

Collaboration practitioners to meet as community of practice

As Canada's social mission sector burgeons – it currently has an estimated 175,000 to 200,000 non-profit organizations that generate \$90 billion a year and employ 1.3 million people – so does the need for collaborative efforts and partnerships amongst organizations.

Since many of the organizations run on meager resources and employ only a small staff, managing and developing partnerships and collaborative projects often becomes the sole domain (and burden) of one person.

According to Tonya Surman, executive director of the [Centre for Social Innovation](#) this “new, emerging” position – the collaboration manager – lacks a model and identified skill set.

“Collaboration managers often have many different bosses, they are also supporting a membership and are saddled between competing interests,” she says.

“We have often not had the opportunity to share what we have learned, to learn from others, and advance our ability to support the collaborative work within our sectors.”

Surman felt that convening a conversation about this role – and by extension, examining new organizational paradigms – could best be done through a Community of Practice.

Beginning in March, The Centre for Social Innovation will begin holding Collaboration Practitioners Communities of Practice workshops/feedback sessions to facilitate a deeper discussion about the importance of constructing a curriculum on the challenges inherent in collaborative projects.

“Unlike executive directors, collaboration managers don’t have avenues for professional skill development – they aren’t there yet. We want to provide a framework for peer networking and skill-building.”

Partnerships offer a range of opportunity, notes Surman, a way to save money, and provide access to infrastructure. Currently, resources don’t exist to assist collaboration managers in becoming more efficient. This lessens the impact of a collaborative project, she explains.

Surman anticipates the Community of Practice as an avenue for developing new, inventive approaches to sector traversing partnerships that are becoming increasingly common and complex.

“Solutions have to be driven by the participants themselves,” she says, “we will be waiting for leadership to emerge. We have to be responsive and support this emergence.”

The first workshop, on March 6th, will look at “Power Dynamics and Conflict” in different partnership projects and experiences. This initial meeting will also help gauge the general level of interest in the social mission sector for developing new collaboration models.

“Because ultimately you want the impact [of a project] to assist in fostering social change,” says Surman.