



Making Community Councils Work: A Community Living British Columbia Position Paper

Community Living BC Vision

"Children and adults with developmental disabilities, supported by family members and friends, will have opportunities and supports needed to pursue their goals and participate as full and valued citizens in their communities."

Introduction

An important part of making this vision into reality is Community Councils. Community Living BC (CLBC) is committed to setting up and supporting these Councils. They will be an important way for families, individuals, service providers, community leaders and citizens to have a strong voice in guiding the priorities and directions of CLBC. The general direction we want to go is pretty clear - based on community feedback, research and consultations to date. Now it is time to implement this direction and we want your ideas and feedback on how to proceed. That's why we have written this position paper.

The paper explains how we got to this point, and how we plan to move ahead with creating and supporting CLBC Community Councils. It then asks some questions about specific aspects of implementation. We want to hear what you think about how the Councils should work, and get your ideas about how best to access the strengths of community. After we look at all the feedback, we will make recommendations to the CLBC Board. The CLBC Board will make the final decision and then we will get the Councils up and running. We plan to do an initial evaluation of the emerging Councils after a year, so we can make adjustments as we go along.

Background - How We Got Here

During the 1950's and 1960's, parents were the catalyst for change – creating services for their sons and daughters through the development of local community organizations. Their efforts continued into the 1980's, when many institutions were closed across Canada and throughout British Columbia, largely due to their advocacy.

In 2002, government, family leaders, service providers, and advocates came together to create the vision for another change in BC. This would see individuals and families have more control and participation in the development of services and supports for children, youth and adults with developmental disabilities. It would also have greater focus on community development and inclusion, not only on funded services. This effort resulted in the creation of the Interim Authority for Community Living.

The Interim Authority was very concerned about how to enable meaningful involvement of families, individuals, service providers and interested community members in CLBC.

The staff did research and looked at what has been done in the past in B.C., and at what other provinces and countries are doing. They held consultation meetings asking people about how best to involve individuals, families and communities in making the vision a reality. At that time, we were talking about community governance, as well as community advisory committees. We learned some important things through that thinking, research and consultation process.

Key Lessons So Far....

- People with disabilities and their families have natural authority, and are in the best position to be leaders, decision-makers and advocates.
- We have to move away from the assumption that services should be the first resort in the lives of individuals and families, and find new ways to access and mobilize the 'associational life' within communities.
- Just having a provincial Board for CLBC does not satisfy the need for meaningful community involvement in how CLBC develops. We have a provincial governance authority, but we also need mechanisms for shared decision-making at the community level.
- Real social change requires collective effort – a community development approach is likely to be most effective over the long term.
- Participating on a Community Council can be an act of citizenship that provides great meaning and learning for people – and is in keeping with the CLBC vision.
- Communities across BC are very different and have different needs and resources. Small and rural areas sometimes feel their voice is drowned out by larger urban centres.
- Community Councils need administrative support, training and easy-to-understand information in order to be empowered.
- We should set out clear tasks and expectations – not broad vague responsibilities.
- There has to be a clear and fair process for choosing who sits on the Councils.
- Councils have to have useful tasks and real influence on decision-making for them to be meaningful. Examples are: access to full financial reporting; input into spending priorities; ability to support local creativity and innovation; participation in evaluation; monitoring and planning for the future; and input into selection and retention of staff.
- We have to be careful about conflict of interest and confidentiality for individuals, families and service providers serving on a Council.
- Communities are the most important way to provide friendship, support and a meaningful life to people with disabilities and their families, and are in turn enriched when people are included and able to participate in civic life.
- Partnerships among individuals, families, communities, governments, service providers and the business sector are vital to meeting the needs of people with disabilities.
- Communication is key - lots of people don't know very much about CLBC or about Community Councils.



Earlier this year, the responsibility for services for people with developmental disabilities in BC was transferred to the new provincial authority called Community Living British Columbia (CLBC). Now we have the opportunity to take what we have learned and make it happen. We need your help to figure out the best way to do that.

Why Do We Need Community Councils?

Quite simply – CLBC cannot, and should not, do it by ourselves. Real change for individuals and families involves a major shift in how we as a society think about and support people with developmental disabilities and their families. That is a tall order – it will take time and require our collective efforts and expertise. CLBC and communities bring different strengths to the task.

Here's what we think communities are best at:

- Figuring out creative ways to do things
- Participating in community development initiatives
- Holding governments and bureaucracies accountable
- Seeing what's working and what's not working
- Coming up with new ideas and lobbying for change
- Finding the potential for people with disabilities to be more engaged in civic life, and doing whatever is needed to turn this potential into reality
- Creating informal networks and safeguards around vulnerable people
- Creating small, local-level change to expand and improve the place or role of people with disabilities within community

Here's what we think CLBC is best at:

- Managing the nuts and bolts of funding allocations and financial accountability to government
- Hiring and supervising CLBC staff within a unionized workplace and a structured system
- Ensuring person-centred plans and formal safeguards are in place
- Monitoring service provision/providers
- Coordinating with ministries and other agencies

We need Community Councils so these two sets of expertise and influence are brought together to make the CLBC vision a reality – to reshape what community living and communities look like over the next generation. We have to do this in a way that honours and respects the strengths and responsibilities of both partners.

Outcomes – The Change We Want to See

It's a good idea to set out what we are trying to achieve before we start. That way, we can measure our progress against something. Here are the changes that we think CLBC and community want to see as a result of having Community Councils. We will measure these changes over time. We will be able to see some changes in the short term – over a year. Some changes will take longer, maybe five to ten years.

Outcomes For Council Members

- Improved understanding of CLBC financial allocation process, issues and decisions
- Improved working relationship with CLBC Managers
- Improved relationship and engagement between CLBC supports and 'associational community life'
- Improved satisfaction with CLBC performance
- Increased influence over CLBC priorities and resource allocation decisions

Outcomes For CLBC

- Improved understanding of community interests and impacts related to financial allocation process and decisions
- Improved access to community feedback and expertise
- Improved relationship and engagement between CLBC supports and 'associational community life'
- More effective use of scarce resources

Outcomes For Community

- Improved community awareness about CLBC, community living and persons with developmental disabilities
- Improved public attitudes about inclusion and diversity
- Improved community capacity to include and support people with disabilities
- Increased innovation and creativity at community level, relevant to specific community needs and strengths
- Closer match between community needs and CLBC resource allocation
- More personal support networks including informal safeguards, and improved community ownership in them

We have developed these outcomes based on the CLBC vision and discussions within community so far. We need to know if they are the right ones, and if we have missed any.

Mandate – What Community Councils Will Do

There needs to be a balance between the independence of the Councils and serving a function for CLBC. We plan to use a shared decision-making model. This means that Councils will have less authority than a governance body (such as a Society's Board of Directors or the CLBC Provincial Board), but more authority and influence than an advisory committee.

Mandate for Community Councils

To create, sustain and nurture the mutual sharing of information, action, decision-making and accountability between local CLBC management and community, towards the collective vision.

This is potentially quite a broad mandate. It covers issues related to both adults and children/youth and their families. To start with, we will set out three roles within this mandate. We want to have a few focussed and achievable roles to start with - and do them well. Over time, the roles could be expanded. Here's what we think the roles should be to start with:

Role # 1 Sharing in Financial Decisions

- Review financial information about budgeting and spending
- Identify gaps, overlaps, issues and problems
- Help make decisions about reshaping funding and services within area budgets
- Suggest and be a catalyst for creative solutions
- Share in setting priorities for new or reallocated funding
- Give feedback on the impacts of financial decisions and priorities

(Quality Service Manager is the key CLBC contact for this role)

Role # 2 Building Welcoming Communities

- Act as a vehicle and bridge for engagement in and access to associational life in community
- Assess and plan ways to expand personal support networks, strengthen informal safeguards and improve citizenship opportunities for people with developmental disabilities
- Assess strengths, needs and barriers, then develop creative solutions, take action, and problem-solve about improving community accessibility and inclusiveness
- Communicate and network within community about CLBC vision and supports
- Build new kinds of local partnerships and collaborative relationships

(Community Living Centre Manager is the key CLBC contact for this role)

Role # 3 Improving Accountability to Community

- Give feedback about CLBC performance, results, services and community practice
- Participate in evaluating the impact of CLBC decisions in community
- Participate in recruitment and orientation of CLBC staff
- Provide feedback on manager and staff performance as part of 360° performance evaluation process
- Identify issues and concerns that may require action outside local area and forward to Provincial Advisory Committee or CLBC Board

(Community Living Centre and Quality Service Managers are both key CLBC contacts for this role)

It is also important to be clear about what Community Councils will not do. Community Councils will not:

- Deal with or try to influence situations involving particular individuals, families or service providers
- Make governance decisions, such as setting provincial policy or budgets
- Hire or supervise CLBC staff
- Represent or claim to represent CLBC, legally or politically

Membership – Who is Involved

Community Councils will be made up of self-advocates, families, community members, local business people and service providers. Members should be representative of the diversity within each community, and the range of ages and life stages of people with developmental disabilities – from young children to aging adults. Ideally, membership should include both people with experience in the community living movement, and those who are new to it. Inviting and welcoming community members who may not have any direct experience with community living will be an important way to broaden support for the vision and bring new energy to the work of creating more inclusive communities. Council members will also have to meet some qualifications.

Qualifications to be a Member of a Community Council

1. Be nominated by at least two individuals or organizations who understand the role of CLBC and the Community Council
2. Live in the area served
3. Explain why you want to be on the Council and what you have to contribute (can be done in writing, verbally or through augmentative communication)
4. Be committed to inclusive communities and the vision and values of CLBC
5. Have time available to attend meetings and participate
6. Sign a confidentiality agreement and conflict of interest disclosure

The CLBC Board will appoint people to each Community Council, based on nominations. Anyone who knows about CLBC can nominate someone, as long as they fit the qualifications. Each Council will have between 7 and 15 members. The exact number will be different for each Council, depending on the geographic area it covers and the number of individuals and families receiving support in that area. Each Council will select its own chairperson from amongst its members.

Rare situations could arise when it might not be appropriate for a member to continue to sit on a Council. An example might be if a Council member is clearly in a conflict of interest and refusing to step aside or behave appropriately, in spite of direction from the rest of the Council. In such cases, the CLBC Board would review the situation and, if necessary, remove the member. This would only be a last resort in extreme or unlikely situations that could not be resolved locally.

Meaningful participation of families and self-advocates is vital to the success of Community Councils. Sometimes self-advocates find it hard to participate in groups like this. Sometimes families 'burn-out' and get frustrated if they feel they are not being heard. There is also a risk that the interests of others, such as service providers, might dominate the agenda. We plan to take specific steps to ensure that families and self-advocates can participate meaningfully.

Ways to Support Meaningful Participation of Families and Self-Advocates

- Provide augmentative communications and other supports as required
- Cover child care and respite costs associated with participating on a Council
- Schedule meetings for times that work for families and self-advocates
- Provide materials in plain language and alternate formats
- Make sure that at least 50% plus 1 of the members of each Council are families, self advocates, friends or support network members

At the same time, we will take steps to define the role for service providers. Service providers have a variety of ways to access and influence CLBC. Their participation on Community Councils is important, primarily as a support and a resource due to their experience and expertise. However, we think the service provider role needs to have some limits, so as to ensure that the voice of families and self-advocates is clearly expressed and heard.

Proposed Limits on Service Provider Role

- Service providers cannot serve as Council chairs
- Service providers are primarily resource people - offering advice and expertise
- Service providers do not participate in any discussions where they may have a conflict of interest
- No more that 25% of the members of each Council are service providers

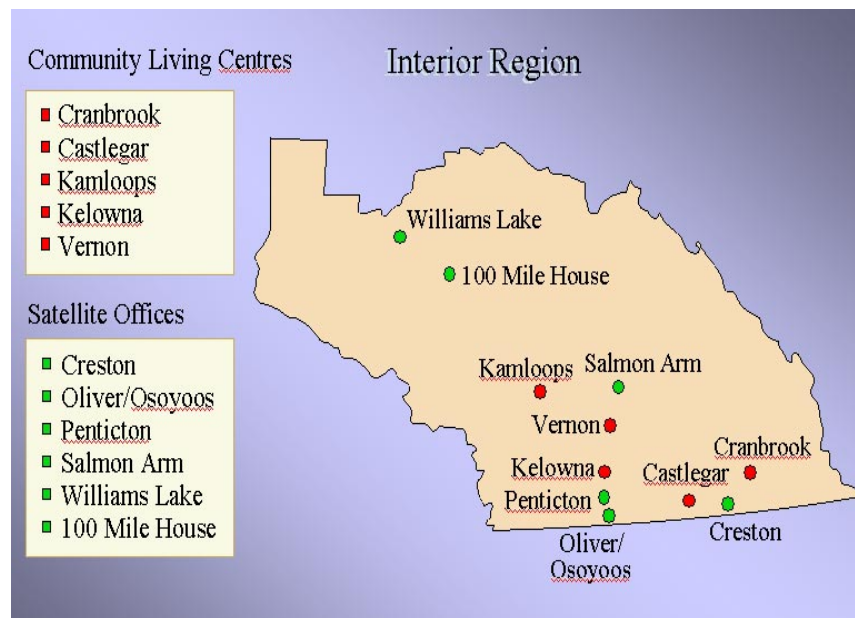
Ensuring that membership is representative of community, and balancing service provider influence with the voice of families and self-advocates will be key to the success of these Community Councils. We need your feedback on how best to do this.

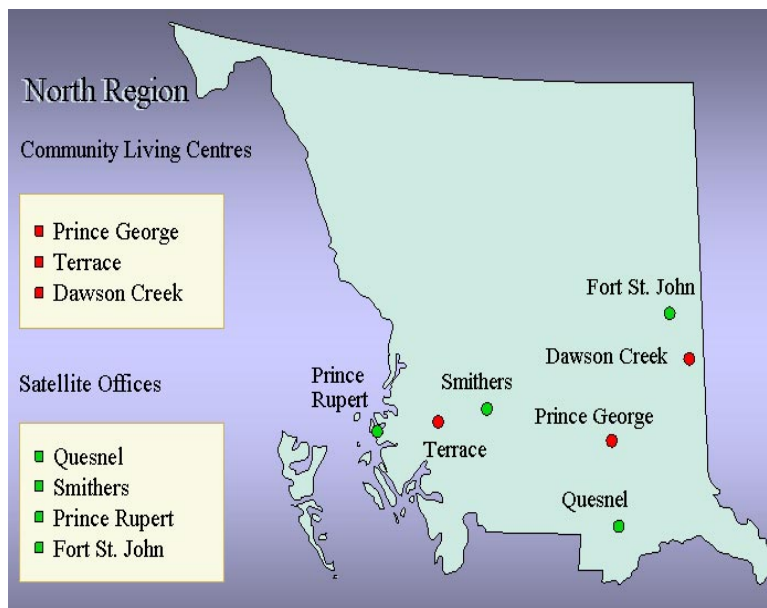
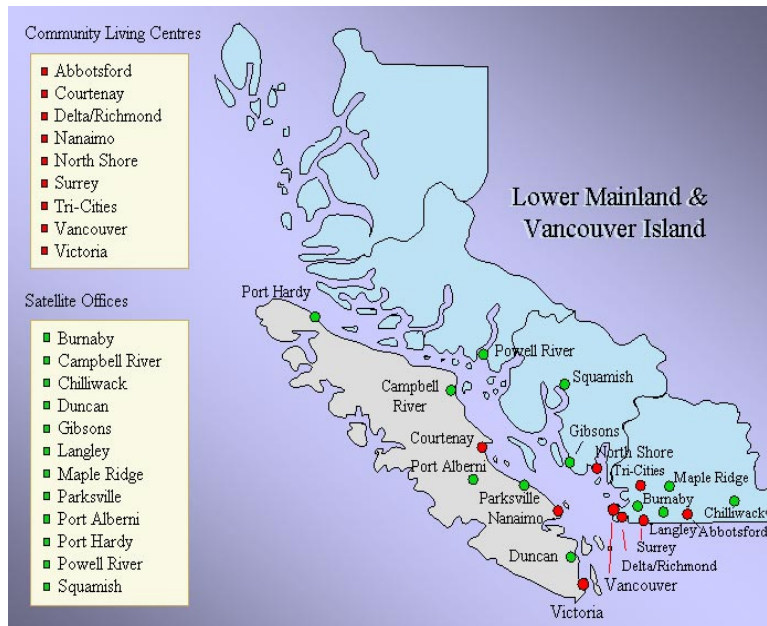
Structure and Process – Ways of Being and Doing

How Councils will be set up and operate is very important. There are several key things to consider:

Location

We propose to set up 17 Community Councils - for each area served by a Community Living Centre as shown on these maps:





In some parts of the province, there will be several satellite communities and long distances within the area covered by one Council. We think we can accommodate this by having representatives from all parts of the area on the Council, allowing for larger Councils in such places, and covering transportation and other costs.



We also think it is more effective to have all parts of an area come together and help address the issues for the whole area with the CLBC Managers for that area, rather than having separate Councils for each community. It is also a more effective use of CLBC staff time. We need your feedback on this issue, especially as it relates to equity between urban and rural areas, and making sure that rural and Aboriginal communities have a voice.

Timing

We could establish all the Community Councils at once or we could set them up one-by-one, as each community decides when they are ready. We need your input on this question.

Term

We propose a two-year term that could be renewed twice. That means that no one could be on a Community Council for more than six years in total. We also propose to have overlapping terms, so that there will be continuity of membership, and new members will have people to mentor them.

Relationships

There are some key relationships that Community Councils will establish and keep going. These include relationships with the CLBC Board, the CLBC Provincial Advisory Committee and key local and regional organizations.

Relationship with CLBC Board

The CLBC Board appoints the members to the Community Councils. It provides them with policy, terms of reference and support to operate. Community Councils are accountable to the Board to follow their mandate and terms of reference. CLBC Managers will take forward any issues raised by the Council that have provincial or policy implications. Each Council will prepare an annual report including any recommendations or issues that affect the provincial level. The CLBC Board will receive and review these reports.

Relationship with CLBC Provincial Advisory Committee

The Provincial Advisory Committee is a separate group that will be appointed to advise the Board on provincial issues. There is no reporting relationship between the Provincial Advisory Committee and local Community Councils. However, there is an informal relationship between them. Provincial Advisory Committee members will be expected to communicate with the Community Councils in their area to exchange relevant information. They may meet at the local level to discuss issues of mutual interest or importance. Once a year, CLBC will bring representatives from all the Community Councils together with the Provincial Advisory Committee to review and discuss key provincial issues and develop recommendations for the CLBC Board.

Relationships with Other Organizations

Community Councils will be expected to have open communications with representatives or leaders of any number of local and regional offices and organizations. These people do not have to be members, but they can be invited to provide information and attend meetings as resource people if needed. Examples might be representatives of local colleges, municipalities, Ministry of Children and Family Development offices, recreation commissions, chambers of commerce, social planning councils, school districts or health authorities.

Process

For Community Councils to be useful and meaningful for the people participating, they must be flexible and non-bureaucratic, embrace a person-centred philosophy, share the CLBC vision and principles, and be accountable and accessible to community. Decisions will be made by consensus as much as possible. Councils will meet at least four times a year, and can decide to meet more often. Councils covering a large geographic area may meet less often but for longer meetings, than Councils in urban areas. Meetings will be open to the public, and information about the Council will be widely shared in the community. All members will have input into agendas and there will be a balance between adult and child/youth issues. The key to a successful process will be using a community development approach.

A Community Development Approach

Community development can be seen as a perspective, a principle, or a set of strategies, all of which are directed to improving life within communities. It is a way to make communities stronger, more connected, more caring, and more welcoming. Community development is about building active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect. It is about changing power structures to remove the barriers that prevent people from participating in the issues that affect their lives.

Community development approaches have been used elsewhere to advance the agenda of inclusion and citizenship for people with disabilities. Some important lessons have been learned about what works best:

- Start with the people who want to be included, their families and friends.
- Make it an inclusion issue, not a disability issue.
- Adopt a broad-based, collective approach with civic society partners and invitations to others who might care about the issue.
- Create a compelling, shared and community-based vision for the future.
- Set clear expectations and goals and get some early wins.
- Develop strategies that are multifaceted and touch different people and places.
- Communicate, communicate, and communicate some more.
- Take time to do thorough research – find out what others have done.
- Create a sense of urgency.
- Build relationships with people and places that are likely to understand the issue.
- Be innovative and build on what is unique in that community.
- Build in opportunities for continuous learning.

Code of Ethical Conduct

Community Councils will have a Code of Ethical Conduct. Each new Council member will review and sign this Code. People will be provided with support to do that. The Code will form the basis of everyone's behaviour while serving on the Council. Signing it is a promise to follow it. It will cover areas such as:

- Commitment to the vision and principles of CLBC and the mandate of the Council
- Promise to act with honesty and integrity
- Respect for the rights of all individuals
- Respect for the role of the Chairperson
- Understanding and respect for confidentiality rules
- Decision-making processes that hear and respect different perspectives
- Definition of conflict of interest and procedures to recognize and avoid it



- Process to resolve complaints or conflicts about the conduct of Council members
- How to remove members who violate the Code of Ethical Conduct

These are the areas where we see the potential for problems and therefore want to cover off at the start. There may be other aspects of ethical conduct that should be addressed, or other ways to address them.

Accountability

Accountability is a two way street. Community Councils will be one way that CLBC Managers are held accountable to the local community. Councils will in turn be expected to live up to their Terms of Reference and Code of Ethical Conduct. They are accountable to the CLBC Board that appointed them and to the community that they represent.

Terms of Reference

All of the topics covered in this past section will be set out in a Terms of Reference for Community Councils. We need to know if there is anything missing, or perhaps a better way to structure the Councils.

Support Required – Making it Happen

No matter how CLBC Community Councils are structured and operate, they will need support in order to be successful. CLBC will provide the following supports for Councils and individual members:

- Orientation and mentorship for new members
- Administrative support including setting up meetings, taking minutes and preparing reports
- Information in plain language, including reports and financial information
- CLBC Managers attending meetings
- Out-of-pocket costs including travel, accommodation, child care, respite
- Plain language handbook, that includes Terms of reference, Code of Ethical Conduct and local information
- Training in leadership and community development
- Conflict resolution support
- Enabling policy and Terms of Reference

Local CLBC Managers will be expected to make sure Councils get this support, as part of their job. We need to know if this is the right way to support Councils, and if we have missed anything.

Conclusion

We have written this position paper to explain how we plan to approach Community Councils, and to ask for your feedback and ideas on the mechanics of how they will be set up and operate. With your input, we will then go to the next step of implementing Community Councils. In doing that, there are some challenges and opportunities we need to be aware of. For example:

- Councils offer opportunities for citizenship for self-advocates and others.
- Council members may sometimes feel frustrated if CLBC is not able to follow through on shared decisions. We need to have conflict resolution and other processes in place so that Councils can find a way through such situations.
- CLBC may not have the financial resources to move in the direction that Community Councils may want. We need to be open with financial information so that there is shared understanding of the financial challenges and shared ownership of possible solutions.
- Both CLBC staff and Council members have an opportunity to learn about other perspectives, and to use that understanding to do a better job.
- We need to remember that Councils are not a place for an individual, family or service provider to advance their own agenda.
- A Council may want to see a local Manager move in a direction that is at odds with the CLBC vision and principles and policy. We all have to be vigilant about the vision and principles.
- Some Council members will be most interested in issues affecting children and youth and others may be most interested in issues affecting adults. It will be important to listen and share perspectives, in order to make improvements that affect people across their lifespan.
- Working together presents an opportunity to achieve much greater results than working separately. Trust and cooperation will be important.

We commit to being aware of these potential things, and to continuing to look for your guidance and feedback as we proceed.

Sources Used for This Paper:

- *Community Living Transition Steering Committee Report* (2002)
 - *Interim Authority Bylaw # 3* (2004)
 - *Recommendations to Revise Bylaw # 3 Based on Preliminary Community Feedback* (Salisbury/Kendrick, 2004)
 - *CLBC Board Briefing/Discussion Paper* (Lord/Kendrick, 2004)
 - *The Role of Community, Civic Society and Community Development: Implications for CLBC* (Lord/Salisbury, 2004)
 - *Dialogue on Possibilities for Participation: Consultations on Community Level Governance* (Lord/Kemp, 2004)
 - *Developing and Implementing Community Councils* (Murray, 2005)
 - Interview with Bill Tidsbury re Alberta experience (2005)
 - *It Takes a Village*, Community Living Ontario, 2003
 - Code of Ethics and Conflict of Interest Guidelines for BC Parent Advisory Councils
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Now It's Your Turn

Thank you for taking the time to read this position paper and think about some of the issues we have raised. We appreciate your answers to our questions, and any other thoughts you would like to share about how to make Community Councils work. Please use the response form to give us your feedback. You should read the paper or have someone go over it with you before you answer the questions on the form. You can answer all the questions or just some of them.

- ▶ You can print the form and fill it out by hand and then mail it or fax it to us. To print the form, [click here](#).
- ▶ You can call our Call Centre and tell us what you think. You can also call the Call Centre if you need help understanding the response form or the paper.

Please send us your response form within a month of reading the paper.

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