volunteer trap,”** feeling that **“everybody wants a piece of you.”**

However, a more significant reason why residents across the case studies reported not participating in community events was their choice to prioritize other activities. Rather than being apathetic, they framed their lack of participation in terms of not valuing community events as much as other potential activities that were more relevant to their interests and life-stage. In other words, it was not that they did not care about their neighbourhood, but rather that they cared more about, or were more fulfilled by, other non-territorial communities such as sports teams, seniors’ organizations, or even professional communities. As a resident of Dover shared:

I'm not sure that it's not of interest; it's just that it has to fit into schedules, and unfortunately, we're just crazy busy... And honestly when we have time, we're going to music and things like that.

Residents were particularly oriented toward their ethno-cultural and faith communities, where they built their social and support networks, rather than through their territorial communities. A South Sudanese resident of Dover explained that refugees from his country

look at their community as Sudanese. To them they don't belong in a physical community... Back in their country, a physical community is the same as a cultural community—but here they become different.

In Hawkwood, one CA member observed that “**the Cantonese families hang out with the Cantonese families**”; and in Martindale, several participants felt that first-generation immigrants in their neighbourhood tended to keep to their own ethno-cultural groups. They did not participate in their territorial communities because they did not value or need them, though they may be very active in faith or ethno-cultural organizations located within their neighbourhood. As a community social worker asked:

Some of the communities have so many things going on—they're very active in volunteering, they have community groups, they have educational classes, they offer scholarships; like, they do support their community quite well. So what would be their big draw to be part of something larger?

One Sikh Punjabi participant relayed, however, that her cultural centre also contributed to the broader community through food and clothing drives, interfaith programs, and other volunteer activities. This points to differing perceptions about the meaning of community participation and to what extent it is defined geographically.

6.2 Structural constraints

While the foregoing circumstances influenced individuals' choice to participate formally in neighbourhood activities, other more systemic barriers worked to limit individuals' opportunities to participate. These factors fall into three overlapping themes: financial limitations, time, and language or cultural barriers.

6.2.1 Financial limitations

Several community leaders speculated that cost was a barrier to participation, and this was true for some individuals. For example, one lower-income participant routinely looked for free events and felt a special CA membership category for residents on a fixed income would be beneficial. Another new homeowner shared that he and his partner were “**house-poor, so we can't really afford to be anywhere but our home.**” In general, however, CAs made a concerted effort to offer free events as a way of encouraging broad participation, and it was the more indirect costs that posed a challenge for participants. One parent without a vehicle talked about the “**hidden costs**” of attending community events, such as bus or taxi fare, or having to purchase snacks for her children while they were out. Thus, while membership fees or event costs may not in and of themselves be prohibitive, low income can nevertheless be a barrier to participating in community activities.

Class differences, and one's status as either homeowner or renter, can also make people feel unwelcome. One participant commented that apartment dwellers in Lower Mount Royal likely did not feel welcome to take part in the community's progressive dinners, for which tickets cost \$175; **"it's recognizable that there's an income disparity and they don't feel part of it."** A renter in another neighbourhood reported feeling that she did not fit in with her community association because it felt like a clique: **"there's a similar group of people that attend."** In relation to this last comment, income may be compounded with age, ethnicity, racial background, or other factors to create a sense for some individuals that the CA is simply not meant for them.

Moreover, CAs focus largely on social and recreational programs that are often not relevant to the needs of lower-income residents. As one single parent in this study argued, the CA should be a much broader resource that residents can turn to when they **"have no other place to go and seek help"**; they should serve as **"a connector, you know, between other resources and references to the families who are in need."** Overall then, CAs can discourage broad participation through offerings that are either beyond the means of certain residents, or that are simply not meaningful to their needs.

6.2.2 Time

Time was a major constraint for a wide range of participants; yet, the reasons for people's time pressures varied depending on their circumstances. Members of two-income households felt restricted by their busy schedules and family commitments, while a resident of the more affluent Upper Mount Royal area described the challenges of **"managing a 4,000-square-foot house with three kids and a busy husband."** In contrast, lower-income residents often had to work multiple minimum-wage jobs just to make ends meet. Some were simply in **"survival mode,"** as one participant in Dover suggested, and their life stresses left little free time or attention for community activities. As a single mother in Martindale shared,

I don't have time to interact with [neighbours]. I've never seen people around me, I've never, you, know, celebrated anything together or been together in sad times. All I know is people at work, that's it.

Participants also had different ways of valuing their time. Some who did serve on boards admitted that the time they had to volunteer was a **"freedom"** or **"luxury."** In contrast, one lower-income resident felt that volunteering her services to the community would diminish the value of what she had to offer:

It's kind of a paradox because what I do have is time... Yet in the volunteer model, I'm kind of expected to just hand it over. But in my case, I can't really do that because it doesn't honour the fact that I will have needs unmet if I just give myself away.

As this comment suggests, volunteering with community organizations is sometimes not open to individuals with lower incomes, for complex reasons. Serving on a community board or committee can require upwards of 30 hours per week, depending on the role. Residents therefore must be able to take on such a commitment; indeed, many of the active participants interviewed were either retired, stay-at-home parents, or independent business owners with flexible schedules. The time barrier was compounded by the fact that boards often seek members with certain educational or professional backgrounds to operate effectively—an expectation that one

participant described as “so ‘old white man’.” As one city employee acknowledged, “**at the end of the day [the CA] is a business... That needs a certain level of skill to be successful, to be sustainable.**”

6.2.3 Cultural and language barriers

Many of the community leaders in this study felt frustrated by what they perceived as cultural barriers that created tensions or divisions within their neighbourhoods. One CA member talked about the challenge of being inclusive while accommodating the needs of specific ethno-cultural or religious groups, for instance a yoga event that some participants wanted to segregate by gender. In Martindale in particular, participants felt that “**other ethnicities aren’t getting involved with each other**” and that even in schools, children “**herd in packs of us and them.**”

While they observed specific communities actively gathering and celebrating amongst themselves, several CA leaders felt it was difficult to engage those communities in broader neighbourhood activities. Although one board member commented on the value of having an “**insider**” who they could go to for advice, she also felt that “**sometimes it’s hard to ask people.**” This meant that boards dominated by “**middle-aged white people**” often relied on assumptions in their engagement efforts. For example, they speculated that recent immigrants might be inhibited from participating in their neighbourhoods because of not knowing what was socially acceptable, and described a cultural “**shyness**” to “**put themselves out of their box.**”

On the other hand, comments by newcomers themselves who participated in this study suggest their disengagement was less a matter of choice than a feeling that community-wide events were simply not meant for them. They also felt excluded from events organized by another dominant ethno-cultural group, particularly in cases where there were tensions “**like, between the Sikh community and the Muslim community.**” One Sikh participant in Martindale commented that:

if some [other] group is celebrating something you can go still, but you wouldn’t feel comfortable. You wouldn’t feel very easy in there, because you don’t know people—you don’t know how they will take you as one of them.

A South Sudanese participant in Dover framed cultural challenges more in terms of navigating differing norms of communication. When he attended a community meeting, two of his friends felt lost in the flow of the conversation, despite having strong English skills and Canadian post-secondary education; “**They were not getting what people were talking about... They didn’t understand anything that people were saying.**”

Further to the challenge of navigating different communication styles, language was also a barrier in several ethno-racially diverse neighbourhoods. One Martindale resident pointed out that her grandmother could not read or write:

Even if it was in Punjabi, she still wouldn’t be able to [read community newsletters]; she would probably need verbal communication or some kind of communication from us.

In multigenerational immigrant households where grandparents care for their grandchildren, language can therefore isolate both generations from knowing what is happening in their neighbourhoods. This sort of barrier seemed to disproportionately impact women; a stay-at-home

mother in Martindale who had established close friendships with other mothers on her street observed, “**There’s a lot of women who are at home who don’t speak English, and can’t really communicate with the outside world without a spouse or a child helping [them].**” These examples highlight the intersectionality of isolation, where a combination of age, race, gender, education and other factors work together to influence different experiences of neighbourhood life, even within a single household.

In some cases, however, language might be only a perceived barrier, reinforced by expectations of the dominant majority that newcomers should make more of an effort to fit in. A more settled immigrant in Hawkwood shared that when she first arrived in Calgary, “**it was a big, big challenge to speak up... And if someone like neighbours would come and just try to engage us, we would definitely be able to be more open.**” While she felt the community could have been more welcoming, another resident, in contrast, expressed that it was newcomers’ responsibility to step up:

People just need to try and assimilate, be a part of this community. And that’s what’s frustrating, you know? I don’t want to go on a rant, but people come to this country or this city and they don’t want to have anything to do with it.

This comment echoes a pattern that Hoekstra and Gerteis (2019) have observed elsewhere, whereby neighbourhood association members used “civic talk” to define the norms and behaviours of desirable neighbourhood residents, as well as appropriate forms of civic engagement. Such discourse ignores the stress that such pressures can put on minority populations (see discussion in Valentine 2008), and shifts the burden to more marginalized individuals to participate in ways that conform to community leaders’ expectations. It thereby reinforces existing boundaries of neighbourhood belonging, and maintains structural inequalities (Hoekstra and Gerteis 2019).

6.3 Organizational factors

As the discussion of cultural and language barriers suggests, organizations themselves have an important influence on the nature of individuals’ community participation. However, participants also spoke about the constraints that organizations themselves experience, which limited their ability to reach out to all members of their communities. This section explores these organizational constraints, which are grouped into three themes: resources, growing pains, and organizational culture. A fourth theme considers how organizations can also act as catalysts to ignite participation.

6.3.1 Resources

From the point of view community leaders, community organizations themselves face challenges in representing or including residents broadly, most of which stem from a shortage of resources. CA board members felt unable to reach everyone in their neighbourhood or to communicate a clear understanding of their purpose—particularly in communities that also had residents’ associations with partially overlapping mandates, or among newcomers who had no prior knowledge of CAs or their purpose. They commented on their lack of time, money, and human resources to print and distribute newsletters, manage social media, or mount door-

knocking campaigns that might help them expand beyond their existing membership. As one board member stated:

If we all had endless time and we were paid board members, I think there's a ton we could do. And I think that outreach is the biggest thing; like, the door-knocking was really great, but that almost killed everybody on the board.

As noted above, volunteers often invest a great deal of personal energy into community activities, which can result in burnout and frequent board turnover.

Inconsistent resources from the City were also problematic. For example, a member of a resident-led organization shared that the frequent turnover of her neighbourhood's community social worker made residents feel that **"We're not really getting the support that we need and the commitment that we need, and there's not really any interest in what's going on in our particular community."** While neighbourhood services staff were generally viewed as indispensable, turnover in those positions made it difficult for residents to build trusting relationships with City employees. Moreover, the limited number and mandates of community social workers also meant they were only available to neighbourhoods and individuals identified as vulnerable. Within the municipal bureaucracy more broadly, participants noted additional constraints that limited their ability to be creative or innovative, such as costs for event insurance or police monitoring; **"There's always someone down at city hall that won't let something happen because of some policy."**

6.3.2 Growing pains

Communities experiencing development pressures or rapid demographic changes were particularly prone to tensions that could either encourage or discourage participation, depending on how organizations managed the tensions. In two different communities, a lack of clarity about mandates created a sense of rivalry between complementary organizations. This rivalry put them in competition with each other and diverted energy away from the community-building work. Tensions around specific issues could also push individuals out, especially when they felt their voice was not being heard. A community social worker observed:

No matter what you do, someone's not going to like what's said or decided upon. And I think that's where we lost a lot of people. And there's factions that form. This group thinks this way, the other group thinks that way.

Even in the relatively homogeneous and stable community of Hawkwood, a proposed community garden became a polarizing issue when some residents near the site worried it might impede their sightlines or encourage negative behaviour. A CA board member commented that:

There's resistance to park benches, if you can believe it. And it's a struggle dealing with that... People don't want the perceived negatives that come with a community garden, or a bench, because they're "hotbeds of criminal activity."

The CA had not yet found a way to meaningfully engage dissenting residents toward a resolution, proceeding instead with the compromise of **"majority rules."**

While seemingly minor changes can thus become divisive if not resolved effectively, contentious issues can also bring community members together. For example, residents of Capitol Hill had ongoing concerns over a transition house located in the neighbourhood until the CA facilitated a resolution:

We had to have our own internal meetings and let everybody vent... A lot of misinformation had to be cleared up, a lot of rumours, innuendo. And people just instantly think of their child's health and wellbeing, and their property values—and I get that. But we still tried to just implore of them that, you know, this could be good. Everybody should try to help people that can't help themselves or that nobody else is helping. And some people got off the committee, and said, "No, I'm not interested in that route." Other people said, "You know, let's try it...they're our neighbours; we treat them like neighbours, they will probably treat us like neighbours" ... And they did, and they do. And it's a really healthy relationship.

While not everyone was happy with the CA's approach, it created a process for residents to deal with concerns directly, based on understanding and mutual respect, instead of appealing to municipal officials or police. Similarly, tensions emerged in Dover when youth from a particular ethno-cultural community were reportedly causing "**a lot of trouble, a lot of assaults, a lot of stealing**" in the neighbourhood. Leaders from both the ethno-cultural community and the CA agreed that the youth would be given access to the CA hall to play basketball on designated evenings. The solution was predicated on a trusting relationship and a willingness to communicate openly to resolve problems. This supports research by Koschmann and Laster (2011), which found that communicative tensions within community associations can be productive and can help promote collective action, if individual differences can be overcome in favour of "cooperative understandings" (p. 45).

6.3.3 Organizational culture

As the discussion about tensions illustrates, the culture and values of an organization can have a significant impact on residents' experiences of participation and inclusion. One of the most intimidating factors that residents talked about was the dominance of a clique or "**core group**," both on the board and at community events. Despite the benefits of having continuity and invested board members, and despite the frequent challenge of finding new volunteers, having long-term cohesive leadership can make new members feel like "**outsiders coming in**." One resident commented that going into her CA hall felt "**a little distant and that you were an outsider... So I mean there is that feeling that maybe some of the members of the board are an in-group**." Insular boards may also become self-interested, based on a feeling of entitlement that "**I'm the one that volunteered to do this, so I should decide what we do**." They may represent only a small segment of their community, be out of touch with what residents need, or lack innovative approaches, as one resident suggested about his CA board:

I think complacency comes in any situation that you've been left too long in, and you're not willing to take on any new ideas and you're not willing to explore new concepts even. And because you tried something once ten years ago and it didn't work, you're not willing to try again.

Organizational cultures also vary in the extent to which they make room for residents to influence community priorities and outcomes. Several participants in this study felt there was no point in getting involved in community issues because their input would make no difference. As one low-income renter said, community leaders are “**driving the ship, so to speak. And a lot of the time they don’t really take the time to get to know me and find out if I have anything to offer.**” A similar sentiment was echoed by another participant who felt that CAs expect new members to conform to existing plans, rather than asking, “**What can you do for this committee or this organization—you know, what can you bring to us?**” The feeling of not having real influence was a particular barrier for working-class, racialized, and both younger and older individuals, who were sometimes treated in paternalistic ways by community leaders who made assumptions about their needs, thereby further marginalizing them.

6.3.4 Catalysts

The first three organizational factors discussed thus far work to discourage residents from actively participating in their community. In contrast, this fourth theme explores how organizations can be catalysts for igniting interest and mobilizing action. Several community leaders expressed the opinion that people would either participate or not depending upon their personality—whether they were a “**doer**” or a “**watcher**.” However, data generated across these case studies challenges such a clear or fixed binary, suggesting instead that participation is more cyclical in nature. Residents might be mobilized by a particular issue that galvanizes the community, such as the demolition of a hospital in Bridgeland-Riverside in 1990 or a more recent development proposal:

There was big participation when the hospital went down... It stirred everybody up, and everyone was like, “What’s our community going to be?” And then it burned everybody out. And they all got jaded and upset, and people didn’t participate for years, apparently. And now there’s another one that’s come up and it got people back caring, you know, “We need a vision for Bridgeland” and “What’s our future?”

Participation in CAs also ebbs and flows with the changing demographics of neighbourhoods. In Capitol Hill participants described a “**revolution**” on the board as younger families moved in and the “**old guard**” was replaced by a more family-friendly membership:

I think there has been a change, but I think the root cause of that was the change in the focus of the community association, in being open to more programs and services, and being open to including everyone. Where the previous board was all about [operating a] bar.

As with organizations, individuals may also experience periods of more or less active participation in keeping with the rhythms of their own lives. One resident said that although he was not presently involved in his community, “**I know that those opportunities are there... there’s definitely a desire to get into that. It’s just a matter of time I suppose.**”

While the decision to become active relates partly to one’s life-stage, as discussed above, interview data suggests that participation can also be activated by a particularly dynamic leader, or by a new program that injects resources and energy into the community. When the Strong Neighbourhoods Initiative began in Martindale in 2010, for example, there was “**an attraction**

to this project that was coming to their neighbourhood... There were definitely some key individuals within that group that were able to mobilize quite a lot of people.” Individuals might also be drawn in by a personalized invitation that makes them feel welcome and needed. For one volunteer, “**A really vibrant leader said to me, you know, ‘We need you. Would you come on the committee because we want to get the seniors involved?’**” Thus, CAs go through different iterations over time, while individuals also experience periods of more passive and active participation related to circumstances in their own lives, but which can also be influenced by a feeling of being needed or the willingness of leaders to reach out personally with an invitation to participate.

7. Discussion

As outlined above, the formal modes of participation that emerged in this study included stepping up or helping out, speaking up, addressing needs, and showing up, all of which involve working in or through a community-based organization to improve the quality of the neighbourhood environment and residents' lives. Participation also included the more informal practices of neighbouring, networking, caring, reciprocating, working together, watching out, and getting out. These informal modes of participation were typically oriented around individuals' social ties and interactions.

Whether or not they would articulate it as such, many participants in this study valued neighbourhood-based civic engagement as a pathway to what some researchers characterize as collective efficacy, a means to achieve both increased social control in neighbourhoods and broader systematic changes (e.g., Morenoff, Sampson, and Raudenbusch 2001; Sampson 1997). Yet participation takes different forms depending on each community's context—and as McCabe (2014) contends, not all forms of neighbourhood participation encourage broader social goods like inclusion or diversity.

In Upper Mount Royal, for example, participation encompassed primarily social activities or advocacy driven by instrumental values, such as reducing cut-through traffic or controlling plant disease. In more ethno-racially diverse or rapidly changing neighbourhoods, CAs often struggled with meeting social needs, negotiating tensions among religious or cultural communities, or managing conflicting interests around development proposals. Thus, to reiterate a point made already, community-based organizations, and CAs in particular, have widely different roles depending on their communities and the individuals involved.

While personal circumstances influence residents' choice and ability to participate in formal community-based organizations, this study illuminates the complex ways in which organizations themselves are "social actors" (Li 1996) that influence participation, largely through their role as connectors. As Anderson, Blair, and Shirk (2018) have found, CAs can facilitate democratic governance at a local scale by serving as a voice for residents, and by connecting and consolidating shared interests to achieve desired outcomes. They can also help connect residents to services, if they are aware of what the needs are and if residents themselves are aware of the services available. As one participant suggested, even if the CA is not directly responsible for a given issue, "**at least they could point me in the right direction to talk to someone that could find a solution.**" CAs encourage residents to connect to their physical spaces through

beautification projects, historical walks, or community clean-up days. They might also offer an opportunity for residents to connect with one another by providing a gathering space such as a hall or community garden, depending upon the availability of amenities and residents' ability to access them. Through their role as connectors, CAs therefore have a potentially powerful role in addressing concerns about social fragmentation and isolation.

This study also confirms a strong relationship between participation in community-based organizations and residents' feeling of cohesion and inclusion, which has been well documented in research related to both social capital and sense of community (e.g., Barati and Samah 2012; Hughey et al. 2008; Omoto and Malsh 2014; Peterson et al. 2008; Putnam 2000). Many residents who were active in their communities spoke about the benefits of participating: it helped them discover new things in their community, made them feel safer, gave them a stronger sense of pride and ownership in their neighbourhood, and helped them feel closer to their neighbours. As one CA board member said, **"We've met so many people in the community, and it's kind of nice to build that group, where you can just walk down the street and say hi to people—kind of build that small-town feel."** Another CA member framed her sense of belonging as a form of investment:

I put a lot into it as well, and I get just as much back. I do volunteer with the community, and I do go to community events, and I take part in community happenings... Because that's the point to me, is just to feel like you are part of a neighbourhood and part of a community.

However, the opportunities to participate, and the benefits of doing so, do not extend equally to everyone. Most community leaders generally agreed that only a small number of residents were either volunteering or attending events and programs—typically long-term homeowners, parents of young children, professionals with desired skills, and individuals who were retired, who had flexible schedules, or who had the financial security to volunteer their time. Board members had less sense of whom they were not reaching, while often assuming that non-participants were disengaged by choice.

On the other hand, residents from under-represented or marginalized communities, such as renters, recent immigrants, or seniors, revealed a different set of priorities and a different range of limitations than what some leaders expected. Rather than being apathetic, uninterested, or withdrawn, they described either structural barriers over which they had limited control, or a general sense that they did not belong. While income was an important factor, the sense of not belonging was compounded by other factors such as ethnicity, race, education, age, and sometimes gender.

Thus, while CAs' priorities shift over time as their memberships change, they rarely if ever reflect a full range of residents' interests or needs. Some CA boards in this study were making a concerted effort to become more representative and inclusive of their neighbourhoods by ensuring limited terms to board positions, and by reaching out to individuals who could help connect them to seniors, young professionals, or ethno-cultural communities. Many also recognized the material barriers that some individuals faced in participating, such as transportation, childcare, or language abilities. Even when they were genuinely interested in becoming more inclusive, however, many CA leaders were unsure of where to begin or how to engage under-represented members of the community. They also had an ambiguous sense of what it meant

to be representative, not recognizing that they may unintentionally help to perpetuate forms of exclusion based on class, race, or other social categories (see Pothier et al. 2019). They typically recruited new members through their existing networks, for example, in part because of a lack of response to more passive appeals, and in part to meet the needs of an efficient and effective board. This reproduces the dominance of white, middle-income, university educated leadership as well as communicative norms. It also makes it even more difficult to attract a diverse range of new members who may feel they are not being asked or recognized for what they have to offer.

Perhaps it is not a surprise, then, that residents in several communities described feeling powerless to influence neighbourhood outcomes. Researchers have suggested that increasing participation should help to redistribute power and redress inequalities by enhancing the access of disadvantaged communities to political processes (e.g., Almond and Verba 1965; Hutcheson and Prather 1988; Ohmer 2010). However, as Verba and Nie (1972) established in relation to political processes, individuals with higher social status tend to hold leadership positions more often, and thus have a stronger voice, which undermines the potential for participation to decrease inequality.

More recently, Wargent and Parker (2018) have argued that ensuring social inclusion in neighbourhood organizations involves not only equality of participation but also addressing the “social gradients” (p. 394) that make it more likely for better resourced groups to participate. In this study it was clear that the benefits of participation did not always extend beyond those individuals or groups who were actively participating. To truly empower more members of the community to participate, Lewis et al. (2019) therefore insist on both breadth of participation (i.e., the inclusion of diverse individuals and groups), and depth of participation (increasing residents’ collective control).

Yet, community associations also struggle with what many participants felt were unclear and unfair expectations from both municipal government and their own residents. When asked what role a CA “should” play, residents suggested everything from gathering input on planning decisions, to maintaining a hall and/or recreational facility, solving neighbourhood problems, planning events and programs, sharing information, advocating for property owners, organizing beautification and cleanup projects, enhancing safety, and even supporting individuals’ child-care or language needs. As one board member stated, **“I think there’s a lot of misconceptions about what we do and who we are. I’m not paid to do this; I don’t do this full-time.”**

Similar comments from other participants raise questions about the broader system of which CAs are a part, and the effectiveness of the current decentralized model of service delivery (see Allard and Small 2013). In Calgary, CAs in particular are critical partners in municipal neighbourhood program and service delivery; but they do not have the professional training, resources, or even mandate to address all of residents’ social needs. Unclear or unrealistic expectations can discourage people from wanting to engage, or cause burn-out among individuals who feel a sense of obligation to carry on.

Moreover, as other scholars have suggested (e.g., Forrest and Kearns 2001; Pothier et al. 2019), many of the socio-spatial divisions and inequalities that manifest locally have causes far beyond the neighbourhood and must be understood as part of processes operating at multiple spatial scales. This study thus adds to existing scholarship (e.g., Modai-Snur and van Ham 2018; Pothier

2016; Pothier et al. 2019; Séguin, Apparicio, and Riva 2012) conceding that, while targeted neighbourhood interventions are important in addressing neighbourhood decline and promoting collective efficacy, they may have limited effects on broader structural inequalities.

Finally, this report highlights the need to broaden conceptualizations of what counts as participation in civic life. Community leaders who took part in this study tended to view participation in terms of being involved in neighbourhood organizations. They placed a high value on civic activities such as volunteering on a CA board, helping to organize an event, attending a community barbeque, or taking part in beautification initiatives. Such efforts did help strengthen the sense of cohesion and inclusion among residents who actively participated. However, they also reinforced boundaries between the “insider” participants and the “outsiders” who kept to themselves—even though the cyclical nature of participation found in this study suggests that such boundaries are extremely porous.

Class and ethno-racial diversity were particularly important in structuring perceived boundaries, primarily through some community leaders’ (explicit or implicit) belief that “they” should follow dominant norms around neighbourhood participation and behaviour (see discussion in Pothier et al. 2019). Thus, this study illustrates how belonging or inclusion is “granted and distributed by those in power” (Huizinga and van Hoven 2018, p. 310) through the structures and day-to-day practices of community-based organizations. Unless community leaders recognize and work to address such power imbalances, they may help to reproduce rather than address the boundaries that create exclusions.

8. Broad Strategies for Increasing Participation and Inclusion

The case studies in this project have identified several strategies that community organizations in Calgary currently use to encourage more inclusive participation (see recommendations in Appendix 1), while also confirming insights from previous research. Perhaps most importantly, this study echoes the finding by Lewis et al. (2019) that place-based initiatives must address both the breadth and depth of participation to empower residents and develop collective control. In other words, it is not enough to simply plan events and expect residents to attend; community organizations need to expand the range of individuals who participate by offering diverse opportunities, encouraging residents to engage in ways that work for them, and, most importantly, sharing power.

Many of the community leaders in this study became involved in neighbourhood work because of personal invitations rather than general calls for help; however, as noted already, such invitations are rarely extended to more marginalized residents who may not be perceived to have the desired skills or backgrounds. By the same token, reaching marginalized individuals can be a major challenge for community organizations. Some CAs and service providers have experienced success by using “brokers” or liaisons to better understand the needs of ethno-cultural or faith communities. These liaisons can help build trusting relations and provide more isolated individuals or communities with a better understanding of the opportunities and benefits available to them.

Another related strategy involves collaboration. Rather than competing for residents’ attention or scarce resources, some community organizations actively sought ways to work with other groups within their neighbourhoods to access expertise and to meet identified needs they could not address themselves. They also worked with local businesses who were supportive of community work as sponsors, donors, or gathering spaces. In some cases, CAs have facilitated unique encounters between residents who may not otherwise have interacted, for example through a shared gardening project between elementary students and a seniors’ group. Collaboration between community organizations, service providers, and municipal services was particularly important to the success of deliberative processes to identify community needs and negotiate desired outcomes. At the same time, some participants were cautious of state involvement in what they felt should be grassroots work—a reflection of Ostrander’s (2012) call

for community organizations to maintain agency and independence in relationships of shared governance.

A third key strategy for more inclusive participation involves the role of connecting. Many participants in this study, whether active in their neighbourhoods or not, felt that CAs could play a greater role in connecting residents with one another or with services they needed. In the lower-income neighbourhoods, there seemed to be more acceptance of and reliance on reciprocal exchanges—even small acts such as shoveling snow from a shared driveway or borrowing a tool to complete a project. Residents of more affluent neighbourhoods also expressed a desire to connect with neighbours, but primarily as a way of making friends who lived nearby or increasing their feeling of safety.

Despite research showing that individuals do not necessarily mix with social “others” living in close proximity (e.g., Amin 2002; Lelévrier 2013), participants’ experiences in this study suggest that neighbourly interactions provide an important opportunity for individuals to encounter, and better understand, others who are not part of their professional, leisure, ethno-cultural, or other existing networks. Across all case studies, being connected with neighbours was essential to participants’ feeling like they belonged in their place communities.

9. Conclusions

This report has explored uneven participation in community organizations in selected Calgary neighbourhoods, and the corresponding factors that both motivate and inhibit individuals' choice and capacity to participate. It sheds light on a range of personal circumstances, contextual factors, and organizational characteristics that influence participation, suggesting that community organizations themselves can play a key role in mobilizing residents toward greater participation and inclusion. By the same token, community organizations can also exacerbate community divisions and exclusions, particularly along class and racial lines. At the same time, inequities often extend far beyond the neighbourhood itself, to issues such as labour market access or housing affordability, over which community-based organizations have limited influence.

Many of the community leaders who participated in this study were engaged in purposeful and creative efforts to broaden the range of individuals who were participating. The organizations themselves faced barriers based on the resources available and the particular contexts of their neighbourhoods. Yet this report highlights the need for organizations, particularly community associations, to take bolder steps to learn who is in their community, what their needs are, and what diverse residents might be able to contribute. It also underscores the importance of nurturing the more informal, day-to-day ways in which residents support one another and develop a feeling of inclusion and belonging within their neighbourhoods.

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Appendix: Recommendations for Inclusive Community Participation

Municipal Neighbourhood Governance

1. Clarify the role of the CA in municipal planning process, and the means by which CAs are expected to generate responses to proposed developments (e.g., by canvassing each affected residents; by hosting town halls; by making recommendations within a planning committee, etc.); clarify how that input will be used in municipal planning process.
2. Clarify mandate of Community Associations vs. Residents' Associations; develop communication tools to help residents understand the mandate and scope of each organization.
3. Increase support (money, personnel, and expertise) for maintenance of CA amenities.
4. Train and make available "mediators" who can help resolve conflicts between neighbours or facilitate contentious/polarizing issues within the neighbourhood.
5. Ensure neighbourhood services staff are available when residents need them—i.e., flexibility during evenings, weekends, or when events and programs are held.

Community Association Governance

1. Set limits to board terms to encourage more frequent turnover.
2. Consider more informal board meeting formats (and/or provide training in rules of order for all new members): offer childcare if possible, or invite members to bring their children.
3. Develop and use liaisons to build trust with particular ethno-cultural or faith communities, and to invite residents who do not typically participate.
4. Strive to recruit board members who reflect the diversity of neighbourhood demographics (ethno-racial background, language, age, gender, etc.); reach out with personal invitation
5. Offer flexible opportunities to volunteer beyond serving on the board.
6. Encourage grassroots ownership:
 - Support projects that are inspired/initiated by residents where feasible,
 - Encourage opportunities for residents to support one another and problem-solve together.
7. Clarify whether the purpose of the CA is to serve members only, or the community broadly; communicate benefits of membership to residents.
8. Develop strategic, focused, relevant programs and services (rather than trying to be everything to everyone); learn who is in your neighbourhood (use Community Profiles as a starting point but also engage directly with residents); which communities are under-represented on the board and at typical community events?

9. Learn what people need or want from the CA (e.g., opportunities to socialize, recreational amenities close to home, help with language skills, information about resources or service providers, etc.).

Communication

1. Communicate openly in meetings; provide every member with opportunities to speak:
 - Invite new members to bring ideas to the table.
 - Listen; what are people passionate about?
 - Formulate plans after (not before) full and open discussion.
2. Create a forum for residents to connect and communicate with one another (even if that occurs outside the scope of the CA).
3. Provide information to residents so they understand how to get involved, what opportunities exist, how to voice their concerns to/through the CA, etc.
4. Disseminate information in multiple formats relevant to both mainstream and underrepresented residents (e.g., print/online newsletter, social media, big bold signs, radio); depending on major languages spoken within the neighbourhood, consider disseminating key information in multiple languages (use liaisons to help).
5. Connect with other organizations within community to learn their mandates; cross-promote programs and services and collaborate where possible.
6. Share questions and ideas with other community associations.

Other Suggestions

1. Be inviting.
2. Ensure community amenities are accessible and welcoming.
3. Consider signage in multiple languages.
4. Plan programs and spaces that encourage encounter, collaboration, and shared projects across social groups (ages, socio-economic backgrounds, ethno-cultural backgrounds, renters/owners, etc.).
5. Consider the role of local businesses; how can they be invited to support community programs? How can the community support them?
6. Create spaces for youth.
7. In neighbourhoods where the school catchment area does not align with community association boundaries, consider programs where children living within the neighbourhood can meet and develop neighbourhood-based friendships.
8. In neighbourhoods bisected by a major transportation artery or other physical landform, consider ways to bridge areas and encourage connections (e.g., signage, walkways, etc.).