

# city building roadmap

November 2011 (edition I)

**eln**  
emerging leaders network

## **About the ELN**

*Founded by the Greater Toronto CivicAction Alliance (formerly Toronto City Summit Alliance), the Emerging Leaders Network (ELN) is a diverse network of rising civic leaders committed to advancing the Toronto region through awareness, influence and by taking action. ELN plays the role of an “action incubator” by convening leaders, informing and facilitating dialogue and catalyzing action. ELN provides mentorship and organizational support to groups of rising civic leaders working collaboratively on challenges facing the Toronto region.*

## **Why ELN?**

*There are many organizations in the city region that support or incubate projects and leaders. However, none like the ELN.*

- *ELN, as a diverse network of Toronto region leaders from the public, private and not-for-profit sectors, includes the diversity of perspectives to create innovative, collaborative, and multi-sectoral solutions to complex issues facing the region*
- *ELN is a unique platform for groups of rising leaders to develop and launch projects or “civic actions” initiated by its members. In line with CivicAction’s own strategic approach to city-building, ELN members develop civic actions that:*
  - *Require multi-sectoral collaboration*
  - *Have a regional approach*
  - *Address a thorny and intractable issue*
  - *Have the potential for high-impact*
  - *Do not have another logical home*

*Individuals who choose to lead and participate in ELN’s civic actions, participate in a unique, experiential leadership development opportunity, develop valuable collaborative leadership skills, work on some of the most diverse teams and make an impact on the Toronto region.*

## Introduction

City building takes place every day in the Toronto region. We see companies, governments, organizations, groups and individuals and different combinations of these, working to strengthen the Toronto region.

ELN brings some of our region's rising leaders together, to collaborate in unusual combinations, test out new ideas, and incubate civic actions. This, our first edition of the *ELN Citybuilding Roadmap* is a high-level guide to collaborative citybuilding, which captures some of these experiences and efforts led by members of the Emerging Leaders Network (ELN). It highlights the best practices and lessons learned from the following:

- **Toronto Homecoming.** An initiative dedicated to making it easier for talented Canadians living abroad to return home. Focused on attracting and retaining innovators to Toronto and to ensure that the city remains a viable choice in an increasingly challenging global market for talent, Toronto Homecoming undertakes research and holds an annual conference that connects high-talent expatriate Canadians with employers and organizations in Toronto. The first Toronto Homecoming conference took place in June 2010 with 40 participants. The second edition took place in June 2011 with 100 participants. Both garnered significant media attention and many participants returned to Toronto and found employment. Toronto Homecoming is led by team co-chaired by Eva Wong Scanlan and Andrew Graham.
- **Project Neutral.** An initiative that aims to create the first urban carbon neutral neighbourhood in Canada. With the goal of developing a replicable model, Project Neutral is working with neighbourhood leaderships teams in each of the two neighbourhoods (the Junction and Riverdale) to test the tactics, develop the tools and resources needed to transition neighbourhoods to carbon neutrality. Project Neutral is led by Managing Director Karen Nasmith and Co-Chairs Julie Dzerowicz and Regan Smith.
- **Better Ballots.** Facilitates a non-partisan dialogue, on 14 ways to make municipal elections more relevant, effective, fair and participatory. In spring of 2010, Better Ballots held four Town Hall meetings in various areas of Toronto and a mayoral forum, including all front-runner candidates, on the topic of voting reform. The second

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phase of Better Ballots augments the scope from raising awareness of the particular reforms to also creating the enabling legislation. Better Ballots was founded by a team led by Dave Meslin and is currently led by Project Lead Rob Newman.

- **Diversity Working Group.** A group of members of the ELN came together to find new ways to embrace and celebrate Toronto's diversity. In the process of exploring many possibilities, the team learnt about a project initiated in Denmark called Living Library. Incidentally, at the same time, the Toronto Public Library was considering presenting a similar program. With the help of the ELN Working Group, the 2011 Human Library project - an event where readers "check out" actual living, breathing people with fascinating stories to tell, was officially launched in 2011, by the Toronto Public Library. The Diversity Working Group was led by Nick Yeo and Jason Wong.
- **Arts and Culture Working Group.** Members of ELN saw the potential to animate John Street with arts and culture and turn it into a creative hub that engaged the public, the institutions and the artistic community. Through consultations with local artists, the group identified specific ways to embed artistic and creative elements into the community. These ideas were shared with the Toronto Entertainment District BIA, who is leading an effort to transform the corridor into a vibrant and unique "John Street Promenade." The Animating John Street initiative was led by Linda Theron.
- **Spot Toronto.** ELN's newest working group, aims to provide information about interesting places in the city, what they offer and how to get to them, Spot Toronto strives to complement existing efforts to make under-utilized places in Toronto more available to the public. Spot Toronto is led by James Cocks.

This *Roadmap* is not meant to be a comprehensive guide to starting an initiative but one that shares ideas and approaches that may be helpful to groups of city builders, who want to work together to take civic action. As you read this you may find familiar approaches and be introduced to new ones.

The guide has been compiled by the ELN Taking Action team, based on input from the leaders of ELN projects, with support from the CivicAction staff. This is a living document that will be updated as our journey unfolds.

## Incubating civic actions

### Convening a diverse group of leaders

City building is happening all over the Toronto region in different ways by different people and organizations. Once you've identified a problem to be addressed, two important initial steps are 1) a participation audit and 2) a perspective audit. Understanding who is already operating in the space and the various perspectives represented on an issue will help you determine who needs to be involved. ELN's monthly meetings and the annual Studio are great places to connect with different leaders and start to create city building teams.

#### **Are the different perspectives you need around the table?**

If the desired outcome is a regional, multi-sectoral solution, it is helpful to have these perspectives from the beginning of the process.

It is also important to find out whether anyone, is already working on a similar solution or trying to tackle a similar or adjacent problem. Discussions with key stakeholders will help define the problem, opportunities for action and help uncover ways in which ELN can collaborate and devise multi-sectoral approaches to addressing an issue.

#### **Do you have the leadership in place and the right people on board?**

**Co-Chairs:** Having at least two co-chairs is vital to the long term success of a project. Two Co-chairs can help shoulder the responsibility of managing the initiative and keep up the momentum of the project. While it may seem early to start thinking about succession planning, it is good to keep in mind who will lead the effort after the inaugural Co-Chairs of a project.

**Core Team:** Apart from the co-chairs, a team should have a core group of volunteers who oversee the design and implementation of the new city building solution. While each project will be unique, ELN Co-Chairs have indicated that it can be useful to have a large group of people during the initial brainstorming/ideation process, but easier to move a small group forward during the implementation phase. When you get to the implementation phase, the team may include a core of 4-6 people (in addition to the co-chairs). More on that later.

*“When I consider common characteristics of the most impactful citybuilding initiatives I’ve had the privilege of being involved in, two elements come to mind: 1) the problem or challenge was clearly identified and agreed upon by a diverse team and 2) the solution was one that could be described simply by all team members. The first characteristic reflects wise investments of time in the early stages and the second speaks to a thoughtful strategy and vision. Taking action is obviously important but you cannot underestimate the value of time spent thinking.”*

*– Naki Osutei,  
Founding Project  
Director, ELN*

## Defining the Problem

### Have you developed a common fact base?

A fact base is a compilation of facts, statistics or analysis, which allows you to clearly identify and communicate a specific “problem” and why a solution is required. When working with different stakeholders, it is important to first develop a common fact base from which you can begin a discussion about solutions.

#### **City building Snapshot: Toronto Homecoming**

When the Toronto Homecoming Co-Chairs decided to tackle the problem of Toronto’s brain drain of top talent, they decided to begin by researching why many of the city’s leaders and innovators leave and often never return. Their first step was to create a research report which examined why a specific subset of the world’s most talented people—those in the early to mid-stages of their careers, with clear links to Toronto—choose to live abroad. Creating this research report (e.g., a common fact base) allowed the Toronto Homecoming Committee to validate their hypotheses around why this subset of individuals were leaving and never coming back. Ultimately, Toronto Homecoming was born out of this initial research, which allowed the committee to design a solution that would address some of these issues.

This research paid off in other ways as well: it was picked up by various media outlets and the exposure they received helped the project gain credibility, attract new volunteers and ultimately obtain sponsors for the implementation stage of their project.

### Have you defined the problem specifically enough?

Social issues are often a result of a confluence of different problems, and narrowing your problem statement can help you keep your project focused. Have you clearly identified the specific problem your project is trying to solve? Are you really trying to solve several adjacent problems?

**Are you trying to solve a root problem or allay a secondary symptom?**

Although, we all strive to create systemic changes, the value of creating incremental change should not be underestimated.

***City building Snapshot: Project Neutral***

When the Project Neutral Co-Chairs identified the problem of rising greenhouse gas emissions within cities, they discovered that the majority of environmental impact reduction projects in the GTA tended to neglect the City's established communities. Given that much of the residential building stock in established communities is old and inefficient, the Co-Chairs determined that a 20-50% reduction in household greenhouse gas emissions could be achieved within five years through zero to low cost retrofits and behavioural change.

The Co-Chairs were confident that the problem they identified was in fact solvable through bringing neighbourhoods together and empowering them to take ownership of their carbon footprint.

**Have you created a focused and compelling project pitch?**

When recruiting partners to join a team or contribute to the solution, it is important to communicate the problem and solution in a clear and compelling manner. Be sure that your project pitch clearly presents its tactical approach to achieving measurable outcomes, but is also a compelling and aspirational vision for change.

***City building Snapshot: Spot Toronto***

As a newcomer to the city, the lead of the Spot Toronto initiative was struck by the opportunity to improve the signage around the city to help newcomers, tourists and even residents find their way around the city and get to special, lesser known places. Knowing that there were many examples of cities with more user friendly signage, he set out to bring a team together to tackle this problem. At this stage, ELN supported his efforts by providing a space to pitch and develop the idea in discussion with a diverse group emerging leaders, connecting him with his co-chair, communicating the call for team members, convening an initial team meeting, providing strategic advice and introducing them to key

stakeholders.

Members of the Spot Toronto initiative were asked why they volunteered to work on this project and they repeatedly emphasized that the initial project pitch was clear, compelling and had a great narrative. The chair was clear about the resources that were needed and team members felt that they could make a contribution that would add value to the project.

*"I think you've got to attack these things on the basis of incremental change. I think a lot of us get attracted by the glamour of dealing with issues at the top level when talking about immigration or jobs or neighbourhoods, and that's fine... However, if you want to look at the way that change is actually achieved, whether in business or in the community, it's one element at a time."*

*– John Tory, Chair,  
CivicAction*

## Developing a Solution

### Have you defined your strategy simply enough?

Can you clearly and succinctly explain how your solution solves the specific problem you're trying to address and why it is unique in Toronto? It is also important to distinguish between your strategies and your tactic(s).

#### **City building Snapshot: Better Ballots**

When the Better Ballots Co-Chairs decided to tackle the issue of municipal electoral reform, they undertook a research project to analyse the various electoral reform proposals discussed or implemented in various municipalities around the world. Rather than predetermining a proposal to advocate for, they compiled 14 of the top proposals in order to obtain feedback and build consensus around which of the proposals most people thought should be pursued.

Their strategy was to ask people what they thought about the various municipal electoral reform proposals and which ones they wanted. Their tactic was to hold town halls across the GTA in order to elicit direct feedback from people living in different communities.

The Better Ballots team had a simple and clear strategy of initiating dialogue with people about electoral reform. This clear strategy enabled them to devise various tactics to enable them to implement their strategy: e.g. town halls, holding a mayoral debate, creating a newsletter campaign, etc.

### Have you set ambitious and realistic goals?

Do you have an idea of what success should look like for your project? Do you have any way to actually measure that success? Defining key metrics

to track throughout the life cycle of your project allows you understand if you're making a tangible impact or if you need to adjust your approach.

### **Do you need to change or pivot your solution?**

Project co-chairs and teams should not expect to immediately land on the perfect solution. If the first solution to a defined problem does not take off, there should be no hesitation to start the solution development phase again to come up with a new approach. Don't be afraid to pivot and change course.

#### ***City building Snapshot: Better Ballots***

The Better Ballots Co-Chairs decided to use the town hall approach to engage various communities in a dialogue about municipal electoral reform. Fortunately, this tactic was successful in bringing people together; however they were prepared to abandon this tactic if people did not turn up at their first few scheduled town halls and devise a new tactic for engaging people.

Similarly, the team was not invested in any one of the fourteen proposals. If, after the first town hall, there was consensus that none of the fourteen proposals were important, they were prepared to abandon the project altogether. If there was only one proposal that was voted as being the most important and received broad support, they were also prepared to turn their initiative into an advocacy campaign for the adoption of a single reform.

## **Citybuilding Teams and Resources**

### **Have you developed a project plan or timeline?**

What are the key milestones for your project? Have you broken down your project into digestible /actionable steps with clear deadlines? Do you have an approximate timeline for your project?

Please see the following link for an example and instructions for developing a project plan:

<http://www.watermarklearning.com/HowToCreateAClearProjectPlanExcerpt.pdf>

Other useful project planning tools include:

*Doodle*: A free online scheduling tool, useful for organizing and planning meetings.

*Smartsheet*: an online project management tool (available through the ELN) for managing key deadlines and actions.

*Google Documents*: Collaborate on key documents/presentations using Google Reader

*Dropbox*: Free file sharing service for exchanging important documents

**With a solution in mind, what are the resources you need to achieve it and a plan for action?**

Resources include: people, funding, subject matter expertise, skills, information

***City building Snapshot: Project Neutral***

When the project leads behind Project Neutral first began their city building initiative, they relied heavily on ELN's mentorship and organizational support. The founders credit ELN's early support as instrumental in the ultimate success of their initiative. Through utilising ELN as an incubating partner, Project Neutral was able to recruit highly motivated volunteers through ELN's network of members, obtain significant press, brainstorm ideas with ELN staff and meet with strategic partners who were positioned to help support the initiative.

The founders also emphasise that ELN was instrumental in enabling the initiative to apply for, and ultimately obtain, grants from several funding agencies and organizations. Due to the fact that Project Neutral is a new organization, and without charitable status, having ELN as an incubator partner provided prospective funders with greater comfort and ultimately enabled the initiative to obtain funding

**Have you adequately considered the time that will be required for each stage of the process? (e.g., idea generation, defining problem, etc.)**

Set realistic expectations in terms of the amount of time that will be required to implement each phase of the project. Many project leaders tend to underestimate the amount of time it takes for collaborative action

by a group of volunteers. One project lead's advice was to anticipate that it will take much longer than you might initially expect to implement your objectives in terms of both volume of time and length of time. There are often elements outside of your control that will slow down the speed of your initiative. It will be important to maintain the momentum of the team during such periods.

***City building Snapshot: Project Neutral***

Project Neutral's strategy consisted of a five-step plan. One of the components of their strategy relied on partners and volunteers living in a particular neighbourhood to help launch the campaign. During this process, the Project Neutral team realized that it would take more support and coordination than originally anticipated to ensure that their neighbourhood partners/leads were empowered to implement their initiative. Their advice to individuals considering the launch of a new initiative is to ensure that adequate time is budgeted to allow for sufficient support and coordination.

They also advise to consider the impact of the time of year when launching:

- Is it during summer months when many people are on vacation?
- Is there an election on the horizon?
- What else is occurring in the city that could distract from your launch?

**Have you considered developing strategic partnerships with other stakeholders and organizations to achieve your strategy?**

Through the ELN, you have access to a diverse group of emerging leaders from different sectors, industries and organizations. Once you have identified a unique solution, consider what organizations or stakeholders you should work to execute it.

***City building Snapshot: Living Library***

When the Diversity working group heard about the idea of a living library, which would enable people to break down barriers through dialogue, they thought that the Toronto Public Library would be the perfect partner. They found out that the Toronto Public Library had been considering this idea and helped to support the launch of the pilot event and continue to engage participants in the program.

***City building Snapshot: Better Ballots***

The Better Ballots Co-chairs were confident that they would be able to gain a significant strategic advantage through leveraging other organizations with similar objectives to theirs. They accomplished this by approaching like-minded organizations who shared an interest in civic engagement whether they would lend them support by agreeing to align with them. They were not asking for money, office space or other services in-kind. Rather, they asked several organizations if they would agree to allow Better Ballots include their logos at the bottom of their letters and press releases. These organizations also agreed to send out an email to their membership lists providing information about the Better Ballots initiative and how they were in support of the endeavour.

Having the names of well-known organizations attached to the Better Ballots campaign added a significant amount of legitimacy and helped them gain traction as they recruited more volunteers and gained additional media coverage.

**Have you recognized the various ways that team members want to contribute to your project? What are the different roles and related responsibilities needed to be fulfilled for the project to succeed?**

When building the project team, recognize that prospective team members will have different priorities and objectives in terms of their function, length of commitment and level of involvement. Some contributors may be inclined to focus solely on certain phases of the project such as idea generation, research, implementation, process or mid to long term growth. Prospective team members may also prefer short-term commitments focused on working on a concrete deliverable.

It is important to be as clear as possible about what resources you may need in various stages of your project (e.g., community capacity building, reaching out to related organizations, etc.) so that partners and team members can best determine whether they can commit to the project.

**Co-Chairs:** As mentioned at the start, the success of the project relies on the leadership of project Co-Chairs. While the leads of ELN projects are very different they have two key things in common:

- A compelling vision and commitment to change
- Ability to lead teams and engage partners

**Core Team:** It may be necessary or valuable to engage new team members as the project evolves. The ELN events and network is a rich pool of leaders to draw from.

**Short-term support:** In addition to the co-chairs and a core team, it can be helpful and necessary to bring on new team members with specific skill sets for short term project needs, such as designing a logo, providing PR services, research, etc.

### ***City building Snapshot: Project Neutral***

Project Neutral demonstrates why it is important to have volunteer opportunities at all ends of the spectrum. The Project Neutral team is comprised of co-chairs, a core team and volunteers providing short term support. The Co-Chairs indicate that they've never turned anyone away who has expressed interest in working with their initiative. When they receive a request from a prospective volunteer, they invite them to attend a meeting in order to allow the volunteer to get a sense for how they would like to contribute. During these meetings, the Co-Chairs discuss various tasks or responsibilities that are required to be fulfilled (often of an administrative nature – checking the email inbox, etc.) and interested parties volunteer to undertake them.

When Project Neutral's Co-Chairs brought new volunteers together, they often had a specific idea in mind about how they would like to contribute (IT support, website development, PR, etc.). Having an open policy of inviting all interested parties to meetings can help to fill gaps at all levels of your initiative.

## **Implementing the city building solution**

### **Have you considered embarking on a small pilot project at the beginning?**

Starting with a clear and actionable pilot project with a set end date can be quite useful when implementing the solution. Instead of attempting to do too much too soon, start by creating a small pilot project that can be implemented in a short timeframe.

#### ***City building Snapshot: Toronto Homecoming***

Working on a small pilot project at the outset gave Toronto Homecoming the benefit of learning how the co-chairs and the volunteers worked together as a team. It provided them with an opportunity to see who was committed to putting in the time and getting things done.

Most importantly, it tested and proved that the solution they landed on was effective. Through a competitive selection process the Toronto Homecoming team invited 45 participants. A dozen of whom have returned to the Toronto region.

#### ***City building Snapshot: Project Neutral***

Rather than attempting to roll out a city-wide campaign, the Co-Chairs of Project Neutral decided to focus on working with one neighbourhood at a time. This enabled them to develop a list of key learnings that could be used to improve future campaigns. It was only through the implementation of their first two pilot projects that they learned important lessons such as the impact of survey length on different communities, the nuances of dealing with urban vs. suburban communities and the level of support and coordination required to empower partners and volunteers.

## **Keeping the project on track**

### **Have you scheduled consistent meetings with team members?**

It is important to consistently schedule meetings to discuss what needs to be done in order to maintain project momentum. It is useful to schedule follow up meetings with clear deliverables so that there is work being done in-between meetings.

#### ***City building Snapshot: Better Ballots***

The co-chair of the Better Ballots initiative emphasizes that it is very important during the first meeting to decide when you're going to meet next and what people are going to do prior to it. Making sure the next meeting is always scheduled is crucial to keeping the momentum going.

### **Have you publicly communicated your initiative?**

There is often a tendency for project teams to spend a lot of time scheduling meetings without being tied to producing tangible outcomes. In order to ensure that you work towards implementing your project goals, it is important to publicly communicate your intentions and to state a delivery date of when you intend to deliver (whether it's an event, report, town hall, key milestones, etc.).

Publicly committing to roll out a solution will help ensure that your project team works towards firm dates and sticks to them. It will also provide the added benefit of attracting volunteers who may be willing to commit to a focused short-term project as opposed to a long term initiative without a clear end date.

When it is time to publicly communicate about your citybuilding initiative, please contact the ELN staff to coordinate these efforts and describe the affiliation with ELN.

The ELN and CivicAction newsletters reach an engaged audience of citybuilders and are good channels to communicate through.

***City building Snapshot: Better Ballots***

When considering a communications strategy, the Co-Chairs of Better Ballots suggest the tactic of piggybacking on things that are happening within the city. Better Ballots successfully used this approach when they held a Toronto Mayoral Debate that allowed them to bring their issue into the spotlight. They took the time to educate each of the candidates about the various electoral reform issues and this resulted in each of the candidates speaking about municipal electoral reform as well as providing their position on the issue. This approach can be used in conjunction with festivals, conferences, elections and various events.

The Better Ballots Co-Chairs also emphasize the importance of knowing who your stakeholders are and which key messages are unique for each group. It is useful to determine what their interest is and how your initiative can align with them.

## Incubating civic actions - summary

### Convening a diverse group of leaders

- Are the different perspectives you need around the table?
- Do you have the leadership in place and the right people on board?

### Defining the Problem

- Have you developed a common fact base?
- Have you defined the problem specifically enough?
- Are you trying to solve a root problem or allay a secondary symptom?
- Have you created a focused and compelling project pitch?

### Developing a solution

- Have you defined your strategy simply enough?
- Have you set ambitious and realistic goals?
- Do you need to change or pivot your solution?

### **Citybuilding Teams and Resources**

- **Have you developed a project plan or timeline?**
- **With a solution in mind, what are the resources you need to achieve it and a plan for action?**
- **Have you adequately considered the time that will be required for each stage of the process?**
- **Have you considered developing strategic partnerships with other stakeholders and organizations to achieve your strategy?**
- **Have you recognized the various ways that team members want to contribute to your project? What are the different roles and related responsibilities needed to be fulfilled for the project to succeed?**
- **Have you considered embarking on a small pilot project at the beginning?**

### **Keeping the project on track**

- **Have you scheduled consistent meetings with team members?**
- **Have you publicly communicated your initiative?**

## Contact Information

**Tamara Balan, Project Director**

CivicAction, the Greater Toronto CivicAction Alliance  
(416) 309-4480 x533  
tamara.balan@civicaaction.ca

**Julia Lo, Project Officer**

CivicAction, the Greater Toronto CivicAction Alliance  
(416) 309-4480 x500  
julia.lo@civicaaction.ca