A SHORT OVERVIEW OF SHARING AND COLLABORATION ACROSS THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

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THIS ISSUE OF *THE PHILANTHROPIST* IS ABOUT NEW WAYS OF WORKING. One of the ways in which the operation of the nonprofit sector is evolving is in the development of shared space, organizational components, and services. Whenever people from community and nonprofit organizations meet, the talk turns sooner or later to the need for collaboration and sharing. Medium and small organizations all struggle with the prevailing model of developing and managing their own finances and administration, managing their own human resources, doing their own fundraising, preparing their own proposals, ensuring effective technology for their own organizations, and running their own communication campaigns – all while providing inspiration and leadership and carrying out the mission of the organization. The value and common sense of collaborating and sharing is obvious: why should every organization have to learn, create, and operate these systems for themselves, especially when they are already so busy carrying out their core business and when most do not have built-in expertise in these areas (since their expertise is more likely to be in carrying out the mission)?

Across the sector, there are many examples of sharing underway and under development. Sharing can take many forms, from coordination and linked-up all the way to common ownership and control. As this overview demonstrates, many different dimensions can and are being shared.

A scan of the nonprofit sector turned up examples of many different forms of sharing and of many different things being shared – policy development, space, money, staffing, benefits and purchasing, technology, and even governance. The scan demonstrates the range of what is being done and provides some examples. A few are included here.

SHARING AND COLLABORATING ON POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Policy development collaboration: most readers are familiar with the collaboration of sector organizations within coalitions to work for policy change on particular issues. In this issue of *The Philanthropist*, Hilary Pearson's article describes funder collaboratives, and Liz Mulholland's article talks about the roles being played by the Toronto City Summit and Sport Matters, a coalition of sports organizations.

SHARED PROGRAMMING AND SERVICES

Programs and services can be coordinated by organizations coming together in coali-

tions or hubs and sharing information on funding, community needs, service priorities, etc. This is sometimes referred to as a constellation model and builds on a shared magnetic attractor – or glue. A frequent glue is poverty, and a number of anti-poverty and child health coalitions take this form.

Physical co-location or one-stop service arrangements are another possibility in which organizations that serve particular client groups are accommodated under one roof. This can also take the form of a "common footprint" where organizations, whether co-located or not, use common forms and materials to simplify service to clients. Or it can move to an amalgamation or merger where organizations serving a given client group join together to provide the full range of services previously delivered by several different organizations. Examples of leading-edge collaborations include Brighter Future Coalitions in which groups of agencies together create a seamless network of early-years programs for children and their families.

SHARED EXPERTISE AND FUNCTIONS

Human resources support can be shared among organizations in a particular region and among organizations working in a particular field. Based on two pilot projects, the HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector has developed a guide entitled *Better Together: A Shared HR Services Framework for Non-profit Organizations* that can guide the creation of shared human resources service models.

Fundraising services and expertise can be shared among a number of organizations, for example, in a collaborative to develop a concerted campaign in which donations are allocated according to a predetermined formula. Creative Trust, another example, brings together 23 performing arts organizations and raises funds and capital on their behalf.

Technology is another area where expertise to develop and, just as importantly, to maintain and service can be shared by a number of organizations. This can take the form of linked websites that share databases or development of online programs that many organizations can tap into. Skills International is a website created by 60 community-based agencies and employers across Ontario. It provides a job-matching service for internationally trained professionals. CanadaHelps is a website that matches charities with donors across the country.

Purchasing and services can be shared through cooperatives that organizations join by buying shares and benefiting from bulk purchases. The United Community Services Co-op in BC is one of the best-known examples of this form of collaboration; it is owned by over 100 organizations. It offers bulk purchases and consulting services.

SHARED SPACE(S) AND OPERATIONS

Shared space and operations is one of the most widespread and best-known types of sharing and takes many forms along a continuum, depending on what is held or operated in common. It can combine various types of sharing. The most straightforward is co-location in which a number of organizations are found under one roof, whether that roof is provided by one of them with the others as tenants or by a third party that makes space available either pro bono or for rent.

Ownership of property can also be shared. Family Services/One Community Place in Ottawa operates on a shared-ownership and property-management model that allows organizations to build equity and contain costs.

A community hub can be a form of shared space when it brings together services in a given neighbourhood for a particular population where its mission relates to a particular geography and involves some form of service provision to a particular population.

Shared equipment and services (e.g., receptionist, equipment, IT support, etc.) are included in some shared accommodation situations. The Centre for Social Innovation in Toronto operates on this type of model. For more information, visit www.socialinnovation.ca.

Back-office function sharing is another model wherein everything from accounting and finances to human resources, technology, communications, and logistics are shared. Typically those who share back-office services also share accommodation, but not necessarily.

Comprehensive infrastructure, organizational and governance support is one of the most recent innovative sharing models. A number of groups come together as projects within a larger entity. The model allows small initiatives to access infrastructure services previously available only to large organizations. Tides Canada introduced the Tides Canada Initiatives model in Canada nearly ten years ago. In this issue, Leslie Wright's article describes the development process, as does David Stevens and Margaret Mason's consultation document, but in greater depth.

The cluster approach describes sharing and innovation across sectors in a particular place. An example is Waterloo Region Ontario where over the past four years, a number of cross-sectoral innovations have started to emerge. These clusters of innovations are blending boundaries and becoming part of the fabric of change. Organizations, networks, and collaboratives work across sectors through unusual partnerships that create synergies and dynamic thinking. In order to capitalize on the synergies and potential residing in the region, a group of funders and a number of leaders in the community from academia, business, and community nonprofits have begun to explore how they might create greater impact by strengthening the resiliency, connectedness, and innovative capacity of the community sector. (More on this model will appear in future issues of *The Philanthropist*.)

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