

Jim Diers

Workshop / Presentation Themes

Many Australian community and economic practitioners have benefited immensely from presentations by Jim Diers. The Bank of I.D.E.A.S. will again coordinate a visit to Australia by Jim in September 2008.

Below is a list of the themes that Jim could present/workshop on.

If you would like to utilise Jim during his visit, email Peter Kenyon at pk@bankofideas.com.au.

- Activists and Bureaucrats: Transforming Adversaries into Partners
- Planning By and For the People
- The Art of Building Community
- Revitalizing Neighbourhoods by Empowering Communities
- Environmental Sustainability Begins with Community
- Mapping and Mobilizing Community Assets
- Rules and Tools of Engagement
- Affordable Housing Strategies
- The Global Community Building Movement
- Business District Revitalization
- Community and Place: A Symbiotic Relationship
- University-Community Partnerships
- Jim Diers - Bio Data

Activists and Bureaucrats: Transforming Adversaries into Partners

In a democracy, it is unfortunate that many neighborhood activists think of government as the enemy and that government officials often perceive activists to be a nuisance or a threat. That thinking can change when both government and activists realize that neighborhoods are not simply places with needs but also communities of people with tremendous untapped resources. Mutually beneficial partnerships are possible when government moves beyond processes of citizen participation to programs of community empowerment and when communities start taking a share of responsibility for their own neighborhoods.

Over the past 30 years, Jim Diers has battled government as a community organizer and worked for government as director of Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods. Jim will describe the City of Seattle's programs of community empowerment and how neighborhood organizations have utilized them to newly involve tens of thousands of residents, including many who had been marginalized. He will share stories about the remarkable plans and projects that have resulted, accomplishments that neither activists nor government could have achieved on their own.

Planning By and For the People

For many community activists, a plan is nothing more than a four letter word. Planning is something done to and not with communities. Because there is no broad ownership or even understanding of the resulting document, it often just sits on the shelf.

Jim Diers will describe how bottom-up planning can lead to results embraced by government and communities. In Seattle, communities were empowered to hire their own planners and to define their own scope of work. The communities, in turn, contributed their unique knowledge, perspective, and expertise. Their vision tended to be more holistic and recommendations more innovative than those of the bureaucracy. 38 neighbourhood plans resulted from the participation of 30,000 people. Broad ownership held government accountable for implementation. More importantly, the community took responsibility for much of the implementation themselves; they even voted to tax themselves an additional \$470 million for new and improved libraries, community centers, and parks as recommended in their plans. Democracy works!

**The Art of Building Community
(Presentation of 30-45 minutes)**

In the hands of the community, art can be a powerful force for achieving public safety, economic development, inclusive participation and other goals that have often proven elusive with more traditional approaches. Jim will use pictures and stories to illustrate the power of community-based art.

Revitalizing Neighbourhoods by Empowering Communities

(Abstract of speech by Jim Diers for 2007 Symposium of BC Crime Prevention Association)

Towns and neighbourhoods everywhere are more than places with needs. They are communities of people with abundant, but typically underutilized, resources. What a waste! Inclusive and active communities are often the key to public safety, economic development, environmental sustainability, and social welfare.

Faced with a growing gap between their revenues and increasingly complex social issues, local governments are beginning to understand the importance of partnering with communities. The City of Seattle established a Department of Neighbourhoods in 1988. As the founding director, Jim Diers will describe how the Department empowers communities to address their own priorities through their own associations. Jim will share stories of how communities have used planning resources and a Neighbourhood Matching Fund to revitalize their neighbourhoods.

Jim will mention that local governments throughout North America and beyond are replicating Seattle's model, but he will emphasize that communities don't have to wait for government's permission. By utilizing their own resources, communities can take the initiative. Jim will talk about ways in which communities can identify and mobilize those resources while having fun. Learn how card parties, a gigantic tulip, and a troll have contributed to safer, more vibrant neighbourhoods.

Environmental Sustainability Begins with Community
(Presentation of 30-45 minutes)

When individuals begin to identify as members of a community, they care for one another and the place they share. They think in terms of the past and the future as well as the present. Communities are also more self-sufficient and less reliant on outside resources. “Meeting present needs without jeopardizing future resources” is not only a common definition of environmental sustainability; it is the goal of empowered communities.

Jim Diers will argue that developing a strong sense of community is our greatest hope for saving the planet. He will illustrate how communities have created innovations and pushed for change, both in systems and in individual behavior, to move towards greater environmental sustainability.

Mapping and Mobilizing Community Assets (Workshop for half to full day)

The traditional approach to community development is to begin by conducting a needs assessment. Once a neighbourhood's deficiencies have been documented, outside resources are identified to "help" that community. Not only does such an approach foster dependency, but it fails to take advantage of the abundant resources that are present in every community and every individual.

An alternate approach is to build community from the inside out. This approach starts by mapping the neighbourhood's resources. The workshop will guide participants in identifying their community's assets including residents, community organizations, agencies, natural and physical resources, the local economy, and local history and culture. Workshop participants will learn a variety of strategies for mobilizing these assets to build their communities both socially and physically.

This workshop can be tailored so that it is appropriate for community organizations or for universities, government, and other agencies.

**Rules and Tools of Engagement
(Presentation of one to two hours)**

Jim Diers is convinced that, if given the opportunity, most people will get involved in community life including those who have been marginalized. He will share the lessons of inclusion that he has learned from his 32 year experience as a community builder. Jim will also describe proven programs of community engagement such as the Neighbourhood Matching Fund, Small Sparks, time dollars, block action groups, City Repair, community gardens, neighborhood planning/visioning, and town meetings.

**Affordable Housing Strategies
(Presentation of 30-45 minutes)**

As communities work to improve their neighbourhoods, increasing numbers of residents are often forced to move because of the escalating cost of housing. Jim will share strategies that communities are using to try to maintain affordable housing. These include land trusts, land banking, mixed use development, adaptive reuse, accessory dwelling units, co-housing, condominium conversion ordinances, inclusionary zoning and other community-driven models.

**The Global Community Building Movement
(Presentation of 30 minutes)**

Jim Diers has traveled to a dozen countries to share his knowledge about building strong communities. In the process, he has learned from each of the places he has visited and been inspired by the community building movement that is taking root everywhere. Jim will share his observations and some of his favorite stories.

Business District Revitalization
(Presentation of 45 minutes or workshop of two hours)

We tend to place the blame for declining business districts on crime, big box retail, or other factors that are someone else's responsibility. Instead of dwelling on what is keeping people out of the district, though, it is usually more productive to focus on strategies that will bring people in. A unique identity, homegrown businesses, gathering places, art, history, events, and neighbors can all play a role in revitalizing a business district. Jim Diers will share success stories from a number of cities. In a workshop, participants will identify underutilized assets in their community and identify ways in which those assets could be mobilized to revitalize the business district.

Community and Place: A Symbiotic Relationship (Presentation of 45-60 minutes)

A neighbourhood or town and a community are two different things. A neighbourhood or town is a place with which we identify. A community is the extent to which we identify with and support one another.

Communities can exercise tremendous power. They are the key to environmental sustainability, crime prevention, emergency response, and our welfare and happiness. Yet, community doesn't happen in a vacuum. It is typically rooted in a place.

A place can provide the key ingredients for community including a common identity, gathering places, and a vehicle for collective action. A community, in turn, can strengthen that identity, enliven the gathering places, and put the vehicle in motion. Jim will illustrate how empowered communities have transformed their neighbourhoods and towns and how those places further strengthen their communities.

University-Community Partnerships (Presentation of 45 minutes)

Universities are often an issue in the neighbourhoods where they are located. Yet, both the neighbourhood and the university have much that they could learn from one another if they engaged in a genuine partnership. Such partnerships are difficult due to power imbalances, siloed disciplines, short courses, student mobility and other obstacles. Jim Diers will describe how the University of Washington and other institutions of higher education have developed models of reciprocity that involve and benefit the community as well as the university.

Jim Diers
Biographical Sketch

Jim Diers has a passion for getting people engaged with their communities and in the decisions that affect their lives. Since moving to Seattle in 1976, he put that passion to work for a direct-action neighborhood association, a community development corporation, a community foundation, and the nation's largest health care cooperative. He was appointed the first director of Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods in 1988 where he served under three mayors over the next 14 years.

Currently, Jim works for the University of Washington where he teaches courses in community organizing and development and connects university resources with community initiatives. Jim also serves on the faculty of the Asset-Based Community Development Institute and travels internationally to deliver speeches, present workshops, and provide technical assistance to community associations, non-profit organizations, and local governments.

Jim received a BA and an honorary doctorate from Grinnell College. His work in the Department of Neighborhoods was recognized with an Innovations Award from the Kennedy School of Government, a Full Inclusion Award from the American Association on Developmental Disabilities, and the Public Employee of the Year Award from the Municipal League of King County.

Jim's book, *Neighbor Power: Building Community the Seattle Way*, is available through the University of Washington Press. More information can be found on Jim's website: www.neighborpower.org