

Northside Rising Early Phase Evaluation Report

October 11, 2019



NORTHSIDE
rising

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Introduction

Northside Rising is a collaborative effort to build a vibrant, healthy Northside community. Its purpose is to bring together a wide range of stakeholders – residents, community organizations, business and government – to find new ways of working to address key issues of community concern.

Initiated in 2017, Northside Rising is supported by Inspiring Communities, a non-profit organization committed to creating new ways to tackle complex issues. Along with Between the Bridges (Dartmouth) and Turning the Tide (Digby), Northside Rising is one of three geographic communities that form a learning network within Inspiring Communities.

The following report on Northside Rising is one part of an overall evaluation of the early work occurring in all three sites. In the case of the Northside initiative, it covers initial organizing and start-up, the process of community engagement and first steps in defining the initiative's common agenda. At the time of writing, Northside Rising was proceeding with defining its shared agenda more fully, particularly with respect to the issue of harmful substance use, and developing the first strategies to help make headway on this priority concern. The current report is focussed on the foundational early work of the initiative taking place between January 2017 and January 2019; the evolving work on substance use will be the subject of future evaluation reporting.

Purpose of Evaluation

Learning and evaluation is a key support provided by Inspiring Communities to local partners. Its purpose is to provide feedback and reflections to help those guiding local initiatives shape their ongoing development.

Key goals of this evaluation report are to:

- Look at the components of the work that are in place, and explore how they can be strengthened or further developed
- Identify any adaptations that are required
- Learn how relationships are developing among partners
- Identify key learnings and achievements.

The evaluation was conducted by Inspiring Communities' Director of Research and Evaluation and Northside Rising's Research and Evaluation Lead with input from a small advisory committee of local participants. It was guided by the evaluation framework developed to support the evaluation process in the three Inspiring Communities sites adapted throughout to suit the Northside initiative.

Background: Northside, Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM)

The Northside is a ‘community of communities’ located on the northern side of Sydney Harbour in the CBRM. It is home to a population of approximately 17,000 people living in the small urban centres of North Sydney and Sydney Mines, the rural towns of Florence and Bras d’Or, and the surrounding rural area.

The population of the Northside grew dramatically in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, largely due to the industrial development of coal and steel. Sydney Mines was a productive coal mining area throughout the 19th century, expanding significantly in the 1890s. From 1901 to 1920, it was also home to the Nova Scotia Steel Plant which, in conjunction with the nearby plant in Sydney, produced fully half of all the steel in Canada during World War I.

However, coal and steel were not the only strengths of the Northside economy. North Sydney was an active port, the fourth busiest seaport in Canada at the turn of the century. It was host to a strong fishery, including industrial fish plants beginning in the 1920s, and from 1894 on served as the mainland terminal for ferry service to Newfoundland.

Both North Sydney and Sydney Mines had significant commercial sectors led by local entrepreneurs. In the 1920s, Sydney Mines was home to the British Canadian Co-operative Society, one of the largest consumer retail co-operatives in North America.

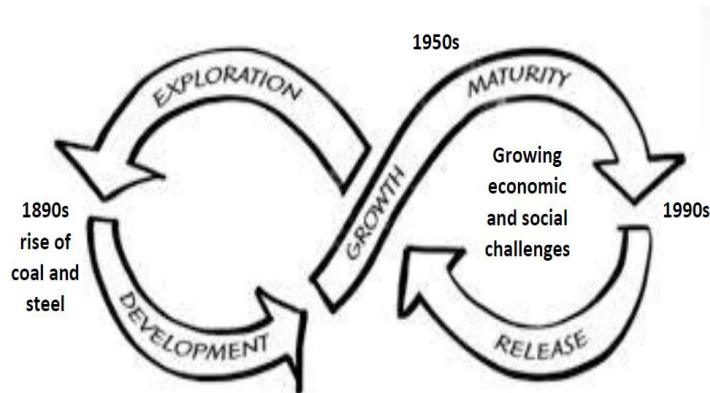
Rural parts of the Northside constituted an important farming centre within the industrial area.

Complementing this diverse economy, the Northside also had active civic and religious organizations. The towns of North Sydney and Sydney Mines were incorporated as independent municipalities in 1895 and 1899 respectively, governing the public life of the towns for the next hundred years. Community-based organizations and faith groups led the way in meeting myriad needs including health and social services.

Not without their struggles, Northside communities were for decades able to keep pace with the challenges they faced and forge decent lives for local people.



However, like the rest of the region known as ‘Industrial Cape Breton,’ this era reached its peak by the 1950s and entered a long and difficult period of decline. In the late sixties, the private owners of the area’s cornerstone coal and steel industry withdrew, and the federal and provincial governments stepped in to prevent an economic and social crisis. For the next several decades the region relied heavily on governments in Ottawa and Halifax to sustain the local economy and communities.



The 'Ecocycle' depicts a pattern of growth, decline and renewal experienced by many communities.

By the 1990s, the pattern of life that had defined the region for nearly a century began to give way altogether. On the Northside, the first blow was the closure of the North Atlantic fishery in the early nineties. The second was the closure in 2000 of the Sydney Steel Corporation as well as the coal mines throughout Industrial Cape Breton.

Outmigration, long a reality of local life, accelerated dramatically; businesses closed and food banks opened.

In 1995, the eight municipalities that made up Industrial Cape Breton amalgamated to form the Cape Breton Regional Municipality. In line with this regional restructuring, many community and social services were centralized in Sydney, leaving a smaller number of community organizations on the Northside to meet the growing demand for assistance of all kinds.

While some residents were able to find their way amid these changes, many were not. Of particular concern were the growing number of children and youth being drawn into a violent street culture of drugs, alcohol and crime. They represent one face of a still larger number of young people who had come to see economic and social hardship as the ‘new normal,’ a generation with little hope for a better life on the Northside.

These economic and social challenges were reflected in the social data. The most recent statistics indicate the high levels of poverty and related conditions relative to provincial averages emerging from this period:

	Northside	Nova Scotia
Incidence of Low Income (After Tax LIM) (2015)		
Total Population	27%	17.2%
0-17 year olds	33.2%	22.2%
0-5 year olds	39.9%	25.7%
Unemployment Rate (2015)	18.5%	10%
Lone-Parent Families (2015)	29%	17%
Less Than Grade 12 Education	31%	22%
Living in Unaffordable Housing	25%	12%
Increased Use of Food Banks Since 2016	23%	
Number of Syringes Distributed on the Northside by Ally Centre Needle Exchange (2016)	92,700 (approximately 7 per resident)	
	**	

Unless otherwise indicated, all data obtained from Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population.

*Data provided by Sydney Mines Food Bank and North Sydney Food Banks, 2016.

**Data provided by the Ally Centre, 2016.

Inspiring Communities on the Northside: The Story So Far

It was data such as this that led Inspiring Communities to the Northside.

Initiated by the eight social policy departments of the provincial government (Departments of Education and Early Childhood Development; Community Services; Justice; Labour and Advanced Education; Health and Wellness; Office of Aboriginal Affairs; Seniors; and Communities, Culture and Heritage), Inspiring Communities was established to develop new ways for government and communities to work together to address complex social issues. Seeing promise in the Collective Impact model (see below) being employed by Between the Bridges in Dartmouth North, the Departments were interested in identifying other communities to engage in similar work.

About Collective Impact

Inspiring Communities draws upon a Collective Impact approach to help build stronger communities across Nova Scotia. Collective Impact is a structured approach to addressing complex issues. It brings together residents, governments, community organizations, and businesses in a way that honours their unique perspectives and valuable contributions.

Collective Impact core conditions and values include...

Shared Agenda: All participants have a shared vision for change, a common understanding of the problem, and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions

Continuous Communication: Consistent and open communication across the many players is needed to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation

Backbone Function: Dedicated, skilled staff are needed to coordinate participating organizations and agencies, and design and support good process and a learning culture

Mutually Reinforcing Activities: Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action

Shared Measurement System: Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures that efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable

Trust and Relationship Building: Participants need to take the time to build trusting relationships so that they can work together differently and productively on a shared agenda

Learning and Evaluation: Dedicated resources are put in place to guide the process, capture and communicate what's working, to inform decision making

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion: The community's voice is the core of the work; ongoing efforts are made to ensure that all voices are heard.

In the summer of 2016, statistical profiles were prepared for communities across the province. The Northside was identified as facing a particularly difficult set of economic and social challenges. Subsequent conversations with local contacts indicated significant interest in the possibility of an Inspiring Communities initiative on the Northside. In the fall, the Social Deputy Ministers made the decision to proceed and in January 2017, Inspiring Communities staff began laying the groundwork for a Northside initiative.

Early contact was made with a grassroots community organization, Community CARES Youth Outreach, with a strong track record working to address social challenges on the Northside, particularly with young people (age 15 to 30). Over-extended and under-resourced in its own right, Community CARES had been working for several years to develop a more sustainable way of doing its work. Included in these efforts were attempts to build stronger partnerships with a variety of individuals and organizations working on the Northside, efforts similar in nature to what Inspiring Communities was proposing. After several meetings, it was agreed that Community CARES would be engaged to help convene the initiative on the Northside during its first year. A community developer from New Dawn Enterprises, a well-established community

development organization based in Sydney, joined in the organizing team as part of his longstanding involvement with Community CARES.

Early steps in the Northside work involved introducing Inspiring Communities to prospective local partners from a wide array of backgrounds and interests. Personal conversations and small gatherings were used to gauge interest and seek feedback about the proposed initiative. Media coverage raised awareness of the initiative in the wider Northside community.

The next step in developing the Northside initiative was the design of a community engagement process, the purpose of which was to hear the concerns and aspirations of local residents and determine where to focus the initial efforts of the new initiative. As part of the planning process an Engagement Team of local residents was formed to help shape and guide the work, make sense of the input from the community, and prepare a community report.

Figure 1: Northside Community Engagement Process

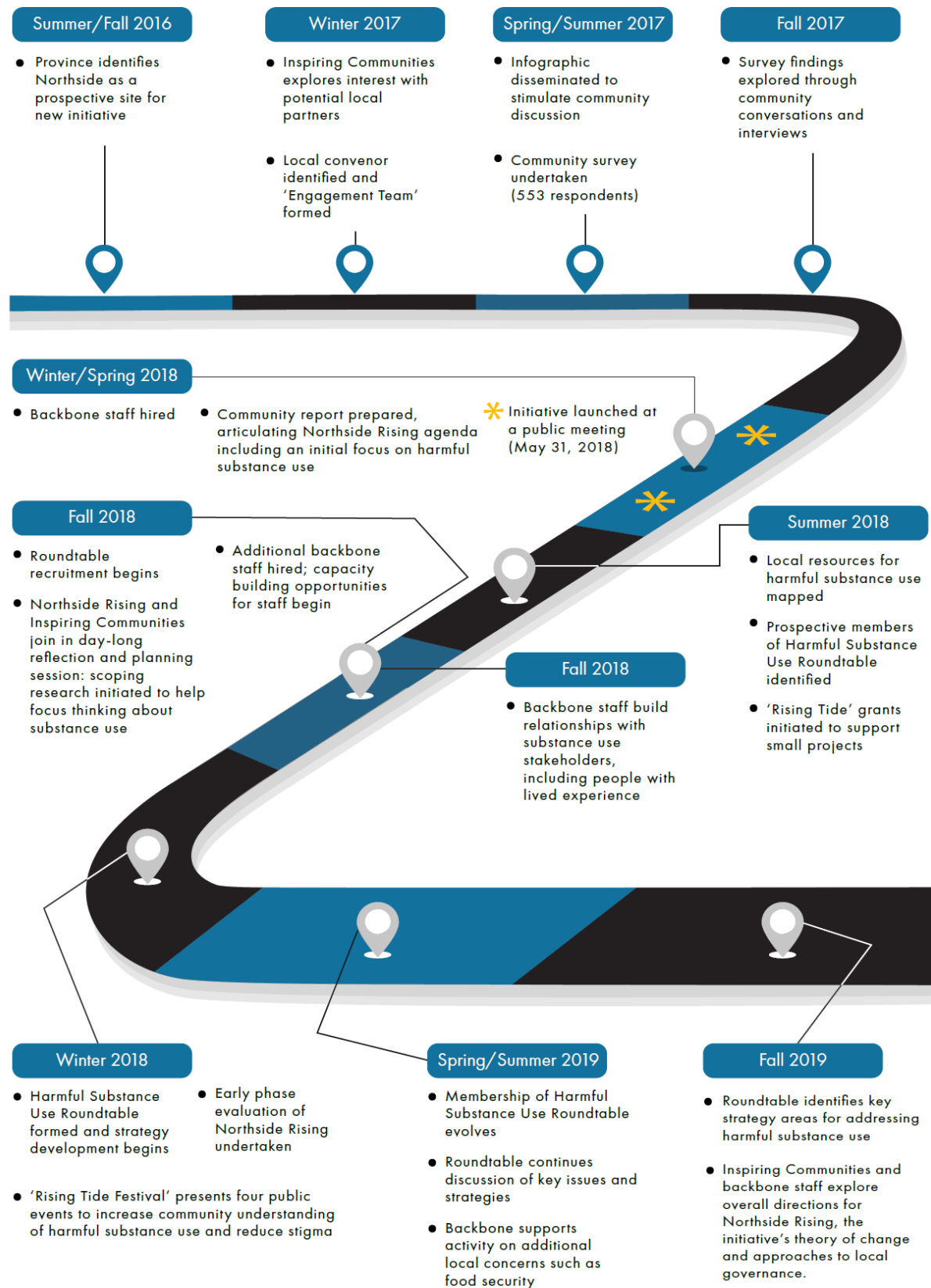


The engagement process drew on various approaches to community organizing and development, including the Orton Family Foundation's Heart and Soul Community Planning process and John McKnight's asset-based community development. The accompanying diagram shows the four key phases in the plan along with the specific measures undertaken in each phase (see Figure I above).

At the core of the engagement process were three main tools for obtaining community input: a community-wide survey, community conversations and individual interviews. Together, these tools were used to explore the state of the community: residents' sense of connection to the Northside, aspects of community life people valued and wanted to maintain, concerns that kept them up at night, strengths on which to build and patterns of community life needing to change in order to create a stronger Northside community.

Reviewing the input from the community, the Engagement Team was able to answer one of the major questions discussed throughout the engagement process: What issue or issues should serve as a starting point for the initiative's work? Although other issues were evident as well

Figure 2: Northside Rising Timeline



However, a second level of conversation running throughout the engagement process was not so easily resolved. This conversation was less about *what* issue or issues to address and more about *how* to build the underlying community capacity needed to create a strong Northside for the long term. Here participants, both local and provincial, held a variety of ideas based on their different backgrounds and perspectives: What might it mean for government to ‘show up differently’ in community and what was needed to establish a new level of trust and understanding between government and community? Was ‘Collective Impact’ intended to be a loose set of guiding principles supplemented by other approaches or the specific operating system to be followed by the Northside initiative? To what extent should the initiative be framed around the problems facing the community versus the assets on which it could build a stronger future? How do you focus attention on a specific issue without losing the broader mandate to build a stronger Northside community overall? How do you balance the community’s need for tangible action on immediate concerns with longer term efforts to address root causes and achieve systemic change? Such questions ran beneath the day-to-day work of the initiative occasionally cropping up to expose different ways of thinking about what to do and how to do it.

Nevertheless, in preparing its report to the community in spring 2018, the Engagement Team began the process of defining the initiative’s shared agenda. The report called for a community movement, Northside Rising, to build a vibrant, healthy Northside community; identified a priority concern on which to focus its initial work – harmful substance use; announced Rising Tide grants to support immediate action on small projects; and invited participation on two tables through which residents could help shape the overall initiative.

Over the summer, new backbone staff began laying the groundwork for advancing this work and in the fall a roundtable gathering of local and provincial participants was held to take stock of the initiative and plan next steps.

Evaluation Findings: Reflecting on the Early Work of Northside Rising

The early phase evaluation helped capture the reflections of participants about the strengths, limitations and possible areas for adaptation from Northside Rising’s early work.

Data for the evaluation comes from the following sources:

- Review of key documents
- Interviews with Government Officials (1)
- Interview with Inspiring Communities Provincial Team (2)
- Interview with Initial Northside Convenors (2)
- Interviews with Backbone Staff (2)
- Focus Group with Core Team (4) (a small coordinating team of local participants assisting the backbone staff to support the initiative)
- Interviews with Engagement Team (7)
- Participant Observation

Findings from the evaluation are summarized below. An initial section presents evaluation participants' views on the most important contributions of Northside Rising to date as well as its greatest potential. Subsequent sections provide reflections on the initiative with respect to the principles of the Collective Impact model (see page 4) relevant to the early phase of the Northside Rising's work.

"Potential Early-Phase Evaluation Indicators" are presented throughout the summary as a broad guide to the types of changes that evaluators were exploring. Possible signs of progress identified in the Inspiring Communities evaluation framework for initiatives in the early phases of their work include:

- Sense of urgency around the issue; are there champions to advance the issue? Stakeholder perceptions regarding the need for change and the level of support for change?
- What are the socio-economic, cultural, political factors influencing design and implementation?
- Which core collective impact (CI) conditions are present and/or gaining momentum vs. experiencing challenges; what merits more attention?
- How should the initiative adapt to changing circumstances? To what extent is the initiative evolving in response to progress/challenges in achieving outcomes?
- To what extent are learning processes and feedback loops embedded?
- How are relationships developing among partners?

Most Important Contribution and Greatest Potential

Participants from all groups identified the way of working to address the Northside's challenges and opportunities as the initiative's most important contribution to date, as well as its greatest potential. This way of working was seen as a process of community-driven change in which local residents had the opportunity to reflect on their community, identify priorities to be addressed and work together to generate solutions. The efforts of the provincial government to 'show up differently' in the community by supporting this process and looking for ways to contribute to the community's emerging agenda was also seen to be important. Key themes from the evaluation findings in this area include:

Most Important Contribution

- *Community voice*

Participants from all groups interviewed highlighted the opportunity the initiative created for the community to have a stronger voice in its own affairs:

"It is the use of community members from the very beginning in the engagement phase; going out to the community and getting their voice and their input, and continuing to do that to this day."

“Having created the space for the community to reflect on its own situation, to indicate the kind of directions it would like addressed. Often there is not a space in the community where that can happen; I think just creating that opening is a big contribution.”

- *Community data, survey and report*

Participants specifically identified three tangible ways in which the community was supported to reflect on its circumstances and articulate its priorities: statistical data about the community, the community-wide survey (553 respondents) and the community report:

“People appreciate seeing the statistics and diagrams – it helps build a case about where we need to start; to see what the most pressing issues are. Issues aren’t hidden when you have those statistics in front of you.”

“I think it would be the contribution of the surveys leading to the report. I was impressed by the overall number of the completed surveys, and the people out there doing the leg work actually getting the community to complete or participate in a focus group or a survey. It laid the groundwork for where we are right now.”

- *Changing the narrative*

For some respondents, the work to date – both how it was undertaken and the way it articulated the community’s situation – was the start of a new narrative for the Northside:

“I think it has re-created an identity of the Northside that it is a functioning unit that can do stuff. I think that got lost over the years.”

“The most important contribution to date is the feeling of hope that comes in when they speak about it; the changing of a mindset. It is hope and knowing there is support for the community coming together, and that we can fix our communities ourselves; that understanding and mentality is wonderful.”

- *Government showing up differently*

Some participants identified the manner in which the provincial government was engaging with the Northside as creating a new dynamic:

“Having the government show up in a very different way has been different for that community in terms of it not being a pre-defined program.”

Greatest Potential

About half of the evaluation participants said that Northside Rising's greatest potential is to create a fulsome community-based process that has an impact on the identified issues and models an effective way of working together. They specifically noted the potential for:

- An organized collective voice for the community at large
- More opportunity for the community to have conversations with decision-makers of all kinds, including the provincial government
- A meaningful role for the community in shaping the policies, programs and services meant to address local needs
- Aligning the efforts of community organizations and service providers, particularly in the not-for-profit sector where under-resourced organizations often need to focus on their own survival and mandates
- Building the working relationships needed to tackle complex problems.

"[The greatest potential is that] it establishes a way of working that actually generates some impacts. People can realize the potential of working together and having a say and in fact, being able to make a difference. That'll do a lot to build confidence and establish an effective way of the community addressing its issues and its opportunities."

"Perhaps the greatest potential is the work we are doing to achieve that end. It is going to bring people together in ways they haven't before, and perhaps show the community that government is showing up differently. We can use that to achieve great things with addictions or maybe other issues – we can leave a legacy of collective action that can be applied to other issues."

Again, some pointed specifically to the potential for developing a new narrative of community hope and empowerment:

"The greatest opportunity is to change an old narrative that has existed in the community for a long time: 'It's only getting worse, it is not getting better, nobody is coming, and nobody is doing anything.' We do have a chance to change the narrative of things getting worse. We are acknowledging that, we are acknowledging crisis, and we are the people that are going to start doing something about it... Narrative has always been on the precipice of movements... The greatest opportunity is that we actually become that movement."

Common Agenda

Potential Early-Phase Evaluation Indicators – Common Agenda

Possible signs of progress on this component of Collective Impact identified in the Inspiring Communities evaluation framework for early phase initiatives include:

- The Steering Committee (or other leadership structure) includes voices from all relevant sectors and constituencies
- An equity lens is explicit
- Members of the target population help shape the common agenda
- Partners and the broader community understand and can articulate the problem
- Partners agree on an Equity Framework for conducting, implementing, and evaluating the work
- Geographical boundaries and population targets are clear for all partners
- Partners use local data to inform the selection of priorities, strategies and actions
- Commitment from leaders of multiple sectors has been made to work together on the shared issue
- Partners endorse a collective responsibility for the issue and generating results around it

At the core of the Northside Rising initiative is developing a common agenda through which a wide array of participants can align their efforts. The [Community Report](#) released in the spring of 2018 laid out three dimensions to that agenda: 1) creating a community movement committed to building a vibrant, healthy Northside for the long term; 2) drawing on the principles of Collective Impact to address the complex issue of harmful substance use in the mid-term; and 3) providing small grants ('Rising Tide' grants) that enable local residents to make tangible improvements to community life in the near term. Evaluation participants identified both progress and challenges in pursuing this agenda.

Strengths of the work so far include:

- Partners are clear on the overall geographic/population target boundaries
- Harmful substance use has been clearly identified as a priority concern for initial attention
- A leadership table of diverse partners has been formed and is continuing to evolve as understanding of the work related to harmful substance use develops
- People whose lives are directly affected by harmful substance use are actively involved in helping to shape the response
- Data, evidence, research and community input are being used to inform priorities/possible strategies
- Partners are developing a shared understanding of the problem and critical areas for action
- Rising Tide grants have been used successfully by local residents and organizational partners to carry out a series of small projects providing visible signs of community improvement.

At the same time, the evaluation identified a number of important **challenges** the initiative has encountered trying to define and address its shared agenda:

- *Defining action-able focus areas within the wider challenge of harmful substance use*

“...folks that haven’t been around addiction as much might not realize how large a scope it is. If we don't narrow down what we are doing we continue to be in this big wide universe and it is very hard to make a system change that you can crack if you're just talking about everything. The narrower your focus, the more progress in what you're trying to do.”

“A common agenda is not a single agenda. This is where Collective Impact is so misconstrued all over the place. The sense that I've got is instead of trying to name deeper challenges, within the addictions world, the common agenda was stated as a big broader topic... They're trying to make progress on breaking addictions down into something that's chewable.”

- *Maintaining a productive pace of change*

“I think they are trying to face the challenge of what the research is saying, but it's moving so slow that I don't know if they'll be able to address that issue. By the time they get to understanding what the research is saying, they may have lost their convening and working groups”.

“I think at their current rate of progress, they are going to run out of money and patience before they get anywhere on the addictions scope.”

“...you have to go slow to go far, but the learning is if you go too slow, you don't go anywhere at all.”

- *Allowing adequate time to build relationships and shared understanding among diverse partners*

“We don’t want to go any slower than we have to, but we can’t go any faster than the speed of trust.”

“As a university student, we were taught about acknowledging our conceptual baggage. I acknowledge that all the time and check myself that my conceptual baggage is what we come into this with, and then there is the learning curve that we are all experiencing, and all experience differently. There is all of that to consider as well when we come into a room together. Understanding where each of us is coming from is really important, and I think that only makes work richer and I think your impact is greater.”

“Getting to a place where you can define a common agenda [on harmful substance use] took a while. Cohesiveness and meeting regularly was necessary. I think it could have happened a little faster than it did, but not by much. When we hit 2019, we kind of got the ball rolling, and we’ve had a lot of good discussion around common agenda lately.”

- *Addressing complex challenges facing the community without becoming overly identified with one issue*

“I think everyone brings to the table their own area of work and passion. If your area was children and early childhood development, when they [Northside Rising] stated the priorities [harmful substance use] you could see people drift off and not see themselves in that. I always believed that this was going to be bigger, and all-encompassing, and I think that narrowing of focus was a natural thing to happen. But by the same token, I never think early childhood development or the state of our downtown and graffiti is disconnected from the drug problem. It is all connected, and that is really apparent to me, but I don’t know if all of those links were apparent to others.”

- *Supporting small projects around which there is energy and interest while continuing to build mutually reinforcing efforts*

“I don't think the Rising Tide projects have taken off as a thread of the work as much as we might have hoped. Not saying that initiative is bad, in fact at this point they're doing as much to either engage more people, animate the work which is one rationale for them, or at a small scale, test out some things that are related to some key themes that we think are of interest. They feel kind of fragmented and not as generative as one might have hoped.”

“I am still hoping they are tied to the common agenda. They are an important impactful investment in the community. The work that has been done has been good work. However, to have them tied with set criteria to the agenda would be important. I think they are important going forward.”

Backbone Infrastructure

Possible signs of progress on this component of Collective Impact identified in the Inspiring Communities evaluation framework for early phase initiatives include:

- The leadership structure/Steering Committee includes a diverse set of voices and perspectives from multiple, relevant sectors and constituencies
- Backbone staff are respected by important partners and external stakeholders
- Partners look to the Backbone and Steering Committee for initiative support, strategic guidance, and leadership
- Adequate resources for backbone infrastructure
- Backbone provides project management support, including monitoring progress toward goals and connecting partners to discuss opportunities, challenges, gaps, and overlaps
- Backbone convenes partners and key external stakeholders to ensure the alignment of activities and pursue new opportunities.

The backbone infrastructure consists of core staff who provide facilitation and logistical support for the initiative from organizing meetings and keeping minutes to engaging participants, building partnership, facilitating collaboration, developing and implementing the shared agenda, ensuring effective communication, and providing research and evaluation support. In Northside Rising, the backbone team has varied in size and composition over time. It currently consists of two full-time initiative co-leads and one part-time local research and evaluation lead. The backbone team works out of a community facility in Sydney Mines owned by Community CARES Youth Outreach, a non-profit community organization that has played an active role in Northside Rising from its inception.

Evaluation participants identified the crucial role played by Backbone staff as facilitative leaders of the initiative and logistical supports for its operation. They also acknowledged the highly challenging nature of this role given the many moving parts involved in a community-wide collaboration and the fundamental shifts in ways of thinking and acting required to bring it to life. Such considerations were reflected in the identified strengths of Northside Rising's Backbone to date as well as the challenges for its ongoing work:

- *'Boots on the ground'*

Many evaluation participants acknowledged the vital role that Northside Rising's Backbone team has played providing the dedicated time and attention that is required to support work of this kind:

"The word that comes to mind in terms of the Backbone team is glue. Full-time support with boots-on-the-ground, helping to hold all the pieces together means a variety of practical things – meetings, keeping of notes, designing of agendas, and helping the group have conversations that are needed. I think there is another piece that is around leadership of this kind of process as well."

"In a real practical way, without full-time boots on the ground, there's not going to be as much of a drive getting to any initiative...The backbone provides the infrastructure for success; without that things fall apart pretty quickly."

Evaluation participants also identified several ways in which the Backbone team needs to continue building its own and the initiative's capacity to tackle complex issues through broad-based collaboration:

- *By leading the process in a way that builds group cohesion and a shared sense of direction.*

"In this phase it is about trying to find some cohesion as a group and directions of the work because there are so many pieces... To help us move forward well, the Backbone and everyone involved need to try and get to that next step of coherent and cohesive sense of where we're trying to go. We are midstream of taking the work to that next level of what the shared agenda is. The Backbone team has a really important and delicate job to do supporting the group effectively to do that."

“Strong capacities include designing of the meetings, knowing what needs to happen next, and knowing how to clarify a common agenda – feeling like there is a path and a process they are following.”

- *By finding the right balance between a ‘core group’ of consistent participants who provide leadership and focus to the work and a wider network of partners whose participation is required to take effective action.*

“... the core group [established after the release of the Community Report] developed some cohesion and were meeting regularly enough that there was a good sense of group perspective and now that's changing a bit with the [expanded] Roundtable... I think it is important to have some sort of a centre of gravity as a group, to have a shared sense of what it's all about as the pieces come together.”

“There needs to be a lot more levels of partnerships. Things that need to happen have to be coordinated, managed and prioritized in terms of who needs to be informed of what and when. There needs to be a plan of how [to] communicate and call people into the broader discussion around addictions. The same way we have an engagement plan, we need a battle plan for how we engage service delivery and how we engage government officials.”

- *By managing complexity in a way that achieves strategic direction and impact.*

“Treating the work as one of things, such as an event to be managed, is insufficient. There needs to always be thinking of how the pieces interconnect, about how are we getting to that objective of aligning efforts for greater impact.”

Continuous Communication

Possible signs of progress on this component of Collective Impact identified in the Inspiring Communities evaluation framework for early phase initiatives include:

- Working groups (or other collaborative structures) have regular meetings
- Members of working groups or other collaborative structures attend and participate actively in meetings
- Partners communicate and coordinate efforts regularly (with and independently of backbone staff)
- The initiative engages external stakeholders in regular meetings and integrates their feedback into the overall strategy

Evaluation participants identified many basic ways in which consistent communication is being undertaken within the initiative:

- Members of the Northside Roundtable are meeting on a regular basis
- The Backbone team is maintaining contact with the wider community through a number of mechanisms, including newsletters, meeting/event announcements, meeting follow-up, social media
- Many initiative participants have consistent contact with one another simply due to the nature of working in a small community.

At the same time, the evaluation identified some areas in which communication could be strengthened:

- Keeping interested community members up to date with the evolving work

“There were a few people that were originally involved, but not so much now. Not sure how much communication goes back to those people. In the beginning they were interested and positive, wanting and willing to have conversations around possibilities. There was interest, but they don’t know much about it now.”

“... the communication dimensions for this are pretty big, if you are trying to use communication to build relationships among a wide range of people. For example, I am wondering what awareness [the Engagement Team] have at this point of where things are, how things have developed. It’s a pretty hard goal to have the general public even have it on their radar screen. I wouldn’t know what the perceptions of Northside Rising and its activities are for the community or people that are fairly active in organizations.”

- Managing the many dimensions and levels of the expanding initiative [Northside Rising and Inspiring Communities] so that participants feel in touch with all that is happening.

“When I go to a meeting now, I find there are a number of different things that I never knew that we were going to be talking about. I don’t know if that’s communication we need to work on, or it’s getting used to things happening behind the scenes, now that we are not as much of a core team anymore.”

- Creating a safe space for difficult conversations to happen

“When concerns are raised, it is unclear whether they are being heard; they almost seem to be dismissed. More could be done to really listen and provide a safe space for those voices.”

- Developing stronger strategies for building and maintaining links with stakeholders such as government

“I think there needs to be a lot more government involvement. When I say government, I don’t mean tenured senior deputies sitting around the table waiting to hear something. I think there needs to be a group, either a task force or something like the addictions working group, of just government staff who are rubbing up against the addictions narrative as it’s defined in Northside.”

Initiative Capacity

Possible signs of progress on this component of Collective Impact identified in the Inspiring Communities evaluation framework for early phase initiatives include:

- Sufficient operating support is available to enable the initiative's BB to fulfill its responsibilities
- Initiative has influencers and champions that command the respect of a broader set of stakeholders and can bring stakeholders to the table
- Initiative partners have a shared definition and approach to equity
- Initiative has supporters who can champion the strategy with the broader community
- Leadership of the initiative comes from multiple sectors that are able to shift both public and private funding
- Individuals with relevant expertise leading the work

Evaluation participants felt that Northside Rising has adequate resources to support the initiative, including financial resources, staff time, physical space and access to expertise supporting the work. It was also agreed that the provincial team has provided ample support in response to the evolving needs and challenges encountered locally including:

- access to coaching
- management
- research and evaluation
- facilitation support
- administration

"I feel there is a lot of support from the provincial team to do the work."

"I have yet to encounter a situation where I asked for something and I didn't get it (they follow up quickly)."

At the same time, evaluation participants noted the challenging nature of the initiative's work and the need for all involved, and especially the Backbone team, to continue building the skills and capacities required to move the needle on difficult issues such as harmful substance use:

- Building trust and respect among participants from diverse backgrounds and perspectives
- Facilitating difficult conversations
- Understanding systems and systems change.

"It needs a lot of intentional work bringing champions (power in this case) around the table to see this as a great opportunity to see and do something new. That requires a lot of strategic leadership and management."

Additional supports that would be helpful include:

- Resources and supports to create a more fulsome understanding of using a Collective Impact approach
- Continued coaching to help the Backbone team develop a deeper understanding of complexity and systems thinking, and to define a clear roadmap for the initiative
- Skill building for the Backbone team in terms of facilitation and project management
- More local partnerships to help hold up the work.

Finally, in order to stimulate innovative thinking, it was suggested that more attention be given to exploring how other communities have addressed the sorts of challenges facing the Northside, not least the issue of harmful substance use:

“There is a culture support that needs to happen, and that is thinking outside the box. I don't know how you get there. I think soon we need to unearth some great techniques that have been used that have helped communities overcome addictions; I am absolutely convinced the answer does not lie within Northside. Relationships could be built, services figured out, policy shifts, but I think this is one of the challenges of Collective Impact – it makes a broad assumption that when you bring enough people around a table, that enough of the answers will come from within, that they can tackle a lot of the issues on their own. I think that is partially true; I would add a fifth component to CI that you have got to go elsewhere for quite a while and resource out, research other options that are out there. They're going to need support around understanding addictions interventions at a community level that are going on elsewhere.”

Culture of Trust and Relationship Building

Possible signs of progress on this component of Collective Impact identified in the Inspiring Communities evaluation framework for early phase initiatives include:

- Principles and practices guiding how to work together have been endorsed and are reinforced in practice
- Partners feel included in major decision-making processes
- Partners regularly seek feedback and advice from one another
- Partners trust each other
- People of different cultures, identities, and backgrounds feel respected and heard within the initiative

Evaluation participants identified a number of reasons that people were drawn to the Northside Rising initiative including:

- *the basic rationale of ‘collective impact’*

“There is a sense that people have to work together; that there are significant challenges in the community. The basic rationale of Inspiring Communities makes sense in terms of collaboration among a wide group of people.”

- *early involvement of trusted local leadership*

“They were aligning themselves with an organization (Community CARES Youth Outreach) that was already listening to first voice and the community.”

- *commitment of resources*

“Some were attracted by the language and conversations around resources (the community is so under-resourced here). For some, they needed the resources to show up early on.”

- *government working differently*

“The thought that the government was listening carefully in a supportive way was an attraction. It was important that the government was willing to do something different, listen and respond to issues in a different way.”

- *branding that inspires hope*

“Northside people feel more connected to it because of the nice branding and logo.”

All of these factors encouraged interest and trust in the proposed initiative.

However, the practical challenges of tackling tough community issues, including those related to relationship building, have also become apparent as the initiative has proceeded. Challenges have included:

- At times, unclear communication about the purpose of the initiative and how it is being pursued
- Active participants at one stage of the work losing touch due to limited follow-up communication about its progress
- The slow pace of the initiative raising uncertainty about its effectiveness
- Changing participants, including the composition of Backbone staff, requiring additional investments of time and effort in building relationships
- Some lack of continuity among participants between its various stages of development
- Uncertainty about where the decision-making power of the initiative resides.

“Once everyone was brought up to speed, we had a really good meeting establishing culture and figuring out what we wanted to do and pushing towards some overall goals, and then we brought in even more people. It is great because we want even more people and voices, but that means they've missed all of the stuff. If we keep bringing people in,

people will keep getting frustrated, and we could get really trapped here if we keep having the same conversations, meeting after meeting, if we are not bringing those people up to speed properly and with the culture of how we do things as an organization.”

“Overall the trust amongst partners is middle of the road. Areas that are a work in progress are between community and government, local and provincial, Inspiring Communities, first voice, system, and members of the general community. There is an issue with general community trust in the process; an uncertainty about if this way of working will produce results soon enough. There is hesitancy to trust in the process or the commitment from the government; if expectations will be filled.”

Diversity, Inclusion, Equity

In terms of support for diversity, inclusion and equity, evaluation participants acknowledged Northside Rising’s significant accomplishments. In particular, the initiative has made intentional efforts to include people with lived experiences of addiction as full participants in defining the challenges and solutions. Collaboration with the Ally Centre, a community-based harm reduction organization, has been especially important in this regard with Ally Centre staff and members participating on both the Northside Roundtable and the organizing group for the Rising Tide Festival, an early initiative focussed on raising community awareness about harmful substance use and reducing stigma.

“I think there has been a good effort to have the many different voices heard. I found with our meetings as the Core Team and now as the Roundtable, a sense of openness and caring for people to weigh in and to share their perspectives. I also see efforts made to reach out to more people with first voice experience, related to the issues we are dealing with. Even though that has not been a big part of the structure, the wider community and in particular people’s experiences with addictions, are being attended to. In terms of culture, my sense is there’s been a good openness to diversity of perspectives.”

In terms of maintaining and expanding the involvement of people with lived experience of addictions, evaluation participants suggested continuing supports such as:

- Transportation to meetings and events
- Refreshments at the meetings
- Honouraria for people’s time
- Support between Roundtable meetings to answer questions, ensure they are up to speed, and help them prepare for the meetings.

They also proposed:

- Reaching out to people beyond Northside Rising’s existing network and particularly including first voice representatives in addition to those from the harm-reduction community
- Developing other ways that people can participate beyond traditional meetings and committee membership
- Recognizing and addressing internal stigma and hidden biases
- Paying close attention for barriers to inclusion and addressing them as they become known.

“I think there is still a ways to go when it comes to first voice perspective. Right now, we have some really strong first voices in certain perspectives of addictions, but because it is a diverse issue there are a lot of first voices that belong to that group.”

“I feel we are not as connected to people that are not in the harm reduction category of lived experienced folks. We need to build out that network a little more, make our office seem like a more open-door place and increase the ways people can be involved.”

Participants also identified the need to include various other segments of the community in the work being done:

“I think it has been acknowledged that we are missing pieces, like businesspeople, someone in policing, etc.”

Learning and Evaluation

Possible signs of progress on this component of Collective Impact identified in the Inspiring Communities evaluation framework for early phase initiatives include:

- Learning and evaluation structures and processes are embedded in the work of the initiative
- Decision-making processes are open and transparent
- Partners have a shared agreement on how progress will be monitored and assessed
- Partners share insights and lessons about assumptions, successes, failures and promising practices
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- Partners share insights and lessons about assumptions, successes, failures and promising practices
- Community input and feedback is sought and used to inform the initiative’s ongoing work
- The initiative applies an equity lens

Evaluation participants discussed the role of ongoing learning in Northside Rising's work. They said that it is critical to the work in the following ways:

- Critical reflection helps the teams learn about all aspects of the work and strengthen it as they are doing it – they see the learning culture as a strength of Northside Rising and Inspiring Communities that will help move the work forward in a thoughtful and progressive way
- Learning about other work in the community (past and present) helps partners understand the lay of the land and what they are building upon
- The change process being pursued by Northside Rising is ultimately seen as 'learning by doing.'

"I believe in ongoing learning, the ability to make decisions in intelligent, informed evidence-based ways. To do this, you need to be introspective and move in a progressive and an aggressive way. This is one of the strengths of Northside Rising and this initiative in general; the attention to ongoing learning in research and evaluation."

"It is essential. I don't think anyone is going to be an expert in Collective Impact without continuing to learn as you do. Everything is a learning experience."

"I think that it is essential to every part of it, such as organizing people, getting the messages out there, that whole way to best facilitate people – we are not going to learn it from a book, but by doing – that is the essential thing that makes things different for us."

Several specific learning needs were also identified:

- Formal learning and networking around Collective Impact
- Learning about continuous community engagement, and how to facilitate a participatory process
- How to make the best use of research and evaluation information to improve the work in real time
- Learning from similar initiatives in other jurisdictions.

Participants suggested that ongoing learning can be improved by:

- Building in more formalized reflection processes
- Cultivating an openness to explore what isn't working and how these things can be addressed
- Continuing to exchange learnings with the other Inspiring Communities sites.

"I need to understand more how DE [developmental evaluation] effects the approach that we are using and can be used on a more regular basis to help the group work through difficult issues; creating that space where issues can emerge. It could be a role for the evaluation person to take the lead on that discussion and make sure voices are heard; that it is a group decision for how to work through it versus the Backbone team."

Key Lessons from the Work to Date

Northside Rising is an ambitious and challenging initiative. While the Northside's statistical profile singled it out for attention by Inspiring Communities, this snapshot was only the starting point for understanding the underlying challenges facing the community. The web of economic and social issues evident on the Northside did not evolve overnight and will take years to address. However, as indicated by participants in the evaluation, the Northside Rising initiative is regarded as an important opportunity for developing new ways of working together to renew the community for the long term. Insights from the early work are important for supporting that longer-term process. Key lessons are evident in three areas: articulating the initiative's shared agenda; managing complex change initiatives and effective practices from the work so far.

1. Articulating the Shared Agenda – Finding the 'Sweet Spot'

Defining a common agenda can be difficult in communities like the Northside that face a variety of significant challenges. Picking one or two issues to address runs the risk of losing the support and interest of residents who don't identify closely with those concerns. On the other hand, working on a wide range of issues runs the risk of spreading resources and abilities too thin, and having only marginal impacts, or none at all. Another option is to focus on building the community's capacity as an end-in-itself. However, capacity-building does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, it develops from working on real issues and learning what works and doesn't along the way.

Northside Rising has recognized these challenges and sought to address them. However, it has struggled to find language that captures the multiple strands and time frames of its work. As a result, it has been challenging at times to articulate a cohesive agenda that aligns the energy and interests of all involved.

Increasingly, there is a recognition that Northside Rising is pursuing what others have called the 'sweet spot' of community development: taking tangible action on specific issues of community concern *in a way* that builds the underlying capacities needed for long-term well-being. Such language unites the three main lines of work proposed in Northside Rising's Community Report: creating a community movement for change in the long term; impacting a major issue of community concern (harmful substance use) in the mid term; and providing small grants to support resident-led projects that contribute tangibly to community improvement in the near term. It may provide a helpful way to frame the work of the initiative as it goes forward.

2. Managing Complex Change – A Balancing Act

One of the key capacities that communities like the Northside require for their future well-being is the ability to manage complex change processes. The success of complex initiatives relies heavily on the ability of its leaders to continuously balance a variety of important tensions:

- Long term vision with near-term goals
- Commitment to outcomes with a commitment to process

- Big picture thinking with targeted action
- Desire for consensus with an openness to diversity and debate
- Opportunity-driven change with strategic analysis and direction
- Local knowledge and leadership with non-local perspectives and expertise
- Bias for action with a bias for learning.

Navigating these tensions in real time is more a craft than a science: it requires an endless series of judgments about how best to apply general principles to specific contexts. Backbone staff and others involved in the leadership of Northside Rising are increasingly coming to know the dynamics of such complex processes and the art of navigating its pushes and pulls.

3. *Effective Practices*

In the work to date, a number of elements have stood out as being particularly important not only to the early phase of Northside Rising but to its future development:

- *Ensure there is a strong backbone in place*

As noted by evaluation participants, backbone support is ‘the glue’ making possible a broad-based collaborative initiative on the Northside. It represents a type of social infrastructure that communities often lack: dedicated resources enabling diverse partners to work on issues that no one individual or agency can effectively address acting on its own. In Northside Rising, backbone support has provided the sustained attention to the overall process of community collaboration and the specific work on the complex challenge of harmful substance use. It brings a new kind of ‘boots on the ground’ to the work of community building, one that is focused on orchestrating the efforts of many partners to address difficult, multifaceted issues. Maintaining this infrastructure in the community and continuing to build its capacity is critical to the ongoing work on the Northside.

- *Devote time to building strong relationships*

In many ways, relationships are the lifeblood of community change initiatives. It is important to spend time cultivating and strengthening them and tending the human experience of engaging in the work. Building relationships takes time and patience, both of which can be in short supply in communities struggling to meet many needs with too few resources. Relationship-building is more difficult still when the issues being addressed can be seen quite differently from diverse perspectives and when participants may not have strong histories of collaboration. In Northside Rising the experience has been that relatively small groups of people engaging with each other over a significant period of time can build the trust and shared understanding that is needed to work effectively across their different experiences and perspectives. Accelerating and expanding this relationship-building work will be important to long term success.

- *Involve people with lived experience of the issues*

The active participation of people with lived experience of the issues being addressed has proven invaluable throughout the initiative. This includes both the initial process of community engagement where the opportunity was created for local residents to have a voice in shaping the community's agenda, and in the more focused work on harmful substance use. As Father Jimmy Tompkins, one of the founders of the Antigonish Movement, once said, 'Local people know where the ice is thin.' People who have direct experience of the issues concerned bring an intimate knowledge of what they look like on the ground as well as a deep stake in how they are addressed. They bring critical insights not only to understanding the problem but to the work of generating solutions. Their full participation is a crucial complement to the knowledge that others, such as professionals and policymakers, bring to the process.

- *Make intentional use of data throughout all phases of the work*

Strong local data has also been a critical ingredient in Northside Rising's work to date. Data made available during the community engagement phase stimulated conversation and reflection among local residents, and deepened awareness of the scale and scope of the issues facing the community. Similarly, the results of the community survey allowed residents to see how others in their community viewed the opportunities and challenges facing the Northside. Both were key to forming a broadly shared agenda for the current phase of the initiative's work.

Likewise, with the ongoing work on harmful substance use, data is seen as a vital resource for shaping understanding of the issue, determining strategies that can be most helpful for addressing it and defining indicators for measuring progress. Already evidence-based research is shaping the discussion about what approaches can have the greatest impact on this issue.

- *Foster a strong culture of learning and adaptation*

Underlying the work in Northside Rising has been a commitment to learning and change. Complex challenges such as those being addressed in this initiative do not come with ready-made solutions. They require ongoing learning, testing and adaptation. Throughout its work, participants at all levels of the initiative, local and provincial, have been grappling with the challenges being tackled and debating the most effective ways to advance the initiative's goals. That openness to learning will continue to be an important part of the civic culture needed to support the work on the Northside as it evolves.

Considerations Moving Forward

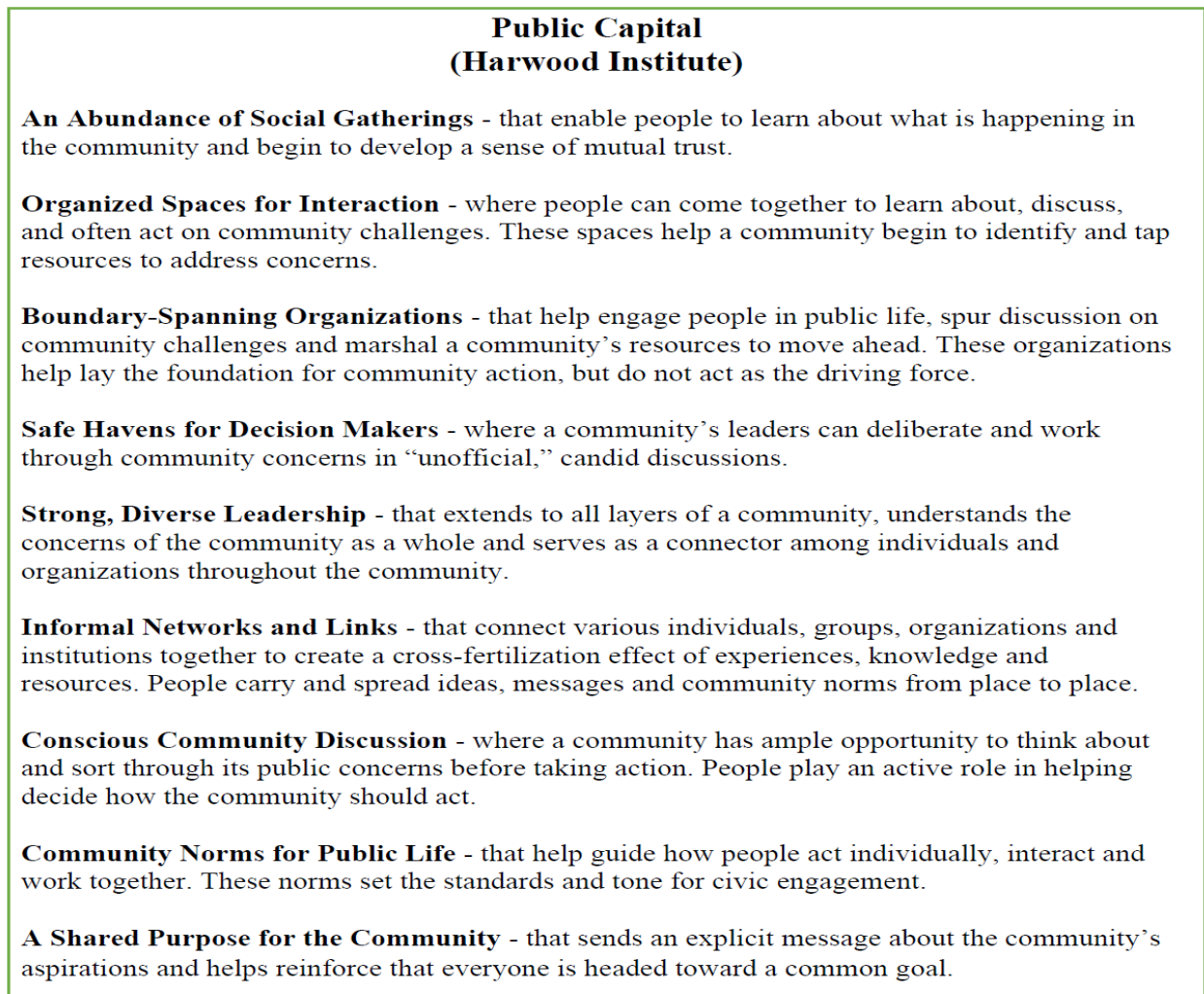
Although Northside Rising put forward a multi-level agenda in its Community Report (spring 2018), the primary focus of its work since then has been on addressing the complex issue of harmful substance use. In the course of this early phase evaluation, the Northside Roundtable on Substance Use has been steadily formulating its approach to addressing this priority concern. Significant work has already been done to increase community understanding of this issue and reduce the stigma experienced by people engaged in substance use. In particular, a series of public events were organized under the name of “The Rising Tide Festival” to deepen understanding about the causes of harmful substance use, to enable community members to share their experiences and concerns, and to explore measures needed to bring about desired changes. Talks and panel sessions featured first voice participants, researchers and practitioners working in the area of harm reduction. In addition, the Roundtable has identified key areas for ongoing work to help reduce and prevent harmful substance use. The progress of that work, its challenges and successes, will be the subject of future evaluation.

While it is clear that Northside Rising needs to continue to concentrate attention on this difficult issue, it may be time for the initiative to bring back into focus two other aspects of its agenda: the broader goal of building a vibrant, healthy Northside and the more immediate one of using Rising Tide grants to support resident-led community projects. Both could be used to extend and reinforce the emerging work on harmful substance use.

1. Building a vibrant, healthy Northside

To round out Northside Rising’s overall agenda, it may be helpful to convene a group whose specific focus would be on ways to build the underlying civic capacity needed to create a vibrant, healthy Northside for the long term. The mandate of the group would be to consider patterns that currently hinder community efforts to achieve desirable change and identify ways to alter these. Examples would be the narrative through which the community understands itself, styles of leadership impacting the community, social infrastructure that enables citizen engagement and collaboration, and capacity to work with larger institutions such as government. Participants could reflect on the evolving work of Northside Rising through this lens and help identify ways to build patterns of community life that best support its long-term development. Figure 2 below illustrates the sorts of community capacity building themes that could be given attention in this way.

Figure 3: Public Capital



2. Rising Tide grants

Rising Tide grants were called for in the Community Report to encourage resident involvement in developing projects that generate tangible improvements in the community in the near term. They were seen as a way to foster hope and confidence and strengthen citizen participation in the work of community renewal. As discussed, valuable projects were undertaken through the Rising Tide initiative (see list and brief description in Appendix One). However, the links to a concerted community agenda were not as strong as hoped. It may be time to revisit the way these grants are used so they are targeted more directly to building out the strategies related to harmful substance use; opening up additional areas of work where there is strong community interest; or more effectively engage the energy and imagination of residents who may not normally participate in community initiatives.

Appendix One:

Rising Tide Grants

Project	Description	Status
Needle Kiosk	Organizing and fund-raising for a new sharps disposal kiosk for North Sydney led by Cape Breton University student	Complete
Red Row Building	Week-long consultation process organized by Tomkins Institute of Cape Breton University to create a re-development plan for remaining units of this Sydney Mines heritage property	Complete
Christmas Surge	Creating positive memories for children affiliated with Clifford Street Youth Centre while promoting community connection and reaching out to others in need by linking children and seniors in Christmas celebrations (caroling, sharing Christmas cards and chocolates)	Complete
North Sydney Food Bank Window Murals	Beautification of the North Sydney Food Bank through creation of 12 locally themed murals painted on large wooden window coverings	Complete
EffLorARC	Purchase of a sound system to support this youth-focus arts program to present shows in its facility at the 511 Youth Centre	In progress
Creative Healing; Creative Change	Led by the Ally Centre, a 10-week peer-led artistic workshop supporting self-exploration for women who have been criminalized as a result of their substance use and are currently facing barriers to social integration due to their drug-related criminal history	In progress
Graffiti Abatement	Young offenders in the NS corrections program to be selected to work with community partners on removing graffiti from public and private areas on the Northside.	Paused
Hope Project	Materials to develop 'Covered by Hope' clothing promoting a culture that recovery is possible	Pending