

National & Regional Alliances

Description

Networking at the national and regional level extends the CEDO's reach beyond what can be achieved by local networking. Especially important is building relationships with other CEDOs around the country, whose experience can bear on issues that your CEDO is confronting. And conversely, in the exchange of information your CEDO may be helpful to others. However, distance and an all-too-common ignorance about the existence of fellow CEDOs require some mediating event to bring the group together. So most relationships between CEDOs almost certainly have grown out of attending conferences or similar gatherings where like-minded organizations are represented and where a give-and-take occurs, especially on an informal level. The growth of national and regional (ordinarily provincial) organizations of CEDOs has fostered such gatherings, and membership in them is the first step in this networking.

Connections with other like-minded groups are often pursued in order to increase their common influence on policy issues. For instance, many CEDOs and other groups are joined in the Canadian Community Reinvestment Coalition, which seeks federal legislation to encourage banks to provide adequate services in marginalized communities.

Benefits

Contacts with people on a national or regional level increase and deepen the CEDO's knowledge of practices that have worked elsewhere and offer new or improved ways to solve local problems. Of course, they may also alert the CEDO to solutions that did not work in other settings and thus might be risky locally. Common activity in alliances on policy issues helps open new opportunities for all affected CEDO's, as seems likely with co-ordinated work to widen the application of the Canadian Small Business Financing Act so as to offer loans for nonprofit social enterprises.

Major challenges

Networking is not without costs. In this case, the prime expense is probably for the travel to meetings at which the best networking can take place. Without subsidies for such travel, many CEDOs have to forego the advantages of national and regional networking. The expense of travel may even reduce the appetite of some CEDOs to network outside their own communities, in a kind of sour grapes reaction.

Some practical steps

1. The first thing to do for any CEDO should be to join the Canadian CED Network. Even if travel to far-off meetings is impractical, your membership can actually be a stimulus to CCEDNet to schedule meetings in or nearer your community. Moreover, you will have access to information and publications through the website, and you will have the addresses of other CEDOs in your region to begin contacts.
2. Similarly, your CEDO should have a subscription to the publication *Making Waves*, which publishes articles on new ideas and techniques being used in Canada and North America generally. Aside from personal interaction, it is the next best way to keep in touch with what is going on in CED.
3. Explore possibilities for subsidized travel. Since the amounts involved are modest, any local funder (a community foundation, a major business or bank, and so on) may be a potential supporter on the grounds of local capacity building. And CCEDNet itself sometimes has subsidy funds available to local groups.
4. Get involved with a CCEDNet committee that is especially relevant to your interests and needs (or even try to get a relevant new committee established). The committees often meet via conference calls underwritten by CCEDNet, and so you can be in touch without expensive travel. The website is also a tool for committee work.
5. Find ways to do similar things with respect to the appropriate provincial or regional coalitions, or with professional or special interest networks (like mental health caregivers or the Canadian Community Reinvestment Coalition) that may have a particular resonance with your local experience and goals.

Resource organizations & contacts

- The Canadian Community Reinvestment Coalition is reached at P.O. Box 1040 – Sta. B, Ottawa, ON K1P 5R1 (tel. 613-787-5753), Duff Conacher, executive director.
- Contact CCEDNet by phone (toll-free) 877-202-2268 or on the internet at www.canadiancednetwork.org

Publications

Making Waves: Canada's Community Economic Development Magazine, 2905 31st Street, Suite 5, Vernon, BC V1T 5H6. Telephone toll-free 888-255-6779.