

Bridging the growing divide in Toronto (follow-up)

Event Details:

Thursday, April 28, 5:45-8:00PM

Northern District Public Library

40 Orchard View Blvd.

Summary prepared by: Julia Lo, Project Officer, CivicAction on May 16, 2011.

MEETING DESCRIPTION: “Bridging the growing divide in Toronto (follow-up)”

On Thursday, April 28, ELN brought together a diverse group of more than 30 civic leaders to explore, through dialogue, the growing gap between the rich and the poor. At the meeting participants heard about some of the programs and services that are already underway and shared perspectives on what leaders in the room could do to contribute to addressing the issue of income polarization and rising poverty.

Participants emphasized the importance of considering not only how to bridge the divide but encouraged each other to consider ways to eliminate poverty.

1. Background

At the ELNStudio, a one day event that brought together more than 200 civic leaders, participants articulated that the single most critical issue facing the Toronto region is growing income polarization.

On March 9th, emerging leaders convened in Lawrence Heights to discuss trends of growing income polarization and the geographic concentration of low-income households in Toronto. Following this initial discussion, participants agreed to meet again to learn more, engage the expertise of others, and explore community-based strategies.

Drawing on the experience, expertise and perspectives of leaders who live and work in communities with a concentration of low-income households and leaders who have engaged communities in exploring interventions (e.g. policy-makers, advocates, etc.), the purpose of the April 28th meeting was to identify the ways in which participants in the room can address the growing gap between the rich and the poor and how to set out on this path.

2. Summary and Next Steps

From participants in the room, we heard opportunities to learn about and explore the issue of growing income polarization. We propose the following next steps for the coming months:

What we heard	Our next steps
<p>1. Deepen our understanding of Toronto's lower-income communities, why the growing income divide exists and how it can be eliminated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Volunteer for or apply to serve on the board of a community agency or organization. ○ Connect existing volunteers and organizations with other volunteers/organizations across the city, with the goal of creating connectivity and scale ○ Engage leaders living and working in lower-income communities in initiatives already underway. 	<p>In the Emerging Leaders Network bi-weekly newsletter, we have created a space to connect members of ELN to existing volunteer and advocacy efforts and to share opportunities for emerging leaders to deepen their understanding of Toronto's lower-income communities. We will continue to reach out to agencies and organizations working in lower-income communities to facilitate these connections, and members of ELN are encouraged to share opportunities via the newsletter and LinkedIn group.</p>
<p>2. "Make more noise" by advocating for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Action Neighbourhood Change (ANC) and other community services ○ Affordable and accessible childcare ○ Social housing asset limit reform ○ Ontario's Social Assistance Review 	
<p>3. Explore ways to enhance the capacity of agencies and organizations working in lower-income communities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reduce overhead costs (e.g. a shared services model or creating a flexible and affordable insurance policy) ○ Facilitate/support mergers in the non-profit sector ○ Increase access to space for community organizing 	<p>A member of ELN has indicated interest in organizing a follow-up meeting on this suggested intervention. Details will be announced in an upcoming newsletter.</p>
<p>4. Create a local "Toronto Homecoming" to unleash the labour market potential of Toronto's lower-income communities.</p>	<p>Emerging leaders interested in this intervention were invited to learn about the model and experience from Toronto Homecoming organizers.</p>
<p>5. Deepen our understanding of neighbourhood revitalization through mixed-use, mixed income communities.</p>	<p>Two ELN members have begun planning a follow-up meeting on this suggested intervention. Details will be announced in an upcoming newsletter.</p>