CCMARD AND HALIFAX: LOOKING FORWARD OVER THE NEXT DECADE

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The African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Office (ANSAIO) was established in September 2012. It was a direct response to the direction of Council regarding the Africville Agreement. The direction was to establish an African Nova Scotian Affairs Office within HRM that would enable our organization to better engage with the African HRM community.

CONTEXT

Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) has recently rebranded itself as Halifax. The rebranding is intended to spark and convey a boldness of purpose and courageousness to step out of comfort zones in all areas of its operation, including its work with marginalized communities within its geographic boundaries. HRM was the 8th municipality to sign the Declaration to join CCMARD when it became a member in October 2007.

Halifax is a unique mix of historical communities with roots dating back more than three centuries. It is home to First Nation communities as well as more recent immigrants. The municipality's geographic diversity (a rural and urban mix), demographic diversity (such as a growing senior population), and differing social classes represent both challenges and opportunities for Halifax to enhance its inclusiveness. As Halifax evolves, brings forward current promising practices, and embraces new ways of addressing systemic racism and discrimination, we see support from CCMARD as critical to its success.

Several shared areas exist for the future work of Halifax and CCMARD:

1. WORKING WITH AFFINITY GROUPS[1] TO UTILIZE INTERNAL EXPERTISE AND RESOURCES TO IDENTIFY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR EMPLOYEE DIVERSITY

There are several areas in which CCMARD can make an important contribution to capitalizing on employee diversity. CCMARD might usefully explore the provision of proper access to training at the municipal level as a means to strengthen the skills and competencies of affinity group members. The work of CCMARD can also be crucial in helping the city establish a grant program so that collaborative projects can occur across municipalities. The coalition can also be a great resource in the areas of providing research on effective ways to integrate such groups in both the corporate and council arms of municipal government and sharing success stories that have helped contribute to systemic change.

At Halifax we believe that strong inroads can be made by working with groups that are dedicated to anti-discrimination. One affinity group firmly rooted in HRM structure is the Racially Visible Employee Caucus (RVEC). It provides support to its members, advice to the organization at the employee and management levels, and guidance on general corporate policy. The RVEC's purpose is to act as a vehicle through which specific issues can be addressed. It is a mechanism to enhance the emotional and mental well-being

of its members and promote collective action. A new group forming as a result of a workshop held in June 2014 is the African Nova Scotian / Visible Minority Women's Network. It will provide peer support to its members, and provide advice to various corporate operational structures which are referred to as Business Units within HRM. It will ultimately serve as a tool to help strengthen skills and instill confidence in its members.

2. ADVANCE COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED DIVERSITY PRIORITIES THROUGH MUNICIPAL COLLABORATION WITH PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND NOT FOR PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Being a member of CCMARD is important as it allows municipalities to share their stories from diverse voices of the community. The coalition can also play a key role in helping support municipalities to meet and collaborate at the regional and national level (e.g. Kings County is known for its leadership in this regard). Promoting the toolkit and its application to municipal operations as well as developing an evaluation framework to provide a baseline and measure for the effectiveness of initiatives, are others ways in which CCMARD can contribute in the next ten years. The establishment of a regional body which is resourced by CCMARD would help with coordination and implementation of the great ideas that exist and are emerging.

This year the history of Africville has been recognized on a commemorative stamp. We continue to work with community organizations to recognize the contributions of African Nova Scotians in the War of 1812, and are exploring possibilities for commemorating key land marks such as Tanger Island. We do so as a means to acknowledge the connection between this community and areas in the United States. In these cases the two countries are connected through legacy of wars and the journey north to freedom.

We are also seeking to preserve our history and balance growth and development with historical Black communities (e.g. Beechville, Preston Area communities, and Upper Hammonds Plains) and are beginning conversations about creating an environment that offers the warmth of "home" for new migrants. Another initiative we are undertaking is exploring a 'Welcoming & Inclusive Communities Initiative' as a unique mix of rural and urban living in Halifax allows for pilot projects to study and support the inclusion and welcoming of newcomers.

3. ADVANCING DIVERSITY WITHIN THE MUNICIPAL CORPORATE STRUCTURE BY IDENTIFYING AND BENCHMARKING PROGRAMS, PROJECTS, AND INITIATIVES

In the next ten years, CCMARD can make an important contribution to this work by providing advice on effective training approaches that serve as best practices to bring about systemic change. This information could be disseminated across the network and internationally. It could also assist in developing and sharing instruments that measure the impacts of various programs and policies on the institutions and the communities they are intended to influence. Finally, the production of a bi-annual report for communities – a report card which provides an easy read of what has gone well, what has not worked, why and what is being done to find solution would be a useful tool for municipalities to judge their progress and opportunities for future work.

HRM offers a Diversity Training Program in which there is a strong focus on building the skills and knowledge of employees at all levels. There is a mix of compulsory and non-compulsory options available. A Diversity and Inclusion Strategy is also being developed in which a key contribution is to expand the relevance to include various Business units reaching beyond its current scope resulting from its location within the Human Resources Business Unit.

It is also working to fully operationalize the African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Office. While the Office is currently located within the Chief Administrative Office's Business Unit, a final decision (as of the drafting of this report) has yet to be made on its location within the organizational chart. Consultations with African Nova Scotian communities, HRM staff, and researchers indicate that it should be positioned in such a way as to have both decision-making autonomy and an appropriate level of resources.

ENHANCING THE ACCOUNTABILITY OF MUNICIPALITIES AND CCMARD

The three theme areas identified above and in which Halifax is currently undertaking work, can be supported by CCMARD in important ways. First, CCMARD can implement a comprehensive accounting of progress at the 10 year mark which will ensure that it is producing impacts. Relatedly, CCMARD should usefully identify major achievements and milestones over the past ten years and barriers that need to be addressed moving forward. Finally, this information could be shared through an intern progress report to share with all member municipalities. In sum, these activities will enhance the functioning of the Coalition as a whole by promoting accountability and knowledge sharing. CCMARD is positioned to provide a forum for municipalities to showcase successes and to assist them in responding to needs identified by their communities. It can encourage actions a by individual municipalities and by municipalities that are empowered to take collective action. By implementing a basic reporting system, CCMARD can strengthen the network and its impacts in Canada.

NOTES

[1] Affinity groups are groups of people who share common interests or objectives and who acting together towards a goal. They sometimes also referred to as interest groups.