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About ACTEW

Founded in 1987, A Commitment to Training and Employment for Women (ACTEW) is a provincial umbrella group, of supporters, trainers, agencies, and organizations delivering employment and training services to women. ACTEW's mission is to promote and support community-based training opportunities for women. ACTEW is a registered charity.

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Introduction

This training manual series has been created as ACTEW recognized a need for sharing information regarding the establishment and development of technology projects. ACTEW founded the Content-Sharing Constellation, an award-winning network of organizations that use online tools to share content across their web sites. When ACTEW participated in outreach projects and presentations, they always received feedback and requests for support from other organizations about how best to use technology to further the goals of their organization and sector.

The purpose of these manuals, therefore, is to demonstrate how to create, develop and sustain technology partnerships. Through the manuals, we define partnership as a relationship between two or more bodies that agree to share the benefits, challenges and responsibilities of a program or project. More strongly defined descriptions of partnerships will be explored as we explore partnership models. A technology partnership is defined in the manuals as a relationship between organizations that involves a project that makes use of advancements in technical capacity to enhance existing infrastructure.

In 2000, ACTEW realized that they were posting much of the same content on their web site as some of the organizations in their network. They also realized that what was not the same content could be useful to web site visitors for many organizations. The organizations were using the same web-based tool to manage the content on their web sites and knew that the tool included a function to support sharing of content across multiple web sites. The organizations decided to use this feature to share news and events across their sites in an attempt to save time and resources for staff that were managing the web sites.

In the next few years the network expanded to include ten other agencies across the non-profit sector, attesting to its usability and need. The network was affectionately called the Content-Sharing Constellation because it involved multiple partners, each focused on a different client group in the community-based training sector. The process of establishing the Constellation to the point that it is at in 2007 has enriched ACTEW and the Constellation network with many lessons to share. In 2005, ACTEW received a Trillium grant to create training manuals and deliver workshops regarding the development and management of technology projects in the non-profit sector. The training manuals are a series that include these topics: manual 1: Technology Partnership Development; manual 2: Collaborative

Technology Development between Non- profits; manual 3: Marketing Technology Tools as a Collaborative of Non-profits.

The goal of Manual 2, **Collaborative Technology Development**, is to provide a forum through which voluntary organizations can explore the process of collaborating to develop technology tools.

What is a Technology Tool?

As a Community Based Training (CBT) organization, our main mission or purpose is to help people and for us to do that we need to use technology everyday. We use phones, email, Internet, computers, MSN, faxes, VCRs and some of us even know how to operate that dreaded DVD player. We are most comfortable with various software packages but mostly MS Word and/or WordPerfect. We use these tools because they are necessary to our profession but we may not necessarily think of them as a “technology tool.” But that is what they are in their simplest form. Technology is anything but simple. We now have blackberry, iPhones, smart boards, blogs, wikispaces, interactive job boards, online discussions, online conferences, distance learning, face book...the list could take up this whole manual and we would need to also include a “definition page” just to figure it all out.

We are so reliant on electronic-based technology tools that when the Internet goes down we feel we cannot function. We forget that we can pick up the phone or actually mail a letter. We want and expect our technology tools to make our lives easier.

Have you ever said these words in frustration?

- There has to be an easier way to do this!
- This takes so much time to find and I am not sure how accurate this is.
- I waste my time by doing the same thing over and over again.
- How many web sites do I have to use to get my message out?
- Can't we all work together and streamline this process?
- With all the technology out there, there has to be something that can help me do this job quicker and more accurately.

Well, you are not alone!

As early as 1999, ACTEW recognized that an increasing number of agencies in the not for profit sector were using the Internet to find resources and information about community supports and to promote their own activities. In an attempt to improve the access to, and

quality of, online information, and also to reduce duplication, ACTEW partnered with three other organizations (two provincial umbrella groups, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) and Ontario Association of Youth Employment Centres (OAYEC), and the Possibilities.ca project of 211Toronto) to use a consolidated online database to share information across the partners' web sites.

As a result, a consolidated online database was created where each partner can have their own website and input their information only "once." Then this information would be shared across all the other partners' web sites by a click of a button. Based on a gap and an obvious need, The Constellation Project – Linking Employment and Training Communities was born.

ACTEW currently works with ten partner agencies and projects including the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI), the Ontario Association of Youth Employment Centres (OAYEC), the Possibilities.ca project of 211Toronto, the Toronto Training Board, ACTEW's Entrewomen project, Ontario Literacy Coalition, Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO), Information Niagara, Community Connection and Ontario Aboriginal Calendar of services and Events.

The innovative technical approach of the pilot was recognized in 2003 when the Content Sharing Constellation won an Award of Merit in the Showcase Ontario Awards. Thousands of events, jobs, news pieces, and resources have been posted to the Constellation and shared amongst the partners' web sites, and the Constellation Project has had an important impact on the Community Based Training sector. Feedback from staff in community agencies has acknowledged the Constellation as a unique initiative that has changed the way they do their work and has increased the impact and effectiveness of their efforts for job-seekers facing employment barriers.

Identifying a Need or Gap

The Constellation Project has been a great success. However, this was not achieved overnight. Many factors come into consideration when you are developing, creating and implementing a "Collaborative Technology Development Project."

First you need to clearly identify a need or gap in your organization's service delivery. Then you need to determine if "anyone" else has that same need or gap.

When you are identifying a gap in your service, it is important to ask the right questions. Creating the right questions starts with referencing your organization's mission, your budget and an idea of what your focus will be. An assessment includes:

- 1) An analysis of the organization's readiness
- 2) The technology needs of the organization
- 3) The organization's current use of technology

The organization must figure out who will do the assessment. Do you require the services of a consultant or do you have in-house expertise? If someone internal will do the assessment, the organization must determine who will be involved. It is important to include people with varied backgrounds: technology savvy, frontline managers, executive directors, administrators and end users, be it staff or clients to ensure perspectives are maximized. If the decision is to use a consultant, do not assume you can leave it all to her. Remember to determine the questions you want addressed and ensure you are involved in planning the assessment so that you are ready for the next steps when the assessment results are completed.

Ensure that everyone in the organization knows of the assessment and welcome feedback. The more information you can get, the more you can anticipate suggestions and comments. Then verify if these suggestions can be implemented seamlessly into the current tools. Ensure your consultant does not drive the process; that is your role. The consultant will be a resource that you hire with direction in exactly what you want accomplished.

Involve the board in the process so that they too champion the tool and its mission. Remember, you do not have to implement everything right away. Use stages or phases to allow people to get used to new technologies and to allow for lessons learned.

Technology Collaboration and Joint Partnerships

What do you think is the biggest barrier to implementing technology within the organization? If you guess "money", you are probably not alone.

As we know, most funders want to see collaboration and joint partnerships. Such relationships should not be taken lightly as partnerships require strong communication and understanding of the nature of the partnership and responsibilities they entail. There are many different structures to partnerships, including:

- Consultative/advisory – a partnership with one primary organization/individual that executes the project with an advisory group for consultation purposes
- Contributory – partnerships for the benefit of one or more community organizations; objectives are established by the initiating group and partners can agree to them or not
- Operational – partnership where many organizations set directions and plan for the project but not all partners are involved in project implementation
- Collaborative – share resources, risks, and decision-making for a shared project

The type of partnership you decide to establish depends a lot on the goal or objective you are trying to achieve. If you haven't already, you need to read ACTEW's Manual 1: "Technology Partnership Development" in The Constellation Training Manuals series. Visit <http://www.actew.org/constellation>

Manual 1: "Technology Partnership Development" in The Constellation Training Manuals discusses and considers the following:

1. Reasons for partnerships in non-profits
2. Considerations in planning your technology partnerships
3. The courtship: How to develop partnerships
4. Tying the knot: Concrete steps to seal the deal in technology partnerships
5. Partnerships: How to ensure the partnership evolves as you and your partners do
6. The dynamics of partnerships
7. Making and meeting objectives: Ensuring your partnership goals are met
8. When are we done? How do you know if your partnership is ending?
9. Final thoughts on technology partnerships

Manual 1 also includes a "Partnership Development Matrix" and a "Partnership Analysis" to help you in the development process.

Effective Research on Technology Tools

Research could seem to be the most difficult aspect of the "Collaborative Technology Development" plan. As discussed earlier, your organization(s) must have a clear understanding of what the specific needs and gaps are. However, now we are going to add the

questions: What would the ideal final result and/or solution look like? What is the ultimate goal desired for this technology tool? Once these questions are answered, determine if the goals are short and/or long-term. Technology is changing so rapidly it is difficult to plan more than three years in advance.

Encourage plans that maximize flexibility and adaptability to new situations. To do this, it is important again to bring in your "team" both internal and external to brainstorm. When you are brainstorming, use language that is accessible to everyone, and it is important not to limit yourselves to what you "believe" is achievable. Write everything on the flipchart or "smart board" and if you hear yourself or someone else saying, "Oh, that is not possible," write it down anyways. With the advancement of technology, one never knows what can or cannot be possible tomorrow!

Then you can start to research tools and develop questions. What are the specifications your organization needs? Do you have tools that it needs to be compatible with? What about the capacity of your organization? How does the tool have to fit inside the organization to work? What is your budget? Remember the 30-70 rule (30% for initial technology costs and 70% for support and maintenance) Do you need a consultant to fill a knowledge gap? What is the knowledge gap? What specific questions would you have for a consultant? Think of as many questions during your brainstorming session so that work can be shared amongst the partners.

If you do not have the internal resources or a partnership already developed with the technical skills required, this would be an ideal time to develop a technology partnership. Technology partnerships can be an efficient way to increase the extent to which technology is used in the organization under limited human or financial resources. Remember, all partnerships must have a win-win factor. Each organization can contribute existing resources and create a technology tool they would not otherwise have had.

One of your main partnerships should include your funders. When possible, funders should be invited to the table early in this process. It is important that sponsors have a strong idea of what you are going to accomplish and the tools you will need to use. However, do not focus exclusively on the tools but how the tools will help you accomplish your organizations' mission and therefore, service your clients more efficiently and effectively.

Building the Collaborative Technology Team

It is better to start “small” and let it grow. Sometimes, it is easier to start with one partner/collaborator who shares the same need. Developing the team can seem effortless but it does require a lot of work and planning. Have a single person responsible for ensuring the project is executed, he/she is the “hub.”

Hire consultants if needed to support your project – ensure that they are responding to your needs, not directing them. Like all of us, consultants have their strengths and specialties; interview them, formally or informally, to ensure they are suited to respond to your needs. Some clues to consider when choosing a consultant: Do they speak in language that is accessible to you? Do you feel comfortable asking them questions and for clarifications? Do they offer options that are realistic for your organization? Do they follow up with your requests?

Ensure that consultants have set timelines and that you have a clear idea of what they are doing and how the tasks relate to your project. The consultant reports to the person responsible and their results are reported to the team. Maintain partnerships and nurture these relationships. Be flexible in ensuring all needs are met.

Most funding bodies do not emphasize the importance of technology – the onus is on the organization(s) to emphasize the importance of what the tool will do for the organization. Remember, not emphasize the tool but the goal of its task and its relevance to their mission and whenever possible bring in the funders early into the collaboration.

Collaborative Partnership Work Plan

Regardless if you have one collaborative partner or fifty, you need a work plan that each partner can agree upon. Every project needs to ensure it is meeting its goals and objectives. A partnered project is no different and may be even more difficult to monitor, as there are a greater number of stakeholders. That is why it is also recommended that a single person be the “hub” but the work plan needs to be developed by the entire “collaborative team.” Generally, projects are easier to monitor when appropriate baseline indicators are set out right from the start. This will take more time in the beginning of the project but in the long run will save considerable time and will alleviate possible miscommunication and potential hardship to your partnerships.

A work plan template has been attached to this manual for your use and/or starting point. All work plans should include the following points with as much detail as possible in each of the categories:

- Task
- Task Description
- Expected Outcome/Result
- Person /Agency Responsible
- Community Partners Involved
- Timeline
- Project completion date
- Success Indicators
- Status of Partnership & Outcomes

Evaluating the Collaboration

As mentioned, it is easier and essential to continually evaluate the collaboration when your work plan is kept up-to-date. It is important for short-term and long-term evaluations to ensure project is on course. Your monitoring and evaluation process can ensure the project moves ahead and will assist in helping you determine if the project purpose is being met. Effective evaluation takes into account the broader context in which the project is implemented and the impact on project outcomes. It is also imperative to incorporate a broad perspective and utilize measures that reflect the diversity of the participants. But, what is the best way to evaluate your project? Here are a couple of links that are included on the constellation website that you should look into. The following information has been taken directly from the web sites:

FinancialVibrancy.org: <http://www.financialvibrancy.org/>

“FinancialVibrancy.org is a hub of peer-to-peer learning for Ontario’s community-based employment and training sector (CBET). It is an online community of practice where leaders and practitioners can learn from others and share their own experiences. It is part of a process to build organizational capacity from within. The insights on this site are actual experiences of leaders within this sector, shared by them in their own words. Check on the section entitled: Results-Monitoring and Financial Vibrancy. Program evaluation contributes to financial vibrancy by:

- Demonstrating organization and program effectiveness and accountability, which are essential for building partnerships, developing new sources of revenues, and attracting funders
- Helping to figure out what is working and perhaps as importantly why it is working
- Helping organizations see what capacities they have developed and which ones they might invest further in
- Helping organizations see what outcomes they produce, and therefore to look more systematically at the potential to partner
- Building 'bragging rights' - positive feedback (e.g., testimonials) and findings (e.g., placement statistics) can be incorporated into marketing materials
- Supporting continuous program improvement, which enhances an agency's funding prospects

Also you may want to check out:

Logic Model, Evaluation & Data Collection Interactive Tools & Workbooks: The Innovation Network; American; 2007 - <http://www.innonet.org>

The Innovation Network provides free online interactive tools and resources that are designed to support your organization in the construction of: logic models; evaluation plans; organizational assessments, and survey development. In order to access the resources, participants are required to register (registration is free).

Online Evaluation Resource Library: Online Evaluation Resource Library; American; 2007 <http://oerl.sri.com/>

The OERL has compiled an extensive collection of resources and tools designed to support program evaluation. The site provides a collection of plans, reports, instruments and professional development models from past and current evaluations. These models include the outlined processes for developing evaluations, questionnaires, interviews, and methods of data collection. The site offers many sample evaluations and programs for reference.

Final thoughts on Collaborative Technology Development

Points to remember:

- Understand how your technology tools fit into your organization's mission
- Understand the tool's role in your project
- Create a committee that includes diverse talents/skills
- Describe what you need the tool to do before you search for a tool
- If you use a consultant, ask specific questions and ensure the knowledge stays within the organization
- Develop specifications that everyone understands and agrees upon
- Nurture understanding and support for the tool and project

Successful collaborative technology partnerships work together towards strengthening the tool as well as the partnership that holds it together. In following best practices, these partnerships can lead your organization to accomplishing program goals in fresh and innovative ways.

We wish you the best of luck and keep in mind with the advancement of technology; one never knows what can or cannot be possible tomorrow!

What's Next? Sign up for the Interactive Workshop

Learn more during the Collaborative Technology Development Workshop. Email: info@actew.org for next available dates:

The Goal of this workshop is to provide a forum by utilizing an interactive case study process through which non-profit organizations can explore the process of collaborating to develop technology tools.

Participants will be given an opportunity to develop their own collaborative technology development work plan based on a need or gap in their sector and/or community. This will be accomplished based on group work, class discussion, role-play and case scenarios.

If your organization(s) already has a partnership formed, bring in one of our trainers to help you with developing your specific Collaborative Technology Development Work Plan.

Appendix 1: Collaborative Work Plan	
Task	
Task Description	
Expected Outcome/Result	
Person (Agency) Responsible	
Community Partners Involved	
Timelines	
Project Completion Date	
Success Indicators	
Status of Partnerships and Outcomes	

Adapted from the 1000 Islands Region workforce Development Board, 2007.