FACT SHEET

PARTNERING AND RESILIENCE
Environmental Service Organizations in Times of Funding Cuts

Social Economy Fact Sheet #08

By Travis Gliedt, Paul Parker and Jennifer Lynes
University of Waterloo

E-mail: pparker@uwaterloo.ca

Birds' Eye View

Conditions for successful partnering include the ability to:

- connect with partners

- leverage access to information and complementary resources

- build relationships that speed implementation of new programs and services

- ensure open communication among all partners

- obtain support and participation from government

- effectively frame and sell the benefits

- last over time, thereby enhancing results and overall success.

Driven by core social and environmental objectives, non-profit environmental service organizations (ESOs) create and deliver services to improve environmental performance and mitigate climate change, by increasing water efficiency, improving waste management and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In 2006, however, dozens of ESOs faced a crisis when the Canadian government suddenly cancelled their main funding, the EnerGuide for Houses (EGH) program. To survive, they built new partnerships. This University of Waterloo research team uses a case study of ESO resilience in southern Ontario to explore how partnerships influenced their ability to adapt to abrupt changes.

Partnering for Resilience: Key Ingredients for Survival

Resilience generally refers to an ability or process rather than an outcome, and is associated with an organization or a community's survival amidst major environmental changes, whether physical, social or financial. It is a key factor in successful adaptation. How it works has become a thought-provoking topic in current debates.

Factors enhancing organizational resilience include:

- Stocks and flows of human and social capital
- Relationships
- Resource mobilization
- Information
- Competence
- Economic development.

Strategic partnerships are broad 'multi-issue' relationships with 'agenda-setting capacity'. *Operational partnerships* focus on specific projects for specific problems. *Collaborative partnerships* give each partner a significant voice in decision-making.

When the funding crunch hit in 2006, the ESO drew upon established partnerships with local electric and natural gas utilities, reaching out for support to replace federal funding, cancelled on a day's notice. In return, the ESO provided its credibility as an established environmental leadership organization. It also contributed to marketing by mentioning the 'partner support' to citizens during residential energy efficiency evaluations.

This exchange of complementary resources strengthened relationships and increased the scale of the local partnerships, as the utility companies provided a large amount of funding, which allowed the ESO to retain staff, and develop new services (e.g. solar energy evaluations, Greening Sacred Spaces, Well Aware).

Methods

This two-step methodology involved:

1. Semi-structured interviews with the executive directors of 12 Canadian ESOs. All delivered the EnerGuide for Houses program and were affected by this federal program's cancellation.

2. An intensive case study of one successful ESO through a three-hour interview and detailed analysis of internal strategic plans (2005-2008) and external documents.

Findings

*   Local *crisis partnerships* provide flexible and timely support, and facilitate community entrepreneurship.

*   *Crisis partnerships* with utilities and local governments involve shared decision-making and focus on multiple objectives (e.g. reduce greenhouse gas emissions, energy demand and cost of energy, etc.).

*   *Stability partnerships* involve indirect connections between the ESOs and the federal government via the Green Communities Canada network.

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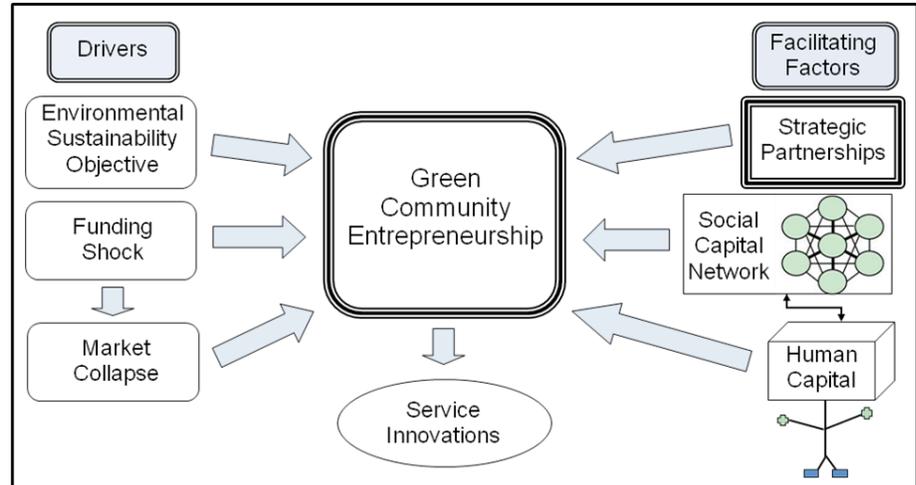sec@oise.utoronto.ca

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Figure 1. Green community entrepreneurship. Based on Gliedt and Parker, 2007

The local utility companies had partnered with the ESO as secondary funders over the previous seven years. They stepped in and replaced the federal funding to keep the cost of the residential energy efficiency evaluations low enough to maintain community demand for the service. The municipal council also played an important role in supporting the ESO by pressuring the federal government to reinstate the EnerGuide for Houses Program. Thus, local partnerships acted as social, knowledge, and financial capital exchange channels to quickly funnel resources between organizations.

The stability created by the partnership resources allowed the ESO to free-up and draw upon its existing human capital resources to develop new services. In addition to partnerships and human capital, social capital networks connecting this ESO to other ESO's across Canada helped facilitate green community entrepreneurship through the sharing of knowledge and expertise (see Figure 1).

In Short: Entrepreneurial Partnerships Build Resilience

Two processes of change in the ESO are similar to Jones's (2006) theory of evolutionary entrepreneurship. The first involves partnerships to mobilize human and social capital to 'release creativity' and generate 'incremental and inconspicuous' innovations. This is a continuous process that fluctuates in intensity depending on the resource support from *stability partnerships*.

The second involves emergency entrepreneurship with new services and programs emerging in response to a sudden external shock through the timely support of *crisis partnerships*. This combination of stability and crisis partnerships creates a landscape that leads to innovation, enhancing the community's ability to meet its social and environmental goals.

Diversification through partnership and entrepreneurship improves organizational resilience. It helps to ensure ongoing delivery of climate change and energy management services to the community.

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http://socialeconomy.utoronto.ca/english/project_pages/project_08.php