

BUILDING COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS (BCO) INITIATIVE

PROJECT ONE: Young Men's Adventure Weekend Society of B.C.

The Client Organization

The client organization was formally founded about 5 years ago. A few of the founders, community-minded businessmen, had been nurturing the idea of establishing an organization since the early 1990s. They have organized an event every year since then. They have a Board of Directors composed of about 8 men, however the founder does not have a "formal" position with the organization and he is basically the motivator who keeps the idea alive. There are no paid staff; the organization is run by volunteers. The group has applied for federal charity status but the application has been stalled and is still pending.

The major initiative of the group is to organize and carry out an annual event. Generally, there are up to 50 adult male volunteers and 100 male teenagers (ages 12-17 years old), many without active fathers, who participate in the event. There are many positive testimonials from teenage participants and from parents as well who have found the event life changing. From time to time, male volunteers came from other parts of North America and some of them have started spin-off groups in their respective locations. The founder was keenly interested in getting assistance to "take the organization to the next level"; that is, to discover where the Vancouver group is headed in the future and develop action steps to take them there.

Work done by the Volunteer Consulting Team

The whole cycle of the project took about 5 months.

January: The BCO volunteer Community Consulting Team (CCT) members and the BCO 'Keepers of the Flame' met with the clients, who were the founder, the previous president and one board member. The purpose of this meeting was to explore areas where the CCT might be able to assist the clients with key issues. (Key issues included difficulty in obtaining charity status, no clear shared vision, unclear role for the founder, keeping volunteers motivated and avoiding burn out, succession planning, and the decision making process.)

February: The CCT met with the consulting mentor to discuss how to go about the project. The suggestion was to use the Action Research model, conduct individual interviews to gather information on goals and roles on two levels: the organization level and the event level, compile the information and report back to the clients.

March:

- The consulting team presented a proposal to assist the client in achieving their goal by doing interviews and providing feedback on where the stakeholders (the Board, the founder and core volunteer men) wanted the organization to go, what roles they wanted to take on and what roles they saw others taking on.
- The process the consulting team proposed included the following:
 - i. Interview key people (two consultants with one interviewee).
 - ii. Compile the information into a report, including recommendations from the CCT.
 - iii. Present the report to the stakeholders.

iv. Develop next steps.

- The consulting team developed questions for the interviews, with the mentor's input.

March to May:

- The consulting team conducted the interviews, focusing on roles, goals and decision making. A total of 8 client members were interviewed.
- The interviews gave the consulting team a vast amount of information about the organization as well as what each person thought and felt. It brought out many ideas as it stimulated each client member to think about what he wanted. It also gave them more clarity in what they were looking to achieve. Shortly after the interview process the president resigned.
- The team compiled the results of the interviews and prepared for the presentation session, with input from the Mentor.

June: The team had a day long session with the clients. First, the clients participated in a healing circle - an idea that came out of the interview process and that many felt was needed. Then, interview outcomes were fed back to the clients in an anonymous process focusing on strengths, key issues and ideas. In the afternoon, the clients were given a choice as to how their time would be spent. They chose to have a visioning session and they created a vision and mission for the organization.

Outcomes of the Project

- Clients were rejuvenated.
- A new president of the board emerged.
- They developed momentum.
- Clients have developed and adopted the vision and mission.
- They were appreciative.
- They started a mentorship program.
- They got two new board members.

What was learned by the Consulting Team?

- Possibilities create momentum.
- Every intervention/contact with clients, no matter how short or what it is will shift/change something – the clients' state, condition, circumstance, mindset, etc.
- The interview process makes people reflect and think in a deeper way that would otherwise not happen.
- The interview process gave clients the opportunity to say what they were feeling, to come up with ideas, and to think about their roles and goals within the group.
- Clients were pleased that they were listened to and could speak their mind.
- It helped the clients in their decision making.
- The consulting team members learned that their personal styles and biases are influential and that each consultant had to develop a strong self-awareness in these areas.

- It was interesting to observe group dynamics among the consulting team members as well as among the clients. The consulting team members' skills emerged along with the process and the team became very cohesive.
- The consulting team realized that different approaches taken by a mentor can influence the kind of work the consultants do and their experience in the consulting role.
- The consulting team got useful models, references and ways to look at organizations from the mentor.

What can be changed or improved for the next project?

- Prior to engagement, each consulting team member should talk about what they want to get out of the process, address expectations and possibly tailor the involvement of the members to their needs, expectations and skill levels.
- Ensure that the mentor will have sufficient time for input and support to the team.
- Have learning sessions with consultants, mentor and clients during the project.
- Have the BCO organization provide increased clarity about the roles of the CCT, the mentor, the 'keepers of the flame', and the consulting process.