

Principles for Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy Public Consultations

- 1. BE SOLUTIONS ORIENTED:** The consultation must ask about what the province can do to reduce poverty. In order for the consultations to focus on what needs to be done to reduce poverty and social exclusion, the government should develop background material to be used in the consultations that lays out:
 - what we know about poverty in Ontario – rates, depth, duration, communities most impacted, different ways of measuring poverty, existing government programs addressing poverty; and,
 - what we know can make a difference based on available local and international evidence.The background material should be in plain language, should touch on a broad range of program and policy areas, and should lay out the kinds of questions the province would like answered. While these questions should not foreclose upon options, they should also not be completely open ended, and should focus on concrete action.
- 2. PROVIDE MULTIPLE AVENUES FOR INPUT:** Recognizing that many individuals and groups do not or cannot participate in large group meetings for a variety of reasons, the consultation process must provide multiple avenues for giving input, including allowing individuals to remain anonymous. These avenues should include: community-based workshops; focus groups with people with lived experience in low income; interactive, web-based methods of giving input; e-mail, phone, fax or mail-in.
- 3. MAKE INCLUSION A PRIORITY:** Women, racialized community members, aboriginal people, persons with disabilities, newcomers, youth, seniors, and other groups most likely to experience poverty must be at the centre of the consultation. This will require paying attention to things like: language (providing for both the diversity of languages people speak and read as well as literacy levels by providing background materials in translation and in plain language); accessibility (physical, linguistic, attitudinal); and the provision of support (financial, child care, etc.) for lone parents and people on low income to participate in workshops or focus groups.
- 4. REFLECT GEOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY:** Consultation workshops and focus groups must be held in different regions across the province, including rural, urban, and reserve venues. Specific steps must be taken to ensure accessibility based on the specific challenges posed by these different geographies.
- 5. PARTNER WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES:** Community-based groups and organizations that work first-hand with low income people can help facilitate a more inclusive and more meaningful process. Provision should be made to collaborate with such groups and organizations to best accommodate the differing conditions of access for participants based on the many ways that historically marginalized individuals would potentially find themselves excluded.
- 6. TREAT CONSULTATIONS AS THE BEGINNING, NOT THE END:** This includes a commitment to report back publicly on what the government has heard as well as a commitment to an ongoing multi-year process of consulting on the design, implementation and evaluation of Ontario's poverty reduction plan.
- 7. MAKE LISTENING A PRIORITY FOR GOVERNMENT:** The consultation process must involve politicians and ministerial staff hearing directly from people at consultations. This means ensuring that members of the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction, MPPs, and ministerial staff are present at community consultations rather than simply given reports from the consultations.

