

Build Together:

Strengthening the Community Housing Sector in Nova Scotia



Community Housing
Transformation Centre
Centre de transformation
du logement communautaire



Consultation B Findings

On May 26, 2021, the Build Together Community Housing Sector Engagement Team came together to hear the draft findings of Consultation A. Consultation B was held on June 1 and 3, where Consultation A - Findings were presented to a broader audience. Approximately 80 people participated in the sessions, stated their observations, and validated the findings. Messages shared related to community housing sector coordination and collaboration, building the capacity of the sector, access to land, increased inclusion and diversity, increased sector visibility, housing as a human right, and supportive housing.

Community Housing Sector **Coordination**

For small, non-profit organizations, operated primarily by volunteers, there are multiple burdens and challenges on the road to developing affordable housing. These include advocating for access to programs, funding, land, research, and support services and it is challenging when volunteer time and capacity are limited. Build Together participants articulated a strong desire for a coordination system that reflects their needs and priorities. Specifically, a need exists for a one-stop source of information on community housing options and models, access to funding programs, technical support, and research projects and findings, among other supports. Keep in mind that community housing groups are at different points in their life cycles and have different needs. A coordinated provincial voice, potentially drawing on regional hubs, could ease the lobbying and advocacy efforts of small housing groups. It is essential to have one provincial voice “so we are all singing from the same song sheet.” It has been suggested that a next step might be to focus and build on the commonalities within the community housing sector to share strategies and successes with others. It might be helpful to look at the New Brunswick Non-Profit Housing Association as a model for Nova Scotia.

Community Housing Sector **Collaboration**

Collaboration Within the **Community Housing Sector**

It has been encouraging to see so many people across the province committed to non-profit and co-operative housing. There appears to be consensus on the issues facing the sector and a sense that the solutions lie within the knowledge, expertise, and passion of the sector. Some respondents feel that it is time to “flip the script to take charge of our own destiny,” to challenge the existing system or create an autonomous system that serves the interests of the community housing sector. Collaboration is especially important moving forward. Individuals and organizations view housing through different lenses, some from an Afrocentric lens, others from an Indigenous lens, and many from a European lens. It will be important to look at attitudinal change and to appreciate diversity to strengthen the sector. Listening to each other will help people understand and respect different experiences and perspectives. To strengthen the sector, an understanding of the spectrum of community housing organizations, what they do, where they are, and the range of capacity building needs they possess is required. It will be important to bring groups together in a coordinated way to strengthen their capacity related to understanding their community’s strengths, accessing support, completing the pre-development process (research, proposal development, planning, acquiring land and funding, etc.), housing construction and/or renovation, financial management, property management, etc.

Collaboration with **Municipal Government**

In some regions, collaborating with municipal government and with other organizations is lightening the load of community housing organizations. Leveraging municipal support for collecting data, accessing land, completing funding applications, and creating community awareness of housing needs is invaluable. Individual municipal councillors are also becoming members of housing organizations and networks and providing support as needed. Municipalities could also support community housing efforts by envisioning land as a community resource, as social infrastructure, and as a not-for-profit asset. The sector would like to see municipalities working with the province and with other groups to support the creation of affordable housing. Rural Nova Scotia voices were clear in the Build Together consultations; their need is great, and they are looking for municipal engagement in their work.

Collaboration with **Provincial Government**

Overall, more awareness of provincial services is needed as well as increased access to funding programs. Participants expressed a desire for municipalities, the province, and other groups to collaborate to create opportunities for developing affordable housing. We cannot continue to look at programs and services that support and enable successful affordable housing initiatives as discrete and disconnected under different provincial



government departments. It will be important for government to pay attention to the information gathered in this consultation. It needs to be used to change the narrative related to the work of the community housing sector and to inform budget decisions. The recommendations of the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Commission related to community housing must be fulfilled and must represent the interests of the sector, especially marginalized groups.

Collaboration with **Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation**

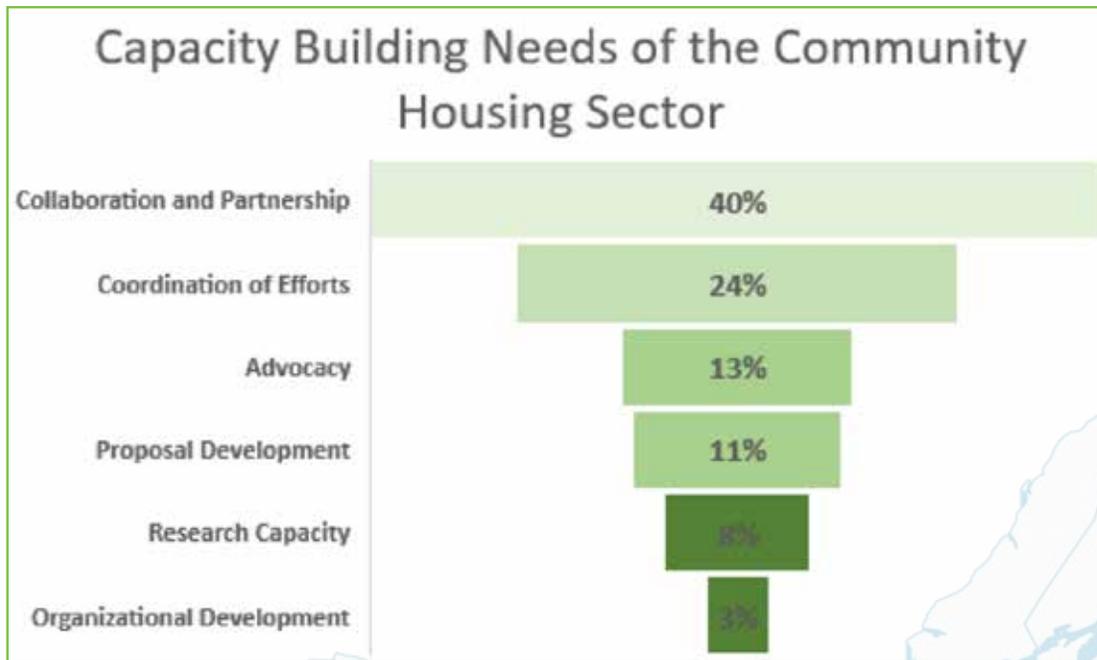
Community housing sector organizations have expressed frustration related to their efforts to access funding through programs administered by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). It is important to communicate with CMHC to ensure it is aware of the challenges faced and to offer solutions to these challenges. A need for support and provide community housing organizations with access to expertise to prepare funding proposals was also noted.

Building Capacity in the Community Housing Sector

There are two opportunities for building capacity within the community housing sector. The first is to **build the capacity of individual community housing sector organizations**. Sector participants describe the need to build capacity throughout the lifecycle of housing activities from determining community housing needs, educating the community, building an organization, initiating and implementing housing projects, maintaining housing units, empowering and supporting tenants, providing navigation and support services, and advocating for policy change. Doing so is a hefty burden for, in many cases, community volunteers to carry, but as noted in Consultations A and B, organizations have been successful by leveraging skills and supports from other groups, universities, consultants, or government. They are also interested in learning from each other and sharing their successes. Multiple challenges face organizations as they begin to address housing needs in their communities, for example, accessing funding programs is complicated and the processes take too long. For smaller organizations in rural areas, this is compounded by isolation and lack of available expertise and resources. As groups share their frustrations and issues in attempting to address housing needs in their communities, they realize where the pitfalls and roadblocks are and begin to call for changes in legislation, policies, or regulations. Advocacy is time consuming and takes housing groups away from their primary goal of developing and maintaining affordable housing in their communities.

The second is to **build the capacity of the community housing sector as a whole**. There have been clear calls for coordination and improved collaboration with government and within the sector. There is also hope that the sector can become more inclusive of underrepresented groups and diverse and marginalized communities. In Consultation A, participants identified the following needs for capacity building in the sector.





At present, housing groups are often working independently and are not benefiting from sharing resources, engaging in learning opportunities, exchanging program information, or working toward a shared vision. Building the capacity of the sector to collaborate, form partnerships, coordinate efforts, etc., has the potential to increase the collective impact of the sector for the benefit of all.

Access to Land

Market pressures are hindering the development of affordable housing, particularly in African Nova Scotian communities in the Halifax Regional Municipality. Land use policies need to be revised to allow community housing organizations access to well-suited (available public transportation, centrally located, municipally serviced, etc.) land upon which to develop affordable housing options. In some rural areas there is little land available, and it is difficult to develop due to zoning by-laws. Market forces need to be recognized by both provincial and municipal government. One suggestion is to put land in trusts so people in the future have the opportunity for affordable home ownership or community housing development.

Increased Inclusion and Diversity

Participation in Build Together consultations was challenging for Indigenous community members due to multiple and constant requests for their engagement in research and other projects as well as workload on the ground. In African Nova Scotian communities, housing support workers have valuable insights, but it is challenging to take time away from front line work to participate in sector processes. Exploring creative strategies for authentic engagement with underrepresented groups will be an important aspect of



strengthening the community housing sector. Options need to be considered to include all voices. Adopting anti-racism policies, using inclusion and diversity lens, and holding governments, organizations, and ourselves to account to overcome discrimination and stigma are also important aspects of strengthening the community housing sector. Respectful engagement of underrepresented groups in ways that do not perpetuate discrimination should be adopted.

Increased **Sector Visibility**

Awareness of the work of the community housing sector must not only be raised but also clarified. Housing is on media radars, and it is important to ensure that full and accurate information is shared – what is the work of the sector, who does this work serve, who is doing this work, how is it supported, what is its potential to address a larger portion of the housing need in Nova Scotia. Sharing this information will serve to increase awareness of community housing and hopefully inspire greater support and participation in these efforts and raise more voices to influence positive change.

Housing as a **Human Right**

Community housing sector voices are clear that housing, a basic need, cannot be left solely to the private sector to address, especially for members of society who are most marginalized and living on the lowest income. Treating housing as a human right will have implications for planning, financing, and real estate. Housing is a basic need and should be considered in the context of essential needs such as employment and food security.

Supportive **Housing**

Consultation A and B participants expressed concern regarding what they see as gaps in government supports and services for youth, seniors, people with disabilities, people with addictions and mental health issues, and others who often live in or are referred to community housing developments. Supportive housing is often necessary to help people stay appropriately housed and to live well. There are a variety of groups in Nova Scotia who require transitional housing to help them move to the next, best step in their journey. In rural areas, people often are unable to get housing with private landlords. They require supportive housing or navigation supports to increase the likelihood that they will be able to maintain secure, long-term housing. These supports need to be viewed as investments rather than expenditures in a long-term comprehensive housing strategy.

