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C-BIG PEI: Hearing the Voice of the Community
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It is a privilege this afternoon to share our PEI experiences of engagement. Maybe we could start by telling each other what we mean when we say we want to engage people.

So here is our PEI story about working towards Basic Income Guarantee. **The Working Group for a Livable Income** is a coalition of community groups and individuals, established 15 years ago. It grew out of a community project on minimum wage, which immediately became livable income.

From the founding, the Working Group for a Livable Income has seen the need to address the on-going roots of impoverishment of a large number of people in PEI and adopting the long term goal of establishing *Basic Income Guarantee* (BIG) as a means of eliminating of poverty. In 2013 we embarked on this as our core program with the assistance of Rob Rainer. We call our program *C-BIG PEI*. Our goal is to establish a federally-provincially-funded province wide experimental program of basic income guarantee.

There are four interest areas for engagement: **the community; media; public policy makers and the national network**. In all of these, we take care to make collective decisions on what we are going to present and how we will present it. Important to this is a concept of communication which responds to two areas: how C-BIG PEI chooses to express itself; and how it hears and interprets the voice, suggestions and concerns of the various sectors.

Because we were trying to represent the *interests* of all low income Island residents and indeed the interests of the whole Island community, we set out first of all to learn from the everyday people in *Island communities*. We held two-hour interactive forums in eight communities and did shorter presentation-discussions with about 12 different community-based organizations. Our core point of departure is “the people know”. So although we presented some basic knowledge of what BIG entails, the only way we would think of engaging people is to ask them what they already know and what BIG would mean to them. We are not surprised, but always in awe, at the valuable things we learned and which gave us significant new directions. We are proud to say that the proposed program we continue to present to policy makers truly comes from the community and belongs to the community.

Our work with **policy makers** involves presenting BIG to all political parties and keeping on-going communication with them. We have an ongoing dialogue with the provincial government, having met with the Premier and the various Ministers and Deputies responsible. We talk with them especially about the feasibility of establishing BIG as a demonstration project for all of PEI. We have had the unique experience of the Premier naming a liaison between the government and our Working Group. We asked that the liaison come to our meeting place rather than have us go to their office. This creates a variation in the power dynamics. We dialogue with Federal members of parliament. To establish a demonstration program requires Federal

Provincial collaborations. We see one step forward, with the PEI Legislature unanimously passing a motion to lobby for buy-in by the Federal level. We experienced two steps back when the Feds announce that BIG is not in the Trudeau cards. And further back when the Parliamentary Budget Officer made his pronouncement of the prohibitive cost of BIG.

Over the past five years C-BIG PEI has involved the formal *media* in various ways on 10-12 occasions with media releases, Op Eds; and interviews initiated by the media. We are in several social media forums: a web site <http://cbigpei.wix.com/c-big-pei>; e-mail cbigpei@gmail.com; Face Book <http://facebook.com/cbigpei> & Twitter: @cbigpei.

Finally, we have communications with other BIG groups and the *national* organization. This takes the form mainly of reports and up-dates and an occasional conference call.

Success?

- C-BIG PEI has achieved a level of commitment of the community, policy makers, and the media.
- the energy of the community response and readiness for action
- Initial positive response of public policy makers
- relatively easy access to conventional media
- increased commitment and professionalism of the members of the Working Group
- Our capacity to relate the difficulties of establishing BIG in the midst of false-majority governments (*Need for Proportional Representation and a commitment to an economic plan which in itself is democratic*).

Failure?

- PEI Government quit so easily when the Federal Government says “no”
- neither government could yet be convinced to go beyond “poverty reduction strategies”
- neither government was convinced that BIG will have long term positive impacts that will justify any extra expenditure necessary to get a BIG going
- neither government is able to conceive of the concept of investment in people being as important as investment in economic enterprises
- neither government has the capacity to redefine work to include; family care; community building; the arts; study
- neither government has the capacity to go beyond a neo-liberal approach: we fail to grasp the depth to which BIG in this context is counter-intuitive for governments.

Challenges?

- many of the Working Group members are working, mostly volunteer time, on a variety of issues and fronts, most of them interrelated, but very demanding.
- to remind ourselves that when some are feeling over-burdened and cannot be involved in some actions, others in the group have capacities, or can develop them, to carry out an active campaign.
- remind ourselves that this not “our project”. It is the people’s project
- accept that we do not have to design a flawless BIG policy; we can do the ground work, have input into design and implementation and keep a buzz going; governments are responsible for developing BIG, costing the program, creating the framework, guidelines, oversight, and evaluation procedures.