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Roots of Hope

A Community Suicide
Prevention Project



Roots of Hope Case Study

Sustainable

Sustainable

Sustainable guiding principle: **Design initiatives that allow for continued funding and leadership.**

INTRODUCTION

The **Sustainable** guiding principle puts the focus on the strategies Roots of Hope project teams can use to establish and extend their initiative past its initial funding cycle.

Project leads identified three key themes in connection with this principle:

1. **Defining sustainability** – Whether the focus is on funding or beyond, projects will benefit from developing a shared understanding of the different options early on.
2. **Sustainability and partnerships** – Securing partnerships and roles are essential for maintaining a project's momentum.
3. **Sustainability, knowledge, and capacity building** – Knowledge and capacity building can be linked to developing and executing a robust sustainability strategy in at least three ways.

This case study offers examples of how local project leads applied these themes, along with the insights they gained and the recommendations they thought future Roots of Hope communities might adapt, according to their needs.

ABOUT THE CASE STUDIES

Roots of Hope is a Canadian community-led suicide prevention model. It draws on strengths and expertise within communities to design and implement tailored local initiatives. Using a collaborative approach across many sectors, it seeks to reduce the impact of suicide in each participating community.

We developed Roots of Hope with experts and communities from across Canada and around the world. Its five pillars and 13 guiding principles provide a framework that each community can adapt to their own needs.

The seven Roots of Hope case studies in this series reflect the wisdom and experience of project leaders from Early Adopter communities across the country, who represent diverse populations in a range of urban, rural, and remote settings. The series focuses on what project leads found to be effective in tailoring and implementing Roots of Hope in their communities. While each case study highlights up to three guiding principles, every project leader interviewed stressed the collective value of all 13.

The work to create and test something new is very different from implementing a proven program. We would therefore like to acknowledge Early Adopter project leads for their courage and willingness to pilot a new approach with us. We would also like to thank them for so generously sharing their wisdom and insights, which will make the work of future communities easier and more effective.



DEFINING SUSTAINABILITY

Insight #1 Start early, consider your options, and develop a shared understanding

For some project leads and strategic partners, sustainability means focusing solely on the task of securing funding (ongoing or new). Other project leads defined it more broadly to include the lasting changes the program generated among individuals, organizations, and communities, and the impact these had on the ways suicide issues (including prevention as well as pre- and postvention) were being understood and responded to inside and outside their local area. As one project lead asked, “Is there a shared understanding of the difference between financial and human resources sustainability and what that means?”

The respondents mentioned several specific considerations in terms of long-term sustainability beyond funding alone. These included: human resource requirements, project infrastructure and administration, the establishment or adoption of new practices, and changes in policy, relationships between strategic partners, and the attitudes and behaviours of strategic partners and community members.

“It would have been important to figure out what would happen beyond the initial five-year time frame. Now we are scrambling to figure this out. We don’t want to lose momentum, and we’re only just starting to get provincial recognition.”

Reaching a shared understanding on how a project’s long-term sustainability is defined and assessed was also an important focus. Having early conversations to establish a consensus between project teams and their partners had at least two significant benefits: the ability to (1) integrate sustainability into planning and ongoing implementation from the beginning, and (2) emphasize that the initial funding is time-limited and finite (to make all partners aware, so they can help secure resources for the project’s continuation if community needs warrant it).

If a community’s definition of sustainability considers the long-term impact of project activities, a number of factors can be used to demonstrate its success. For example: new connections and partnerships, a greater capacity to address issues of suicide and suicide prevention, and changes in the practices and policies of various sectors and organizations or in the awareness and attitudes within the community. Such factors also influence the focus and design of the project’s measurement and evaluation plan.



SUSTAINABILITY AND PARTNERSHIPS

Insight #2 Securing partners and maintaining project roles

For several project leads, one effective strategy involved considering ways to secure and leverage partners to support their work beyond the initial five-year funding commitment. Some found provincial partnerships a pathway for securing a project's sustainability, particularly when it involved the project lead role. Having such a partner in this role helped ensure its momentum, its existing relationships and partnerships, and its expertise and experience.

“Focusing on sustainability helped us think about how to spread expertise among the community partners instead of the Roots of Hope project.”

One project lead secured funding for their coordinator position from the provincial ministry of health but noted that, for some local projects, “these positions will end with Phase 1, which will mean losing that experience and expertise.” Other project leads echoed this concern and thought it was important to consider what might be expected from non-profit partners, while asking, “What is sustainable in terms of supporting staff, community members, and volunteers doing the work?”

Some projects were able to secure continued funding through local organizational partners rather than their province. For example, one project built greater sustainability through the provincial mental health association. Another managed to transition its municipal partner from its role as a convenor and driver to that

of an investor, which they believed “was more appropriate for such an organization.” After doing so, the project “received an additional four years of ongoing funding within a municipal community safety and well-being strategy.”

Other project leads questioned the capacity of non-profit organizations to be sustainability partners, in part because of how the sector is funded. For example, one respondent noted that, “As a non-profit organization we get ‘bursts’ of funding, which negatively impacts the momentum and sustainability of this work. Very often we are expected to do a lot with very little funding.”



SUSTAINABILITY, KNOWLEDGE, AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

Insight #3 Matching skills and connecting with other projects and community partners

Project leads identified three different ways knowledge and capacity building can be linked to sustainability, whether for initial or additional funding.

First, as one project lead noted, is “the ability to find and secure funding, which is something that requires both time and skill.” For instance, if seeking to secure funding beyond a project’s initial five-year investment, it’s important to have access the capacity to research and write grant proposals, either through in-kind contributions from community partners or investments in training for local program staff.

Second is the value of knowledge sharing between and among project coordinators, which contributes to the sustainability of an initiative by increasing its efficiency and effectiveness. As one respondent noted, “There’s tremendous value in being connected with others doing this work.” Another project lead encouraged the creation of a “community of practice with other coordinators to build relationships, improve practice, and share learnings.” Other interviewees saw “knowledge transfer as a key component of Roots of Hope” and found great value in sharing best practices.

Third is by intentionally leveraging and sharing knowledge with community partners. An important aspect of this strategy is the value of learning about and using the knowledge and programs of community partners. One project lead emphasized how doing so allowed the team to avoid “recreating the wheel. There were so many resources that already existed. Using partner resources also has the benefit of engaging them in the project and recognizing their work.” Equally important is sharing the knowledge the project generates with community partners. Embedding the project’s insights and wisdom with these partners helps ensure that, even if funding cannot be found to retain staff, these will live on in the community. As one project leader said, “Focusing on sustainability helped us think about how to spread expertise among the community partners, instead of making the Roots of Hope project and coordinator the kingpin of suicide prevention work. We wanted to sensitize different sectors to what their role or piece of the suicide prevention puzzle could be.”



CONCLUSION

Those with a comprehensive view of sustainability recognize that Roots of Hope projects are cultivated by using a range of strategies. Securing additional funding to maintain an existing project, while important, is just one aspect of this work. Sustainability can be strengthened not only by connecting to and sharing knowledge with other Roots of Hope communities, but also by embedding a project's work within the ongoing operations of a strategic partner. In this way, sustainability is reflected in the skills and knowledge it developed, which continues in the minds and hearts of partners, their organizations, and the community as a whole.







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