

2013 REPORT ON THE STATE OF CANADA'S CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



OPENING A NEW CHAPTER

Some 22 years ago, municipalities moved their campaign for recognition of the role and place of local governments in a modern Canada from the constitutional to the political arena. Facing intractable institutional obstacles, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) abandoned its decade-long campaign to change the 19th century constitutional framework that is holding municipalities back and opted for a more pragmatic approach based on aggressive, issue-by-issue advocacy.

FCM's plan was to build the foundations for a new intergovernmental relationship one policy breakthrough at a time. It is the strategy it has followed to this day.

The State of Canada's Cities and Communities 2013: Opening a New Chapter examines how effective FCM's shift in intergovernmental strategy has been in modernizing federal-municipal relations, and how it has increased the capacity of local governments to manage their growing agenda.

The report examines a number of important federal policy and program announcements, as well as the growing municipal footprint on national affairs, and draws conclusions about the foundations and the future of the federal-municipal relationship.





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KEY FINDINGS

Although there have been many significant programs and investments aimed at cities and communities over that period, only two contribute to modernizing the federal-municipal relationship in a significant way: the 2011 legislation that made the federal Gas Tax Fund (GTF) permanent and the Budget 2013 announcement that the government would index the GTF.

The current division of powers encourages short-term, informal and ad-hoc federal policies in the municipal sector, often designed without meaningful consultation with either municipal or provincial/territorial governments. The result is policies that respond to short-term political pressures and opportunities rather than address structural issues.

For Canada to embrace the 21st century with confidence, it needs cities and communities that contribute according to their full potential. The only way they can do this is with tools adapted to their new realities and roles.

Recent history suggests this will not happen until an accountability framework adapted to the 21st century is in place. In a country as vast and diverse as Canada, a powerful catalyst will be needed to break through the institutional inertia standing in the way of that goal.

Only the Government of Canada can provide that catalyst.

A PROPOSAL FOR CHANGE

The report calls for a re-invention of the federal-municipal relationship. Three things need to occur:

1. The federal government must explicitly recognize the role of cities and communities in national prosperity, the challenges they face, and the national interest in vibrant, competitive and safe communities.
2. Such political recognition must be made tangible through a formal and transparent framework to guide federal policy development and program interventions and create clear accountabilities.
3. Most important, this political recognition and framework must lead to the collaborative development of policies and programs that focus on those issues that remain unaddressed under outdated policies and jurisdictional obstacles.

Anything short of these measures will fail to deliver the change that is needed for our cities and communities, and for Canada, to succeed.

For more information

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Download the full report at www.fcm.ca.

