

ENTERPRISE FACILITATION IN RURAL ONTARIO

Overview

ORIGINS IN ONTARIO

In 2008, an innovative adaptation to a traditional business coaching model was introduced in Eastern Ontario to support rural entrepreneurship development and community economic development. Mark Hanley, a serial entrepreneur from the age of 23, was divesting his businesses and eager to stay connected with the world of entrepreneurship. Mark was looking at supporting the next generation of entrepreneurs when he landed a job as manager of the small business office at Kingston Economic Development. Mark knew he wanted to bring in something different.

“No one builds a successful business by studying regulations and creating business plans in solitude,” says Mark Hanley.

Mark was introduced to the Sirrolli method of social enterprise after reading the foundational book “Ripples from the Zambezi” by Ernesto Sirrolli. The book resonated with Mark’s professional experiences and aspirations for economic development in Eastern Ontario.

THE SIRROLLI METHOD

The Sirrolli method was first developed by an Italian community development specialist named Ernesto Sirrolli to address the challenges he encountered while working on international development. This method has since been implemented and adapted in communities throughout the world.

The fundamental approach of the Sirrolli method shifts the understanding of the role outsiders play in economic or community development. Outsiders are not to be regarded as “experts” but more appropriately, “facilitators” of individuals’ entrepreneurial ambitions. Facilitators find people who have a passion and help them develop this passion into a business. They don’t train them or advise them or follow up or initiate dialogue. Facilitators are there to support someone when they’ve been asked for help – to knock down the barriers to starting a business.

HOW IT WORKS

There are two main components to the Enterprise Facilitation® model: the Enterprise Facilitator® and a Community Resource Board.

Ideally, the Sirrolli method is first introduced by a group of community leaders and volunteers in recognition of a local need. This group is known as the “community board” and looks after the administration of the project, access to funding and the hiring of the Enterprise Facilitator®. The community board takes the management of the project away from the Enterprise Facilitator®, allowing this individual to focus on their job. For some communities, the Enterprise Facilitator® is municipally funded, and in these cases, the community board is more a reflection of the municipal governance system than a volunteer board.

The Enterprise Facilitator® is the primary contact for prospective entrepreneurs and business owners. The Enterprise Facilitator® does not engage in training or coaching - they listen first to the needs of the entrepreneur: Where do they want to take their business? How fast are they looking to grow? What are the shortcomings they think they need help with? Once the Enterprise Facilitator® has an understanding of the questions, they are able to guide the entrepreneur in the right direction and connect them with appropriate resources. To get a better understanding of the Enterprise Facilitator's® responsibilities, see the job description at the end of this Case Study.

The Community Resource Board is made up of 40-50 local stakeholders who create a wealth of connections between the Enterprise Facilitator® and community leaders (business owners, politicians, investors, economic developers, financial advisors, consultants, banks, educators, etc.). The Community Resource Board can become actively involved in the work of the Enterprise Facilitator®, often weighing in and providing advice and guidance to entrepreneurs when deemed necessary.

Both the Enterprise Facilitator® and Community Board members receive training from the Sirrolli Institute in the principles of Enterprise Facilitation® and the Trinity of Management®.

TRINITY OF MANAGEMENT®

The Trinity of Management® is Ernesto Sirrolli's belief that a successful business requires three basic competencies: the production of a product or service; marketing the product or service; and financial management of the operations. Further, no individual entrepreneur can (or should) possess all three of these competencies. The Trinity of Management® emphasizes the importance of a team approach to entrepreneurship. There is an individual that specializes in each of the three core competencies. And while there is sure to be disagreement between the members of the team, it is through this dialectical problem solving that creative solutions emerge.

ASSOCIATED COSTS

Depending on the size and complexity of the community, the Enterprise Facilitator® and the associated working expenses could range from \$50,000 to \$100,000 a year. There are two predominant types of expenses: 1) Enterprise Facilitator® Salary and 2) On-the-job Expenses.

1. Salary

The number one highest cost is the salary. This could be a range similar to an Economic Development Officer, but would vary based on experience.

2. On-the-job expenses

On-the-job expenses may include: travel costs; telecommunications and IT; meals and coffees; community support meetings (facility rental/catering); marketing (website, brochures etc.).

> **Note:** As this method relies on an individual to deliver the programming and the development of a vast support network, this methodology is very dependent on finding the right person. Finding someone with the right experience, skills and temperament is fundamental to running a successful program.

ADAPTING TO YOUR COMMUNITY

Every locality is different and will always take on a flavour of the funders, the local community and its management board. In Lennox and Addington, Tracey Snow, also trained in the Sirrolli method, has adapted the model to better fit the needs of her community. Tracey has seen the benefit of actively seeking opportunities to better support her clients – she is constantly out looking for new opportunities that might help the businesses with which she is working, which brings her out in the community networking with grant organizations, banks and funding organizations. When she sees opportunities, she forwards them to any of her clients that might benefit. While it is important to maintain some continuity with the underlying principles of the Sirrolli method, it is inevitable to see some changes as you move from community to community.

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

- Face-to-face interactions are always best. While the territories in rural Ontario can get to be quite large - creating challenges with travel costs and access to clients - it is important to be out in the communities as much as possible.
- The community board needs to take on the administrative components and leave the Enterprise Facilitator® out of the lengthy reports so they can do what they do best.
- It is imperative to find the right facilitator for your community. They need a wealth of business experience, but more so, to be outgoing, approachable, a great listener, and a credible authority.
- Openness and informality are important. The environment of meetings is imperative. Put two people in a board room and see how they interact. Put the same two people in a coffee shop and it's a totally different experience.
- In the rural context, anonymity is an important benefit. Rural communities have the challenges associated with a small town – not everyone wants to be seen going into an office seeking business advice. When you travel to see them in their environment – at the kitchen table – they are often more open.
- Always give credit where credit is due. Never take ownership of another person's idea.

SUGGESTED READING

“Ripples from the Zambezi” by Ernesto Sirrolli.

“Local Enterprise Facilitation”, PhD Thesis, Ernesto Sirrolli, Murdoch University.

ENTERPRISE FACILITATOR - JOB DESCRIPTION

Responsibilities

- > Support clients looking to expand/establish new businesses in prioritized areas in accordance with the principles of Enterprise Facilitation.
- > Support the development of every kind of business that seeks to generate the greatest economic and social value for the community in general.
- > Develop an understanding of the business needs of clients.
- > As needed, support clients with identifying human and physical resources consistent with the aims and objectives of their proposed business activity.
- > Throughout the project, identify and support interventions that remove barriers, helping to sustain and create sustainable enterprises.
- > Support the development of the Enterprise Facilitation Management Boards and Resource Team.
- > Continuously engage with partners and the deliverers of business support locally, regionally or nationally.
- > Maintain coordination and communication with Management Boards and Resource Team for effective implementation of day-to-day operations.
- > Establish, develop and maintain contacts with the business community and business agencies to facilitate the exchange of business support.
- > From the start of the project, develop a network of communication at all levels of government, with business support agencies and throughout the communities where the initiative will be operational.

Essential Character Traits:

- > The ideal Enterprise Facilitator is a local/external who has a perfect knowledge of local languages, customs, culture, etc.
- > Good listener, respectful, accessible, visible, good teacher.
- > Ability to work alone and must be trusted to be well organized and self-motivated.
- > An excellent communicator able to reach a wide cross-section of the community (from successful business people to unemployed young people).
- > They never call their clients; rather the clients call them back. They do not create dependency they empower their clients.

ENTERPRISE FACILITATOR - JOB DESCRIPTION CONTINUED

Minimum Requirements:

- > Practical experience working in or running small businesses and facilitating business development and sustainability.
- > Practical experience of providing and brokering guidance to small businesses, supporting development and sustainability.
- > Proven understanding of the local economy and local economic development approaches.
- > Sensitive to economic, social and political reality.

Preferred Requirements:

- > Willingness and capacity to attend the provided training offered by the Sirolli Institute-International Enterprise Facilitation®.

Most Critical Proficiencies:

- > A strong facilitator, able to strive to achieve results in the face of adversity, being positive and proactive at all times.
- > Ability to listen – listen with all their senses!
- > Proven enabler, able to build capacity and empower entrepreneurship and creativity in others.
- > A dynamic broker, able to think, communicate and liaise clearly with a wide range of potential clients, businesses and support agencies.
- > Able to deal with representatives from all sectors, build professional relationships and effectively use networks.
- > Ability to provide constructive criticism and supportive challenge while having empathy with clients and their circumstances.
- > Ability to work flexibly, practically and proactively.
- > Enterprise Facilitators have personal and practical business experience.

Essential Job Functions and Physical Demands:

- > Ability to work with sensitive information and maintain confidentiality.
- > Demonstrate a high degree of honesty and integrity.
- > Willingness to travel as per position demand.
- > Ability to work independently
- > Ability to work with a flexible schedule.

CONCLUSION

This model of entrepreneurship development is a relatively low cost solution to compared to some models, saving on administratively heavy bricks and mortar initiatives and financial incentives. Additionally, the community involvement that underpins this model does more than just help support businesses - it helps bring the community together as a whole. It is fundamentally a people based approach – people working with people to help entrepreneurs and the community thrive together, a philosophy not dissimilar to how rural communities have grown throughout history.

This model certainly isn't without challenges - finding the right facilitator that knows the community, understands the principles of entrepreneurship and is capable of building a network around them is no small task. However, building grassroots community investment and a sense of ownership over economic development initiatives and investment in the success of local entrepreneurs is a goal many think is worth striving for.

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