

The Development Wheel Project

Follow-Up Interviews with Community Based Organizations: Summary of Findings

Introduction

Part of the research design for the project is that community based organizations who had participated in Development Wheel workshops during April and May of 2006, and who had completed the "Next Steps Questionnaire" – meaning they had decided to proceed with SE development within their organization or group – would be followed up with a second round of questions from the Next Steps about six months after workshop attendance.

In the spring of 2006, both Provincial Steering Groups for this project agreed that the formal survey follow-up of community based organizations should be delayed so that we contact them in an ongoing rotation, one year after their workshop participation date (rather than at 6 month periods). Generally, it was felt that there would not be enough progress or change, if we contacted them sooner than that. Due to the lack of community organizations coming forward for technical assistance after the workshops however, it was agreed that we needed a less formal way of finding out where groups were at with their SE development – why had they not been in touch with the regional intermediary in their area?

During September of 2006, phone interviews (or in person interviews in some cases) were conducted with 21 people who had completed the workshop and a "Next Steps Questionnaire". There were 22 possible participants in BC, and 10 in Ontario. Of this total of 32, there were 14 completed interviews in BC and 7 in Ontario.

Types of Organizations

Generally speaking the mix of organizations and groups surveyed covers the spectrum from small, totally volunteer run groups, through to larger non-profits with equity and over 5 staff. The sectors represented include health, inmates, youth, hospice, First Nations and agri-related. 2 of the BC organizations are quasi-government, (CORCAN delivers employment services for Corrections Canada in the Fraser Valley & the Northern Health Authority runs a psychosocial rehab program in Smithers).

Factors Associated with NO Progress Since the Workshop

All of the Ontario groups surveyed had made some progress since the workshop. Of the 14 interviews in BC, 5 had not made any progress.

- All 5, identified internal organizational challenges as the reason for not proceeding (staff changes, board changes/lack of support, re-location, etc.)
- Of the 5, 3 thought now that they might not pursue SE, at least in the short to mid term. Their reasons for this were focused on the need to build a stronger organizational base or staffing levels before they undertake SE.

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- 2 were going to proceed and identified next steps as presentations to their boards; both these groups thought they either had, or could get, resources to support this work
- 2 identified the workshop as energizing or useful, while 3 said it was interesting but not useful in helping them address their internal challenges
- 3 of the 5 did not understand the full scope of what the intermediary could do for them
- 1 of these organizations simply said they did not need SE at this time; they were stable & well funded & there was no urgency for them to take any action

In general, these organizations were all dealing with internal challenges that prevented them from advancing their SE work. Half had decided since the workshop that it was premature to focus on SE, while the other half were going to start with educating their boards. Many did not fully understand the role of the regional intermediary in providing early stage coaching or helping them plan.

Factors Associated with MAKING Progress Since the Workshop

In Ontario (N=7):

- All 7 organizations met and/or developed applications or proposals shortly after the workshop that they hope will allow them to proceed with their SE work. Several mention working to get board and staff support, working with RDEE, developing action plans as the types of activities they had completed.
- All 7 organizations rated the impact of the workshop very high – that it contributed the steps, new ways of thinking and doing things, and the motivation to go forward.
- 2 organizations identify many sources of assistance (including RDEE) while others suggested it is not that easy to find human or fiscal resources for SE.
- Only 1 organization thought they would have the resources to proceed with their plans.
- Sources of outside support cited: RDEE, Community Futures, Social Capital Partners, CCO, L'Art du developpement, CEDTAP.

In BC (N=9):

- These organizations cited the workshop, board support, the availability of ENP funds, the regional intermediary, and their own ability to give leadership as key factors in their progress.
- As in Ontario, most were focused on activities related to planning or applications for funding: 3 identify working with the regional intermediary on next steps; 3 identify going through ENP for funding.
- The workshop was identified as being useful for: the sequence of steps in the process, planning, making connections, getting inspired, getting ideas from others. The workbook itself had not been read by several, although they thought perhaps once they got further along the checklist would be useful.
- 3 could not site any outside sources of assistance, while the others cited other SE's, the DW newsletter, other business people or the regional intermediary as helpful resources.
- One third, or 3 organizations, thought they could get or already had the resources to complete their SE work. 6 did not.

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- Sources of funds included: FVCSE, ENP, Rural Secretariat, Aboriginal funds, and fund raising.

In general, it seems that the availability of either outside funding sources, or outside expertise for early stage planning/support are key factors for community organizations who want to develop a social enterprise. Internal leadership and the ability to educate their boards were also consistently mentioned. About 75% were going to need additional funding to undertake the development work for SE. Several organizations contacted the regional intermediary for assistance after the interviews.

Conclusions for further testing and tracking

1. Ability to undertake SE does not seem to be a factor of size. Larger organizations underwent staff changes, board changes or simply had no staff time to give to SE just as smaller organizations told us. We do however want to identify more specifically if there are any common features of organizations that advance their SE work. This information can be accessed in the workshop registration data base.
2. Half of those in BC who had not made any progress had in fact determined that SE was premature for their organization. This suggests that the results of Next Steps Questionnaires need to be considered again, with others in the organization who were not at the workshop.
3. Most suggested they were taking it on off the sides of their desks until they could get to a point of applying for funding to help them advance their research or planning for SE. For others it was a matter of needing more time to build board understanding and support.
4. Almost half of the organizations indicated they did not know if the regional intermediary could be helpful, or in what way. This can be addressed during the future workshops.
5. The front end tasks that most organizations were dealing with included getting board and staff support, creating their own action plan to advance SE or applying for funding to hire the expertise they needed. Some organizations needed outside support with all of these tasks.
6. Only 25% of the organizations had access to resources to undertake their next steps. Respondents in each province only identified 4 sources of funding, 1 of which was fund raising in their communities.
7. The response rate for interviews was 60% overall. Of those who could not be reached for interviews we know that some have moved (changed emails and/or phone numbers), but others have simply not been responsive to requests to talk with them. This might mean they too have decided NOT to pursue SE, or could be symptomatic of the staff overload cited by respondents.