2025-2026

Executive Summary

Evaluation Report for the Neighbourhood Organizing Initiative



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Neighbourhood Organizing Initiative Evaluation 2026

Background

Based on its program theory, REACH Edmonton's Neighbourhood Organizing Initiative (NOI) operates within a broad definition of **Community Safety and Wellbeing (CSWB)**, described as a "sustainable state where everyone in the community is safe, feels a sense of belonging,"[1] and can meet their fundamental social and cultural needs. Their work is consistent with their philosophical foundations of empowerment, hyper-local work with an ecological lens, and social and community development.

The initiative's work is inherently complex because it must navigate multiple community voices that often have juxtaposed or competing priorities. A critical takeaway is that the process that it takes to gain community engagement is vital.

In a context of shifting relationships and situations, outcomes do not follow a linear path; they vary in intensity and pace depending on the specific situation, and are shaped by positive or negative external factors well beyond NOI's influence.

The evaluation of NOI was conducted between September 2025 and July 2026. A collaborative, utilization focused approach to the evaluation ensured the findings were practical, relevant, and impactful. Data sources included administrative data and insights gathered from a range of interest holders, such as community members, organizations, partners, and NOI staff.

The Bottom Line: NOI Walks the Talk

> The evaluation findings indicate NOI contributes to positive changes across the full range of anticipated outcomes, the conditions that foster Community Safety and Wellbeing in Edmonton neighbourhoods (*see:* program logic model). Research studies suggest that as these conditions develop and are sustained over time, they can strengthen social cohesion, collective efficacy, and social capital.
>
> NOI works alongside other formal service providers in Edmonton, filling gaps and strengthening community-based efforts rather than duplicating them.

[1] Canadian Municipal Network for Crime Prevention, 2020, p. 7.

The Impact of NOI

Neighbourhood safety was a concern for all evaluation participants, and for some communities, people report "*there's momentum and there's change … perception is definitely on the rise that it's a safer, cleaner place to be*".

Since each neighbourhood has unique resources and challenges, the resulting "*intensity and pace at which change happens will be specific to the situation*". All outcomes center on community and its actors because without them, the positive changes will not be sustainable.

One of the most prominent early outcomes supported by NOI is the shift from historical friction to positive interaction. Neighbourhoods once characterized by "*bitterness and resentment*" toward past leadership have seen a "*significant shift*" in tone.

Increased familiarity is another consistent outcome linked with NOI, with the initiative breaking down social barriers to the point where residents state, "*I can't believe how many people … that now I know in the neighbourhood.*"

Familiarity opens the door to relationships, although the sustainability of new connections within a broad, neighbourhood context varies. Regardless, when people have relationships in their community, they lead to informal helping as neighbours look out for one another.

Outcomes to which NOI contributes also include more knowledge of resources to support CSWB, especially municipal systems and advocacy channels.

As momentum builds, NOI-fostered cooperation creates inclusive community networks. These connections among community members and neighbourhood partners evidence growing trust at individual and organizational levels.

Formal and informal community leadership is strengthened through NOI's work with neighbourhoods, organizations, and initiatives. Some communities define their own unique CSWB priorities and reject "*outside-led solutions*". Some are increasingly cognizant that they cannot rely solely on REACH or the city to fix systemic issues, leading to a stronger drive for self-reliance and the belief that it is the community's "*responsibility to voice*" concerns and support CSWB initiatives.

How NOI Works with Communities

To drive change, NOI employs a flexible toolkit of activities tailored to each community's unique readiness.

The core process is broad engagement, which focuses on bringing people together - "*opening up 'more seats at the table'*" to ensure diverse and inclusive representation. Engagement ranges from formal meetings to grassroots, door-to-door outreach. Over the first two quarters of 2026, the NOI facilitated extensive community engagement

by supporting 79 meetings involving nearly 450 people, and 27 events that reached over 1000 participants.

Building relationships by bringing people together is fundamental to the NOI's work. Their approach is to operate at the "*speed of trust*" through a "*slow iterative process*". Across different contexts, NOI maintains a consistent set of principles and roles, including acting as a neutral mediator.

NOI builds capacity through a combination of formal organizational development, specialized skills training, and a focus on long-term self-sufficiency. While consistently prioritizing practical tools and mentorship, there are distinct differences in how these strategies are applied, depending on whether NOI is working with business owners, community governance, or grassroots community members.

NOI's approach to community assessment is defined by a commitment to resident-led identification of problems and a focus on determining a neighborhood's readiness for action. While only one community has a formal Safety Council, safety is the central priority guiding all strategic planning efforts.

NOI supports hyper-local action through a combination of financial backing, the provision of practical tools, and specialized expertise.

NOI defines sustainability as a community's ability to operate without "*constant outside intervention*," and to this end, focus on building "*social infrastructure*"; NOI acknowledges that communities may hold diverse local views on whether progress is best sustained through physical, economic, or staffing-related growth.

NOI's Foundational Ideas

The NOI is grounded in a "*hyper local*" philosophy that is explicitly neighborhood-specific and resident-driven. The primary aim is to center community voices by supporting residents as they identify and act upon their own priorities for CSWB. This approach recognizes that the process itself is an outcome; as residents work to improve their surroundings, they gain "*confidence, skills, and collective agency.*"[2]

Where the Initiative is Carried Out

Evaluation findings indicate that the NOI is typically invited into neighbourhoods facing significant community safety challenges. Between January and June 2026, two NOI staff worked with 10 Edmonton neighbourhoods, six organizations, and six specific initiatives.[3]

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[2] e.g., Wallerstein, N. (1992). *Powerlessness, empowerment, and health: Implications for health promotion programs.* American Journal of Health Promotion, 6(3), 197–205.

[3] See the Administrative Data Collection Tool for descriptions of the entities with which NOI worked during the evaluation timeframe.

Three neighbourhoods provided qualitative data to the evaluation. Their physical environments were marked by a history of neglect or "*significant economic strain*." Residents frequently described living in a "*nightmare*" environment characterized by high levels of social disorder. These communities also struggled with population dynamics that complicate a unified sense of belonging.

Despite these stressors, there was a persistent hope that their neighbourhoods are moving toward "*renewal and revitalization.*"

Program Theory

Note: A logic model is a concise visual representation of program theory, showing how program activities are expected to contribute to intended outcomes.

