



**Collaborating to Reduce Poverty
Among Seniors in Waterloo Region**

The GIS Initiative Evaluation Report



“Measuring Community Initiatives”

**by Heather E. Rodgers
October 2003**

OPPORTUNITIES 2000

MUST POVERTY HAVE A FUTURE IN OUR COMMUNITY? *

The citizens of Waterloo Region – one of Ontario's (and Canada's) most prosperous communities – want to put an end to poverty. Historically generous and well-organized in alleviating hardship among the disadvantaged, since 1997 they have turned their inventiveness in a new direction. Opportunities 2000 (OP2000) is a community-wide effort to create new pathways out of poverty. Business, government, non-profit organizations, and people of low income work together to create the means by which people can become more self-sufficient. This unprecedented alliance has unleashed the energy, creativity, and grassroots insight into poverty and the complex measures required to uproot it.

Opportunities 2000's Vision Statement

We have a vision of a caring community with social and economic well-being for all.
We have a vision of a community where:

- ◆ People care about each other
- ◆ Children are cherished
- ◆ Diversity is valued
- ◆ Food and housing and health care are secure and affordable
- ◆ Employment is meaningful and adequately compensated
- ◆ Education is available life-long
- ◆ Opportunities are accessible and abundant

We have a vision.

It takes an entire community to make the vision a reality. Residents, businesses, voluntary and public sector organizations create innovative opportunities and solutions.

We all have a part to play.

Opportunities 2000's Mission Statement

Toward a Community of Opportunity

“Opportunities 2000 ignites community action and leadership to create bold solutions that reduce and prevent poverty through collaboration, advocacy and education.”

* From McNair, Don and Eric Leviten-Reid. (2002). “Creating Pathways Out of Poverty in Waterloo Region”. Waterloo: Lutherwood Community Opportunities Development Association Publications.

**Collaborating to Reduce Poverty
Among Seniors in Waterloo Region**

The GIS Initiative Evaluation Report

by Heather E. Rodgers

October 2003

Copyright © 2003 by Opportunities Waterloo Region

This report is protected by copyright. If credit is given, up to 10 percent of the contents may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes. To reproduce larger portions, or for commercial uses, contact:

Opportunities 2000
235 King St. E., 1st Floor
Kitchener, Ontario, Canada
N2G 4N5
Phone: (519) 883-2353
Fax: (519) 568-8587
Email: op2000@lwdcoda.org
Website: www.op2000.org

Published by: Opportunities Waterloo Region

Opportunities 2000 publications are available at www.op2000.org.

National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Rodgers, Heather E. (Heather Elizabeth), 1976-
Collaborating to reduce poverty among seniors in Waterloo Region : the GIS initiative
evaluation report / Heather E. Rodgers.

Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-9734467-0-6

1. Aged—Ontario—Waterloo (Regional municipality)—Economic conditions. 2. Guaranteed annual income—Ontario—Waterloo (Regional municipality) I. Opportunities Waterloo Region (Project) II. Title.

HV1475.O6R62 2003

362.6'3

C2003-907094-8

Acknowledgements

It is with sincere appreciation that the author acknowledges all those who participated in the GIS Initiative and in the preparation of this report. Many people contributed their time, vision and energy to this effort to reduce poverty among seniors in Waterloo Region. Many thanks to the staff at HRDC for their willingness to share their time and expertise, and to the community partners who worked together in planning and implementing the GIS initiative.

The GIS Initiative Partners included:

Bosnian Community
Cambridge Self-Help Food Bank
Canadian Hearing Society
CIRCA Development
City of Cambridge
City of Kitchener
CKWR Radio
Club 55
Community Care Access Center
Emmanuel United Church
Freeport Health Center
Grand River Hospital
House of Friendship
International Gospel Center
Kitchener Downtown Community Health Center
K-W Friendship Group of Seniors
K-W Islamic Association
K-W Multicultural Centre
Latin-American Seniors
Lutherwood-CODA
Meals on Wheels
RAISE Home Support
Region of Waterloo Public Health
Region of Waterloo Social Services
St. Mary's General Hospital
Social Planning Council of K-W and Area
Waterloo Region District School Board
Waterloo Region Homes for Mental Health
Waterloo Region Housing
Wellington County Social Services
YMCA Cross Cultural Services
YMCA of Cambridge Immigrant Services

The numerous staff and volunteers from these and other agencies who participated in the GIS Initiative Train the Trainer sessions are to be commended for helping such a large percentage of the eligible seniors in Waterloo Region to access GIS benefits. It was through their direct contact with seniors that the impact of the GIS Initiative was delivered.

Region of Waterloo Public Health contributed to the creation of this report through the secondment of two full-time staff positions to Opportunities 2000. In addition, staff in the Health Determinants, Planning & Evaluation division provided extensive evaluation support.

Without Opportunities 2000's funders (see below), the guidance of the Leadership Roundtable, and OP2000's dedicated staff and volunteers, both present and former, our community would not have been able to come together to create such a successful project.

The Opportunities 2000 staff team of 2001-2002 included:

Mark Cabaj, Program Developer (GIS Strategy Group Lead)
Tim Fox, Executive Director
Sanjay Govindaraj, Program Developer (GIS Training Team Lead)
Sharalynn Krahn, Administrative Assistant
Denise Wamsley, Program Developer (GIS Communications Team Lead)

The author also wishes to acknowledge the support of the current staff team in editing this report:

Chris Cowie (Executive Director)
Sanjay Govindaraj (Program Developer)
Lea Porter (Administrative Assistant)
Denise Wamsley (Program Developer)



Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Table of Contents	3
Executive Summary	4
1.0 Introduction	6
1.1 Opportunities 2000	6
1.2 The Guaranteed Income Supplement	6
1.3 The GIS Initiative	7
2.0 Background to the evaluation	11
2.1 Purpose of the evaluation	11
2.2 Rationale & process of the evaluation	11
2.3 Design	11
3.0 Evaluation Methodology	11
3.1 Data Collection	11
3.2 Analysis	12
3.3 Limitations to Interpretation	12
4.0 Outcomes	13
4.1 Train the Trainer feedback	13
4.2 Targeted sessions	15
4.3 Other project outcomes	16
4.4 Sharing resources	16
4.5 Unknown Impacts	17
4.6 Summary of project results	17
5.0 Learnings from the GIS Initiative	19
5.1 Challenges	19
5.2 Positive factors	22
6.0 Recommendations	23
6.1 Future GIS Initiatives	23
6.2 HRDC	25
7.0 Conclusions	27
References	28
Appendices	29

Executive Summary

Background

Since 1997, Opportunities 2000 has sought to develop strategies and develop community partnerships toward the reduction and prevention of poverty in Waterloo Region. Through a significant community consultation process in 2001, Opportunities 2000 brought together many community stakeholders for the purpose of determining high impact strategies for poverty reduction. At that time considerable media attention was focused on the lack of uptake of the Guaranteed Income Supplement across Canada. The issue quickly emerged as a priority area for Opportunities 2000 to address.

The Guaranteed Income Supplement

The Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) is one of three major income support programs for seniors available through Human Resources Development Canada's (HRDC) Income Support Programs branch. The GIS was developed to reduce poverty among seniors by providing a monthly income supplement for eligible seniors with low incomes.

According to HRDC, in 2001 an estimated 200,000 Canadian seniors who were eligible for the GIS were not receiving it. Based on population rates, staff at Opportunities 2000 estimated that this figure would translate to approximately 2,950 seniors in Waterloo Region. The low uptake of GIS benefits was due to a number of factors, including a complex application process, language and literacy challenges among eligible seniors, and barriers to communication between the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA) and HRDC resulting from confidentiality concerns.

The Initiative

Opportunities 2000 convened a group of partners in January 2002 to explore the GIS issue more fully. They formed a strategy group, researched barriers to receiving the supplement, determined constituencies of seniors most likely not accessing GIS benefits, and developed a strategic intent based on their work. The GIS Initiative was developed with a goal to increase the uptake of the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) among low-income seniors in Waterloo Region. It would require a truly cooperative and collaborative effort among multiple stakeholders with OP2000 simply providing support to reach this goal.

The strategy group determined two areas of focus that would have the greatest impact both on seniors who require information about the GIS, and seniors who require support in the application process. Two initiative teams were developed to focus on these areas. The Train the Trainers initiative team focused on the development of a series of information sessions and "Train the Trainer" style sessions. The Communications initiative team focused on the development and implementation of a communications plan, which resulted in over 5,000 information flyers being distributed locally.

Evaluation

The goal of the GIS Initiative was to assist at least 600 seniors in Waterloo Region to access GIS benefits. It was determined by OP2000 staff that an evaluation of the GIS initiative would need to focus on the effectiveness of the process of collaboration as well as the outcomes of the initiative to be of greater value to future collaborative efforts. The purpose of the Opportunities 2000 GIS Initiative Evaluation was to determine whether the initiative met its goal of increasing the uptake of GIS benefits among low-income seniors in Waterloo Region, and to document the lessons learned from the GIS experience for use by other communities, and in OP2000's broader work with youth and the working poor.

The evaluation consisted of three methods in order to increase the reliability of the information gathered. Thirty-three surveys with program participants provided information on the quantitative outcomes of the initiative, as well as participant satisfaction ratings for the training sessions. Four structured interviews with GIS Initiative partners and an examination of OP2000's initiative records and organizational documents were used in determining the effectiveness of the collaborative processes that were used.

The Outcomes

The GIS Initiative resulted in a total of 85 community members being trained in the process of helping seniors to apply for the GIS benefit. Information on the GIS supplement was shared with over 2,600 people through general community information sharing sessions as well as individual outreach by trainers. Of these 2,600 individuals, at least 636 were seniors who were subsequently approved for the Guaranteed Income Supplement between May 2002 and June 2003 through the GIS Initiative.

This remarkable outcome means that in each 12 month period an aggregate sum of \$2.6 million is obtained by eligible seniors in Waterloo Region who would not have received it were it not for the efforts of OP's community partners. Based on estimated program costs of \$4,388.00, the GIS partners were able to leverage \$592 for every dollar donated in-kind to the initiative.

The GIS Initiative also contributed to community capacity building through its collaborative, community-based nature. The initiative created a positive impact not only in individual households, but also by forging partnerships among local organizations, and by bringing specific resources more directly into the hands of community members.

For information specific to Opportunities 2000 or the GIS Initiative, please contact Opportunities 2000 at (519) 883-2353.

For more information specific to the Guaranteed Income Supplement, call the Government of Canada's Income Security Programs at 1-800-277-9914.

1.0 Introduction

This evaluation report summarizes and analyzes both the process and the outcomes of Opportunities 2000's Guaranteed Income Supplement Initiative, which took place in 2001-2002.

The purpose of the GIS Initiative evaluation was a) to determine whether the initiative met its goal of helping at least 600 low-income seniors in Waterloo Region access the GIS benefit, and b) to document the lessons learned from the GIS experience for use by other communities and in OP2000's broader work with Youth and the Working Poor.

1.1 Opportunities 2000

Opportunities 2000 (OP) is sometimes referred to as a Comprehensive Community Initiative. This can mean many things, but most importantly it means that OP promotes cross-sectoral interaction and collaboration in order to achieve its objective of reducing and preventing poverty in Waterloo Region. OP believes that real solutions to poverty require participation and commitment from all corners and sectors of a community.

OP's mission is *"to ignite community action and leadership to create bold solutions that reduce and prevent poverty through collaboration, advocacy and education."* By bringing together a broad network of partners from many different sectors, OP2000 is able to increase the potential and the impact of their work in Waterloo Region.

In 2001, through in-depth, multisectoral community consultation and strategic planning sessions, the OP2000 network of partners developed four key focus areas to direct their work. These areas include:

- 1) The Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) Initiative
- 2) Preventing Youth from Entering the Cycle of Poverty
- 3) The Working Poor
- 4) The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach

The Guaranteed Income Supplement Initiative provided the first opportunity for OP to pilot a new process of igniting community interest in an issue, convening a group of partners, and stepping back to play a supportive role as partners determined the most appropriate direction for the initiative to take.

1.2 The Guaranteed Income Supplement

The Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) is one of three major income support programs for seniors available through Human Resources Development Canada's Income Support Programs branch. These programs include:

Table 1 – HRDC's Income Support Programs

Program	Eligibility	Comments
Canada Pension Plan	All employed and self-employed persons who have contributed to CPP in the past, over age 60.	Subject to income tax.
Old Age	Seniors over 65, resident of Canada. Amount of	Subject to income tax.

Security	benefit is linked to years living in Canada (minimum of 10 years).	Some or all can be clawed back.
Guaranteed Income Supplement	OAS beneficiaries (see above conditions) living on 'modest income'.	Not subject to income tax.

The GIS was developed to help alleviate poverty among older Canadians, and includes a payment of up to \$518.00 per month to seniors with low incomes. There are a number of eligibility requirements that must be met to receive the GIS, including age requirements (see above), having lived in Canada for a minimum of 10 years, and having an income below the eligibility cut-off. (See Appendix 2 for eligibility and program information).

Seniors are required to apply for the GIS benefit. HRDC uses a number of methods of informing seniors of the GIS, including mail-outs, outreach officers, community advertising, and an automatic renewal process for GIS recipients who file an income tax return by April 30th each year.

1.3 Background to the GIS Initiative

Poverty among low income seniors was one of the key focus areas during the OP2000 regeneration year (2000-2001). During that period OP2000 realized from a CBC radio report that despite HRDC's GIS notification processes, there was still a lack of uptake of the GIS among many eligible seniors. Although income tax returns reveal when someone is eligible for the GIS, Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA) officials could not share this information with HRDC because of the confidentiality provisions of the Income Tax Act.

At the time, HRDC's Income Support Programs estimated that 200,000 eligible seniors across Canada were not accessing the GIS. Once this figure was compared to the population of Waterloo Region, it was estimated that 2,950 low income seniors in Waterloo Region would have been eligible for the GIS but, due to various reasons, were not accessing the benefit. Opportunities 2000 saw a role for community collaboration to increase the uptake of GIS benefits among low-income seniors in Waterloo Region.

Opportunities 2000 staff and partners went through a number of stages in the process of developing the GIS initiative. The focus began with conceptualizing the issues related to a GIS initiative, including a review of the complex causes underlying the lack of uptake of GIS benefits, both across Canada and specific to Waterloo Region.

Next, a "strategy group" was convened to engage in an in-depth planning process for the initiative. The strategy group worked together to develop planning directions for increasing the uptake of GIS benefits in Waterloo Region. Once the overall strategic planning was solidified, a strategic intent was drafted to provide concrete direction to the initiative (see Appendix 6).

Finally, initiative teams were formed to identify, assess and select the strategies that would be implemented. Opportunities 2000's role was as a convener of the partners, a support to the initiative teams, and a facilitator of the overall process.

It should be noted that the GIS Initiative was facilitated by OP2000 staff during an extended period in 2002 where no Executive Director was in place within the organization. Their

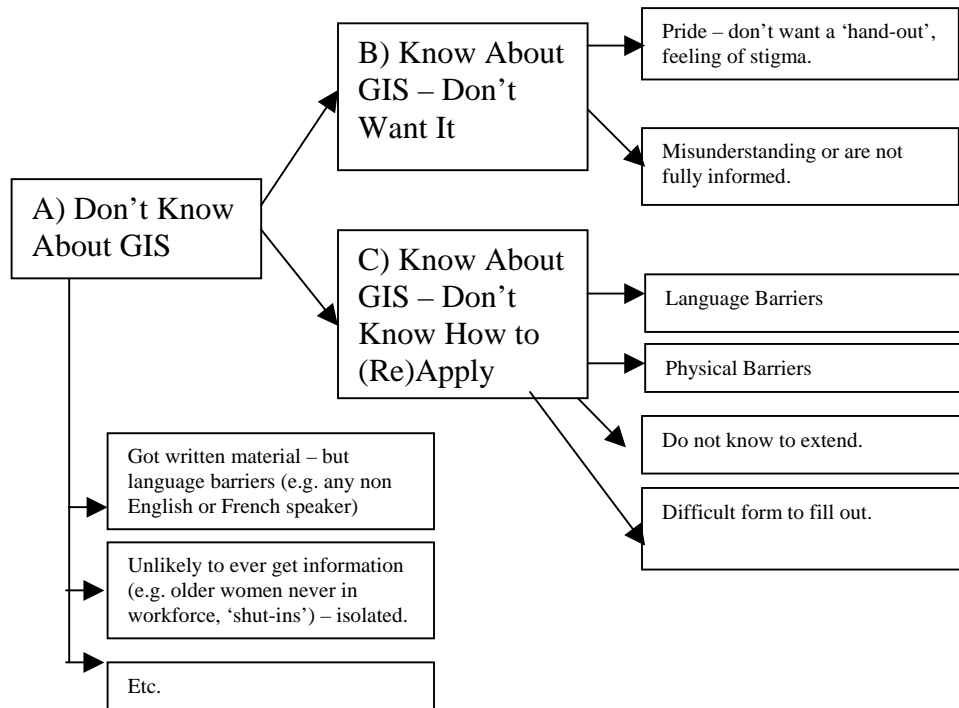
determination and hard work have been noted by interviewees as a major factor in the achievement of OP2000's workplanning milestones.

Conceptualizing the Issues

OP2000 staff and volunteers met with staff from HRDC in October 2001 to learn more about why there appeared to be a larger than anticipated number of eligible low income seniors in Waterloo Region not accessing the supplement available to them.

The population of eligible non-uptakers was conceptualized as belonging to one of the following three categories:

Diagram 1 – Causes Underlying the Lack of Uptake of the GIS



a) Don't know about GIS benefits

The greatest percentage of the estimated 2,900 eligible non-uptakers appeared to be the “don't know” category. The lack of awareness of the GIS can be due to a number of factors (e.g. language barriers, low literacy, isolation, etc).

b) Know about the GIS, don't want it

A percentage of eligible non-uptakers choose not to apply for or to receive GIS benefits. For some, there is a lack of sufficient information about the GIS that can lead to misunderstanding. Others do not want to receive a “hand-out”. It was recognized that this may be a larger than average category given the large Mennonite and immigrant populations in Waterloo Region.

c) Know about it, don't know how to (re)apply

Can be due to language barriers, physical barriers, lack of information (e.g. unaware of how to extend benefits), difficult application process.

Strategic Planning

OP2000 gathered a group of key stakeholders in 2002 to engage in strategic planning. The goal of the GIS Initiative was to develop a comprehensive plan of action to increase the uptake of GIS benefits among eligible seniors, and thus, to reduce poverty among seniors in Waterloo Region. For OP2000, the GIS initiative was also part of a larger campaign to reduce poverty region-wide. The focus was on how to leverage the impact of their work to create more extensive results.

The GIS Strategy was built around a number of key features:

- ◆ Designed to complement HRDC's Income Support Program's existing and upcoming broad-based communication efforts on the GIS;
- ◆ Seeks to maximize coordination of existing human services and public, private and non-profit networks in the Region;
- ◆ Develops a 'train-the-trainer' style resource that reduces the 'lost institutional knowledge' associated with high staff turnover
- ◆ Tailors information to the communication styles of the various target groups
- ◆ Sensitive to the reality that many seniors will best learn about their eligibility for the supplement through their children and/or friends.

The strategy group agreed on a target group of all low-income seniors in Waterloo Region. This target group includes approximately 11.5% of seniors in Waterloo Region who fall under Statistics Canada's Low-Income Cut-Off rate (based on the 1996 census). There was also special emphasis on New Canadians, who can experience much higher rates of poverty than 'mainstream' senior populations. The goal of the GIS Initiative was to assist at least 600 seniors in accessing the GIS benefit.

A number of strategies were explored, and were later narrowed down to focus on the "high impact areas" where the community might have the greatest impact in increasing the number of people accessing the GIS. The initiative ultimately focused on the "Don't Know About the GIS" and the "Don't Know How to (Re)Apply for the GIS" categories of eligible non-uptakers.

Initiative Teams

Two central issues were identified as needing attention. The first was how to get simple-to-understand information out to people who could pass on the information, especially to seniors living in isolation. The second was to ensure that help was available to seniors who might find it difficult to complete the application alone. A matrix was developed to aid in planning for the most efficient use of project resources (see Appendix 5).

In order to address these issues, two initiative teams were formed. The Communications Team focused on communications planning for the initiative, including the development of a simple information sheet on the GIS for mass distribution. A flyer suitable for multicultural populations

within Waterloo Region was also created and widely distributed, with support from the Community Care Access Centre, YMCA Cross-Cultural Services and YMCA Immigrant Services.

The second team focused on training, including the organization of two intensive, direct Train the Trainer sessions. These sessions were targeted towards local social service agency staff who come into regular contact with low-income seniors. In all, 64 community members attended the Train the Trainer sessions, and feedback from the sessions was very positive (see “Outcomes” section 4.1).

OP2000 staff and volunteers acted as facilitators by providing support to each of the initiative teams in designing project activities, mobilizing resources, implementing strategies, and assessing the GIS initiative. A broad range of local organizations partnered with OP2000 to plan and implement the GIS initiative. (See Project Partners in Appendix 5).

The Commitment

The participants of the Train the Trainer sessions made a commitment to train 98 additional staff and volunteers in the GIS application process and eligibility criteria.

They also agreed to reach out directly to seniors over the following year to provide them with information on GIS benefits, as well as assistance with the application process. They projected that they would share this information with a total of 2,870 seniors over one year. 90% of those who attended the training sessions agreed to pass on the GIS information, and to participate in a follow-up survey after one year.

2.0 Background to the evaluation

The GIS Initiative Evaluation Report was requested by OP2000's Leadership Roundtable and the OP2000 staff team. The evaluation work took place through a staff secondment from Region of Waterloo Public Health, Health Determinants, Planning & Evaluation.

2.1 Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of the Opportunities 2000 GIS Initiative Evaluation was a) to determine whether the initiative met its goal of increasing the uptake of GIS benefits among low-income seniors in Waterloo Region, and b) to document the lessons learned from the GIS experience for use by other communities, and in OP2000's broader work with youth and the working poor.

2.2 Rationale & process of the evaluation

The rationale for the evaluation design was based on a program logic model that was created for the Opportunities 2000 GIS Initiative. The logic model outlines the project goal, project activities, target groups, process and outcome indicators, and the evaluation questions related to each indicator.

2.3 Design

The evaluation process included 5 distinct stages: planning, data collection, data analysis, reporting outcomes, and sharing findings in order to initiate action. The study was conducted by the Evaluation Project Lead with support from the Opportunities 2000 staff team. Ethical considerations were taken into account through an analysis of the risks and benefits to evaluation participants, informed consent, and careful handling of confidential information.

3.0 Evaluation Methodology

3.1 Data collection

The majority of information for the GIS Initiative evaluation was gathered from April to September 2003. Study methods consisted of 33 surveys with program participants and 4 structured interviews with GIS Initiative partners, as well as an examination of OP2000's initiative records and organizational documents.

The surveys focused on specific outcomes of the Train the Trainer sessions during the period between the training sessions and follow-up. A survey was forwarded to all participants of the training sessions who agreed to be contacted. Due to the length of time between the sessions and the follow-up, some participants were no longer able to be reached. However, the overall response rate was within acceptable limits (55%).

The evaluation interviews focused on questions related to the quality of the partnerships developed, on the soundness of the strategic planning process, and on the organizational and community level impacts of the GIS project. Interviews were conducted both in person and over the phone. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

A project history was kept by OP2000 staff during and after the GIS Initiative planning and implementation phases, including a summary of meetings, strategic planning tools, media coverage of the project, and monitoring and evaluation tools. These records were reviewed and are synthesized in this report.

In addition to the GIS evaluation project, a participant satisfaction survey was administered at each of the two Train the Trainer sessions in April 2002 by OP2000 staff; they are also summarized in this report.

3.2 Data analysis

Interview data was analyzed using a qualitative data analysis program (NVivo), while the survey data was analyzed through a simple summary of outcomes and analysis of themes. Themes were based on the comments that were repeated by multiple respondents. A reliability check was done on data entry, and calculations were verified by a Health Data Analyst.

3.3 Limits to interpretation

Although every effort was made to utilize solid data, a number of measurement challenges were experienced.

It was recognized at the outset of the GIS initiative that there would be a measurement challenge in determining how many seniors accessed the GIS in Waterloo Region, as HRDC does not track this information at the local level. The closest region for which GIS statistics are reported is for South-Western Ontario, through Chatham. Therefore some figures in this report have had to be based on this broader region. Changes to the overall GIS application rates (based on the Chatham office) are not being used as evidence of GIS Initiative success or failure, as it is impossible to know of or control for all the potential factors beyond the scope of the project.

In an attempt to gather Waterloo Region-specific data, the GIS application packages that were distributed through the Train the Trainer sessions were colour-coded. This was expected to allow a measurement of the actual number of applications completed as a result of the Train the Trainer sessions. Unfortunately, despite careful planning of this strategy by both OP2000 and HRDC staff members, these envelopes were not tracked.

Instead, a sample group of participants was surveyed and results for the full group were extrapolated based on the sample group responses. Although counting the actual number of applications received is the most direct method of tracking program outcomes, some strong estimates were still obtained through the follow-up surveys received, and were used in determining the outcomes of the GIS initiative.

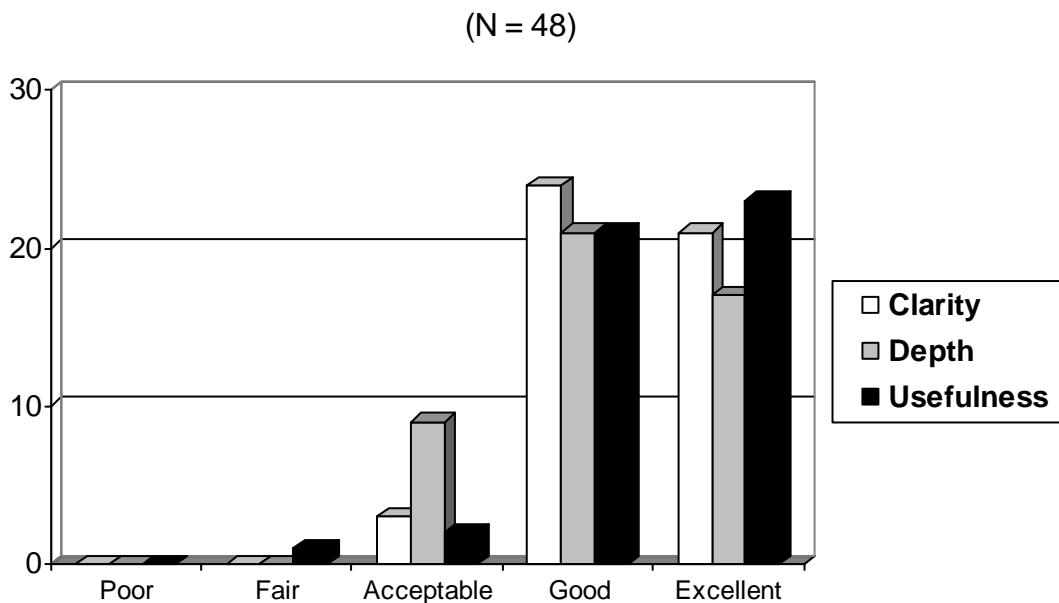
4.0 Outcomes of the GIS Initiative

4.1 Train the Trainer Sessions

Participant Feedback

The participant feedback indicates a very high level of satisfaction with the training sessions. Over 80% of participants rated the sessions as good to excellent on each of the three indicators of quality, which included the clarity, depth and usefulness of the information provided at the sessions.

Chart 1 - Train the Trainer Participant Satisfaction



The trainees rated simply receiving information on the GIS (particularly getting an overview of the GIS and other programs) and receiving handouts (such as application forms and materials to take away after the session) as the most useful aspects of the training sessions. Participants also noted their satisfaction with the quality of the presentation style and the knowledgeable speakers from HRDC.

“Very informative. An excellent way of keeping professionals updated to assist in educating clients about the GIS and their eligibility for it. Thanks!”

In terms of suggestions, participants asked to have resource materials provided in different languages, and requested additional sessions (e.g. yearly updates) if any changes occur in the GIS program.

When asked how participants hoped to apply the GIS information in their work, many indicated that they would participate in educating seniors, their co-workers, and the community about the GIS in a more proactive way.

Increase in the uptake of GIS benefits (from Train the Trainer sessions only)

A follow-up survey was sent to the participants of the Train the Trainer sessions in order to gather information on program outcomes. Of the 64 training session participants, 60 surveys were sent out, and 33 responses were received (a response rate of 55%).

The number of seniors that each group (i.e. survey respondents and non-respondents) expected to assist in applying for GIS benefits was reviewed. Then these figures were compared to the number of seniors that the survey respondents actually helped to apply for GIS benefits. Through a statistical weighting of the two groups, the evaluator was able to estimate what the total group responses would have been if all surveys had been returned.

Table 2 – Summary of Train the Trainer Results

	Expected¹	Actual²	Outcome
Number of additional staff trained	106	21	21 additional trainees able to inform seniors of the GIS
Number of seniors accessing GIS benefits	600	628	785 seniors were helped to apply for GIS benefits. HRDC-estimated approval rate for GIS benefits is 80%, therefore 628 of these applicants were likely approved for the supplement through the Train the Trainer sessions alone
Total number of seniors informed of the GIS supplement	2,970	1,768	Therefore, at least 983 other seniors (in addition to the 785 applicants above) were given information, but the outcome is unknown.

Secondary Training

The “Train the Trainer” concept was used in order to maximize the dissemination of GIS program information. ToT participants were encouraged to take the information back to their own organizations and to train additional staff in how to assist seniors in the GIS application process.

¹ Based on feedback in April 2002 from Train the Trainer participants regarding the number of staff they expected to train and number of seniors they expected to inform of the GIS or help apply for GIS benefits over one year.

² Weighted estimates based on survey feedback in June 2003 of number of staff and seniors actually trained/helped over one year.

Although the primary training, in the form of the Train the Trainer sessions, was highly successful, the follow-up surveys indicate that there was a lower than expected carry-over of training to the secondary level. The original 64 trainees estimated that they would train an additional 106 staff. Of the 33 trainees who responded to the follow-up survey, only four participants (12%) indicated that they had passed on their training.

Based on the responses to the follow-up surveys, we can estimate that 21 additional people were trained in helping seniors to apply for the GIS supplement.

An additional 8 trainees noted that they had shared the GIS information with their co-workers, but had not done any formal training.

The low level of secondary training was not based on a lack of information. 98% said the information they received prepared them either “somewhat well” or “very well” to train others. Feedback indicated that the low follow-through in training additional staff was due to 1) lack of other available staff to be trained within the organization, 2) lack of fit with the organization’s mandate, or 3) a lack of confidence to train others, or feeling that training others is “not my job” within the organization.

4.2 Targeted Sessions

One objective of the GIS Initiative was to target strategies to reach visible minority groups. New Canadians experience much higher levels of poverty than the general population. It was noted that minority groups were not attending the GIS information meetings that were being held. The response was to change the locations of the community information meetings, and to work more closely with local multicultural groups. The initiative teams “brought HRDC to the basements of the Temples” in an attempt to tailor the information sessions to the needs of minority groups in Waterloo Region.

“The immigrant population hesitates to go into mainstream buildings or events. If we hold separate sessions they participate more. We need to hold small gatherings for a particular population, based on languages.”

Two targeted sessions were held for multicultural groups, with interpretation provided by YMCA Immigrant Services.

1. 32 members from the Punjabi Faith Community attended an information session in October, 2002
2. Approximately 62 representatives of various faith organizations attended an information session in October, 2002

Partnerships with the multicultural centres in Kitchener and Cambridge were vital for tailoring these sessions to specific cultural groups in the region.

4.3 Other GIS Initiative Outcomes

The Communications Team developed community education and communications materials which also contributed to the success of the GIS Initiative (see Table 3).

Table 3 – Summary of Other GIS Outcomes

Item	Partner(s)	Approximate number
Additional training and information sessions (including targeted sessions, Region of Waterloo caseworkers, and Community Care Access Centre staff)	HRDC staff	6 additional sessions held, approximately 130 seniors attended
GIS applications distributed	HRDC	700
Information packages distributed during information / training sessions and by direct request after the sessions	HRDC	75
Flyers distributed at key centers (e.g. pharmacies, faith organizations, seniors centers, community centres)	Communications Team	5,000
Media coverage – K-W Record article	OP2000	Phone calls to OP2000 regarding the GIS were directed to HRDC. 67 direct calls to HRDC were logged. Result: 26 applications sent out by HRDC staff, 10 seniors applied for GIS; estimate of 8 approvals.

4.4 Sharing Resources

The GIS initiative was based on collaboration, and used donated staff time and other resources, requiring no fundraising whatsoever. All of the program outcomes were achieved through the energy of the community, and through existing agency supports.

Table 4 – Resources Shared Through the GIS Initiative

Item	Partner(s)	Value
Staff time	HRDC	In-kind (\$1,968.00 provided in staff time)
Staff Time	YMCA Immigrant Services	In-kind (\$400.00 provided in staff time and interpretation)
Staff time	Opportunities 2000	In kind (\$1,500 provided in staff time)

Travel costs	HRDC	In-kind (\$120.00 provided in travel costs)
Photocopying	Community Care Access Centre	In-kind (5,000 copies x \$0.08 = \$400.00)
Food for meetings	YMCA Immigrant Services Punjabi Community, Rockway Seniors Centre, OP2000	In-kind
Meeting spaces	Kitchener Public Library, Region of Waterloo, Rockway Seniors Centre, churches/temples, etc	In-kind
Total		\$4,388.00

For every dollar spent on the GIS initiative (\$4,388.00), the partners were able to leverage \$592.00 for the community in the form of GIS benefits to seniors.

4.5 Unknown Impacts of the Project

The figure for the number of GIS applicants (636) is based only on those seniors that are known to have applied for the supplement. An additional 983 individuals are reported to have been given GIS application information, but due to confidentiality issues, it is unknown whether they applied for benefits or not.

It is also unknown how many seniors were assisted by the 21 secondary trainees, or by family members who attended the community information sessions. An unknown number of people would also have responded to one of the 5,000 flyers that were distributed through the Communications Team. Although a number were likely ineligible for or already receiving GIS benefits, it is reasonable to assume that a portion of these seniors applied for, and have been receiving, GIS benefits.

Furthermore, it is unknown how many of the seniors who were approved for GIS benefits may have also received retroactive funds. Up to 11 months' worth of retroactive GIS benefits are available for new claimants who have been eligible for the benefits but were not receiving them. Again, the overall projected outcomes of the GIS Initiative are believed to be low estimates.

4.6 Summary of GIS Initiative Outcomes

Although the expected and actual figures for the number of new GIS applicants to be assisted by community agencies vary quite widely, the results of the initiative are still well in line with the original goals of the strategy group to help at least 600 seniors in Waterloo Region access GIS benefits.

Table 5: Summary of GIS Initiative Outcomes

Indicator	Outcome
Number of trainees (primary and secondary)	85

Number of known individuals / seniors informed of the GIS supplement	2,663
Number of seniors approved for GIS benefits (Train the Trainer and direct calls to HRDC) (Goal = 600) ³	636
Percentage of estimated “eligible non-uptakers” in Waterloo Region approved for benefits ⁴	22%
Dollar amount added to low-income households through the project in each 12-month period ⁵	\$2.6 million

At least 636 seniors were approved for the Guaranteed Income Supplement through the GIS Initiative between May 2002 and June 2003. Based on the average monthly GIS amount of \$347.00, each household will have received an average of \$4,164.00 over a 12-month period.

This remarkable outcome means that in each 12 month period an aggregate sum of \$2.6 million is obtained by eligible seniors in Waterloo Region who would not have received it were it not for the efforts of OP’s community partners.

³ Based on an 80% approval rate (source: Ross Tayler, Director, Human Resource Centre of Canada).

⁴ Based on an estimate of 2,950 eligible non-uptakers in Waterloo Region.

⁵ Based on an average monthly GIS benefit of \$347.00 multiplied by 12 months (source: Ross Tayler, Director, Human Resource Centre of Canada).

5.0 Learnings from the GIS Initiative

5.1 Challenges

Sharing GIS Information with Seniors

Participants were asked to rate the degree to which they felt certain barriers had presented a challenge in sharing the GIS information with the seniors they came into contact with between the training sessions and follow-up surveys. A number of key barriers were identified.

Table 6 – Barriers to GIS Application

Barrier	Not at all	Somewhat	Moderately	Quite	Very Much	N of responses
Little contact with seniors	11 (38%)	4 (14%)	5 (17%)	7 (24%)	2 (7%)	29
Lack of information	19 (68%)	6 (21%)	2 (7%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	28
Unsure of eligibility criteria	14 (52%)	6 (22%)	5 (19%)	2 (7%)	0 (0%)	27

Little contact with seniors

48% of survey respondents reported that low contact with seniors was either “moderately” or “very much” a barrier. Although a more targeted group of Train the Trainer participants might increase project efficiency, it does not seem likely that there was substantial time or energy wasted in including these participants in the training sessions. The potential for the participant to help a senior living on a low income to improve their financial well-being outweighs the small gap in efficiency that results from broad training participation criteria.

Lack of Information

Lack of information related to the GIS supplement does not appear to be a barrier in sharing GIS information with seniors. Although 46% of respondents indicated that they would like to receive more information related to the GIS, when asked if lack of information was a barrier, 68% said “not at all” (see Table 6).

Unsure of eligibility criteria

The majority (74%) of respondents indicated that they were confident in their understanding of the GIS eligibility criteria (i.e. indicating “not at all” to “somewhat” of a barrier), therefore this does not appear to be a barrier to helping seniors apply for GIS benefits.

For the 26% of respondents who reported that they were “moderately” to “quite” unsure of eligibility criteria for the GIS, this uncertainty was due in part to the time lapse between training and follow-up (over one year), or the lapse between training and the utilization of the new skills.

“I don’t use it all the time, so I’d have to look up the [eligibility] criteria again.”

Confusion

An isolated senior can experience a great deal of difficulty in attempting to re-apply for their GIS benefits alone. Indeed, some survey respondents (see the 26% above) noted in the follow-up surveys that they felt confused about the GIS eligibility criteria themselves, even after attending a training session. There was some difficulty experienced in determining whether a senior was already receiving GIS benefits, in addition to trying to determine their eligibility for the supplement.

“Sometimes seniors won’t remember if they’re already receiving the GIS, or won’t quite understand what you’re asking, especially seniors who haven’t been in the workforce. It’s a different category of people who aren’t sure what you’re asking or what the benefit is.”

Due to the unique challenges some seniors may face, such as language barriers, low literacy levels, isolation, language barriers, and age-related vulnerabilities, there is a need for a highly simplified application process, as well as access to assistance with the application, and access to translated application forms.

Disappointment

Some ToT trainees found that seniors were very disappointed if they were not approved for the GIS benefit. Trainees were advised to help anyone that might fit the criteria to apply for the GIS, even if the odds of approval were small. However, some trainees felt that a denied GIS application was too difficult for the senior citizen to deal with.

“If you tell someone to apply and they do not get the benefit, they get disappointed. At this stage of life it’s not a good thing for them.”

Barriers for Multicultural populations

GIS application packages and assistance are currently available only in English and French through HRDC. In Waterloo Region, 21% of residents are immigrants⁶, and immigration to the area is expected to increase. The GIS initiative focused a great deal of energy on tailoring resources to the type of information and methods of communicating preferred by certain ethnic groups, providing information in different languages, and bringing the initiative to the settings of the groups that were targeted.

A number of specific barriers were identified by interviewees for multicultural populations, beyond those experienced by 'mainstream' seniors and their families. A senior has to have lived in Canada for 10 years before being eligible for the GIS benefit. Some people found out after attending an information session that they weren't eligible.

“The staff’s response was ‘why bring them out, especially with mobility or health problems, if they won’t end up being eligible.’”

For seniors who have lived in Canada for 10 years, language and literacy barriers are often still an issue. Despite these challenges, the connection between HRDC staff and the multicultural community was very positive.

Measurement Challenges

There were a number of measurement challenges experienced with the GIS Initiative. Due to the confidentiality necessary in the GIS application process, HRDC was not able to tell the GIS Initiative partners whether the seniors they assisted were ultimately approved for benefits.

It was understood at the outset that measurement would be a challenge. In order to track the number of applicants through the initiative without infringing on their confidentiality, an HRDC staff member devised a strategy of colour-coding the return envelopes of the applications handed out through the community information and Train the Trainer sessions. Unfortunately, despite notification of this strategy, these envelopes were not tracked by staff at the Chatham HRDC office, the intake point for Southwestern Ontario.

The number of GIS applications made was determined instead through feedback from the Train the Trainer participants. It is likely that this method has led to low estimates for the number of GIS applications sent to HRDC through the initiative. A number of the ToT participants were unsure whether the seniors they gave information to actually applied, or whether they were approved. In order to ensure reliable data, only those applications that are known to have been forwarded to HRDC were included in the calculations used in this report.

In addition to the challenges of tracking GIS applications (see “Limits to Interpretation”, section 3.3), a measurement challenge was experienced in trying to determine the GIS application approval rate. A number of useful statistics are tracked within HRDC and reported to the public regularly. Unfortunately, the GIS approval rate is not one of these readily available statistics.

⁶ Based on 2001 Statistics Canada information.

The 80% approval rate used to estimate the number of GIS applicants receiving benefits through this initiative has therefore been based on the best estimates from HRDC staff of the standard GIS approval rate.

5.2 Positive Factors

The strategic planning process that was used facilitated the sharing of resources, allowed for diversity in the strategies chosen, focused on collaboration and the utilization of partnerships, and used effective decision-making processes⁷.

As a result, partnerships were developed that helped drive the project forward. This created a synergistic effect where the outcomes of the project were more than the sum of its parts, as each partner contributed the assets available to them.

Some characteristics of the GIS Initiative that survey respondents reported as being beneficial to the project include:

- ◆ The ability of OP2000 to act as a “conduit” between local agencies and government staff
- ◆ The dedication of OP2000 staff to see the project through, and their ability to develop strong working relationships with partners
- ◆ The project made a resource for seniors more visible and more community-based
- ◆ The initiative brought GIS partners together to work towards the common goal of filling a gap for seniors in their community

⁷ Region of Waterloo Public Health. “Planning Framework.” May, 2001.

6.0 Recommendations

6.1 Future GIS Initiatives

Coordination of follow-up sessions

Ongoing training and outreach are needed to continue getting information to those who need it. A number of GIS partners indicated that they would be interested in attending additional information or training sessions, particularly if any GIS details change. Among the service delivery agencies that participated in the GIS initiative, staff do not often have time to research changes in programs and services that affect their clients.

In surveying Train the Trainer participants, high staff turnover was evident. Agency staff noted that they do not follow through with secondary training as much as was anticipated, therefore it should not be assumed that new staff members are receiving information through either their predecessors or their current co-workers. Continued training sessions would allow HRDC to reach agencies that were not reached in the first round, such as the National Child Benefit Outreach Workers and members of local cultural associations. In addition to agency staff, new people become “senior citizens” every day, and they also need information on the GIS.

Due to their mandate and available resources, HRDC would be the ideal “owner” of the GIS initiative, to fill the role of continuing to share information related to the GIS with the community, and to create new avenues in accessing the GIS. It would be useful for HRDC to follow up on any changes in program details with local agency staff, and to offer additional GIS information sessions in the future (as they have continued to do).

A further step for Opportunities 2000 would be to coordinate a series of training sessions for local staff and community members on a broad range of resources that are available in the community, and how to access them. Topics could include other public and non-profit resources in addition to further GIS sessions. Opportunities 2000 is in a unique position to use its networking capabilities to bridge the gap between local service delivery agencies and other sectors such as government, business and education.

Continued focus on vulnerable groups

Outreach was community-based through the GIS initiative, but often relied on people coming to an agency for assistance. For seniors who are physically isolated or have mobility challenges, information and assistance need to be available in their homes. In addition to targeting those seniors isolated within their urban homes, the GIS barriers for seniors who are isolated in our Region’s rural areas should be explored. Isolation should be viewed as more than a question of geography; barriers in terms of literacy and language should also be considered.

According to HRDC staff (Kitchener office), it has become part of their ongoing strategy to tailor their methods to multicultural groups. Community-based GIS initiatives are believed to have been implemented only in Waterloo Region and Toronto, therefore the majority of communities are not providing these intensive information sessions for immigrants. The need for a wider review of the accessibility of the Guaranteed Income Supplement for immigrants is indicated by the findings of the GIS Initiative. Connections between HRDC’s Income Support Program offices across Canada and the multicultural centres and cultural associations in each community

would be useful in tailoring information materials for various cultures, and in accessing multicultural communities for information sessions.

Including tax return completion in planning

The filing of tax returns is an issue that is related to GIS benefit renewal. For seniors receiving a GIS benefit, the tax return process is critical, since GIS benefits are only reassessed for seniors who file a tax return each year. Given the difficulties that seniors face in applying for the GIS supplement, support will also be needed in the similarly complex process of filing a tax return. Ideally, a future GIS initiative would include some follow-up with seniors who apply for the GIS. This would be useful both in assuring that the individual files subsequent tax returns, as well as to track the long-term outcomes of the initiative.

Integration of OP's philosophy of poverty reduction rather than alleviation

A Sustainable Income

While there have been several attempts to establish a widely accepted 'poverty line', until now the most commonly used measure of poverty in Canada is LICO⁸. For seniors living in poverty, the GIS is a welcome relief. However, GIS benefits only provide enough financial assistance to sustain seniors at a level approximately 75% below the established poverty line⁹.

OP2000 has done extensive research to determine the actual cost of a modest lifestyle in Waterloo Region. This research has confirmed that LICO does not provide enough income to create a sustainable lifestyle. Although the GIS initiative was very successful at alleviating the impact of poverty on many local seniors, future work on the GIS needs to document the gap between GIS income levels and a truly sustainable level of income for seniors.

A Sustainable Livelihoods Approach

In OP2000's search for a reasonable income level, the network adopted the holistic model of sustainable livelihoods. The SLA is an asset-based approach to poverty reduction which acknowledges that factors beyond financial income contribute to an individual's or community's sustainability. The five asset areas include human, social, personal, physical and financial assets. The approach is holistic and positive in that it assists individuals in developing a complete inventory of personal assets which are often overlooked. Future work on GIS could incorporate tracking tools already developed and successfully piloted by OP2000.

⁸ Statistics Canada's "Low Income Cut-Off". See www.statcan.ca.

⁹ Armitage, 1996, p68.

6.2 HRDC

Accessibility of benefits

Following public pressure resulting from media coverage of the GIS gap (see example in Appendix 4), HRDC and CCRA policies began to change. In February 2002, the CCRA began a process of sending GIS applications to seniors with low incomes:

“In February and March 2002, just over 105,000 seniors received notification of their potential eligibility for an income supplement. The individuals contacted were sent a special GIS application, composed of a one-page form that had the individual’s income information and marital status pre-printed on it. Most seniors were able to apply for the GIS by confirming the declaration of income and family status, and by returning the signed form to HRDC. These applications will be automatically reassessed for clients who file income tax returns the following year¹⁰.”

This policy change helped to overcome one of the main barriers in accessing the GIS, namely the communications gap between government departments. Recent simplifications in the GIS application process are encouraging. However, the barriers related to literacy, language and the confusion that some seniors will still face when they receive their simplified GIS notification letter remain.

HRDC has a mandate to make GIS benefits as accessible to the community as possible. There is a clear need for the continued involvement of community agencies in the GIS application process in order to support seniors with language, literacy and other vulnerabilities to access GIS benefits. Kitchener’s HRDC outreach staff have indicated that they intend to continue community information sessions with multicultural groups, which is an excellent start, but requires a stronger foundation to ensure continuation.

HRDC should develop a policy that requires each office to look at ways of tailoring their outreach efforts to the particular community where they are located. A ‘commitment’ can be overridden by a superior and may only lead to short term changes. Conversely, a policy change would require the development and continuation of specific processes for tailoring information to the given region, and would have a much wider reach (i.e. a national scope) than an isolated program modification would have.

Program-wide policies also allow for the planning and assignment of necessary program resources, such as additional outreach staff and program funding. In addition, a policy level change can increase the likelihood of monitoring and evaluating the resulting programmatic changes, and of carrying these lessons into future policies and programs.

¹⁰ HRDC, 2002, p4-5.

Regional focus

The GIS program is currently implemented as one singular strategy administered through Ottawa in multiple different communities. However, each community has unique assets, needs and characteristics. During the GIS Initiative, the local HRDC office was very flexible and innovative in looking at ways to tailor the initiative to the needs of the local community. However, developing the most appropriate program for each region requires both flexibility and autonomy. HRDC staff were required to wait for approval from Chatham or Ottawa on a number of ideas before they could be implemented. One solution is for the GIS program to be customized to each region, rather than to Ottawa, with more autonomy at the regional level. In addition, community consultation should be used from the outset of new initiatives in order to tailor efforts to the local community and to streamline processes towards the most effective activities for the region in question.

Immigration and the GIS

Seniors are only eligible for GIS benefits after they have lived in Canada for a minimum of 10 years, based on the immigration policy that the immigrant's sponsor is responsible for supporting them during their first ten years in Canada. The goal is to ensure that immigrants do not become beneficiaries of income support programs. However, if a sponsor is no longer able to support the senior due to a job loss or another such financial crisis, the senior is left with very few supports. By denying immigrant seniors GIS benefits, the result is a transfer of these costs to other social programs such as the public health care system. A more innovative and preventative approach would be to provide poor seniors with GIS benefits based on need rather than immigration status.

Adopt a sustainability-focused approach to determining benefit levels

Current GIS benefits only support seniors at a very low standard of living, far below the amount needed to ensure that the individual has a healthy and sustainable lifestyle. HRDC should adopt a sustainability-focused approach to determining GIS benefit levels, much as OP2000 has done with its "sustainable wage formula" (see section 6.1). HRDC could calculate the basic amount needed for a senior to sustain a modest yet healthy lifestyle in each region and set their benefit levels accordingly.

7.0 Conclusions

This analysis of the process and the outcomes of Opportunities 2000's Guaranteed Income Supplement Initiative indicates that a number of successful outcomes were achieved. The initiative did meet, and surpass, its core goal of helping at least 600 low-income seniors in Waterloo Region to access the GIS benefit. A number of other important gains were also made.

The GIS Initiative helped to build the capacity of individuals, organizations, and the broader community, in a number of important ways. Individual or household-level financial gains were created for at least 636 local seniors who are now accessing the GIS supplement. For a low-income senior living on \$12,000 per year, an addition of up to \$581.00 per month (or \$6,900 per year) can make a substantial difference in terms of health and well-being.

Local organizations benefited from the development of partnerships and community leadership to focus change on a mutually-shared problem. Interviewees commented on the beneficial nature of the new partnerships that were forged between agencies. And Opportunities 2000 was able to broaden their network of partners for future initiatives. At the community-wide level, a support has been created that helps to fill a gap in a way that is both innovative and responsive to the community.

Not only do partners now understand the GIS benefit better, but they have the tools they need to access more information on the supplement. A connection has been created between seniors, service organizations and HRDC, bringing an often complex process one step closer to the community. The capacity of local organizations to participate in reducing poverty has been improved as a result of raised awareness around an important issue, and the addition of concrete tools to use in helping seniors.

In addition to these individual and organizational level gains, the broader community can be expected to benefit from the overall impact of raising the incomes of poor seniors, in the form of improved health and wellbeing. The community gains as well through the economic value of the income added to poor households, who typically spend the majority of an increase in income to meet basic needs, often through local businesses¹¹.

The results of the GIS initiative are yet another testament to the positive impact that can be achieved when a group of committed people come together to create change.

¹¹ Phillips, Peter. "A Living Wage Makes Good Economic Sense for Local Communities." December, 2001.

References

Armitage, Andrew. (1996). Social Welfare in Canada Revisited – Facing Up to the Future (3rd ed.). Don Mills: Oxford University Press Canada.

Centre for Research and Education in Human Services. An Evaluation Framework for Opportunities 2000. Kitchener: CREHS, 2003.

Hayes, Jackie. (2002, May 28). Many poor seniors are unaware of federal income supplement. The K-W Record.

McNair, Don and Eric Leviten-Reid. (2002). Creating Pathways Out of Poverty in Waterloo Region. Waterloo: Lutherwood Community Opportunities Development Association Publications.

O'Connor, Elaine. (2001, August 23). Seniors not told of millions in benefits. The Toronto Star.

Phillips, Peter. "A Living Wage Makes Good Economic Sense for Local Communities." December, 2001.

Response to the 6th Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. (2002). Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada.

Ross, Jen. (2001, September 9). Privacy rules deny thousands income. The Ottawa Citizen.

Region of Waterloo Health Department. "Planning Framework." May, 2001.

Statistical Bulletin, August 2003 - Canada Pension Plan, Old Age Security. (2003). Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada.

The ISP Stats Book 2003. Statistics Related to Income Security Programs. (2003). Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada.

Leviten, Eric. "The 3 Levels of Outcomes: A Framework for Evaluating Multidimensional CED." Making Waves, Vol. 11, No. 2.

Leviten-Reid, Eric. Opportunities 2000: Multisectoral Collaboration for Poverty Reduction. Final Evaluation Report. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, September 2001.

Statistics Canada. (2001). www.statcan.ca

Taylor, Andrew and Janos Botschner. (1998). Evaluation Handbook. Kitchener: Centre for Research and Education in Human Services.

Torjman, Sherri and Eric Leviten-Reid. (March 2003). Comprehensive Community Initiatives. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy.

Appendices

- 1) “Guaranteed Income Supplement” program information flyer
- 2) “How to Assist a GIS Applicant” flyer
- 3) “Many poor seniors not aware of federal income supplement” (K-W Record article May 28, 2002)
- 4) “Privacy Rules Deny Thousands Income” (Ottawa Citizen article September 9, 2001)
- 5) Feedback on “Increasing the GIS Uptake” meeting
- 6) GIS Initiative “Strategic Intent”
- 7) List of GIS Initiative partners
- 8) Train the Trainer survey design
- 9) GIS evaluation interview consent form
- 10) GIS Initiative interview questions

Guaranteed Income Supplement

Did you know?

The Old Age Security pension may be available to individuals in Canada who are over 65 and meets specific residence requirements.

The Old Age Security program provides benefits for seniors of low or modest income:

- The **Guaranteed Income Supplement** (GIS) for Old Age Security pensioners;
- The **Allowance** for 60 to 64 year-old spouses/common-law partners of GIS recipients; and
- The **Allowance for the Survivor** for 60 to 64 year-old widowed spouses/common-law partners.

The GIS and the Allowance are tax-free benefits for low-income seniors, and, just as for OAS, you must apply for them.

You must renew your application for the GIS and the Allowance every year. If you file income tax by April 30, your GIS will be renewed automatically if you are eligible. If you use an application form, it's important that you complete and return it as soon as possible.

If you know someone who may be eligible for these benefits, please encourage them to apply. See the steps provided on back.

For more information about Old Age Security benefits, contact Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) at:

1-800-277-9914

or visit their website at:

<http://hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/isp>

How to Assist a GIS Applicant

Eligibility for the GIS is based on the following basic factors:

1. **Identify if the individual receives an Old Age Security Pension. If the individual does not** (or is not sure), contact Keith Veige or Carolyn Lewis with individual's name, address and telephone number for helpful instructions.

Keith Veige
HRDC (Kitchener)
Income Support Program
Ph: 571-5632

Carolyn Lewis
HRDC (Kitchener)
Income Support Program
Ph: 571-5552

2. If the individual receives an Old Age Security Pension, **determine if he/she is receiving the Guaranteed Income Supplement.** (The Old Age Security cheque will be more than \$442.66 with the GIS benefit.)
3. **If NOT**, determine the individual's annual income from the previous year, not including Old Age Security payments.

Income requirements should be below or near the income guideline provided below:

Single Pensioner	\$12, 648
Married or Common-Law Couple (both pensioners)	\$16,484
Survivor (between the ages of 60-65)	\$17,304

A community information program supported by:



Appendix 3 – K-W Record Article

Many poor seniors are unaware of federal income supplement.

Jackie Hayes
K-W Record
May 28, 2002.

More than 3,000 seniors in Waterloo Region are eligible for the guaranteed income supplement, which is provided by the federal government for older low-income people.

The problem is too few of them, especially new Canadians and elderly women, know about it, said Denise Wamsley of Opportunities 2000, a network of active partners and supporters working toward the goal of reducing and preventing poverty.

She and Sanjay Govindaraj, a regional health promotion officer, have been working with Keith Veige and Carolyn Lewis of Human Resources Development Canada in Kitchener to reach seniors who may be eligible for the supplement.

It can make a substantial financial difference. For example, a single senior with no income other than the Old Age Security payment of \$442.66 could be eligible for a supplement of up to \$526.08, bringing their monthly income to \$968.74.

People eligible for the guaranteed income supplement or the survivor's allowance should have income below the following levels: \$12,648 for a single pensioner; \$16,484 for a married or common-law couple (both pensioners) or \$17,304 for a survivor between the ages of 60 and 65.

The closer their income is to the cutoff level, the smaller the supplement.

Statistics Canada reports that approximately 11.5 per cent of seniors in Waterloo Region have income below those qualifying levels.

The catch is that even if a senior files a tax return and reports low income, that person is not considered for the supplement unless he or she formally applies for it.

Once a person submits an application, has been approved and starts receiving the supplement, it will be automatically renewed each year if he or she files a tax return showing income that remains eligible for the supplement.

Opportunities 2000 has enrolled the support of local agencies, volunteers and businesses to distribute information flyers in an attempt to reach isolated seniors and seniors in the multi-cultural community, whose language barrier may prevent them from filling out government forms.

Two information sessions have been held, and organizers have a goal of reaching 2,870 seniors over the next year.

"I met a couple from Granada at a meeting last month at Kitchener Public Library. They had been in Canada for 22 years and the wife had never worked, but didn't know about the GIS," Sanjay said. "For some of these women it is the first money they will ever get on their own. We still see a lot of gaps, especially also in the native community."

The region will host two sessions for case workers and Keith and Carolyn have offered to hold additional training sessions on the guaranteed income supplement if required.

Organizers are also tacking applications to see what sources of information were most helpful in reaching seniors.

"Feedback has been positive," said Gail Roth Abbott, services and resource development supervisor for Rockway Seniors Centre, a partner in Opportunities 2000.

For more information, or to get a form, please contact Keith at 571-5632, Carolyn at 571-5552 or Gail at Rockway Centre, 741-2510.

Jackie Hayes is a Kitchener writer who looks at seniors' issues and personalities each Tuesday.

Appendix 4

Privacy Rules Deny Thousands Income

Seniors, poor not told they qualify for money; Revenue Canada says it can't share information.

Jen Ross
The Ottawa Citizen
Sunday, September 09, 2001

Fifty thousand low-income widows are not receiving the federal spousal allowances to which they are entitled because of departmental information-sharing barriers and "confidentiality issues".

They are among more than 382,000 low-income seniors that are not getting essential government benefits such as spousal allowances and Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) because they don't know - and aren't being told - they qualify.

Government officials are now trying to figure out how to rectify the problem. Income tax returns easily reveal when someone is eligible. But if a person hasn't applied for the supplement, Canada Customs and Revenue Agency officials say they can't tell them to.

Agency spokesman Michel Proulx said part of the problem is inter-departmental - Human Resources Development Canada doles out the benefits.

"You're stuck between two ministries here," said Mr. Proulx. "Our responsibility is to assess tax returns. When we have a situation when an individual is qualifying and not receiving benefits, that's not our mandate. I mean, we have a thousand other things to do."

Moreover, he said Revenue employees cannot share information with HRDC because of the confidentiality provisions of the Income Tax Act

Sue Pitts, director of HRDC's old age security programs, said the two departments are considering several strategies to catch those falling between the cracks. She said Human Resources Minister Jane Stewart has asked the department to determine if seniors could apply directly for the GIS on their tax return. The departments are also considering a box on tax returns that people could tick to allow revenue officials to give information to HRDC.

CCRA currently does share some tax information with HRDC. For example, it will alert HRDC on how much old age security benefits they can claw back if a recipient's income rises above a certain level.

Social policy consultant Richard Shillington argues that if the government can share tax information to deny or reduce someone's benefits, there is no excuse not to use it to increase the benefits. Mr. Shillington first blew the whistle on the shortfall while doing research for St. Christopher House, a Toronto community social services agency. He found that at least 330,000 eligible seniors were missing out on benefits totaling about \$500 million between them.

The group most in the dark about their potential benefits is widows between the age of 60 and 64. Ms. Pitts confirmed that just 39 per cent received their Allowance for Survivors in 1998-99. That's only 33,000 beneficiaries of the 83,000 eligible.

Only 55 per cent of those in that age group with living spouses received their allowance.

Of low-income seniors over 65 who are eligible for the GIS, Ms. Pitts said 70 per cent of one-pension couples, 78 per cent of two-pension couples, and 82 per cent of single seniors got their supplement.

Mr. Shillington recently learned that if seniors now discover they have been eligible for the GIS for the past five years, HRDC will only give them one year of retroactive benefits.

Shirley Dmytruk, president of the watchdog group United Senior Citizens of Ontario, finds the whole situation unacceptable.

"Unfortunately, seniors are the kind of people who would say something is better than nothing and just take it," she said. "But there are seniors like me who would be indignant to think that some poor soul can't get what they're entitled to."

Ms. Dmytruk said seniors are disproportionately affected by poverty, which makes the supplement all the more essential.

Ms. Pitts said HRDC has been trying to promote the supplement for years, through outreach officers, a standardized letter in T4 statements for Old Age Security recipients, posters and brochures.

But Mr. Shillington said that isn't enough.

"I'm saying forget their little posters and their general advertisements and send a piece of paper in their tax return," he said.

But CCRA insists that specifically contacting those who qualify would violate their privacy.

"Logically, we should be doing it, but legally we can't violate our confidentiality agreement," said Mr. Proulx. "Three years ago, we were giving HRDC information on UI fraud and we got our fingers slapped for sharing confidential information, so we have to follow the letter of the law."

Mr. Shillington says that's a lame excuse.

"They say your privacy isn't violated when they look at your income tax return, it's only violated when they call you about it," he said. "That's like saying your privacy is not violated by a Peeping Tom, it's only violated when he waves."

Officials in the Privacy Commissioner's office would not comment on whether contacting seniors would violate privacy laws. They said the commissioner is talking with both departments to reach a solution.

Old age security pensions put \$436.55 a month in the pockets of Canadians over the age of 65. The GIS is an additional supplement for low-income seniors receiving the OAS. Single seniors with an annual income below \$12,456 are entitled to a maximum of \$518.82 monthly and senior

couples with incomes below \$30,192 are entitled to between \$337.94 and \$518.82 under the GIS.

Widowers between the age of 60 and 64, making less than \$17,064 qualify for \$855.05 a month under the Allowance for Survivors.

Ms. Pitts said a total of 1,368,918 seniors did receive the GIS in 1998; another 97,087 received spousal allowances.

Seniors who want to know if they qualify can call 1-800-277-9914.

Appendix 5 - Feedback on 'Increasing the GIS Uptake'
From 1st Strategy Group Meeting

	General Public		Shut-Ins		English Language Barriers		Little History In Formal Workforce	
	<i>Partner</i>	<i>Solution</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>Solution</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>Solution</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>Solution</i>
Broad Information Campaign	The Record Radios CKCO	Media Stories and Communiqués	The Record	Inserts into papers.	Ethnic Publications	Media Ads		
Generic Services/ Gathering Points	Banks	Statements	Meals on Wheels	Simple Information Package	Newcomer Agencies	Translated Info. Package Presentations Mail Outs		
	Doctors Offices/ Pharmacies	Simple Information Package Educate Caregivers	Postal Service	Simple Information Package	Employers of large % of New Comers	Translated Info. Package Presentations		
	Neighborhood Centres	Simple Information Package Educate Caregivers	Home Care Agencies	Simple Information Package	Immigration Canada	Citizenship Classes		
	Income Tax Services (H&R Block, Revenue Canada, Accountants)	Simple Information Package Educate Caregivers						
	Regional Social Services	Simple Information Package Educate Caregivers			Ethnic Clubs	Translated Info. Package Presentations Mail Outs		
Services Targeted to Low Income Seniors	Social Housing		Rent Geared to Income Housing	Simple Information Package				
	Ontario Works Caseworkers		Other Social Housing	Simple Information Package				

Appendix 6 – GIS Initiative “Strategic Intent”

Opportunities 2000 Strategic Intent

Improving the Uptake of the Guaranteed Income Supplement for Seniors in Waterloo Region

Purpose

The purpose of the Seniors Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) strategy is to decrease the number of eligible seniors not accessing the GIS from approximately 2800 annually to a TBD. goal.

Key Features of Strategy

- ◆ Is designed to complement Human Resource Development Income Support Program’s existing and upcoming broad-based communication efforts on the GIS;
- ◆ Seeks to maximize coordination of existing human services and public, private and non-profit networks in the Region;
- ◆ Develops a ‘train-the-trainer’ style resource in social service system, re: the GIS, that reduces the ‘lost institutional’ knowledge associated with high staff turnover as well as ‘maximizes’ the efficiencies of train the trainer approaches.
- ◆ Tailors information on the topic to “communication styles” of the various target group (e.g. many ethno-cultural groups prefer verbal rather than written communication);
- ◆ Is sensitive to the reality that many seniors will best learn about their eligibility for the supplement through their children and/or friends.

Target Group

- ◆ All low-income seniors in Waterloo Region (note - approximately 11.5% of seniors in the region fall under the Statistics Canada Low Income Cut Off rate).
- ◆ Particular emphasis on:
 - ◆ New Canadians and/or people that find it difficult to communicate in English and/or French (46% of New Canadians arriving from 1990-1996 fall under the LICO; 25% from 1986-1990; and 11.5% arriving before 1986)
 - ◆ as well as women (15.2% of all elderly women fall under the Statistics Canada Low Income Cut-Off rate).

Stakeholders (Under Development)

- ◆ Human Resources Canada – Income Support Programs.
- ◆ Government and Non-Profit Human Service agencies (public, private) serving New Canadians.
- ◆ Human Service agencies, clubs, and churches with strong links to New Comer communities.
- ◆ Planning & Research Bodies.
- ◆ Radio, T.V., Papers

OP 2000 Offering

- ◆ Assist HRD-ISP promote the GIS to the broad community;
- ◆ Assist HRD-ISP to engage local players on communicating the GIS to difficult-to reach low income senior groups as well as apply for the GIS;
- ◆ Provide assistance to local players in designing, mobilizing resources, implementing and assessing initiatives (staff leads; strategy group supports).

Outcomes

- ◆ # of new/adjusted initiatives designed to address the existing local gaps ('train-the-trainer on GIS; New Canadians outreach);
 - ◆ # increase of actual/projected eligible seniors securing the GIS

Note – Initiative Teams will prepare appropriate outcome targets for each of these measures once established.

There is a 'measurement challenge' in determining how many extra seniors are accessing the GIS due in Waterloo Region as HRD-ISP does not track this information at a local level (only provincial and federal).

Timelines/Milestones (Recommended)

Initiative Teams

1. Establish 2 initiative teams, one each for 'Train-the-Trainer on GIS' and 'communicating the GIS to 'New Canadian community' that will work to create concrete outcomes in their area.
2. Initiative Teams are comprised of local organizations that are currently involved in addressing that issue; Strategy Group members are invited to participate in 1 or more of the Initiative Teams.
3. Initiative Teams will design initiatives based on the strategic intent features described above (though can certainly upgrade these features based on their understanding of the issues).
4. Initiative Teams will, with OP 2000 support, prepare communications campaign

Strategy Groups

1. Strategy Group will be available to provide feedback and support to initiative teams. Strategy Group will, with staff support, help oversee a community education and marketing campaign, re: the link between poverty and these gaps, as well as how community can get involved to assist.

Appendix 7 – List of GIS Initiative Partners

The GIS Initiative was planned and implemented through a collaborative effort on the part of many local organizations, including:

Bosnian Community
Cambridge Self-Help Food Bank
Canadian Hearing Society
CIRCA Development
City of Cambridge
City of Kitchener
CKWR Radio
Club 55
Community Care Access Center
Emmanuel United Church
Freeport Health Center
Grand River Hospital
House of Friendship
International Gospel Center
Kitchener Downtown Community Health Center
K-W Friendship Group of Seniors
K-W Islamic Association
K-W Multicultural Centre
Latin-American Seniors
Lutherwood-CODA
Meals on Wheels
Opportunities 2000
RAISE Home Support
Region of Waterloo Public Health
Region of Waterloo Social Services
St. Mary's General Hospital
Social Planning Council of K-W and Area
Waterloo Region District School Board
Waterloo Region Homes for Mental Health
Waterloo Region Housing
Wellington County Social Services
YMCA Cross Cultural Services
YMCA of Cambridge Immigrant Services



**GUARANTEED INCOME SUPPLEMENT (GIS) TRAINING
SESSION – Follow-Up Survey**

June 13, 2003

Dear GIS Training Session Participant,

THANKS for participating in the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) Training Session sponsored by the Opportunities 2000 network and Human Resources Development Canada on either April 24 or April 25, 2002. The GIS, as you know, is a federal income supplement for low-income seniors, which many seniors in Waterloo Region did not know about or were not accessing.

Our last meeting was held in April of 2002 (at either the Kitchener Public Library or the Community Health and Social Services building on Regina Street). The goal for the session was to learn about the GIS supplement, and how to help more seniors access this benefit.

We mentioned in April 2002 that we would be following up with participants in order to identify the extent to which this training has supported efforts to inform seniors about the GIS.

Please complete this brief survey to help us evaluate our efforts and the effectiveness of the GIS initiative. It should take about **5-10 minutes** to complete. The survey can be printed, filled out and faxed or mailed to Opportunities 2000. Or, if you feel more comfortable on the computer, simply save the survey in Word and email it to Opportunities 2000 as an attachment.

Please return this survey no later than **Thursday, June 26, 2003** to:

Sharalynn Krahn

Phone: (519) 883-2353 ext. 5985

Opportunities 2000

Fax: (519) 568-8755

30 Duke St. West, 2nd Floor

Email: op2000@lwdcoda.org

Kitchener, ON

N2H 3W5

The information collected in this survey will be used in evaluating the GIS initiative. Please note that no names will be used in reporting the results of this survey, and that all contact information will remain confidential. The information gathered will be combined with the responses from all participants at the GIS training and will be distributed in that format. You will receive a summary of the responses to this survey. If you have any questions or concerns about the content of this survey, please contact Heather Rodgers at 883-2353 ext. 5983.

Thanks!

GUARANTEED INCOME SUPPLEMENT (GIS) TRAINING SESSION

Follow-Up Survey

Name: _____ Position: _____
 Agency: _____ Date: _____

- 1) Approximately how many seniors have you been able to share the information you learned at the training session with to date? _____
- 2) To your knowledge, how many of these seniors have applied for the GIS supplement?

- 3) Did the information you received prepare you to train others within your organization?
 YES ___ SOMEWHAT ___ NO ___
- 4) Did you train other staff or volunteers within your organization on how to apply for the GIS? YES ___ NO ___
 If yes, how many people did you train? _____
 If no, please explain.

- 5) The following are some of the barriers you may have encountered in trying to share this information with seniors. Please rate the degree to which you feel these barriers have presented a challenge for you in sharing the GIS information.

Barrier	Not at all	Somewhat	Moderately	Quite	Very Much
Little contact with seniors					
Lack of information					
Unsure of eligibility criteria					

Other (please describe):

- 6) Do you need any additional information or training sessions to assist you in sharing information about the GIS with seniors or other trainees?

- 7) Any additional comments:

THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK!

Appendix 7 – Consent Forms

Interview Consent Form

I have been told that the interviewer will ask questions about my (and/or my organization's) relationship to Opportunities 2000, and that this information will be used towards an evaluation report. I understand that I may decide not to answer any questions and I can stop the interview at any time.

What I say will remain confidential. I have been told that everything I share with the interviewer will be kept private and any identifying information will be kept confidential. Neither my name nor my organization's name will be attached to these interview notes.

I understand that quotations or comments from this interview may be used in the evaluation report, and that every effort will be made to protect the identity of the speaker.

I understand that I can request to have a summary of our conversation sent to me.

I agree to have our interview recorded on audio-tape, and I understand that Opportunities 2000's administrative assistant will transcribe the interview.

Yes No

Name (please print) _____

Signature _____

Date _____

If you have any further questions, please contact:

Heather Rodgers
Evaluation Project Lead
Opportunities 2000
235 King St. E
Kitchener, ON
(519) 883-2353 ext. 5983
rheather@region.waterloo.on.ca

Appendix 8 – GIS Evaluation Interview Questions

Inviting Feedback from GIS Project Participants

1. Can you describe how you were involved in the GIS initiative? *(e.g., inviting community members to sessions, strategic planning team, Train the Trainer sessions, communications team, etc.)*

2. What were your reasons for becoming involved in the GIS initiative? *(e.g., to learn more about poverty-related issues in your community, to make connections, to collaboratively plan or advocate, to develop programs that will reduce poverty, etc.)*

STRATEGY TEAMS

PLEASE MARK ONE BOX FOR EACH QUESTION:

	Not at all	Somewhat	Fairly	Very
3. How well did you understand your role in the GIS initiative? <i>(i.e. Did you understand your personal contributions and responsibilities to the project, and what was expected of you?)</i>				
4. How clear were the goals of the GIS initiative? <i>(e.g. did you understand the aims and purposes of the GIS project?)</i>				
5. How well does OP's mission fit with the mission and goals of your own organization? <i>(see mission statement)</i>				
6. Did the strategy team use effective decision making processes? <i>(e.g. dealing with differences of opinion, finding consensus)</i>				
7. To what degree do you feel your input was respected or valued by others involved with the GIS initiative?				
8. Did the project have the right capacities to meet its goals? <i>(i.e. did those involved have enough knowledge of the issues, follow-through on commitments, resources, etc.)</i>				
9. Did you feel a shared sense of responsibility for the outcomes of the GIS project?				

10. How did you or your organization contribute to the GIS initiative? *(e.g., in-kind contributions, sharing of resources, staff time, providing contacts, bringing new ideas, or involving others in the initiative)*

11. To what degree do you feel you have benefited from your participation in the GIS initiative?
Do you feel you have:

	Not at all	Somewhat	Fairly	Very much
❖ Found ways to save money or work more efficiently by collaborating with others?				
❖ Made new connections?				
❖ Developed a better understanding of poverty-related issues?				
❖ Learned more about the GIS benefit for seniors?				
❖ Developed new skills? <i>(Please specify)</i>				
❖ Come up with new ideas for your own work? <i>(Please specify)</i>				
❖ Benefited in other ways? <i>(Please specify)</i>				

12. Did you gain a better understanding of OP and their work through your involvement in the GIS initiative?

13. Do you consider yourself to be a “partner” of OP?
(Yes or no; comments)

14. How would you describe the quality of your relationship with OP during the GIS initiative?

Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
------	------	------	-----------

15. In your opinion, how successful was OP’s staff in providing high quality support for the strategic planning process, in terms of:

Please mark one box for each question:

	Not at all successful	Somewhat successful	Quite successful	Very successful	Not applicable
Bringing together different sectors to work towards a common goal					
Facilitation of teams					
Providing solid local data to support the strategic planning process					
Development of concrete strategies for the project					
Implementation of the strategies developed					
Communication of information and findings to the community					
Meeting planned timelines					

Leveraging necessary resources					
Evaluating their efforts					

16. Have you seen any improvement in the ability of your organization to work towards poverty reduction as a result of your participation in the GIS initiative? (e.g. able to plan more effectively, make new contacts, access community members, secure resources, contribute to your community, impact people living in poverty, etc.) (Yes or no; what makes you believe this?)

17. What do you see as the factors that helped the GIS initiative in reaching its goals?

18. What do you see as the factors that hindered the success of the GIS initiative?

19. Did the project help financial supports for seniors to become more visible?
(Yes or no; what makes you believe this?)

20. Did the project help financial supports to be connected to seniors at a more community-based level?
(Yes or no; what makes you believe this?)

21. Did the GIS initiative result in a more stable and reliable connection between the GIS benefit and seniors?

Not at all Somewhat Fairly Very

22. Did the GIS project tailor information on the GIS benefit to the communication styles of the target groups (i.e. seniors, staff at social service agencies, family members)?

23. Are there any specific lessons that you learned through your involvement in the GIS initiative?

24. Do you have any other comments or reflections?

Thank you for your feedback!

Opportunities
2000

ISBN 0-9734467-0-6

\$12.00