



Interview Findings

CAPACITY BUILDING:
A FRAMEWORK FOR STRENGTHENING
STEWARDSHIP IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

MARCH 2009

PREPARED FOR:
THE STEWARDSHIP CENTRE FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Fraser Salmon & Watersheds Program



Fraser Basin Council



Fisheries and Oceans Canada

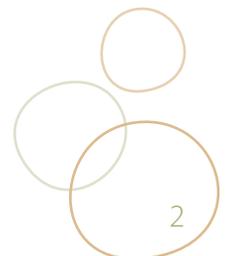


All organizations are encouraged to use the information in this document to their benefit, provided that acknowledgement to the authors and The Stewardship Centre For B.C. is made.

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Please note: both this document and the full report can be accessed at www.StewardshipCentre.bc.ca.



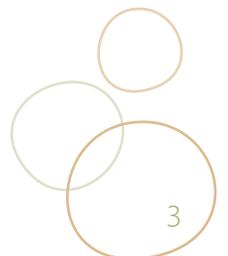
Background

The Stewardship Centre for British Columbia Society (SCBC) promotes stewardship of natural values as the foundation for sustainability. The mission of the Stewardship Center for B.C. is to promote ecological stewardship by engaging British Columbians, increasing knowledge and understanding of healthy ecosystems, and building the capacity of stewardship organizations.

The Stewardship Centre is working to build capacity of stewardship organizations in BC both by addressing the critical need for core funding and by exploring other mechanisms to build capacity within individual stewardship organizations and across the sector as a whole. From November 2008 through March 2009, SCBC undertook research to examine capacity building in relation to the stewardship sector and to gain a better understanding of the capacity challenges and solutions facing B.C.'s stewardship sector. As part of that research, telephone interviews were conducted with stewardship organizations across the BC. This document summarizes key interview findings that informed the report "Capacity Building: A Framework For Strengthening Stewardship in British Columbia". Both this document and the full report can be accessed through the Stewardship Centre for B.C. at www.StewardshipCentre.bc.ca.

The Interviews

Telephone interviews of approximately one-hour in length were conducted with twenty-one stewardship organizations from across British Columbia during the first two weeks of February 2009. The main purpose of the interviews was to gather feedback on the Capacity Building Framework developed by the authors as part of the research project. The Framework was created to provide a common platform to be able to discuss capacity building and to help stewardship organizations systematically approach capacity building. The interviewees were selected from a list of twenty-six stewardship groups provided by the SCBC. Interviewees were provided with a copy of the questions and the proposed Framework for Building Capacity prior to the interviews. The Framework and interview questions can be found in Appendices.



The Interview Questions were divided into three main categories:

- Basic information about the stewardship groups themselves such as scope of activities, annual budget, number of staff, volunteers and members;
- Baseline questions about stewardship organizations' understanding of and experience with capacity building;
- Questions about the proposed Capacity Building Framework and including priority areas for building capacity for individual stewardship organizations and the sector as a whole.

The questions provided a platform to begin a broader dialogue about capacity building with organizations in the stewardship sector.

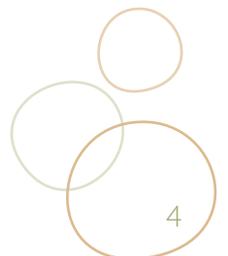
Summary of Interview Findings

Profile of Stewardship Groups Interviewed

Twenty-one stewardship groups were interviewed for this project and it became abundantly clear that they possessed, as individuals and collectively, an incredible array of skills, dedication, and sense of purpose as stewards of our natural heritage.

While groups shared a similar sense of purpose there was significant variability in other characteristics. For example, some of the groups interviewed had extremely limited budgets - three groups had budgets of under \$10,000. However, four of the groups had budgets of \$250,000 or more. Fourteen of the groups employed two or fewer full-time staff (or equivalent) whereas three had five or more staff. Although the sample size did not allow for statistically robust comparisons or extrapolations to the sector as a whole, this variability may help in providing a broader insight into the capacity culture of BC's stewardship sector than if the sample had been more homogenous.

As a group, these stewardship organizations oversaw budgets of approximately four million dollars, employed approximately forty staff (in various flexible part and full-time configurations), engaged close to 600 volunteers and connected close to 3500 community members with local stewardship issues.



The groups were predominantly involved in the tasks of education (17), monitoring (15) and habitat enhancement (14). Policy development (6) and advocacy (6) work were done by fewer than half the groups that were involved in education, monitoring or enhancement. Seven groups described themselves as umbrella organizations or networking hubs while eight stated they were engaged in land use planning or landowner contact.

The stewardship groups interviewed for this project had limited staff (often on contract or part-time) and all but one respondent expressed significant concern over consistency and availability of funding.

Questions About Capacity Building

Defining Capacity Building

When asked to describe what capacity building meant to them, the responses were varied and many of the respondents expressed confusion about the term and its application to the stewardship sector. A sample of responses is given below:

"Everyone has a different idea about [capacity building]; I think it means being "more capable" of doing what they want to be able to do."

"I don't know- sounds like a "governmentese" word."

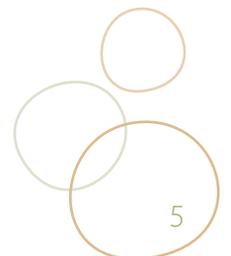
"Ability to do our job consistently without having to worry about funding."

"Developing creative strategic ways for people and money to come into and remain in an organization in order for the organization to do its work."

"Ability to grow or maintain as an organization especially when it comes to staff, members, volunteers and knowledge for the community."

"Ability of an organization to fulfill its mandate- investing in the people who are there for the long-haul."

"Hardest thing that all non-profits go through- constant level and attention to each part- volunteers, staff, projects, money etc."



This range is interesting and likely reflects the pervasive confusion about what capacity building is and how to carry it out that was consistent with the finding of the overall research project.

In discussion most interviewees talked about capacity building in terms of an ability to accomplish the mission or work of the organization in an efficient and effective manner harnessing both internal and external resources.

Is Capacity Building a Priority?

Fourteen of the twenty-one groups identified capacity building as a priority for their organization; as one interviewee stated she “hope[s] it will provide focus and take group out of survival mode”. Only one group indicated that they had no need for capacity building at the present time.

Current Capacity Building Activities

Seventeen of the twenty-one stewardship groups had engaged in some sort of capacity building activity. Most of the capacity building was ad hoc: groups opportunistically attended workshops, some regularly or semi-regularly reviewed strategic or management plans, but few stewardship groups appeared to have approached capacity building systematically.

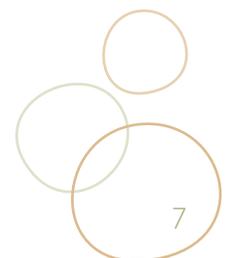
Over half of all capacity building activity fell into the Foundation Category of the Framework with less work in the areas of Funding & Financial and People categories. Marketing & Communication and Leadership were each identified by one group. Most capacity building appeared to be episodic with few groups mentioning more sustained activities.



That having been said, groups still articulated a range of beneficial outcomes resulting from the capacity building work they had undertaken.

Category	Outcome
Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Staying focused on what we do;” • “Provided recognition that paid staff was needed, improvements to facility;” • “Eternally grateful, developed guiding principles and a better understanding of roles and responsibilities; developed an annual calendar related to strategic plan;” • “Good consensus; community connected to environment and created a common vision;” • “Positive – opens up lines of communication between Board and staff, helps Board to better understand the full context or reach of organization;” • “Helped clarify priorities and focus activities and frame discussions.”
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Identifying personal purpose, linking it to work resulting in inner confidence and drive.”
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Better membership management/ development;” • “Avoid volunteer burnout.”
Funding & Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Plan ahead, anticipate annual funding cycle crunches, reduce stress, achieve continuity;” • “Mixed reviews Did fundraiser- concert; needed to postpone once. Overhead was high and actual profit low compared to the time and energy;” • “Learned different ideas skills in managing the finance, gained confidence and skills in dealing with Revenue Canada.”

Of the seventeen groups that had participated in capacity building activities only four had received funding to do so. Funding in itself was not an indicator of success- two of the groups that received funding had mixed results.



Barriers to Capacity Building

For Organizations

Stewardship Groups identified a number of barriers to overcome in building capacity in their organizations. The predominant and interrelated challenges identified by respondents to building capacity were *funding, time* and *staff*. Funding is key to be able to hire consultants, free up staff time to attend training and develop and implement capacity building strategies while continuing the important work of the organization. Groups recognized that secure and adequate funding would allow them to attract and retain staff and ensure investments in capacity building did not leave with short-term staff. Another funding issue groups identified was the current problematic project-based funding structure which hampers groups' ability to make long-term investments in their organizations and work.

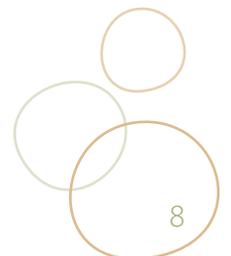
However, no amount of funding or resources will enable groups to do the work of capacity building if they are not convinced of its importance. Many groups identified the need to for education about the benefits of capacity building as a precursor to doing capacity building. In the same vein, some groups spoke to the action-oriented culture of stewardship groups as a challenge, as one interviewee put it "most stewardship groups are action oriented so somewhat goes against the grain to plan and talk about the work rather than do it".

For the Sector

For the sector as a whole, the same barriers of funding, time and staff were identified but the additional following barriers were also identified:

- Shifting government support;
- Current political climate;
- Competition between stewardship groups for resources, and
- Variable capabilities of organizations;
- Lack of knowledge and experience of leaders who have evolved from within the sector;
- The need for better public perception about stewards and the benefits of stewardship work.

Groups generally felt that there were more barriers to building capacity in the sector than five years ago - particularly in the areas of funding and government support. As one respondent said, "[we] used to get a lot of support- staff time, technical, now there aren't the people to ask, we're doing more and more of what [government] used to do."



Questions About the Framework

Capacity Building Priorities

Interview participants selected priorities for capacity building for both their organization and for the stewardship sector based on the Framework. Selecting priorities was a difficulty for many respondents as they recognized the value and interrelatedness of all of the categories. One respondent explained that partnerships were essential but because she felt they already did this well, she did not select it as a current priority area for building the capacity of her organization.

Many respondents identified core funding as their first priority, in spite of being directed that this research was looking at mechanisms for capacity building beyond core funding. When reminded of this respondents generally revised their selections to both People (to reflect the use of core funding to support staffing) and/or Funding & Financial (to reflect the urgent need for core funding). The results are represented in graphs below:

Priorities for Organizations

Perceived Benefits

Framework Mechanism (# Selected)

The People (18)

- Ability to accomplish more and get to incomplete tasks; reduce stress, inspire and renew board of directors; reduce pressure on staff; enhance 'organizational memory' by keeping staff and long term volunteers.

Funding & Financial (11)

- Stability; ability to improve and enhance programs; ability to plan for the long-term; ability to attract and keep staff; avoid mission drift; fiscal accountability.

Marketing & Communication (11)

- Raise profile of organizations and cause; increase membership and participation.

Leadership & Teambuilding (8)

- Reduce risk of relying on one person; share responsibility; reduce stress; motivate staff and volunteers.

Partnerships/ Networking (2)

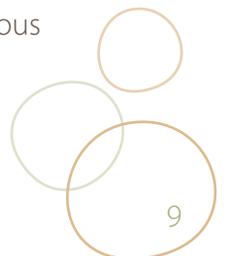
- Reduce competitiveness; avoid overlapping programs; achieve more with less.

Design/ Management (2)

- Enable functionality and ability to evaluate and track progress; achieve balance and provide staff with benefits other than salary.

Foundation (1)

- Goal setting/checking; set priorities and stay focused; clear focus gives permission to say 'no' to extraneous activities.



Priorities for the Sector

Perceived Benefits

Framework Mechanism

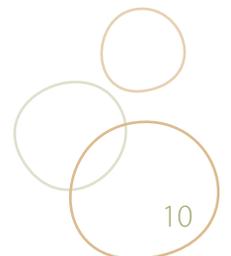
(# Selected)

The People (9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to take advantage of the many volunteers who want to participate; less burn -out and ability to keep and nurture quality staff in the sector
Marketing & Communication (9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More effective at 'getting the message out'; generate more interest and engage more people in cause; more volunteers for all the groups; stewardship groups would be seen as a resource; raise awareness of stewardship activities.
Funding & Financial (8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enable long-term planning;
Partnerships & Networking (8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Effect change in policy; avoid duplication; more government accountability and better decision-making; working together and not competing for funds; allow the movement to become more mainstream; increase partnerships between municipal governments & engos;
Leadership & Teambuilding (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Influence government and policy decisions; increase public value for stewardship work;
Design/ Management (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maximize and keep volunteers; program continuity; less burnout;
Foundation (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong and relevant to the community, respected and listened to - ability to effect change; ability to stay focused; clear priorities.

The top three areas identified as priorities for capacity building were consistent both for organizations and within the sector: The People, Marketing & Communications, and Funding & Financial. Partnerships & Networking was also identified as a high priority for the sector as a whole.

Feedback on the Framework

The overall feedback on the framework from interview participants was positive. Some respondents expressed an interest in using it with their organizations even before the completion of the final report. Most found it to be a good overview of the various components of capacity building, suggesting that it helped to clarify and connect the range of activities and ongoing processes that work to strengthen organizations.



Other Insights

Several interviewees emphasized the importance of using plain language when developing resources and programs to strengthen organizations. Some found the term “capacity building” itself, problematic or off-putting. Another caution offered by respondents was to ensure any capacity building resources reflected the unique characteristics of the sector and were delivered by consultants with appropriate sector experience.

Some respondents offered strategies for approaching capacity building. One suggested an approach to support capacity building modeled on the public education system where teachers are enabled to attend professional development opportunities by having teachers on-call brought in to cover their class time. This respondent suggested that funding could be provided, possibly through a scholarship system, to stewardship groups both to attend capacity building training and to cover the lost staff time for groups attending training.

Many interviewees spoke to the difficulty of knowing where to start with capacity building and where to access resources. The SCBC was viewed as a logical organization to coordinate or function as a clearinghouse for capacity building activities for the stewardship sector.

Conclusion

Stewardship groups have many demands on their time, they have a well-deserved reputation of being ambitiously committed to a variety of tasks ranging in nature from monitoring species, restoring habitat, and educating the public to the complicated business of running their organizations. The fact that these same groups gave generously of their time to participate in this research, adding to the limited body of knowledge about capacity building and the stewardship sector, speaks to the importance groups placed on capacity building. The stewardship groups interviewed offered a range of opinions and insight about capacity building. They recognize the value and benefits of strengthening their organizations through capacity building however are lacking both a strategic approach and sector specific tools to do so. Capacity building resources and strategies developed with on-going input from the sector will likely be met positively by stewardship groups eager to increase their effectiveness and organizational stability.

Appendix 1: Capacity Building Framework

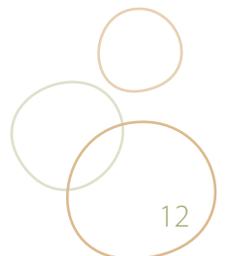
One of the issues for organizations who want to do capacity building is knowing how to accomplish it. Thus, an important aspect of this project was developing a capacity building framework in order to provide a common platform to be able to discuss capacity building and to help stewardship organizations systematically approach capacity building. The goal in producing the framework was to include all areas of capacity building and yet use simple language and be easy to comprehend. The framework was reviewed by the Project Team and twenty-one interviewees from stewardship organizations around the province and was well supported. Some of the interviewees were so pleased with having the framework as a tool that they planned to put it to use in their organizations immediately.

1. Foundation Without a clear direction, it is not possible for an organization to function optimally. Having an explicit idea of what you want to accomplish through your organization is the basis for capacity building. Indeed, all other capacity efforts build upon having a clear focus that is shared throughout the organization.

Initial research suggests that nonprofits increase their capacity tremendously when they reassess their aspirations – their mission, vision and their strategy and the actionable ways to achieve their goals.

2. Organizational Design & Management Well-articulated goals and well-developed strategies are an important first step in capacity building, but unless these are placed within the context of the right organizational structure, an organization is unlikely to be effective. A good organizational structure allows an organization to be responsive to change while integrating and aligning human resource capabilities, external environmental factors, strategic practices, technology and internal resources.

3. The People While many nonprofits recognize the people working and volunteering for the organization as their greatest resource, this is also an area of great challenges for organizations. Capacity building in this area involves recruitment, retention, management, succession planning, and training matters for volunteers, staff, management, boards and members.



4. Leadership & Team Building Leadership is the process of influencing others to accomplish objectives that move the organization to realize its vision and mission and effect social change. The most distinguishing characteristic between thriving enterprises and struggling enterprises is the presence and quality of leadership at all levels.

Teamwork provides a strategy and structure to enable groups to build skills to work together to achieve the mission they all so passionately believe in. Not only does teamwork help people accomplish more in less time, but it also helps people find greater fulfillment in the work by providing a sense of connection and belonging.

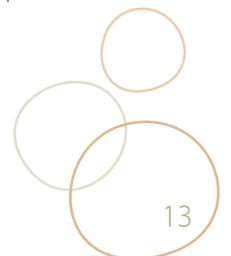
5. Funding & Financial Management Financial capacity involves developing the skills required to design a diverse and effective financial strategy, creating an organizational culture that recognizes the importance of integrating fundraising into all areas of the organization and building the expertise to be able to make the most of the funds raised and reduce the administrative burden of reporting.

6. Getting the Message Out: Marketing & Communications All nonprofits have a need to stand out in the crowd – whether it is to attract volunteers, change people’s behaviour, find people to participate in their programs or get funding. Not knowing how to effectively communicate in order to get the desired response prevents many organizations from being the strong and productive organizations they want to be. Without the ability to communicate strategically, an organization’s voice is likely to remain unheard – or worse, create misunderstandings and problems for the organization.

7. Relationships & Networks The development of connections is a way to bring together people working in similar ecosystems or with comparable challenges to be able to share information, pool resources and learn from each other. Such connections prevent overlap and improve effectiveness, reduce competition among organizations, and increase opportunities to share infrastructure and other resources.

8. Advocacy: Changing Policy, Practices, & Legislation Historically, changes to government policies, practices and legislation have almost always resulted from grassroots pressure. Webster’s dictionary defines advocacy as “the act of advocating, or speaking or writing in support (of something)”. Under this definition, almost every stewardship group plays an advocacy role.

Capacity building in the area of advocacy involves providing groups with philosophies, techniques and tools to connect their communities with decision-makers that are based on effective engagement rather than confrontational models.



Appendix 2: Interview Questions

Building Capacity in BC's Stewardship Sector – Interview Questions

Stewardship Organization Profile

Organization Name:

How long has your organization been in operation?

What are the primary types of activities your organization is involved in?

- Advocacy and/or lobbying
- Education
- Land acquisition
- Policy development
- Habitat enhancement
- Monitoring and/or mapping and/or inventory
- Networking and/or umbrella
- Sustainability and/or sustainable development Land use planning
- Landowner contact
- Other

What is your annual budget?

How many staff does your organization employ?

How many volunteers are involved with your group?

How many members does your organization have?

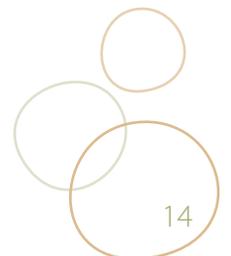
Capacity Building

Capacity Building is a broad topic; could you describe what capacity building means to you?

Has your organization engaged in any capacity building activities?

(If yes) Which have you done? (Did you do any that were not identified in the Framework?)

What were the outcomes?



Have you ever received funding for Capacity Building? (If yes, ask specifics i.e. was a special CB grant or rolled into a project?)

Have you ever or do you now receive core-funding support?

Would you say that capacity building is a priority for your organization? (scale: 1 not very important to 5 extremely important)

Are there barriers or challenges you face in building capacity in your organization? Could you identify your top 3)

What barriers do you see to building capacity for the stewardship sector as a whole in BC? Are they different than they were 5 years ago?

The Framework

Having had a chance to review the Capacity Building Framework sent to you by Naomi Tabata from the Stewardship Center for BC, could you identify the 3 most important areas of Capacity Building for your organization? (Prompt with whys).

1. The Foundation
2. Organizational Design & Management
3. The People
4. Leadership
5. Funding & Financial Management
6. Getting the Message out: Marketing and Communication
7. Partnerships, Networks and Alliances

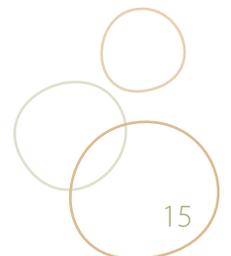
What would be the benefit of capacity building in these areas?

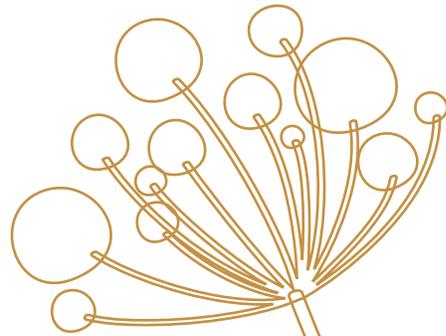
Which 3 do you think are the most important to build capacity for the BC Stewardship Sector as a whole? (if they are different from above, why/)

What would be the benefit of capacity building in these areas?

Is there anything you feel could be added to the framework?

Are there any parts of the framework that you didn't understand/ found confusing?





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