

Challenging old ideas: Manitoba's partnered approach to social policy and governance

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The Province of Manitoba, located geographically in central Canada, is uniquely positioned to explore broad social policy and governance innovation at the sub-national (provincial) government level. The combined strength of its provincial economy and the progressive agenda of its government has provided a fertile ground for innovation. In this context Manitoba has seized the opportunity to challenge out-moded and ineffective governance and policy approaches and experiment with new holistic, respectful and community-driven models.

This paper will discuss four broad areas of social responsibility and some of the innovative approaches the Provincial government has taken. These areas include early childhood development, aboriginal economic integration, community economic development and the piloting of a results-based budget planning tool. To encourage social change as a partner rather than the paternalistic institutional approach of old, Manitoba has fostered multiple community-based relationships that inform policy development. These relationships and communications help policy makers understand and respect the complexity, interconnections and changeability of social needs.

By listening to community voices and viewing policy as something that is alive, flexible and changing to adapt to needs rather than static and fixed, space is created for a new policy holism to emerge. While in its infancy, this new perspective is proving to be a balanced, responsive and effective approach that respects the needs of the client groups, community organizations, government and taxpayers.