building SUSTAINABLE non-profits

the waterloo region EXPERIENCE

CENTRE FOR RESEARCH AND EDUCATION IN HUMAN SERVICES &
SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL OF CAMBRIDGE AND NORTH DUMFRIES

BUILDING sustainable NON-PROFITS

THE WATERLOO REGION EXPERIENCE

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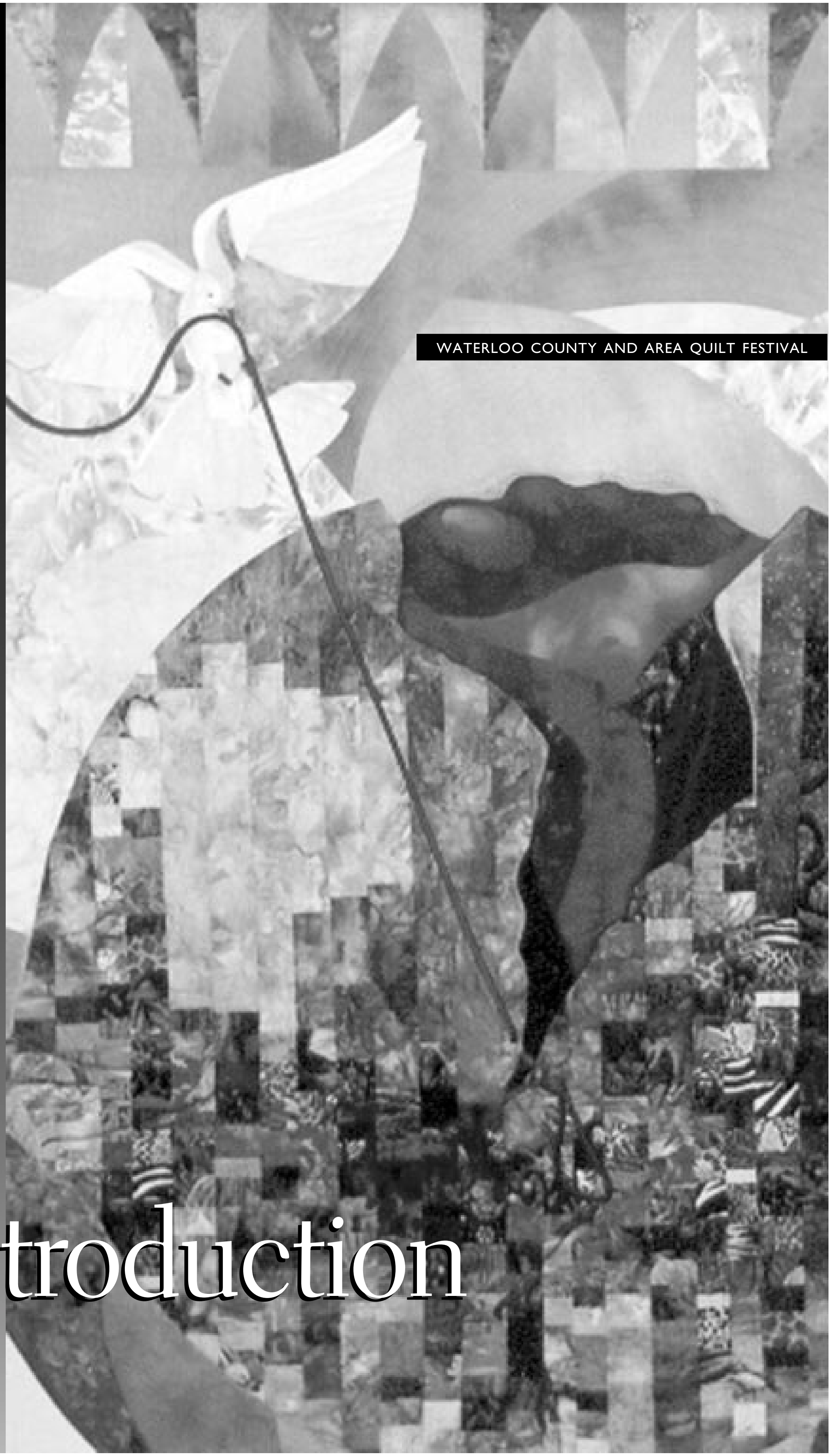


WATERLOO COUNTY AND AREA QUILT FESTIVAL

1. introduction

1. INTRODUCTION

THE PURPOSE OF THIS MANUAL is to provide non-profit organizations of all types with practical strategies for building their capacity to weather sustainability challenges. This manual on sustainability is intended to be useful to non-profit organizations anywhere. At the same time, it arises directly out of the experiences of non-profit organizations in a particular community. We think the stories will be more useful to you if you know something about our community.

Waterloo Region is in Southwestern Ontario, about 90 minutes west of Toronto, and an hour north of Lake Erie. It includes three cities, clustered very close to one another in the centre of the region. It also includes large rural areas. The common thread that links many of these communities together – indeed, the reason why many of these communities came to be – is the Grand River. This river, one of the main arteries of southwestern Ontario's watershed, winds through Waterloo, Kitchener, and Cambridge, and plays a major role in the life of the region. Many of our parks and conservation areas are clustered along its banks, and some of our biggest cultural events and festivals celebrate the river's history and ecology. Even the notoriously quirky layout of streets in Kitchener and Waterloo arises in part because of the ways in which major thoroughfares mirror the river's twists and turns.

Waterloo Region is also well known for its two universities and one college, a major automobile factory, and a vibrant high-tech sector. The region is culturally diverse, being home to many recent immigrants as well as several distinct Mennonite communities. Our hope is that the unique stories of local organizations and their efforts to adapt to the challenges and opportunities their environment presents will be useful to you.

Background

Developing program sustainability is becoming a critical issue for the non-profit sector. Traditionally, non-profit organizations were supported through a mix of volunteers, donations, fundraising activities, grants and government contracts. However, there has been a shift in the responsibility, expectations and resources available in the non-profit sector over the last 20 years. According to Statistics Canada (2000), changes in non-profit sector spending, public policies and community demands have resulted in the following challenges for non-profit organizations:

- The total number of non-profit organizations has increased resulting in greater competition for funding and other resources. There are now 80,000 non-profit organizations across Canada, all competing for funding as well as volunteers and other kinds of resources.
- Government downsizing and downloading have increased pressures on non-profits to become more efficient and accountable, while funding has been reduced to short-term government grants and contracts. In fact, 81 per cent of non-profit funding now comes from short-term government grants and contracts.
- More time and energy is spent on grant-writing and paper work, causing distraction from core service provision.
- There is a reduction in organizational flexibility and creativity.
- There is a continual struggle to prove legitimacy and credibility.
- The fear of funding cuts has dropped advocacy from the agenda of many organizations.

With the reduction in government funding to the non-profit sector, many organizations are turning to foundations and the private sector for funds. However, foundations have been forced to cut back their charitable contributions (Smith, 2002).

Many non-profits feel that they are "in the dark", not knowing where funding will come from or whether policies will work in their favour. This makes it very difficult to develop new programs, impedes long term planning, and threatens the sustainability of organizations (Mullet and Jung, 2002). In one survey of non-profit organizations, 85 per cent of those who responded said they feel more vulnerable now than they did five years ago (Statistics Canada, 2000). In these uncertain times, many non-profit organizations are searching for ways to remain viable while continuing to provide needed services in the community.

Developing this manual

In response to the challenges faced by non-profits today, a Sustainability Manual Committee was initiated by Opportunities 2000, a poverty reduction initiative in Waterloo Region. It was felt that developing a guide for sustainability which would be rooted in local experience and complemented with broader research would enhance the capacity of agencies to respond to their sustainability issues. The Sustainability Manual Committee accessed Ontario Trillium Foundation funding in 2002 to develop this manual. Under the committee's direction the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services and the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries developed this manual.

It has been an inspiring and humbling process to gather sustainability stories and best practice information from non-profit organizations throughout Waterloo Region. Local organizations have met challenges and found success in surprisingly creative ways.

What we realized through this process is that there is no magic formula for sustainability. In fact, flexibility and responsiveness to changing situations seem to be the predominant themes. This may seem frustrating, but hopefully, by reading the stories of some local organizations and information from the literature, non-profit leaders may find the creative energy they need to move their organization to a more sustainable position.

We began development of this guide by reviewing the literature on sustainability in the non-profit sector. Next, local organizations were encouraged to submit their sustainability stories and close to 30 stories were gathered. From these stories a list of general themes was developed and six diverse agencies were chosen for more in-depth interviews. In making these choices, we tried to be representative of various non-profit sectors, different sized organizations, diverse geographic communities, and varying experiences with sustainability. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with Community Health Helpers, Christopher Champlain Community Centre, Cambridge Youth Soccer, Grand River Conservation Authority, K-W Extend-A-Family, and Waterloo County and Area Quilt Festival.

How this manual is organized

When we think of sustainability challenges, the questions that immediately jump to mind have to do with finding funds, recruiting volunteers, and other immediate practical concerns. Sustainability challenges like these arise, in large part, because of factors that are well beyond the control of most non-profit organizations.

However, this manual is not organized around writing proposals, securing sponsorship, or other funding-related strategies. Rather, it is built around four chapters that deal with basic, underlying factors that (according to our research) are within the control of non-profit organizations, and seem to enhance the capacity of non-profit organizations to weather the crises and uncertainties that are a fact of life in the sector. In response to funding cuts or reductions, many organizations return to these four factors to strengthen their organizational sustainability.

Specifically, the manual explores four dimensions:

1. Relationships and partnerships
2. Organizational culture
3. Planning and leadership
4. Organizational relevance

The contents of these sections overlap in an organic way. In fact, sustainable organizations often seem to juggle efforts in all of these areas at the same time. The four chapters cover elements over which readers have some control and where they can implement practical strategies to improve the sustainability of their programs. The layout of the chapters varies somewhat, but most include the following sections:

1. Main message
2. Local vignettes
3. Several specific content sections
4. What to do in times of crisis
5. Worksheets, tips and other resources
6. Summary

This manual is not a crisis response kit (although it does include several handy and easy to use worksheets and a long list of resources to consult on specific topics). Rather, the manual is intended as a thorough and measured exploration of the reasons why organizations respond to sustainability challenges as they do and what can be learned from their responses.

We have taken this approach because we feel there are already many useful resources on the various concrete and practical skill sets needed to manage an organization (e.g., proposal writing, financial management, strategic planning). In fact, our format and approach to developing this manual was significantly influenced by the organizations we interviewed. When we asked local leaders about the keys to sustainability, their specific, concrete strategies were as diverse as their situations. What the stories held in common was a connection to some core principles or organizational processes that informed the development of context-specific sustainability strategies. It is these processes and principles that we have used to organize this manual.

DEFINING SUSTAINABILITY

At the beginning of their work together, the Sustainability Manual Advisory Committee defined sustainability as:

> *The degree to which a program or organization can mobilize resources from one or more sources consistently over time to respond effectively to local needs.*

In his article *The Struggle for Sustainability*, Mark Cabaj (n.d.) states that sustainability goes beyond self-sufficiency, which he defines as the ability to recover costs. He describes sustainability as a project's ability to continue into the future, using a combination of resources and strategies such as volunteers, grants, fundraising, donations, and user fees.

Sustainability requires planning from the beginning and throughout the life of a group or organization. Generally, sustainability has to do with funding success combined with an ability to: (Health Canada, n.d.)

- protect and maintain organizational values
- ensure ownership across staff, board, volunteers, and other members
- use a community development approach
- foster partnerships, recruit and nurture volunteers, and manage effectively day-to-day

In the environmental sector, sustainability has a distinct, but perhaps not completely unrelated meaning. Sustainability as an approach to planning recognizes the interconnectedness of systems:

> *Sustainability is a new paradigm of decision making for all sectors of society based on a better appreciation of the complex inter-connections between economic, social and environmental issues and the impact of today's decisions on future generations.* (Molnar and Morgan, 2001)

In this context, sustainability is a holistic approach to the management of resources that implies good stewardship on the part of the organization. As a process, it is imbedded in the community itself:

> *Sustainability is an approach to decision making that considers the interconnections and impacts of economic, social and environmental factors on today's future generation's quality of life. It is a dynamic and evolving notion, and as a process, it strives to be participatory, transparent, equitable, informed and accountable.* (Molnar and Morgan, 2001)

There are two streams that emerge from the multiple definitions of sustainability. Some of the literature looks at sustainability as an outcome that can be traced to the efficacy of organizational planning. Other writers seem to see sustainability as something more like a process. Rooted in an ecological perspective, this way of thinking recognizes the evolving nature of sustainability as organizations interact with the social, economic and environmental sectors of the community. While they are not necessarily mutually exclusive, these two definitions are helpful in identifying the context for the various strategies employed in sustainability planning.

The following diagrams provide an illustration of the two streams:

Sustainability is an outcome –
rooted in a financial model of sustainability

Sustainability is a process –
rooted in an ecological model of sustainability

Organizational capacity self assessment tool: self-assessment of your ability to respond to sustainability challenges

This short quiz should provide you with some sense of the areas in which your organization is strong, and the areas where you may be able to build your capacity to manage sustainability challenges. The quiz is intended for your use only, and need not be shared with anyone else. After you have answered each question honestly, add up your scores. Your total score in each of the four theme areas will give you an idea of how well your organization is doing with respect to that theme. High scores (27 and up) indicate good organizational capacity, while low scores (15 and below) suggest that you might want to review that section of the manual for ideas.

Partnerships

How well do you know who your organization's current partners are?	1 not at all	2 •	3 somewhat	4 •	5 very
How well do you understand the practical value of current partnerships?	1 not at all	2 •	3 somewhat	4 •	5 very
How well do you understand the match of values in current partnerships?	1 not at all	2 •	3 somewhat	4 •	5 very
How clear are the roles and responsibilities in current partnerships?	1 not at all	2 •	3 somewhat	4 •	5 very
To what degree do you think your organization is maintaining partnerships that should be ended?	1 very much	2 •	3 somewhat	4 •	5 not at all
Are there existing partnerships within your organization that can be used more effectively?	1 very much	2 •	3 somewhat	4 •	5 not at all
Are there new partnerships you should build?	1 very much	2 •	3 somewhat	4 •	5 not at all

Organizational Culture

How well do you understand your organization's values?	1 not at all	2 •	3 somewhat	4 •	5 very
How conscious do you feel your organization is about its assumptions?	1 not at all	2 •	3 somewhat	4 •	5 very

How satisfied are you with the clarity of communication within the organization?	1 not at all	2 •	3 somewhat	4 •	5 very
How quickly does important information move through your organization?	1 not at all	2 •	3 somewhat	4 •	5 very
How inclusive is the communication loop within the organization?	1 not at all	2 •	3 somewhat	4 •	5 very
How long does it take you to make a decision that affects the whole organization?	1 very long time	2 •	3 •	4 •	5 not long at all
Who is normally involved in decision-making processes?	1 very few or too many	2 •	3 •	4 •	5 as many as we need

Leadership

How clear are your organization's goals and objectives?	1 not at all	2 •	3 somewhat	4 •	5 very
How well do you understand your leadership style?	1 not at all	2 •	3 somewhat	4 •	5 very
How many people are involved in leading the organization?	1 very few or too many	2 •	3 •	4 •	5 as many as we need
How long do volunteers stay with the organization?	1 not long at all or too long	2 •	3 •	4 •	5 as long as we'd like
How satisfied are you with the infrastructure you have to manage volunteers?	1 not at all	2 •	3 somewhat	4 •	5 very
How clear are the roles of various people in your organization?	1 not at all	2 •	3 somewhat	4 •	5 very
How satisfied are you with your organization's willingness to take risks?	1 not at all	2 •	3 somewhat	4 •	5 very

Organizational Relevance

How well do you understand community needs?	1 not at all	2 →	3 somewhat	4 →	5 very well
To what extent do you draw on data about your community when making decisions?	1 not at all	2 →	3 somewhat	4 →	5 very much
How well do you understand your organization's capacities and weaknesses?	1 not at all	2 →	3 somewhat	4 →	5 very well
How measurable are your goals and objectives?	1 not at all	2 →	3 somewhat	4 →	5 very
To what degree do you have evidence of your organization's impact?	1 not at all	2 →	3 somewhat	4 →	5 very
How clear is your communication with outsiders about your work?	1 not at all	2 →	3 somewhat	4 →	5 very clear
How well does your community (those people and groups you would like to reach) understand what you do?	1 not at all	2 →	3 somewhat	4 →	5 very well

SCORE

	Sub-total for each item
Partnerships	
Organizational culture	
Planning and leadership	
Organizational relevance	
TOTAL	

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Local vignettes
- Definitions
- Getting clear about relationships and partnerships
- Developing or maintaining long-term partnerships
- Avoiding partnership problems
- Partnerships in times of crisis
- Assessing your partnership
- Summary

CHRISTOPHER CHAMPLAIN COMMUNITY CENTRE

2. relationships and partnerships

GRAND RIVER CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

2. RELATIONSHIPS AND PARTNERSHIPS

■ RELATIONSHIPS AND PARTNERSHIPS HAVE ALWAYS been essential for non-profits, but recent pressures on the sector have changed the purpose and feel of partnerships. Funders and non-profit organizations have become more conscious of the importance of partnerships and more strategic in building relationships with other organizations. However knowledgeable or well-educated we are, and however clear our strategic plans and funding proposals, none of these resources mean much if we can't build trusting relationships with the people around us. This basic truth is especially important in the non-profit world, where progress often depends on many different kinds of people playing very different roles.

In the 1990s, funders began to recognize the importance of partnerships in the non-profit sector and started requiring partnerships of their grantees. Many organizations were thrown into a reactive mode, and ended up in shallow partnerships motivated by a desire to meet funding criteria or share the burden of risk.

More recently, local organizations have become more reflective and strategic in their partnership building efforts. Our hope in this chapter is to suggest that success in partnership-building begins with a focus on the basic qualities of a good human relationship: trust, respect and open communication. Partnerships based on good relationships can play an integral role in organizational sustainability by creating buy-in and building trust on broader issues. This creates ownership of problems and offers a collaborative approach to problem solving. This chapter provides tools and strategies to help non-profits re-discover how partnerships can improve and bring strength to organizations.

Local vignettes

Christopher Champlain Community Centre (CCCC) and the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) are local examples of how mobilization around a specific community concern can evolve into tangible, long-term solutions.

Christopher Champlain Community Centre began 12 years ago in response to concerns about the degree of crime, vandalism and drug use in a local neighbourhood. The neighbourhood was considered "high risk" and focused mostly on the activities within one of the community's housing complexes. The City, the Housing Authority and local police came together to work with residents on developing strategies and solutions and to reach out to local youth. Lutherwood CODA, a local multi-service organization which had experience in developing programs for youth, were invited in the process. The result was the Champlain Drug Prevention Program, staffed by volunteers and employees of Lutherwood. In 1995, cuts to program budgets resulted in Lutherwood pulling out of the community, however, a community board began to organize in an effort to maintain the programs that were meeting community needs. The board, with the assistance of the City of Cambridge and Waterloo Regional Housing, became incorporated as a non-profit organization, and by 1997, became a registered charity. Currently, programs are funded through several major partners, including: the United Way, the City of Cambridge, and the Region of Waterloo. Programs include employment supports, personal counselling, recreation programs, after school programs and family resource programs. The Centre has become a neighbourhood hub, serving a catchment area of 12,000 people.

The Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) has a long history of developing and maintaining multi-sector partnerships around a watershed-wide environmental concern: preserving the Grand River. Beginning in the early 1900s, the tradition of "cooperative watershed management" was initiated when the water quality of the Grand River was threatened (Veale, 2002). Even during these early years, wide public and private involvement and participation were essential. For example, the 1946 Conservation Authorities Act identified the importance of community-driven control and decision-making supported by government funding with regard to the watershed. This tradition of "cooperative management" has continued through the years as the GRCA evolves. In the process of working towards becoming a Canadian Heritage River, the GRCA created a plan that focused on "advocating a collaborative approach that is adaptive, on-going and flexible" and one that is "based on the concepts of consensus, commitment, co-operation and community involvement" (Veale, 2002). The GRCA's long history of collaboration continues as an important pillar of its strength, survival, and success.

Definitions

Many organizations depend on their partners in order to do their work. In fact, some of the literature indicates that partnerships within the non-profit sector are essential to its continued success, and are the means through which non-profits address the needs of the community (Torjman, 1998).

Partnerships and other kinds of relationships within the non-profit sector take many different shapes and sizes. They can grow out of long-term personal relationships, or they can be very formal arrangements with joint governance structures.

Not all relationships are partnerships, and they don't need to be. True partnerships include shared risks, accountability, responsibility and benefits (Torjman, 1998 and Frank and Smith, 2000). They require strong leadership, open and honest communication, common goals and objectives, willingness and energy to move toward a purpose, and a common understanding of expected results.

"Whether projects are talking about building partnerships, increasing community involvement, offering programs, or working with evaluators or government funders, the basic truths about building relationship seem to apply. From the first tentative steps of acquaintanceship, to the trust and faith that characterize mature friendships, the process of relationship building is slow and incremental, but can never be taken for granted."
– Sylvestre, 1998

Getting clear about relationships and partnerships

CLARIFYING RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION

Relationships and partnerships warrant a chapter in this manual because work in the non-profit sector is by its very nature cooperative. The focus here is on becoming more open to the ways in which you can allow other people to help strengthen your organization. The basic skills and strategies required are similar whether you are building relationships among your own volunteers, board members, and staff, or whether you are developing closer partnerships with other organizations. This first section explores strategies for coming to a better understanding of the relationships within your organization.

Because of the emphasis placed on gaining credibility (particularly with funders), some non-profits focus their energies on developing and maintaining external partners. In the process, they may not invest enough energy in some of their most important relationships: those among their own staff, board members and volunteers. Our experience suggests that these relationships are often the most important. They are also, in many cases, the source of external connections that eventually grow into meaningful partnerships. Although the sections that follow focus on partnerships, many of the suggestions apply equally well to the process of strengthening relationships among your core team members.

REVIEWING YOUR EXISTING NETWORK: WHO ARE YOUR CURRENT CONNECTIONS?

One of the most efficient ways of beginning the partnership process is to review the existing relationships and partnerships with groups or organizations outside of your organization. Organizations that have a history with each other can often move more easily into partnerships when trust and common values have already been established.

First, make a list of all of the people and groups that have a connection to your organization. Then, go through the list critically by asking the following questions for each partner (then, complete Worksheet 1, next page, to compare your results):

What type of connection does your organization have with this partner?

- Inconsistent or consistent
- Occasional or steady
- Other (specify) ____

What are the functions or activities this partner is involved in regarding your organization? Examples:

- Provision of leadership
- Provision of problem-solving capacities
- Provision of resources
- Contribution to service delivery
- Provision of expertise and knowledge
- Other (specify) ________________________________

What are the benefits of this partner's involvement?

- Increased expertise
- Increased service delivery
- Shared resources
- Increased awareness/promotion
- Eliminated duplication or overlap among similar groups
- Prevented closure or elimination of services
- Other (specify) _____________________________________

To what degree does this connection support and/or affirm your organization's values and principles? Examples:

- Makes good use of shared knowledge, experience and skills
- Increases ability, influence, credibility or standing
- Integrates ideas, activities and goals with others

Is there "unfulfilled potential" in this relationship? Are there ways it could be made more helpful to you and/or your partner(s)?

Worksheet 1: Analyzing Your Current Network of Relationships or Partners

	CONNECTION #1	CONNECTION #2	CONNECTION #3
What function does this connection play?			
Does this connection support / affirm our values?			
Is there unfulfilled potential?			

Interpreting this table:

- Are there important functions not served by any of your current connections?
- Are you sustaining multiple connections that all serve very similar functions?
- Is there a balance of practical help and support for your values within your network?
- Where does the greatest potential for growing more formalized partnerships exist?

"Addressing an issue from different perspectives helps people to recognize the community-wide impact and complexity of the issue. When problems on a larger scale are addressed and resolved, the benefits trickle down to individual groups and organizations."

–Axner, n.d.

"Multisector collaboration has the greatest potential for communities to become empowered and more democratic. In multisector collaboration, community members can become equal players with business and government in making decisions that affect community members and their human service needs."

–Axner, n.d.

Developing or maintaining long-term partnerships

Although some partnerships have short-term goals or one-time purposes, others extend beyond their intended duration, or have no expected end at all. For these longer-term partnerships, knowing how *to renew energy and commitment and keep things fresh* is essential to partnership maintenance.

Maintenance is an important part of relationships and partnerships. Depending on the nature of the partnership, there are a number of ways to approach maintenance strategies.

PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

Creating or re-visiting the partnership agreement or the purpose and expectations of the partnership ensures consistency and checks the relevancy of partnerships. Sometimes the partnership is still relevant, but the goals and objectives of the partnership are not. Other times, this process of reviewing your relationship can help you determine if and when the partnerships have run their course. A good partnership agreement will cover:

- Purpose of the partnership
- Principles to guide the partnership
- Clear roles and responsibilities of each partner
- Process for regular communication and resolving difficulties
- Resources to be shared and received by each partner
- Duration of the partnership

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN FORMING PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

- Who will benefit, and how (individuals, groups, organizations)? Who might be harmed through the partnership, and how? How will valued resources be shared? All partners should understand their roles, agree on how much and to what degree they will contribute, and be clear about expectations. Getting this down on paper together with your partners is a good starting point in building the structure of your partnership. Creating partnership structure ensures consistency and transparency regarding roles and the time and effort each partner is expected to contribute.
- Is there a common purpose? What is the function of the partnership? Is it intended to be: (Frank and Smith, 2000)
  - ~ *Consultative or Advisory:* Partnerships for the purpose of receiving feedback in order to influence community and/or policy change.

- ~ *Contributory:* Partnerships for the benefit of one or more community organizations. Objectives are established by the initiating group, and partners can agree to them or not.
- ~ *Operational:* Partnership for the purpose of setting direction for a product or service, but implementation is by one partner.
- ~ *Collaborative:* Partnership formed to share resources, risks, and decision-making. This is the most common to community-based partnership.

- Who will control the process (scheduling meetings, chairing committees, managing budgets)?
- How will we ensure that everyone involved participates actively? Find the channels of regular communication with your partners. Commitment and ownership come with mutual understanding, mutual problem solving and mutual sharing. *Credit, acknowledgement and celebration* are important, yet perhaps the most easily neglected aspects of partnership maintenance. Creating opportunities to remember, recognize, and celebrate the contributions of partners can require little effort and is a great way to nurture your partners and show them your appreciation for their support.

Once you have reviewed and analyzed your current partnerships, you may decide to bring one or more to the next level, to find and recruit new partners, or to end some existing partnerships. During your planning for new partnerships, consider branching out to different sectors. Although they may not be the "usual suspects" in your network, developing connections with other sectors can open the door for new opportunities that were not previously available to you. In multi-sector collaboration, private, public, and non-profit organizations from different parts of the community can form a successful partnership to solve systemic problems in a community.

Active involvement across different stakeholders and sectors can increase the buy-in of partners, improve the longevity of the partnership, and improve the chances of developing long-term, sustainable solutions (Torjman, 2001). Shared responsibility and action can also reduce power imbalances between different sectors and stakeholders in the community.

TIPS ON MAINTAINING PARTNERSHIPS

- be clear about your values and long term vision
- develop clear principles of working together
- ensure open communication
- respect diversity of opinion
- be aware of competing interests and conflicting agendas
- look for mutual benefits
- use consensus as a form of decision-making
- establish a conflict resolution process

—Axner, n.d.

Avoiding partnership problems

Difficulties can occur at various times throughout the life of a partnership, and a number of challenges during partnerships can disrupt or set back progress. Some of the problems partners can face include:

- contrasting goals or values,
- conflicts between different members of the partnership,
- communication break-downs,
- power imbalances,
- commitment imbalances,
- clashing organizational cultures,
- financial or budgetary losses,
- unequal work-loads,
- confusion about resource allocation.

WARNING SIGNS

Like all relationships, a variety of challenges and struggles can come up to set back your progress. When unmanaged, small problems can get out of control, or even sabotage your partnership altogether. Even at the beginning stages, some partnerships require a lot of maintenance. Recognizing the warning signs early can save you valuable time, energy and resources.

In *The Partnership Handbook* (2000) Frank and Smith describe a few red flags to watch out for, that indicate an unsafe partnership:

- If there are hidden motivations or agendas (e.g. if you feel that partners aren't communicating their true purpose)
- If the partnership creates tokenism or was established for appearances
- If there are power imbalances or if responsibilities, risks, and benefits are not shared

If you recognize one of these red flags, your partnership could be in trouble and you need to act. Worksheet 2 (next page) might help you stay on top and help to raise your awareness of your partnerships. The next section might help you determine what steps to take next.

MANAGING UNEXPECTED OR (EN) FORCED PARTNERSHIPS CAREFULLY

Not all partnerships are planned or even chosen by the organizations involved. As a result of the recent pressures on the non-profit sector, organizations have experienced incredible cut-backs on services and programs, and loss of choice and freedom. Some non-profits have even been forced to close their doors, while others have no other choice but to enter into unexpected (or even unwanted)

Worksheet 2: Weighing the benefits and the drawbacks of partnerships

Partner	Benefits of the partnership		Investments made in the partnership		Compromises required by the partnership	Challenges associated with the partnership
	For your organization	For the partner	By your organization	By the partner		
1.						
2.						
3.						

Looking at your completed table, ask yourself how things weigh in. Are you benefiting in any way from the partnership? Are there things you can live with to make it work?

"Many non-profit organizations question their ability to be equal players with business partners who may wield substantial economic power and political influence."
—*Torjman, 1998*

partnerships in order to survive. The Waterloo Region, like many other communities across Ontario and Canada, has been faced with these challenges.

One question non-profits might ask themselves when facing a situation like this, is: "What is best for our organization and for our clients/participants?" Although the answers to these questions are not clear-cut or simple, it is important to know what you are giving up and what you are gaining. Many non-profit leaders know that a delicate balance is necessary when making decisions that significantly affect your organization.

Worksheet 2 (previous page) will help you to self-reflect and map the benefits and drawbacks of each of your partnerships.

Partnerships in times of crisis

Sustainability often becomes a pressing issue when an organization faces a turning point. If funding has been cut, a key leader has been lost, or other unexpected twists have left you worried about the future of your organization, then part of your response may be to turn to your partners.

TIPS FOR EQUALIZING YOUR PARTNERSHIPS

- Analyze the balance of power by mapping out roles and dynamics. Check with others in your organization to make sure this perspective is shared and seek out solutions.
- Ensure equal representation of stakeholders.
- Practice democratic decision making.
- Emphasize both personal and professional selves.
- Provide excellent facilitation.
- Provide training and support.

REASSESSING PARTNERSHIPS

One of the most practical strategies during a "critical point" in your organization's development might be to return to the planning stage. In re-assessing partnerships, organizations may decide to build new partnerships or develop new goals and objectives. In these cases, starting anew with the strategies and principles used in planning may be a useful way to "re-create" the partnership.

BE CONSCIOUS OF POWER ISSUES AND RESPECT DIFFERENCES

Sometimes partnerships can cause challenges that threaten the identity or ability of one or more of the partners involved. Depending on the partners, their status in the community, their organizational culture, their economic status, and the reasons for working together, the partnership may cause a power struggle. Being open about this possibility early in the process will help to minimize any power imbalances.

RETAINING PARTNERS IN TIMES OF CRISIS

A significant challenge that non-profits face is retaining partners in the long-term, especially in times of uncertainty or crisis. Making sure that partners stay interested when energy is low or when you need support is a valuable skill and can contribute to sustainability in a variety of ways.

The GRCA was strategic in focusing their energies on their partners through times of crisis, which paid off. During the time of the cutbacks, there were many lay-offs, retrenchment, shifting-gears, but their goal was survival. The GRCA was surprised by the enormity of the cutbacks, however, they strengthened their relationships with partners, forming a strong team between the Authority and municipalities; the GRCA is renowned for its strong relationships with municipalities. Investing in partners is important at any stage, but remembering your relationships and partnerships when your organization is in trouble can increase your support structure, broaden your problem-solving abilities, and boost energy and morale by sharing the problem with a larger community. Investing in your partnerships during these times can also encourage wider responsibility and accountability so that the problems aren't only yours to carry, but are shared with the community.

TIPS FOR ACKNOWLEDGING YOUR PARTNERS

- Thank them by calling or sending a card
- Give them acknowledgement through advertising or media coverage
- Ask for their advice and take advantage of their skills, knowledge and experience when you need help
- Bring them together in problem-solving capacities

KNOWING HOW AND WHEN TO END PARTNERSHIPS

Sometimes relationships and partnerships end naturally, when the project is complete or the purpose of the partnership has been fulfilled. However, not all partnerships have happy endings. Some end abruptly and can leave one or more of the partners dissatisfied or even angry. Knowing how and when to call it quits can be difficult and stressful for all partners involved.

If you are thinking about ending a partnership, it might be useful to review your assets and resources and determine whether or not you have the capacity to go on without the partnership. Worksheet 2 (p. 25) may be helpful in working through some of these considerations. Here are some questions you can ask yourself:

- Are there any resources available to fill the gaps and strengthen the weaknesses in the partnership? What are they?
- What are you willing to sacrifice in order to maintain the partnership?
- What are you not willing to sacrifice in order to maintain the partnership?
- Will your partnership and your organization survive if you make those sacrifices?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of ending the partnership?
- What is keeping you from ending the partnership?

Most non-profit organizations will go through at least one period of crisis, and many people working within them may feel that successful non-profit work is learning how best to maneuver from one crisis to the next. Sticking to your values and your goals through these challenges can help you stay focused and make your organization stronger for the times ahead.

Assessing your partnership

When partnerships become consistent fixtures in your organization, one challenge is to know how to keep them relevant. Assessing your partnerships at various intervals is a good way of reminding you how and why they are important. It also ensures *accountability* of the partnership. Assessing your partnership might be as simple as reviewing your goals and purpose with your partners. However, depending on the value and impact of the partnership within your organization, you can also consider hiring a consultant to do a formal evaluation on the outcomes of your partnership.

Regardless of how rigorous the approach, here are a few things partners can do together to assess the partnership (Frank and Smith, 2000):

- Have a clear sense of your successes as well as your failures
- Agree on a process for sharing these successes and for acknowledging and addressing your failures
- Based on successes and failures, agree on what direction to take the partnership in for the future
- Be ready to revise/renew your partnership or bring closure to it

Taking partnership assessment to the level of evaluation creates an opportunity to examine partnerships in greater depth. Evaluation can guide improvements and new directions and provide valuable information and feedback, beyond the function of your partnership.

"Evaluation is the step in the process that allows a partnership to assess its progress and to measure success."

– Frank and Smith, 2000

Specifically, evaluation can measure progress, identify weaknesses, examine both the process and the outcome of your partnership, and help you to better understand goals and objectives. Through involving different stakeholders in the process, evaluation can also create buy-in, accountability, and ownership for all those involved.

Evaluation is ongoing. The reality of non-profits can change from moment to moment, which is important to keep in mind when deciding to evaluate. To ensure optimum effectiveness from your evaluation, you may want to find ways of continuing some or all aspects of the evaluation as your partnership and your organization evolves.

(For more information on evaluation, go to the Organizational Relevance chapter or to the References and Further Readings section at the end of the Manual).

Summary

Historically, non-profit organizations have always been involved in developing partnerships. However, it seems that more flexible and strategic partnerships are extremely beneficial to an organization's ability to be sustainable over time. As well, it appears that non-profits are increasingly utilizing various types of partnerships and relationships to facilitate their ability to conduct their work in the community. We hope that this tips and worksheets in this chapter can help non-profits: initiate and develop effective partnerships; maintain and review them; and finally to terminate them when necessary.

3. planning and leadership

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Local vignettes**
- **Strategic planning**
- **Volunteer recruitment and management**
- **Understanding leadership and leaderhips styles**
- **Internal communication and decision-making**
- **Planning and leadership in times of crisis or change**
- **Summary**

EXTEND-A-FAMILY

CAMBRIDGE SELF-HELP FOOD BANK

3. PLANNING AND LEADERSHIP

ONE OF THE COMMON THEMES in the sustainability stories we gathered was the importance of maintaining a sense of energy and purpose within a non-profit organization. The people we spoke with had many good suggestions about finding ways to move forward, innovate, celebrate and create a strong sense of ownership in a large group of core people. In Waterloo, one organization is completely committed to developing new leaders across the region.

Leadership Waterloo Region identifies and selects emerging leaders in the community and provides development opportunities for new leaders within the business, government, and non-profit sectors, with the aim of increasing community leadership capacity. Their annual graduate directory is a resource for other organizations seeking to fill volunteer leadership positions.

In this chapter, we bring together some of these ideas under the heading of planning and leadership. This chapter covers a wide range of related topics, including:

- strategic planning (the process of articulating a clear sense of direction and communicating it to others)
- volunteer development and management (the process of finding and supporting people capable of putting a plan into practice)
- leadership (which might be thought of as the process of passing your energy and vision along to others).

The chapter ends with a section on communication and decision-making within your organization.

Local Vignettes

Two local organizations illustrate how leadership and vision are crucial in maintaining and sustaining organizations. In different ways, Extend-a-Family and Cambridge Youth Soccer have had extraordinary leadership that has kept them moving and helped them maintain a strong presence within community, even when growth and change threatened to de-stabilize their underlying purpose.

> "No matter how well prepared you are, you are never prepared for this kind of impact … this was a 110 per cent growth for us overnight."
>
> *– Interview with Extend-a-Family, 2003*

Extend-a-Family has weathered many changes in the past 15 years. In 1988, it added a respite program, and then a family care program started in 1990. Since then, numerous other programs and services have been added to the mix. At the end of 1999, Extend-A-Family had a staff of eleven and about seventy contracts with individual support workers. A proposal for amalgamation and expansion was accepted at this time and by the beginning of 2000, the total number of contracts increased to 600. Seemingly overnight, the organization had to scramble to hire an additional 300 workers to meet the demand. This represented a monumental challenge and led to significant changes in organizational functioning and governance. In the past, Extend-A-Family consulted staff concerning decision-making and relied largely on an atmosphere of trust working within a typical community development model. The organization and its leaders shifted by making executive decisions without much staff input and adopting a more bureaucratic model of operations in order to survive. However, while in fact this way of operating was seen to be necessary in the short term, a determined effort has been made in the last year, to develop a model that is based on consumer/staff/board input. Much time and effort has been spent on developing an organizational Vision Statement.

Cambridge Youth Soccer officially began in 1972 and offers competitive and recreational-level soccer leagues to over 5,000 children annually. The group originally developed as a grass-roots organization and has grown considerably as a result of the interest and popularity of soccer for families in the Region. Part of the success of the organization is due to the emphasis on "fun." All players are valued and recognized for their efforts. The program develops leadership in children and youth that later benefit the organization. As a result, there is a strong leadership base that has developed from past players who come back to the program as volunteers, coaches and referees. The program's strongest and most valuable asset has been the volunteers who give their time as youth coaches and as role models to other players. Although the continued growth and size of the program has been challenging, especially with staff, volunteer, and structural limitations, the strong commitment of volunteers, coaches, managers and referees allows the program to continue.

Strategic planning

Strategic planning has fast become a key tool for governance and long-term maintenance of non-profit organizations. It is a method of mobilizing staff, board and sometimes other members in a visioning exercise for the organization or for specific programs and services. Strategic planning sets priorities, helps to determine what is and is not possible and can be a tool to rejuvenate energy and commitment within the organization.

Christopher Champlain Community Centre (CCCC) is a good example of how different groups, organizations and community members can contribute to a community planning exercise and develop solutions based on this plan. Strategic planning has been a valuable exercise at every stage of their work. The board continues to use strategic planning to enhance programming and facilities, and the community development worker has the skills to guide planning efforts in a strategic manner. This approach to program development and problem-solving has created a strong sense of community ownership: "the centre maintains the view that when the community owns the centre it will be responsive to community needs" (Interview with Christopher Champlain Community Centre, 2003). In addition, CCCC believes that working together through the challenges has allowed the strengths of the community to emerge.

WHAT MAKES A STRATEGIC PLAN REALLY USEFUL?

The simplest way to develop a strategic plan is to start with reviewing the vision, mission, and objectives of your organization. Whether you're reviewing these important components of organizational philosophy or whether you're developing them for the first time, the following tips and strategies are helpful for any organizational planning process.

Often, the development of strategic plans and mission statements take up a great deal of the organization's energy. There's nothing more frustrating than looking back and realizing that the product you have created is not being used or discussed within the organization. A good strategic plan should be concrete. Values or beliefs should be linked to their practical implications. The plan should also be action oriented. All of the content should be linked to statements about what the organization will do or won't do. It should also be dynamic, and capable of growing and changing over time.

Depending on the status of your organization, you should try to develop, review or revise the basics of organizational philosophy (Scott, Jaffe and Tobe, 1993):

Vision Your vision communicates what your organization believes are the ideal conditions for your community; how things would look if the issues impor-

TIP: CONCRETE PLANS

One good exercise that you can use to "test" your purpose statement was used recently by the Safe and Sound crime prevention project here in Waterloo Region. It is described below.

Think back over the last five years of your organization's history, and try to identify your most important achievements. Try to write down the things you are most proud of, and biggest contributions you have made to the community. Next, take a look at your purpose statement, and try to identify the things you would like to see on that list of proudest achievements five years from now.

(continued next page)

tant to you were all addressed. A vision statement makes the beliefs and governing principles of your organization clear to the greater community (as well as to your own members). In general, vision statements should be: (a) understood and shared by members of the community; (b) broad enough to allow a diverse variety of local perspectives to be encompassed within them; (c) inspiring and uplifting to everyone involved in your effort, and (d) easy to communicate.

Mission An organization's mission statement describes what the group is going to do, and why it's going to do it. Mission statements are similar to vision statements, but are more concrete and more "action-oriented." Some general guiding principles about mission statements are that they are: (a) concise; (b) outcome-oriented; and (c) inclusive.

Purpose Statement and Objectives Once you have reviewed or developed your organization's vision and mission, you can start building a purpose statement for your program or whatever you are focussing on for your strategic plan. A *purpose statement* is a description of precisely *what* you hope to achieve. It can be as short as a sentence or up to two or three brief paragraphs in length. To ground your purpose statement in the realities of your organization, review your: organizational records, policies and standards, organizational and other relevant research and literature, and your knowledge of local conditions. This helps to form the rationale for your program or organization.

Your purpose statement should describe:

- the needs you intend to address
- what you propose to do
- why you think it is important
- how your organization or program will make an impact on clients/ participants

Once you have a purpose statement, the next step is to think about your objectives. What does the program expect to achieve? In what concrete ways will it try to achieve the purpose?

Programs often have two types of objectives: outcome objectives and process objectives. Outcome objectives describe the expected benefits or changes for participants and often use words like "increased," "reduced," or "improved." Process objectives talk about *how* you intend to do this work. Examples include:

- treating all clients with respect
- ensuring that consumers control their services

Although many non-profits feel pressure to identify outcomes, process objectives are at least equally important. Consider two programs that both deliver meals to seniors. One is a private business that drops off frozen meals once a week. The other is volunteer-driven, and volunteers typically spend half an hour chatting to each senior as they drop off a hot, freshly prepared meal. Even if the nutritional outcomes of the two programs are the same, the profound differences in the way they go about achieving these outcomes are critically important in understanding each program.

Process and outcome objectives enable the leaders of an organization to develop program theory, which often guides and informs the governance of the whole organization, in addition to helping the strategic planning process. Other actions leaders can take in building program theory and developing program objectives include asking questions like:

- What is the program intended to achieve?
- Why does this program matter?
- What will be different because of this program?
- What are the important outcomes of the program?

DESCRIBING YOUR INTERVENTION

Having explored the questions of "why?" and "so what?" the next step in the development of program theory requires a much less theoretical and more pragmatic attitude. It is important to state, clearly and in practical terms, exactly what you do in the community (or, if you are planning a new intervention, what you intend to do). This description can take many forms, from a comprehensive list of activities, to a flowchart, to a set of guiding principles for practice.

One of the key challenges in describing an intervention is distinguishing statements about approach or process from statements about activity. For example, you might describe what you intend to do in a drop-in program with statements like those in the first column of the table on the next page:

Compare the two lists. If you are like most organizations, your list of past achievements will be much more concrete and practical than your list of goals or plans for the future. The list of past achievements will include things like "got the community centre built," or "increased the number of volunteers." The list of future plans will be much more abstract, including statements like "raise awareness of the issue" or "strengthen the network." See if you can translate some of these vague ideas into more concrete purpose statements, more similar to your statements of past achievements.

This statement about approach or process ...	... might go with this statement about activity
We will respect the diversity of parents who participate	Each week's theme will be presented in several different ways (e.g., text, videos, role plays), to fit different learning styles
We will create a welcoming environment for children to play and learn	Staff will welcome each child as they arrive, and try to learn and use the children's names

In the first column are two statements about program description regarding how the program will be managed, what kind of tone will be set, or what kinds of principles will guide practice – all of which are important parts of program description. On their own, however, they say very little about what staff, volunteers, or participants will actually do. In the second column are two more statements about program description that provide more concrete information about activity.

If you want to try to accurately describe the practice of a program that is currently operational, you may wish to:

- Bring together those involved in these activities (staff, volunteers, and possibly clients).
- Get them to brainstorm about all the things that occur throughout the day as part of the program. Encourage them to be as concrete as possible. For example, if someone says they "do home visits," try to get them to explain the activities that are involved (perhaps, listening to people's concerns, identifying early warning signs for health risks, sharing information, making referrals).
- Get them to write each activity on a cue card or post-it note.
- Work together to try to cluster all the activities everyone wrote down into "main components." Name these components.

You may also want to create a section to include tasks such as staff meetings, paperwork and other "behind the scenes" tasks.

Strategic planning is a useful exercise at every stage of your organization's existence. It can help you develop, review or revise your vision/mission/purpose/objectives, while providing an opportunity to bring the members of your organization together and involve them in the process of moulding who you are and what you bring to the community.

Volunteer recruitment and management

One of the most essential resources for non-profits is volunteers. Recruiting, managing and maintaining volunteers are important to the overall governance of organizations. In addition, volunteer coordination within non-profit organizations is a critical leadership role, since it can determine how many, and how long volunteers will contribute to an organization.

In Canada, 7.5 million people, or 31.4 per cent of the population, volunteered at organizations in 1997, giving over 1.1 billion hours of their time (Panel on Governance and Accountability in the Voluntary Sector, 1999). Many non-profit organizations would not exist without the dedication and commitment of their volunteers. In fact, some non-profit organizations operate solely with volunteers or are the result of volunteer organizing.

One of the biggest challenges non-profits face is maintaining the valuable resource provided by volunteers. There is some evidence to suggest that cutbacks to the voluntary sector have already begun to undermine the ability of non-profits to harness volunteer resources effectively. A study by the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy (2001) indicates that almost one third of Canadians volunteer, but that the average hours of volunteering have dropped since 1987. In addition, only eight per cent of volunteers provide the bulk (72 per cent) of volunteer time. These volunteers tend to be over 45 years of age, parents of children between the ages of six and 17, higher income earners, post-secondary or university educated, and religious. The study suggests that the biggest challenge and priority for non-profits is not only recruitment, but volunteer management (Hall, McKechnie, Davidman and Leslie, 2001).

Several local examples illustrate how volunteer recruitment and/or maintenance contribute to sustainability challenges and successes. For example, Wesley Apple Corps, who sell baked goods at the Cambridge Farmers Market to raise money for maintaining a heritage church in downtown Galt, have had the same group of dedicated volunteers for the past eleven years. This group depends on the continuous labour of its volunteers for its success, however that group is aging and they have had difficulty recruiting new volunteers.

The Community Healthy Helpers have experienced similar problems, with a small group of dedicated volunteers and high turnover of general volunteers. Cambridge Youth Soccer is now paying staff for activities that they could previously rely on volunteers for. Kids Can Play, a Cambridge program that provides monetary assistance to families for children's athletic and cultural activities, greatly depends on the commitment of board and committee members. The secret to their success has to do with their ability to grow at a pace that matches organiza-

"Recruiting volunteers might be more effective if recruiters recognized that volunteers are distinctive in different ways and to different degrees in different kinds of communities and in different regions of the country. Volunteer organizations can potentially improve their recruitment processes by taking account of these differences and using local profiles to target prospective volunteers."

– Statistics Canada, 2000

tional capacity, and in particular, the capacity of their board. In order to sustain the Compassion in Action program, the Cambridge Vineyard Church depends on a cross-section of community supports, and on the dedication and commitment of their volunteers in particular. These are just a few local examples of the importance of volunteer recruitment and maintenance and how volunteers contribute to an organization's sustainability.

Community perceptions, such as the de-valuing of unpaid work, can also undermine the important contribution of volunteers in the community. This is another challenge faced by the Community Health Helpers. This program brings together people from different ethno-cultural backgrounds that are interested in connecting with others in their own communities and helping them gain access to the resources and support they need. The Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre provides the group with meeting space, some administration support, and some staff support. The Community Health Helpers is a volunteer-run group. Although they are leaders and ambassadors for their communities and provide valuable education to health providers about culturally sensitive issues, one of their biggest challenges is credibility. As volunteers, their efforts are not always recognized as "real work" in the community and by service providers.

Although there is no simple solution to changing the way the community thinks and feels about volunteers, creating opportunities for acknowledgement and respecting volunteers is a small step toward bringing meaning and value to people that the non-profit sector depends on most.

In a study conducted about the non-profit sector, Statistics Canada (2000) suggests tailoring strategies to different audiences, which will appeal to specific groups, rather than taking a general approach to volunteer recruitment. During your recruitment process, or when working with your volunteers, there are a few simple rules (identified in Worksheet 3) that can make the process more effective and meaningful for everyone involved. This can also help you to tailor your approach to different audiences.

Incorporating volunteers into your organization is not without challenges. It is important that rules, policies and guidelines are in place to ensure that your volunteers are suited to your work and that their skills and abilities are used effectively.

Worksheet 3: Creating a Structure for Your Volunteers
(Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector, 1999)

Do you:	Yes or No	Describe
have a volunteer coordinator or have someone who takes responsibility for your volunteers?		
know why you need volunteers and know what role they will play?		
have clear policies about volunteer recruitment (i.e. do you target or screen volunteers)?		
give your volunteers clear direction, such as specific tasks and activities?		
follow a code of ethics or have guidelines regarding recruiting and managing volunteers?		
provide adequate orientation and training for your volunteers?		
have a process for evaluating your volunteers, volunteer training or volunteer management?		
formally celebrate and recognize the work and achievement of your volunteers?		
have a policy for dealing with difficult volunters or a process for dismissing volunteers?		

In many ways, governance and leadership go hand in hand. The Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector (1999) describes the balance between leadership and governance by identifying that effective governance is a result of responsible leadership within non-profit organizations:

"An organization's leadership has a moral, legal and fiduciary responsibility to its members, constituencies, users and beneficiaries, staff and volunteers, as well as the general public. Specifically, it is responsible for effective governance of the organization. This means ensuring that the appropriate process and structures are in place to direct and manage an organization's operations and activities, and to ensure that they function well. The ultimate goal of good governance is to ensure the effectiveness, credibility and viability of the organization."

– Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector, 1999

Understanding leadership and leadership styles

Leadership can be defined in several ways. It is sometimes defined as a quality, such as a personality trait that occurs naturally for certain people. Greenberg, Baron, Sales, and Owen (1995) define leadership as the "process whereby one individual influences other group members toward the attainment of defined group or organizational goals." Leadership can also mean the assigned, specific roles played by one or more people within a group or organization. Different layers or levels of leadership may exist at the same time in order to achieve various organizational goals.

Governance refers to the structures and rules within an organization, for the purpose of guiding staff, volunteers, board members and others connected to the organization. Governance involves the "processes and structures that an organization uses to direct and manage its general operations and program activities" (Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector, 1999). Effective governance helps an organization to perform efficiently and have the capacity to adapt readily to change.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD LEADER?

Good leaders can have many different characteristics, but generally, they: desire achievement, are ambitious, have lots of energy, are tenacious, take initiative, are honest and have a high degree of integrity. People often consider them to be trustworthy, reliable and open. Good leaders also have strong motivation and their energy is often contagious. They are self-confident and have faith in their own abilities. Good leaders should have the cognitive ability to integrate and interpret large amounts of information, and have strong, relevant knowledge of the field and related technical matters. Good leaders are creative and original. They are flexible and can adapt to the needs of others and various situations (Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1991).

Good leaders seek power as a means to achieve desired, shared goals. They use cooperation and partnerships to achieve their goals, rather than manipulation or force. People who lead for the 'right' reasons use leadership to help others, not to gain personal power. Good leaders are not dictators, but serve others and put the needs of the whole organization first (Greenberg, Baron, Sales, and Owen, 1996).

WHAT ARE 'LEADERSHIP STYLES'?

Leadership styles refer to "how leaders relate to others within and outside the organization, how they view themselves and their position, and – to a very large extent – whether or not they are successful as leaders" (Rabinowitz, n.d.). Leadership style is influenced by many factors, including ideas about what leadership is and what it does. Talking openly about different concepts of leadership can help to define expectations of particular ways of leading (e.g., exercising power, task orientation, empowerment, or providing and working toward a vision).

In what ways does leadership style influence the organization?

- It defines how your organization relates to the community and how the community relates to your organization.
- It can determine how communication occurs between staff and other members of the organization.
- It can determine whether or not the vision of the organization gets transferred through the programs and into the community.

Although it may be difficult to identify a specific leadership style in a given organization, it is often reflected in the nature of the organization (its purpose, what type of programs and services are offered, etc.) and in its relationships with the community. A leader's style can also define an organization (its culture, philosophy, purpose, etc.) and can shape the relationships within and among staff, participants, the board, and others. Leadership style can also influence policies, procedures, and program and service delivery. Because of the level of influence it can wield on an organization, consistency between leadership style and an organization's philosophy and mission is important to keep in mind when recruiting and hiring leaders (Rabinowitz, n.d.).

Below is a summary of four common leadership styles and associated characteristics (Rabinowitz, n.d.):

Leaders who Serve

- Hold the belief that leaders are equal to others, and that all team members learn from each other.
- Draw on the strengths of others and lead by allowing everyone to do what they do well.
- Actively seek out the opinions and ideas of those in the organization.
- Inspire others through honesty, awareness, empathy, passion, a sense of joyfulness, and an ability to overcome obstacles.
- Rely on a highly skilled and motivated team.
- May have difficulty managing conflict or poor work performance.

Collaborative/Democratic Leaders

- Ensure that decision-making processes are collaborative. Solicit and value opinions from staff members and others.
- Support group control over organizational vision and workings.
- Strive for consensus.

- Trust people to make good decisions when they have all the relevant information.
- See his/her role as provider of necessary information and facilitator of discussion.
- May take responsibility for final decisions (or sometimes involves a small group, such as an executive committee).

Autocratic Leaders

- Retain most of the decision-making power.
- Provide a predictable, highly-structured, stable and secure work environment, but at the cost of diversity, innovation, initiative, and personnel development.
- Emphasize maintaining authority, reward and punishment, and hierarchical structure.

Managerial Leaders

- Mainly concerned with an organization's effective functioning (e.g., securing funding, strengthening systems and infrastructure, or attention to daily tasks).
- Aware of what's happening in the organization.
- Can deal with issues quickly, fairly and firmly as they arise.
- Don't typically steer the organization, which can result in a lack of clear vision and sense of purpose.
- Often neglect to foster passion in staff members or to evaluate the changing needs of the population or community.

Catholic Family Counselling Centre is a local organization that attributes its success to strong leadership and defines its leadership and governance style through a "team-based working environment that empowers staff members to be collectively responsible for ensuring the agency achieves its mission" (Brothers, 2002). This resembles the collaborative/democratic style of leadership in that both staff and board contribute to the decision-making and direction of the organization and ownership is shared with everyone.

Leaders may have many characteristics of one of these sytles, or have some characteristics of a variety of styles. It may be beneficial to the organization if leaders are flexible in their style and if they are able to change and adapt when necessary. Although it is important for leadership style to complement the values and purpose of the organization, it may take time and patience for leaders to grow into their strengths and truly represent and complement the organization.

Examining your own leadership style or approach can remind you of the skills and abilities that you already have, highlight areas of weakness, and help you to determine what can be improved. Worksheet 4 (next page) highlights some questions you can ask yourself during this process. In order to seek out and recruit leaders who will best suit your organization, first, take a look at the qualities common to effective leaders and the various styles that leaders can offer.

This table can help you think about specific formal leaders in your organization, as well as informal leaders. Informal leaders – or those who lead naturally, rather than assigned into leadership roles – are often important assets to your organization for a number of reasons: they contribute to the work of other leaders; they may be more approachable than leaders in formal positions; and they may be good candidates as future formal leaders. Here are a few other things to consider when recruiting leaders (Rabinowitz, n.d.):

- Envision your leadership team
- Set leadership development goals for your group or organization
- Set leadership development goals for individuals
- When necessary, look for new leaders outside your organization
- Develop yourself as a leader
- Reach out to successful leaders in other organizations and find out what works for them
- Be prepared to change. Being open to both positive and negative feedback on your leadership style will help you make adjustments and move forward more effectively.

MESH BETWEEN LEADERSHIP STYLE AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Strong leadership is central to maintaining and perpetuating good organizational culture. Therefore, it is important that leaders and their particular style support the vision and purpose of the organization, that they complement staff and other members, and that they enrich the life and personality of the organization. Across Waterloo Region, non-profit groups and organizations have used a variety of methods to recruit and maintain leaders. For example, Cambridge Youth Soccer finds leaders through its volunteer network. There are approximately 4,000–5,000 children registered in programs each year. The organization relies heavily on volunteers to run the programs, providing many opportunities for leadership development through volunteering as a coach or a referee. Leaders of Cambridge Youth Soccer fold naturally into the culture of the organization. Former players of Cambridge Youth Soccer are later trained as coaches and referees. As a result, there are many leaders and responsibility is shared.

"Players often come back to the program as volunteers, coaches and referees. Leadership skills are developed that later benefit the organization."

Interview with Cambridge Youth Soccer, 2003

Catholic Family Counselling Centre has a strong history of providing professional counselling services to individuals, families, and the community in the Waterloo Region. The secret to their success and sustainability since their incep-

Worksheet 4: Analyzing Your Leaders

	BOARD LEADER(S)	STAFF LEADER(S)	VOLUNTEER LEADER(S)	OTHER LEADER(S)
What leadership responsibilities/roles do these leaders have?				
What are their strengths?				
What are their weaknesses?				
Suggestion for improvement (training, education, more opportunities to communicate, more leaders)?				

tion in the Region in 1946 has been strong leadership. Their current organizational culture reflects a belief in organization-wide leadership and sharing ownership across the staff and board. Their organizational culture document specifically states that all staff are entrepreneurs and each is responsible for developing solutions, developing programs and services, generating revenues and contributing to other resources (Brothers, 2002.). Catholic Family Counselling believes in and supports a strong connection between organizational culture and leadership to create a supportive, empowering, and effective environment for staff, board and clients.

Leaders are often the glue holding staff and other members of an organization together. Good leadership can instil a sense of solidarity, inspire energy and purpose among staff, board and/or volunteers, and ensure that others stay committed to the group or organization.

Leaders also transmit knowledge about the organization between staff, volunteers, the board and the community. Therefore, it is important that they are committed to the organization and represent it well, based on the values and vision.

One way to think about the match between leaderships styles and your organization's needs is to think of your organization as an entity that, like a person, goes through distinct developmental "phases" over time, and that the type of leadership required has to be matched to these phases.

Moyer (1990) is one author who has tried to identify the developmental stages of organizations. The table on the next page provides an adapted and simplified version of his system.

For more information on leadership, see Organizational Culture chapter.

"As a leader, you have to help people take your vision and make it their own. This is an important step in bringing people together to work toward a common goal. Members of a group need to have a shared vision and a sense of ownership in order to be committed to the group. That is key in helping people stay with a group for the long haul."

– Rabinowitz, n.d.

Internal communication and decision-making

Perhaps the most important quality of a good leader is the ability to practice strong communication skills. This is the foundation and formula for successful endeavours in many non-profit organizations. Supervisors can spend as much as 80 per cent of their time engaged in some form of communication (Mintzberg, 1973).

Whether communication is formal or informal, it should occur at all levels of the organization – board, staff, volunteers, partners (Greenberg, Baron, Sales, and Owen, 1996). The nature of communication patterns between members can greatly influence group functioning and either make life easy or difficult for leaders and everyone else involved (Shaw, 1978).

One lesson, based on the experience of Extend-A-Family with its mass restructuring and organizational change, was to practice continuous open communication between everyone in the organization. "Really listening" to people and paying

Stages of Organizational Development	Organization's Leadership Needs
Existing systems are failing in some way, and people begin to organize in order to address these problems.	Moderate, articulate visionaries who can explain the problem, build connections, and get ordinary people interested. Strategic, well-connected brokers who can lay a solid foundation.
Tensions in the system become acute, and the new organization grows in size and intensity – emotions run high. Public opinion shifts in response to crises or trigger events.	Exciting, charismatic, daring leaders who put the issue in the public eye.
Organization shifts towards longer-term, more moderate strategies – issue becomes seen as important and mainstream, there are fewer clear 'opponents."	Systems thinkers who can address underlying political or social issues, keep the vision clear in the absence of simple short-term solutions. Articulate, moderate educators who can sustain interest and build the volunteer base.
Organization becomes well established and successful. Ordinary citizens know about and support the work.	People willing to make a long-term commitment to the organization and direct the growing resources strategically and constructively. People who can sustain many different kinds of efforts at addressing the issue simultaneously.

attention to their needs can help make decision-making abilities more effective and foster a trusting relationship with staff, participants, and anyone else involved (Interview with Extend-A-Family, 2003). Listening and communicating does not necessarily mean that you agree with everyone, but the process of listening and providing information to others, especially during times of crisis, can alleviate stress and make people feel that their needs and opinions matter.

Planning and leadership in times of crisis or change

In times of change or crisis, organizations depend on strong leaders and effective volunteer management to sustain their sense of purpose and to guide them through the crisis. Leaders who are effective under these circumstances have the ability to energize staff, volunteers, partners and the board when people are stuck or discouraged; they can mobilize people around specific issues and concerns; and they can find solutions in unlikely places. Although problems and challenges can occur at virtually any point in the life of an organization, the obvious times are when something new is about to start, when something is about to end, when resources are stretched or low, and during times of transition. Because challenges are a reality and an ongoing part of non-profit work, there is a constant need to identify, recruit and create new leaders.

GETTING CLEAR ABOUT ROLES

Extend-A-Family went through enormous change in very little time. Massive growth in their services, their participants and their staff threatened to undermine the values of the organization and created many challenges and stresses for organizational leaders. Without the time to prepare for the change, the increase in participants and staff meant that current leaders within the organization took on considerable responsibility. Without adequate internal infrastructure to manage the increase in program participants, the leadership team was constantly faced with new, unexpected roles and tasks.

A lot of role clarity was necessary to move them from an organization where everyone did everything. One of the most important tasks was to define what it meant to be a supervisor and what it meant to be supervised.

On a smaller scale, Kingsdale Community Centre has faced similar struggles. This neighbourhood association evolved from a small local committee and eventually received support through the resources of several agencies and government bodies. Kingsdale learned the importance of diversified community buy-in and funding. However, maintaining paid staff and ongoing leadership has been the primary challenge as their work becomes increasingly complex. The agency has outgrown the current infrastructure and more staff and leadership support are needed to keep up with the growth.

Many non-profit organizations have probably gone through similar challenges with clarifying roles, especially when the organization changes in some way. The current context of non-profits leaves many with more work and fewer resources to address the needs of the community. As Extend-A-Family suggests, with the absence

"The leadership team was exhausted because you regularly worked 60–70 hour weeks plus weekends for the first year … we didn't have the infrastructure and the coordinators were out there matching up families and doing a lot of the secretarial stuff as well."

– Interview with Extend-a-Family, 2003

Leaders also face personal challenges, which can affect their work and the organization. Leaders can deal with personal challenges in a number of ways, such as:

- Taking personal time to regroup and replenish
- Maintaining a support network of people that understand your work and who you can go to for advice or just to talk
- Finding new challenges to become energized about
- Setting limits and maintaining your boundaries
- Remembering to keep the larger purpose of your work in mind

of resources the most effective solution may be to communicate with others and to take the time to define roles. In these situations, organizational leaders are integral in setting the tone for the rest of the organization to follow.

TAKING RISKS AND BEING FLEXIBLE

Many organizations in Waterloo Region identified the importance of risk-taking and being open and flexible to change. The realities of non-profits change so frequently that being able to "go with the flow" while maintaining the underlying vision and purpose of the organization may be one of the most valuable qualities a leader can have.

Several non-profit organizations across the Region of Waterloo have demonstrated this. Taking risks and finding alternative approaches to service provision illustrates commitment and a willingness to do what it takes in order to meet community needs.

The Cambridge Self-Help Food Bank (CSHFB) is an alternative food bank strategy that offers emergency food options, a food co-op, employment support, and several other programs to support low-income people. The goal of the organization is to provide people in need with food products in a way that preserves the dignity and self-respect of participants. It offers a holistic approach to food and to participants. The strength of this organization is its brave leadership and vision. It has a unique approach to food security by providing volunteer opportunities to co-op members. Although the CSHFB has experienced some difficulties receiving supplies, it is committed to its philosophy and approach to food security, and therefore, finds alternative ways of getting resources and food to members such as requesting that members participate in volunteer staffing (according to individual skill level, interest and life circumstance) and charging members a nominal fee.

Kids on the Block is a disability awareness program offered to schools and community groups that operates under the Independent Living Centre (ILC). The purpose of the program is to break down attitudinal barriers towards people with disabilities, by using puppets as a tool to reach children and youth in schools and other community groups that request a presentation. The program began in 1982, and is run by a coordinator and a group of volunteers. Since the program lost its core funding 10 years ago, the program has worked more with the ILC to implement creative strategies. Both staff and volunteers have taken on leadership roles when necessary and they have changed program delivery by reducing repeat visits to schools and other groups. In addition, the program receives strong support from the ILC and a number of community partners. Although the sustainability of Kids on the Block is fairly uncertain from year to year, the manoeuvrability, flexibility and creativity of key leaders has enabled its success for over 20 years.

Although the CSHFB and Kids on the Block are just two examples of how taking risks and being flexible can contribute to organizational sustainability, there are many leaders across the Region who use similar strategies and demonstrate their commitment to their communities by finding creative ways of keeping their programs and organizations alive in the long-term.

One of the most difficult and challenging tasks of leaders is making effective decisions during stressful times. When local organizations were asked what helped them during these times, a number of leadership characteristics were identified: ability to be realistic and clear, self-awareness about capacities and limitations, ability to step back and examine or reflect on service outcomes, and willingness to change. When reviewing services, it is important for leaders to consider current research, best practices, and service experience to date. It is also important that they not be satisfied with mediocre results.

For example, the Canadian Mental Health Association, Waterloo Regional Branch, provided employment support for individuals with mental health needs through the Club House Model. Through examination and reflection with all stakeholders, it was determined that the Club House Model did not go far enough in supporting people to reach their entitlement of fully integrated employment. A new approach was needed and the employment service was redesigned to provide individualized support to achieve integrated community employment opportunities and the Club House was closed. Services and service providers must be willing to look closely at the effectiveness of the services provided, and when necessary, risk change.

An innovative service that has remained strong and sustainable is The Welcome Home Initiative, which uses a peer model of leadership. Consumer/survivors, or people who have struggled with significant mental health issues, act as buddies to other consumer/survivors who are leaving hospitals. They provide support, connect people to services and help them with community re-integration. The challenge to sustain the Initiative has to do with balancing volunteer/informal leadership with professional/formal leadership in order to work with service providers and consumers at several levels within the system.

Tips on dealing with challenges and change

- Take the time to step back, analyze, and think strategically about your organization. A lack of resources and high demands of non-profits often force leaders and organizations to work at the emergency or crisis level. Wherever possible, try to incorporate a thoughtful process during challenging times, and invite others to join you. This will help you come to solutions that are grounded and that make the most sense for the community.

- Be aware of the size and capacity for growth of your organization. Good leaders take risks, but also have an awareness of the organization's limits.
- Understand your organizational life cycle and manage timelines and funding streams both business-mindedly and creatively. The Waterloo Regional Quilt Festival combines these two approaches quite effectively. The Quilt Festival is always looking for new ideas, new themes, new projects, and new ways to improve and be more self-sufficient. At the same time, they are constantly aware of building their credibility in the community. Being considered an important player of the arts and culture scene in Waterloo Region is always at the forefront of their thoughts and strategies.
- Make sure that the organizational mission stays relevant; have the ability/expertise/insight to reframe the organization and its programs according to the changing realities and dynamics of the larger community.
- At major organizational decision points, remember that you have options. At critical points, consider: (a) carrying on with what the organization is doing; (b) transforming the organization and its philosophy to meet the demands of new external situations or new strengths and abilities of the existing organization; (c) merging the organization with another related or different organization; or (d) closing your doors.
- For Extend-A-Family, the first year of the expansion was extremely difficult. During this chaotic period, a few specific things contributed to their survival:
  - ~ "sheer determination, tenacity and blind optimism"
  - ~ a committed, supportive board and leadership team
  - ~ staying focused on the good work, the small successes, and "serving families really well"
  - ~ getting a few key administrative staff, which gave them an infrastructure to handle the expansion
  - ~ paying attention to the process: really listening to staff and families to understand their needs, even in times of crisis
  - ~ understanding that where there are gains, there will be also be losses

Summary

An organization that can nurture and channel the energies of its members is better equipped to manage sustainability challenges. It seems that sustainable organizations are strategic in choosing leadership and the work they do (i.e. good planning). In Waterloo, non-profit organizations marshal the energy and skills of their members by clarifying and articulating their vision and goals, getting volunteers and other supporters to invest themselves in these goals, and by accepting the responsibility for keeping the vision clear when things get confusing.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Local vignettes
- Definitions
- Understanding your organizational culture
- Strengthening your organizational culture over time: deconstructing components of culture
- Culture in times of crisis: overcoming the challenges
- Summary

WATERLOO COUNTY AND AREA QUILT FESTIVAL

CATHOLIC FAMILY COUNSELLING CENTRE

4. organizational culture

4. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

WHETHER PEOPLE ARE AWARE OF IT OR NOT, culture exists in every organization. It first takes shape with the organization or group's inception, as a result of the original vision for the organization. Organizational culture is either maintained or changed through the leaders, staff, and/or volunteers that are involved throughout the life of the organization, and bring with them particular personalities, values, skills and abilities. In turn, this impacts organizational values, mission and purpose.

One of the secrets to organizational sustainability is self-awareness – knowing the culture or personality of your organization and knowing how it is perceived by the community. Understanding your organizational culture, and how it works for and/or against you brings knowledge and choice to your organization. As interviews with non-profit organizations illustrate, both are essential ingredients when working towards sustainability.

This chapter explores several components of organizational culture and provides some strategies for developing, maintaining, or changing your culture so that it works for you and for the community in which you work.

Local vignettes

The Waterloo County and Area Quilt Festival and Catholic Family Counselling Centre are two local examples of how organizational culture has played an important role in determining organizational direction, and in defining what an organization represents to its members and to the community.

The Waterloo County and Area Quilt Festival is a 10-day event celebrating the art and heritage of quilting. It began in 1996 as a small Festival and has grown to over 40 events in 10 communities by 2003. In 2002, it drew over 35,000 people from all over the world. It acts as a non-profit umbrella organization for a wide range of events, programs and services in connection to quilting and other related activities. Every year, the Quilt Festival organizes a "world piece" exhibition and invites a different international guest to showcase quilts from their country. International guests have included South Africa, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Japan. Visitors to the Festival come from across Canada, the US, and Europe. The Quilt Festival has a number of objectives, including:

- providing education and raising awareness on the history and art of quilting
- promoting the art of quilting across Canada and internationally
- celebrating the social function of quilting in communities

Key attributes in the Quilt Festival's success are versatility and an ability to grow and change in order to stay fresh and enhance community interest. Conducting planning and promotional activities is a continuous priority in the pursuit of their goals.

The Waterloo County and Area Quilt Festival has an organizational culture that stems from the energy and enthusiasm of its members and their desire to continually strive towards greater and more creative paths. It has gained national and international respect as a valued form of art and contribution to cultural heritage. With confidence, creative energy, and a self-awareness of its work and its culture, the Waterloo County and Area Quilt Festival continues to mobilize partners and communities around an important art form and to gain credibility as an initiative that enriches the local economic tapestry.

Catholic Family Counselling Centre (CFCC) is a local example of an organization that has maintained a strong vision and its values for over 50 years, and communicates this to its members throughout the community. There are more than 50 full-time and part-time employees of CFCC. A number of factors have contributed to its success, including strong leadership and an ability to successfully diversify funding sources. In addition, the staff of CFCC are said to be responsive and adaptive and they are all encouraged to be "entrepreneurs" for the organization. CFCC is a "non-profit, professional counselling agency whose team of passionately committed staff and volunteers sees its work as an expression of Christian charity through promoting well-being within individuals, families, and the community" (Catholic Family Counselling Centre Board of Directors, 2000). CFCC has a strong, clear organizational culture that is based on: the above values; the active participation of staff in decision-making; and staff ownership of programs, services and all other aspects of the organization.

Definitions

Organizational culture includes the symbols, ceremonies, rituals, and traditions of a group or organization. Organizational culture is what makes an organization unique and it is a direct reflection of the stakeholders within or connected to the group or organization, its reason for being, its history, and its goals and vision. The values of a group or organization are also an integral part of its culture, and there is often a dynamic interplay between values, symbols, traditions, and ceremonies (Mullet and Jung, 2002).

Healthy organizational culture is vibrant and doesn't remain stagnant. This is reflected within organizations that are willing to flow with change, while at the same time, remaining respectful of historical values and beliefs. Organizational culture also relates to energy, enthusiasm and excitement, and the intersection of these qualities with organizational structure. Self-awareness, creative thinking, and strategic planning are just a few characteristics that can contribute to good organizational culture.

Organizational culture can create a common bond between stakeholders, encourage and inspire people to continue with a group or organization, and keep organizational vision alive. On the other hand, organizational culture can also apply considerable strain on organizations and even sabotage them. How your culture grows, changes, evolves, and struggles all contribute to the sustainability of your organization.

Understanding your organizational culture

Although organizational culture may be difficult to plan for in an intentional way, an awareness of culture can be very helpful in other kinds of planning. With the help of local stories, we will illustrate various types and styles of organizational culture in order to come to this first stage of awareness and understanding. Throughout this section, we will provide some useful tips, strategies, and cautions to help you through this process.

BEING AWARE OF YOUR CULTURE

Having an awareness of your organizational culture is like knowing your personality. Few of us stop to think about the nature of our organizational culture, but it affects us just like the water in the bowl affects the proverbial goldfish. Organizational culture can also differ drastically between organizations that seem very similar to an outsider.

If you want to become more aware of your organizational culture, you can:

- Learn the history of your organization
- Check and/or re-visit your values statements *(see values Worksheet 5)*
- Try to get outside your usual way of thinking about your organization and identify some of the core assumptions of your organization and the assumptions held by individuals within your organization
- Be willing to change or challenge some of these assumptions or paradigms

Having strong analytical skills, a willingness to learn, and access to or knowledge of organizational theory will help you while you begin this process. Good documentation can be very helpful, particularly for older organizations where culture may have changed over time. Examples of good documentation might include stories about the history of the organization or up-to-date statements of vision, mission, and goals.

When organizational history has not been well documented, you may want to talk with past and/or current members. Staff, board members, partners, and volunteers are valuable resources to help you learn about the organization. They know the real-life experiences of the organization, and at one point or another, have contributed to the culture. Speaking with and observing the staff, board and volunteers will also help you to understand the norms, symbols, and dynamics of the organization.

Here are a few other strategies for identifying organizational culture (Mullet and Jung, 2002):

- Get involved in the organization's formal review and planning processes.
- Have informal processes that inspire critical reflection and introspection within the organization.
- Consult with other organizations to determine how your organization is viewed.
- Think about the way in which the size of your organization and the demographic/population it serves influences your organizational culture.
- Have an organizational history written, or create a pictorial "timeline" of your organizational history.
- Think about the ways in which your organization uses symbols (such as logos), stories, ceremonies (such as staff birthday celebrations, annual general meetings, employee reviews, promotions) or jargon.

The Community Health Helpers (CHH) program, administered through the Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre, brings people together from different ethno-cultural backgrounds who are interested in providing support and education to members of their communities that don't have access to the resources they need. The CHH is a volunteer-run leadership group that bridges information and resources on health and a variety of other issues to isolated people within their communities.

During an interview with the group, members identified a number of their goals and objectives, including: valuing and utilizing the knowledge and skills of the CHH, experiencing peer support among the CHH, developing relationships between the CHH and other community members, and addressing the needs of various communities. Although many of the volunteers are transitory, there is strong commitment and dedication from the main leadership body. Even though there is a culture of change in the group through volunteer turnover and the changing needs of the community, a large part of the group's culture is also defined through the passion of its leaders, principles of inclusion, and valuing of diversity.

Taking the time to get to know your values and your assumptions is an important first step in understanding organizational culture.

Here's an example of Worksheet 5 (next page) from a hypothetical organization offering arts and crafts workshops and events:

What we believe: • All people should have exposure to art and are capable of creativity • Our services should be accessible to anyone who needs them	**And what we do:** • Run events at non-traditional locations • Translate our materials into several languages • Offer workshops to all citizens **And what we don't do:** • Compare or judge artworks, hold competitions
What we assume: • Art has an important role in movements for social change and is inherently "political" • Our program participants have a responsibility to "give back" by volunteering in the community	**And what we do:** • Form partnerships with advocacy groups • Make use of the media to get out the organization's messages • Encourage people to volunteer **And what we don't do:** • Reach out to traditional rural craft clubs and associations

Worksheet 5: Reflecting on Organizational Values

<table>
<tr>
<td rowspan="2">What we believe:
• Write down some of your core values or beliefs.</td>
<td>And what we do:
• Identify some of the ways in which your values are visible in the things your organization actually does.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And what we don’t do:
• Identify some of the things you don’t do because of your values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td rowspan="2">What we assume:
• Identify some of the unwritten, unstated things your organization tends to assume or take for granted.</td>
<td>And what we do:
• How are your unstated assumptions played out in what you do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And what we don’t do:
• How do your unstated assumptions play a role in your decisions about what you choose not to do?</td>
</tr>
</table>

Strengthening your organizational culture over time: deconstructing components of culture

Culture is the unique personality within your organization and the drive behind your purpose. It is often changeable. When changes from outside or within your organization occur, they can also have an effect on organizational culture.

In order to manage the impact these changes have on culture, first steep yourself in the components of your culture and understand how each of these components function individually, and together.

"Although organizational culture is generally stable, it is not immutable. Culture often evolves in response to outside forces as well as deliberate attempts to change the design of organizations."

– Greenberg, Baron, Sales, & Owen, 1995

HAVING ORGANIZATIONAL DIRECTION

Having clear direction (purpose, self-awareness, vision) is an important part of sustainability efforts in non-profit organizations. Having a clear sense of purpose, combined with the ability to really understand and implement the organization's values, mission, vision, and objectives are critical.

This provides a framework for the organization and its members to live and work by. How staff and other members of the organization choose to work within this framework is a function of organizational culture. *(See Chapter 3: Planning and Leadership.)*

Having energy and excitement about the purpose and goals of your organization helps to keep momentum going and motivates the people who will carry out the work in the community. The Waterloo County and Area Quilt Festival is a local example of how a strong commitment to vision and purpose can be acted on and shared within the community to push the organization into new directions and achieve larger goals. The Quilt Festival is constantly challenging itself to come up with new, innovative ways to make quilting exciting and to spark community interest. Energy, creativity, community responsiveness, and the quilts themselves are all part of the organizational culture of the Quilt Festival.

"If we got closer to non-profit organizations, we might be surprised to learn that even some of their own members aren't entirely sure of the organization's goals; they only know about a specific project they are working on at that moment. Very often, these organizations end up slipping quietly away; they lose their momentum, they lose their funding, and finally, the organization is gone, with no one other than staff really noticing much."

– Nagy and Fawcett, n.d.

TEAM COMPOSITION, DYNAMICS, AND SYNERGY

Although values are at the heart of organizational culture, the actions of staff, volunteers and other members of an organization can support and reflect these values, cause changes in them, or undermine them. The energy, attitudes, and personalities of the members of a group or organization create dynamics that can influence the social and structural reality of an organization and determine what everyday life is like inside that organization.

When the members of a group or organization determine a group's reality, the results can be powerful, both within the organization and in the community. When it comes to recruiting new staff, board members or volunteers, keep organiza-

"As the mission, vision and strategy express the outer purpose of the organization, its work in the world, the organizational culture expresses its inner life and character – the way in which it pursues its work in the world."

– Soal, 2000

tional culture in mind by choosing people who will contribute to or complement your culture. Here are a few questions to ponder during staff and volunteer recruitment:

- Do this person's professional/personal goals and values match the goals, values, objectives and purpose of the organization?
- Will this person fit in or mesh with other members of the organization?
- How does this person add to the culture?
- Could this person adequately represent the organization or act as an ambassador?

In order to maintain your culture, there should be a good fit between new staff, the values of your organization, and current members of your organization. Being careful about staff and volunteer selection can diffuse problems before they arise, such as staff dissension, poor communication habits, or conflict. *(For more on volunteer recruitment see Planning and Leadership chapter.)*

An important part of organizational culture is that members feel a sense of belonging – that they are an important part of the work of the organization and the team itself.

When the team within a group or organization does not gel or when the members are transient, it is more difficult to meet the needs of the community, produce consistent work, or gain credibility in the community. The organizational culture of Community Health Helpers relates to the needs of new Canadians and with how services and resources are provided to them. Many of the CHH are fairly new to Waterloo themselves and are in transition. Although there is a strong core leadership body, there is high turnover of other members and they have difficulty maintaining a consistent group of volunteers. They also have difficulty as a volunteer-run group. These issues have affected their credibility as a valuable, knowledgeable resource.

"A team is a group of people with a commitment to one another, to the team, to a high level of achievement, to a common goal, and to a common vision. They understand that team success depends on the work of every member."

– Nagy and Fawcett, n.d.

Although a number of uncontrollable circumstances can cause retention problems, applying these few simple strategies may help you develop or maintain group cohesion:

- Making sure everyone agrees on and is clear about the vision of your group/organization
- Creating opportunities for the team to bond, such as staff outings and team-building activities
- Involving the team in decision-making that affects the organization and creating opportunities for members to participate at various levels within the organization

- Creating a structure for regular communication, including problem-solving and conflict resolution
- Providing individual and team support
- Recognizing and celebrating accomplishments

LEADERSHIP

Leaders usually play a key role in reflecting and/or determining organizational culture. Leaders have the ability to either strengthen or significantly alter organizational culture, and often have the power to do so. Therefore, consideration of culture during leadership recruitment is also very important. A leader that suits your organization can enrich organizational culture, protect it when necessary, and know how and when it should evolve. *(For more information, go to Chapter 3: Planning and Leadership.)*

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Inside the culture of an organization, people learn how to dress, how to act, and even how to communicate with each other appropriately. Once people adjust their attitudes and behaviours to organizational culture in a consistent way, individual personalities become part of the fabric of the organization, along with the other members. Communication patterns between these members are one example of how individual personalities can influence organizational culture. Unhealthy internal communication such as gossiping or the absence of conflict-resolution skills, can be challenging for any organization.

Open internal communication is important to create an environment where dialogue is possible at all levels within the organization. This should be initiated, encouraged and modelled by organizational leaders, who can set the standard for other members to follow.

The success of the Community Health Helpers depends largely on good internal communication. They come together on a monthly basis to share knowledge and provide support to each other and to bring what they've learned back to people in their communities. How they relate to each other and their ability to remain open and trusting with each other is vital in order to keep a culture of mutual support and resource-sharing alive.

Some tips on creating good internal communication in your organization (Rabinowitz, n.d.):

- Practice what you preach. To ensure open communication between members, it should start with and be modelled by organizational leader(s). If you find that there is unhealthy internal communication

"The style of an organization's leadership is reflected in both the nature of that organization and its relationships with the community. If a leader is suspicious and jealous of his power, others in the organization are likely to behave similarly, in dealing with both colleagues and the community. If a leader is collaborative and open, she is likely to encourage the same attitudes among staff members, and to work collaboratively with other organizations. In many ways, the style of its leader defines an organization. If the organization is to be faithful to its philosophy and mission, its leader's style must be consistent with them."

– Rabinowitz, n.d.

> "Good internal communication will flourish if you can create an organizational climate of openness that is conducive to the free flow of communication and information in all directions; adjust your organization's systems or develop new ones to encourage, rather than discourage, internal communication; and create clear definitions of what needs to be communicated and by whom."
>
> – *Rabinowitz, n.d.*

within your organization, take a moment to reflect on your own communication style to see if it contributes in some way.

- Treat everyone similarly, regardless of their position or how you feel about them personally. Communication is important for everyone within the organization, and perhaps most importantly, between clashing personalities. Communication can be the mechanism through which your differences are resolved in a productive, respectful way.
- Be sensitive to different styles of communication, including your own.
- Be culturally sensitive to communication – there are many different styles and methods of communication. Understanding how your members communicate will make things easier for the whole organization.
- Make sure information flows in all directions. This can happen at staff meetings, or simply by inviting members of your organization to communicate in a way that is constructive and appropriate. You can make sure this happens by holding personal/professional development sessions on healthy communication, or simply by bringing your members together and discussing how healthy communication should look.

Once you ensure that communication occurs within your organization, develop methods to monitor and/or assess it so it continues to be productive and effective.

Some tips on monitoring internal communication (Rabinowitz, n.d.):

- Ask your staff if the level and type of information that is circulated in your organization is adequate and appropriate to their needs.
- Ask for feedback and encourage participation during staff meetings and during decision-making processes.
- Discuss internal communication with your staff and make it a priority during staff meetings, professional development sessions, or retreats.
- Examine how long it takes for information to travel through your organization, what key people pass it on, and how accurately it is passed on.
- Try to determine how long it takes for problems to be resolved – try to measure the size and frequency of the problem over a specific period of time and how fast it is reduced.
- Try to identify and rectify sticking points at the individual, group, and organizational levels.

MATCHING CULTURE AND STRUCTURE

Another aspect of organizational self-awareness is making sure that your organizational culture is in synch with your structure. When culture and structure mesh, your organization will run more smoothly and consistently. Organizational structure is also how culture is "articulated and reinforced" and the framework around which the group is organized (Zdenek, 2003).

Organizational structure can include governance, or rules by which the organization operates, as well as the distribution of work. Whereas culture is the personality of the organization, structure is the framework in which it exists. These two work in conjunction. Organizational structure gives people guidelines as well as boundaries for their actions, and it keeps the organization and its members together (Neggy, n.d.).

When policies and governance work well with the organization's members and the overall climate within the organization, there is a greater chance that the staff and other members will be happy and that the organization will run smoothly. Ultimately, matching organizational culture with organizational structure will allow for greater sustainability of both.

The Cambridge Self-Help Food Bank is a local example where there is a conscious matching of organizational culture with structure. The goal of the organization is to provide short-term emergency food, while, at the same time, provide a food co-operative for longer-term use. Both of these services are delivered in a way that preserves the dignity and self-respect of participants. Through a self-help model, the goals and objectives of the organization are brought to life through the commitment and partnership between the staff and the participants who volunteer their time in return for food. This model allows little room for disconnect between organizational culture and structure. In fact, the unique strength of the Cambridge Self-Help Food Bank is illustrated in the consistency between its culture and its structure.

When culture and structure clash within an organization, it can be very difficult, or even impossible, to change fixed behaviours, norms, and habits within an organization. Culture changes slowly and in incremental moves. The process of becoming aware of your organizational culture is a start, but changing it takes time and patience, particularly because it is intangible, it is the result of a number of varying factors, and it can be a direct result of or strongly linked to your organization's history. Changing organizational culture takes careful, strategic planning through an awareness of the past or history of the organization, looking at individual will and motivation of the members, and then making a series of action plans to change the things that are more visible and easier to grasp conceptually.

Sometimes, the solution isn't to change the culture but to learn to apply it more directly to your structure (Soal, 2002).

Wherever you are in the process of matching your culture to your structure, it is important to make the process transparent and open to everyone within your organization. This will help maintain cohesion and ownership between all members in improving the organization.

DECISION-MAKING STYLES: PROCESS, OUTCOMES, OR BOTH?

Another aspect of culture and maintaining your organization over time is decision-making style. When making decisions about your organization – whether they have to do with recruitment, roles, governance, or program delivery – do you focus on how you arrive at decisions or the decision itself? Examining how you make decisions can help determine if decisions are based on your values (i.e., all staff should take part in decision-making, various stakeholders should be involved in all aspects of the organization) and how you actually do what you said you will do (i.e., outreach to 50 families, hold two annual volunteer-training sessions).

Balancing your organizational philosophy and values with maintaining efficiency and productivity is not always simple or easy, especially if you are not aware of an imbalance. Here are some questions that will get you thinking about how your organization makes decisions and whether you maintain a balance:

- What is the organization's leadership style (see pages 41–42 for styles of leadership)? How does it influence decision making?
- How are decisions made in your organization?
- Who is involved in the decision-making process?
- How long does it take you to make a decision that affects the whole organization?
- How often are decisions second-guessed or tabled until a later date?

Although different decision-making styles may apply to particular situations, an awareness of this can help you determine if your style works best for your group or organization.

CELEBRATE VICTORIES AND HAVE FUN!

"There is an emphasis on playing for fun … Participation is valued and players often come back to the program as volunteers, coaches and referees."
– Interview with Cambridge Youth Soccer, 2003

Another part of healthy organizational culture is celebrating. It is important that organizations recognize accomplishments, acknowledge people for their hard work and commitment, and make time for fun! Celebrating victories and creating the time for fun can reassure the staff, board, volunteers and partners of your organization that their work is appreciated and rejuvenate them to continue the work.

The timing of celebrations might be obvious, but below is a reminder about for whom and when celebrations can take place:

- When program goals are achieved or at the completion of a program
- When funding is granted
- When a new partnership is developed, when a partnership achieves it goals, or at the completion of a partnership
- When new staff join the organization or when staff move on from the organization
- For staff birthdays or the anniversary of the organization
- For volunteer/board appreciation
- During annual holidays
- To reconnect with or show appreciation for staff

A number of local organizations have identified the importance of recognition and celebration. For instance, an important part of the culture of Cambridge Youth Soccer is ensuring that participants and their families enjoy the experience. Cambridge Youth Soccer emphasizes this so that participants will keep attending, whether as returning participants, or later as coaches or referees.

Celebrating and having fun can also orient new members into the organization, help to reduce burn-out of existing members, and give you an opportunity to appreciate the organization, its members, and even your own work.

Culture in times of crisis: overcoming the challenges

BEING CONSCIOUS OF CULTURE IN TIMES OF CRISIS

When other problems threaten the security of programs, or the sustainability of your organization, it may feel almost impossible to step back and critically reflect on the personality of your organization and its intricate workings. However, several organizations throughout the Region of Waterloo have illustrated that critical reflection, resourcefulness, and creativity have worked, even during the most critical times.

When the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) lost 70 per cent of its provincial funding, they were devastated. Their reaction was to tap into important partnerships and find creative ways of stretching the resources that they did have. The GRCA has a long history of developing innovative methods of accessing and leveraging their resources, such as cross-sectoral partnerships and maintaining a culture of community ownership of the GRCA. Fast-acting skills, self-awareness, and accessing a variety of resources enabled them to continue their work even during the most critical times. This ability to “think on your feet” and look for creative solutions when crisis strikes is one reason why so many non-profit groups and organizations continue to exist.

SEEING THE "BIG PICTURE" AND PREVENTING SELF-ABSORPTION

In times of change or crisis, one of the most difficult tasks can be to keep a "big picture" or macro-level perspective. Not surprisingly, organizations become focused on the problem, and for a number reasons, turn inward to mobilize resources, solve problems, and take measures to try and avoid long-lasting impacts that could damage the organization. These problems can become all-consuming, causing you to get behind on other aspects of your work or other needs in the community.

"[We are] continually creating partnerships and re-organizing the program to cut down on expenses … We re-vamped the program so it's more tailored to each audience and complete with one visit, rather than repeating the location more than once a year."

– Interview with Kids on the Block, 2003

Kids on the Block is a local example that illustrates the importance of maintaining vision and at the same time, an awareness of the needs of the community during times of crisis. Kids on the Block is a disability awareness program offered to schools and communities and administered through the Independent Living Centre. Funding problems and inconsistent leadership have threatened the sustainability of the program several times. Fortunately, Kids on the Block was able to stay focused and resolve problems as they arose.

Although staff, volunteers, and funding resources have been continually unstable, Kids on the Block continues to raise awareness and provide education about disabilities to grade school children in a way that upholds their vision and purpose. Throughout the program's 20-year history, fostering a culture of creativity and flexible leadership helped to implement the strong vision/mission that the program promoted.

KNOWING WHEN TO SEEK OUTSIDE FEEDBACK AND/OR CONSULTATION

Although being aware of the danger and potential for self-absorption is helpful, it may not prevent it from happening. Seeking outside, objective help may help you get a fresh start and a fresh look at your organization. First, consult your staff and board to exhaust the possibility of finding solutions internally. This is also a good opportunity to ask the members of your organization if they know someone who would be appropriate for advice or consultation. Knowing who to contact and when to contact them depends on the issue and what's at stake. Organizations seek outside consultation for a number of reasons, including:

- Mediation between members or partners
- Conflict resolution
- Evaluation and other types of research
- Financial advice

If and when you decide to go outside for advice or consultation, you may want to consider finding someone whose values are similar to yours, but who can remain objective. Compatibility can help to ensure that strategies are appropriate for your organization. At the same time, your consultant/advisor should be distant enough to remain professional and put your interests first. When seeking outside help, be sure you understand the problem well enough to ask for specific advice for optimum solutions.

During their expansion, Extend-a-Family identified two ways in which they sought feedback for their problems: through outside consultation, and through the open, continuous communication of their leadership team.

This combination of external and internal problem-solving created an environment where communication was open and honest, while problems could be solved efficiently, effectively, and appropriately.

BRAVERY TO MAINTAIN CULTURE IN TIMES OF CRISIS OR CHANGE

During times of significant change to your organization, it may feel impossible to maintain your values. It may seem easier to "let go" of or compromise your values in order to make transitions easier, to accept funding, or to form a partnership, rather than lose your organization altogether. Sacrificing some of your values may be your only option for survival. Organizations also need leaders who will take calculated risks, stand by the values of the organization and trust that things will turn out.

The values and purpose of Extend-a-Family were tested when their infrastructure completely changed, practically overnight. Throughout staff, leadership, participant and program changes, the leadership team remained optimistic. This anchored the organization and helped it survive.

Expanding from a relatively small organization that served 70 families to one that served over 600 families, the organization came up against a number of challenges. Throughout this time, staying loyal to their original values and principles was extremely important. This kept the leadership team committed and, ultimately, the organization together.

TESTING YOUR ASSUMPTIONS AND CULTURAL COMPETENCY

Organizational culture often begins with the founders of a group/organization or with the first staff of an organization. These people have a strong vision and set the tone of the organization with their values, beliefs, and assumptions. However, over time, the needs of the community can change and the staff and other members of the organization will grow and evolve. When change occurs, critical reflection and checking with the community can help organizations remain relevant and able to meet the needs of a changing community. Testing your assumptions is a first step in the process of critical reflection. *(See Chapter 4: Organizational Culture for more information.)*

"When we felt like we were sinking, we went and got advice. Don't be afraid to go to consultants. We had two consultants: one who did the organizational review… [and then] someone who knew us and the organization really well, who spent a day with the team and was able to give us some really good advice. We as a leadership team also made an agreement early on to be brutally honest with each other, to tell it as it is, so that we could have that sanctuary and safety of saying how we're feeling and what we were dealing with and that we would feel free to call on each other for things. …And seeking advice from someone who would say 'this is what I'm seeing' made all the difference."

– Interview with Extend-a-Family, 2003

"I am eternally optimistic and I always believed that things were going to get better and that we would get through this. There were some really bad times, but I believed that we could serve families really well and I think that that was what kept us going. We did have some successes in that we could see some progress and families were being matched. There were enough little gains that we could see some light."

– Interview with Extend-a-Family, 2003

"A culturally competent organization has the capacity to bring into its system many different behaviours, attitudes and policies and work effectively in cross-cultural settings to produce better outcomes."

– Brownlee, n.d.

Checking what you believe, identifying how you understand problems, and examining how you solve problems are all part of testing assumptions. When communities become more complex and diverse, it is important for organizations to continually re-examine and challenge themselves in relation to the social environment around them. Actively aligning your organization with the community and its needs can increase organizational effectiveness and ensure that your work is grounded in the community and determined by the community.

A question to pose to your organization is: do the values, beliefs and norms of the organization reflect the diversity of the community? When organizations do not have the knowledge, skills, or capability to reflect the diversity of the community, there is a need to build cultural competence into organizational culture.

Building cultural competence enables organizations to work more effectively and collaboratively on problems in the community and to continue to challenge beliefs, assumptions, and problem-solving techniques. The following are some action steps for building culturally competent organizations (Brownlee, n.d.):

- Encourage and develop support when and if you need to make structural or organizational cultural changes within your organization
- Involve various groups that represent and reflect the demographics of your community and involve them in the process
- Identify the barriers that community members might face in participating in or working with your organization
- Assess your current level of cultural competence by looking at the knowledge and skills you possess, what gaps exist, and what areas should be improved
- Identify what resources you will need to become culturally competent
- Identify your goals and objectives regarding cultural competency and the steps you need to take in order to achieve them (include a timeline)
- Incorporate an evaluation process to make sure that you are successful in meeting these goals and objectives

Building cultural competence is just one of the ways in which organizations can challenge the assumptions and norms within the culture of an organization. It is important to examine and reflect on other assumptions you may have and take steps towards building a culture that is consistent with the community and supported by the members of your organization.

Summary

Organizational culture has its roots at the inception of a group or organization, and sometimes even prior to that. As culture evolves there are a number of things you may want to consider to maintain good organizational culture that accurately reflects who you are and what you are trying to achieve in the community.

"One of the major challenges that organizations face is how they manage the growing diversity of our society in terms of gender, race-ethnicity, language, communities, and special interests … Shared assumptions, values and beliefs vary among different cultures and ethnicities. Organizations need to test their basic assumptions in light of growing diversity, and reflect whether the mission and philosophy of the organization should be altered. Strong leadership can help the organization respond to a more diverse society."

– Zdenek, 2003

5. organizational relevance

IN THIS CHAPTER

- **Local vignettes**
- **Understanding community needs and the relevance of organizations**
- **Identifying capacities in your organization**
- **Evaluating your outcomes**
- **Communicating about (marketing) your work**
- **Summary**


GRAND RIVER CONSERVATION AUTHORITY


THE COMMUNITY HEALTH HELPERS

5. ORGANIZATIONAL RELEVANCE

ORGANIZATIONS MUST REMAIN RELEVANT and useful in order to survive. The point of this chapter is to review some of the many ways in which non-profit organizations can improve their understanding of community needs and develop a stronger sense of the ways in which they are best equipped to help.

Some local organizations actually see relevance as a higher priority than sustainability. Staff and volunteers at Argus Residence for Young People, for example, report that their lack of regular government funding forces them to be responsive to changing community needs in order to survive, by doing things like amalgamating life skills and shelter programs. They say that their long-term goal is not to be sustainable as an organization, but to "work themselves out of a job" by creating a better community for youth.

The following chapter reviews how local organizations have maintained relevance in the community and provides a number of useful tips and strategies to help you do this in your own organization.

Local vignettes

Pursuing efforts and activities to remain relevant and ensuring that your organization is viewed as relevant within the community is a task faced by all non-profit organizations. The Community Health Helpers and Argus Residence for Young People are two local examples of how relevance can be a challenge for non-profit organizations – both in how they view themselves and how they are viewed by the community.

The Community Health Helpers is a program that brings together people from different ethno-cultural backgrounds that are interested in bridging with others in their own communities and helping them gain access to the resources and supports they need. The Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre provides the group with meeting space, some administration support, and some staff support. They come together on a monthly basis to share: knowledge and experiences; ideas about linking and advocating with the community; different ideas of providing support; and ways of accessing resources and information from health professionals and others and bringing it back into their communities. Although the Community Health Helpers are leaders and ambassadors for their communities and provide valuable education to health providers about culturally sensitive issues, one of their biggest challenges is maintaining their relevance and credibility within the community. As volunteers, their efforts are not always recognized as "real work" and they continually work to convince others that their work is important and valued, even though it is not paid.

Argus Residence for Young People is an emergency and transitional shelter for youth between the ages of 16 and 24 who are in crisis in the Cambridge community. Since they began in 1985, Argus has been providing shelter services along with life skills programs to prepare youth for healthy and viable community integration. They are a grass-roots organization and up until recently were without any regular source of government funding. Although lack of core funding has been one of their major challenges, this also provides them with flexibility in service and program delivery. Their self perception of relevancy is different from many other organizations, in that they strive towards working themselves out of a job.

Understanding community needs and the relevance of organizations

The first step in becoming responsive and relevant is developing a better understanding of community needs. Non-profits have always relied on informal conversations with their clients and networks and a willingness to go out into the community and meet people on their own turf to develop a sense of the key local issues. However, local organizations in Waterloo Region are learning that it isn't always enough to rely solely on informal methods of understanding community needs.

More strategic and research-based approaches to understanding needs are becoming increasingly important. A great example of the range of approaches to needs assessment comes from just outside of Waterloo Region. Service providers in a small town in southwestern Ontario had long known that a particular neighbourhood was "high in need," and that residents from this neighbourhood did not access their services as often as people in other parts of town. A staff person was hired to do a needs assessment of the neighbourhood that was specifically focused on access to services.

She began informally, by visiting the local school during lunch hour, and riding the school bus. She got students to help her distribute invitations to "coffee get-togethers," and a summer barbecue, which were opportunities for informal chats with local families. A short survey was sent out, and produced 10 responses.

During the summer, the staff person ran several events for kids in the local park, in an effort to learn even more about the local reality. On the basis of her experiences, conversations with residents and other service providers, the staff person identified five "social" barriers to service use (alienation, lack of planning skills, lack of role models, boredom among youth, and literacy). She also identified four "physical" barriers – lack of space, lack of transportation, traffic on a main street, and cost. A number of programming ideas were suggested, with recreational programs as the first priority.

WHAT IS A NEED?

When it works well, needs assessment will help you get to the heart of the issues you see in your community. Sometimes, needs are expressed, indirectly, in the form of solutions. People in a particular community may, for example, say that the community needs a public transportation system. However, this is more of a solution to a (as yet unstated) need. It may not be a good solution. In small communities, bus systems are rarely financially viable. Even in larger communities, people tend to use public transit less frequently than planners expect them to.

However, needs assessment is a way of getting behind statements like these to understand the underlying issues. What, exactly, is the problem or need that people feel public transit will address? Is it a lack of supports for families without cars, or social isolation among stay-at-home parents? Is it poor air quality? Is it a perceived lack of commitment to families on the part of the municipal government? Very likely, the need being expressed in the community is a mixture of two or more of these issues, and perhaps others as well. Once these issues or needs are named more clearly, a more informed discussion about the pros and cons of different solutions can begin. This discussion might consider improved internet access, taxi vouchers, or the use of a travelling resource van as well as improvements to public transit.

Sometimes a needs assessment may contradict accepted wisdom about community needs. It may be that the group of families that are (according to research) "in need" of more support do not see themselves this way. When this happens, it probably means more discussion or research is needed before action can begin. At other times, needs assessment affirms and helps to further focus the needs that informed community members have known about for a long time.

DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

Very often, different stakeholder groups see the same social issue differently. Even when it is possible to bring together research information that helps you to better understand the underlying issues, this is of very little use if key people can't or won't accept that the need exists.

Identifying local needs has to be a participatory process. Key stakeholder groups should be involved in the interpretation of the data. An important part of the process of conducting a needs assessment can be coming to an understanding of what matters to these different stakeholder groups, what their goals or dreams are, and how to connect the information you have gathered to their priorities. To be successful, needs assessment findings have to be discussed and interpreted in a way that is constructive and respectful as well as accurate and evidence-based.

HOW READY ARE YOU TO DO A NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

- Have a look at any needs assessments local groups may have done before.
- Imagine some possible results and think about what the consequences would be if they actually happened.
- What do you want to find out from the needs assessment? How clear are these goals?
- Who will use the needs assessment? How much influence do they have to implement its recommendations?
- Does your centre have the funds and/or the people to take action on what is learned from the needs assessment?
- When does the needs assessment have to be completed?
- Does your organization have the resources and skills to do a needs assessment?

WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME TO DO NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

The right time to conduct a needs assessment may be:

- when you suspect that the groups you serve or their problems are changing
- when you are receiving many requests for services that you have not provided in the past
- when you are thinking of extending or expanding programs

On the other hand, there are also times when it may be necessary to do some background work before a needs assessment can begin. A formal needs assessment probably won't be your first step if:

- there are strong unresolved differences of opinion among staff or board on the purposes and uses of a needs assessment

- your organization lacks financial resources and/or staff to implement the changes a needs assessment might recommend
- it seems like the organization is not sure what kinds of questions it wants answered – when the questions seem like a mixture of a program evaluation, feasibility study, or research project, for example.

HOW TO DO NEEDS ASSESSMENT:

Once your needs assessment is complete, you should be able to complete Worksheet 6 (next page). Below is a completed example:

KEY QUESTION	**EXPLANATION**	**SAMPLE NEED**
What is the need in your community?	Make sure the need is expressed as an issue or a problem, rather than a solution.	*There is a need to get information about existing programs out to more families.*
How do you know it is a need?	What evidence is your identification of this need based on? Have you been able to confirm this need through another source of information?	*Focus groups with parents from different parts of the county all included some parents who said they knew very little about available programs, and that they felt a need for more support. Tracking data from existing programs confirmed that some groups of families rarely make use of their programs.*
Who has this need?	Who, specifically, is in need? How many people are in need? Do these people agree that the need exists?	*Young parents, parents living in rural areas, and grandparents who are primary caregivers are less likely to know about existing programs. There are lots of young parents in our county. The young parents we met confirmed this need, but we did not reach many young parents with our focus groups.*
Is there evidence that current efforts to meet this need are inadequate?	Who, if anyone, has tried to meet this need? How widespread is the agreement that further action is needed?	*Many different awareness-raising efforts have been tried over the years. Currently, a web-based database is under development. However, community members who attended a forum agreed that more could be done to get information about programs out to employers, grandparents, and other secondary audiences.*

Worksheet 6: Needs Assessment

KEY QUESTION	
What is the need in your community?	
How do you know it is a need?	
Who has this need?	
Is there evidence that current efforts to meet this need are inadequate?	

A few years ago, the City of Kitchener commissioned a research report on city neighbourhoods and the authors of this report identified neighbourhoods they saw as the highest priorities for municipal investment in community centres. Kingsdale didn't make the list of top priorities. This frustrated the local volunteer committee that had been planning for a Kingsdale Community Centre. With the support of a local social service agency called House of Friendship, and the regional Safe and Sound project, the committee was able to use census data and other information to develop a strong, evidence-based case for why Kingsdale ought to be a high priority for the city. They made a presentation to council and were able to get the city to commit to building a community centre in Kingsdale.

Identifying capacities in your organization

Once you have turned outwards, and tried to develop a better understanding of the needs and capacities in your community, it is time to turn to your own organization and take a hard look. What are you good at, and what are you not so good at? What unique, useful contribution to your community are you in the best position to make? What special gifts or capacities do you have, and how well do they match the emerging community goals and priorities?

Useful questions to ask yourself might be:

- What do we do best? Where have we had the most success?
- What do we enjoy doing?
- What are our limitations? What can't we do? What can't we be flexible on? What are our resource limitations?
- How do others in the community see us? What is our "niche" or unique role in the community? Who turns to us for help, and what kind of help do they look to us for?

The Wesley Apple Corps is a group that makes and sells baked goods at the Cambridge Farmer's Market in order to raise funds for maintenance of a heritage church. Their goods have become very popular, and at one point the group made an effort to increase production (and extend their range of products) in order to meet a demand. However, they quickly learned that their small group of about 20 core volunteers had limited capacity. The nature of their work requires on-going volunteer commitment. Baked goods must be produced every week to maintain a presence in the market. As a result, the Apple Corps have scaled down production goals and focused on the products they do best.

Of course, organizations grow and change over time, and there is nothing wrong with trying to do things you have never tried before, or moving in new directions. Staff of the Canadian Mental Health Association's Cambridge Club-

Sometimes it is tempting to define your organization's unique role in very broad, general terms. You might want to say that your unique role as an organization is "facilitating partnerships" or "raising awareness" or "challenging stereotypes." These may all be important and true statements, but it is often helpful during this kind of a discussion to try to translate these over-arching ideas into practical terms. What exactly do you do, on the ground, in your community?

house program reflect that, "A business (profit or non-profit) that is not flexible enough to examine and change to improve their service will not survive." However, this kind of a decision should be made in an informed way, on the basis of careful consideration of the risks and potential benefits.

Evaluating your Outcomes

Many people think program evaluation, and indeed all types of research, are primarily about measurement. When they hear the word evaluation, the images that often spring to mind are long, detailed surveys, bar charts and boring, technical reports. However, in the long run, what is more important and central to building a responsive, sustainable organization is the art of reflecting critically on your practice, and formulating clear, focused, and useful questions to guide your research. It is often said of computers that if you put garbage in, you get garbage out. The same is true for the technical components of evaluation. Regardless of how much you know about measurement tools and statistics, the answers that these tools generate won't be any smarter than the questions you asked of them.

Program evaluation is a systematic approach to asking and answering questions about your program. Although we look at program evaluation as a logical endeavour that follows a set of broadly-defined steps, it should not be viewed as a rigid, cookbook type of process. Evaluation research can be very extensive and complex but it doesn't have to be. The ability to ask yourselves some basic but important questions can start you on the road to either conducting an evaluation of your own, or hiring and managing more effectively someone who is conducting an evaluation for you. Even a very small-scale evaluation that is well-designed and carefully carried out can help you make better management decisions, ensure the continued support of donors and volunteers, and optimize the quality of the service that you are able to provide. Chances are that you already do some program evaluation, even if you don't call it that. Any time you collect and think systematically about program-related information, you are doing a form of program evaluation.

WHEN EVALUATE? WHY EVALUATE?

A decision to evaluate may be made because:

- You want to demonstrate the value of a program or an organization to funders, in order to retain or obtain support.
- You want to demonstrate the value of a program to community members, in order to remain accountable to members, or raise public awareness.

- You are required to complete an evaluation (either internally, or using an imposed framework) as a condition of funding.
- You want to decide how best to address an identified problem or limitation of a program (such as poor attendance).
- You want to be proactive, and make sure that your work is continuing to improve.
- You want to ensure that a program or organization is doing as well as you think it is, or remains relevant into the future.

Depending on the combination of motivations in your situation, you may be evaluating a program that is already up and running, or trying to build evaluation into the design of a new intervention. You may be able to track the intervention over a period of time, or you may be forced to gather and analyze data quite quickly.

The "Wraparound" project run by Lutherwood CODA and KidsLink encourages different professionals involved with the same family to coordinate their efforts. It was started with creative local fundraising efforts, but has now acquired government funding. Key staff attribute this success to the fact that they were able to show funders persuasive national and international research findings about the value of the Wraparound approach.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND METHODS

The next step in evaluation planning is to sit down with your team – hopefully, an evaluation advisory group that includes all key stakeholders – and discuss the questions that will guide your evaluation.

Implementation questions ask about the degree to which a program is functioning as intended. Examples of implementation questions include:

- Are the referrals coming in from our partners?
- Do the workshops meet the standards set out in the manual?
- Have we met our attendance targets?

Process questions deal with the real life "story" of people's experiences within the program. Examples include:

- What is working smoothly, and what isn't?
- What have been the most frustrating aspects of the job for staff?
- What questions do our visitors ask us the most?

Satisfaction questions ask how happy different stakeholders are with their experience in the program. Examples include:

- Are parents enjoying the program?
- Do our partners see the program as worthwhile?

Outcome questions focus on the difference the program has made. Examples include:

- Are participating children better prepared for the transition to school?

- Are premature birth-rates going down in our community?

Concept questions are a little less common, but are sometimes important. These questions deal with definitions of key concepts that underlie a program:

- To what degree does the program apply a capacity-building philosophy?
- How is empowerment applied in the practice of the program?

Resource and efficiency questions get at whether a program uses the best, cheapest, most efficient way to achieve a given outcome. Examples may include:

- Compared to our in-town programs, what is our cost-per-family for our workshops in rural areas?

We have drawn many times on the story of the Waterloo County and Area Quilt Festival. As a large annual cultural celebration, the Festival holds events in many venues around the region and attracts many out-of-town visitors to the area. A few years ago, some review and reflection on the public image of the Festival led committee members to the conclusion that they needed data that would highlight the economic impact of the Festival. The Festival worked with a local university professor to design and implement a survey of Festival patrons that would gather data about where they stayed during the Festival, how much they spent and where they spent it. Because this study was very focussed on a narrow and strategic evaluation question (in this case, a "resource and efficiency" question), the Festival knew exactly what to do with the findings. They report that the study has been very helpful in attracting corporate sponsorship and support.

Once you have a sense of the questions your evaluation will explore, the next step is to gather some information that will help you to answer this question. The information gathering methods can include focus groups, personal interviews, written surveys, observations and document analysis, etc. Designing research methodology is, of course, a big topic, and one that is covered very well in other places (see for example, Taylor and Botschner, 1998; Ellis, 1998).

The process of assessing, planning, intervening and evaluating is cyclical. No needs assessment or evaluation ever answers all the questions you have, and no single study ever produces a completely clear and foolproof plan for action. Hopefully, each imperfect piece of applied research moves you forward in your understanding of the issues. If you are lucky, a good needs assessment or evaluation will leave your stakeholders energized and enthused about the process, and willing to engage in it again in the future. Over time, several different studies and program and planning exercises will gradually move your work forward.

Communicating about your work

Remaining relevant requires gathering information from other people, through a needs assessment, program evaluation, or an informal chat. Equally important, however, is letting others in the community know what you are doing. Reinforcing the valuable contribution you are making reduces the risk that others will duplicate your functions, attracts potential partners and volunteers, and is (according to the local groups we have spoken with) the most reliable approach to seeking additional funding support. Marketing your organization basically means three things: First, it lets people know that your organization exists. Second, it encourages people in the community to like your organization. Third, it convinces people to support your work.

Generally speaking, marketing messages can only move people forward one "step" along in the process of changing their thinking or behaviour. A poster campaign might get people who have never thought about the importance of buying local food to start thinking about the issue. A newspaper insert might let people who are already interested in buying local produce know where to shop. But it is unlikely that a single marketing tool will move someone totally unaware of the issue to the point where they change their buying habits in a single leap.

CLARIFYING YOUR MESSAGE

When telling others about your work, it is important to have a very clear and focused message. This lesson was shared with us several times as we spoke to local organizations about sustainability. For example, one of the secrets to the success of the Quilt Festival's marketing strategy has been the clarity of their message. For several years, their various marketing strategies have been designed to demonstrate that quilting is a diverse and culturally important art form, and not simply a hobby or a folk tradition.

In the mid-1990s, the provincial government cut 70 per cent of its allocated funding to the GRCA. The GRCA had anticipated some cutbacks and had planned some response but were still surprised by the enormity of the cutbacks. In response, they approved many lay-offs, reduced their expenditures, focused their programs and shifted gears toward the simple goal of organizational *survival*. They strengthened their relationships with partners and formed a strong team between themselves and local municipalities. The Grand River Conservation Authority is careful, in all of their communication, to emphasize that their work is based firmly on a thorough understanding of solid environmental science. They have learned that the link to science heightens their credibility in the public eye.

In the past, the GRCA had been a relatively modest organization. Many of their successes/accomplishments were behind the scenes. The public only heard about major issues, most of which were negatively biased. A multi-million dollar Basin study conducted from the late 1970s to early 1980s resulted in a greater profile for the GRCA. The Grand River's designation as a Canadian Heritage River in 1994 was also a very positive step for increased recognition. In 2000 the GRCA won the prestigious Thiess River Prize for excellence in river management in Brisbane, Australia. Following this recognition, the GRCA took steps to acknowledge municipalities for their help and support, thereby recognizing others' contributions to their success. Relationship building efforts such as these have been key to their success. The GRCA understands that it takes a long time to build relationships, and that establishing credibility and a healthy community profile can help to protect these partnerships from erosion over the long term.

Other environmental organizations have faced similar challenges in building their community profile and having their message resound within the community. On a smaller scale, the Green Team, the Green Champions, and the EnviroTeens, all out of Cambridge Memorial Hospital, work on a number of initiatives to promote and protect the local environment. They have contributed in events such as Canada clean-up days, earth week, waste reduction week, and conducting transportation surveys. Like the GRCA, public recognition has increased awareness of their work in the community. As a result of the work of these groups, Cambridge Memorial Hospital became the first hospital in North America to receive the International Environmental Certificate, and it also won an award on Environmental Sustainability from the Region of Waterloo.

Deciding on a core message requires working backwards from the change you hope to achieve. Think about who you hope to communicate with, and what you would like them to do with the information you are sharing. Perhaps you would like people to volunteer with your organization, donate money, or write a letter of support. Once you are clear on what you hope to achieve, work backwards to create a message that will give your target audience the motivation, and the information to act.

THINKING COMMUNICATION WHILE REPORT WRITING

A good quality report makes the intended audience clear, includes enough detail to assess the quality of the work, includes the absolute minimum amount of technical jargon possible, and makes explicit the practical implications of the findings. A good report also explains whose conclusions are being presented. It lays out clearly how stakeholders have been involved in the process of designing the study, gathering data, and interpreting findings.

Once a clear technical summary of your work has been created, it may rarely be read. In many cases, we end up "mining" this summary for a variety of smaller, more readable and user-friendly products. Examples include:

- **Executive summaries** – short summaries of the main points of the report, often less than 10 pages in length, are a familiar format for politicians and senior civil servants. They are also easy to translate into other languages or electronic formats.
- **Power-point presentations** – if you would like your partner to pass on your findings, it can be helpful to provide them with a short set of slides or overheads that they can take to (for example) a board meeting, a briefing for a cabinet minister, or a municipal council meeting.
- **Feedback forums** – public events at which those who participated in the intervention or evaluation are invited to come and hear a sum-

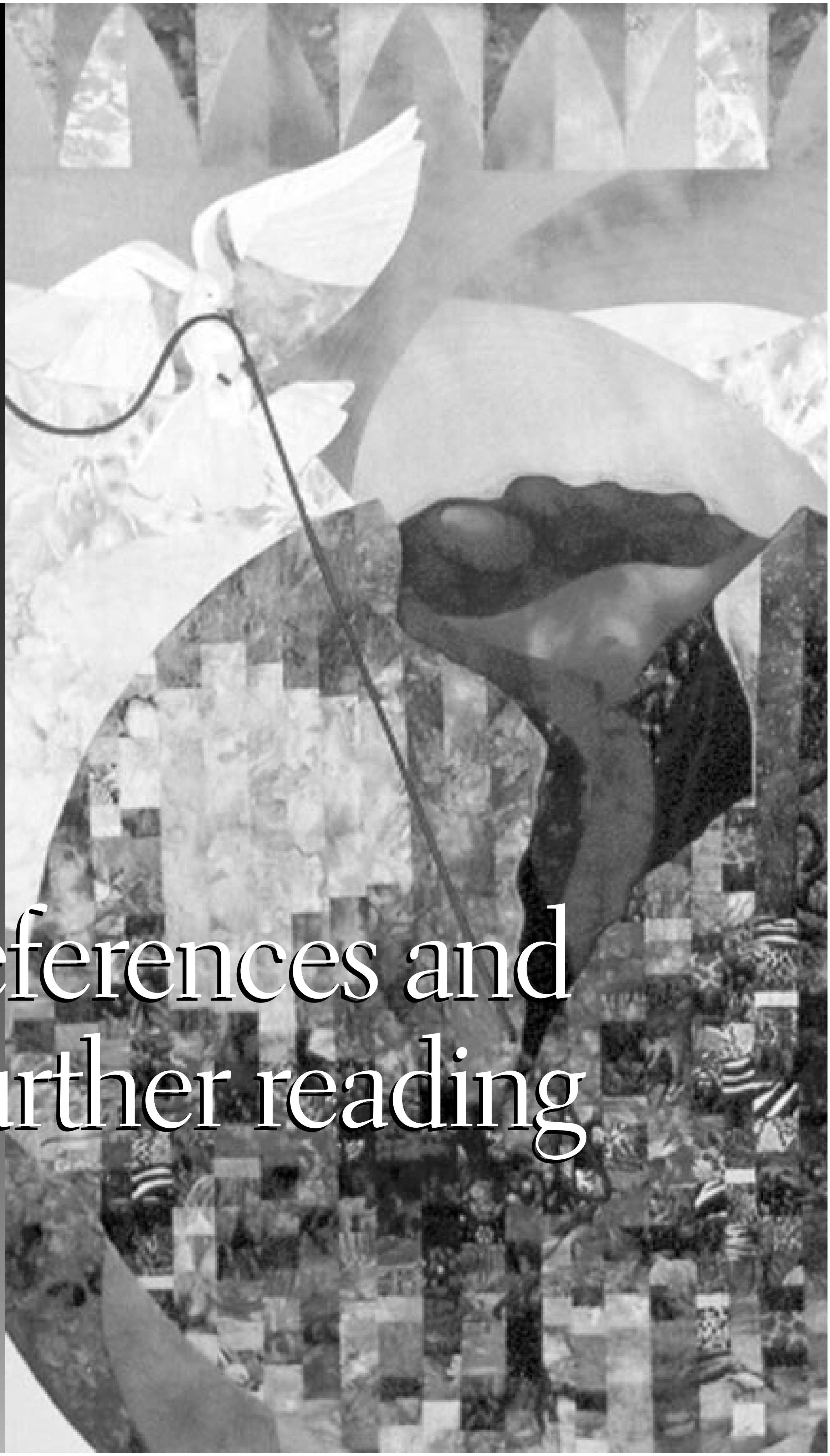
mary of findings. Often, such events also include poster displays, or small group discussions about what the recommendations should be, or celebrations of the completion of the project.

- **Bulletin board/lobby displays** – sometimes, displays of findings in high-traffic, public locations can generate a great deal of discussion, and let people know that the work has had value.
- **Fact sheets and newsletters** – very short, easy to read summaries, with graphic elements and information on where to go for more information, always work well. Even if these fact sheets don't really give enough information to convey the full importance of the work, they can be "teasers" that increase the readers' interest in reviewing a longer report.
- **Journal articles/conference presentations** – sometimes, translating evaluation findings or similar data into a format that can be used in more academic settings lends credibility to the project in the eyes of other stakeholders. It can also be an opportunity to bring together groups of stakeholders that rarely have direct contact – academic experts and neighbourhood residents, for example.
- **Press releases** – letting the media know about the results of an evaluation (or a needs assessment, or other applied research project) can be a good opportunity to raise the profile of your organization or program.
- **Individual stories –** sometimes, a collection of personal stories can convey the value of your work in a more powerful way than a comprehensive evaluation or annual report. The Cambridge Self-Help Food Bank published a book containing many personal stories organized to tell the history of the organization over time, and then sold copies of the book as a fund-raising campaign. House of Friendship did a similar project, publishing the book "Friend to Friend," with stories and photos of program participants.

Summary

This chapter emphasizes the need for organizations to stay in tune with the community. This means being aware of community needs and trends, specifically the needs of your clientele. Once your niche has been defined, it is critical to ensure that your programs are meeting those needs in an effective and efficient manner. Communication and marketing are effective strategies to ensure that people know who you are and what you do best.

6. references and further reading



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Other useful websites and resources

- Assuring Protection for Tomorrow's Environment (Elmira, ON) – 519-669-5321
- Caledon Institute of Social Policy – http://www.caledoninst.org/
- Canadian Centre for Philanthropy – http://www.ccp.ca/ and http://www.ccp.ca/store/publications.asp
- Canadian Centre for Social Entrepreneurship – http://www.bus.ualberta.ca/ccse/
- Canadian Policy Research Network (CPRN) – http://www.cprn.com/en/
- Charity Channel – www.charitychannel.com
- Charity Village – http://www.charityvillage.com/
- Citizens' Network on Waste Management (Kitchener, ON) – 519-744-7503 email: jjackson@web.net
- Community Tool Box – http://ctb.ku.edu/
- Dandelion Festival Group (Kitchener, ON) – 519-578-8508
- Laurel Creek Citizens' Committee (Waterloo, ON) – 519-888-6917 email: pr@vogo.com
- Ontario Trillium Foundation – http://www.trilliumfoundation.org/OTF-English/new/index.htm
- Museums Alberta: Museum Excellence Program Guide – www.museumsalberta.ab.ca
- The People's Car Co-op (Kitchener, ON) – 519-578-1895 email: info@peoplescar.org
- Statistics Canada – http://www.statcan.ca/start.html
- Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement – http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/index.html
- Total Non Profit Resources – http://www.tnpr.ca/
- United Way of Canada and the Voluntary Sector Roundtable: Board Development www.boarddevelopment.org

- Venture Philanthropy Partners – www.venturephilanthropypartners.org
- Virtual Volunteering – www.serviceleader.org/vv/vvwhatis.html
- Volunteer Action Centre of Kitchener-Waterloo – http://www.k-wvolcentre.on.ca/
- Volunteer and Information Cambridge www.cvbinfocam.ca
- Volunteer Canada – http://www.volunteer.ca/index-eng.php
- Volunteer Centre of Toronto – http://www.volunteertoronto.on.ca/
- Waterloo Regional Arts Foundation – http://www.waterlooregionalartscouncil.on.ca/download per cent20files/WRAF per cent20brochure.pdf
- Waterloo Stewardship Network – Al Murray, Stewardship Coordinator: 519-826-4920 email: al.murray@mnr.gov.on.ca
- Woolwich Healthy Communities Sustainable Communities Group (St. Jacob's, ON) – 519-664-3534 ext. 230 email: jfinney@wchc.on.ca

Interviews and stories with nonprofit organizations in Waterloo Region

- Interview with Cambridge Youth Soccer (2003)
- Interview with Christopher Champlain Community Centre/Neighbourhood Association (2003)
- Interview with Community Health Helpers (2003)
- Interview with Extend-a-Family (2003)
- Interview with Grand River Conservation Authority (2003)
- Interview with Waterloo County and Area Quilt Festival (2003)
- Story from Achievement in Motion (2002)
- Story from Argus Residence for Young People (2002)
- Story from Cambridge Memorial Hospital: Environment Office (2002)
- Story from Canadian Mental Health Organization/Waterloo Region: Cambridge Club House (2002)
- Story from Cambridge Self-Help Food Bank (2002)
- Story from Cambridge Speed Skating Club (2002)
- Story from Cambridge Telecare Distress Centre: Social Befriending Listening Service (2002)
- Story from Cambridge Vineyard: Compassion in Action (2002)
- Story from Catholic Family Counselling (2002)
- Story from Community Action Program for Children (2002)
- Story from Kids Can Play Association of Cambridge (2002)
- Story from Kids on the Block (2003)

- Story from Kingsdale Community Centre (2002)
- Story from Leadership Waterloo Region (2002)
- Story from Lutherwood CODA and KidsLINK: Partners and Wraparound (2002)
- Story from Welcome Home (2002)
- Story from Wesley United Church: Wesley Apple Corps (2002)

Centre for Research and Education in Human Services

www.crehs.on.ca

Social Planning Council
of Cambridge and North Dumfries

www.socialplanningcouncil-cnd.org

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