

New Models of Collaboration A Guide for Managers

**The “AMBASSADEUR” Project
Human Resources Development Canada
and Saguenay Lac St-Jean Region
Community Futures Development Corporations**

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Abstract

As part of the research endeavor “New Models of Collaboration for Delivering Public Services,” selected projects were studied to analyze the cooperation model adopted, management practices used, and key success factors. The “Ambassadeur” project launched by the Saguenay-Lac St-Jean Office of Human Resources Development Canada in 1999 and carried out as a partnership with the local Community Futures Development Corporations, is one of the innovative projects chosen for this study. This report describes the Ambassadeur project, the services provided to the public, and in particular the relations among the various partners in pursuing a common goal. The case study was conducted and written in 2001 by Carole Maziade, Researcher and Line Ricard, Ph.D. from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes de Commerces in Montreal.

Project Background

The Ambassadeur project is a pilot project initiated by the Saguenay-Lac St-Jean regional office of Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC)¹. The problems of employment, the circulation of information, and communities assuming responsibility for their economic development as well as training are the main focus of this endeavour.

Socioeconomic Setting

Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean is a region with one of the highest unemployment rates in Quebec (Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC, 1999a). Moreover, the Jonquière-Chicoutimi twin-cities area is often the urban centre with the highest unemployment rate in the country. The region is somewhat dependent on natural resources such as forestry and agriculture. Manufacturing accounts for 21% of jobs and is primarily engaged in processing wood and aluminum — industries subject to the vagaries of world markets (Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC, 1999a). There are numerous seasonal jobs and skilled positions that remain unfilled. There is also a school dropout problem: “Around here unemployment is a family tradition,” as some might say. Similarly, there is a decline in the employment opportunities for newcomers, especially unskilled youth, in the labour market. This leads to an exodus of youth and the best trained workers.

Yet Saguenay-Lac St-Jean has interesting information about the labour market in the region, its needs and training. In this regard, considerable research and studies have been done jointly by HRDC and local organizations (e.g., the agreement with the region’s industrial commissioners for the knowledge and updating of employers in the territory; agreement with the Chicoutimi, Jonquière et La Baie Chambers of Commerce, school boards and post-secondary institutions in the Saguenay, and local employment centres (CLEs), on workforce erosion in the Saguenay). The problem does not appear to be related to the availability of information because there is a great deal of information about the labour market and it is published on the Internet. Yet it is failing to reach the target clientele, especially young people choosing a career and job-seekers.

¹ Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC, http://www.qc.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/imt/html/saguenay_e.html

At the same time, the federal government is putting increasing emphasis on the Internet both as a means of providing information about its products and services, and as a means of communicating with citizens. The Ambassadeur project derives its foundation from the standpoint of strategic orientation and particularly federal initiatives in the realm of information technology.

Strategic Context

The Canadian government has rooted its strategies for delivering public services in the development of information and communication technologies. Many initiatives are underway under the umbrella of the *Connecting Canadians* program, by which the federal government aims “to make Canada the most connected country in the world”².

To attain this objective, Industry Canada³ was put in charge of administering the Community Access Program (CAP)⁴, through the creation of Community Access Centres (CAC) in rural areas to provide Internet access at affordable prices in various public places such as schools, libraries and community centres. Launched in 1994, the CAP was initially intended for communities with a population of less than 50,000, but since December 1999 the program also applies to larger urban municipalities. Run by volunteers, the CACs are headed by a management committee made up of community representatives and including a member representing the Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC). The CFDCs are community organizations in rural areas subsidized by Canada Economic Development (CED)⁵ to stimulate the local economy.

At the same time, the Government On-Line initiative⁶ is a plan to give all Canadians Internet access to government programs, services and information so that they can deal with the government electronically. Similarly, Service Canada⁷ offers three forms of access for obtaining information: the Canadian government’s website, toll-free access for all citizens with a 1-800-O Canada line, and “In Person” access through accredited centres with an Internet connection. These programs are part of a strategy to improve service delivery for all citizens. “By 2004, our goal is to be known around the world as the government most connected to its citizens, with Canadians able to access all government information and services on-line at the time and place of their choosing” (*Speech from the Throne*, 1999).

All these initiatives are orienting the actions of the federal government, various departments and players towards service delivery based more on a relational approach, one of personal service that meets the citizen’s specific needs, while gradually abandoning the purely transactional service (forms to fill out) available directly through the Internet.

² Connecting Canadians, <http://connect.gc.ca/en/100-e.shtml>

³ Industry Canada, www.ic.gc.ca

⁴ Community Access Program (CAP), <http://cap.ic.gc.ca/> and www.connect.gc.ca/en240-e.shtml

⁵ Canada Economic Development, www.dec-ced.gc.ca

⁶ Government On-Line, http://www.gol-ged.gc.ca/index_e.asp

⁷ Service Canada, <http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/>

For Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC, this change must be accompanied by an effort to create awareness of the new technologies and teach people to use them. Since HRDC wants citizens to be able to find information on their own, to improve decisionmaking and interact with the government, it was necessary to reach them where they live. The CACs therefore seemed the perfect place for mobilization in rural areas. But, as one person put it, “Just having a computer doesn’t make you a winner.” The information is there on the Internet, the computers are available, yet no specific program, mobilization or training accompanied Industry Canada’s creation of these centres in rural communities.

In fact, as result of a study of the situation at the approximately 40 CACs scattered throughout the region, HRDC found that these issues are left to volunteer initiative and the drive of each community.

Thus the idea of the Ambassadeur project began to take shape: use the CACs to introduce people to the Internet, teach them to find as much information as possible on their own, and promote government programs and services.

When HRDC approached Industry Canada and Canada Economic Development (CED) about its intention regarding use of the equipment installed in CACs, it was referred to the Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDC), the organizations responsible for the CACs. To carry out this type of project within the CACs, a partnership with the CFDCs was essential. In addition to being members of the federal family under the CED umbrella, the CFDCs have expertise in the field. The project appeared to be an excellent opportunity to connect federal players in the region through a common goal.

The proposal was submitted to the CFDCs in autumn 1999 and sparked their interest. Although the CFDCs had been an HRDC responsibility for over five years, the initial meetings were spent on winning them over according to participants. Based on the general idea, the project was mapped out jointly with the CFDCs with two main dimensions emerging: an employer phase and a citizen phase. This report takes a closer look at the latter.

The Project

The Ambassadeur project aims to meet the information needs of citizens and employers so that they can fulfill them on their own through CACs and local organizations. By hiring information officers in the community, who would be responsible for distributing information about government products and services, the project will make it possible to identify needs and make people aware of the new information technologies, “a decisive stage for informed decisionmaking by the community”, according to one participant.

With a goal of development and individual autonomy, the project aims “to foster the community taking charge of the development of its potential” (Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC, 1999b) by establishing follow-up and feedback mechanisms for communities and individuals. According to some HRDC officials, the project would make it possible “to adopt communication strategies, follow-up and feedback mechanisms for the community” and consequently “improve our ability

to target our efforts in the community more carefully and develop products adapted to what people need.”

The main partners were HRDC and the Fjord, Haut-Saguenay, Lac Saint-Jean Est, Lac Saint-Jean Ouest, Maria-Chapdelaine and Chibaugamau CFDCs⁸. Although the latter lies outside the Saguenay-Lac St-Jean administrative region, its proximity and interest in the project led it to join.

The project officially got underway with the process of hiring the information officers (the “Ambassadors”) in December 1999. The citizen phase was planned to have a three-year span, but with no guarantee at the outset because there was none that the funding would continue. In fact, every year the Minister decides on whether or not this fund is available and the rules for its allocation. Lastly, the grants received from the Pan-Canadian Activities Fund will total some \$300,000 and cover operations until March 31, 2001.

Mandate

The general thrust of the mandate was defined with the partners. Initially, HRDC stated its intention of acting as mobilizer in setting up the project, with the idea of gradually withdrawing and handing it over to the community. As the organization managing the main source of funding, the Pan-Canadian Activities Fund, it handled project administration with an expected three-year timeframe while phasing in community control. It coordinated project activities, helped train the personnel and provided the stakeholders with all the necessary documentation. It also hired a project coordinator.

Meanwhile the CFDCs managed the activities and resources in the field based on the needs identified in their communities and with their local partners. They hired the information officers (“Ambassadors”) for their territory and contributed in terms of logistics, administration and training. The information officers were CFDC employees but required to focus their activities on the Ambassadeur project.

For the citizen phase, while each CFDC was given leeway to carry out its activities based on local characteristics, the partners agreed on the following regional objectives:

- To disseminate socioeconomic information while meeting citizen needs through the CACs and various organizations active in the region;
- To get more people to go to the CACs and use the information technologies through which the partners were distributing products and services, and;
- To publicize the partners’ products and obtain feedback on them from people.

⁸ Chibougamau-Chapais CFDC, www.reseau-sadc.qc.ca/chibchap
Fjord CFDC, www.royaume.com/sadc
Haut-Saguenay CFDC, <http://www.sadchs.qc.ca/>
Lac-Saint-Jean Est CFDC, www.reseau-sadc.qc.ca/lsjed
Maria-Chapdelaine CFDC, www.mrcmaria.qc.ca
Lac-Saint-Jean Ouest CFDC, <http://www.sadclacstjeanouest.com/>

The target clientele were citizens, present and future CAC users as well as their leaders and the various organizations in the region. The preferred means were presentations and training sessions with various groups at the CACs or in their own communities. Each CFDC adopted the project and some developed their own subprojects (webpage, contest, etc.).

The approach to the employer phase was different. It was managed by HRDC with the participation of some CFDCs and other regional partners. At first activities focused on updating the database of businesses available at the Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC site and creating an “employers on-line” website (since this phase was less developed at the time of our study, it is simply summarized in the Appendix).

In December 1999, the CFDCs received the first slice of the subsidy to cover until March 31, 2000. It enabled hiring two information officers for each CFDC and conducting a promotional campaign. Next, an application was submitted for renewal of the funding for the period from April 2000 to March 2001. The response to the request was slow in coming. Most of the stakeholders were convinced the funding would be renewed, but this still led to uncertainties in some quarters. Confirmation came in May 2000, but the grant was less than the amount applied for. This forced the CFDCs to employ only one information officer each.

For the third year, it was no longer possible to use the Pan-Canadian Activities Fund. HRDC felt another fund seemed more suitable for the thrust of the project. It therefore referred the CFDCs to the Office of Learning Technologies (OLT) for 2001-2002 funding. HRDC would no longer be responsible for the grant, which henceforth would be managed by the CFDCs for the citizen phase. For the project to continue, the CFDCs are waiting for confirmation from the OLT because they believe in the value of this project. Unfortunately, given the uncertainty surrounding its continuation, some of the Ambassadeurs are leaving for other positions.

Phases

After preliminary negotiations between the CFDCs and HRDC, the project officially got underway by hiring a coordinator at HRDC and the partners establishing regional objectives. Next the information officers were hired by the CFDCs. They became part of their CFDC staff, received training from HRDC, drew up an action plan with their CFDC management in keeping with regional objectives, developed presentation tools and crisscrossed their territory to meet people.

Since the citizen phase of the Ambassadeur project is essentially based on the circulation of information and training, each CFDC set its own objectives for each type of clientele. For the period that ended March 31, 2000, i.e. a three-month phase, the CFDCs had all the latitude required to select target clientele. Some emphasized seniors, others youth, the unemployed, CAC users etc. The results were then generally considered very interesting by all the stakeholders (Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC, 2000a, 2000b).

The second phase of the project, from April 2000 to March 2001, got off to a slow start. The uncertainty about continued funding, confirmation of its renewal coming slow in May 2000 and the staff cutback to one information officer per CFDC because of the smaller budget resulted in

few activities being carried out between April and August 2000, a period that also encompassed the summer holiday business closures (Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC, 2000c). The rules also changed a little by shifting the emphasis to employability, information about the job market and employment prospects. The target clientele therefore became employment insurance and income security beneficiaries, workers with no job nor benefits, as well as students. Some CFDCs had already started working with these groups in the first year, but for others it was a new clientele to approach.

Also, to develop a profile of the people encountered, a system was set up with follow-up and feedback mechanisms to track their progress (Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC, 2000d, 2000e). Although this reorientation is much more in line with the CFDC's mission, it forced some information officers to rebuild their network of contacts in the community.

In this regard, some organizations expressed concern about the potential duplication of services for the same clientele (Carrefour Emploi-Jeunesse, CLE, etc.). Relations were smoother in the territories of some CFDCs than others, but on the whole the officers were able to demonstrate their specific role and the complementary nature of their work in relation to what was already being done by various government and community agencies.

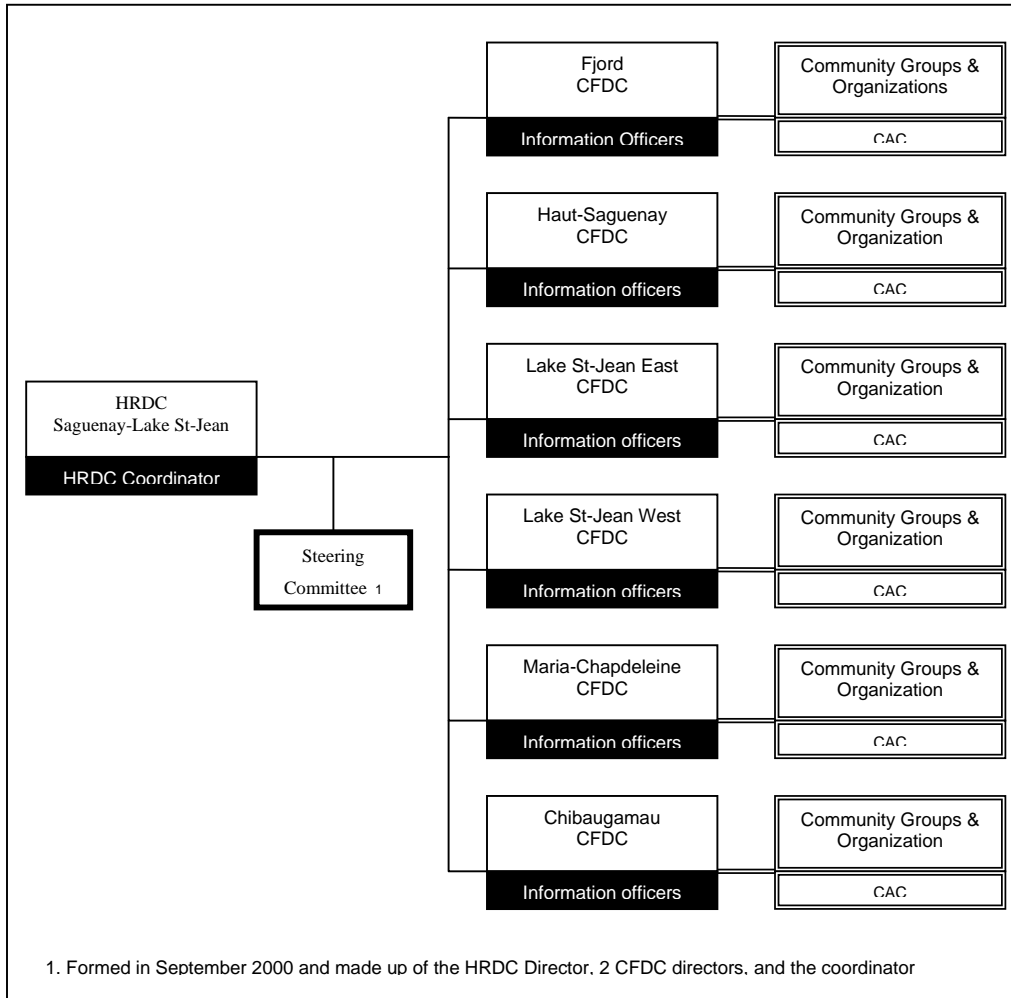
Management Framework

For the Ambassadeur project, the partners opted for a management framework intended to be simple, and essentially based on two communication networks (see Figure 1). The first consisted of the directors who mapped out the project's general orientation and determined the division of responsibilities. It was made up of CFDC management, the Director of Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC, and the Coordinator. A Canada Economic Development representative occasionally provided guidance and serviced as a resource person for the project.

The second network was made up of the "Ambassadors". It was a structure for coordination, exchange and communication related to activities in the field. This network encompassed the HRDC Coordinator and CFDC information officers.

After a few months of experimentation, the direct relationship between the coordinator and the information officers made the CFDCs somewhat uncomfortable. The executive directors wanted to be better informed about the strategies proposed to their personnel (the "Ambassadors"). A steering committee was therefore set up, consisting of the HRDC Director, two CFDC directors, and the Coordinator. This also ensured closer contact with HRDC, enabled more in-depth work and provided a better framework for the project to gauge its results. Thus the committee ensured that all documentation about the project in circulation took into consideration both local realities and the administrative rules governing the project.

**Figure 1
Ambassadeur Project Organization Chart**



Partners

A number of partners were involved in the Ambassadeur project, but its pillars were Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC, the project instigator, and the CFDCs, the organizations directly involved in the communities.

Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC

In the context of the new citizen-focused service philosophy of HRDC management in Quebec and the orientation of the “Connecting Canada” program, the Ambassadeur project was a bridge between the information and the tools for accessing it. HRDC put itself in the position of a “socioeconomic information broker”, and the project provided an opportunity to bring the CACs to life, demystify and adopt technology, hold discussions, and convey information about HRDC

and federal government programs and services in tight communities.“ In fact, informatics is a pretext for putting people in touch with the information,” said one Department official.

DRHC is involved in various partnerships with local organizations and stakeholders in conducting joint studies to identify the needs of youth, updating a database of employers, and training people in use of the Canadian government’s website. Its partners include Chambers of Commerce, school boards, CEGEPs, the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, local employment centres (CLE) and industrial commissioners.

The strategy of HRDC officials for this project was to “drop the puck,” “sink solid roots” and then let each community run it. Their objective was to get as close as possible to citizens and their needs, and “to organize a chain starting from the information to make it friendly and convey it to the CFDCs.”

CFDCs

CFDCs are community organizations established in rural areas and largely subsidized by Canada Economic Development. Their mission is twofold. The first is economic and involves providing primarily counselling services for business creation, expansion and consolidation. The CFDCs also provide financing in the form of loans, loan guarantees or equity investments to create and maintain lasting jobs in the community. The second has to do with community development by fostering partnership and influencing the orientation and future of communities within their territory.

As part of the CAP, which is administered by Industry Canada, they manage the CACs within their boundaries. Run by volunteers, the vitality of CACs and the condition of their hardware varies from one location to the next.

For many CFDCs, the Ambassadeur project breathed new life into the CACs not only as a forum for sharing but also as a potential business place. It is also attractive because of the funding that comes with it and having an additional employee in the field.

Other Partners

Involved as the departmental sponsor of CFDCs, the Saguenay-Lac St-Jean office of Canada Economic Development (CED) initially served as the bridge between HRDC and the CFDCs. For CED, the employer phase of the Ambassadeur project provided an excellent opportunity to survey and reach all the businesses in the region and especially make very significant progress in the realm of transactional e-commerce at local enterprises.

A number of government departments and agencies are active in the Saguenay-Lac St-Jean area. The project also aimed to network with them and give them an opportunity to gain publicity through Ambassadeur. The project was therefore presented several times at the regional panel of federal partners. This panel consists of representatives from about ten departments and agencies: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Business Development Bank, Passport Office, Canadian Forces Recruiting Centre, National Defence, Economic Development Canada, the Royal

Canadian Mounted Police, Industry Canada, Le Régiment du Saguenay, Heritage Canada, Natural Resources Canada, Revenue Canada, the Solicitor General, Public Works and HRDC. “The panel is based on uniting our means to provide better service for the public as well as to carry out the mission of each of our departments” (Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC, 1999a).

It is a special forum where the various participants discuss their concerns and projects. Unfortunately, the frequent turnover of some federal department and agency representatives sitting on the panel prevented participants from having a clear understanding of the Ambassadeur project and effectively exploiting all of its potential as well as the showcase it provided.

Finally, it should be noted that in each community the CFDC developed meaningful relations with local partners including school boards, Carrefours emploi-jeunesse, local employment centres, etc.

Cooperation

Because Ambassadeur is a pilot project that has a limited timeframe and was launched quickly, the parties involved very early on faced a variety of implementation problems (e.g. organizational framework, activity planning and evaluation). Yet, through everyone adhering to the project’s objective and orientation, these efforts at adjustment to achieve the intended results led to the cooperation and partnership between HRDC and the CFDCs.

Management

In the first phase of the project, coordination gave rise to a number of irritants. HRDC supervision was considered too strict and its ties with the “Ambassadors” too bossy; this made the CFDC managements uncomfortable. Occasionally CFDC managers felt left out of the loop. At the same time, the CFDCs noticed a lack of clarity in the documentation provided by HRDC.

To remedy this situation, as mentioned earlier, a steering committee was formed in September 2000. Its purpose was precisely to establish a *modus vivendi* between the realities facing the CFDCs and HRDC’s obligations, as well as a *modus operandi* for aligning the project’s objectives with the evaluation of results. The committee provided overall project coordination while leaving the technical details related to carrying out activities to be ironed out by the network of information officers, and the main strategic orientation of the project to the network of directors. But since the project was then at the end of its second year, according to some people financing soon became the main topic of discussion at these meetings.

Financial Dimension

The rules governing budget control were considered too restrictive by the CFDCs. To collect the subsidy, each CFDC signed a contract with HRDC that established ties between the funding and the attainment of objectives. In the first phase, the subsidy covered total expenditures; in the second, it was only enough for part of the costs and involved red tape and more meticulous

verification of the eligibility of all expenses. The requirements, both in terms of financial justification and multiple activity reports, were considered burdensome and some felt they exceeded those of CED for a bigger budget. Note that around the same time the Minister responsible for HRDC in Ottawa had to account to Parliament for the breakdown and management of certain grants. This difference in the way departments managed budgets, while understood by the CFDCs, was an irritant for some of their managements. Yet the gap appears to have narrowed because the latest agreements between CED and CFDCs call for accountability with quantitative and qualitative objectives.

Also, all the financial uncertainty caused by the delays in awarding the subsidy and the declining amounts spawned discontent. Yet the CFDCs appreciated HRDC's efforts to arrange financing for the project. The money was essential for carrying it out and supporting the resources in the community.

Relational Dimension

On the whole, relations were considered good. Yet some CFDCs very often felt they were not involved in a partnership but rather a relationship between principal and agent, and in the position of a subcontractor. The problems of annual financing and management lay at the root of this situation along with the one-shot nature of the project.

For HRDC, it was the first attempt at cooperation with CFDCs since the transfer of responsibility for them to CED. It was part of a subsidized project with its own rules of accountability. It was a pilot project to which HRDC wanted to apply rigorous control.

There was no adaptation phase to speak of as all the partners felt rushed to implement the project. The partners adjusted to each other as they went along. For the CFDCs, the misunderstanding of their mission and expertise in the field were cited as factors that influenced the relationship of trust. Yet for HRDC the important thing was to remain focused on the project's objectives, to reach citizens to inform them and better equip them for decisionmaking while establishing a win-win relationship with the CFDCs from which each partner, and especially the public, stood to gain.

All the parties agree that, to carry out the Ambassadeur project, the CFDCs were the right partners: they are close to the grassroots and familiar with their community. A view expressed by one HRDC representative and shared by many was that this first attempt at cooperation between HRDC and CFDCs "proves that we can create ties between agencies" and paves the way for other projects.

Technology

The Ambassadeur project was related to the use of Internet technology and especially to the adoption of tools for taking advantage of on-line resources. The training was adapted to the clientele and mainly covered two aspects: the ABCs of using a computer and navigation software, and on-line exposure to websites meaningful to the user. The project's value therefore

lies in terms of the user approach to the technology from a standpoint of better equipping citizens to look after their needs for information and more easily access the services available through the new technologies.

PERFORMANCE

All parties are very satisfied with the project's performance. Although the means of evaluation were unclear during the first phase, the project was assessed more in qualitative terms.

Circulation of Information

At first the objective of the Ambassadeur project was to provide socioeconomic information that addressed the concerns of citizens through the CACs. In the first phase, all clientele were targeted. The regional results indicate that, in a very short time, the information officers managed to reach a substantial number of people. In the second phase, the energy was focused more on employability. A follow-up tool was used with some participants and, in some areas, it was found that, as a result of information officer intervention, a number of the people landed jobs.

The "Ambassadors" quickly realized that the CACs were ideal places to provide information and lead sessions, and that their involvement gave new life to some CACs.

With a tool such as the Internet, it is difficult to evaluate the extent to which people who attended a session absorbed the information, among other reasons due to the lack of counters at the websites and the absence of a control group with the same characteristics as the pilot-project region but no Ambassadeur. On the other hand, some CFDCs took initiatives that to us reveal the interest sparked by their efforts in the community.

The Lac St-Jean Ouest CFDC created a website about the Ambassadeur project. From February 28, 2000 to January 25, 2001, the site received 2,545 hits compared to 500 for the CFDC since its creation. The Haut-Saguenay CFDC produced an Internet guide that was handed out at the information sessions and sold at a modest price (\$2.00). The Fjord and Lac St-Jean Est CFDCs organized contests in which contestants had to find information at specified sites and qualified to win a computer. The Fjord CFDC, by checking the IP addresses of contestants, found that the connections did not just come from CACs.

Although information tools adapted to the needs of the groups were developed in each community, the project's performance is closely tied to the quality of information officer selection. The candidate profile for the project called for communication and training skills and talents combined with a knowledge of new information technologies, and not computer scientists. As you may recall, each CFDC was responsible for their selection and the profile had been worked out with HRDC assistance.

The results achieved confirm that this approach produced unexpected dividends. The information officers quickly become community resource persons and were approached to obtain

information, to learn how to find specific information and to plan information sessions. Their ability to enter the communities and arouse public interest gave the CFDCs un hoped-for exposure, yet also created pressure to add this service as part of their offering.

Financing

An important factor that affected the project's performance was financing. The uncertainty created by the delays in approving the grant, the shortfall in the money received from the Pan-Canadian Activities Fund and the questions surrounding the project's survival hampered CFDC initiatives in the field.

From the very outset, all parties involved found that the project filled a need, but at the same time it gave rise to expectations that they may not be able to live up to unless the project is renewed. A number of planned initiatives were only partly carried out, or postponed, or simply dropped due to the precarious nature of the information officers' jobs. The time limit on the project prevented any medium- or long-term planning.

The partners all agree that this service should be maintained. Some CFDCs have indicated their intention of adding it to their service baskets, but funding remains a central concern. As of April 2001, the citizen phase of the Ambassadeur project is no longer financed by the Pan-Canadian Activities Fund, but the CFDCs are continuing their work in the field in the hope of obtaining a grant from the OLT.

Project Benefits

The Ambassadeur project proved to be an important promotional tool for the partners. It gave the CFDCs public exposure and, above all, enabled them to cultivate relations with numerous local organizations. A number of CFDC executive directors talk about this project with pride. Moreover, it created expectations in the community. People greatly appreciated the service ("a good free service...how could we do without it?"). But the project's short lifespan worried some. As one participant put it, one can ask, "Is it enough to help the community pull itself up by the bootstraps?"

For HRDC, it turned out to be a very interesting means of promoting government products and services. The project also made it possible to develop ties with people in the field and to combine the forces of two organizations with different missions in pursuit of a common goal. Some even foresee the possibility of cooperating on other projects.

The citizen phase of this project spanned a very short period of approximately two years, including a year and a half of work in the field, because:

- it no longer officially comes under the Pan-Canadian Activities Fund,
- the partners are looking for funds to continue the project; and
- it is difficult to clearly identify all its ramifications in the communities.

There are many avenues to explore in measuring the extent to which the regional objectives set at the start were attained by the project, as well as its benefits including:

- the impact of the training given by the “Ambassadeurs” to CAC volunteers in their efforts to lead, support and coach users;
- subsequent use of the documentary resources by the people reached, the use of information and communication technology to meet their needs and the dissemination of information in their entourage and social network; and
- the organizations concerned taking charge of the information to convey it to their clientele.

In fact, one benefit of the citizen phase worth considering is the multiplier effect of the efforts made in the various communities by the information officers. From the outset, the comments are positive but, with distance, the partners will be able to accurately assess all of the project’s benefits. The qualitative evaluation is rather positive.

Appendix – Employer Phase

The employer phase of the Ambassadeur project was part of an effort to make small and medium-sized businesses aware of the new information technologies but also aimed at providing an Internet infrastructure suited to their needs.

The project, initiated by Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC in a partnership primarily with CFDC managers, has two aspects. The first, of a technical nature, involved the creation of an integrated website, “Employers On-Line”⁹, a portal where each enterprise will have an opportunity to showcase its products and services with a view to business development. The second aspect has to do with the content and purpose of the site, with the partners involved in development orientation, educating businesses, coordination and community mobilization around its achievement.

The project received a \$263,000 grant from the Canada Jobs Fund (CJF) spread over three years from 1999 to 2002 (Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC, 1999a). Although managed internally by HRDC, it attracted a number of regional partners and, like the citizen phase, called for the community to eventually take over the project.

For the website, Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC already has a database on employers updated through agreements with various economic players in the region, particularly Emploi-Québec, the Société de promotion économique de Chicoutimi (SPEC), the Société de développement de Jonquière (SDJ) and the Société de développement économique de La Baie (SODEB). It will be available at the HRDC website and adjusted and improved to rapidly offer the products and types of information responsive to the needs expressed in the employer phase.

⁹ Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC, Employers On-Line, <http://employers.gc.ca/> Information also available at Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC website.

But creation of the portal required a more robust interactive search engine and, following analyses, the choice fell on Industry Canada's Strategis¹⁰. The Department was a federal partner. The agreement covered the creation of a separate regional interface, namely a home page with access to the Strategis search engine with the specified keys, using the database already built by HRDC. Updates would be handled by Industry Canada.

To meet the needs of a number of regional partners and employers, the plan was to develop a web product, a portrait of the region intended for employers and investors that would provide information about location factors as well as investment and operating costs and conditions in a specific area. Also, for a clear picture of the territory, teaming up with the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi and its Electronic Atlas project¹¹ led to the creation of 35 maps covering the industrial areas in the region. The e-atlas is a research project whose purpose is "to identify the strong trends shaping development of the territory and making the findings available to the social players involved in development planning".

Thus in June 2000 "Employers On-Line" offered, in addition to access to the employer database, the following products: list of occupations in demand, guide on 1999 pay rates, developments/outlook (1998-2001), the study on workforce erosion in the Saguenay, community profiles, a portrait of the region, and the e-atlas.

At the same time, the site is making employers aware of the "Branché en affaires" site. The Local Development Centres (CLD), CFDCs, and economic development corporations in Saguenay-Lac St-Jean, in association with CED, are managing "Branché en affaires," a business opportunity watch and search website offering services such as information about business opportunities, bid transmission and follow-up, prospecting for clients, partnerships and alliances, etc.

The employer phase involves a number of partners, primarily HRDC, CFDC managers in the region, industrial commissioners, CED and the regional manufacturers corporation.

At present people seem to be very satisfied with the results of the employer phase despite occasional problems brining certain partners aboard. In fact, the challenges of this phase lie mainly in creating synergy among existing initiatives, avoiding redundancy by relying on partners' expertise, and providing a consistent and efficient network of information that meets the needs of SMBs in the region.

¹⁰ Strategis, <http://strategis.gc.ca>.

¹¹ Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, Electronic Atlas, <http://atlas.uqac.quebec.ca/saguenay-lac-saint-jean/accueil.html>.

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