

Class Case for Discussion

“The Homeless File: A Case Study in Horizontal Implementation”



*I'm not sure... It's either the Homelessness file
or the Unified String Theory.*

Class Discussion

Below is a description of the Homelessness Initiative launched by the previous federal government. You are looking at this case because it represents a complex social policy implementation challenge that involves not only all levels of government but many players in civil society. As a group, discuss for 15 minutes the following questions:

1. What risks need to be taken into account to ensure that the objectives of this policy will be met?
2. What would be some impediments to effective collaborative management of this policy initiative?
3. What governance structure would you see as being necessary, taking into particular account the need for:
 - a. successful intergovernmental co-operation;
 - b. effective co-operation between governments and civil society?

- c. accountability for both the management of this kind of horizontal project and for the results
4. What might be the impacts – both positive and negative – on a line manager engaged in a highly collaborative project.

For each question, give two points. Each group will be asked to do the same. Assign a spokesperson.

National Homelessness Initiative

As a Throne Speech commitment, the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI) was launched in December 2000. The purpose of NHI was to provide a wide range of supports and interventions, to help homeless people move from situations of risk to greater independence. The lead Minister was the Minister of Labour (also the Minister responsible for homelessness); the lead department was Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC). Some \$753 million in new funding was provided for it over 3 years. Nationally the new funding was allocated among three federal organizations (HRDC 57%, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation 41%, Public Works and Government Services 1.3%).

NHI offered a combination of new community-based programming and enhancements/modifications to existing programs. Most of the funds were allocated among provinces and cities according to various formulae that were based on need. In most cases, partnerships were established with the province, the municipality and some non-profit organizations. The structures and processes for program coordination, however, varied from province to province and from municipality to municipality. Some 62 municipalities became involved in NHI and 13 of them agreed to be delivery agents for programming in their jurisdictional area.

Under HRDC leadership, NHI was planned and developed by an inter-departmental committee (with PWGS, CMHC and central agencies) in the national headquarters (NHQ); the committee was later expanded to include other departments. HRDC established an NHI Secretariat to provide some ongoing direction and coordination for the program. The lead Assistant Deputy Ministers of the three funded departments met periodically. And NHQ maintained an ongoing, inter-departmental committee that meets quite often, largely for the purpose of information exchange. The implementation authority for NHI has been delegated to regional offices across the country.

From the outset, the NHI had certain objectives that lent themselves to collaborative working approaches:

- *With the NHI's launch in December 1999, the Government recognized that a concerted federal response was needed to address this growing, visible social problem.*

- *A unique community-focused approach was adopted to facilitate community action and ownership.*
- *Addressing locally identified needs.*

In addition, the NHI had, at the outset, a number of objectives:

- Enhanced access to information
- Better information and data on the homeless population and homelessness issues
- Better ways of researching and gathering information on homeless issues in Canada
- Increased awareness of NHI and homelessness issues
- Increased inclusion of homelessness in policy options at all levels of government
- More coordinated response between sectors to address homelessness
- Increased local capacity to deal with homelessness
- Concrete actions taken by communities to improve services and facilities in order to alleviate the hardship of homeless people
- Improved decision making around investments

In fact, such objectives tied the success of the program to such collaboration. However, good will and internal co-ordination are not enough to make this happen. What is? In discussing this, you should range across all aspects of implementation as well as the unique challenges in collaborative environments? Consider such areas as: the policy framework, funding and fund sharing, goals, working arrangements, formal and informal decision-making, communications, developing mutual understanding of responsibilities and roles.



I can't imagine why, but I get the feeling some of our partners doubt our commitment to horizontality.