



Toronto Neighbourhood Centres
Community Development Renewal Initiative

Transferable Strategies & Case Studies
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Sustaining a Blended CD/Service-Delivery Model

Issue

Neighbourhood Centres and other community agency models promote the integration of service delivery and community development work, where the community connections made through responding to individual and family needs also inform and drive an agenda for system-level changes.

The difficulty of maintaining a balance between service and social change functions has increased over the last decade, as governments rely more heavily upon the nonprofit sector to deliver direct services.

Agencies that seek to combine these practices also face ongoing tensions. At times there can be significant variance between social service and social change strategies and assumptions. While services seek to support individuals to adapt to circumstances, system change efforts seek to alter the circumstances themselves.

Combining these objectives in one organization can limit the kinds of community action that agencies support. However, integrated models can also help to ensure that the agitation for system change remains rooted in the real experience of community members who are facing these issues.

Background Information

Governments are increasingly turning to the nonprofit sector as an efficient and creative alternative for delivering services to meet social policy objectives. As they contract for these service impacts, most are overlooking or actively dismissing community development roles played by organizations.

Funders have also greatly increased their monitoring, reporting and evaluation requirements, but do not fund agencies to do this work. This growing administrative burden has been accompanied by increased fundraising pressures required to back-fill inadequate service-delivery contracts.

In the past, community organizations could direct more of their fundraised dollars to projects of their choosing, including community development initiatives. But now agencies are diverting more and more of their non-government “other revenues” to cover a growing service-delivery shortfall.

This has resulted in a troubling dynamic. Community organizations that are growing as they receive more resources from government to operate services, may also find that their capacity to engage in and sustain community development work diminishes.

Promising Practices

Some agencies have found it helpful to integrate a discussion of these challenges into their processes of reflection and strategic planning. It is critical that agencies take the time to assess the full impact of increasing their service-delivery activity, and measure the value of new resources in terms of their flexibility and fit with the agency's vision and theories of change. These considerations should be an integral part of an agency's fundraising process.

One way to formalize these discussions is to develop a set of agency "**fundraising guidelines**" or philosophy that can help guide and assess the impact of decisions and negotiations with agency funders.

A number of community organizations are still finding ways to carve out the space, time and resources to keep their community development agendas alive. Networking and collaborative learning initiatives with like-minded organizations (e.g. via TNC's CD-network, and the Toronto Community Development Institute) provide important opportunities for organizations to share these successes and strengthen their own strategies to pursue CD activities.

Collective advocacy with governments is also critical. Agencies need to work together to demand funding reforms that increase their flexibility and capacity to maintain community development work. The current Community Social Service Campaign is one example of a collaborative effort between community agencies and provincial unions to negotiate an accord with the provincial government to support these objectives.

Reflections/Conclusions:

Community agencies can be an essential source of strength for "movement-building" strategies, providing points of contact to great numbers of community members who can be supported to contribute their voice, insight and talents to building a more equitable, sustainable and just society.

To sustain and strengthen these roles agencies must critically assess their funding relationships. An organization's mission must always drive its approach to funding, and not vice-versa.

Contacts

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