

## **Collaboration within the Nova Scotia Non-profit Sector: Shared knowledge, shared skills, shared sustainability**

**Abstract:** Non-profit organizations face many challenges such as unstable funding, high staff turnover rates and inadequate training. These challenges are further exasperated by increasing pressure from government agencies to address public issues that are complex and not easily mitigated by individual organizations. Non-profit organizations would benefit by collaborating with one another to overcome these challenges and help address society's complex problems. This paper examines resource and institutional theories to explore reasons that may explain why there appear to be low levels of collaboration among non-profit organisations, it also emphasizes the need for increased collaboration using aspects of the social issues framework. The Centre for Entrepreneurship, Education and Development (CEED) is presented as a case study of a Nova Scotian non-profit that could benefit from a high level of collaboration. Through this case study analysis, the paper also provides guidelines for moving forward with collaboration within the Nova Scotian non-profit sector, and how a unified non-profit sector may be the solution to issues of sustainability.

**About the Author:** Jessica MacIntosh is a Candidate in the Master of Marine Management program at Dalhousie University. She obtained her BA (Hons.) in International Development Studies and History at Dalhousie University in 2010, and is concluding a Certificate in GIS for Environmental Management from the University of Toronto. Jessica completed this report for a Management Without Borders class where she researched innovative and sustainable funding strategies for non-profit organizations.

The author would like to thank her colleagues from MGMT 5000 and the Centre for Entrepreneurship, Education and Development (CEED) for providing a valuable learning experience. Additional gratitude is owed to the three anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and both Jenny Baechler and Liz Wilson for their kind support during the research and editing stages.

## 1.0 Introduction

Non-profit organizations face many challenges such as unstable funding, high staff turnover rates and inadequate training that constrain their ability to fulfill their mandates. Non-profit organizations are additionally burdened by the downloading of public sector responsibilities from the government (Huxham, 1996), a practice that has become a trend in Canada especially after the economic crisis of 2007-2008. Additionally, regional factors such as aging populations, urban sprawl and economic recession increase the need for social services. Although declining rural populations may help mitigate some of these factors, it also reduces the human resource pool from which to draw so as to address these needs. As such non-profit organizations now face a greater challenge by taking on the responsibility to meet these increased demands with less funds and fewer skilled staff.

When an organization is in a situation that limits its ability to meet its objectives, collaboration with other groups can help the organization realize its mandate by providing access to resources and reducing operational costs. There are several internal and external factors that affect how an organization collaborates. Many theories, such as resource dependence theory (Pfeiffer & Salancik, 1978) and institutional theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), explain the reasons for collaboration among organizations, namely between government and non-profits, business and non-profits, government and business, and tri-sector collaboration. However, there appears to be little available research on how non-profits collaborate with each other (Guo & Acar, 2005).

While it is tempting to “try to develop a model of success that will fit [the] complex world” in which non-profits operate, there is no “one size fits all” theory to explain collaboration in the non-profit sector, as these concepts fail to “take into consideration the myriad of factors... that must be understood before [they] can be of much use in the ‘real world’” (Mandell, 1999 as cited in Hall, 1999, p. 277). As such, this paper draws from resource dependence and institutional theories to explain why some non-profits do collaborate. Furthermore, by using aspects from the social issues framework, the paper also explores potential limitations of the above theories, to make a case for why non-profits should make collaboration more of a priority.

The first section offers some interpretations of collaboration that are appropriate for the non-profit context. Next, the theories of collaboration are introduced. Following is a discussion on the benefits and challenges to collaboration, and then these are applied to the non-profit sector. The case study introduces the non-profit sector in Nova Scotia with specific focus on the Centre for Entrepreneurship, Education and Development (CEED). The remaining section proposes some guiding steps towards achieving a successful collaborative non-profit sector in Nova Scotia, and concludes with some final insights.

## 2.0 Collaboration

Collaboration can be defined in many ways. Gajda (2004) argues that the diversity of interpretations is often what blocks groups from achieving collaboration, because they do not exactly know what they are supposed to do to get there. While non-profits have different clients and different mandates, most of them share the common objective of solving complex problems to create positive change in society. Therefore, definitions of collaboration that emphasize a) the breaking down of organizational barriers; b) creative thinking; and c) improved service delivery systems for the benefit of all society and not just the non-profit and its clients, are more suited for the purpose of defining collaboration for non-profits.

In the non-profit world, a collaborative alliance is “an inter-organizational effort to address problems too complex and too protracted to be resolved by unilateral organizational action” (Gray & Wood, 1991, p. 4). In this respect, collaboration can be defined as a “process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible” (Gray & Wood, 1991, p. 4). This process can include a range of levels of collaboration, resulting in different levels of service integration. Figure 1 presents three different levels of collaboration, ranging from low collaboration to high collaboration. They include partnerships, alliances and integration. These levels are expressed in greater detail in Figure 3.

Gajda (2004) attempts to expose the variation among the levels of collaboration; she states that collaboration is a complex theory “that can represent a multitude of intra- and inter-organizational alliances” and is characterized by “how multiple individuals or entities work together to develop a relationship” (p. 68). Her interpretation touches on a key aspect that is fundamental to successful collaboration: building relationships. Without a solid relationship built on trust and communication, collaboration in the non-profit sector is unlikely and is at risk of being a wasted effort.

Type of Collaboration	Characteristics
Partnership	Information sharing Program coordination Joint planning
Alliance	Administrative consolidation Joint programming
Integration	Management service organization [MSO] Parent subsidiary Joint venture Merger

Figure 1: Levels of collaboration. Adapted from Guo and Acar (2005).

### 3.0 Theories of Collaboration

Resource dependence theory is one of the most common explanations as to why organizations may collaborate (Pfeiffer & Salancik, 1978; Guo & Acar, 2005). In general, it suggests that organizations with greater resource scarcity will likely collaborate, while organizations with adequate resources will have less inclination to collaborate (Guo & Acar, 2005). Selskey and Parker (2005) observe that within the resource dependence framework, the motive of collaboration is predominantly self-serving (i.e., acquiring resources), and an ancillary motive is the social impact of the partnership. They further state that these “social partnerships... are conceived in a narrow, instrumental, and short-term way” and are kept separate from the organization’s primary objectives and goals (p. 853). Resource dependence theory can explain collaboration between non-profits that lack sufficient resources, but it only focuses on internal factors (i.e., an organization’s lack of resources) and neglects to consider the external factors that may affect an organization’s decision to collaborate.

Institutional theory suggests that an organization’s sustainability depends heavily on how it conforms to the norms and expectations of its institutional environment (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Guo and Acar, 2005). The theory examines the external factors of an organization that affect its reasons to collaborate. These external factors can include the political climate within which the organization operates, and the formal laws and societal expectations of its

environment. For example, many organizations are mandated by law to collaborate on some level with other organizations, especially if they receive funding from the government. Therefore, an organization that is reliant upon external funding, such as government funding, is more likely to collaborate if it is mandated to do so (Guo & Acar, 2005). Institutional theory can explain why many non-profits that are financially supported by the government enter into collaborative partnerships. However, in this context its scope is limited in that it fails to address why non-profits may collaborate for reasons other than those that are self-serving or mandatory (Galaskiewicz, 1985).

Resource dependence and institutional theory can explain collaboration among non-profits, but not the level of collaboration that is encouraged in this paper. Rather, a framework like the social issues framework offers a more comprehensive understanding of non-profit collaboration (Waddock, 1991). The social issues framework developed out of a growing realization that individual sectors cannot adequately address the complex issues that plague society. Selskey and Parker (2005) state that these complex issues, or “metaproblems... are poorly defined and tend to fall through the cracks of prevailing institutional arrangements” (p. 852). The social issues framework dictates that only collaborative partnerships can successfully address these complex issues because of enhanced learning opportunities, the availability of more resources and the ability to encourage more stakeholder participation (Selskey & Parker, 2005). Unlike the short-term, self-serving or mandated types of collaboration defined by resource dependence and institution theory, collaboration within the social issues framework is defined by partnership logic where parties both take ownership of a social issue and integrate that issue into their core set of objectives (Linder & Rosenau, 2000).

## **4.0 Benefits and Challenges to Collaboration**

### **4.1 Benefits**

The ultimate benefit to collaboration in the non-profit sector is long-term sustainability through effective operations. In most cases, when organizations achieve positive results with no wasted effort from redundancy, they become better candidates for funding, and well-funded organizations are better able to fulfill their mandate and objectives. As such, they are more capable of generating social return on funders’ investments. This success can help an organization earn a reputation for efficient and effective operations that will likely ensure that it remains sustainable into the future. Such a reputation is achieved by sharing resources such as knowledge and skills, which build capacity and increase the chance of successful outcomes without the duplication of efforts.

Smedlund (2010) discusses how the transfer and creation of knowledge depends on the relationship between entities. If a group is open and externally focused, it is more susceptible to finding new knowledge; however, if a group is more closed and internally focused, it will likely be better at transferring complex knowledge because it will have stronger inter-personal

relationships (Smedlund, 2010). Knowledge management can be defined as the process of gathering, organizing, and storing information and making it available to others (Choo, 2002). Collaboration would facilitate knowledge management for non-profit organizations because it would provide an opportunity for this transfer of knowledge to occur. Indeed, as Berkes (2009) suggests, success in bridging organizations can lead to successful knowledge transfer.

Collaboration could provide greater opportunities for skills training. In the political climate of budget cuts and loss of public confidence in the government, it is commonplace for the government to rely on civil society to provide public services (Selskey & Parker, 2005). However, as individual organizations take on more responsibility with no additional resources or training, their operational capacity is weakened. This specific issue has been extensively deliberated in community-based management discourse, which argues that “decentralization reforms are characterized by insufficient transfer of powers to local institutions...[and] a great deal of evidence indicates that central governments are a major reason for the failure of decentralization reforms” (Berkes, 2009, p. 492). If organizations operated as a collaborative unit, they could share their resources and skills so that this extra responsibility could be dealt with effectively. As a result of this skill-sharing, each organization would have an enhanced skillset.

## **4.2 Challenges**

While the benefits to collaboration are undeniable, such initiatives are not without challenges. Issues include determining group aims, objectives and responsibilities; the difficulty of building trust and communication; the risk of minority organizations’ cultural and specific values becoming underrepresented in a homogenous group; and the difficulty of achieving shared control (Huxham, 1996; Phoenix & FOCO, 2012; Sloan, 2009; Osborne, 2000). Moreover, an overarching concern is that managing all these challenges will take valuable time away from project implementation (Berlin, 2012).

For a holistic body that represents several diverse groups, identifying broad aims and objectives that are inclusive, but specific enough to be matched to particular strategies, is not an easy task. Developing a “team charter” and spending time identifying common objectives is crucial to the success of collaboration; as Byrd and Luthy (2010) state, “by having teams develop and codify the rules by which they agree to abide, norms evolve which become the framework for the decision-making process” (p. 13). However, developing this common framework is not easy. Huxham (1996) discusses how unlikely it is that organizations will have the same objectives for collaborating. Some organizations will have hidden agendas, which can create tension and inhibit trust and communication.

Overcoming these tensions requires trust, but building trust and communication is challenging because it takes time, and there are no shortcuts. Moreover, a large group means that there will be more relationships and thus a more complex environment. Building trust and

communication in a large complex system takes even more time and effort and is one more thing in the way of project implementation (Berlin, 2012). Nonetheless, building trust and communication is vital to the success of collaboration. Indeed, Pisano and Verganti (2008) note that the design of a collaborative network dictates how well it will function. Taking the time to build relationships and create communication pathways is challenging, but worthwhile.

A particularly important pathway is that of knowledge transfer, and important requirements for successful knowledge management in a collaborative group are trust and communication (Smedlund, 2010). Knowledge is often considered a competitive resource, so groups would benefit from trusting that sharing information and similar resources will contribute to a greater social good (Parkinson, 2006). Additionally, different types of knowledge such as political, scientific, experiential and theoretical knowledge will have varying complexities and thus solid communication platforms like workshops, presentations, lectures, newsletters and meetings will be required to make them accessible for everyone.

Trust is also necessary for what Huxham (1996) calls “collaborative empowerment”—a term to describe the devolution of all responsibility for the collaborative initiative to the participating organizations (p. 14). A major challenge with this approach is deciding who, or what organization is responsible for facilitating or organizing the initiative, and how to control their influence on the process so that it remains representative (Phoenix & FOCO, 2012). For example, communicating and building trust can be especially difficult between people with different values and cultural beliefs. As such, a unified sector must stress the importance of communicating professionally and respectfully through various communication platforms.

## **5.0 Collaboration in the non-profit sector**

Non-profit organizations can be characterized by the issue or sector that they represent (e.g., environment, health, children, education), by their partnerships (e.g., with the government, with the private sector, with industry), or by their geographic scope (e.g., international, national, regional, urban, rural). The process and outcomes of collaboration for each type of non-profit will be different. Therefore, it is useful to examine what attributes of different types of non-profits can lead to collaboration. As Guo and Acar (2005) state, “the extent of formal collaborative activity is a function of internal organizational characteristics, environmental pressures, and organizational attitudes” (p. 345).

Figure 2 displays the enabling attributes to various types of collaboration that different kinds of non-profits may experience. It examines the differences among non-profits from different sectors and different partnerships. However, because this paper is only focused on non-profits in Nova Scotia, only the geographic differences between rural and urban non-profits are examined. The level of collaboration is connected to the type of organization through theoretical reasoning about why that organization would collaborate depending on their enabling attributes.

<b>Attribute that enables collaboration</b>	<b>Most likely type of non-profit that will possess this attribute</b>	<b>Most likely level of collaboration</b>	<b>Theoretical reasoning</b>
Older organization	Rural; urban; any sector	Alliance, Integration	According to social issues framework, it is unlikely that an older organization is competing for priorities so collaboration will likely be more formal for the purposes of addressing complex problems.
Larger budget	Usually urban; usually sectors that have strong government or public support	Alliance, Integration	According to social issues framework, an organization with a larger budget will likely be interested in more formal types of collaboration that are beneficial for the purposes of reaching a larger clientele and addressing complex problems.
Board Member ties with other non-profits	Urban; sectors that other non-profits also address	Partnership, Alliance, Integration	According to network theory, an organization with ties to other organizations, no matter what its budget or age, is likely to be involved in any level of collaboration
Legal mandates to collaborate	Rural; urban; any sector	Partnership, Alliance,	According to institution theory, a legal mandate to collaborate likely refers only to the requirement to share information and resources in order to avoid redundancy, and would not require a total integration of organizations.
The need to reduce transaction costs and maximize economic gain	Rural; urban; any sector	Partnership, Alliance	According to resource dependence theory, an organization that is seeking to reduce its operational costs is likely seeking to collaborate at an informal level so it can reduce costs while maintaining its independency.
Need for resources	Mostly rural; some urban; often sectors that are not aligned with government priorities	Partnership, Alliance	According to resource dependence theory, an organization that has insufficient resources will likely seek to collaborate for the purpose of sharing resources.



Figure 2: Different reasons and levels of collaboration for different types of non-profits. Adapted from Guo and Acar (2005) and Selskey & Parker (2005).

Non-profit organizations often define themselves as entities separate from the government, and usually representing a distinct and marginalized group within society. As such, individual non-profits are not always considered as an integral and representative part of society. For example, the term “non-profit” is immediately reflective of what non-profit organizations are *not* (associated with government, out to make a profit), not what they *are* (benevolent, indiscriminate advocates of social justice) (Morris-Poultney, personal communication, October 5 2012)<sup>1</sup>. Identifying non-profits by what they are not is a distraction from acknowledging the positive entities that they are, and from imagining the possible instigators of change that they could be as a unified group.

Building on the concept of what non-profit organizations can do, if individuals can collaborate to form a unified sector, the potential benefits could include an increase in their capacity to fulfill their mandates as they will now be able to share valuable resources like knowledge, skills and training. A collaborative non-profit sector will also be able to secure a sustainable long-term future, as resources can be conserved, and redundancy of research and efforts will be minimized, which is attractive to external funders like the government (Imagine Canada, 2010).

Resource dependence theory dictates that sharing resources is a major incentive and benefit to collaboration (Trist, 1983). Indeed, in most cases non-profit organizations are always in need of more skilled staff, time and money. Moreover, non-profit organizations with specific mandates may have sufficient resources in one area but may lack in another. For example, organizations that offer support services to immigrants may focus on language training, but lack the resources to provide professional development training. According to the social issues framework, by sharing resources, non-profit organizations will gain the resources they need, and as such will likely be more effective, efficient and capable of addressing complex social issues (Selskey & Parker, 2005).

### **5.1.1 Knowledge management and sharing**

Knowledge management is a mindful, collaborative process that encourages social learning, and social learning is an important component of trusting and building resilient communities (Berkes, 2009). Individual non-profit organizations that focus on one group in society can have a wealth of knowledge about that particular group. As noted by Choo (2002), “information is data given context, and endowed with meaning and significance, and knowledge is information that is transformed through reasoning and reflection into beliefs, concepts, and mental models” (p. 501). Many non-profit organizations focus on specific local issues like ecology, the

---

<sup>1</sup> D’arcy Morris-Poultney is Director of Operations for CEED in Halifax, Nova Scotia and is involved in research on how to strengthen the non-profit sector (Willwerth, MacIntosh, Clarke, Travers and Yao, 2012).

environment, immigrants, women, domestic violence and youth, to name a few. The knowledge that these organizations would have about a particular issue would be highly developed in a way that is only attainable through experience. However, as many of these issues can be interrelated (e.g., youth and domestic violence; women and domestic violence), to really work towards meaningful change, collaboration is needed to share knowledge.

If an organization is open to partnering with other groups, it is likely to benefit from new knowledge. However, if an organization is focused on its own issues and mandate it will develop a more complex, deeper understanding of those issues, at the risk of losing out on opportunities to gain different knowledge. A collaborative non-profit sector would strike a balance between these two positions. For optimal knowledge sharing and management, individual non-profit organizations would benefit from cooperating with other agencies and both collectively creating new knowledge, but also remaining focused on their own mandate and objectives so that they are able to contribute valuable, complex knowledge to the group.

### **5.1.2 Training and skills sharing**

The Nova Scotia non-profit sector research project, *At the Same Table: Developing the non-profit sector in Nova Scotia*, conducted in 2012 by Phoenix House and the Foundation of Community Organizations (FOCO), identified a lack of training opportunities within many organizations, but considers these opportunities necessary to ensure the sustainability of an organization. Collaboration in the non-profit sector could enhance training opportunities via the sharing of skills and the development of a sector-wide training department (Phoenix and FOCO, 2012). According to the 2010 Nova Scotia Non-Profit Labour Market Study, 75% of employees in the non-profit sector have university education, but lack specific competency skills, identified by the HR Council for the Non-Profit Sector as governance, financial management and sustainability, information technology, human resources, programs and services, community engagement and fund development (Phoenix & FOCO, 2012). Unfortunately, non-profit organizations often lack the time and money to invest in proper training programs for their staff.

If non-profit organizations collaborated to form a unified sector, relevant and regular training could be more easily provided and attainable. Phoenix and FOCO (2012) suggested that the government has an opportunity to provide training to non-profit organizations via access to relevant government employee training, through a government training entity, or by funding training from external agencies. All non-profit organizations, regardless of their focus, require the same general competencies. For example, ideally, a collaborative non-profit sector would have a physical space that all organizations could access to receive equal training opportunities. An established communication channel/outreach program would also help keep clients and the general public informed on training updates, schedules, and opportunities.

Despite the benefits, collaboration can be perceived as a risky endeavor (Guo & Acar, 2005). However, formal training or experience interacting with other organizations/partners can help change this attitude (Sloan, 2009). While non-profit organizations will share a general interest in social welfare, specific professions will be diverse, and communication must avoid “specialized and unfathomable jargon” (Huxham, 1996, p. 11) that can frustrate others. Due diligence to the inclusion of diverse values within an accessible communication network will help build trusting relationships (Gajda, 2004). Additionally, to avoid losing focus or direction in a collaboration, non-profit organizations can rely on their values, principles and mandate to direct the decisions they take.

## **6.0 The non-profit sector in Nova Scotia**

In Nova Scotia, the idea of a unified non-profit sector is not new one. Non-profit organizations have already been informally engaging in collaborative efforts, but a unified voice has failed to emerge out of these partnerships (Phoenix & FOCO, 2012). The challenges that face Nova Scotia in particular have encouraged many round-table discussions and feasibility studies on the possibility of creating a unified non-profit sector. A particular issue that fueled this discussion is the changing demographics of the labour force (Phoenix & FOCO, 2012). The workforce in Nova Scotia is diminishing as the aging population grows; and as more people move from rural to urban areas, many communities in which non-profit organizations operate are left without skilled labour. Moreover, non-profit organizations rarely have the budget for competitive salary and compensation packages, yet they have to compete with the government and private sectors for skilled labour (Phoenix & FOCO, 2012). This is a major challenge for non-profit organizations, because they are accommodating more responsibility from the government (e.g., Capital Health, Regional School Boards) to address social issues that traditionally fall under specific governmental mandates.

A good example of a Nova Scotian non-profit organization that has a collaborative structure is the Black Business Initiative (BBI). The BBI is a province-wide business development initiative committed to fostering the growth of businesses owned by members of the Nova Scotia Black community<sup>2</sup>. The BBI places priority on educating Black business owners in the operation of their business - from marketing to budgeting to securing funding (BBI, 2011).

The BBI is a network of organizations that rely on different funding sources, also known as the BBI Composite Group of Companies. These include Black Business Consulting, which operates ADEPA, a construction consulting firm; the Black Business Community Investment Fund; the Business is Jammin’ charity, and Black Business Enterprise. These individual organizations collaborate by sharing knowledge, training, and resources, and they also collaborate structurally by sharing administrative space. The critical principle that unites these

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bbi.ca/>

organizations is their shared objective to provide business development support to the Black community. This unified vision is captured in BBI's mandate "One Brand with One Vision under One Organization."

These entities operate on a for-profit, investment, government-funded or charitable status while in every way remaining true to the mission of BBI<sup>3</sup>. It is partly because of this aligned diversity that BBI has been so successful. While it does not technically act as a government 'subcontractor' to provide public services, it does provide a highly relevant public service to a particular group in society. As such, the organization ensures and prioritizes that it is able to provide adequate service over the long-term for its members (BBI, 2011).

## **6.1 Centre for Entrepreneurship, Education and Development**

The Centre for Entrepreneurship, Education and Development (CEED) is an example of a non-profit that already strives to collaborate on an alliance level, but will benefit from an integrated level of collaboration. CEED is a Halifax-based non-profit organization committed to providing both at-risk youth and young entrepreneurs professional development training and small business loans. CEED originated in 1993 as a partnership between the Nova Scotia Department of Education and the Canada/Nova Scotia Cooperation Agreement on Economic Diversification, with a mandate to foster an entrepreneurial spirit into the education system in Nova Scotia (CEED, 2012). In 2002, CEED became a non-profit organization and expanded its clientele to include youth and entrepreneurs outside the public school system. CEED's programs include professional development training, a Second Chance youth employability project for at-risk youth, and loan programs such as the Self Employment Benefits Program and the SEED Capital Loan Program. CEED is guided by a Board of Directors and a Loan Review Committee, and its programs are delivered by program facilitators and client consultants.

The success of CEED's programs has made the organization a valuable part of society; as such, the government currently provides all of their funding (Willwerth, et al., 2012). However, CEED is limited by this funding model, as their operational capacity is limited by government priorities, and their longevity is at risk with government cuts still in effect. CEED recognizes the need to diversify funding in light of government cut-backs, but is uncertain whether to pursue charitable status, investment funds, or other means. This is not a challenge unique to CEED. Many non-profits are often applying to the same funding source, and due to this competition, they may defer from their mission to align their priorities with those of the funder. Compounding this situation further, another major challenge for CEED is that it currently faces

---

<sup>3</sup> ADEPA is a for-profit construction consulting firm that provides employment opportunities to African-Canadians; BBI is in part funded by the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and the Nova Scotia Department of Economic Development; Business is Jammin' is a charitable non-profit, and the Black Business Community Economic Development Investment Fund (CEDIF) is a pool of capital from private investors that produces a social return on the investment, in addition to a financial return.

a lack of organizational direction (Willwerth et al., 2012). Consequently these factors limit the ability of CEED to fully achieve its mandate effectively; participating in a collaborative initiative could help mitigate these challenges.

CEED is an ideal candidate for enhancing collaboration because of a number of factors: (a) it is an older organization that is not competing for priorities, (b) it is providing a public service that is supported by the government, (c) has board members with ties to other organizations, (d) has a need for more resources (i.e., diverse funding), and (e) addresses complex social issues. Figure 3 illustrates the three different levels of collaboration available for CEED and their respective characteristics. The characteristics highlighted in green are most beneficial to CEED, thus illustrating that the highest level of collaboration, i.e., integration, is recommended for CEED.

			Definition	Beneficial Characteristics		
<b>Level of Collaboration</b>	<b>Low</b>	Partnership	Information sharing Program coordination Joint programming	Short term relationship; maintain independence	Build network and linkages	No funding changes; no reduced costs
	<b>Medium</b>	Alliance	Administrative consolidation	Casual long-term relationship; some independence	Stronger network	Reduced operational costs
	<b>High</b>	Integration	Knowledge transfer Skills sharing Resource sharing Merger	Long-term relationship; fused mandates	Becomes part of a network that is better able to address complex issues	Diversified funding; reduced operational costs

Figure 3: Levels of collaboration and their beneficial characteristics. Green highlights characteristics that would benefit CEED. Adapted from Guo and Acar (2005).

One of the major benefits of integrated collaboration that CEED could experience is a greater ability to address complex issues because of an enhanced skill set, more training opportunities and shared knowledge that a collaborative initiative would offer. However, such an integration does not require CEED to lose sight of its objectives. When making decisions about direction or implementation, CEED focuses on matching the need to the service, and matching their strategic directive to their mission statement. In a collaborative unit, CEED could still use this guiding principle to ensure that its mandate is respected.

## **7.0 Discussion**

As noted from both the literature and case study, collaboration amongst non-profit organizations (specifically) in Nova Scotia is crucial. As an organization, CEED appears to be at a crossroads. However, it has many features that enable collaborative efforts. It is an older organization with a well-established network and government support, and it addresses complex social issues such as employability for at-risk youth. To ensure its sustainability, CEED would be wise to enter into high-level collaborative initiatives with similar non-profits.

Although there are some elements of resource and institutional theory that support CEED's current situation, their future opportunities for higher forms of collaboration might be better reflected by the social issues framework. There are many options for moving forward. CEED could begin its collaborative journey by forming relationships with other non-profits that operate under a similar mandate, or it could follow BBI's structure and become a collaborative network by creating more CEED organizations that are structurally diverse yet connected through a unified mandate. The other option is that CEED, or any other non-profit or group of non-profits in Nova Scotia could take the lead and act on the recommendations from the At the Same Table report and start forming a collaborative non-profit sector.

There are so many benefits to collaboration that one may wonder why it has not already been established. A major obstacle is the current paradigm. Although non-profit organizations are important because they fill a gap in society where the government fails to address certain issues, they may also be perceived by their clients in opposing ways. For example, on one hand the clients whom non-profits serve may interpret them as integral parts of society as they meet their needs when the government fails to do so. Alternatively, people who do not benefit from a specific non-profit organisation or use the services may perceive them as a separate, perhaps less important entity within society's structure. Another layer to this paradigm is the perception that the non-profits have of themselves. For example, non-profits position themselves as separate entities from the government for the purpose of aligning with a specific group in society that the government inadequately represents, but they consider themselves an integral part of society because they represent that specific group. In the same respect, the government perceives non-profits as external bodies that fulfill government priorities but are not part of government, and thus not guaranteed to receive full government support.

Collaboration can help clarify the complexity surrounding external and internal perceptions of non-profits. Primarily, collaboration can expose the connections between issues that non-profits address, help non-profits see that they have an important role to play in society, and that they do not have to be distinct from government, industry or business. Moreover, a collaborative non-profit sector will address a wider range of connected issues more effectively and efficiently, and this is likely to convince those who do not directly benefit from non-profits realize that they do benefit at least in some indirect way. Finally, a collaborative non-profit sector that effectively addresses issues of public concern with minimal redundancy can help alter the government's perception of the non-profit sector, and perhaps the government could be more inclusive and consider this collaborative unit as a "Community Sector."

The shifting away from disconnected non-profits that are not perceived as integral parts of society and towards a unified group of non-profits that collectively represent society requires a collaborative effort. Throughout this collaborative process as relationships form and communication and trust are developed, the ways in which non-profits, the public and the government perceive non-profits will evolve.

### 7.1 Collaboration in the Nova Scotian non-profit sector – Moving Forward

Establishing a management framework for collaboration is one of the primary steps towards achieving successful collaboration and a unified non-profit sector in Nova Scotia. Pisano and Verganti (2008) created a framework that describes four basic models of collaborative structure as a means of making it easier for stakeholders interested in collaboration to decide which type will best suit their desired outcomes (Figure 4). The models vary by the type of governance and level of participation.

Collaboration Model	Governance Structure	Participation Structure
Innovation Mall	Hierarchical	Open
Innovation Community	Flat	Open
Consortium	Flat	Closed

Figure 4: Structural models of collaboration (Pisano & Verganti, 2008).

Hierarchical governance implies that one or a group of parties are the sole decision-makers, while a flat governance structure means that anyone involved in the collaboration can make decisions. Open participation implies that anyone can participate in the collaboration, whereas closed participation means only a select group of stakeholders are collaborating (Pisano & Verganti, 2008). Non-profit organizations that wish to collaborate could benefit from using this

framework to decide what type of management structure will be most useful in terms of meeting their needs.

A collaborative Nova Scotian non-profit sector would benefit best from a consortium style management framework, as participation would be exclusive to non-profit organizations from Nova Scotia, and governance would be flat (i.e. all participating non-profit organizations would have decision-making power). The first step towards initiating this collaboration would be to involve a few key organizations to start the process. A good model is identified in the report compiled by Phoenix House, on developing the non-profit sector in Nova Scotia (Phoenix & FOCO, 2012). However, a key lesson identified in this study notes that although organizations should take on management responsibilities, the facilitating organizations should not monopolize decision-making.

Once these organizations have met and established a degree of rapport, the second step would be to determine common goals and objectives, and create a team charter. To achieve this, it is necessary to break away from silo professionalism and compromise with others (Huxham, 1996). An initial meeting also gives organizations a chance to choose not to participate, which saves them, and the collaborating team, from wasted time and effort (Gajda, 2004; Osborne, 2000). After the initial meetings, regular meetings and ongoing communication can build relationships, which are crucial to successful collaboration. Many non-profit organizations have existing networks, and as building new connections can be time intensive, prevailing relationships should be built upon and, where necessary and/or time allows, strengthened by connecting with other organizations.

Creating time and space for informal collaboration between non-profit organizations (e.g. talking over lunch and coffee breaks) is also important, because these informal interactions help build close relationships that foster the transfer of creative ideas that generate knowledge (Smedlund, 2010). Furthermore, implementing small projects that are likely to produce positive outcomes (i.e. low hanging fruit) in the initial stages of collaboration can help build trust and communication, and get people excited about collaboration. Finally, to encourage and sustain relationships, communication would be a priority throughout the collaborative process. A regular, indirect form of communication could be established, such as a newsletter or a social media forum, and regular direct communication can occur in the form of meetings and workshops. Ongoing self-reflection and evaluation should be a part of this communication so successes can be measured and celebrated, and approaches can be adapted as necessary.

## **8.0 Conclusion**

Establishing a unified non-profit sector in Nova Scotia would help organizations fulfill their own mandates by sharing knowledge, skills and training, and it would improve the success of mitigating complex social problems that are rarely solved by any single organization. A collaborative sector would also be more efficient than non-profit organizations working



individually, as it would absolve redundancy in efforts. This would, in effect, attract more funding from government and private investors who are attracted by efficiency and successful outcomes, and thus ensure the long-term sustainability of the sector. However, collaboration is not without its challenges; building relationships requires ongoing trust and communication, which requires effort from all parties. Spending time and investing effort into initial inquiry and developmental phases will best prepare organizations to exert this effort, as common objectives will be identified, and roles and responsibilities will be clarified. Moreover, designating a specific physical space for regular meetings and communicating regularly via newsletters or social media forums will help all parties stay involved and excited about collaboration.

Like CEED, many organizations in Nova Scotia already have long-standing relationships with other non-profits, and inquiries into the feasibility of a unified non-profit sector in Nova Scotia are already underway. Collaboration amongst non-profit organizations in Nova Scotia is a natural step forward, and should be supported by the non-profit community, the government and the private and public sector. It is, after all, in the best interest of all non-profit organizations, and thus, the people in Nova Scotia that they serve.

## References

- Berger, P. L., Luckmann, T. (1967). *The Social Construction of Reality*. New York: Doubleday.
- Berkes, F. (2010). Devolution of environment and resources governance: trends and future. *Environmental Conservation*, 37(04), 489-500.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S037689291000072X>
- Berlin, J. M., Carlström, E. D., & Sandberg, H. S. (2012). Models of teamwork: ideal or not? A critical study of theoretical team models. *Team Performance Management*, 18(5/6), 328- 340.
- Black Business Initiative. (2011). *About BBI*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbi.ca/about-bbi/index.html>
- Byrd, J. T., & Luthy, M. R. (2010). Improving group dynamics: creating a team charter. *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal*, 14(1), 13-18.
- CEED. (2012). *About Us*. Retrieved from <http://www.ceed.ca/index.php?id=1>.
- Choo, Chun Wei. 2002. Knowledge Management. In J.R. Schement (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Communication and Information* (pp. 501-506). New York: MacMillan Reference USA.
- Gajda, R. (2004). Utilizing collaboration theory to evaluate strategic alliances. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 25(1), 65-77.
- Galaskiewicz, J. (1985). Interorganizational relations. *Annual review of sociology*, 281-304.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.11.080185.001433>
- Huxham, C., & Vangen, S. (1996). Working together: Key themes in the management of relationships between public and non-profit organizations. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 9(7), 5-17.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09513559610153863>
- Imagine Canada. (2010). *A Framework for Action for the non-profit sector*. Retrieved from [http://www.imaginecanada.ca/files/www/en/publicpolicy/framework\\_for\\_action.pdf](http://www.imaginecanada.ca/files/www/en/publicpolicy/framework_for_action.pdf)
- Linder, S. H., & Rosenau, P. V. (2000). Mapping the terrain of the public-private policy partnership. *Public-private policy partnerships*, 1, 2-5.

- Osborne, S. P., & Murray, V. (2000). Collaboration between non-profit organizations in the provision of social services in Canada: Working together or falling apart? *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 13(1), 9-19.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09513550010334452>
- Parkin, C. (2006). *Building successful collaborations: a guide to collaboration among non-profit agencies and between non-profit agencies and businesses*. Retrieved from  
[http://www.cfc-fcc.ca/link\\_docs/collaborationReport.pdf](http://www.cfc-fcc.ca/link_docs/collaborationReport.pdf)
- Pfeffer, J., & Salancik, G. (1978). *The external control of organizations: A resource dependence perspective*. Stanford Business Books.
- Phoenix and the Federation of Community Organizations (FOCO). (2012). *At the Same Table: Developing the non-profit sector in Nova Scotia*. Retrieved from  
[http://www.foco.ca/online\\_documents/Documents%20-%2050664%20Phoenix%20final.pdf](http://www.foco.ca/online_documents/Documents%20-%2050664%20Phoenix%20final.pdf)
- Pisano, G. P., & Verganti, R. (2008). Which kind of collaboration is right for you? *Harvard Business Review*, 86(12), 78-86.
- Sloan, P. (2009). Redefining Stakeholder Engagement: From Control to Collaboration. *Journal Of Corporate Citizenship*, (36), 25-40.
- Smedlund, A. (2010). Characteristics of routine, development and idea networks in teams. *Team Performance Management*, 16(1/2), 95-117.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/13527591011028942>
- Trist, E. L. 1983. Referent organizations and the development of interorganizational domains. *Human Relations*, 36:247-268.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/001872678303600304>
- Waddock, S. 1991. A typology of social partnership organizations. *Administration & Society*, 22(4): 480-516  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/009539979102200405>
- Willwerth, J., MacIntosh, J., Clarke, M., Travers, R., and Yao, Y. (2012). *Innovative and Sustainable Fundraising Approaches for Non-profit Organizations*. (Unpublished report). Dalhousie University, Canada.