

Master's Research Project – CD 598
Masters of Arts in Community Development

TITLE:

Impact of Government-Mandated Partnerships
on Service Providers: The BC Experience

Date:	November 14, 2013
Prepared By:	Barbara West, MACD Graduate student
Supervisor:	Lynne Siemens, Assistant Professor School of Public Administration, University of Victoria
Client:	Norma Strachan, CEO ASPECT – Association of Service Providers for Employability and Career Training
Second Reader:	Catherine Althaus, Assistant Professor

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research report explores the experience of BC employment services agencies as they formed partnerships in response to a government Request for Proposals (RFP). The RFP introduced a new model that included partnerships as a mandatory element. The partnerships were intended to integrate general services with specialized services in a one-stop shop model. Proponents had to form partnerships while involved in a competitive RFP process. The central research questions in this report explore the partnership building experience of employment agencies who responded to the RFP. This research was conducted in order to find out what were the best practices and challenges for organizations in forming mandated partnerships.

The client for this research project was the Association of Service Providers for Employability and Career Training (ASPECT). ASPECT is a non-profit provincial association with a membership of more than 180 community based employment agencies

All of ASPECT's members deliver employment services and were affected by the transformation of the new BC Employment Program. This report will be given to the client to be shared with the sector and government to inform policy about mandated partnerships.

The transformation of employment services programming in BC was a result of the devolution of \$366 million in funding from the government of Canada to the Province of BC. This was accomplished through a Labour Market Agreement (LMA) and a Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA) signed in 2008. Mandated partnership building and one-stop shop service delivery were elements of the transformation of employment services programming in BC. Ten existing (legacy) programs were blended into a service delivery model that integrated general and specialized populations programs. The RFP model mandated that 25% of funds flowed from the lead agency to its partners.

In the literature review, this research report explores the popular model of using partnerships to deliver social services. Partnership service delivery has been used in education, social services, health care and integration projects around the world as a common government public policy. Existing research and case studies establish that the definition of partnership varies depending on the context. The literature also agrees that there are general best practices in partnership building regardless of the sector. These factors include voluntary shared purpose, trust, clear communication, shared decision-making, clear roles, mutual respect and compatibility. The literature also agreed that it was important to have sufficient time for partnership relationships to develop. Research also recognized that the time commitment was significant.

Many of the case studies explore the nature of “mandated” partnerships as they become a prerequisite to service delivery as a function of public policy. Insufficient time was a challenge for these types of partnerships. The involuntary driver of these partnerships was another key element contrary to best practices.

The research method employed to collect data were semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. Interviews were conducted with 17 senior managers and executive directors of organizations responding to the RFP and therefore, necessarily, engaged in building partnerships.

They were the ones responsible for forming and cementing partnership relationships and therefore had firsthand knowledge of what this entailed. They knew what worked and what did not work well in the process. They were able to answer questions about their personal experience and the impact on their organization. Their perspectives could inform and answer the research questions for this report.

Analysis of the findings revealed two meta-themes that influenced all the participants in their partnership building efforts. Participants experienced conflict between their values and the risks inherent in the RFP process. These were closely linked to the conflicting values of the collaboration and competition.

Key findings revealed that interviewees struggled with the definition and structure that was intended by the Ministry. The RFP intentionally left the term partnerships flexible to include cooperatives, formal partnerships, contractor/ subcontractor models etc. with the intention that proponents would be free to design what worked best in their community. Other findings pointed to the excessive complexity and time-consuming nature of the partnership-building activities.

The pressure to collaborate while competing was incompatible in the experience of interviewees, which also bore out the conclusions in the literature. Partnership building in this context was likened to a “shot-gun” wedding. The debate about specialized services needing separate programs and the efficacy of one-stop shops meant that some agencies opted not to submit proposals or participate. Another reason for not submitting a proposal was that the model was seen as a funder-focused model and not a client-centered program. Ultimately time did not allow interviewees to form “real” partnerships and their organization and staff were drained of resources.

There were several recommendations about supporting transformative change, partnership building and delivering the one-stop model. Procurement documents and processes should be streamlined, clarified and simplified. Consultations should begin at the pre-design stage or present a variety of options rather than solicit comments on a complete model. Monitoring of successful partnerships should cover areas of concern including cost analysis, referrals and management and operations of the partnership in delivering services. The quality of service should be another area that is evaluated.

Finally, on-going research is needed to see how these partnerships adapt and implement program delivery. Interviewees predicted another swing back to separate specialized services within five to 10 years but also a massive reduction in infrastructure and qualified individuals in the wake of layoffs, resignations and retirements that are currently resulting from the transformation project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
1. INTRODUCTION	6
1.2 Research Client	7
1.2 Research Question	8
2. BACKGROUND	10
2.1 Devolution and Provincial and Federal Labour Market Agreements	10
2.2 Transformation of the BC Employment Program.....	10
2.2.1 RFP Process	11
2.2.2 One-Stop Model.....	12
2.2.3. ASPECT’s Support Activities.....	13
Conclusion	16
3. LITERATURE REVIEW	17
3.1 Introduction.....	17
3.2 Definition of a Partnership.....	17
3.3 Purpose for Partnership.....	18
3.4 Partnership Structure.....	19
3.5 Partnership Building Process	20
3.6 Successful Partnerships.....	21
3.7 Partnership Challenges.....	23
3.8 One Stop Shop Model (Integration).....	24
3.9 Community Partnerships versus Government Mandated Partnership Model.....	25
Conclusion	27
4. METHODOLOGY	29
4.1 Interviews.....	29
4.2 Limitations	30
Conclusion	31
5. FINDINGS	32
5.1 Interviewees	32
5.2 New One Stop Model.....	33
5.3 Meta-Themes	35
5.4 Values versus Risk.....	36
5.4.1 <i>The Big Picture</i>	36
5.4.2 <i>Client Focus: Mission and Vision and Community Service</i>	38
5.4.3 <i>Financial Risk/Sustainability/Survival</i>	39
5.5 Collaboration versus Competition	41
5.5.1 <i>Definition of Partnership</i>	42
5.5.2 <i>Real Partnership Building</i>	43
5.5.3 <i>Mandated Partnerships</i>	44
5.5.4 <i>Partnership Criteria and Process</i>	45
5.5.5 <i>Complexity</i>	46
5.5.6 <i>Exclusivity</i>	46
5.5.7 <i>Time Factor</i>	47
5.5.8 <i>Cost</i>	47
5.5.9 <i>Rural versus Urban</i>	49

5.5.10 Conclusion	49
Conclusion	52
6. DISCUSSION	53
6.1 Values versus Risk	53
6.2 One Stop Shop/Partnership Service Delivery Model.....	54
6.3 Collaboration versus Competition	55
6.4 Mandated versus Real Partnerships	56
6.5 RFP: Complexity, Time and Cost.....	57
Conclusion	58
7. RECOMMENDATIONS	59
8. CONCLUSIONS.....	65
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	66
REFERENCES	68

1. INTRODUCTION

Social service delivery, specifically employability and career training, has followed a pattern over the last 30-40 years where governments contract out the direct provision of services to various parties including non-profits, charities and for-profit companies (Ford & Zussman, 1997). These various organizations then deliver a variety of program models to support unemployed Canadians into jobs often relying on funding through the federal government's Employment Insurance (EI) program and EI Part II funding that targets specific groups and activities (Walker & Sankey, 2008).

In recent years, the federal government has devolved responsibility for administering this funding and employment support services to several provinces including Ontario, Alberta, Quebec and to BC (Walker & Sankey, 2008). The contractual mechanisms that govern this transfer of funding are called Labour Market Agreements (LMA) and Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDA) which cover both EI and EI Part II budgets, respectively (LMA, 2008; LMDA, 2008). They are distinguished by the eligible client groups and activities targeted by each funding source.

In 2008, the government of Canada and BC signed an LMA and LMDA that devolved responsibility for the programs and funding from the federal government to BC (LMA, 2008; LMDA, 2008). The total funding represented by these two agreements was \$366 million for a period of five years. After the transition to provincial management of the existing programs, the province undertook a transformation project which introduced a new service delivery model. This new model blended 10 programs, which served both general and specialized populations such as immigrants, persons with disabilities or women who have suffered abuse, into a one-stop shop integrated single program.

This new model was undertaken for several reasons. Reducing the number of contracts the government had to administer from 400 to 75 was a means of cost savings. Integrating the separate programs under a single service window could also create greater efficiencies and cost savings. One-stop shop models were also viewed as a beneficial service model for clients who would not have to access different programs in different places and simplify referral procedures.

This new program was tendered through a Request for Proposals (RFP) competitive bidding process. Part of the mandatory requirements of the new model was that a lead proponent partner with specialized service delivery organizations to provide the full spectrum of services to the general and specialized populations. The lead contract holders were required to flow 25% of the total contract funding to its various partners (RFP #ELMS-004).

Agencies which chose to submit a bid for this program had to create partnerships between general and specialized service providers to fulfill the service requisites contained in the RFP. A large number of agencies across BC rapidly engaged in the process of partnership building in order to respond to the RFP and, if successful, to deliver this new program.

The introduction of a new employment service policy in a one-stop shop model that mandates extensive partnership building between multiple service agencies is an important and potentially

influential development to research. This research can inform specific government actions or policies considered in the future and in every sector about what the effects are likely to be on organizations attempting to follow these new policy guidelines. It can also disseminate knowledge to social service agencies about the specific implications, risks and benefits of partnerships and some guidelines about best practices to follow. Research about past change projects of this size and scope perhaps can improve the process for others.

1.2 Research Client

This research is undertaken for the Association of Service Providers for Employability and Career Training (ASPECT). ASPECT is a membership association that provides advocacy and support for community-based employment agencies. A community-based agency is located within the community it serves with deep and wide-ranging local connections and networks. An employment agency is one which includes programs which support people in the acquisition of employment.

ASPECT's members include organizations that focus on serving specific client groups such as youth or at-risk youth, women surviving abuse, immigrants, persons with disabilities and aboriginals (ASPECT Website, n.d.). They may include other social services such as ESL language training, as well as referrals to drug and alcohol programs, housing initiatives or daycares. ASPECT members deliver services from both federal and provincial funding sources and may be non-profit agencies and for-profit companies.

ASPECT was formed more than two decades ago in response to indications that devolution of employment services from the federal government to the BC government was imminent at that time (N. Strachan, personal communication, April 1, 2012). Although it did not occur, ASPECT saw a need for an umbrella organization to strengthen and represent the community-based employment service sector. ASPECT has been a vocal advocate, presenting position papers to government, participating on various committees and stakeholder engagement sessions. ASPECT worked with the Ministry in putting together initial consultations about the devolution with the provincial transition team.

ASPECT has held annual professional development conferences annually since its inception. These conferences bring keynote speakers and two days of breakout workshops on issues, resources and practices to support frontline practitioners and employment counsellors as well as Executive Directors and senior management. Topics range from new career and employability curriculum to board of directors management, operations and financial sustainability. Over the last several years, as the transition and transformation projects evolved, Deputy Ministers, Assistant Deputy Ministers, and their staff have had extended sessions to present information and answer questions about the transformation project at ASPECT's annual conferences.

ASPECT regularly canvasses its members to identify advocacy issues relevant to the sector as well as identifying resource gaps to assist employment counsellors at member agencies to support their clients. ASPECT has developed many curriculum projects such as the Employability Skills Curriculum, Work Search Strategies and Job Well Done curriculum. ASPECT created two recent online curricula to support learning in the areas of financial literacy

and essential skills in the workplace. Members use these teaching and learning instruments to increase the employability of clients actively seeking employment. The curriculum is also informed by needs expressed by employers and different sector councils about what they are looking for in employees. Frontline staff needs tools that will get their clients employment and provide employers with a labour pool that has the skills they need from their employees.

Particular topics or needs have recommend ASPECT host additional workshops over the years. ASPECT organized a one-day workshop led by a Ministry procurement specialist to outline the governments RFP response expectations and how to read and respond to RFPs as well as how the government reviews submitted proposals.

Another major component of ASPECT's operation is bidding on and delivering employment programs that serve large regions or the province as a whole in a single contract. As a prime contractor or lead agency, ASPECT subcontracts to its members across the province. Smaller community agencies are not always able to bid on these larger contracts depending on how they are designed. One prime contractor may not choose to subcontract but deliver all services from their own storefronts. ASPECT's model frees agencies from the administration and overall management of the contracts and allows them to perform the services. Both ASPECT and its members benefit and ensure their continued sustainability with this model.

The organization researches and monitors the impact of government policy on its members and the public at large, particularly with reference to the government-mandated partnership delivery model. In preparation for this change, ASPECT held several workshops for its members on partnership building, change management, risk management, and privacy and legal considerations. The transformation of employment services has been of utmost importance in ASPECT's activities, research and events since 2008.

1.2 Research Question

This research project will document the mandated partnership-building experience of respondents to the RFP during the transformation of the employment service delivery model in BC. This research wants to discover what practices worked well and why others failed. Additionally, it intends to illuminate what experiences may have been unique to this partnership-building experience in order to add to the existing research, knowledge and resources about partnership-building.

There are extensive implications for organizations related to the focus on partnerships as a service delivery model. Organizations need to know if they are prepared for partnership-building activities. Do they have the knowledge, resources and capacity to build partnerships? Are their governance bodies, management and staff supportive of partnerships? Another question to explore is the nature of partnership-building in this particular context and how it may differ from partnerships arising by virtue of other motives than that of an RFP with mandated collaboration.

It is important to see the true costs of partnership building on individual organizations as well as the sector. Costs include financial costs, labour costs and service and operational interruptions as well as intangible costs such as stress and emotional turmoil. The competitive nature of this

exercise may also include costs to existing relationships. This research can assess, in some degree, how successfully partnership-building activities progressed for organizations while they prepared a proposal in a competitive procurement process. This will provide information such as what to avoid and what to pursue for this sector and others as they may encounter similar scenarios.

This project's objectives are to isolate best practices, pitfalls and preparation techniques. It is intended that this information will inform, most specifically, the BC Government's policy of consolidation and mandatory partnerships as an employment services delivery model. However, there are wider audiences, sectors and levels of government who may be considering mandating partnerships within a competitive RFP process for service delivery, for whom this research will be valuable and relevant.

Documenting the experience of organizations in forming these partnerships is an important primary piece of research upon which to analyze their implementation, service delivery and longevity in practice over the five-year term of this new employment program contract. Additional research is warranted as the service delivery model is put into operation.

Partnerships involve complex, sensitive and complicated issues and are largely successful through a sharing of vision and mission and organic or voluntary development. The question of how they develop under competitive RFP pressures will yield some valuable information that other government policy makers and program managers need to consider, address and anticipate if implementing similar policy guidelines in the future. It is of particular interest to ensure these partnerships are able to ultimately deliver services effectively and efficiently to their clients. Research with community-based agencies as they undergo these partnership-building activities can provide insight into the resources and policy measures that are needed to support this type of service delivery (Wilson & Charlton, 1993).

Research included a literature review of the various definitions and models of partnerships; and the process of partnership-building; the government policy trend around integration and consolidation of programming into one-stop-shop models; and existing research and case studies on mandated partnerships in social service delivery. The literature and interview findings were analyzed in order to yield recommendations on the BC employment agency mandated partnership-building experience. The next section includes some background information is provided to outline the developments that resulted in the current context and the primary issues that influence and support the research.

2. BACKGROUND

This section will provide background information to the research question: the issues pertaining to devolution of funding and the development of federal and provincial labour market agreements and the genesis of the new employment program model. Understanding the context in which the research was conducted will be a useful precursor to the Literature Review section which presents current relevant research conclusions about partnership building issues within the context of government policies that mandate partnerships in social service delivery.

2.1 Devolution and Provincial and Federal Labour Market Agreements

Internationally, as governments attempt to reduce their spending, there has been a common policy emphasis on devolving government responsibility for social services such as employment assistance to local, provincial or state governments and subsequently to non-profit and private service agencies (Hall, M. H & Reed, P., 1998, p.2; Curtis, K. A., 2005). Employment services include assistance with job search, resumes, cover letters, interviews and providing labour market information (Global Jobs, p.1). Programs may afford external training at either public or private institutions to give the clients skills and education to gain a career in a particular field. For example these courses may include high school prerequisites, vocational requirements such as safety training or courses in the trades or in medical support roles.

In Canada there is a history of devolution or decentralization of employment programming from the federal government to provincial governments (Walker, B. & Sankey, S, 2008, p.34). The general practice of devolution is one that is reached through Labour Market Agreements (LMAs) and Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs) that specify the length of the agreement, the responsibilities of the province and policy guidelines to signal the intended activities, outcomes and accountability governing the use of the funding (2008, p.4).

Wood and Klassen note that these federal provincial agreements are compiled by government actors and may not involve service delivery agencies or other stakeholders (2010). However they also state that “devolved LMDAs have provided provinces with the skilled staff, capacity, opportunity and motivation to develop integrated workforce development service-delivery arrangements” (p. 261). Therefore, provinces have a responsibility to deliver services according to the terms of the LMDA. They also have the funds, staff and capacity to develop integrated services such as partnerships. However, in the recent devolution in BC, none of those funds were used to support the actual service deliverers in the development of partnerships.

2.2 Transformation of the BC Employment Program

In 2008, British Columbia entered into a Labour Market Agreement (LMA) and a Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA) with the government of Canada. The substance of these contracts was to complete the devolution of responsibility for employment and training support for unemployed EI and non-EI clients from the federal government to the province of BC (LMA, 2008: LMDA, 2008). These two agreements transferred a combined total of more than \$366 million in funding.

Employment programming consists of various government-funded services to help the unemployed who may be receiving Income Assistance and Employment Insurance living supports to find and maintain employment. Some employment services may also be available to the general public who are unemployed and some may be geared towards individuals who have multiple barriers to unemployment such as an individual who had low literacy, low skills or the challenges of additions and/or mental illness (Ministry of Social Development, 2013).

The agreements use language and set forth objectives, principles and accountability measures that fully inform the new service delivery model. For instance, in Article 5 of the LMDA, it states that “BC will be guided...by the following principles: client-centred services for a broad range of client groups” and will “provide an array of integrated labour market services” (2008, p. 7). The LMA agreement also supports the integrated one-stop shop model (2008). The policy intent is to have consistent services across Canada, therefore these are similar agreements to the LMAs in other provinces (Walker, B. & Sankey, S. 2008, p.4).

The consequences are that integrated services are a top-down federal policy mandate with which the province must comply and that agencies on the ground must formulate. They must provide services to a broader range of client groups than previously. Client service skills and knowledge must be learned throughout service agencies and by all personnel because the new client groups will not be served in isolation.

This also means that the province is accountable to the federal government to include integration of services for a range of client groups in its model. Multiple levels of government monitoring and reporting will increase the administrative burden on both the province and service providers. The federal government often wants different information about clients, service providers and contract management than the province. Specifically, the agreements ask for annual plans, measurement of outcomes, benefits and impacts, public reporting of results and review and evaluation of activities (Backgrounder).

2.2.1 RFP Process

A Cross Jurisdictional Research Final Report published on the BC Ministry’s transformation project website is a summary six pages in length and does not provide references for the documents that were the source of its research and conclusion. It states that, “to provide background and considerations for key questions in moving forward with the Business Transformation Project a significant amount of research was undertaken” (Business Transformation, n.d., p.1). It refers to international research sources and models for service delivery currently used in Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, the United States, the UK, the Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand as well as literature from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) (Cross Jurisdiction, p.1).

The Cross Jurisdictional Research Report was part of the basis or rationale for the RFP for the new employment program and model. However, the RFP Executive Summary states that “The Program design was based on an extensive two-year consultation process with service providers,

advocacy groups and other stakeholders” (2010, p.1). Integration of programs was repeatedly identified as a coherent way to simplify access, manage services, treat people as individuals, and ensure that Clients receive the needed services for which they are eligible” (LMDA, 2008).

The first year’s phase was the seamless transition of services from federal employees and agencies to the BC government and its employees (Executive, 2008). The seamless transition goal was to have as little upheaval as possible and little to no interruptions in current programs and services. The next phase was a series of consultations with the sector. The “one-stop shop” model was introduced in the form of a Request for Information (RFI) document as the optimal service method for clients (Cross, 2010).

2.2.2 One-Stop Model

This one-stop-model meant that instead of visiting multiple locations for different kinds of services, they would all be accessed through a single storefront. Potential proponents were invited to contribute their comments on the new model. The clients to be served are unemployed or underemployed people with different levels of barriers to employment which were defined as tiers 1-4. Tier 1 clients were defined as self-service because they might require only access to computers and job boards. Others may have communication or interpersonal skills to work on. Recent immigrants may need to increase their English language acquisition before entering the workforce. Youth may need education and/or experience. These groups would all fit in tiers 2 or 3. At the most extreme end of the spectrum, tier 4, individuals may have housing issues or drug or alcohol addictions, situations involving violence or abuse or mental health issues or even a combination of all of these.

The second stage was the transformation of services through an RFP process to identify which agencies would be awarded new contracts for service delivery. The new service model merged 10 existing programs into one employment program. This new model required a competitive bidding process wherein proponents submit written proposals to deliver the services. As part of this process, organizations must develop and enter into partnerships with other agencies to deliver their separate services under one contract with one agency becoming the named or lead contractor. A draft RFP/RFI was issued that outlined the new model’s parameters and inviting feedback from potential proponents (RFI#ELMS-003, 2010). This meant introducing a new mode of service delivery and the investment of additional time and resources from organizations in this sector to compete to deliver employment services. As seen in Figure 1, the timeline below was very tight across the various phases.

RFP Phases	New Employment Program RFP Issued	Proponents Meetings: Prince George, Kelowna, Nanaimo, Vancouver, Surrey	Deadline for New Employment Program Proposals	Interviews with top scoring proponents
2011	March 30	April 19-27	May 26	Aug-Oct

Figure 1: Timeline for RFP Competitive Process

The final RFP for the Employment program was issued March 2011 with an award notification date in October 2011 (RFP #ELMS-004). Interested proponents worked with information

contained in the draft RFI released in October 2010 which indicated that partnerships would be part of the new model (RFI#ELMS-003, 2010). However, since the RFI invited feedback and was still in draft form many waited to draft responses until the final requirements and questions were released. Therefore, the deadline for the RFP from when it was released was two months (RFP #ELMS-004, 2011),

In the RFP, partnerships are described as arrangements that provide a financial mechanism for specialized service delivery that mandates a flow of 25% of service delivery fees from the primary or lead contractor to community-based specialized service providers. It stipulates that “Proponents are expected to use consortiums, partnerships or other arrangements with community organizations with general or specialized employment service expertise to offer the range of services required” (RFP #ELMS-004, 2011, p. 33). The eight specialized service groups are people with disabilities, immigrants, francophones, people with multiple barriers, women who are survivors of violence or abuse, aboriginal people, youth and people living in rural and remote locations (RFP #ELMS-004, 2011, p.18).

In an addendum to clarify numerous questions about potential partnership arrangements, it was stated that:

“The RFP purposefully does not prescribe the type of partnership arrangement required by Contractors in order to allow Service Providers and Proponents maximum flexibility to develop an arrangement that works in their communities” (Appendix 13, April 29, 2011, p. 1).

In addition to the mandated partnerships and 25% flow-through of fees, the RFP also required the single lead agency or primary contract holder to take responsibility for the contract service delivery regardless of the partnership structure (RFP #ELMS-004, 2011).

Top scoring proposal were invited to give in-person presentations and interviews in the months of July, August and September 2011 as a final requirement of the competition. Interviews with competing top scoring proponents were held at the end of the RFP process but the results and successful partnerships were not yet known. Proponents expected to be either entering into new service delivery contracts and implementing their partnerships and actively starting up programming or in the rebound of unsuccessfully competing for a contract. This will be a period of potential unrest or constraints. Unsuccessful organizations may have to lay off staff. These staff may attempt to move to other organizations in the sector. Successful organizations will be constrained by the time and labour requirements of implementing a new employment program. This will take time away from other programs or services they could pursue.

2.2.3. ASPECT’s Support Activities

All of ASPECT’s members are involved in delivering employment programs. Member organizations vary from large general employment service providers to smaller specialized community-based organizations. Virtually all of them have been entrenched in their communities for decades and are current providers of the services for the integrated model: the 10 “legacy programs”. This new policy and program model affects all ASPECT members who had to consider and potentially respond with a competitive proposal and create or join a

partnership. The previous contracts were procured through a similar RFP process which has been the established method of government contract procurement. A Request for Proposal is put out to the public and all interested parties can submit proposals.

ASPECT wants this research completed now to capture the firsthand response and experience of employment-related social service agencies to inform government and influence future policy shifts and implementation. The product of this research may contribute to decisions that ease the burden on community-based agencies in partnership-building and transformation projects and result in their sustainability to deliver quality services.

ASPECT held a two-day Partnership Summit in September 2010 which offered specific resources in partnership-building that was attended by 250 delegates, primarily ASPECT members (ASPECT Website, 2011). ASPECT then held a 2011 Symposium with more presentations about relationship-building, strategies for change, financial modelling, risk management, privacy and legal considerations relating to partnership building.

The following chart and timeline chronicles some of ASPECT's activities related to the transformation of employment services in BC and some corresponding government activities. This chart is by no means exhaustive of ASPECT's efforts as the meetings, advocacy and attendance at various external events is too weighty to be held in a single chart.

Figure 2: ASPECT Activities Related to Transformation and Government Involvement

BC Government		Attended ½ day session at ASPECT conference		Attended ½ day session at ASPECT conference	Attended ½ day session at ASPECT conference		Request for Information RFI# ELMS-003 released	Attended ½ day session at ASPECT conference	RFI Closing Date		New Employment Program RFP Issued
Timeline	2007 June 25-26	Nov. 29-30	2008 Feb. 20	Nov. 6-7	2009 Nov. 5-6	2010 Sept. 13-14	Oct. 22	Nov. 4-5	Nov. 30	2011 Jan. 17-18	March 30
ASPECT	Preparing for the Canada-BC Labour Market Development Agreement including Government Panel from Alberta, Ontario, Quebec and BC (2-day Conference funded by ASPECT) Experience, Implementation, Reality	Labour Market Development Agreement Session (1/2 day at ASPECT Annual 2-day conference)	Canada-BC LMA and LMDA Agreements signed	Presentation by Transition Team on the BC LMDA (1/2 day at ASPECT Annual 2-day conference)	Presentation by Transition Team on the BC LMDA (1/2 day at ASPECT Annual 2-day conference)	ASPECT Partnership Building Summit 2 day (partnership-building tools and resources)		Ministry Updates on the BC LMDA Transformation (1/2 day at ASPECT Annual 2-day conference)		ASPECT Symposium: <i>underSTAND and DELIVER</i> (2 day conference: effective working relationships, change strategies, risk strategies, legal and privacy issues)	

Of note are ASPECT's two multi-day events which provided resources relevant to responding to the RFP for the new employment program of BC. The Partnership Building Summit on September 13-14 provided specific tools and resources to support the process of establishing partnerships. The underSTAND and DELIVER symposium on January 17-18 2011, which held workshops on effective working relationships, change strategies, risk strategies, and legal and privacy issues, contained timely and relevant information in the lead up to the release of the RFP several months later. These two events constituted the only comprehensive preparatory resources offered to potential proponents with respect to preparing the sector for responding to the new employment program of BC. ASPECT's activities may provide the start of some guidelines on supporting organizations in preparation for partnership-building in any future government policy shifts, where inclusion of mandated partnerships is part of the service delivery model.

Conclusion

The transformation of service delivery is a major policy shift that combines what were previously 10 separate programs into one. It also reduces the number of contract holders from more than 400 to 73 (ELMS, 2010). Individual organizations that were funded through these contracts faced intense competition for a substantially reduced number of contracts. Organizations that are unsuccessful and cannot locate other sustainable sources of funding may be forced to close.

A critical factor in this RFP process was forming top scoring partnerships with agencies which had the proven ability to deliver the mandated employment services within a comprehensive integrated environment. The proposal had to effectively communicate the specific operational model of the partnerships and demonstrate its anticipated ability to perform. Immense investment of resources accompanied these activities.

Building Partnerships was a central piece of the new policy model. Therefore, it was an urgent activity for potential proponents. Examining their experience and discoveries along this path is the central research question of this report. In order to put the Findings in context, the next section looks at some of the existing research about partnerships. The Literature Review looks at partnership-building in a broad sense and mandated partnership-building as a unique phenomenon. Mandated partnerships are usually part of attempts at integration into one-stop-shop models. Therefore, some examples of the challenges and successes encountered in the one-stop model with mandated partnerships will also be examined.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

There are several components to the research question that is the basis of this report. The core issue is the experience of employment agencies in pursuit of partnerships to respond to a BC government RFP. Therefore, the literature on partnership building is central to this section. Definitions and frameworks of what constitutes partnership are examined. Best practices and challenges concerning the essential elements to effective partnership-building are explored as they are generally accepted in the literature. The nature of mandated partnerships versus “real” partnerships will be compared.

Secondly, the literature review looks at the trend on a national and international arena to explore new or alternative service delivery models. Particularly, the propensity to promote, propagate and compel partnerships in social service delivery as a mandated function of participation in the contract. The BC government RFP for a new partnership model of service delivery was predicated on the benefits of an integrated or “one-stop shop”. Therefore, literature that addresses the one stop model is also examined.

Several case studies where this policy has been instituted will reveal some fundamental issues experienced by agencies in various jurisdictions and social service sectors. Finally, the different meanings of partnerships will be compared between the various contexts and stakeholders in social service delivery, such as non-profits, government and community development practitioners and brought into relief.

3.2 Definition of a Partnership

Partnership is a term with a wide range of meanings and definitions and differing degrees of formality and legal registration. The term may also be used interchangeably such as collaboration, coordination, service integration and even community capacity-building or community development (Purcal, Muir, Patulny, Thomson & Flaxman, 2011).

According to the National Network for Collaboration, it is a process entered into in order to achieve shared goals (Collaboration, p. 4, 1995). Purcal et al. reiterate this goal oriented definition of partnerships between otherwise independent organizations (p.474, 2011). Other definitions emphasize the element of human interaction and relationships inherent in the process (Wildridge, Childst, Cawthra & Madge, p. 4, 2004). Building partnerships is a process of developing and sharing trust between the partners and sharing a common language and understanding of various concepts and practices in service delivery.

There appears no single definition of partnership (Wildridge, Childst, Cawthra & Madge, 2004). This can be problematic when it is widely recognized that while “the notion of partnership is essential to much contemporary public policy, there is no generally accepted terminology or definition” (Purcal et al, 2011). This can create problems and confusion when there is no common language or conceptual definition of partnership. As a result, participants may have no roadmap or easy means of communicating or building a partnership. Policy which dictates

partnerships is often deliberately vague. This may be to provide flexibility or it may be that those mandating partnerships have no clear idea how they define partnership.

3.3 Purpose for Partnership

A variety of purposes move organizations towards partnership. Optimally, there needs to be a clear will or desire by each of the partners to form the partnership. The impetus should originate between the partners not an external force (La Piana, 2001). There needs to be a clearly identified and shared purpose in order to carry participants through to a successful joint endeavour. The collaboration will not survive or attain its objectives if there is a lack of will to engage in the partnership-building activities.

Organizations consist of individuals who, in the best of circumstances, are generally resistant to change through fear or concern that services will be adversely affected (Barton & Quinn, 2001). They are also generally resistant to change that is forced upon them. They may elect not to participate or actively sabotage the partnership (La Piana, 2001). Collaborations are stronger and more easily achieved when participants anticipate positive benefits and change.

Different drivers and motivators towards partnership have been catalogued in the literature. These include internal drivers such as recognizing that a problem can only be solved by working with other organizations for a holistic approach or to achieve critical mass (Wildridge, et al, 2004, p. 6; Barton & Quinn, 2001, p. 51; Wild Rose Foundation, 2001, p. 1).

This problem or shared goal could be to respond to a crisis or to solve a social problem in the community. Community problems often involve multiple causes and multiple effects. Issues such as health and wellness, crime and safety and education, skills and employment constitute the basis of many governmental and non-governmental organization's mandates. Each may be tackling similar or tangential solutions. Therefore, it often makes sense for them to combine forces for efficiency and efficacy.

Often organizations may share a "vision of how life should be for service users – in which they are offered a service that appears seamless" (Wildridge et al. p. 6, 2004). This driver is focused on improving service delivery for clients who may have need of multiple different services in the community and providing those in the same location makes it easier for clients to access. This is particularly true where services are located at far distances from one another and transportation may be yet another challenge or a deterrent to client use.

There is the financial consideration of applying for funding in order to continue delivering services which may be an internal decision between organizations. They may form a partnership in order to leverage different skill sets to complete a project or to offer a range of services within a service delivery program. Certain foundations and government departments indicate a preference for projects that are built on partnerships (La Piana, 2001).

There is also the external driver of a government mandated service delivery policy (Wildridge et al 2004). This means that organizations will not be considered for contracts unless they are working in a partnership. There is no choice but to form a partnership or cease to deliver the

service. This driver will be discussed further in section 3.11 Community Partnerships versus Government Mandated Partnership Model. There are ramifications to the structure, process and challenges that would best be discussed after a general look at these issues in the literature.

3.4 Partnership Structure

The variety of partnership structures is vast. It may be informal or contractual. One typical initial step is to create a Memorandum of Understanding that is often a simple statement of the intention to form a partnership and work together but may also be a detailed outline of the key structural considerations (La Piana, 2001). La Piana offers a sample MOU for collaboration that includes key headings describing purpose, membership, decision-making, lead agency and steering committee (2001, p.10).

There are a number of areas that need to be defined and decisions made to inform a partnership’s structure. The central issue is the nature of the relationship between the partners. Namely, what are the roles that each partner plays and who makes the decisions (National Network, 2012)? The responsibilities of each member of the partnership should be covered. Every consideration that effects an organization individually also must be considered in a partnership from financial reporting, to governance to the flow of information.

The level of formalization will inform the structure of a partnership. A very loose, informal relationship will not require a lot of structure. The more formal a partnership is, the more highly structured it becomes with written or legal documentation that outlines the rules and roles of the partners. The variety of relationships that the term partnership is applied to may be described as existing along a continuum contingent on the level of involvement and commitment of the parties. One collaboration matrix, summarized in Table 1, identifies five levels or types of linkages from Networking, the most informal with little assigned leadership, through Cooperation or Alliance and Coordination or Partnership up to Coalition and Collaboration, the most formal, organized and contractual levels.

Table 1. Collaboration Matrix

Levels	Purpose and Structure	Process
Networking	Informal and flexible communication	Little hands on leadership or decision-making
Cooperation or Alliance	Semi-formal, links, communication and roles	Facilitative leaders and complex decision-making
Coordination or Partnership	Share resources, roles defined, formal links, frequent communication	Central body and group decision making
Coalition	Commitment to several years, written agreements, develops resources and	Shared leadership, prioritized communications, formal

	budgets	fully integrated decision-making
Collaboration	Independent system established, consensus decision-making	Strong, trusted leadership, ideas and decisions shared through well-developed communication

(Derived from Hogue, 1994)

Each level has a unique purpose, structure and process. The levels move from informal, loose, possibly infrequent communication with little process or structure to a highly integrated and formalized model with comprehensive and often legally binding documentation that is one stage away from full integration into a new single organization. Most social service agencies had operated primarily at the networking level. It should be recognized that it is a much accelerated process to go from one end of a continuum to the farthest end and create new formal arrangements at the coalition or collaborative levels.

Questions that need to be asked when formulating a written partnership agreement include subjects such as the objectives and intentions; the roles; the information, skills and resources required and who will supply them; the flow of internal and external communication and by whom; the anticipated timeframe; personnel; management and reporting; conflict resolution; and the outcomes and evaluation (Wild Rose, 2001, pp. 6.0-6.2.10).

The answers to these questions will determine the structure of the governance model and who makes decisions. It may be very hierarchical and defined or operate more as a cooperative. They will also answer who is responsible for the communication systems and how and where service delivery takes place as well as the evaluation model. The degree of formalization will determine the number of subjects that are defined and included in any written agreements or contracts. Correspondingly, a more complex or formal partnership will involve a more intensive and time-consuming process.

3.5 Partnership Building Process

Many authors liken the process of partnership building to a courtship or dating period because it is fundamentally about building relationships (Coulson, 2005, p.157). As Wildridge et al. (2004, p.4) state “successful partnership working is all about human interaction and requires a long and complex process”. Critical factors for the partnership building process include open communication, information sharing, respect and engagement. Partnership-building literature agrees on several fundamental requirements beginning with trust and time (Waddock, 1989; Wildridge et.al., 2004).

The genesis of partnership building is an idea or the inspiration to form a partnership and can be characterized as “fluid, creative and experimental” (La Piana, 2001, p.9). At the core of the process is the inspiration for a desired outcome. This is the purpose of the partnership. All the choices for the structure and mission of the partnership are available at this point. Discussions

will debate the various pros and cons and eventually consensus or general agreement will be given for each item to be addressed in the partnership agreement.

This process also involves getting to know the culture, values and strengths of each partner between themselves. If there was no prior relationship, creating one is the crux of the more operational decisions. This is where trust plays such a critical role: as the basis for a relationship.

Eventually, this process expands beyond the executive or management to the staff depending on the nature of the working arrangements. Staff may be involved in the formative stage as well if that makes sense to contribute to the terms of the agreement.

3.6 Successful Partnerships

The factors that define best practices in partnership-building are plentiful. They are also not easy things to accomplish and require time to develop. According to Wildridge (2004, p.7), there are six broad areas that will contribute to successful partnerships:

- Shared or common vision
- Ensure equal value of smaller partners to be seen as bringing legitimacy
- Sharing knowledge
- Effective decision-making
- Joint ownership of decisions and collective responsibility
- All partners must feel involved or will disengage

Essentially, the more sharing of information and decision-making will make each of the partners feel valued and involved. If people and processes are working well then services will be more efficient. Therefore, success in partnerships can relate to level of success in service delivery or more broadly, achieving whatever the goal or purpose of the partnership was. Sometimes the goal of success may also be defined as longevity or expansion. Generally, the literature stipulates that the factors they identify can make partnerships more likely to be successful whatever goal or purpose brought them together and can be applied across different sectors.

The Wilder Research Centre (Wildridge et al., 2004, pp. 7-8) identifies 20 critical success factors for partnership building which are grouped into 6 categories as per Table 2 below.

Table 2. Success Factors for Partnership Building

Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History • Collaborative seen as legitimate leader • Favourable political and social climate 	Purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concrete attainable goals and objectives • Shared vision • Unique purpose
Membership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutual respect, understanding and trust 	Process and Structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members share a stake

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate cross section of members • Members see collaboration in their self-interest • Ability to compromise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple layers of participation • Flexibility • Clear roles and policy guidelines • Adaptability • Appropriate pace of development
Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open and frequent • Informal relationships and communication links 	Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient funds, staff, materials and time • Skilled leadership

There is a lot of overlap of subjects that appear in both lists. Wildridge’s list could easily be slotted into the table within the various categories where they are not already mentioned. These items constitute an extensive change project particularly when the cultures of the organizations forming a partnership do not embrace the same values or operational styles. Organizations who embrace these requirements and who have knowledge beforehand of the goals and best practices for partnership should be more likely to succeed.

Finally, Borden and Perkins have developed a collaboration self evaluation tool which identifies 12 key factors that have the potential to “promote or inhibit the collaborative process” (1999, p.1). These factors are quoted in Table 3.

Table 3. Factors to Promote or Inhibit the Collaborative Process

Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • open and clear with established process 	Policies/Laws/Regulations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective changes to policies, laws and/or regulations for collaborative functionality
Sustainability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a plan for sustaining membership and resources and guidelines for terms of office 	History <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community has history of working collaboratively and solving problems
Research and Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed needs assessment and information related to goal achievement 	Connectedness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members are connection and have informal and formal communication at all levels
Political Climate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive history and environment around power and decision-making 	Leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership supports team building, diversity and individual and organizational strengths
Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is access to needed resources: environmental, in-kind, financial and human 	Community Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community mobilized and there are communication and information channels
Catalysts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration started for existing problem or for a comprehensive approach 	Understanding Community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The collaboration understands the people, cultures, values and habits of the

Again, there is considerable overlap; however, Borden and Perkins introduce several new elements such as mobilizing the community; completing research and evaluation and changing laws, policies and regulations within the individual partners to facilitate and accommodate the new partnership relationship as well as the project activities and goals. There will need to be changes to internal operational policies to allow for the communication, resources, leadership and possibly also to allow for flexibility and adaptability. All changes and influences cannot be anticipated especially in the political or external environment.

In order to achieve these ideal conditions, it is equally valuable to know and anticipate the common challenges that partnership-building processes may encounter. The various factors which are identified in are proved out seem to be very similar in all cases and can be universally applied.

3.7 Partnership Challenges

New partnerships face many challenges. Every change project will be accompanied by some amount of resistance by those who prefer the status quo and may be fearful of the effects of the partnership on service delivery, employment, workplace culture and internal operating procedures.

One of the elements of building successful partnerships is finding adequate time to contribute to the process. This also represents one of the biggest obstacles. The time-consuming nature of the enterprise may be prohibitive or allow only a truncated process that ultimately results in the dissolution of the partnership. The reason time is needed is to allow the relationship to develop but also to reach consensus on key elements of the partnership. Even given sufficient time, there may be inter-organizational cultural difference that make the partnership unworkable.

Coulson (2005, p. 156) lists the following potential pitfalls that can strain partnership building activities:

- Shifts in strategy by partners
- Absence of common framework
- Uneven commitment
- Imbalance in power – resources, information
- Imbalance benefits
- Conflicting loyalties
- Undermanagement

The cited challenges reference incompatibility for a number of reasons including culture, organizational changes or conflict in priorities as well as potential changes in the external environment, imbalances and a lack of commitment by one or more of the partners. They point to a lack of equality created by a variety of imbalances such as benefits and power. The aspect of undermanagement would be a function of a lack of commitment or resources. If the partnership does not involve the main work of the organization it may be marginalized or managed off the

side of the desk. Most of these challenges reflect a lack of the qualities that contribute to successful partnerships. Other challenges include:

- Additional activity added – not inconsequential
- Competitive process
- Shot-gun wedding
- Inequality
- Lack of time and trust

These challenges echo the others in many ways. Partnership building is a time intensive activity. Without proper planning, it may interfere with other work and services or be neglected through lack of time. A competitive process adds extra stress and tension to relationship building and may feel like a forced union. The frequently cited inequality and lack of time and trust appear to be essential elements to partnership building. Other challenges may include not having management or staff equipped with skills and leadership in partnership-building (Takahashi & Smutny, 2002).

3.8 One Stop Shop Model (Integration)

Partnerships and collaborations go hand in hand with the concept of the “one stop shop” model where a variety of services are offered at a single location or access point. Services oriented to a range of different populations are offered. In this way, collaborations are the instruments through which integration of services is achieved.

Therefore, despite their risks and challenges, collaboration and partnerships are generally recognized in international literature as a “good thing” and are embraced by countries such as US and the UK as central to social service policies (Coulson, 2005, p.154). The central rationale is that social problems cannot be solved by any one group alone and that success is more likely when municipal, non-profits and government agencies work in concert. The general understanding is that collaborations and partnerships will achieve greater, more positive outcomes.

Canada has also championed this model in its Labour Market Agreements with BC and other provinces. As noted by Coulson, the basis for this is “often a financial or efficiency motivation” (Coulson, 2005, p. 154). The government can see a cost savings in reducing the number of contracts it administers and therefore the amount of funding. Rather than funding many organizations or groups, it integrates their services and reduces duplication in capital and operating expenses. The assumption is that there is also cost savings through cutting duplication in services. In the community, there can be cost savings in duplication of administration, management, rent and other expenses by pooling efforts and resources. There is also the hope that best practices and positive cultural environments may be shared between organizations from different sectors (Coulson, 2005, p.154).

In 2007, Nova Scotia, BC and Ontario government representatives presented their initiatives to the Shifting Sands conference about how they are undergoing transformation to provide a new service delivery model for a “one-stop shop” (Williams, 2007). This conference addressed their

work on creating an electronically Integrated Case Management (ICM) system. All of these provinces have subsequently had devolution agreement and one-stop shop models implemented. The ICM is part of the new BC Employment Program: a database to collect information and case manage clients and services. Technology has been employed to enhance the integration of data and services about clients from various sources into a single electronic file.

Research into international case studies and sources revealed an abundant amount of literature about the preference for integrated public employment services in response to the global economic climate. Several facets of the new BC Employment program are detailed in a publication by the UN Agency, the International Labour Organization (ILO) as trends in the delivery of services including tiered service delivery, information technology and “partnerships to deliver programmes...through a one-stop shop” (Thuy, Hansen & Price, 2001, p. iv).

This report summarizes the results of cross-jurisdictional studies to conclude that:

“In some countries, there is a proliferation of schemes which need streamlining on the basis of evaluation findings. Evaluation suggests that job-search assistance can be highly cost-effective” (p.iii).

However, in another policy brief, the ILO (2010, p. 2) recommends “modifying existing labour market services rather than introducing completely new measures” in order to respond to financial crisis.

Greater devolution and consolidation in California’s employment programs also emphasized one-stop shops. According to Reville and Klerman, “the conclusion of the evaluation literature is that access to a wide variety of services, as in one-stop shops...is the most effective way to provide training” (1996, p. 4). However, they also identify potential problems such as insufficient funding and overly restrictive eligibility criteria. If one-stop shops and integration is not funded adequately, they may lack cohesion and endurance. Service provision may suffer so that the disadvantaged do not get appropriate training. Eligibility criteria may prevent certain groups from receiving services. They also suggested that consolidation in a single location may necessitate lengthy travel to that travel that may actually cause some groups to experience a decrease in access to services (1996). One-stop shop services are commonly achieved through integration of service provision in mandated partnerships.

3.9 Community Partnerships versus Government Mandated Partnership Model

Partnerships are complex and multi-faceted endeavours. They have not proven to be simple solutions to complex social service delivery. However, they continue to be embraced for a spectrum of organizational purposes in numerous fields from healthcare, early childhood services, immigrant services and employment services (Purcal et al., 2011; Radermacher & Karunarathna, 2011; Lynn, 2002). Partnerships have been adopted internationally as government policies in order to respond to financial constraints. However, government mandated partnerships carry extra challenges and are intrinsically at odds with the definition of what constitutes a preeminent community partnership model.

There is a tension between the community definition of “real” partnerships and those mandated by government policy (Wild Rose, 2001). Real partnerships may have been defined as those that are organically and voluntarily generated from the ground up in response to a local need. Mandated partnerships have been likened to “shot gun marriages” where the parties may not actually want to partner but are forced into it through a top-down efficiency-driven government policy (Wildridge et al., 2004).

The literature abounds with warnings about this type of partnership because it is usually introduced in a high-pressure competitive RFP process that does not allow the time needed to develop successful partnerships (La Piana, 2001). Funders and government can underestimate the complexity of creating partnerships and the reality of mandated partnerships (Barton & Quinn, 2001). It is also important to realize that organizations may prove to be “ultimately incompatible, the cultures and histories are too diverse to be brought into harmony in a short period of time” (Coulson, 2005, p. 155). There may also be a lack of commitment by the parties and there may be inequalities in size, resources and capacity between the agencies that the government wants to partner with each other (Radermacher, 2011).

Additionally, the requirement for a lead agency to be responsible for the contract in a mandated collaborative model may create resentment and power imbalances yet equality and respect are foundations for the most successful partnerships (La Piana, 2001). In short, many of the challenges to partnerships are intensified in this kind of environment and new ones are created.

This tension in definition, purpose and process could be described as ideal versus reality. The ideal conditions for partnership-building may never be completely optimized but there are greater chances of success outside of any competitive process. Research asserts that “collaborations succeed in an environment that is oriented toward cooperation and away from competition” (Bergstrom et. al., 1995, p. 19).

While mandated partnerships incur extreme challenges, at the same time, case studies have also shown that they can reap some of the same benefits as more organic partnerships. Some of these rewarding developments include: shared knowledge about services and other organizations; increased referrals; greater communication and contact within the community; reducing duplication of services; leveraging of resources and capacity; and increased capability and coordination in services to clients (Wildridge et. al., 2004; Hart, Zimbrick & Ghiloni, 2001; Lindstrom et. al., 2009).

Mandated partnerships may not be as effective as those developed more organically between organizations with similar organizational cultures and missions (Waddock, 1989). There are inherent challenges about a forced relationship where the parties may have no real desire to partner. Resistance and ill will can adversely affect what is largely a trust building exercise. La Piana (2001, p.5) suggests that “It is perhaps most difficult to build a collaborative relationship if the impulse for partnership arises during the hectic period of responding to a funder’s Request for Proposal”. Deep or real collaboration requires time to develop trust and commitment and they must be voluntary to succeed.

Armistead and Pettigrew (2004, p.574) suggest that a mandated partnership approach to service delivery be carefully reconsidered in view of the negative perception that they are “synonymous with lengthy, fruitless meetings forced upon unwilling organizations by powerful external agencies prompted by Government policy”. The practitioners in their case study identified the difficulty of simultaneously complying with mandated partnership building while also attempting to do their “day job” (2004, p.582).

Takahashi and Smutny assert that mandated partnerships may be short-term responses to comply with the funder’s policy and therefore unlikely to result in long-term program improvements (2002, p.166). It is also unwise to mandate partnerships without clarifying the definition of partnership and equipping organizations with resources and skills in the partnership-building process (Armistead & Pettigrew, 2004). Without direction and resources, organizations are forced to waste their own time and resources fishing for answers. Partnerships will develop unevenly, in fits and starts, and may ultimately fail causing the process to begin all over again. This also causes the whole concept of the validity, reliability and effectiveness of partnerships to be questioned, by organizations and across sectors as a whole. As Armistead & Pettigrew (2004, p.574) suggest “the very term ‘partnership’ might increasingly be perceived pejoratively, synonymous with lengthy, fruitless meetings forced upon unwilling organizations by powerful external agencies prompted by Government policy”. This would increase resistance to any future partnership-building.

A case study of mandated partnerships in Australia captured the comments of one participant who complained that “the government tends to just go ‘here, here’s the money implement it. We are going to make you accountable for this, but we are not going to tell you, or give you any idea of how you are going to work together” (Radermacher, Karunarathna, Grace & Feldman, 2011, p.556). This is problematic because the government may not achieve the partnerships and outcomes they envision. As well, organizations are not equipped with the knowledge of how to build the appropriate partnership or accountability frameworks. This study found that there was a lack of capacity and partnership building skills and therefore a need for guidelines on partnership-building to accompany government policies as well as a need to protect smaller organizations from inequality with larger partners. Several authors asserted that government policy should not view partnerships as a “panacea” (Coulson, p.155, 2005; Barton & Quinn, 2001). In other words it is not a universal remedy to social problems or the appropriate answer to achieve cost-savings in service delivery.

Finally, because partnerships are labour intensive they are actually quite expensive enterprises. And while there may be savings for government in service costs and contract management, the reality is that “the cost of the mandated inter-agency working is being borne solely by the welfarist sector” (Barton & Quinn, 2001, p. 61). This expense seems to be discounted by policymakers mandating partnerships.

Conclusion

The impetus that inspires organizations and agencies to partner is varied. Similarly, the route to which partnerships are formed is not unidirectional nor does it adhere to a prescribed schedule.

Certain conditions, environments, processes and desired outcomes have risen to the fore in relevant research that may serve to optimize partnership-building activities.

The driver or motivation behind the partnership is of paramount importance. It is the foundation, the purpose that determines how the partnership develops and functions over time. The literature has demonstrated how individual commitment must be earned on a scale wide enough to sustain the complex and difficult process of partnership-building. This process involves intensive decision-making. The level of formalization will depend on the type of partnership and the social and political environment. There are a multitude of internal and external issues that may influence this process. The literature points to “facilitating factors for partnerships such as obtaining consensus over program principles, identifying and pursuing community goals, promoting democratic and participatory governance and actively involving community organizers, support staff and researchers” (Takahashi & Smutny, 2002, p. 168).

Each partnership purpose and process is unique. However, the literature points to optimal and generally applicable partnership-building conditions such as sufficient time to develop trust and knowledge about partners, clear purpose and shared understanding of desired outcomes. Case studies help to add to our knowledge about how partnerships form under specific conditions.

The next section describes the methodology used to gain information about the partnership-building experience of BC employment organizations. It describes how the Findings were acquired in order to answer the primary research questions about best practices and challenges in mandated partnership-building within a government RFP process.

4. METHODOLOGY

The research design is based on exploring the experience of a number of organizations who participated in partnership-building for the purposes of employment program service delivery to identify best practices, strategies and obstacles.

One-on-one semi-structured interviews were deemed the best research method to explore in-depth the experiences and issues of interviewees. Open-ended questions allow the interviewer to access the perspectives and observations of those directly involved in partnership-building (Patton, 2002, p.279). The interviewee can describe in their own words and with their own emphasis what they felt and thought about a past experience. Both quantitative and other qualitative methods were considered. However, statistical options would not elicit the richness of information that was required to answer the client's research question. Another factor was that the majority of existing research and literature about partnership-building uses interviews and case studies. Therefore, the findings could be discussed more directly in the context of the literature review by using this method.

A series of semi-structured interviews provided a purposeful sampling in a variety of communities across BC. Criteria were developed to achieve a wide spectrum in terms of agency size, age, location, program delivery experience and potential for feedback. Both non-profit and for-profit organizations were interviewed. It was also important to include small specialized service delivery organizations as well as large general employment agencies with greater stores of resources and multiple locations.

ASPECT's more than 180 members were invited to voluntarily participate in the research interviews because they had participated in responding to the RFP and building partnerships for that mandated purpose. They have operated for many decades each and have a great amount of knowledge about service delivery and the sector as a whole: its general mission, history, strengths and challenges.

The primary research generation and collection is a deliverable that provides the content of the study and analysis. This deliverable took the form of open-ended semi-structured interviews with senior management and executive directors of member organizations who had formed partnerships to respond the new BC employment program RFP.

An analysis of the data to discover themes and issues is central to this research project is the focal point in terms of deliverables. The Findings and Discussion sections illuminate some key issues and forecasting related to both best practices and limitations which may be useful to inform on-going research by the client agency. A final deliverable is the completed research report that documents all of the foregoing and which concludes with Recommendations and possible further research activities.

4.1 Interviews

The interviewees were from organizations who responded to the government RFP to deliver the Employment Program of British Columbia. They were recruited through an email invitation.

Open-ended questions with voluntary participants allowed contributors the flexibility to isolate and put forward what was important for them. Interviews were mostly conducted face to face in the participant's workplace. Where distance prohibited travel, telephone interviews were held, also with the clients located in their own offices. Interviewing subjects in their respective places of work allowed a sense of ease and familiarity in their environment so that atmospheric influences such as discomfort or stress or just learning and scanning a new place, would not be factors that might inhibit, alter, skew, or interfere with their responses.

Advance planning and consent offered a wide enough time frame to schedule interviews at a time most convenient for participants. Additionally, in respect to time pressure, interviewees and their organizations had completed and submitted their proposals and were awaiting the results. They were between the RFP process and the busy training time of start-up and implementation.

The research methodology consisted of semi-structured interviews with senior management involved in forming mandated partnerships in order to submit competitive proposals. Senior managers were interviewed to identify best practices, strategies and obstacles. Seventeen senior managers or Executive Directors of member agencies engaged in partnership-building for the RFP were interviewed. These interviews were conducted a couple of months after the RFP proposal submission deadline but before the notification of awards. This would be the interim period in the RFP process – at least for the agencies – while government considers the proposals in the period between submission of proposals and award of the contracts: August to October 2011.

Twenty-six questions elicited general background information and an exploration of partnership-building processes, previous collaborative experience, learning, outcomes and conclusions. Two key wrap up questions asked what advice should be given to others and what information do the participants wish they had from the beginning of the partnership-building activities.

Interviews were between 45 and 70 minutes long. There was an equal split between smaller cities and rural locations versus Metro Vancouver and the lower mainland. There was a variety of geographic and regional locations, large and small organizations, lead and partner organizations and general as well as specialized service providers were represented.

The qualitative data from these interviews was analyzed to identify similarities and differences in responses. Key issues arose in the respondent's answers that could be conceptualized into general themes. This analysis revealed various strategies and techniques that were used by respondents in dealing with these broad challenges and opportunities and highlighted areas where supports and resources were absent. By investigating and charting multiple responses, meta-matrices for the conceptual meta-themes could be derived and subthemes identified (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

4.2 Limitations

Generally, the limitation on interviews as a research method is the human factor. The respondents may be influenced too excessively by conditions, the situation, external pressures,

professional or personal preferences to give accurate information or a relatively true picture of the research intended to be captured. The danger of bias is equally true of the interviewer. However, the size of the sample, the analysis of the data and the additional input of a literature review of existing research on the same subject aided in verifying the accuracy of the research results and recommendations. Questions were targeted but also open-ended. Therefore, answers could be compared across interviews along with the more editorial comments.

This approach was limited to the number of interviews that were held. One person involved in any number of partnerships was the sole representative and the research is limited to their answers and opinions. Quite strong feelings and opinions emerged around specific questions for several of the interviewees. However, these were reiterated by several attendees. The context and timeframe for the interviews must be considered as a limitation. Interviewees had just emerged from a period of intense pressure which was the culmination of many months of hard work to build partnerships and respond to the RFP.

The study was not exhaustive of the thousands of people involved in responding to the RFP and involved in partnership-building from different parts of the organization. Ultimately the intention of the research project was to get an overview from Executive Directors and Senior Managers with a manageable number and still gain valuable in-depth qualitative data, which was achieved. This research is being conducted during the procurement or competitive process after proponents have submitted proposals but before the selection process has been completed by the Ministry of Social Development. A complete picture of how the partnership proposals will be evaluated by the Ministry is not available to the public. Therefore, one of the limitations of this study is that we don't know which of the various models of proposed partnerships will be successful or what evaluation criteria is applied to this policy.

Conclusion

The participants were very responsive and fulsome in their answers to the interview questions. Transcripts produced 166 pages of observations from the interviewees about their experience with the process of building partnerships within the pressure driven RFP context. The next section presents these findings in an analytical method wherein meta-themes and subthemes emerged from the totality of the research.

5. FINDINGS

This section of the report presents the information gathered in the research interviews. As described in the preceding section on Methodology, interviewee responses were submitted to a thematic analysis that identified common elements, differences and insights into the partnership building experience.

The interview questions ranged from background to process, learning and outcomes. Therefore, this section will first present an overview of the nature of the participating organizations, the individual representatives and the geographic field. This will be followed by an exploration of the overarching meta-theme derived from the totality of the research. The research is organized into ways in which the meta-theme impacted the process of partnership building for interviewees.

Substantially, the meta-theme is the fundamental incompatibility of two opposing imperatives driven by 1) the nature, mission and mandates of the responding organizations: their values versus risk and 2) the circumstances of responding to a government RFP informed by specific policies and the nature of partnership-building: collaboration versus competition. The subthemes derived from the qualitative research data introduced philosophical, conceptual/structural and practical process-driven issues; both as a result of the central tension and inherent to the nature of partnership building itself.

5.1 Interviewees

The 17 research interviewees were from organizations that spanned every region of the province: from the North, Okanagan, Kootenays, Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island. Participating organizations included general employment service organizations as well as those catering to specialized service clients. The organizations were all of long standing and community-based, which means they were created and grown in and for the communities where they are located. The interviewees likewise had many years of experience in the sector. As senior management, each interviewee fell somewhere in the range of possessing 20 to 35 years of experience in the employment and career counseling sector.

The size of the organizations ranged from 8 to 350 employees with an average of 66 employees. In terms of locations, this ranged from a single storefront up to 22 separate locations in multiple communities. The average number of locations was four. The annual operating budgets of the organizations ranged from \$650,000 to \$19 million with an average of \$5.6 million.

Virtually all of the organizations, large and small, entered into multiple partnerships in one or more catchment areas (potential contracts). Also, all of the partnerships involved both for-profit companies and not-for-profit organizations. In terms of the types and number of organizations in any given partnership, for example, there might be six partners with two having in excess of 200-300 employees, two with 4 – 10 employees and the others in between. Many larger general service organizations also had some of the specialized services in-house or in combination with other large organizations. Therefore, generally one or two larger organizations joined together

with two or more smaller specialized organizations to provide all of the requisite one-stop shop services.

This organization of the service delivery into catchment areas with mandated partnerships by the RFP resulted in a situation where organizations might be in collaboration with another organization in one partnership group but in competition with them in another area. This was the one of the cornerstones of the research findings.

5.2 New One Stop Model

The new service delivery model introduced an omnibus of change. The model mandated an integration of specialized service programs within a general employment model. It further mandated partnerships and collaboration between different organizations with their own unique missions, visions and governance structures. Clients were to be slotted into one of four tiers according to their level of support needed to achieve employment. Taken as a whole, organizations had to analyze the model and how it would affect their operations, values and clients.

It is important to note that this change project was neither requested nor welcomed by those in the employment sector. It was a top-down dictate instigated by government funders. Many felt that the consultation process was, in reality, merely a pretense; a presentation of a fully formed model that had already been decided: a fait accompli. Participants felt that the government was going through the motions of inviting input.

However, while several interviewees doubted the veracity of the consultative intent, others welcomed the opportunity to offer their opinions. They felt that they had been heard and that their input had some influence in the final version of the model. There were in fact several adjustments made to the draft RFP model in the final version. ASPECT also effected some concessions around the payment model and government expectations that agencies could take out bank loans for start-up costs rather than advance contract fees.

Interviewees also questioned the motives behind the integrated model. There were apparent discrepancies within the logic of the change impetus. The transformation project claimed the dual drivers of efficiency as well as improved client services. Many felt integration would constitute a decrease in services for specialized populations; therefore, the real or number one motivation was a reduction in costs for the government and not a client-centred or community development model.

Organizations had to decide whether they philosophically agreed with the one stop shop model. They questioned if they could ethically support the model and the effect it could have on client services and organizations. Many interviewees had fundamental concerns with the one-stop model.

More than one interviewee noted that the one-stop shop had been tried in BC before and abandoned because it did not adequately serve specialized cohorts. Specialized service providers were the most vocal in opposition to this model. They were firmly of the opinion that it did not

work then and will not work now. Their research, conclusions and advocacy over the last several decades was to achieve separate employment programs for specialized populations which the introduction of the new model basically dismantled. In this way the model was diametrically opposed to their values relating to client services.

Several interviewees expected the pendulum to swing in the other direction in five or 10 years and the model reversed. Forward-looking interviewees also expected a greatly reduced talent pool for the next competitive process. The reduction in contracts province-wide would force many unsuccessful organizations to close that would result in a loss of community infrastructure. The attendant layoffs and retirements would also have sent expertise and human capital to other sectors.

A small number of interviewees embraced the new model and its potential to deliver and perhaps improve services and client access to those services. However, irrespective of a positive or negative outlook, no one could know what lay over the horizon when the model was to be implemented. The unknown played a major role in the difficulty, stress and fear of decision-making. Their decisions were based on extrapolations of theoretical models and reasonable expectations.

There seemed to be a general feeling that the model was not based on reasonable or realistic expectations. Organizations chose to suspend their disbelief in the interests of the competition but reserved the hope that as the program rolled out it would adapt in a real context.

Several interviewees noted that they were hindered in truly understanding the model because the software database, called the Integrated Case Management program (ICM), that would drive the model, its operations, activities and administrative reporting requirements was not yet available. This important technical component was still in development. In their program delivery experience, oftentimes, systems drive services rather than the other way around. The case management software had not been part of the consultative process.

The program would have a huge impact the hypothetical implementation of this new model. Furthermore, since the fee payments were to be generated by the interaction between service providers and the system, there could be ramifications on the element of financial risk and risk as a whole.

The new model detailed in the RFP provided the context within which the partnerships had to be built. This was the structure that organizations had to understand first. It was the lens through which they had to carry out the partnership-building process. However, beyond simply learning and digesting this large content, they also had to adapt and innovate to mesh what they knew or learned about partnership-building with a competitive environment. Numerous issues had to be addressed. These became clear from the research interviews. Some were to be expected in light of the partnership literature but some were unique to the BC experience. The Findings will be illuminated in this manner in the Discussion section. The following analysis synthesizes these issues into the meta-themes and subthemes that emerged.

5.3 Meta-Themes

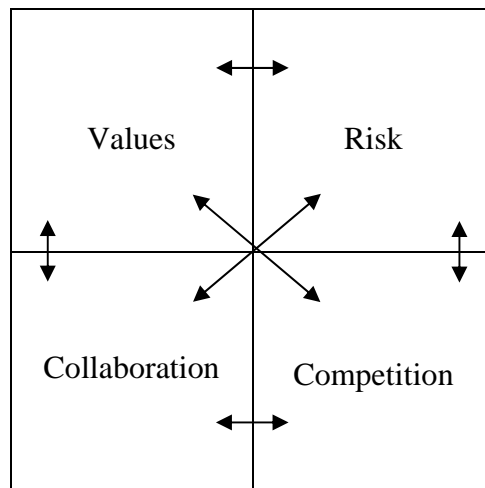
The meta-theme that emerged from the interviews was the disconnect between the competing demands of the RFP, central to which was the mandate for collaboration or partnership building, and the competitive nature of the entire enterprise. Participants described collaboration in a competitive process as an oxymoron.

An oxymoron is two contradictory or opposite terms which both cannot hold true at the same time. The conflicting values inherent in competition and collaboration, respectively, brought into relief both the values of the organization and the many areas of risk attendant to the process. A competitive request for proposal pits organizations against each other in a quest for contract funding to deliver services. Instead of aiding to develop relationships, this contest makes organizations guarded and secretive.

Collaborative values may be the first to be sacrificed in favour of self-interest. For many organizations, the risk of not obtaining funding was its very existence. At best, there would be many staff losing their jobs and reliance on remaining contracts. Financial risk and the risk to human resources were conjoined with the entire risks attendant in the partnership-building mandate: choosing the wrong partners, losing sight of the organization's mission and vision, negatively affecting organizational culture, operating standards, service delivery, clients and community. Management and Boards of Directors with fiduciary duty were bound to safeguard their own organization first.

The framework that confronted organizations and which had to be reconciled and made to work on all levels consisted of four major areas: values, risk, collaboration and competition. None of these are mutually exclusive or independent. Many of the same issues had to be viewed with each of the lenses. Individuals' choices and decisions had to consider all four of these fields as they progressed through the RFP process and the partnership building activities. The following Figure 3 shows the interconnectedness of the four areas that impacted organizations and individuals during the competitive and partnership-building process.

Figure 3. Competing Values in Partnership Building Activities



These competing ideas had to be forced to work in tandem. They had to be addressed in each stage of the process and at all levels from the individual, organizational and external relations viewpoints. They are intertwined; therefore each issue and partnership decision had to be addressed from all four perspectives.

The first step reported by organizations was to make the decision whether or not they could proceed at all. This was an internal decision at the level of the organization: its leadership and governing bodies asked themselves if their mission, vision and values could support the service delivery model. The risk assessment was the other side of the decision-making equation. Would they jeopardize their mission, vision and values by proceeding? However, interviewees noted that a lot of it was guesswork as they were unfamiliar with all of the factors that might arise from the model and in the implementation.

The research findings will be organized into sections that relate to the oppositional meta-themes that were woven throughout the partnership-building exercise. The sections will explore how these key tensions were experienced by the interviewees and how they translated into subthemes that in turn brought about specific actions and emotions in the various stages of the process. In addition to the common elements, key differences in experience will also be highlighted. The sections will be divided into 1) Values versus Risk; and 2) Collaboration versus Competition.

5.4 Values versus Risk

This section will look at the many specific issues which organizations had to deliberate within the values versus risk conflict. Starting with the highest level considerations and working through to more practical concerns.

5.4.1 The Big Picture

The first value versus risk proposition that was tackled by organizations was an ideological or what some termed the “big picture” issue. When presented with a transformative service delivery model and RFP, their first decision was whether to participate at all. Initially there were three choices: to engage, to not engage, or to actively protest. Engaging with the process included attending consultations, responding to the RFP and building partnerships. Organizations could also decide to do none of these things and continue to operate their services outside of this contract or offer services to contract holders once they were awarded.

The third choice was to effect a vocal opposition to the RFP and refuse it in its entirety as a contract and program model. However, there was little support for a rebellious stance and solidarity for opposition within the sector would have been required. Although several organizations decided to opt out of the process, most thought that, ultimately, their participation held the greatest chance of benefiting their organization, clients and community and that they might be able to influence changes from within i.e. once they controlled a contract.

There were many roles and responsibilities the interviewees had to be accountable for. As long-standing and knowledgeable members of the sector, they felt a duty to be active agents in the policy and service delivery changes: in other words, to be an active participant in consultations and to respond to the RFP and secure a contract, whether as a lead or a partner. As experienced and integral components of the social service network in their community, they felt duty-bound to continue to provide the quality services they knew were needed; and, as organizations employing trained professionals and governed by boards of directors, they felt a responsibility to maintain their integrity, values, fiduciary duties and responsibility to their employees.

A main concern for organizations was if they didn't deliver these services, what might be the effect on their community? They recognized the fact that if service levels or standards fell, both individuals and the community would be negatively impacted. Employers depend on an employment-ready local labour pool. The services are intended to assist people into employment. Unemployment harms both families and local economies.

Organizations believed in the integrity of their mission to support both employers and clients for a healthy community. If the services were delivered by an organization that did not understand the community and the interconnected referral networks and did not have the long-term relationships to make them thrive, then the community would suffer because the unemployed would not get the help they needed to get employed and employers would not have a properly equipped workforce for employment. Thus, many answered this question as a values related to risk assessment to not only internal but also external stakeholders.

Questions fundamental to the mission, vision and values of the organizations had to be answered. Although the new service delivery model was not generated from the grassroots, they had the choice of whether to engage it or not. This entailed an inventory of the potential effects of the model. For example, would it provide adequate service levels to specialized populations? Would there be conflict or discomfort with women suffering from violence, youth at risk and general clients in immediate proximity? Were the fee levels sufficient to allow the time to service clients properly as well as to cover the costs of the organization? It required a significant amount of time to understand the new model and the precise meaning of partnerships within its context. The two, often conflicting, core considerations were maintaining the values of the organization against the various arenas of risk such as financial sustainability, integrity, identity and autonomy.

In order to alleviate the perceived risk to their organization, a number of organizations chose neither to take a lead role nor to partner with lead organizations but to operate on a fee for service to any organization. Some chose to close entirely without responding to the RFP. There were two key reasons that influenced these choices. The risk of participating was viewed as greater than the risk of not participating. For some organizations this meant that they felt there was not enough money in the contract to support the services and they would be outlaying immense resources to partner and respond to the RFP, only to be operating at a loss if they won a contract.

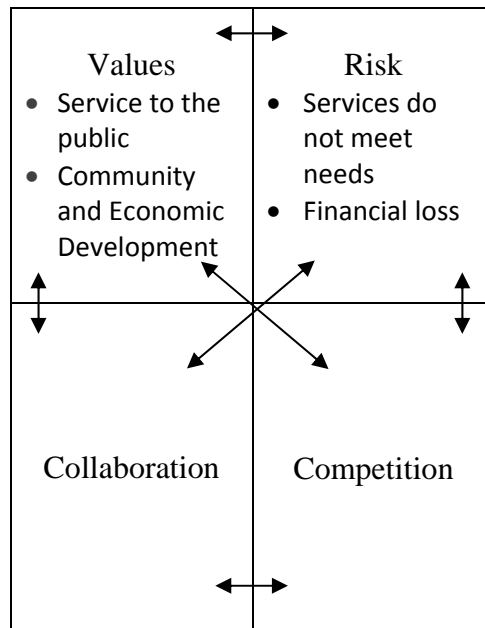
Other organizations decided that services to specialized services would not be client-centred in the new model and that it was designed for the needs of the funder rather than the clients. They did not respond because they felt that the new model would not service specialized clients

properly or mesh with their vision and mission. Interviewees felt that in the new model they would be servicing the funder rather than their clients.

The ideological issues all involved a weighing of various competing priorities and decisions about what could reasonably be expected in the future. Many of the philosophical and big picture issues remained undefined and hypothetical throughout the entire RFP process. The two key issues of values and risk were woven through the conceptual and structural struggles with partnership-building as well as intertwined with every practical step and consideration.

Table 5 shows how issues such as services to clients became both a value and a risk.

Figure 4. Values and Risks



5.4.2 Client Focus: Mission and Vision and Community Service

Virtually every interviewee mentioned values and very similar specific values as both a motivator to respond to the RFP but also as a central value proposition. As leaders in community employment service providers, the interviewees espoused a deep commitment to client-centered or client-focused service provision. They sought out partners with a shared vision of delivering client-centered services.

This was a tenet shared by all the interviewees. The *raison d'être* of their organizations was essentially to help individuals with whatever their specific needs and goals were, on a case-by-case basis. This commitment to the client is imbedded in their vision and mission statements. Continuing to deliver services to their clients was one of the prime motivations in responding to the RFP.

Some interviewees saw a conflict between the model and optimum service delivery. The highly structured and prescribed services did not allow the flexibility needed to provide service on an individualized basis.

Interviewees felt that the cumbersome administrative requirements of the new model and the structure of the integrated partnerships were designed to cater to government policy and fiscal imperatives rather than to optimize client services. The change project agenda appeared to be focussed on other outcomes than the employment success of unemployed citizens.

The funder set the parameters of the model and the requirements for partnership-building or collaboration in a competitive environment. Most organizations had no experience building formal partnerships for contract bids. They also had no experience working in partnership to produce a proposal. The full complement of what needed to be asked and answered had to be learned at a cold run. The pressure of climbing a steep learning curve against the RFP stop watch added to the pressure. The next section will explore some of the risks and potential ramifications for service agencies in their efforts to execute these multifold activities.

5.4.3 Financial Risk/Sustainability/Survival

The perceived risks were multifold. There was the financial risk, the risk to the organizations' service philosophy and the risk to the reputation and status of the organization in its community.

Organizations were aware that if they did not succeed in securing one of the five-year employment contracts that they would be perhaps permanently penalized in terms of future contracts to deliver the Employment Program of BC, particularly if this had been the only employment-based program they had been delivering. Most RFP have mandatory minimum requirements to qualify as a proponent. One of these is typically a set number of recent years delivering similar programs to the one out for tender. This recent experience requirement could be anywhere from within two to five years. Without recent experience, proponents generally are unsuccessful. Even if they had other employment contracts, they would lose staff and potentially no longer have the capacity to deliver the program in the future.

This pressure to survive and to be the successful proposal or bid was a constant irritant as organizations attempted to tackle the multiple fronts that this change project engendered. The outcome of this competitive process had higher stakes than just a single contract. Staff jobs were on the line across the myriad organizations involved across the province. The results could reconfigure the whole sector and profoundly alter many professional lives.

Interviewees felt that in order to remain relevant they had to be service delivery organizations in the new model. The only way to get a voice with the Ministry was to secure a contract. Most felt that they had no choice but to tackle the new model and the partnership building process.

The financial risk associated with the new model was a big picture issue for organizations as they determined whether they would engage in the process. They asked whether they could survive without a contract to deliver the new program and what the implications would be for their sustainability and survival.

For smaller organizations, the impact would be greater. This was an issue of ultimate survival for many organizations whose programming was to be subsumed in the new amalgamated model. This was especially the case for smaller, specialized service providers. They would have to close down their organization if they were not successful in participating in a contract.

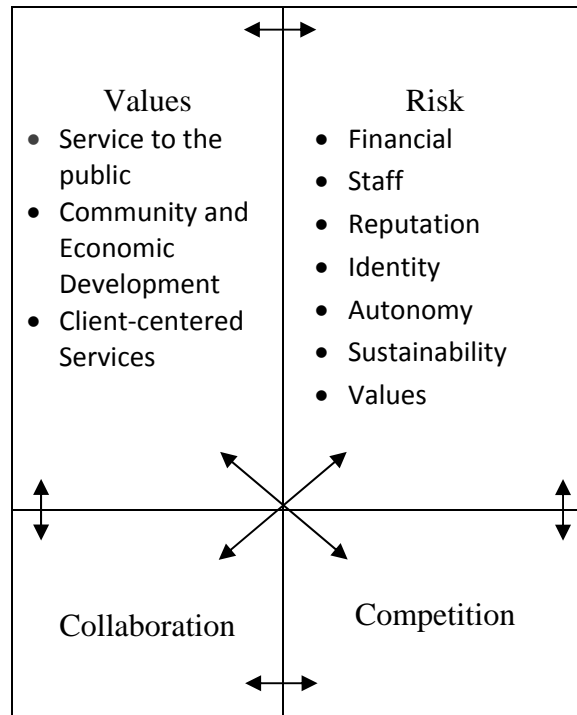
The consensus of interviewees was that regardless of whether they engaged in the new model or not, that they would be forced to cut staff positions. Even if successful in optimizing their participation in the new program, lead organizations would be downsizing. Concern was not only on an individual or organizational level but extended to considering the effect on the employment counselling occupation in BC as a whole.

The financial risk included concerns that in the partnerships and in the maximum fee structure for services there was simply not enough money available to run the program. Running a contract that involved numerous partners with a minimum 25% flow through to these other organizations was not viewed as a potentially viable model. The consolidation of programming and mandated flow through of 25% meant that even successful lead agencies could no longer employ the same contingent of staff while the subcontractors would be subsisting on even less. There was a sense that delivering this model could threaten to harm the sustainability of everyone involved.

Two of the most widely repeated comments concerning the BC Employment program in stakeholder engagement and the RFP Q & As, was that there was not enough money in the contracts to support the multiple partnership one-stop shop model and that the four-tiered prescriptive client eligibility model would not be economically viable and would not support adequately the unemployed populations.

The management and volunteer boards of directors or owners of the service delivery agencies weighed the various risks associated with delivering the new model carefully. Establishing a legal partnership and the associated optimal conditions did not adhere to this competitive process. There was little time for building trust or meeting as equals. Anxiety, uncertainty and fear were the predominant emotions experienced by interviewees. Organizations were concerned that forming these partnerships might endanger their autonomy, identity and reputation in their community. Getting involved with the wrong partners, even if successful, might have negative consequences down the road. Basically, the risk applied to all the values of the organization as well including mission, vision, client-centred service and community well-being. Figure 5 itemizes the long list of values and risks to be protected.

Figure 5. Expanded List of Values and Risks in Partnership Building



Both the values and risks carry over into the categories of collaboration and competition. In fact, in many ways values may be considered synonymous with the priorities of collaboration and risk synonymous with competition. The next section will look at the values and risks as they relate to the tasks of collaborating and competing, respectively.

5.5 Collaboration versus Competition

The primary conclusion of the interviewees was that the activity of collaboration and building partnerships is at odds with a competitive environment. This tension permeated every stage of the change process; adding another layer of uncertainty and anxiety to the transformation enterprise.

Individuals were hard pressed to find strategies and behaviors that were compatible with both collaboration and competition. The parameters that informed their knowledge and experience with collaboration and those that surrounded competition had no common elements to draw out.

People were often in the position of essentially collaborating with the enemy or the opposing team, given that the enemy may be one's competitor in one proposal and collaborator in another. They would be an enemy in the sense that one does not want them to have intelligence about the strategies, information and content contained in proposals that stood in competition with them. This was a dilemma because organizations would want to include material in every proposal that gives them the best chance of being successful. It is impossible to have information withheld in one circumstance but provided in another. Once the information was shared in a partnership,

there was no certain way of knowing which of the other partners were competing against them in other catchment areas.

This fundamental dichotomy of demanding that proponents in a competitive process be collaborative partnership builders was difficult to reconcile even within longstanding relationships. The competitive risk to an organization's self-interest rose to the fore when in competition for potential survival.

Historical relationships were tested as people attempted to operate in unfamiliar territory without familiar signposts and often deliberate withholding of information. There were many situations where interpersonal and inter-organizational ties were tested; some were stretched and some were broken in the course of this competitive process.

Situations arose in which organizations became evasive and secretive with their partners. This is not conducive to partnership-building which requires trustworthy relationships and openness in order to develop and function in a satisfactory way. Feelings and emotions ran very high in this competitive environment as they scrambled to produce a winning proposal.

The conceptual and structural issues were focused on understanding the definition of partnership and the actual structure that needed to be put together before beginning the practical aspects of the task. However, the one constant at each stage was the analysis and decision-making was undertaken, in most cases, with very little experience, knowledge and resources regarding partnership-building for service delivery.

5.5.1 Definition of Partnership

The first conceptual issue involved the definition of partnership required by the Ministry. A partnership could be anything from a new legal entity including a formal partnership or a cooperative to a subcontractor or fee for service model. The effect of this flexible policy was that agencies spent a lot of time grappling with what arrangement would work, asking themselves questions such as what did they prefer as an organization and what would a successful partnership look like as well as what did the Ministry want to see?

Interviewees noted that they struggled with defining partnerships that would best serve clients, what would fit best with the individual organization, how it would suit the community and the provision and access to services. Agency management spent a lot of time researching different structures and accessing resources to inform themselves and their boards of directors about their options. Most individuals had little or no experience working in formal contractual partnerships or what different models entailed. Risk and values played substantial roles in this decision-making owing to the fact that agencies had no previous experience and the various models were untried.

While the cooperative model was entertained for various lengths of time, few organizations actually embraced this structure. Risk dissuaded many boards of directors from approving this type of alignment. Directors have a fiduciary duty to safeguard their organizations and mitigate risk. Organizational autonomy was something that every interviewee wanted to protect.

Autonomy was both a value and a risk that was brought to the fore in partnership-building within the competitive regimen.

The structure that most organizations were familiar with was the contractor and subcontractor model. Several had been subcontractors before but only a couple of agencies had been primary contractors who managed subcontractors for service delivery. The RFP tended to encourage this model with the stipulation that only one agency be identified in the partnership to be the lead and hold the sole responsibility for the contract and all interaction with the funder for the course of the contract. Therefore, this was the most popular form of partnership that was assumed. Ironically, this is not technically a partnership but rather a business arrangement.

5.5.2 Real Partnership Building

The general understanding and experience of partnership-building among interviewees was on an informal, voluntary and community-focused basis. All interviewees had a history of building partnerships with other organizations. In fact, most organizations had partnership-building as part of their mandate and/or strategic plan in keeping with their community-building purpose. Collaboration with other community agencies was a value that helped to serve the mission and vision of organizations. Therefore, this value was essentially put at risk by mandating collaboration in a competitive procurement process.

Most interviewees recognized some of the conceptual distinctions between real partnership-building and what was required by the new model and the RFP. Conditions such as equality, mutual respect, trust and shared values were identified as prerequisites for partnerships building. Successful partnership motivators were also seen as answering a community need and entered into with mutual desire. Some organizations and individuals were committed to following a consensual decision-making process and building a real partnership. A few of the partnership-building experiences were extremely positive.

Although the RFP mandated partnerships, it also called for a single lead and contract holder through which all management and communication with the funder would flow. This requirement creates an imbalance in the internal relationships and any structure that was created. Interviewees felt this was more of a business arrangement to answer a competitive call rather than the positive pursuit of partnership-building as recognized in community development. Some participants felt that their lead organizations had domineering attitudes and were not inclined to pursue a collaborative process.

In this conceptual and structural stage, many organizations brought this dichotomy into their deliberations. The type of partnership they were willing to consider was another function of their value inventory and priorities as well as perceived risk. Several agencies reported that they would not have considered entering a contract unless it was a real partnership and not just a business arrangement. They had established for themselves and believed in one of the classic purposes of partnerships and the authentic driver of partnerships which was to accomplish more positive outcomes than they would be able to achieve alone.

Another factor that intensified the competitive nature of risk, was that while interviewees had extensive experience informally building partnerships within their communities, they virtually all remarked that they had no experience with legally binding, formal, contractual arrangements. The beneficial resolution of this component was largely taken on faith that if successful, the contractual arena would take care of itself.

5.5.3 Mandated Partnerships

Mandating partnerships and collaboration while being forced to compete were seen as incompatible. Many had experience with integrated service delivery through what was seen as true community building projects. They were deliberate, joint, purposeful partnerships created by the community over considerable time. Table 5 lists some of the distinctions that arose from the collaborative or real partnerships and the competitive mandated partnerships.

Table 1. Collaborative and Competitive Qualities

Collaborative	Competitive
Open Communication	Confidentiality
Trust	Lack of Trust/Suspicion
Time	Deadline
Client-centred	RFP Defined
Community-based	Catchment Area
Voluntary	Mandated
Values-based	Financial/Sustainability
Equality	Inequality

As a new experience and due to the mandated nature of the partnerships, several interviewees likened the partnerships to “shot-gun” weddings noting that the competitive nature of the process made secret bigamists of many. This analogy serves to solidify the fact that organizations were forming partnerships against their will with the gun of risk playing the preeminent role in motivating the process. Further to the marriage analogy, the process was likened to a courtship or even “speed dating”.

Interviewees involved in multiple partnerships noted that the process of partnership building was different in every case. The partnership-building was influenced by the partners involved, their culture and values, the structural nature decided upon and who the lead organization was. The level of communication and consensus was likewise a product of the competitive rather than collaborative model. Inequality was a common theme whereby decision-making had to be an interpretation of what would make a successful proposal.

Some agencies reported not even knowing what service model was submitted in the proposal. Several did not know who the other partners were in the submission. Lead agencies were

described as “secretive” and playing their cards “close to the vest”. In many cases, the competitive nature of the driver cast a pall over any real or even pretence of collaboration or partnership-building.

There was an aura of desperation and intense anxiety. Several agencies reported being contacted mere weeks before the deadline to partner with agencies. Partnerships broke down before the proposal was submitted. They discovered in the process of partnership-building or proposal writing that they were incompatible or could not agree on the proposal elements.

Even where partners were reported to be on a more equal footing in their outlook, the time pressure, availability and irregular communication in the process, made consensus decision-making very difficult. This factor contributed to stress, anxiety and negative reactions to the process. This was viewed as another area where competition and collaboration are incompatible. The toll for those attempting to engage in multiple partnerships was extreme.

There were cases where partnerships could be very collaborative with everybody all together working it through; financial, service model etc. Some organizations had the experience where a partner pulled out and notified the other partners at the last minute.

5.5.4 Partnership Criteria and Process

Another common subtheme was identified in the selection of partners and the general criteria organizations applied to this selection. The first criterion was practically oriented. The organization had to have the expertise and experience to deliver the services that the partnership required. The second but closely ranked criterion was the quality of the services provided by the organization and their reputation in the community, among service providers and with government. Thirdly, the organization had to have the same philosophy regarding the priority of client-centered services.

Generally, non-profits felt that other non-profits fit together and would work together more easily than profit and non-profit. However, after assessing all factors including who were the most recent deliverers of employment contracts, who held the “legacy” programs that were being amalgamated, virtually all of the interviewees formed partnerships that blended non-profit and for-profit organizations. These organizations reported being pleasantly surprised by the nature of the for-profit organizations and having some of their negative assumptions removed.

Partnership-building activities and discussions revolved around understanding the financial payment structure, service delivery tiers, case management and accountability elements and how those would be distributed and operationalized within the partnership structure. Partnership-building activities were woven through the RFP and proposal writing process. Key discussion revolved around the requirements of the RFP and finding a positive approach to the many layers of details requested. The actual partnership-building questions were structured by the RFP and were largely the actual questions asked in the RFP.

Some early partnership building efforts were derailed when there was a reduction of catchment areas in Vancouver from 20 to 7 or 8 and things started to break apart. Changes to the RFP or clarification as to meaning and intent added to the complexity of creating proposals.

5.5.5 Complexity

Another major theme voiced by every respondent was the overwhelming and unprecedented complexity of the RFP. The response to this complexity was multiple meetings and hundreds of hours spent deciphering and attempting to tease meaning from it. Proponents used the Q&A forum extensively. Similar questions were asked repeatedly to understand the nuances and subtle distinctions between similar questions, content requirements and to clarify the preferred partnership model of the government. It was a search for the hidden meaning that would make a proposal successful.

Interviewees noted that the level of complexity required a considerable amount of time to absorb and understand. Organizations who intended to take a lead role felt that the onus was on them to thoroughly digest the new model and RFP requirements before approaching potential partners. Additionally, they had to have a strong sense of the conceptual framework and structural model they wanted to pursue which they could describe and explain to the specialized service providers they wanted to recruit as partners.

The complexity of RFP and process was complicated by the fact that the on-going questions and answers adjusted and altered definitions as time went on. Some issues, like the type of partnership to form, were left purposefully vague in order for proponents to customize their arrangements uniquely to their community. Therefore, the partnership building and sizing up of potential partners was undertaken in conjunction with guesswork and decision-making.

Most interviewees entered in to multiple partnerships or proposal submissions. Exclusivity was largely avoided in either requesting or committing to it as being unfair or interfering with another agency's ability to sustain themselves. It was noted that upon informing their partners of their intention to be involved in other bids, they were asked not to share information. This suggests a high degree of trust in some parts of the sector. However, there were also situations in which the competitive edge led to some perceptions of unfair circumstances. It is important to keep in mind that there was an on-going assessment of risk as potential partners were identified and practical considerations were enumerated.

Several interviewees reported that it was difficult to get some of their partners to respond to telephone calls or emails or to share information. Although it was unknown if they would be successful at this time, this indicator was not a harbinger of success for the future and ultimate potential implementation of the partnership.

5.5.6 Exclusivity

One of the primary issues that arose from the competitive process was exclusivity. Some organizations wanted exclusivity agreements from partners or potential subcontractors so that they were not in competing proposals. There was a lot of heated debate about exclusivity. Some

organizations felt that it was unethical to demand exclusivity, particularly from small specialized service organizations that needed to be successful to survive. Other organizations thought that it was unethical not to be exclusive because you would be involved with their competitors.

In order to answer the risk and sustainability threat that the new service model introduced to smaller organizations, the Ministry, rather naively, suggested that they participate in as many bids as possible thus maximizing their chances of still being able to provide services. They seemed unaware that there was an ethical and competitive logic conflict. Organizations reported being on multiple bids in one catchment area and having other providers object close to the deadline. Participating in multiple bids also increased the cost to smaller organizations in this competition so they would bear a disproportionate amount of expense in relation to larger organizations with greater resources and capacity.

Therefore, the competitive advantage was clearly with the larger organizations that had the resources to put the time in to thoroughly analyze all of their options. Small specialized service providers came out of the competitive process as beggars rather than choosers.

Some didn't mind partners being on competing bids as long as no information was shared. It seemed to be different in every partnership depending on the values and risk assessment by other organizations in the partnership. However, the fact that the Ministry was advising specialized service organizations to participate in competing bids as a way to mitigate their risk of survival in a policy they themselves dictated seems an odd way to try to preserve the sector and to manage both a collaborative and competitive processes.

5.5.7 Time Factor

Due to the complexity of the RFP, time was a limiting factor to partnership-building. This was described as an all-consuming project involving countless meetings and communication between partners, management and staff. Interviewees noted weeks and months of early mornings, evening and weekend work.

This factor was exacerbated according to the number of partnerships that were formed or joined by an organization. Large multi-location urban service providers may have had up to 18 different proposals and different partnership groups that they helped to create. Time can be viewed as equivalent to the some of the cost of responding to the RFP and building partnerships.

5.5.8 Cost

Cost can be understood in terms of a dollar value but also at the expense of other revenue creating activities and client services. There is also the cost on human resources in terms of sick leave or stress leave, both of which were reported to be the caused throughout this process.

The financial cost of partnership-building alone was largely incalculable. Interviewees noted that many individuals were involved from their organization at different points in time and hundreds and hundreds of hours were committed. For example, one organization estimated conservatively that 800 hours of the agency's direct time was committed – this would be exclusive of overtime

evening and weekend work. This translated into \$40,000 worth of time. Another agency estimated direct costs of \$15,000 and ended up not partnering or bidding in any contract. It should be remembered that there was a majority of non-profit respondents across the province whose budgets are generally fully committed. Participants knew that they would never recover the costs of partnership building or responding to the RFP.

Key staff had to commit significant amounts of office hours to this project which meant they were not available for the daily work of their organizations. In many cases, operations were limited and resources were needed to temporarily backfill positions for the duration of the RFP process. This put pressure on frontline staff who had to operate with reduced and absent managers. If additional temporary frontline staff were hired, services to clients may have been negatively impacted by less experienced personnel who were learning new systems. Management expertise was required to respond to the RFP as well as to build partnerships. Interviewees reported that if they missed meetings this might have been misinterpreted as disinterest.

Key decisions about partnership roles and responsibilities were being determined at these meetings and it was essential to be at the table or risk getting a small portion of the service delivery and hence revenue from fees. Failure to attend was not an option; therefore different staff may have attended different meetings and arrived at options not agreed to by other staff who may have objections upon their return. With different players from an average of eight partners at any given meeting, the road to consensus or final decisions was often one that backtracked. The competitive nature of the partnership-building exasperated that already difficult decision-making reality for any partnership.

As with any stress-fraught negotiation or major project, compromises and changes from established models and financial prospects were difficult. The essential one-on-one relationship building that often is the first step to partnerships was a splintered process.

Stress was definitely a debilitating factor for individuals and organizations. Continual overtime and lack of days off for an extended period of time negatively impacted productivity and the current service provision to clients as people were stretched to their limits.

Also, interviewees reported that the fact that several fundamental changes were made to the RFP and that points of clarification through Question and Answer amendments posted to the procurement website hosting the RFP altered their understanding and necessitated reworking their proposal response. Changes to the RFP meant continually learning new material that affected program design, implementation and approach as well as partnership building responses.

Another kind of change was to the pre-defined geographic catchment area's territory and the reduction in catchment areas. Within each catchment area was a set number of Employment Service Centres (ESC) or storefronts: the one-stop-shop locations. In one area, for example, the number of ESC locations was reduced from 20 to nine. This had the effect of breaking apart a number of planned partnerships and changes to proposal submission content. These kinds of Ministry decisions added to the time and cost for proponents.

5.5.9 Rural versus Urban

Just as the costs and risks of this collaborative and competitive process were unevenly spread between larger and smaller organizations, they were also experienced differently between organizations located in rural and urban communities. Although the complexity of the RFP was equally shared, identifying partners and building the partnerships was easier in some of the smaller communities where all service providers were either well known to each other or were already working in collaboration and even co-located. In disparately populated communities or where great distances must be travelled it was a reality that services should be in close proximity or conjoined in partnerships because of smaller client groups in specialized and general cohorts.

The number of potential partners is much smaller than the urban centres. In some instances, there might be only one existing community-based agency and only one agency delivering specialized services. Some of the smallest centres even had to reach out to other cities for services that were not currently being provided in their community but were part of the new integrated services program. The degree of difficulty for the urban agencies with multiple locations in several catchment areas was significantly greater than for the rural communities. However, rural organizations quite often faced a challenge in achieving a 25% flow-through if they were the only provider in their community and provided 90% of the required services.

Generally, in the smaller communities where informal partnerships were formalized for the RFP, they could see the value of coming together and learning more about each other and ways in which they could have strategic opportunities arising from these new arrangements.

It should be noted that most of the urban organizations suggested that outside of the enormous work and problems posed by the RFP and mandated partnerships that the single positive outcome was getting to know other organizations and some of the different services that they offered in a way that they never had before and which may not have been possible or have happened if not for the RFP.

Many organizations already had complementary or informal partnerships; however, most of these were used exclusively for referrals. In rural, as in urban locations, where values and philosophical and true partnerships were built it was easier to answer difficult questions like how the pot of money was to be split and who would deliver which services.

Interviewees noted that much of the work is still yet to come. Only certain individuals became invested in the partnership or “bonded”. Staff of the various organizations, who are on the frontline in direct contact with clients, still have the long road ahead of participating in the partnership and sorting out the different cultures, values and service perspectives between themselves. The actual practice of collaboration and the work it entails will be carried over into the years of the contract. Proposal content is theoretical.

5.5.10 Conclusion

Several respondents concluded that if they were confronted with the opportunity to do it all over

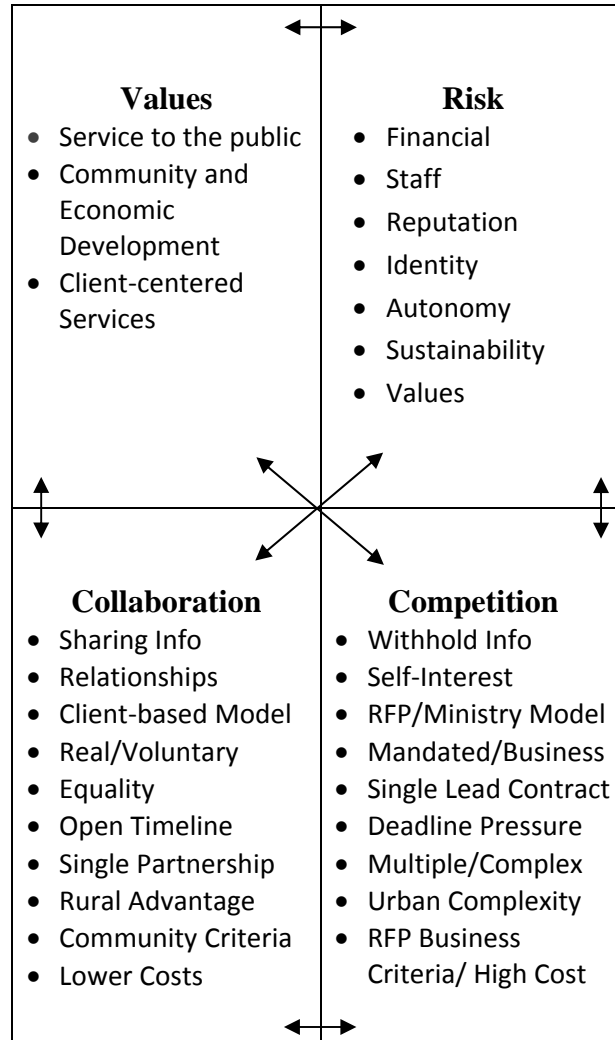
again, they wouldn't. They were determined that, in the future, they would only pursue partnerships that had equality and shared mission and vision.

Furthermore, if they didn't have one in place already, they determined that they would maintain a partnership policy but only outside of a competitive process. In the competitive process, organizations cited the need to have a plan B and C because the intense pressure can cause partnerships to dissolve. Individuals were surprised at first that people pulled out and went back on their word despite prior relationships. The competitive reality of business can interfere with hitherto solid values and beliefs and can be incompatible with trust. Several interviewees noted that the leadership, managers and career counselors are primarily social workers or human resource specialists rather than business people or proposal writing experts.

The process was characterized as "horrible", "horrendous" and other superlatives, particularly in the scenario where partners had been working together for months and then the partnership would fall apart because they couldn't get philosophies to agree which caused confusion, anger and angst as the clock wound down. There needs to be leadership in the sector adequately prepared for change management and partnerships building as well as working in a partnership model.

Without exception, the interviewees called attention to the inadequacy of the timeframe that was allowed both for partnership-building and responding to an RFP with a 300 page proposal. Managers and Executive Directors required board approval at each stage before they could take the next step. This would be multiplied by the number of partners in the partnership. Volunteer boards are not often available at a moment's notice to consider an issue, discuss and come up with a decision. The entire partnership and proposal could be held up by a recalcitrant board. This was another challenge that effected values and risk. Valuing or respecting the internal governance of partners and the need for consensus could be a challenge that increased the risk. The following Figure 6 summarizes the competing values that the process involved.

Figure 6. Factors in Partnership Building: Values, Risks, Collaboration & Competition



As Figure 6 demonstrates, there was a multiplicity of oppositional interests between the collaborative values and the competitive risks to be balanced and considered in this RFP process. In the findings and the experience of those grappling with these issues there were implications for their organizational relationships; for their internal resources and operations; and on the staff, managers and executives building partnerships within this environment in order to write a 300 page proposal under deadline.

For some, the conflict between collaboration and competition was an experience that they would not repeat in the future. The elements that may have led to this conclusion will be analyzed in the following Discussion section. In addition, the factors that contributed to the realization of a successful partnership will be discussed. However, ultimately the process and experience of partnership-building was negatively impacted by the tension between collaboration and competition.

Conclusion

The first thing that all respondents encountered in this process was the need to examine their value systems and the mission and purpose of their organizations. The second was to assess the risks involved. Once these were reconciled in some way, they proceeded with the partnership building enterprise and constructing a response to all of the requirements of the RFP.

They had to learn skills as they went because working in formal partnerships was a new experience for most. Therefore, the task was extremely time consuming and costly. The costs were both financial and human in nature. The process of building partnerships was a hit and miss affair likened to a courtship culminating in a shot-gun wedding. After much effort, some partnerships fell apart and were disbanded prior to submitting a proposal. In other cases, although their collaborative values were tested by the competitive process, they reached compromises in order to move forward. The experience was grueling. Some emerged with partnerships that garnered well for the future. Others were not pleased with the outcome or actually joined partnerships where they had no real knowledge of the group they would be working with.

The time pressure of the RFP deadline added stress to the process and inhibited true partnership building. There was inadequate time to develop the trust and shared purpose that characterizes real community collaborations beyond the scope of the effort to secure a contract. The next Discussion section will analyze these findings in relation to the literature on partnership building.

6. DISCUSSION

This section will provide an analysis of the findings within the context of the literature review. The findings from the interviewees will be discussed in relation to some existing research and case studies about similar types of business transformations and mandated partnership-building. The primary meta-themes and subthemes will be addressed. It will also discuss the ways in which the research questions have been answered.

6.1 Values versus Risk

The research findings echoed many of the themes in the partnership literature. Their experience exemplified the best practices and challenges prevalent in collaborative endeavors. The burden of their efforts was greatedened by the RFP and competitive process. At heart, the creation of partnerships was a bid for funding and to provide services for their community. This is not the ideal driver for a successful partnership. Amid the tension of a time-limited deadline, they pulled into play all the values and risk adjustment practices they could. This was a unique case study in partnership building in several ways. Not only were partnerships mandated, they were foisted upon a competitive process, an RFP procurement measure as well. They were also on a vast, province-wide scale, with some organization competing and forming partnerships in two or three or more catchment or jurisdictional areas.

The partnership research literature identified risks that organizations face in creating mandated partnerships. Partnerships may be viewed as a potential threat to the organizational identity and autonomy (Barton and Quinn, 2001). Particularly, in the respect that it “could lead to the abandonment of long-held beliefs and working practices” and that this fact is not properly understood by those devising the initiatives. (p.54). Respondents clearly reported this fear and hesitancy throughout the organization and governance structures towards protecting their independence, mission and vision. They struggled to maintain their internal and external values from within a competitive process.

Every respondent articulated financial risk as a concern that in the new model that there would not be enough money in the partnership service delivery contracts. Other research has concluded that “partnerships can be economically disadvantageous (i.e. result in a financial loss) and extremely time consuming” (Radermacher et al., 2011, p. 552). In this way partnerships are a risky investment of extensive resources that may not have any yield to offset the expenditure. It was evident from the costs itemized by participants in terms of direct financial outlay and labour as well as emotional stress that the full costs of partnership-building was shouldered by the sector as reported in the literature about other jurisdictions and policy edicts.

Participants upheld all of the common partnership challenges identified in the literature starting with the definition of the term and the choice of structure. Due to the deliberate flexibility and lack of definition in the RFP, respondents felt set adrift and rudderless. Everything had to be designed from scratch. Their responses echoed those of the case study participant in the UK, who bemoaned the fact that government mandates partnerships but without specific direction or resources and just expects the organizations to figure it out on their own.

Most of the interviewees identified the active advocacy role that ASPECT played as being a very valuable and beneficial part of the entire process from transition to transformation to mitigate risk. They noted that the only supports and resources in partnership-building that they had available were offered by ASPECT. As potential proponents, a clause in the RFP prevented them from speaking with public officials about the model or content. Organizations were worried that any objections from them might damage their opportunity to secure a contract.

Respondents shared similar values in regards to their commitment to improving their communities through client-centered services. They also placed high value on their staff and the services they delivered. As in other cases, a reduction in staff is almost inevitable in a major change project instituting integration of services. Management and Executives had to contend with a transition plan or support for employees should it be necessary. Another factor that accompanies partnership-building is the effect on existing staff in terms of overtime, stress and burnout. As noted in the literature, during partnership-building they must take on extensive extra work and meetings in addition to their regular jobs.

6.2 One Stop Shop/Partnership Service Delivery Model

A public employment program and its model are policy instruments to deal with unemployment and improve the economy. There are many positive objectives that provide a foundation for the choice of a one-stop-shop model. Some literature contends that it is the most efficient service delivery model. However, stakeholder consultations showed a split between those who supported a one-stop shop and those who had spent years advocating for separate specialized programming. If the goal of the policy shift was to promote partnerships in service delivery, this was not the perception of community agencies involved in the process. They viewed the primary driver as financial: a cost-savings project. Virtually all the literature on partnership-building for one stop service cites efficiency as a top motive.

The literature clearly identifies the prevalence of a preference for integration through partnerships on an international level. The BC government created the cross-jurisdictional research report to itemize the rationale behind the new model. However, the experience of agencies in early consultations and future developments felt that true consultation was not part of the process. Rather, it was felt that it was a top-down mandated government policy. Given the language contained in the Labour Market Agreements, it seemed the model was already a fait accompli before any community consultation process had begun. Organizations felt there was no part given to them in discussing a variety of models or in contributing to the new model which decreed partnerships as a key element.

Participants clearly identified cost as a key driver for the government policy. Again, the literature reflects this as one of the reasons behind the integration and call for partnerships. However, the BC Ministry background documents and research also identified improved service delivery as another motive.

However, the realities of partnership building were not presented as part of the government's process. There was no support or even documented literature referred to proponents. The only

resources and support were offered through ASPECT's partnership-building summit. Similarly to other research participants in the literature, the feeling was described as like being thrown in the ocean without a life raft. As one case study participant noted it was like being told to just do it but no one is going to tell you how. In that case study, however, the partnership-building was supported with funding but insufficient resources or guidelines. In the BC experience, there was neither. Both found it to be a complex, time-consuming project attended by similar challenges such as time, unequal power and decision-making ability and threatening to an organization's mission, vision, service delivery, operational standards and autonomy.

The BC employment sector was also similar to reports about social service sectors in other countries in that they were more familiar with informal partnership arrangements. They reported a paucity in respect to leadership and management skills in formal partnership-building.

The massive financial risk, cost and challenge of putting together partnerships was downloaded onto the proponents in the sector. This cost was also assumed with no promise of acquiring a contract. There could be no expectations of any cost recovery even if a contract was obtained because there was no provision for those expenses in the RFP or any government literature. In some other cases such as the UK and Australia, the government has provided funding and resources for partnership-building but participants found them to be insufficient to the task. The new model with new partnerships represents change of an extreme magnitude. Policies are needed to support the success of these new constructs to operate effectively and deliver quality services.

6.3 Collaboration versus Competition

There is a wide spectrum in the definition of partnership-building. This is a relatively new formalized concept in service delivery that raises new challenges in both the field and is demonstrated in other research literature. The struggle that respondents had in defining the structure of their partnerships has been experienced in other mandated policy cases. In fact, the lack of consideration about adequate capacity and knowledge is also common to this type of government imperative. In a study where other common experience included the inequality of smaller organization forced to provide services with more mainstream organization, participants stressed "the importance of preparation and having the skills and information to enter into partnership arrangements" (Radermacher et al, 2011, p.556).

The practical partnership-building issues with which this sector has struggled in this research project are commonly experienced in the light of other case studies. It is also evident that the necessary strong supports for partnerships identified in the literature are reinforced by the research in this study. The following discussion will make clear the foregoing assertions.

The intense competitive process has negatively impacted some relationships and community networks. It will be important to assess the impact on referral and collaborative efforts in the future as the new model is implemented. The embedded increased accountability and administrative demands are accompanied with lower funds and operating costs.

Another problematic scenario in this procurement design was the reality on the ground in the catchments areas. As a lead, an organization could build a positive partnership for one contract but could not necessarily carry this partnership over into another proposal. The specialized service providers could be small entities located in only one community. Therefore, large lead organizations were forced to build new partnerships for each contract bid with different partners in each. Not only was this an exponential factor in the labour incurred, it did not necessarily produce the best partnerships possible in each area.

Many organizations experienced the situation where the lead or prime agency for the contract took on a dominant role and asserted themselves as the sole decision-maker. As a result they felt squeezed out of the process and fairly helpless because they were at the stage where it was too late to go out and find another partnership to work with. Interviewees reported incommunicative partners who were not collaborative in nature.

Many organizations were forward looking to the implementation of the partnerships and where that would lead. Organizations that had put in the time to develop trust and common values and goals were confident that these would serve them well as new obstacles or challenges presented themselves. They cited a tremendous amount of dialogue that moved them beyond the standard issues and into the intangible cultural value systems of their respective organizations to a place where they were in it for everyone and not just a single agency. This provided a basis for group decision-making that respected a mutual investment.

6.4 Mandated versus Real Partnerships

The literature projected that mandated partnerships or forced partnerships are less likely to be successful than those created by mutual desire and over time. Discussions with potential proponents have confirmed that most, if not all of these partnerships are new, untested and a result of the policy change. Many organizations face survival and sustainability challenges with the new model. There was a contingent of interviewees who expected the partnership to yield better results than they could accomplish alone.

Most leaders of community-based agencies have an innate knowledge of what “real” partnership-building means in terms of intent, process, time and trust. All of them have informal partnerships in the community as a daily part of referring clients to other services and supports that may help them in keeping with the client-centred philosophy and case management model they embrace. A disconnect between the intention and process of building community partnerships versus the partnerships formed in response to a government RFP which are predominantly contractual business arrangements exists.

Again the literature strongly supports the research findings regarding the experience and knowledge of interviewees. A Guide for Grantmakers asserts that the characteristics of real collaboration include important issues such as trust. Real collaboration is understood to be a voluntary undertaking that develops over time. Real partnerships “cannot begin, be nurtured, and mature within the limited timeframe and high-pressure environment created by most funder-sponsored Requests for Proposals” (La Piana, 2001, p. 5). Interviewees universally identified a lack of time as one the most stressful and challenging aspect of the process

As the new partnerships are implemented, there is a real opportunity to influence the interpretation and the relevance in practice as the partnerships perform the services. Another key instrument to assess is the financial viability of the budget allocation through internal monitoring and financial reports to provide validity if funding is to be proved to be insufficient. This provides a fact base for discussion. However, in exploring this approach it is useful to take to heart one of Mulholland's tips to not "build on foregone conclusions" (p. 484). The approach should be open to feedback and exchange of information.

Despite a "terrible" process, partnerships realized the potential benefits in creating a new alliance. They felt that as a partnership they were had much stronger capacity to effect change than they could have as an individual organization. Similar comments from participants occur in other research findings examining mandated partnerships (Radermacher et al., 2011, p.553). Research participants valued the knowledge they gained about other organizations in partnership-building.

6.5 RFP: Complexity, Time and Cost

Complexity really has to be necessary and simplicity has to have a value in program design and service delivery while maintaining oversight. There should always be an evaluation of the ease of use and understanding of a programs structure and demands in terms of the people who are using it. Does it make sense to design a new model and procurement process of such complexity that it drains so many resources from a mostly non-profit sector? There are three issues here. One is that the program is designed for the requirements of the funder with no input from end-users that are unemployed individuals that may or may not have adequate education to understand it or may have barriers to employment and personal challenges like addiction or abuse.

Interviewees engaged in multiple partnerships often had a clear preference for one over the others but no control over which proposal would be successful. They also may have joined the partnership bid through a single yes or no email. With so many untried partnership proposals it is not clear whether the best service delivery teams will be the result of a competitive procurement process that assesses solely on the basis of written documents in order to be short-listed for an interview.

The complex demands of responding to the RFP and of building partnerships have left the sector drained of resources. The partnership process demanded what seemed like endless meetings. Juggling of all competing interests of partners and collaboration as well as the requirements of the RFP was exhausting for all participants. The true purpose of these partnerships was to produce a proposal to respond to an RFP and secure a contract and funding rather than a goal of building a lasting partnership.

The management and staff of the service agencies are highly educated. Many frontline staff have Masters degrees; however, most of these are in social work, counselling or HR management. The entire sector of social service workers who are experts in their field were sorely tested by an RFP and procurement process of Kafkaesque proportions. Consideration should be given to simpler and more appropriate procurement strategies.

Finally, these demands of time and money are made from non-profits who may not have the capacity to dedicate the same as a larger for profit organization. The process should be simplified and clear supports outlined prior to the RFP process. Any small financial capacity in these organizations has been exhausted.

If the new partnerships are less effective in this model, will performance standards suffer as well? These partnerships have been mandated and defined in the broadest sense of the word and could range from co-operatives to contractor and subcontractor models. There has been no support to accompany the requirement for partnerships and a failure in the policy to adequately prepare the sector for partnerships in service delivery and to successfully integrate specialized services within general programming.

Both the literature and the interviewees in this case study identified the need for leadership and management skills in partnering with other organization; both the instigators who create the partnerships as well as the day to day (Radermacher et al, 2011; Armistead & Pettigrew 2004; Takahashi & Smutny, 2002). In fact, in the interaction between different cultures the staff also needs increased capacity around working in partnership.

Clients will no longer access services where they have in the past. Plus, the number of organizations and storefront services are being reduced drastically. Streamlining and cost savings may not correlate with greater access for specialized services. Research into the service standards and survival rates of these partnerships is needed.

Conclusion

Overall, the mandated partnership building experience for respondents was intensely frustrating. They struggled to define partnerships within the context of the RFP and the new employment model. Most were not prepared with past experience, knowledge, resources or capacity for partnership building. For those that found some best practices such as taking the time to build trust and knowledge of each, this was unsatisfactory against the time pressure of the RFP. The costs in time and human resources were beyond anything they had imagined. Those in rural communities and who had previous solid relationships in place had an easier and better experience than those in large urban centres.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

There are several recommendations suggested by the foregoing findings, literature and analysis in order to provide improved models, processes and resources in partnership-building. ASPECT could advocate and petition government via meetings and position papers to inform government and urge them to take some of the following steps. For its membership, ASPECT can continue to inform and educate about the realities, best practices and challenges of partnership-building as well as encourage and facilitate relationship building within the sector.

Recommendation 1: The client should conduct an assessment of the sector, its knowledge, concerns and capacity in partnership building.

A first step before considering this type of mandated partnership model would be an assessment of the sector and an analysis of its common values in view of the policy ramifications of forced partnership-building as evidenced in research. Additionally, if mandated partnerships are being considered as a central piece of policy, inform the sector organizations about what this means and consult organizations about their opinions, knowledge, capacity and preparedness. This could be accomplished through provincial symposiums or regional meetings and workshops.

It is important to truly re-examine if mandated partnerships are the best practice available. Questions should include whether local communities and frontline organizations have any voice or influence into the language, policies and agreements in documents such as the LMA and LMDA between the provincial and federal governments which ultimately has such a huge impact on them.

Recommendation 2: The client should prepare position papers to present to government that describe the challenges of mandated partnerships and petition for resources to support partnership building outside of a competitive process.

This research indicates that best practices for partnership-building are not compatible within the confines of either mandated or competitive processes. Consideration should be given to promoting partnerships outside of a competitive process. Incentives and funded support would be required. Funded support is required to prepare a sector for massive scale change with mandated partnerships. Organizations need assistance in building capacity and skills for partnership-building.

Recommendation 3: The client should present a summary of the findings in this report to advocate for sector partnership building resources to government.

The true costs and burden for partnership-building in the non-profit and social service sectors should be considered and they should be adequately prepared, funded and supported in this activity. There should be sufficient time allocated to build trust. Ideally, this process should not occur in a competitive process. There should be an assessment of the consequences of the policy in capacity, resources, service delivery and human resources.

The client can inform government about the risks and challenges to organizations asked to pursue partnership building. The government should realize the practical realities that it entails and not just the assumed benefits. This summary could present a clear picture of the true costs to organizations in time, labour and fulfilling other service obligations.

Better risk assessment analysis is needed around integrated program models to reveal the true costs before embarking on a similar project. Improved financial assessments would reveal the inaccuracy of certain assumptions such as the assertion by the Ministry that banks would loan start-up costs to service providers. This added to fear and resistance to change project.

Recommendation 4: The client should recommend to the government that it is important to simplify and clarify procurement documents for future competitions.

Participants were quite vocal that this process should not be used again in this way or replicated in other Ministries or other programs. Many potential proponents would choose not to respond to a similar RFP process.

Increased complexity does not equal increased accountability and productivity. There is a need for simplification of RFP repetitive response requirements. There also should be recognition where cost-effectiveness is actually cost-incurring and simply cost-shifting onto the social service sector.

It would be useful to have a more direct definition of partnerships in government RFPs. If one of the intended outcomes is healthy partnerships, this should be clear. It should also be clear if the outcome is a business arrangement to provide the integration of services.

There is additional work required on creating a true consultation process without preconceived notions or models. Many interviewees felt that the consultations were merely presentations. In a true consultation, the merits of a selection of options would be analyzed and consensus understood or compromise agreed upon.

Finally, the RFP and eventual contract called for only one lead organization. This factor worked against building the trust needed for true partnership building. It created inequality among those trying to build partnerships. A sense of equality is one of the important elements in building partnerships. For a true partnership, all partners should be responsible for the contractual obligations.

Recommendation 5: The client should research and consult employment sector organizations about different models for urban and rural locales.

There could be a benefit in considering different models for urban versus rural communities where particular issues and population demands provide a good rationale. Uniformity and equal access may be laudable but sometimes they just do not make sense. There is a case to be made that one particular service may not be required in a smaller rural location but the numbers in an urban center support the case for separate specialized service organizations.

One option could be to offer separate specialized services in the most densely populated areas with existing agencies and infrastructure and have a different model in the rural areas. One size does not fit all particularly when the population size and make up is massively different.

Recommendation 6: The client should advocate through meetings and position papers for government funding to prepare for transformative change models and partnership building.

After the new business transformation model was introduced, the government was approached to participate in and contribute to a Partnership Building Symposium to prepare service providers for this new structure of delivery. The government declined and ASPECT, a non-profit membership association stepped in to provide the symposium. This is a role in which government should have been involved. In the future adequate supports for a change project of this magnitude should cover the key elements. Partnership building was the cornerstone of the new model and needed more support from the government change agents.

The government has moved from managing 10 programs to only one but there is the potential for the same number or greater of service providers. There will be 73 contract holders instead of 400 but still 400 or more service providers managed by 73 for instance if there are an average of six partners times 73, that would be 438 organizations. This number surely would support the argument for an outlay of funding to support the preparation of partnerships. Most lead contractors have zero experience as lead contractors employing subcontractors. Everything is new; perhaps radical change such as this could be implemented in phases and perhaps after the database is completed.

Recommendation 7: The client should support or conduct future research on the success of partnerships after the implementation of the new model.

Going forward, it would be interesting to capture information on how many partners belong to each contractor. A survey of partners could collect data to check the status of partnership relationships and how successful they have been after one year or two years. It would be useful to know how many of these marriages of convenience ended in divorce or endured. And if they endured, were they positive unions or dysfunctional attachments.

Time needs to be spent testing the new model, seeing what works and what needs to change and what the responsiveness is to feedback. Agencies can and should gather their own facts and evaluation of the implementation of the new service delivery and the experience of clients and counsellors. They should keep a realistic accounting of the time spent on fee for service and performance measures to compare with those of the Ministry.

The roles and responsibilities of various partners may be intertwined to a large degree or quite distinct and separate. Approaches that bring the interests and roles closer together will enhance relationships and a sense of shared responsibility for the success of the new model and new partnerships. Agencies should capture information about how the partnership works in practice and how it evolves.

It will be valuable to capture the best practices and knowledge gained during the implementation of the transformation project and new BC Employment Program. The literature suggests several tools and methods for evaluation of partnerships. A recommendation from some interviewees is to make partnership-building a more prominent and permanent on-going activity for organizations. This could lead to new opportunities. It also has the benefit of spreading knowledge between organizations about successes to build reputations. This was one of the top criteria for selecting partners in this partnership-building exercise.

There are several responsibilities that the government has accepted to monitor the program, not only internally but with a joint government and sector represented advisory panel that was a result of non-profit advocacy. In response to concerns about specialized population “falling through the cracks” from stakeholders, there will also be an advisory panel with specialized service provider representatives (The New Employment Program, 2010). However, there are no policies or measures to monitor the development, implementation and operation of the partnerships beyond the financial compliance with a 25% flow through of funds. The health in partnerships is something that not only should be done internally but also from a Ministry perspective.

Agencies should gather data through internal evaluation processes of the implementation of the new service delivery and the experience of clients and counsellors. They should keep a realistic accounting of the time spent on fee for service and performance measures to compare with those of the Ministry. Specifically, as suggested in the literature, the amount of money required for start-up and the effect of eligibility requirements on operations.

Additionally, as interviewees noted, a wave of Diaspora will be leaving the sector. Research into where these people are using their qualifications would be useful to know. Also the magnitude of the consequences of the transformation project on human resources in the employment and career training sector could be measured.

A public employment program and its model are policy instruments to deal with unemployment and improve the economy. There are many positive objectives that provide a foundation for this choice. Stakeholder consultations showed a split between those who supported a one-stop shop and those who had spent years advocating for specialized separate programming. There are two sides to the issue of successful service delivery: one is the effectiveness of partnerships and the other is the one-stop shop model providing the right supports to those who need them. Both are influenced by the implementation of organizational change.

As the new policy guidelines are implemented there is a real opportunity to influence the interpretation and the relevance in practice. This is an important instrument as the major policy decision is moving forward. Another instrument to influence is budget allocation through internal monitoring and financial reports to provide validity if funding is to be proved to be insufficient. This provides a fact base for discussion.

In the role of a contractor, those struggling with the new model may not be in a position to argue policy issues in the public domain. This may not be the wisest approach at this point in time.

Time needs to be spent testing the new model, seeing what works and what needs to change and what the responsiveness is to feedback.

This research was conducted at the stage where organizations were only putting together theoretical partnerships. There could also be an assessment through surveys as to the need for on-going partnerships training and leadership training in the sector.

Recommendation 8: The client should support or conduct research through surveys and interviews about how the new policy of a mandated partnership policy model affected all stakeholders.

This policy issue is one of transformational change that has the potential for both negative and positive impacts on different shareholders on both a local and provincial level. There are four main stakeholders. These are the government setting policy; the service providers working in partnership; the clients being provided employment services; and the employers looking for employment ready workers.

The force behind the transformation is, of course, the BC government decision-makers who are responsible for effectively servicing communities, utilizing federal funding and making responsible decisions to provide labour market resources to the provincial economy. Directly responsible for this policy is the Ministry of Social Development and within this ministry, the Employment and Labour Market Services Division which is managing the Business Transformation Project. Their main interests are providing effective and efficient services resulting in measurable outcomes to exhibit sound management and successful policies.

The second key stakeholders are the service providers who may or may not be delivering services in the future. They may no longer exist as organizations. The staff in these organizations has a profound interest both for their own futures and the future of their clients and communities. Many have invested many years in the sector. Local communities and cities have built knowledge and operational networks around organizations and key people. However, their high interest is coupled with relatively low power.

Another limitation is that it is not possible to know how the partnerships fare upon implementation. It would require a longitudinal study to compare the partnership-building process under the RFP process with successes, challenges, evolutions and failures in both the endurance of the partnership and the successful delivery of services.

The third stakeholders are the clients who access services. These groups will range from deep interest if they are in specialized groups that require on-going services such as persons with disabilities or low if disinterested in government programming. Stakeholders who are unemployed are an amorphous group that changes over time. It is interesting that this stakeholder group did not participate, and were not invited to consultations about their own service delivery.

A final group of stakeholders that should be mentioned is BC's business community. Their interest in the issue is somewhat indirect. They need to recruit staff and fill jobs with qualified and trained workers. The RFP Executive Summary stated that "the purpose of the Program is to

support Clients in achieving and sustaining Employment as quickly as possible” (March, 30, 2011, p.1). The business community needs to connect to service providers to fill positions. Employers may not concern themselves with exactly how employment services are delivered or by how many agencies. That being said, in smaller communities where established networks and referral systems have been disrupted or eliminated, this may be of great interest to some employers.

This further research may serve to inform future models of service delivery. There is great value in a comprehensive research project that considers all stakeholders’ input. This could be conducted in partnership with government.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Transforming the employment service delivery model is a challenging and complicated task for both the government funder and the community-based employment sector in BC. The complexity of the RFP and the introduction of mandated partnerships in a competitive environment was proven to be a most difficult process borne out in the literature and the research interviews. Nor was this process a truly collaborative exercise based on time, trust, equality and commitment in most cases. The impetus was one of survival, competition and high-intensity pressure. The attendant emotions of proponents were anxiety and fear.

Additional themes and recommendations will emerge as this research is completed. However, it is already apparent that additional research into the implementation and active service delivery of the new partnerships will be essential to further knowledge about the results of mandated partnerships in the delivery of public programming.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Background

1. What is your organization and title?
2. How many total employees did you have in March 2010?
3. How many locations do you have?
4. How long has your organization been in existence?
5. What is your average annual operating budget?
6. Have you created a partnership with other service delivery organizations?
7. How many organizations are involved in your partnership?
8. Are your partners located within your community or outside your community?
9. Was this partnership created to deliver services for the new Employment Program of BC?

Process

10. How did you identify potential partners?
11. Can you describe your process of partnership-building?
12. What topics did you cover with your potential partners?
13. Does your organization have a history of collaboration?
14. Has your organization built partnerships for service delivery in the past?
15. How critical was building this partnership to your sustainability?
16. Are you entering this partnership by necessity or for other reasons?
17. Would you be forming this partnership if you didn't have to?
18. How did you feel going into the process?

Learnings

19. Has your attitude changed through the partnership-building process?

20. What have you learned from the partnership-building process?
21. How much time did you partnership-building activities take?
22. What sort of total cost would you assign your partnership-building activities?
23. What model did you start with and what model did you end up with?
24. Did you turn down any requests from other organizations looking to partner?
25. Were you turned down by any organizations you wanted to partner with?
26. What is the structure of your partnership?

Outcomes

27. Did you discuss mission with your partners? What were the key outcomes?
28. Did you discuss staff with your partners? What were the key outcomes?
29. Did you discuss financial systems and reporting with your partners? What were the key outcomes?
30. Did you discuss management issues with your partners? What were the key outcomes?
31. Did you discuss legal issues with your partners? What were the key outcomes?
32. What is the legal structure of your partnership?
33. Did you involve any organizations outside of your partners in your partnership-building activities?

Conclusions

34. For someone embarking on this exercise, what advice you would have for them?
35. What do you wish you had known at the outset?

REFERENCES

- Aronson, J. (1994). A Pragmatic View of Thematic Analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 2 (1). Retrieved April 10, 2011 from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/BackIssues/QR2-1/aronson.html>
- ASPECT Website. Retrieved February 19, 2011 from www.aspect.bc.ca
- Barton, A. & Quinn, C. (2001). Mandated 'Joined-Up' Working: A Pandora's Box for Welfarist Organisations. *Public Policy and Administration* 16(2), 50-62.
- Coulson, Andrew. (2005). A plague on all your partnerships: theory and practice in regeneration. *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 18(2), 151-163.
- Cross Jurisdictional Research Final Report June, 2010. Ministry of Housing and Social Development. Retrieved October 25, 2010 from www.bcbid.gov.bc.ca
- Eisler, R. & Carter, S. (2010). Transformative Leadership: From Domination to Partnership. *ReVision* 30(3-4), 98-106.
- Executive Summary. Canada – British Columbia Labour Market Development Agreement. February 2008. Retrieved February 20, 2011 from <http://www.aspect.bc.ca/userfiles/file/publicfiles/LMDAExecSummary0208.pdf>
- Ford, R & Zussman, D (Eds) (1997). *Alternative Service Delivery: Sharing Governance in Canada*. Toronto: KPMG Centre for Government Foundation.
- Global Jobs Pact Policy Briefs. Brief No 05. The Role of Employment Services in Supporting the Labour Market. International Labour Organization.
- Hall, M. H. & Reed, P. B. (1998). *Shifting the burden: how much can government download to the non-profit sector?* *Canadian Public Administration*. 41(1) 1-20

- Hogue, T. (1994). *Community Based Collaborations – Wellness Multiplied*. Oregon Center for Community Leadership.
- La Piana, D. (2001). *Real Collaboration: A Guide for Grantmakers*.
- Labour Market Agreement: Canada – British Columbia (2008).
- Labour Market Development Agreement: Canada – British Columbia (2008).
- Labour Market Agreement (LMA) Presentation for June 12, 2008, Ministry of Economic Development. Retrieved February 19, 2010 from <http://www.aspect.bc.ca/userfiles/file/publicfiles/LMDAagreement.pdf>
- Miles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. (1984). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods*. Beverly Hills, CA, USA: SAGE.
- Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation Website. Retrieved October 27, 2013 from <http://www.eia.gov.bc.ca/bcea.htm>
- National Network for Collaboration Framework website. Retrieved August 29, 2012 from <http://www.uvm.edu/extension/community/ncco/collab/framework.html>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods, 3rd Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA, USA: Sage.
- Purcal, C., Muir, K., Patulny, R., Thomson, C. & Flaxman, S. (2011). Does partnership funding improve coordination and collaboration among early childhood services? – Experiences from the Communities for Children programme. *Child & Family Social Work* 16, 474-484.
- Radermacher, H., Karunarathna, Y., Grace, N. & Feldman, S. (2011). Partner or perish? Exploring inter-organisational partnerships in the multicultural community aged sector. *Health and Social Care in the Community* 19(5), 550-560.

- Request for Information, RFI #ELMS-003, (October 22, 2010). Ministry of Housing and Social Development. Retrieved October 25, 2010 from www.bcbid.gov.bc.ca
- Request for Proposals, RFP #ELMS-004, (March 30, 2011). Ministry of Housing and Social Development. Retrieved March 30, 2011 from www.bcbid.gov.bc.ca
- Reville, R. T. and Klerman, J. A. (1996). Job Training: The Impact on California of Further Consolidation and Devolution. Retrieved October 20, 2012 from http://www.rand.org/pubs/conf_proceedings/CF123/reville.html#src=mobile
- Takahashi, L. M. & Smutny, G. (2002). Collaborative Windows and Organizational Governance: Exploring the Formation and Demise of social Service Partnerships. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*. Retrieved July 24, 2012 from www.nvs.sagepub.com
- Waddock, S. (1989) Understanding Social Partnerships: An Evolutionary Model of Partnership Organizations. *Administration & Society* 21 (1), 78-100. Retrieved March 10, 2011 from <http://aas.sagepub.com/content/21/1/78.short>
- Walker, B. & Sankey, S. (2008). International review of effective governance arrangements for employment-related initiatives. Department for Work and Pensions. Research Report No 543. Retrieved January 22 from <http://campaigns.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2007-2008/rrep543.pdf>
- Wildridge, V., Childs, S., Cawthra, L. & Madge, B. (2008). How to create successful partnerships—a review of the literature. *Health Information and Libraries Journal*, 21 (1), 3-19. Retrieved April 10, 2011 from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1740-3324.2004.00497.x/pdf>
- Wilson, A. & K. Charlton (1993). *Making Partnerships Work*. UK, York: York Publishing Services for the J. Roundtree Foundation.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research, design and methods* (3rd ed.). Newbury Park, California, USA: Sage Publications.