



Let's Explore: Coast Community Resource Hub

On March 16, 2018, representatives of over twenty Sunshine Coast organizations gathered at the invitation of the Community Resource Centre to discuss whether there is an appetite for a shared location for non-profits and social enterprises on the Sunshine Coast. This is a summary of the background to that meeting, its findings, and recommended next steps.



Background

On April 18, 2012 over 80 representatives of Sunshine Coast not-for-profit and government organizations/agencies participated in a workshop exploring the potential of a co-op work style with John Restakis from UBC, facilitated by Jennifer Charlesworth. There was excitement in the room at that time but the concept stayed on the back burner until the Resource Centre applied to the BC Rural Dividend Fund (BCRD) for funds to do a Feasibility study on co-locating not-for-profit organizations, agencies and perhaps government programs together in one space and streamlining our community's access to resources.

On receipt of a \$9924 grant from the BCRD in late 2017, the Resource Centre formed an advisory committee of community organizations including Community Futures, Sunshine Coast Economic

Development Organization, the Sunshine Coast Community Foundation and the Sechelt Chamber of Commerce. The group decided to hold a half day facilitated workshop for all interested community organizations to explore the notion. In advance of the workshop, staff and the advisory committee completed background research, held interviews with key community stakeholders, and created a draft mission and vision to present at the workshop.

Scan of Shared Spaces in Canada

Staff reviewed material such as the Multi-Tenant Non-Profit Centres Handbook and the Non-Profit Centres Network (US) Boot Camp Course held by the Centre for Social Innovation, and visited many co-location centre websites. The most relevant information available was gathered by Tides Canada in a 2014 report that identified over 200 shared office and meeting complexes in Canada. Most fall into one of four general categories: co-working spaces, economic development and innovation hubs, arts and culture clusters, or health and social services agency clusters. These hubs generally include shared facilities such as kitchens and meeting rooms, and some have quite elaborate event space. The vast majority are located in major cities. The average Canadian shared centre has 13 tenants, 33,000 square feet, two full time staff to manage it, and \$480,000 in gross revenues. Many of the properties are owned by government or large organizations such as a church or the United Way.

March 16 Workshop Participants

The following organizations participated. Note: many people who attended wore more than one hat.

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| • Coast Car Co-op | • Ruby Slipper Fund |
| • Community Futures | • SC Amateur Radio Club |
| • Community Resource Centre | • SC Caregivers Association |
| • Eldercollege | • SC Community Foundation |
| • Gibsons Family Network | • SC Conservation Association |
| • Grandmothers & Others | • SC for Meatless Mondays |
| • Habitat for Humanity | • SC Minor Hockey |
| • Halfmoon Bay Citizens Association | • SC Regional Economic Development (SCREDO) |
| • Halfmoon Bay Community Association | • Sechelt Downtown Business Association (SDBA) |
| • Home Healthcare Network (for profit caregiving service) | • Solar Association |
| • Pender Harbour Seniors Initiative | • Vancouver Coastal Health |
| • Resilient Coast | |
| • Rogue Arts Festival | |

Mission/Vision

The group workshoped draft vision and mission statements.

DRAFT VISION

We are the 'go to' information & referral/community connection hub for the Sunshine Coast. We grow the capacity and effectiveness of local non-profit organizations.

EDITED VISION

We are recognized as the "go to" hub for connecting people, programs and services on the Sunshine Coast.

NOTES: The word 'recognized' was debated. The distinction between programs and services may not be clear to the public.

DRAFT MISSION

The Resource Hub is a welcoming, accessible centre for information, referral, education and empowerment. Co-location of non-profits enables us to share knowledge and resources and to collaborate on initiatives to support a healthy, connected and sustainable community

EDITED MISSION

The Resource Hub supports a healthy, connected, sustainable community by sharing resources, collaborating and co-locating to grow capacity & effectiveness of non-profits & social enterprises.

NOTES: The term co-location is not defined. Is it a shared physical or virtual space, and what is included?



What is happening in your organization that brings you to this discussion?

Most organizations were there out of interest, to gather information, and to share their expertise and experience. A number had no pressing need for space in the foreseeable future, however, the following organizations reported specific needs:

- Community Futures already operates a shared work hub [in leased office space]. They have space needs and may be interested in buying property, but high real estate prices are a challenge.
- The Sechelt Downtown Business Association is extremely interested in shared office and meeting space, but just signed a 5 year lease.
- SC Conservation Association is looking at creating their own space to perhaps share with other environmental

- groups. They may have a donated property in Roberts Creek.
- Habitat for Humanity's present lease expires in Dec 2019. Should they build? They currently pay \$100,000/yr rent, and their two social enterprises (Restore & Recycling) need space for expansion. They are potential anchor tenants.
 - SC Community Foundation could be a resource to assist with community development. They are growing themselves, with two part-time staff, and need meeting space.
 - SCREDO wants space for their manager to work on regional economic development, and also wants to support the hub concept.

What is your need for co-location?

Most organizations were interested in sharing ideas, skills, resources and volunteers. Other specific needs included office and meeting space, reception, storage for confidential files and display materials, a legal mailing address, and virtual space (e.g. website, email, software). Another interest was co-working space for independent contractors who work for social service and non-profit agencies, e.g. grant writing, administrative support, IT.



What might your agency/organization bring to the partnership?



Most organizations have specific knowledge and expertise, plus membership and/or mailing lists, volunteers and existing community partnerships. The smaller groups mostly do not have significant funding. A couple, such as the Conservation Association, have charitable status, but most do not. Organizations with reasonably secure funding and continuity in the community include the SDBA, Community Futures, Habitat, the Community Foundation, and SCREDO. Most of these groups also bring

some degree of business acumen to the table. The two who have both the most resources and the largest space needs were Community Futures and Habitat.

SWOT

Participants worked in small groups to create a SWOT analysis. Note that items in bold italic represent common challenges and advantages identified by groups in the U.S. and Canada who have launched co-location projects.



STRENGTHS

- Opportunity to efficiently share resources and expertise including human capital and funding opportunities.
- ***Can give groups secure office and meeting space for the long term.***
- Shared reception and storage.
- Possible lower costs per organization and/or affordable space for smaller organizations.
- ***Shared spaces can reduce isolation of staff and volunteers, improve community cohesion and collaboration.***
- Opportunity to reduce duplication of support services and infrastructure (e.g. reception, administrative and bookkeeping support, legal services, technology platforms, storage).
- ***Convenient one stop shop for public, and exposure to more information and organizations.***
- Networking, cross pollination.
- There are existing co-working spaces and co-location spaces that can share experience; we are not starting entirely from scratch.

WEAKNESSES

- Difficulty finding enough "anchor tenants" with secure funding who agree on a vision/mission for a shared space.
- ***Partners may lack capacity to carry out the project. (Co-location projects require dedicated staffing.)*** Many Sunshine Coast organizations are very small.
- ***Partners taking on a hub project may struggle with mission creep.***
- Partners may have different timing consideration (e.g. leases) and different needs (e.g. public vs. private space).
- Organizations may fear diminished profile, loss of identity or control, and public confusion about their role. Established silos and history may hinder collaboration.
- Public awareness of existing co-working locations is low.
- Difficulty agreeing on a location.
- Long term funding model uncertain.
- Interruptions, noise, and other issues with shared space and staffing.
- ***Long term management of a shared facility involves considerable work, costs and relationship management that can easily be underestimated.***

OPPORTUNITIES

- Some partners may have real estate or leasing opportunities upcoming.
- Many other community organizations need space i.e.) Sechelt Library & Town Hall.
- There may be possible partners in local government, social enterprise or the for-profit sector.
- ***It is not necessary to reinvent the wheel; there are templates and other tools available for creating shared space.***
- ***Partners can bring a variety of resources and skills to the table.***
- ***A new, innovative idea can create excitement with participants and funders.***
- Possible redevelopment of older buildings or facilities e.g. small malls are struggling.
- Potential hub for economic and community projects; synergy for creative energy.
- There are many non-profits on the coast, which means many potential partners and strength in numbers.
- We can start small and grow.
- We could develop a model and inspire other small rural communities to do this.

THREATS/CHALLENGES

- It may not be possible to find a suitable physical space that is affordable.
- ***Donated space is often inappropriate in size, layout, location, or condition, and sometimes comes with restrictive conditions or lease terms.***
- This community may not be large enough to support the co-location model.
- Inertia is a powerful force. Organizations may be slow to change and adopt new models of operation.
- Consistent strong leadership is needed to carry through a multi-year project; that may not exist.
- ***There is a lack of financial and legal resources available for managing social purpose shared real estate. Legal and tax issues can arise.***
- ***Different mandates, objectives and values could cause conflict.***
- ***Partners should not expect to save money by sharing space. A shared facility has significant costs for management and maintenance.***
- Partners should not expect proximity to result in communication. Successful co-location models work at intentional interaction, which is key to relationships and collaboration.
- Funders may not be willing to support the concept.

What We Learned

Our research into other successful community hubs shows that **intentional interaction** is a key to successful co-location spaces. Intentional interaction involves bringing people together face-to-face in activities that help them to find commonalities and create long term relationships of trust. Examples of gatherings might include carrying out small hands-on projects, holding social events, or celebrating partner milestones. **The foundation for successful collaboration must be built in advance of an actual physical location for the project.**

The Follow-up Meeting

A number of organizations met again on April 26 to discuss the draft final report prepared by the Resource Centre, and to help formulate recommendations for moving forward with a Community Resource Hub.

Recommendations

1. The Resource Centre will publish the final report on the Coast Community Resource Hub exploration funded by BC Rural Dividend Fund. The report will be widely distributed to inform the community about our progress and attract any additional partners.
2. By June 1, 2018, the Resource Centre will form a working group comprised of potential anchor tenants, key partners and champions. They will build out a common vision for a centrally located Resource Hub as validated in the consultation phase of the project. Working group participants will be drawn from the following organizations who have expressed strong interest: the Resource Centre, Community Futures, Habitat for Humanity, FUSE Work Hub, Sunshine Coast Tourism, Sunshine Coast Regional Development Organization (SCREDO), Tsain-Ko (the shíshálh Nation's Economic Development Arm) and the Sechelt and Gibsons Chambers of Commerce.



The working group will undertake the following:

- Establish a timeline with key milestones, and a budget for an implementation phase.
- Hold confidential detailed conversations with possible partners about their space needs and financial capacity. (SCREDO has volunteered to do this.)
- Immediately incorporate some of the simple, easy to implement needs that were identified by non-profits into existing partners' programs and services. For instance, the Resource Centre will offer a new menu of non-profit services based on a membership fees and/or fee for service model, and SC Tourism will investigate sharing their existing space more effectively.
- Consolidate lists of meeting spaces available on the coast and post a list online. (Resource Centre has volunteered to do this.)
- Encourage continued utilization of existing co-working spaces at SC Tourism and Community Futures in Sechelt and FUSE in Gibsons.
- Investigate available and under-utilized space. Develop a gap analysis; what is needed versus what is available, and what are the probable costs versus what are organizations already spending?

- Investigate potential models that have been successful elsewhere, e.g. The People Place in Vernon. (Sechelt Chamber of Commerce has volunteered to do this.)
- Identify large agencies that have funded similar developments, e.g. United Way, and explore funding models that might apply to our situation. (Sechelt Chamber of Commerce has volunteered to do this.)
- Decide what core partners would be the "right mix" to meet both the needs of partners and the community. Get a commitment by a minimum of four organizations or agencies to move forward with implementation.
- Develop an initial plan for an ideal shared space, incorporating the physical space needs of partner groups. Determine how other smaller organizations and agencies, or independent workers might participate.
- Apply to the BC Rural Dividend Fund and other funders to fulfill the vision and develop a suitable co-location business model and space, i.e. buy or lease, renovate an existing building or develop a new building.



Conclusion

The co-location concept has been warmly received by the Sunshine Coast community. Organizations see an opportunity to improve their services, strengthen collaboration, and develop better access to both facilities and services. Participants in our workshop and follow-up meeting felt that a co-location model is feasible for the coast and the timing is ripe to bring this vision to reality. The project also aligns with other initiatives on the Sunshine Coast, including regional economic development, co-working and Maker spaces.

Appendix 1

Following the April 26 meeting, SCREDO sent a survey to groups who expressed interest in co-locating. Responses were received from nine organizations with the following results:

How many square feet do you use today?	Total: 4,280
Could you use more space in the years to come?	Yes: 2 Maybe: 2 No: 5
If yes or maybe, how much more space (square footage) could you utilize?	1650 sq. ft.
How much do you currently pay? (Monthly)	Total: \$7,023
Do you think you could pay more (monthly) in the years to come?	Yes: 3 Maybe: 5 No: 1
Do you have a kitchen in your current facility?	Yes: 6 No: 3
Do you currently have at least one washroom in your facility?	Yes: 8 No: 1
Do you currently have a boardroom (or large meeting room) in your facility?	Yes: 5 No: 4
Would you be willing to submit a letter of intent to help move the project ahead?	Yes: 9
Are you currently involved in a lease (short or long term) that would prevent you from moving location?	Yes: 4 No: 5