Learning from Smart Services and Infrastructure Projects in Rural BC: Final Report

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Availability

Copies of the report may also be accessed through the website of the Canada Research Chair in Rural and Small Town Studies at: http://www.unbc.ca/greg-halseth/canada-research-chair-in-rural-and-small-town-studies.

Project Reports

- Learning from Smart Services & Infrastructure Projects in Rural BC: Executive Summary
- Learning from Smart Services & Infrastructure Projects in Rural BC: Final Report
- Learning from Smart Services and Infrastructure Projects: Case Studies in Rural BC

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ACRONYMS

BC	British Columbia
BCGEU	BC Government and Service Employees' Union
CALP	Community Adult Literacy Program
CAO	Chief Administrative Officer
CAPPA	Canadian Association of Programs in Public Administration
CASA	Co-operative Association of Service Agencies
CBT	Columbia Basin Trust
CEDNet	Community Economic Development Network
CEDTAP	Community Economic Development Technical Assistance Program
CLBC	Community Living BC
CMHA	Canadian Mental Health Association
CMHC	Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
CN	Canadian National Railway
CNIB	Canadian National Institute for the Blind
CSAPP	Community Service Alignment Pilot Project
CSCD	Ministry of Community, Sport and Cultural Development
CSSEA	Community and Social Services Employers Association
CSSISR	Community Social Services Innovation and Sustainability Roundtable
ED	Executive Director
ESDC	Employment and Social Development Canada
EVA BC	Ending Violence Association of BC
FASD	Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GICs	Guaranteed Investment Certificates
GNPI	Government-Non-Profit Initiative
HIV / AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HR	Human Resources
HRSDC	Human Resources and Social Development Canada
HST	Harmonized Sales Tax
JTST	Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training
LEED	Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design
LMDA	Labour Market Development Agreement
LMP	Labour Market Partnership
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
NDIT	Northern Development Initiative Trust
NDP	New Democratic Party of Canada
NHA	Northern Health Association
NLC	Neighbourhood Learning Centre
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAC	Parents Advisory Council
PGCF	Prince George Community Foundation
PO	Program Officer
PWGSC	Public Works and Government Services Canada
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
REACH	Resource, Education, and Consultation Hub Program
RFP	Request for Proposal
RPLC	Rural Policy Learning Commons

SFRPHI	Surplus Federal Real Property to Prevent Homelessness Initiative
SFU	Simon Fraser University
SKY Project	Safe Kids and Youth Coordinated Response
SOSWS	South Okanagan Seniors Wellness Society
SSHRC	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council
TR Cares	Tumbler Ridge Community Association Responding to Extended Services
UBCM	Union of British Columbia Municipalities
UNBC	University of Northern British Columbia
WHMIS	Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rural BC has been experiencing an ongoing transformation of infrastructure investment and services. Since the 1980s, the transformation has been from a Keynesian public policy framework of government participation and investment towards a neoliberal public policy framework defined by government withdrawal of direct participation in favour of allowing market-based providers and reduced government expenditures in many areas. Public policies and grants have increasingly called for smart services and shared infrastructure as a part of "bottom up" community development. Policies that are driving new expectations for organizations to adopt integrated or shared service arrangements, however, are challenging the transformative capacity of rural organizations. While such challenges are not unique to rural organizations, they can exacerbate pressures and undermine the effectiveness of an already limited capacity in underserviced small communities. With limited human, financial, infrastructure, and political capital, rural stakeholders must ensure that these limited capacities are not wasted, but are purposefully deployed in the most relevant and effective way. This means that rural and small town places must pay increasing intention to their place-based assets and how possibilities for developing those assets can create local benefits that fit with local aspirations. There is an urgent need to understand how infrastructure and services pressures, and new arrangements to cope with these pressures, are shaping the capacity in rural and northern places since they are particularly vulnerable to the long distances and low population densities involved.

Our research team conducted 51 interviews in 35 communities to examine the best practices and key issues that must be considered by rural stakeholders and senior governments who wish to strengthen smart service and infrastructure projects in British Columbia. The research explored multi-purpose or co-location initiatives, service co-operatives, and multi-service or one-stop shop organizations. There were a series of best practices and key messages that emerged from this research that can be used to inform supportive policies and investments to support the renewal of small communities in order to better position them to respond to the challenges and opportunities associated with the new rural economy.

Best Practices

Governance

- Identify partners that provide complimentary supports for co-operatives or co-located facilities.
- Identify and understand the capacity (assets, skills, strengths, networks, potential synergies, threats, liabilities, and weaknesses) of potential partners.
- Reconcile different interests, values, and strategic directions of potential partners.
- Use ownership and user agreements as a strategic tool to foster dialogue about strategic planning and long-term expectations.
- Develop guiding principles to provide clarity about the goals, roles, and responsibilities of partners.

- Ensure there is clarity about who is paying liability / insurance, including the type of coverage that is provided to address concerns with indoor and outdoor activities of multi-purpose facilities.

- Streamline access for frequent user groups by drafting agreements for frequent users of multi-purpose rooms.

- Ensure all appropriate protocols have been put in place (i.e. escape / termination clauses, conflict resolution protocols, reciprocity protocols, access to space, access to shared equipment, sign-in protocols, health and safety plans, emergency / security protocols, whistle blower protocols, confidentiality agreements, data sharing agreements, conflict of interest agreements, non-compete protocols, maintenance agreements, etc.).

- Use sub-committees to test co-operative working relationships and build trust before pursuing larger joint or shared initiatives.

- Integrated service teams have been formed to manage contracts for specific service areas.

- Use scaled-up collectives, such as service co-operatives or co-location networks, to negotiate language and service deliverables with contract models mobilized by senior levels of government.

- Develop information management systems for sharing information about programs and activities, job descriptions, human resource strategies, protocols, policies, constitutions and bylaws, social media strategies, etc. that can enhance operations and make wiser use of limited resources.

- Carefully manage the scale and scope of operations for multi-service agencies and co-operatives by assessing personnel capacity and the economic viability of new pursuits.

- Slowly nurture the development of multi-service agencies and service co-operatives by starting with small contracts in order to enable the strategic development of infrastructure and organizational capacity to deliver more supports.

- If multiple co-op members or partners are involved in an initiative to deliver supports, obtain clarity and consistent interpretation of contract details with various ministries.

- Regionally-based co-operatives should rotate meetings across various communities.

Human Resources

- Develop a human resource strategy to examine wage parity issues and appropriate opportunities for sharing staff resources.

- Hire local management and staff in satellite offices of multi-service agencies.

- Ensure adequate human resources are in place to support different service models (i.e. co-operatives).

- Explore appropriate opportunities for cross-training, mentoring, and succession planning in order to provide coverage for delivering programs and strengthen risk management plans.

- Pursue opportunities for joint training on topics such as finance and administration, first-aid, core training, etc.

- Provincial agencies have been delivering workshops to provide training and advice to multi-service agencies delivering services and management housing assets.

- Ensure adequate resources are allocated to deliver cultural sensitivity training and awareness of First Nations protocols to staff in order to broaden working relationships and operations.

- Nurture skills of staff and board members to function in a culture of change.

- Pursue opportunities for sharing administrative or financial staff resources to provide greater stability and coverage for daily operations and enable staff to focus more time on delivering services with appropriate workloads.

- Share staff to support fundraising events.

- Provincial ministries are more flexible with blended positions from multiple contracts.

- Reduce administrative tasks by replacing monthly passes for certain parts of the facility with seasonal passes / arrangements.

Infrastructure

- Understand the history of land ownership for potential sites.

- Invest adequate time and resources to design functional multi-purpose or shared spaces (i.e. storage, meeting areas, whiteboard walls, reception areas, resource rooms, multi-purpose rooms, etc.).

- Local stakeholders can work collectively to provide housing for out-of-town contractors / professionals in order to reduce costs of constructing multi-purpose or shared facilities.

- Organize routine meetings to address maintenance and infrastructure issues.

Funding

- Local and regional governments can provide in-kind assistance by sponsoring and managing grants.

- Local governments can support smart / shared service and infrastructure initiatives through amenity fees / affordable housing funds, grant-in-aids, permissive tax relief / tax exemptions, special lease arrangements to support investments in social infrastructure.

- Provincial capital grants have allowed service organizations to replace lease arrangements with mortgages and strengthen social infrastructure in small communities.

- Negotiate to allocate savings from contracts to support administrative resources for multi-service or shared service arrangements.

- Flexibility built into provincial / federal contracts to enable non-profits to shift resources across various programs within specific ministries / departments.

- Flexibility to negotiate changes in expenses due to significant events that can increase demand for supports (i.e. industry closure, rapid growth, traumatic event, etc.).

- Senior levels of government have transferred properties at nominal costs for support multi-purpose and social infrastructure initiatives.

- In addition to broader financial support, Industry can provide in-kind assistance through donated / low-cost materials, access to equipment, and expertise.

- Leverage in-kind support provided by non-profits for community events and training in order to secure more financial support.

- Non-profits have diversified their financial resources through social enterprises, investments in GICs, investments in property management, and alternative sources of financing.

Building Capacity

- Deliver webinars, web-based meetings, or teleconferences to foster early discussions about smart / shared service and infrastructure initiatives.

- Use workshops and meetings to share best practices.

- Local and regional governments, and school districts, can provide in-kind assistance by installing equipment, brokering relationships, and providing advice and expertise about construction and renovations of shared facilities.

- Share resources in order to strengthen partnerships and foster a sense of belonging within co-located facilities.

- Pursue synergies and savings through shared advertising, joint brochures and promotional materials, shared cell phone / telephone plans, joint upgraded server capacity, shared websites, and shared software programs.

- Scale-up to purchase insurance, software programs, equipment, supplies, etc.

Policies

- Local and regional governments can provide assistance with zoning variances guiding the development of shared facilities.

- Local and regional governments, and school districts, can provide in-kind assistance to draft ownership and user agreements guiding the development and operations of shared facilities.

Key Messages

Governance

- Shared service and infrastructure arrangements require patience and careful attention to nurture relationships and the capacity of rural stakeholders. With significant resources invested in these arrangements, adequate time and resources should be invested in building relationships, trust, and strategic planning processes in order to make appropriate decisions to support multiple uses and synergies within these facilities.

- Local and senior levels of government should continue to strengthen their roles to support relationship building and strategic planning for these complex shared infrastructure initiatives that will play an important role in the social and economic renewal of these small communities.

- Relationships were stronger where stakeholders had repeated opportunities to work together. Stakeholders, however, should start with smaller investments in co-operation through joint workshops and projects, shared staffing, and shared equipment before embarking on larger shared service or infrastructure arrangements.

- Clear, viable expectations are needed to guide stakeholders throughout these collaborative endeavors.

- Clear statements are needed concerning the financial contributions of co-located partners and tenants for shared infrastructure, related assets, and staff. Shared contribution agreements for developing and operating shared facilities should be worked out early during the development phase.

- Collaboration must be purposefully and continually nurtured given the turnover amongst staff and distance between some member agencies in rural regions.

- Management / tenant committees should be put in place to guide the operations and resolve any disputes.

Human Resources

- At the local government level, a reinvestment in social planners would help to strengthen the support needed to guide these endeavors.

- Provincial and federal levels of government need to develop a better orientation of new service delivery and infrastructure models in order to strengthen the capacity of senior government staff to develop appropriate advice, funding programs, and reporting processes for these initiatives.

- Partnerships between the Province and post-secondary institutions need to be strengthened in order to provide training opportunities that can equip leaders and staff with the skills needed to manage such diverse and complex organizational structures.

- Stakeholders need to develop stronger orientation programs for new staff and board members who are engaged in these new service arrangements.

- Train staff to use shared facilities (i.e. understanding protocols, access to space / equipment, etc.).

- To support growth and expansion of multi-service agencies and co-operatives, there is a need to develop protocols around leadership training, succession planning, and defining clear roles and responsibilities.

Infrastructure

- More time is needed to generate a list of design features needed to support the functionality of multi-use spaces in shared / co-location facilities.

- Infrastructure programs are specifically needed to support investments in stronger social infrastructure initiatives.

Funding

- A significant portion of annual operating budgets are consumed by travel costs—costs either to deliver services in a low-density wide-reaching geographic area, or costs associated with connecting with policy and program offices. Contract flexibility is needed to address mileage costs for multi-service agencies and service co-operatives that are serving rural regions.

- Given the limited tax base of many small communities, greater flexibility is needed to support financing arrangements.

- A central hub for smart or shared services and infrastructure arrangements should also promote alternative sources of financing to support investments in infrastructure and ownership.

- Short RFP processes and short-term funding has been insufficient to support the early stages of time consuming and complex service and infrastructure initiatives. Such short-term pursuits can also interrupt the momentum for building relationships, planning, and mobilizing other contributing assets for these initiatives. Senior levels of government need to ensure that program policies requiring partnerships are accompanied with appropriate timelines and commensurate resources to effectively build those relationships in rural regions.

- Longer contracts are needed to provide greater stability for effective collaborative relationships.

- There is a need to standardize senior government reporting processes as different reporting procedures and databases are used by each ministry. Efforts are also needed to streamline reporting criteria and procedures with coordinated timelines and information management systems across various ministries.

Building Capacity

- Distance exacerbates the possibility that policy-makers may not understand rural and small places. Distance also impacts exposure and access to information and different forms and types of innovations, ideas, options, and solutions.

- The provincial and federal governments should partner to develop a central hub for rural stakeholders to learn about different models and processes that have been used to develop and operate smart services and infrastructure arrangements.

- Senior levels of government, local governments, and regional trusts can deliver workshops that address important topics, such as ownership and user agreements, cost-sharing negotiations, design and functionality of multi-purpose facilities, risks and liabilities, and protocols to guide the development and operations in order to strengthen the capacity of rural stakeholders to pursue smart service and infrastructure arrangements.

- Senior levels of government should create shared services assessment teams or managers to provide advice and guide the development of these new infrastructure and service arrangements.

- Municipal government associations should work to develop appropriate information management systems to track the benefits associated with multi-purpose or co-located projects.

- Strengthen provincial and federal organizational networks that are better positioned to provide support and advice to non-profit / service agencies about important topics such as finance, administration, and human resource management.

Policies

- Local governments need to ensure that social policy frameworks are in place to support alternative service and infrastructure arrangements.

- Local governments can play a greater role to support multi-service agencies by donating or leasing space to non-profits below the market rate, encouraging new major commercial developments to allocate space for non-profits, as well as by engaging non-profits in multi-purpose facility projects.

- Policies and regulations need to be revised to better communicate and reflect the unique needs and differences of new service delivery models such as multi-service agencies and social service co-operative structures.

- Policies and contracts need to be revised to provide more flexibility to enable stakeholders to respond to rapid social and economic changes that can take place in small communities. Rural regions have multiple resource sectors that may not experience boom and bust cycles, but rather waves as different sectors boom and bust at different times. Communities may be responding simultaneously to the impacts of a boom and bust cycle across various sectors.

- Greater political leadership is needed by designating ministries to lead supportive policies that can shape the implementation of new shared infrastructure and service arrangements.

- There is a need to strengthen rural structures within provincial and federal levels of government in order to strengthen the voice, visibility, and responsibility for rural issues.

Final Word

New service and infrastructure arrangements are key tools for renewing our small communities, but we are lacking appropriate governance, infrastructure, human resource, funding, and policy tools to support their full development and potential. The CRC team, in partnership with the Rural Policy Learning Commons, hopes that the report will stimulate debates at the community, regional, provincial, and national level about the challenges and opportunities for alternative service and infrastructure arrangements to support rural renewal. There is no single model or approach to renewing our service and infrastructure assets. With such a diverse array of infrastructure costs and availability; distances between communities; breadth of potential industry, business, non-profit, or government partners; housing pressures; and human resource issues, the context of the community / region will shape the potential design and capacity of new arrangements. Stronger investments in governance, infrastructure, human resources, funding, and policy tools, however, can go a long way to strengthening the capacity and assets to support rural renewal.

Learning from Smart Services and Infrastructure Projects in Rural BC: Final Report

PREPARED FOR THE RURAL POLICY LEARNING COMMONS

INTRODUCTION

The new rural economy is situated within a constantly changing and hyper-connected global economy. Since the early 1980s, neo-liberal policies in many OECD countries, such as Canada, Denmark, the UK, the US, and Australia, have downloaded more responsibilities to local governments and increasingly looked to contractors in the private and voluntary sectors to deliver services and manage infrastructure (Askim *et al*. 2011; Burke-Robertson 2002; Howard 2014; Province of New Brunswick 2011). At the same time, public policies and grants have increasingly called for collaboration, partnerships, smart services, and shared infrastructure as a part of "bottom up" community development (Paagman *et al*. 2015; Shortall and Warner 2010; West 2013). This means that rural and small town places must pay increasing intention to their place-based assets and how possibilities for developing those assets can create local benefits that fit with local aspirations (McDonald *et al*. 2013). There is an urgent need to understand how infrastructure and services pressures, and new arrangements to cope with these pressures, are shaping the capacity in rural and northern places since they are particularly vulnerable to the long distances and low population densities involved.

The purpose of this research is to examine the best practices and hard lessons that must be considered by rural stakeholders and senior governments who wish to strengthen smart service and infrastructure projects in British Columbia. After discussing infrastructure and service restructuring pressures for small communities, this report briefly introduces the concept of shared services, including different models / approaches and key factors that are shaping decisions to pursue these types of arrangements. The report then profiles key governance, funding, human resource, infrastructure, collaboration, and policy issues that are shaping three specific types of shared infrastructure and service arrangements, including:

- Multi-purpose or co-location initiatives,
- Service co-operatives, and
- Multi-service or one-stop shop organizations.

Information collected can be used to inform policies and investments to support the renewal of small communities in order to better position them to respond to the challenges and opportunities associated with the new rural economy.

Rural Restructuring to Rural Renewal

Services and infrastructure were once seen as the foundations for creating strong working communities that would drive the provincial economy. However, rural BC has been experiencing an ongoing transformation of infrastructure investment and services. Since the 1980s (Sullivan *et al.* 2014), the transformation has been from a Keynesian public policy framework of government participation and investment towards a neoliberal public policy framework defined by government withdrawal of direct participation in favour of allowing market-based providers and reduced government expenditures in many areas. As a result of these changes in the public policy mindset, non-metropolitan BC is experiencing an accumulating infrastructure deficit.

Infrastructure Restructuring

Across BC, small communities are confronted with the challenges of aging and inadequate infrastructure. Many of BC's small communities consist of buildings developed during the war or immediate post-World War II era to attract and retain young workers and their families. Many of these structures require new foundations, roofs, windows, insulation, and other energy efficient considerations. In some cases, rural infrastructure assets were not even equipped with basic elements, such as running water and indoor plumbing. Mold has also rendered many older infrastructure assets unusable to support community renewal. New per capita funding formulas prompted school closure announcements in rural areas. Over time, the closures of schools, former military buildings, businesses, and industries have left small communities with poorly maintained and underutilized infrastructure.

The limitations of these structures are not only that they are aging, but they were never designed for uses envisioned today. Major renovations are needed to update rural facilities and equip them with the technology, equipment, and space to support meetings, industry functions, new economic sectors, community events, and broader community development initiatives (Bauch 2001). At the same time, much of the infrastructure in small communities is not accessible for young families with strollers, people with disabilities, or an aging population.

The abundance of aging infrastructure manifests some important issues for renewal. Small communities tend to have many non-profit organizations and groups that have limited resources. While these groups benefit from being able to lease or own affordable infrastructure, it has left small groups dispersed in tiny and inadequate spaces in small communities. There are missed opportunities to create synergies, renew infrastructure, and reduce operational costs through shared space.

Rapidly growing rural communities have experienced unique infrastructure renewal challenges of their own. Despite similar concerns of aging infrastructure in these communities, pressures from tourism and renewed industry activity have made it difficult for rural stakeholders to acquire property to support shared infrastructure projects.

Service Restructuring

Since the 1990s, the provincial and federal governments increasingly moved towards open procurement and tendering processes. This prompted concerns that service contracts would be awarded to, and delivered by, larger agencies outside of rural regions in distant regional centres, leaving rural and remote residents with more limited access to supports (Province of New Brunswick 2011). There were concerns that regional agencies would not understand the rural context and may not provide the same quality of services in smaller communities (Paagman *et al.* 2015). There continues to be debates about whether senior levels of government are moving towards regional contracts in order to reduce government expenditures on contract management (Evans and Grantham n.d.; Province of New Brunswick 2011).

Over the past 25 years, service agencies were faced with successive rounds of funding cuts, competitive funding environments, and contract reforms[1]. These fiscal pressures threatened the retention of key staff, the viability and effectiveness of programs, as well as the organizations themselves. Since 2009, the federal government has transferred a number of housing and employment programs to the province. During this transition period, the province reduced the number of contracts under the guise of eliminating duplication and inefficient use of public funds. Non-profits were charged with doing more with less money, all while demonstrating efficiency and accountability.

The economic and social restructuring processes that have affected rural and remote regions have increased concerns about services and have motivated civil organizations to pursue new ways to deliver supports to residents that may otherwise not exist. Exploring new arrangements is becoming increasingly important as non-profits struggle to respond to the increased downloading and hollowing out of government services, demands for more accountability and collaboration, constrained fiscal environments, limited human resources, and the complexity of many social and economic development issues that are often beyond the mandate of any individual organization (Milbourne 2010).

Policies that are driving new expectations for organizations to adopt integrated or shared service arrangements, as well as business-oriented models of service delivery, however, are challenging the capacity of rural organizations (Poole *et al*. 2002). While such challenges are not unique to rural organizations, they can exacerbate pressures and undermine the effectiveness of an already limited capacity in underserviced small communities (Hanlon *et al*. 2011). With limited human, financial, infrastructure, and political capital, rural stakeholders must ensure that these limited capacities are not wasted, but are purposefully deployed in the most relevant and effective way.

Motivations to Pursue Shared Service and Infrastructure Arrangements

Shared service and infrastructure arrangements are not new and have been pursued by public, private, and non-profit sectors in many OECD countries, such as Australia, Norway, Sweden, the UK, Canada, the US, Germany, the Netherlands, Scotland, and New Zealand since the 1970s (Askim *et al*. 2011; Dollery *et al*. 2010; Farquhar *et al*. 2006; Malone and Anderson 2014; Minas 2014; Rumball-Smith *et al*. 2014; Scottish Government 2007; Stein *et al*. 2011; Walsh 2008). In the mid-2000s, one study suggested that two-thirds of senior governments internationally were engaged in some form of shared services (Cefola *et al*. 2010). Shared service and infrastructure models are being actively pursued across many sectors, such as health care, poverty, education, early childhood development, business[2], and government (Blue-Howells *et al*. 2008; Cefola *et al*. 2010). In Ontario, 368 out of 444 municipalities engage in some form of shared infrastructure or service arrangement (KPMG 2014).

Local governments and community organizations are pursuing new service and infrastructure arrangements for many reasons (Figure 1). To start, ***restructuring pressures*** associated with economic downturns and new public policy environments have reduced public funding and compelled community stakeholders to reexamine how they manage and renew their organizations and assets (Burke-Robertson

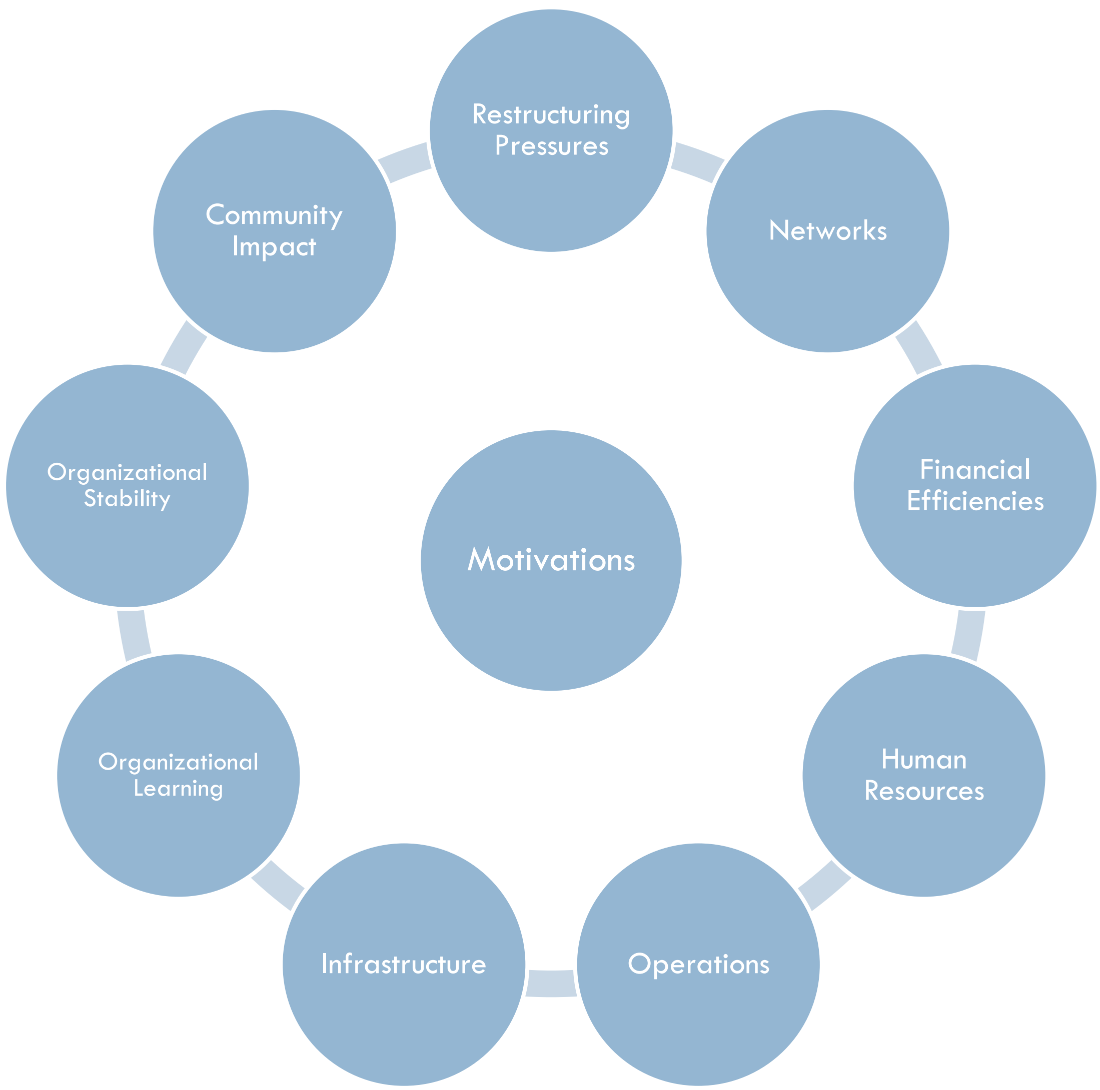
[1] Contract funding is also determined on a per capita basis, leaving rural non-profits to deliver the same quality of services with limited financial resources.

[2] A study by Cefola *et al*. (2010, 10) indicates that "by 2002, approximately 80% of Fortune 100 companies had implemented some form of shared services. Between 2001 and 2003 an estimated 20,000 strategic alliances were fomed in the private sector, with the number of businesses forming alliances growing at 25% each year since".

2002; Cefola *et al.* 2010; Evans and Grantham n.d.; Main 2012; Moseley *et al.* 2004; Scully and Levin 2010). Through new policy directions, senior levels of government have been seeking to reduce expenditures by consolidating program funding mechanisms, reducing contracts, and encouraging more partnerships through tender processes (Main 2012). Increased expectations for certification, accountability, and transparency from donors, service sectors, industry, and government have commanded more resources that have impacted the ability of organizations to focus on providing services to those in need (Evans and Grantham n.d.). At the same time, small communities have been constrained by smaller, and at times shrinking, tax bases that have provided limited local resources to invest in renewing infrastructure and support community organizations (Bauch 2001; KPMG 2014).

Shared structures provide organizations with the opportunity to expand their ***networks*** and connect with a broader range of expertise, information, and resources (Bauch 2001; Community Foundations of Canada 2009). These networks may be mobilized to build more support and legitimacy for initiatives, stronger co-operative relationships, and strategic alliances (Beachy *et al.* 2010; Lennie 2010).

Figure 1: Motivations to Pursue Shared Service and Infrastructure Arrangements



A third key topic area concerns an interest for organizations to acquire ***financial*** efficiencies and better economies of scale by operating shared services and facilities (Farquhar *et al*. 2006; KPMG 2014a; Paagman *et al*. 2015; PriceWaterhouseCo-opers n.d.; Walsh 2008; Whitfield 2007). The ability of an organization to significant reduce costs alone can be difficult (Moseley *et al*. 2004; Paagman *et al*. 2015). This has prompted organizations to consider streamlining administrative departments and scaling up in order to purchase bulk equipment and supplies[3] (Canadian Press 2014). There are also potential savings for organizations by sharing equipment, vehicles, and staff such as IT, payroll, human resources, and reception (Lennie 2010). Through co-location, organizations can acquire cost savings in areas such as rent, insurance, telephone and IT services, and cleaning (Lennie 2010). By engaging in shared services and infrastructure initiatives, organizations have also been eligible for other revenue streams (Zeemering and Delabbio 2013). Organizational structures and joint decision making processes that accompany shared services can make the allocation of resources more transparent, targeted, and effective (Hultberg *et al*. 2005).

Through shared service arrangements, organizations are motivated to pool their ***human capital*** in order to strengthen their organization's capacity (Scottish Government 2007). There is an interest to use these new structures to share knowledge about new skills, new requirements, new technologies, and other innovations by accessing new external skilled resources (Janssen and Joha 2006; Paagman *et al*. 2015). It also allows organizations to strengthen their labour pool and become more competitive in attracting and retaining staff (Beachy *et al*. 2010; Evans and Grantham n.d.). Organizations are able to nurture more consistent human resource practices within a particular sector (Beachy *et al*. 2010). By sharing staff, organizations may refocus staff resources to deliver needed services instead of being distracted by administrative tasks (Graves and Marston 2011; Walsh 2008).

In terms of ***operations***, local governments and organizations have engaged in shared services and infrastructure projects in order to respond to the increased demand for supports that are often complex and beyond the capacity or mandate of any single organization (Graves and Marston 2011). Through their combined expertise and resources, organizations are using these arrangements to be more flexible and adaptable to changing service and policy environments (Anttirioko *et al*. 2014; Beachy *et al*. 2010; Bubel *et al*. n.d.; Cooke 2006; Main 2012). Organizations are also pursuing these new arrangements as a response to sector silos and fragmented service delivery by strengthening the coordination and integration of key supports (Anttirioko *et al*. 2014; Askim *et al*. 2011; Bubel *et al*. n.d.; Hultberg *et al*. 2005; Minas 2009). Stakeholders are motivated to consolidate and reduce redundant programs and adopt more efficient and streamlined processes for referrals and delivering services (Askim *et al*. 2011; Corbett and Noyes 2008; Grant *et al*. 2007; KPMG 2013; Lennie 2010; Malone and Anderson 2014). As a part of developing streamlined processes, organizations have also been able to develop better information management and decision-making structures (PriceWaterhouseCo-opers n.d.). Shared service and infrastructure arrangements can also help to raise the profile and expand the presence of service agencies within the community (Bubel *et al*. n.d.). Shared service models have also been used to broaden an organization's mandate across a larger region (Evans and Grantham n.d.; Graves and Marston 2011).

Many small communities are confronted with the challenge of aging or inadequate ***infrastructure***. Shared infrastructure initiatives are then a response to provide access to better space, and adopt new technology and innovations (Bauch 2001).

[3] The Province of Nova Scotia completed a Shared Services Review and adopted the Shared Services Act with a goal to centralize procurement processes estimated to produce $60 million in annual savings (Canadian Press 2014; Province of Nova Scotia 2014).

Organizations pursue shared service and infrastructure arrangements to nurture co-operation that can lead to a change in organizational culture and nurture ***organizational learning***. New learning networks are created that can expose staff to different organizational models, processes, expectations and philosophies, knowledge, and skills for delivering services (Beachy *et al*. 2010; Bubel *et al*. n.d.). It may also expose staff across multiple organizations to a broader range of community needs and opportunities across many sectors (Beachy *et al*. 2010).

Furthermore, organizations pursued new service and infrastructure arrangements in order to retain control over services and strengthen the ***stability*** of their organization (Janssen and Joha 2006). Through shared initiatives, stakeholders are not only able to share risks but also expand their capacity to pursue larger projects (Beachy *et al*. 2010; Lennie 2010).

Through efficiencies, greater capacity, co-operation, and organizational stability, organizations are motivated to preserve local jobs, increase efficient access to multiple supports, improve the quality and consistency of services, and improve the quality of life in communities (Anttirioko *et al*. 2014; Askim *et al*. 2011; Farquhar *et al*. 2006; Howard 2014; Lennie 2010; Paagman *et al*. 2015). Furthermore, by scaling up, they are able to achieve a stronger voice and better position themselves to advocate and negotiate with government stakeholders for local needs (Beachy *et al*. 2010; Lennie 2010; Rural/Urban Cost-Sharing Task Force n.d.).

What are Smart Services?

There are many different terms used for smart services and infrastructure, including smart services (Barile and Polese 2010), smart city, smart partnership (Anttirioko *et al*. 2014), one-stop shops (Minas 2014; Turner 2012), coordination initiatives (Champion and Bonoli 2011), multi-service agencies (Moseley *et al*. 2004), multi-purpose centres (Van Belle and Trusler 2005; Malone and Anderson 2014), co-location (Lawn *et al*. 2014; Moseley *et al*. 2004), one-stop government, single-window services, single gateways (Askim *et al*. 2009), one-stop service arrangements (Carter 2010), multi-purpose service program (Malone and Anderson 2014), and multi-tenant non-profit centres (Bubel *et al*. n.d.).

Just as there have been many different terms used for smart services and infrastructure, there have been many different ways in which it has been defined and conceptualized. Smart services have been conceptualized through innovations that result in the adoption and use of new products, new services, different administrative practices, new technology, and new behaviours, knowledge, and strategies (Keast *et al*. 2004). They are also defined by services that produce greater efficiencies, streamlined and improved access to supports, cost savings, strengthened intelligence of user needs and changing contexts, greater interaction and connectivity, and greater flexibility for users (Allmendinger and Lombreglia 2005; Wünderlich *et al*. 2012). The 'smart' component, then, is defined by the intended goals and uses by organizations, businesses, governments, and other users. It is also continuously informed by evidence and intelligence supported through information structures (Mental Health Council of Australia 2006). Smart services that provide many stakeholders with access to sensitive information, however, can be perceived as a risky endeavor (Wünderlich *et al*. 2015).

Organizations have pursued shared arrangements for a variety of needs, including:

- Administrative supports (receptionist, contract management, accounting, bookkeeping, investment management, billing, procurement, human resource management, marketing, communications, IT support, and reporting);
- Shared liability and insurance costs;

- Shared costs to obtain specialized expertise, such as real estate advice, legal advice, investment and financial advice, etc.;
- Joint volunteer programs;
- Fundraising;
- Joint planning and delivery of events, programs, training, workshops, and services;
- Development and management of shared equipment and facilities (i.e. meeting rooms, kitchen areas, reception areas, washrooms, storage, resource rooms, office supplies, computer servers, photocopiers, software, etc.); and
- To raise the profile of non-profit organizations (Beachy *et al*. 2010; Bubel *et al*. n.d.; Burke-Robertson 2002; Carter 2010; Community Foundations of Canada 2009; Cooke 2006; Lawn *et al*. 2014; Matan 2008; Rumball-Smith *et al*. 2014; Sloper 2004; Walsh 2008; Whitfield 2007).

There are many different types of service delivery models being used as communities pursue new service and infrastructure arrangements. To start, ***horizontal shared service models*** involve partnerships between two or more local governments or community organizations (Dollery *et al*. 2010). In this model, groups share the common knowledge that the shared service is fully owned by a local government or community organization. All activities, costs, revenue, and risks rest with participating local governments or community organizations. This approach allows municipalities or community organizations to generate revenue from excess capacity with protection, emergency, transport, environmental, or administrative services (KPMG 2014a). For example, the City of North Bay sells sewage treatment to the Nipissing First Nation (KPMG 2014a). With an interest in coordination but not necessarily integration, these initiatives may be governed through a joint services committee (KPMG 2014a). Community organizations and municipalities have also formed corporations to manage joint services, programs, and infrastructure, such as regional airports (Burke-Robertson 2002; KPMG 2014a).

With interagency or intergovernmental ***vertical shared service models***, local governments and community organizations may work with state agencies to offer residents services within a specific geographic area. Supports may be provided as a normal contribution to members or through a fee-for-service (Dollery *et al*. 2010). This allows local governments and organizations to deliver services on behalf of public agencies on an ad hoc, contract basis (Dollery *et al*. 2010). RFP processes, regulations, and legislation are then used as management tools to guide the negotiation and performance of such contracts (Minas 2014).

Some organizations may choose to engage in an ***outsourcing model*** by allowing another organization to create a service for participating organizations and their clients. This model provides flexibility for organizations by allowing them to determine how much of the service that they may require at any particular time (Beachy *et al*. 2010). In this case, the responsibilities and risks are legally shifted to the outsourcing organization (Janssen and Joha 2006). Similarly, with the ***Peak Body Support Model***, an organization may provide services for its members in exchange for a membership fee or subscription fee (Walsh 2008). In Australia, for example, organizations such as the Local Government Association of Queensland, Volunteering Queensland, and the Queensland Council of Social Service have offered a range of services by subscription for other organizations, such as human resource manuals, bargaining manuals, census data, web design, procurement, and financial management (Walsh 2008). In the ***lead supply model***, a contract is developed between organizations undertaking shared services (Beachy *et al*. 2010). There is no legal structure, but instead a formal agreement is developed. With its use for largely temporary projects, this model can pose challenges for organizations engaged in long-term planning. Concerns can quickly emerge about the degree of power and control that the lead agency has within the partnership (Beachy *et al*. 2010). Similarly, some organizations have pursued the ***umbrella model*** where a lead organization offers several core services to other community groups that retain their own separate legal status (Graves and Marston 2011; Southard Hay 2009). As a result of many financial and infrastructure challenges, communities have also pursued ***co-location*** where a number of organizations share a common physical space or facility, and they may also share some equipment, operational costs, and administrative resources (Walsh 2008). In this case, the goal of each organization is to foster a learning and collaborative environment; although, each organization retains its own identity and governance structure. Typically, a lead agency manages the shared facility and owns or holds the lease for the building in which other organizations are located (Lennie 2010).

With service ***co-operatives***, more organizations are exploring their potential to generate benefits such as shared risks, shared administration, and resources. A co-operative is an entity where each member group invests in the organization. Each member typically has one vote and representation on the board of directors (Beachy *et al.* 2010; Lennie 2010). The ability of the co-op administration to assume central governing and administrative tasks allows each member organization to focus on services delivered by member groups (Beachy *et al.* 2010).

Another popular model has been the ***one-stop shop*** or ***multi-service*** agency where clients may access multiple supports. Since the 1970s, there has been considerable variation with one-stop shops across many countries such as Australia, the Netherlands, Austria, Canada, the US, and Scandinavia (Askim *et al.* 2011, Blackburn 2014); however, with some facilities providing full support to connect clients to needed services while other organizations provide partial advocacy or referral supports, leaving clients to do the rest. This has prompted a distinction across one-stop shops from those that are the “first stop shop” to the “convenience store” to the full “one-stop shop” (Askim *et al.* 2011). Finally, some organizations with similar programs and objectives have pursued ***mergers*** in order to streamline administration and operations (Burke-Robertson 2002; Walsh 2008).

Many tools and strategic personnel have been used for new service and infrastructure arrangements. For example, strategic partners have been used to nurture broader support and legitimacy for the initiative. The roles of administrative personnel have reshaped to transform organizational structures and develop new efficiencies. Furthermore, change agents or champions have been strategically used to inform and support broader organizational commitment and readiness for change (Cooke 2006). These shared infrastructure and service arrangements, however, remain very complex endeavors that require stakeholders to consider many regulations and legal matters related to tax laws, corporate law, trust laws, real estate laws, and employment regulations (Burke-Robertson 2002). In the remainder of the report, we will examine how three forms of shared infrastructure and service arrangements are being mobilized to support community and economic renewal processes in rural and small town places.

CO-LOCATION

Multi-purpose or co-location initiatives remain underdeveloped in rural areas (Van Belle and Trusler 2005). There are several approaches, however, that can be pursued to develop these complex facilities. One approach is through buildings owned or leased by the private sector or government agencies where non-profits may share space. Such non-equity models are less risky for rural organizations that may have limited financial reserves, but do not contribute to their long-term asset development (Bubel *et al*. n.d.). It has been more difficult, though, for non-profit organizations to generate the capital needed to purchase or develop a one-stop shop or shared facility. This has been particularly the case for non-profits in small communities. When several organizations come together to purchase a building, new agreements are developed to address real estate and legal requirements, as well as financial and property management (Bubel *et al*. n.d.). In this study, local governments and service leaders around BC explored co-location initiatives to pool financial resources and expand infrastructure capable of supporting a community centre for meetings, special events, or recreational activities; to obtain new space for local government; and to provide space for local services, such as daycares, public libraries, schools, tourism information centres, and community service agencies.

Building Relationships and Capacity

It took a long period of time to identify and build relationships with appropriate partners. By drawing upon long established networks and previous experience of working together on events, programs, and other infrastructure projects, informal approaches were used to identify stakeholders for co-location projects. Some initiatives used formal stakeholder interviews to better understand the capacity, limitations, and potential synergies associated with each partner.

There were some co-location projects where potential partners did not have a long history of working together. There were also co-location projects that had a limited collaborative history amongst local government, First Nations, and Metis stakeholders. Strong relationships are an important asset to nurture the development of co-location projects.

Some co-location initiatives struggled with a lack of interest by potential partners. Potential partners may prefer to retain their own space, especially if organizations have already invested large amounts of funds into renovating space. For small stagnant or declining communities that have an abundance of low-cost, underutilized infrastructure, there may be little incentive or motivation to share space. In contrast, organizations in rapidly growing communities may be locked into long-term lease or rental agreements due to fears of rising rental rates. It can also be challenging to encourage businesses and business organizations to locate in multi-purpose facilities. Tourism information centres, for example, have a preference to be located in close proximity to highway junctions. This location, however, may not be suitable for other partners wishing to locate in these facilities. There are concerns amongst broader community stakeholders, however, that this results in missed opportunities to renew aging infrastructure and create synergies between these groups and other stakeholders in the community.

Concerns about sharing equipment or books, operational and maintenance costs, as well as concerns about the roles, responsibilities, and job security of different unionized personnel can also stop a co-location project before it even begins (Grimsey and Lewis 2002). Similar to experiences in Alberta and Australia, some co-location initiatives in this study encountered limited public support for developing shared infrastructure due to concerns about costs, impacts on local tax structures, fears of the displacement and replacement of local organizations delivering services, fears of other types of users and age groups within the facility, and perceptions that the budget, design, breadth of use, and control of shared facilities were falling short of local expectations (Conway *et al*. 2011; Rural/Urban Cost-Sharing Task Force n.d.). In some cases, these concerns were overcome by repurposing other facilities in the community. For small communities with significant infrastructure deficiencies, grants can be used as one tool to overcome limited engagement.

Geography plays an important role in community engagement. Being in a small community means that interest, momentum, and will can build as stakeholders and potential partners are more intimately involved with each other. Many multi-purpose projects benefitted from strong community support. Across BC, there are not only concentrated municipalities, but there are also “dispersed” cities that are comprised of multiple smaller communities over low-density areas. This has important implications for community identities, interactions, relationships, and infrastructure. It can be difficult to foster social cohesion and support in communities that service large surrounding rural regions. Rural areas can have a different culture and different perspectives compared to those living in small towns.

Co-location initiatives can be difficult to nurture in small communities that have limited trust for government and industry. In some projects, distrust was grounded in school closures of tight knit, small communities. Some residents became focused on the loss of an important asset for their community rather than the opportunities to pursue new ones. It became critical to provide opportunities for parents to discuss the concerns and impacts of school closures to rebuild relationships during the development of these new infrastructure projects. One issue, for example, that needed to be addressed concerned the removal of equipment and supplies donated through local PAC fundraising efforts following school closures.

Advice and Support

Co-location initiatives can be very complex endeavors. While previous research suggests that there has been a lack of information to guide stakeholders through the development of shared infrastructure projects (Lennie 2010; Walsh 2008), our study found that the potential resources, capacity, and processes to engage in co-location projects varied tremendously across a diverse rural landscape in BC. Recognizing that each project is unique, stakeholders from small communities attempted to learn from other co-location or multi-purpose initiatives in Port Clements (Multi-purpose Facility), Pouce Coupe (Neighbourhood Learning Centre), Nazko First Nation, Sooke (Sooke CASA), Saanich (Saanich Neighbhourhood Place), Revelstoke (Neighbourhood Learning Centre), and Jasper (Jasper Community Team).

Local Government

Local governments were often viewed as one of the key partners in co-location or multi-purpose facility projects. In terms of advice and expertise, local government staff would often not only manage these projects, but provide in-kind assistance to co-located partners by installing equipment and appliances. While most of these co-location or multi-purpose projects were driven by local government partners, other co-location initiatives did not receive advice or guidance through staff support. Some felt that local governments view social development, and their related co-location initiatives, outside the realm of their responsibility. Local governments were sometimes unaware of the complex issues and contentious relationships between stakeholders which impeded their ability to provide effective advice and support.

Regional Districts

Regional districts have also been supportive of multi-purpose infrastructure projects in smaller and unincorporated areas by completing research; providing verbal and written support; and drafting agreements guiding the development, construction, ownership, and use of multi-purpose facilities. Long-term regional district employees developed trust and good working relationships between rural residents and senior government partners. In some cases, regional district staff not only organized stakeholder meetings with residents, community organizations, and school district staff, but provided advice and expertise to discuss renovations and potential future expansions.

School District

School districts provided staff resources to research the tasks and processes that needed to be worked though in order to obtain and prepare former school properties for multi-purpose facilities. In some cases, initiatives connected with a former school trustee or provincial cabinet minister concerning rules, regulations, and processes associated with major infrastructure projects that involve school districts. There were examples of co-location projects, however, that did not receive early public support from the school districts. This prompted community groups to attend meetings in order to put more pressure on school district to engage in solutions that could save school assets within these smaller places.

Provincial

Rural stakeholders received advice and guidance from the provincial government through various mechanisms. In Golden, BC, StepUp BC[4] provided webinars and participated in weekly video-conferences to guide early discussions for the co-location initiative. Through the Ministry of Education, the provincial government also provided staff contacts and on-line information about Neighbourhood Learning Centre models, success stories, and templates of shared use agreements (http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/administration/community-partnerships/neighbourhood-learning-centres) (last accessed on: January 5th, 2016). Through these staff contacts, stakeholders learned more about what the government was looking for before preparing proposals for their NLC project.

Federal

Gas-tax funding required some projects to ensure that the infrastructure met the Gold LEEDS standard. Completing the project, however, becomes more complex as communities must obtain their LEED certification through the Canada Green Building Council. Limited advice and support was available to assist rural stakeholders to address these LEED standards.

[4] StepUp BC was a program delivered by the Vancouver Foundation through the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism, and Skills Training's Labour Market Partnership Project. Through their Creative Commons, the Vancouver Foundation's program was designed to provide on-line tools and additional support to address human resource issues of non-profits in BC (Vancouver Foundation 2015).

Infrastructure

Project Management

In most cases, local and regional government staff have been responsible for project management or acted as the lead contractor, hiring sub-contractors to support various stages of construction; although, there were examples of multi-purpose facilities spearheaded by non-profit leaders. To support the consultation and planning for these new infrastructure arrangements, municipalities have also provided meeting space for stakeholders. In other multi-purpose projects, school districts have assumed the lead role for managing the project, including the RFP processes and all the related activities with contractors throughout the various stages of construction.

Site Selection

In dispersed communities and rural regions, site selection can be a controversial issue that determines the fate of co-location initiatives. School districts may prefer to rebuild on sites that they already own and have physical infrastructure in place. The costs associated with extending rural roads, water, and sewer systems to new site locations can prove to be too high and can impact the viability of a project.

Church properties are increasingly being considered as potential repurposed sites for multi-purpose development initiatives in small communities (Bubel *et al*. n.d.; Moseley *et al*. 2004). In Squamish, for example, the United Church approached the Sea to Sky Community Services Society about acquiring the church property to support a new joint development initiative. The church had a declining congregation and was seeking creative solutions to maintain their organization in the community. With five city lots and a contribution of $1.5 million from the church, the Sea to Sky Community Services will lead a new multi-purpose facility that will include housing for people with developmental disabilities, offices, a community hall, a community kitchen, multi-purpose rooms, and a church. In a new lease arrangement, the church will have first right to access the use of community rooms for special events.

An unanticipated issue for some co-location initiatives concerned the need to understand the history of land ownership for potential sites. There are many rural school properties located on land donated to the Crown. Over time, some historical clauses may not be registered properly with Land Titles and the transactions can became lost in local memory, resulting in a false sense of ownership and jurisdiction. In Dome Creek, School District 57 provided land to the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George to support a new multi-purpose facility. While registering the property with Land Titles, the regional district discovered that a rural resident had once provided land for the school through the Crown. Once the school closed, the land had to be reverted back to the Crown. As a result, the land transfer process consumed more time as the regional district applied for, and received, the 30 year Crown lease. Dome Creek had a referendum to establish a taxable service for the new multi-purpose facility in 2002; but due to land issues, the regional district was not able to ensure the proper license and occupation was in place until 2006.

Design of Space

Once designated sites were in place, community consultation and planning processes unfolded to address the design and functionality of shared infrastructure projects. Common features included a shared reception area, separate inside or outside access points, multi-purpose activity rooms, family rooms, quiet activity rooms, shared whiteboard walls that can be folded away to create larger rooms, Wi-Fi, teleconferencing, videoconferencing, and audio-visual equipment, expanded storage space in the walls, a shared staff room, storage for recreational equipment, banquet facilities, and a common kitchen area.

Different types of organizations required strategic locations and tailored designs of spaces within co-located facilities. For example, careful consideration was needed to provide private access and sound-proofed, confidential space for community service and health agencies. Prominent space was strategically allocated to enable other co-location partners to have adequate visibility to promote their organization's programs and services. Work Safe BC regulations required tailored specifications for common reception areas to provide a full view of the door, hallway, and office access points. Ground floor access was needed to provide services to seniors, young parents with strollers, or people with disabilities. While some multi-purpose facilities may be planned with central washroom facilities, libraries have requested their own washrooms in order to ensure that parents remain close to their children.

Energy Efficiency

A number of small communities used multi-purpose facility projects to renew and enhance the energy efficiency of their infrastructure through investments in passive solar heating systems for hot water, geothermal heating systems, infrastructure to collect water from roof tops for use in washroom facilities, and better insulation. For example, an old oil furnace had been used to heat the elementary school in Wells, BC. The community used its joint infrastructure project with the school district to invest $650,000 in a geothermal heating system to save $40,000 a year on fuel. After consultations with Fortis BC and BC Hydro, some multi-purpose infrastructure projects did not find sufficient cost savings by investing in things such as geothermal heating or LEED building designation, and therefore, did not pursue these additional energy-efficient features for their facilities.

Design Challenges

Stakeholders discussed a number of challenges encountered during the design of co-located facilities. With limited funding sources and a small tax base, budget constraints meant that some co-location projects needed to compromise and eliminate certain design elements, such as a staff room, a first aid room, landscaping, air conditioning, divider walls, an indoor playing area for children during the winter months, and the size of various rooms in the facility.

Storage

Prominent amongst these challenges is the lack of storage incorporated into co-located facilities. This includes a lack of storage for local government documents, recreational equipment, computer and related technology equipment, repair and maintenance equipment, books and other educational supplies, and equipment and supplies for fundraisers and community events. Some stakeholders have responded to limited storage issues by allowing community groups to install additional storage sheds and units. A key follow-up issue for community stakeholders, however, is that other groups are unable to install storage in the limited remaining space available in these multi-purpose rooms.

Technology

Despite a number of provincial and federal initiatives (i.e. New Building Canada – Small Communities Fund, the Connecting Canadians Rural Broadband program, Network BC, the BC Broadband Satellite Initiative, and BC's "Connecting British Columbia Agreement" with Telus), there are still many small and remote communities around BC that do not have Broadband infrastructure. The absence of technology infrastructure has limited the design and potential of multi-purpose facilities. Despite this limitation, some facilities have been wired with conduit to support videoconferencing and other technology applications in the future.

Construction Challenges

Costs for professional advice, contractors, and labour are higher in smaller and more remote settings. There were multi-purpose infrastructure initiatives that experienced considerable difficulties attracting affordable bids for construction. The bids were exceedingly over the anticipated budget. Learning from past difficulties attracting contractors for construction projects in rural and remote locations, School District 59 brought in eight portable sections to form key components of the classrooms and the library in the multi-purpose facility in Pouce Coupe. With limited hardware and supply stores equipped with the capacity to handle the scale of multi-purpose or co-location projects, there were additional transportation costs for materials and other supplies. It can also be challenging to adopt new technology innovations in rural and remote locations due to the high costs involved to order replacement equipment and bring in support for repairs. Stakeholders also discussed geological and environmental challenges encountered during the construction phase of co-location initiatives that delayed the completion of these projects. These issues ranged from blasting on solid rock foundations to addressing contaminated soil.

Funding

By their very definition as small communities, stakeholders in small communities operate with smaller economies of scale that equip them with fewer resources. It is these limited financial resources that has provided motivation and prompted the pursuit of these multi-purpose or co-location facilities. Confronted with aging infrastructure, many stakeholders noted that they would not have had sufficient revenues to pursue new infrastructure projects on their own.

Some suggested, however, that grant programs no longer reflect the context and needs of smaller communities. For example, smaller, unincorporated areas that no longer have a school are ineligible for playground grants[5]. This aspect of rurality can impact the ability to engage potential senior government partners. Isolation from key decision-makers and staff in regional, provincial, and federal levels of government can also impact their understanding of funding processes. Some rural stakeholders engaged in multi-purpose facilities were located up to 6 hours away from the closest regional centre. At the same time, however, isolation was a key factor that supported successful decisions to obtain funding and the retention of infrastructure assets, such as former schools, in small communities.

A diverse range of strategic approaches were used to fund rural co-location initiatives. Rural stakeholders obtained funding from community foundations, the Columbia Basin Trust, the Northern Development Initiative Trust, the Gwaii Trust, the Vancouver Foundation, Tire Stewardship BC's Community Grant Program[6], the Canadian Wood Council, Tourism BC, UBCM grants through the community tourism program, forestry, mining, and oil and gas industries, credit unions, businesses, non-profits, community and recreational associations, private donations, community recycling, and fundraising events. Multi-purpose facilities in small communities have also benefited from several in-kind contributions from residents and industry through donated and nominally priced timber and donated materials for concrete work.

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[5] For example, Community Gaming Grants could be obtained by Parent Advisory Councils for the purpose of purchasing playground equipment. These grants for playground equipment, however, have been suspended until further notice (Gaming Policy and Enforcement Branch 2014). Furthermore, in 2007, the Ministry of Education provided grants through its ActNow BC program for PACs to replace or rebuild playground equipment (http://bccpac.bc.ca/playground-equipment-grants) (last accessed on: January 5th, 2016). This program was extended in 2011.

[6] Tire Stewardship BC's Community Grant Program provides funding for communities that use and benefit from recycled tire products in their projects (http://www.tsbc.ca/grant.php) (last accessed on: January 5th, 2016).

Local Government

Local governments made significant contributions to co-location initiatives by matching federal infrastructure funds. Local governments, however, face an important dilemma when applying for grants that require them to prove they have the ability to proceed with the infrastructure project if funding is approved. They must decide to ask the community to borrow money for the multi-purpose facility before applying for the grant or after the grant is secured. Other small communities have benefitted from amenity fees associated with large developments, property sales, surplus and reserve funds, and a strong industrial tax base to support investments.

Many small communities and unincorporated rural areas have a limited tax base to support large-scale investments in multi-purpose or co-location infrastructure projects. This makes it difficult to acquire their share (i.e. one-third of the total project funds) needed to obtain matching funding from provincial and federal infrastructure programs. These financial challenges have intensified as industries reduce community donation programs and, in a number of cases, reduce or close their operations.

Regional Government

Regional districts have contributed revenue through regional district grants, CN grants-in-lieu of taxes, property sales, and the general tax base to support the construction and ongoing operations of these infrastructure projects. Regional district staff have also spearheaded grant applications to federal programs.

School District

Through the Neighbourhood Learning Centre initiative, school districts became major financial contributors to multi-purpose facilities in smaller communities. School districts also provided in-kind support by having their trades staff build shelving units or install equipment and appliances for shared spaces and community centres contained in these facilities. There is no long-term certainty, however, to protect these rural assets from future closure decisions. Rural stakeholders engaged with joint infrastructure partnerships with schools are continuing to build financial reserves in order to purchase multi-purpose facilities from school districts in the event of future school closures.

Provincial Government

Small communities have received funding to support co-location or multi-purpose infrastructure programs through a number of provincial ministries, such as the Ministry of Education (Neighbourhood Learning Centres), the Ministry of Community and Rural Development (Towns for Tomorrow[7]), the Ministry of Community, Sport, and Culture, and the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism, and Skills Training (StepUp BC / Labour Market Partnership). Some funding emerged unexpectedly due to the strong support and advocacy of local MLAs and provincial ministers.

[7] Towns for Tomorrow was launched in December 2006. It was a granting program specifically targeting small communities and their infrastructure needs. Typically, provincial granting programs provide matching funds up to one-third of the project costs. Towns for Tomorrow, however, provided up to 80% of the funding needed for rural infrastructure projects. Small communities (under 5,000 people) cost-shared with the Province on an 80/20 basis, with a maximum provincial contribution of $400,000. Towns with a population between 5,000 and 15,000 could obtain shared funding on a 75/25 basis, with a maximum provincial contribution of $375,000 (Ministry of Community, Sport, and Cultural Development n.d.).

Rural stakeholders, however, experienced a number of challenges pursuing or using provincial sources of funding. The first key challenge concerns the constant restructuring of provincial programs. Short-term funding programs do not provide adequate time for communities to mobilize and engage in larger and more complex infrastructure projects. Opportunities for community planning and consultation become limited. Some funding programs were not well promoted or supported, and eventually were cancelled. Such short-term funding programs can interrupt the momentum for building relationships, planning, and mobilizing other contributing assets to these initiatives. With a focus on funding to support the planning of infrastructure projects, there has been inadequate additional support for constructing the project itself. There were examples where funding was only obtained for a portion of the building. This produced challenges for tracking and reporting grant expenditures on different components of the building.

Despite policy shifts that target to use public facilities more efficiently through co-location or multi-purpose facilities, there have been challenges accessing funding due to the ownership structure of facilities. Provincially owned buildings are not eligible for federal grants to improve accessibility (i.e. Employment and Social Development Canada's Enabling Accessibility Fund[8]). This requires a shift in policy as many schools and other public buildings are inaccessible and thus unable to address the client needs of other potential co-location partners. Stakeholders advocated for a 'community development equivalent' to the Early Years Centre initiative that is designed to bring community development organizations together through co-location (Human Early Learning Partnership 2015).

Stakeholders also advocated for more flexibility within the Community Charter through longer-term borrowing agreements to empower small municipalities to lead and pursue these larger, complex initiatives. There were also calls to strengthen the redistribution of tax revenues to local municipalities in order to empower small communities to pursue and support shared infrastructure arrangements.

Eligible Expenses

Strict criteria for eligible expenses also impeded the early stages of developing joint infrastructure projects. Rural stakeholders struggled to justify the importance of paid coordinators to nurture relationships and planning for co-location projects.

Reporting

Detailed reporting and updates are required throughout the development of these infrastructure projects. Forms used by provincial and federal levels of government, however, keep changing, making the process of tracking and reporting more difficult for community stakeholders. Changes in provincial ministers and government staff have also posed challenges to work through the development process and attend to reporting procedures for these infrastructure projects.

Federal Government

Small communities accessed funding through Infrastructure Canada (gas tax funding)[9] and Employment and Social Development Canada's New Horizons grant program[10] to support renovations and investments

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[8] The federal government's Enabling Accessibility Fund supports capital investments to renovate, retrofit, or build community facilities where programs and services are offered to people with disabilities (http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/disability/eaf//index.shtml) (last accessed January 5th, 2016).

[9] Infrastructure Canada's Federal Tax Fund provided municipalities with more flexibility by allowing them to pool, bank, and borrow against this funding (Infrastructure Canada 2014a). A Small Communities Fund Program was also provided to support new infrastructure investments (Infrastructure Canada 2014b).

in energy-efficiency and environmentally sustainable infrastructure. In Ucluelet, the multi-purpose facility also benefitted from Service Canada's wage subsidy program to support a receptionist position for the facility's reception area.

Eligibility

Community stakeholders found that they benefited from flexible eligible criteria for federal grant programs. The New Horizons program, for example, required infrastructure programs to benefit seniors. The definition of a senior, however, was not strictly age-dependent, but was defined as residents who no longer work. This allowed some projects to encapsulate benefits for a broader range of residents in the community.

Reporting

Stakeholders expressed concerns about the pressure placed on limited human resources in small communities to complete detailed reporting requirements for the small grants that were received.

Trusts and Foundations

Multi-purpose infrastructure projects have pursued funding from trusts to support grant writing, the construction and renovations of these facilities, the installation of biomass infrastructure, as well as social and historical displays. There can be complications, however, to secure funding for co-location or multi-purpose facilities that are partly or wholly owned by school district partners. Trusts can be concerned about investing funds to support senior government facilities, despite other uses contained in these facilities. Trusts have a strong interest to invest in long-term community and economic development. The key issue for trust leaders concerns the fate of these multi-purpose assets as a result of school closures. Local stakeholders have responded to these concerns by ensuring agreements are in place to allow local stakeholders to purchase the property if schools are closed.

With few structures being taxed to support new facilities, there are additional challenges for rural, unincorporated communities to obtain sufficient funds to support multi-purpose facilities. This is a particularly important challenge for rural areas that are required to submit a financial strategy of how the site will be sustained and operated in order to receive trust funding. Some trust programs require detailed reporting of both in-kind contributions that can be difficult to quantify (in dollar value), and the use of co-location facilities that can be difficult to track with multiple stakeholders using these space during and after regular business hours.

Co-location or multi-purpose infrastructure projects that involve multiple stakeholders and jurisdictions can take an extensive amount of time to complete, a point that is often misunderstood by funding organizations. Across BC, multi-purpose facility committees faced challenges to spend grants obtained by trusts and foundations within short timeframes. In some cases, projects were confronted with significant financial risks of losing grants. This left rural stakeholders scrambling to put pressure on other partners to secure the total financial resources needed to move forward. Despite obtaining grant extensions, it also meant that rural stakeholders felt pressured to rush public consultation and design processes.

Another issue raised was that ample funding through organizations such as the Northern Development Initiatives Trust and the Columbia Basin Trust can stifle innovation and co-operation. It can produce

[10] Under the New Horizons for Seniors Program, organizations can apply for up to $25,000 per year (http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/seniors/funding/index.shtml) (last accessed January 5th, 2016).

competition for "unlimited" funds. With an abundance of funding available for certain rural regions, each group can apply to fund their own initiative. Furthermore, non-profits that do not own their building may be ineligible for foundation grants.

Financial Impact on Operations

A key motivation for pursuing multi-purpose facilities is the anticipated cost savings that can be generated for many user groups. Some small communities, such as Wells, experienced reduced operating and maintenance costs. This meant that a smaller portion of the tax revenue was needed to support these facilities. There were cases where no cost savings were generated from co-location initiatives because the user groups were co-located in existing, aging infrastructure often heated by outdated propane heating systems, resulting in high energy costs for user groups. Some have further argued, however, that small local governments and smaller organizations will find it more difficult to recover the costs of developing shared infrastructure and service arrangements (Paagman *et al*. 2015).

It was difficult for many small communities, however, to determine the extent of financial benefits for two reasons. Many small communities do not have the information management systems needed to track such benefits. New software packages adopted by small municipal governments, for example, have consolidated many items, making it difficult to examine specific items such as hydro costs. Second, there are small communities that continue to operate old facilities for other uses due to the increased demand for infrastructure. It becomes difficult to determine if there are heat and hydro savings from these multi-purpose facilities until these older structures are no longer in use.

The debentures used to pay for many multi-purpose facilities have had an impact on some municipal taxes. Rural stakeholders also pursued grants and generated revenue from rentals to support ongoing operational and maintenance costs and limit the impact on municipal tax structures. Some public / shared libraries have experienced minor cost increases in staff wages to process more books for elementary school children in co-located facilities. This includes extra costs to catalogue both municipal and school books into the Sitka system used by municipal libraries.

In some joint use agreements, the school district or local government co-located in the facility pays for the heat / utilities, phone, Internet, maintenance, janitorial services, and snow removal, resulting in considerable savings for co-located libraries or community service agencies. The shared facility can be a double-edged sword for rural stakeholders. If rural communities owned these multi-purpose facilities alone, there would be more costs, but also more control over the operations of the facility.

Governance / Ownership

Governance During Development

During the development phase, governance arrangements varied depending on the partners involved and the nature of the co-location initiative. The development of co-location or multi-purpose facilities was generally managed by a stakeholders' advisory committee, a rural schools committee, a joint building committee, or a multi-purpose society. The primary responsibilities of these committees were to facilitate a public consultation process, support referendum events, and complete fundraising.

With a smaller pool to draw from, organizations in small communities not only face challenges attracting new board or committee members, but there are challenges recruiting qualified people with skills for specific positions (i.e. treasurer, marketing, monitoring diligence, etc.). These challenges were not prevalent in all small communities. Faced with the closure or loss of services and infrastructure assets, some small communities found it easy to recruit a range of stakeholders to engage in committees and boards to oversee the development and operations of these multi-purpose facilities.

Being in a smaller community, however, shaped the overall tone of how these committees or boards operated with some adopting more of an "informal" rather than a "formal" approach to their operations. Others suggested that formal agreements for stakeholders involved in multi-purpose or co-located facilities have enhanced the governance skills and approach to their own organization. Many participants also talked about efforts to simplify the language as much as possible in these legal documents in order to strengthen the trust across different stakeholders.

Once these responsibilities were completed, the tendering and construction process was managed by a lead stakeholder. In most cases, this meant that the development process was managed by the school district or local / regional government; although, there were co-location managed by non-profits. After the multi-purpose facilities were completed, these building committees ceased to exist. Local / regional governments or community organizations assumed responsibilities for booking rental spaces and addressing complaints. Surprisingly, once these multi-purpose facilities transitioned into operations, formal management / tenant committees were rarely put in place. Instead, grievances are addressed by key partners in the facility's ownership on a case by case basis. In most cases, tenants would raise issues with the local government administration as part of the conflict resolution protocols inserted into lease agreements. These arrangements are rarely adequate, however, to address union and other staff-related conflicts across stakeholders.

Strategic Planning

A series of actions were undertaken to guide the strategic planning for co-location initiatives. The first step involved background research through interviews with organizations and lists provided by BC Registry Services to identify and understand the capacity of potential partners. The next phase involved community engagement and building relationships amongst potential partners. In some cases, guest speakers were invited to the community to provide more information about co-location initiatives. Discussions were facilitated to develop a broader understanding of the capacity (strengths and weaknesses) of each potential co-location partner. Guiding principles were adopted during the development phase in order to provide clarity about the project goals, roles, and responsibilities, as well as to filter options for potential partners and uses. The guiding principles were valued for their ability to orient new stakeholders representing potential partners during the long period of time needed to development these initiatives. Strategic planning involved considerable consultation and community conversations to prioritize service and infrastructure gaps in the community.

Communications

Face-to-face meetings and websites were used as tools to strengthen communication and address rumours and misinformation related to the initiatives. As a part of an effective communications strategy, it was important to be clear and transparent about roles and responsibilities, what was being done, and what was agreed upon in order to move these initiatives forward. Despite these efforts, rural leaders sometimes encountered challenges during the strategic planning phase of co-location initiatives. With high workloads, service providers became insular. With increasing budget constraints, some organizations were reluctant to share funds and hid other resources.

Final Ownership and Use Agreements

Multi-purpose facilities examined in this study were generally owned by a single stakeholder, notably the local government or school district, with lease arrangements made for other co-located partners. Some co-location facilities are also owned by non-profits with leasing arrangements made with other community groups. Ownership and user agreements have been an important tool needed to foster dialogue, strategic planning, and maintain effective communication and expectations (Walsh 2008). User agreements also include statements to guide access to shared supplies and equipment, such as library books or gymnasium equipment.

These ownership and lease agreements outlined escape and user clauses. This included agreements for purchasing property and building assets. Escape clauses carefully considered the timelines and conditions under which co-location stakeholders could terminate their agreement or lease. School districts, for example, could terminate or re-negotiate co-location agreements if enrolment continued to decline significantly in rural areas. If capital costs associated with the conversion of aging infrastructure became unmanageable, local governments could also terminate the lease. One-year termination notice was a common standard adopted in escape clauses.

Where schools are involved, clauses are included to ensure other uses that may present a hazard to students are excluded. An unanticipated issue for some co-location initiatives that have school partners concerned the need to adopt a policy to prevent the use of alcohol on site for community events.

Final agreements for the ownership, use, and management of multi-purpose facilities created discomfort for some non-profit organizations that have invested time and resources to raise funds, contribute expertise and, at times, manage site construction but were excluded from the security of ownership and control of such key assets. Giving up ownership was a compromise made by rural stakeholders to satisfy the completion of a joint user agreement.

Some user agreements adopted more complex and layered arrangements with stakeholders in order to share or transfer the responsibility of managing spaces to community groups. The East Line Activity Centre, for example, contained an ownership agreement between School District 57 and the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George, but also agreements between the regional district and the Willow River Recreation Association in order to enable the recreation association to manage the booking and use of space in the activity centre.

Protocols

During the development phase, conflict dispute protocols were also commonly put in place. Disputes were generally addressed by the primary owner of the facility or by a joint committee with representation from all key stakeholders who own or lease space in the facility. Other protocols and plans that were needed to guide the use and operation of multi-purpose facilities include health and safety plans to address health authority regulations and licensing requirements concerning food safety, cleaning, and sterilization processes; emergency protocols for incidents such as fire, earthquakes, etc.; working alone protocols; sign-in, evacuation, and other security protocols for designated spaces; and protocols for access to recreational and technology equipment in schools, community gyms / centres, and other common spaces.

Maintenance Agreements

Issues around inspection and maintenance procedures are not always considered in user agreements. For example, local government staff have faced challenges inspecting community centre / gym spaces following evening special events. Post inspections may not be possible until after school. With school stakeholders using shared facilities during the day, the local government is not able to hold renters liable for damages. The community then bares the costs of repairs to shared spaces. In some cases, different stakeholders take care of maintenance for different parts of the multi-purpose facility. If major capital repairs are needed to the interior or exterior of the facilities, a task force is formed to pursue options for moving forward. In other ownership and lease agreements, shared spaces or event rooms must be cleaned after events and meetings. Custodial services may be provided by one or two key stakeholders who primarily own the facility. Those custodial costs are passed along to other renters / users of shared spaces or assumed by local governments if cleaning is required on days when the custodian does not usually work. This can reduce the overall revenues generated from renting such facilities.

Access to Space

Once the co-location or multi-purpose facilities were completed, the management of space was guided through multi-user and partnership agreements signed during the development of these projects. For the most part, local governments manage space bookings and rentals through their office clerk. There are examples in smaller, rural areas, however, where the management and booking of space is handled by a third party (i.e. non-profit) organization.

Multi-purpose facilities that contained schools required other co-located services to adjust their hours of operation. Concerns about liability, potential unsupervised interactions between adults and children, and the safety of students meant that there needed to be more restricted control over the use and operations of spaces within these multi-purpose facilities. For example, in Pouce Coupe, the library functions as a school library from 8 am to 2 pm and then functions as a public library from 2 pm to 8 pm. Similarly, there are user agreements that allow schools to control the use of community gyms or community centres during school hours, before transferring the use of those spaces to the local government after school.

An unresolved issue for multi-purpose facilities concerns ways to streamline access and better support frequent user groups. These ‘frequent user groups’ either do not require daily access to space or they do not have the financial resources to obtain a lease for a designated space within these facilities. Currently, these frequent user groups must go through a booking process and obtain and return a key for each routine monthly meeting or event. One possible solution proposed includes drafting annual lease agreements that provides keys to groups that frequently book multi-use / meeting rooms.

Furthermore, there can be challenges maintaining realistic expectations of control over shared spaces. Frequent users of multi-purpose rooms, for example, can develop a strong sense of ownership over some rooms that can pose challenges for others to use the same space. Stakeholders using shared spaces must discuss issues around supplies, ownership, and the potential need for lockable storage spaces in these multi-purpose rooms.

Liability and Risks

Co-location initiatives continue to be an underutilized approach to renewing infrastructure in small communities. As a result, people we spoke with felt that stakeholders were not used to discussing financing models or risk and liabilities issues related to these initiatives. Involvement in co-location projects has also been perceived as a political risk to the trust, power, and influence of organizations.

Financial Risks

It can be a significant financial risk for communities to pursue co-location initiatives. For co-location initiatives with strong local / regional government partnerships, financial risks were often resolved by ensuring adequate revenue from local taxes was in place. Local governments are also covered through the Municipal Insurance Association of BC for liability. Unforeseen financial risks can emerge, though, if alternative financial tools and strategies are used to support these projects. In Ucluelet, for example, the local government planned to use revenue collected from amenity fees as part of their contribution to the multi-purpose facility project in order to reduce the burden on local taxpayers for the facility. The area had been experiencing rapid growth in tourism, prompting a proposed golf course that would have produced $1 million in amenity fees. The golf course development was cancelled due to the economic downturn initiated in 2008, leaving the local government to rely more on local tax base revenues. For stakeholders engaged in co-location initiatives involving schools, there were concerns that taking on a school meant taking on a building that a government agency no longer wanted to run due to rising costs.

Liability

Stakeholders in co-located facilities need to discuss who is paying the liability / insurance costs, what type of coverage is being purchased (i.e. liability, fire, content), and whether the insurance policies address all the potential uses and concerns associated with indoor and outdoor spaces. In some multi-purpose facilities, these costs and policies are addressed by the primary owner of the facility (i.e. local government, school district, etc.). In some cases, key partners will share liability / insurance costs based on their square footage of the building outlined in their agreement.

For community events, partnering community groups sign agreements with the sponsoring local government that allow the event to be covered under the municipal liability insurance plan. If events and activities are not sponsored by the local government, then community groups need to purchase their own insurance. There can also be concerns about synergies between maintenance schedules and daily users of these facilities. In some cases, injuries occurred to students and residents who arrived at multi-purpose facilities very early or late at night. This has prompted some communities to adopt a clause in their agreement requiring parties to notify maintenance staff of any changes to working schedules.

Safety Risks

Where schools and libraries are involved, there are also perceived risks and safety concerns with adults and children sharing space. Hours of operations for public libraries needed to be rescheduled outside of school hours in order to create a more controlled environment for school children. Stakeholders must also discuss potential risks and liability issues related to different user groups of co-located facilities. There may also be discussions around age limits for supervision. As a public venue, criminal record checks are routinely completed for staff. Youth programs, however, may be operating in close proximity to community services that deliver mental health and addictions services to residents with criminal records. More attention to screening and security may be required in these spaces. Facilities are generally equipped with an alarm system with codes for each tenant or group. There can be challenges, however, ensuring that all parties use the alarm system appropriately. Ongoing orientation, reminders, and billing have been used to improve the proper use of alarm coding procedures. Sign-in protocols have been developed to better understand who remains in different areas of the building.

Human Resources

During the development of co-location initiatives in small communities, there are a number of human resource issues that need to be considered. Some co-location initiatives hired coordinators or consultants to bring stakeholders together and guide the planning and development of these facilities. Local government CAOs, economic development officers, and leisure directors often played a leading role to pursue grants and other sources of funding, as well as to work with architects, contractors, and subcontractors. In these small and remote communities, multi-purpose facility projects also relied heavily on volunteer resources from community associations, non-profits, and farmers' institutes for gathering letters of support, providing assistance with project referendums, and fundraising. Due to the cyclical nature of economies in small communities, however, there can be considerable turnover amongst people representing various organizations. Stakeholders in small communities find it logistically and financially difficult to recruit and retain qualified staff. Limited staff resources mean that it is difficult for executive directors or senior staff to attend meetings for the development or management of a multi-purpose facility. Any changes in representatives of organizations engaged in co-location initiatives during the development phase can also impact the momentum and stability of the project.

Smaller communities may have more limited access to professionals, such as facilitators, architects, engineers, contractors, trades workers, lawyers, equipment repairmen for heating systems, etc.) to support the development and operations of multi-purpose or co-location projects. These challenges have been exacerbated with the out-migration of trades workers as a result of industrial restructuring. In response, small communities have repackaged projects to enable a few local contractors to complete much of the work under the supervision of the local government's CAO or public works division. Construction contractors would hire locally as much as possible; although, a number of contractors used for multi-purpose building projects in smaller and more remote communities utilized mobile labour to complete projects. To reduce costs, the Village of Port Clements provided housing for its contracted project manager from Abbotsford. Concerns were raised about the costs and delays associated with unions and strikes during construction of facilities. When working with school district unions, frustrations were also experienced with delays ordering and installing appliances.

As organizations pursued potential partners during the development phase, co-location initiatives sparked fears of attrition amongst staff of various non-profit agencies. These perceived pressures are already exacerbated in rural regions that have experienced successive periods of government restructuring, a trend towards the regionalization of supports, and reduced public funding. Organizations have invested more time to discuss the benefits of co-location with staff, including opportunities to reduce workloads and allow staff to focus on tasks they enjoy. Most stakeholders located in multi-purpose facilities have maintained separate administrative and program staff. In Penticton, however, the Penticton and District Community Services has been providing advice and support for the strategic development of the co-located SOSWS board.

After multi-purpose facilities are completed, stakeholders must examine their staffing resources in order to ensure that the multi-purpose facility is open at appropriate times to accommodate different user groups. Rentals for meetings and community events have also impacted staff costs for inspecting spaces after each use throughout the day, evenings, and weekends. In response, local governments have rotated staff or donated their time to complete inspections. Some communities have also changed the payment structures of their programs in order to manage staff workloads. For example, in Wells, the local government replaced monthly gym passes with seasonal gym passes in order to reduce administrative tasks.

Stakeholders in co-located facilities are now grappling with the intersection of different union workforces in their human resource management strategies. This includes, for example, grievances presented by one union member about another union member doing certain tasks. These issues are complicated by the different sets of rules that are presented by different unions. Concerns are emerging about the potential for one union to file grievances when the member of a different union assumes specific responsibilities in a consolidated or shared workforce strategy. Ongoing conversations are also taking place to resolve disputes between unionized and non-unionized stakeholders located in co-located facilities that pursue shared human resources for tasks such as maintenance, reception, and administrative supports. Discussions are also emerging to combine janitorial contracts in some co-located facilities.

Finally, there are circumstances when staff must be trained about how to use shared facilities. Due to the uniqueness of municipal and school libraries, and turnover in staff, library staff and teachers in Pouce Coupe receive an orientation with how their shared library works.

Collaboration

The close proximity that is possible through co-location has strengthened routine interactions, collaboration, and the efficient delivery of services. Service providers can quickly introduce their clients to additional supports within the same facility. However, collaborative synergies have not evolved in some co-located facilities where organizations have maintained an independent and isolated approach to their operations. This has not only impeded the ability of groups to make the wisest use of their financial resources, but it has also led to conflict.

Community Impacts

Multi-purpose facilities have resulted in several positive impacts for rural communities. These projects provided much improved infrastructure to support the operations of local governments and community services. In many cases, stakeholders felt that their rural communities would not have key assets, such as a community centre or a school, without these scaled up, multi-purpose facility initiatives. The ability to strengthen their infrastructure assets has helped these small communities to retain important supports that go a long way to retain residents and businesses in the community. Service providers are able to deliver more programs and are also noticing increased use of their facilities as a result of improved and increased space, improved access to services, and greater visibility and awareness of community services and programs (Rumball-Smith *et al*. 2014).

Another positive outcome from multi-purpose or co-location arrangements concerns opportunities to share resources to support day-to-day operations. While several supplies and equipment are shared or provided as a part of the tenant's lease arrangement, resources were also shared informally. Shared resources include printers, photocopiers, phone and Internet service plans, multi-media to support Skype / teleconferencing meetings, community kitchen, chairs and tables in multi-use rooms, school and library books[11], etc. Sharing resources was used to strengthen partnerships and foster a sense of belonging within co-located facilities. There were challenges sharing resources. The extent to which opportunities were taken to share resources amongst co-located organizations varied, and at times were underutilized or non-existant. Some organizations chose to remain self-contained with their own Internet, storage, janitorial, and maintenance arrangements.

[11] Books are stamped to identify them as school books or public library books.

The technology investments made to retool these multi-purpose facilities have strengthened the day-to-day activities and operations of local stakeholders using these facilities. Residents and tourists who come to these multi-purpose facilities also use the Wi-Fi. Investments in technological infrastructure, such as high speed Internet and audio-visual capabilities, have also enhanced the capacity of these facilities to support industry requests to rent the facilities for training sessions. Furthermore, multipurpose facilities are now better equipped to hold computer literacy and multi-media workshops for youth, seniors, entrepreneurs, and other residents.

The renewed infrastructure is also enhancing the capacity of space to generate revenue by hosting special events, such as weddings, funerals, community barbeques, etc., as well as supporting fundraising initiatives. The revenue generated through these new facilities has been reinvested into obtaining or replacing equipment, attending to routine maintenance and repairs, or pursuing larger infrastructure needs, such as bio-energy investments. Revenue has also been generated to support community and school programs. Communities now have adequate space to handle registration for conferences and sporting events. Despite the expanded capacity of event rooms in these multi-purpose facilities, however, some suggest the opportunities to generate revenue through special events are limited due to the limited capacity of accommodations in smaller communities.

Some multi-purpose facilities are providing space to support community gardens and farmers' markets that are allowing residents to generate income. These new facilities have also freed up affordable space in other facilities that are now supporting community services, community forest offices, artist guilds, youth organizations, and clubs. Multi-purpose facilities have fostered a stronger sense of community pride. The different uses that are facilitated in these buildings provide residents with a sense that there is always something going on in the community. Some local leaders have noticed that residents are taking more ownership of the building by organizing a series of routine activities and events.

Multi-purpose facilities are also nurturing inter-generational relationships. In Port Clements, for example, youth have decorated the seniors' room for Remembrance Day events and have become more involved in mock council meetings and related local government initiatives. Through the provision of newly updated libraries, multi-use rooms, and outdoor playground equipment, these community facilities are also providing positive, attractive places for youth to spend time after school hours.

The long-term experiences of working on the multi-purpose facility have strengthened working relationships. Non-profits have moved beyond working in silos within their organizations are becoming more engaged in broader community leadership. Small communities are experiencing more communication and co-operation amongst leaders and staff of community service agencies, family resource centres, food banks, early child development centres, seniors' centres, and youth centres. Improved coordination and co-operation was also a product of co-location initiatives that were still under development. In Golden, the Golden Loom Co-location Project was able to bring together seniors' groups who had not previously extensively engaged with each other to develop an Age-Friendly Communities Plan. As a result of the Golden Loom's work, non-profits started to overcome fears of making operational and structural changes and became involved in the Community Service Alignment Project[12] to make more efficient use of funding resources and improve services to clients. Co-location initiatives also have also become a rallying point for rural communities, the success of which has inspired community groups to pursue other projects in the community. The failure of some co-location initiatives, however, has also produced important impacts for their respective communities. In some small communities, there

[12] The Community Service Alignment Project consists of the Golden Community Resources Society, the Family Centre, the Women's Centre, and the Food Bank. These partner organizations have contracts with many ministries, including MCFD and the Ministry of Justice.

continues to be concerns about the decline of community services with recent closures of schools, daycare facilities, and other community organizations.

Moving Forward

For many small communities across BC, co-location or multi-purpose facilities are urgently needed in order to renew and retain infrastructure assets for local organizations. Stakeholders in this study talked about many lessons learned to support the development of other co-location initiatives in small communities. First, rural stakeholders need to be persistent and patient to endure in these types of long-term projects. Considerable time must be invested in research, public consultation, a shared vision, fundraising, design, and construction. Rural residents and community groups can be intimidated by the process and the need to engage with different levels of governments, funders, and other stakeholders. This requires patience and careful attention to nurture relationships and the capacity of rural stakeholders. With significant resources invested in these facilities, the process also needs to unfold methodologically and carefully in order to make appropriate decisions to support multiple uses and synergies within these facilities.

It takes time to develop trust amongst co-location partners. This relationship building process should be initiated prior to any significant referendum events. Relationships were stronger where community organizations had repeated opportunities to work with each other and with various levels of government. Stakeholders recommended starting with smaller investments in co-operation through joint workshops and projects, shared staffing, and shared equipment (Zeemering and Delabbio 2013). Rural stakeholders must be ready to be flexible and compromise on infrastructure and design features in order to maintain rural assets. Some people we spoke with even suggested having potential committee members complete a questionnaire prior to joining the project in order to better understand and match personalities on the project. Clear, viable expectations are needed to guide stakeholders throughout these collaborative endeavors. More time is also needed to generate a list of design features needed to support the functionality of multi-use spaces in these facilities.

Clear statements are also needed concerning the financial contributions of co-located tenants for shared staff and spaces. Shared contribution agreements for operating these facilities should not be worked out after tenants are operating in leased areas. In small communities, community members can also wear many different 'hats', resulting in a confused awareness of where different funding and benefits come from. The roles and responsibilities of those who are engaged in managing the spaces and operations of these multi-purpose facilities must be clear and documented in order to ensure that 'institutional memory' is not lost with turnover or out-migration in the community.

The advice and support provided by local and senior levels of government has varied across the infrastructure projects examined in this research. Local and senior levels of government have important roles to support relationship building and strategic planning for these complex infrastructure initiatives that will go a long way to strengthen the social and economic infrastructure in these small communities. Considerable experience is starting to emerge from the development of co-location or multi-purpose facilities in rural BC. With a number of infrastructure programs across various provincial and federal ministries, there is no central hub for rural stakeholders to learn about different models and processes that have been used to develop and operate these assets. There remains considerable confusion and understanding of ownership and user agreements, design features that can improve the functionality of shared and multi-purpose spaces, risks and liabilities, and protocols to guide the development, operations, and maintenance of these facilities. Workshops that engage rural stakeholders about these issues will go a long way to further strengthen the support and capacity of rural stakeholders to pursue similar shared infrastructure projects in the future. Posting agreement templates and best practices on-line are positive steps to support the early stages of planning for these projects, but are not sufficient to address some of the complex issues that can arise. Some provinces are working to deploy teams capable of facilitating and providing advice for municipalities who are pursuing service and infrastructure cost-sharing negotiations (Rural/Urban Cost-Sharing Task Force n.d.). Furthermore, given the limited tax base of many small communities, greater flexibility is needed to support financing arrangements. Short-term funding programs do not provide adequate time for communities to mobilize and engage stakeholders in these complex infrastructure projects. Such short-term funding programs can also interrupt the momentum for building relationships, planning, and mobilizing other contributing assets for these initiatives.

COMMUNITY SERVICE CO-OPERATIVES

Since the mid-nineteenth century, co-operatives have emerged across many sectors, providing a diverse range of benefits and services to members. While agricultural co-operatives have dominated the rural landscape in Canada, these forms of organizations have also widely emerged in retail, fishing, housing, non-profit, and even public services. In their research documenting the growth of co-operatives in Canada between 1955 to 2005, Quarter *et al*. (2012, 53) found that service co-operatives grew by 300% to 4,167 and even represented "the highest number of organizations within the co-operative sector, accounting for 73 per cent of the organizations responding to the Co-operatives Secretariat census of the sector". The presence and growth of co-operatives, and service co-operatives in particular, however, remain more concentrated in Ontario and Quebec.

Service leaders pursued service co-operatives as a response to government restructuring pressures. Through these new structures, non-profit organizations were able to strengthen local and regional networks of support, foster collaboration and learning, and strengthen the voice of small communities and maintain local control over services. Over time, collaboration produced opportunities to pursue joint purchasing agreements with a range of suppliers; to reduce operating costs through shared administration, equipment, software, and space; to share technical and other forms of expertise; to share staff and volunteer resources to deliver programs; and to enhance the overall viability of organizations.

Relationships

Some service co-ops were formed by organizations that had a history of working together through various community meetings, interagency groups, child and youth committees, referrals associated with employment and community service programs, and even through the use of Katimivik volunteers. While service co-ops were open to non-profit societies, care was taken to strategically identify partners that provided similar or complimentary supports (Lennie 2010). To foster co-operation, it was important to ensure that members understood the same language. Due to the time commitment involved to nurture the development of the co-op, service co-ops also looked to recruit new member organizations that had a full-time executive director. Some noted, however, that there was not a lot of co-operation and trust prior to developing their service co-op due to government restructuring and threats to programs. With large distances and concerns about winter travel, rurality also negatively impacted the ability of service co-ops to expand their membership further in rural regions.

Advice and Support

Service co-operatives can be very complex and resource intensive to nurture and develop. A key challenge for many rural stakeholders we spoke with, however, is that there are relatively few models, and especially rural models, of service co-operatives to learn from. Collectively, however, service providers drew upon a variety of resources to learn from other co-op initiatives, including Realize Co-op (formerly United Community Services Co-op), BC Co-operative Association, the Kootenay Boundary Community Services Co-op, the Central Interior Community Services Co-op, the Upper Columbia Co-op Council, MOSAIC, a member of the Fraser Works Co-operative, Lutherwood in Waterloo, Ontario, and co-operatives throughout Quebec.

Realize Co-op, formerly United Community Services Co-op, completed a shared services feasibility study for the non-profit sector with support from the Labour Market Partnership (Beachy *et al*. 2010). Through this work, they have provided information about the early stages involved in developing shared services. This has encouraged non-profit organizations to understand their challenges and opportunities; to assess their situation by understanding their competition, potential partners, costs and benefits, and risks and liabilities; to develop shared service organizational structures, policies, and protocols; to complete a feasibility study; to develop a shared services business plan; and ensure adequate resources are in place to implement the plan accordingly. They also share information about different shared service and co-op models that can be pursued.

Through the BC Co-op Association, there were also opportunities to participate in international co-op development programs that connected rural stakeholders with additional resources and information about the advantages of co-operatives; access to partnership manuals, toolkits, and financial fitness workshops; assistance reviewing bylaws, memorandum of understandings, and other documents; and sharing lessons about how to engage members and promote the co-op model to younger generations. Also, in BC, rural stakeholders can connect with UVIC's Centre for Co-operative and Community-Based Economy which has explored important topics such as co-ops and registered charitable status in BC (Blomfield 2002), and key issues facing social sector co-operatives (i.e. home care, health care, culture and immigration, etc.) (Bowman 2001; Panayotof-Schann 2009) (https://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cccbe) (last accessed on: January 5th, 2016).

Local Government

Interagency organizations and municipal social planning officers have helped to strengthen relationships between non-profit agencies and local government staff, often leading to the provision of additional advice and support for community development initiatives. Through local government staff, service co-ops were able to obtain assistance with zoning variances, as well as sponsorship and management of grants for infrastructure projects. Recently, however, many social planning positions have been eliminated in efforts to reduce municipal spending.

Provincial Government

As provincial policies increasingly move to encourage more collaboration and shared service models, most service co-ops experienced positive support from provincial government leaders and staff. A number of service co-ops have been involved with the British Columbia Community Social Services Innovation and Sustainability Roundtable to provide the province with advice about the advantages and disadvantages of using the co-op model as a mechanism to support shared service delivery. Following the RFP process, service co-ops also appreciated feedback and advice obtained through debriefings with provincial stakeholders about their RFPs and funding applications. With multiple co-op members involved in regional contracts, service co-ops connected with provincial contract managers to obtain clarity and consistent interpretation about contract details. Most of the service co-operatives are located in smaller regional centres that have ministry offices. This allows co-op members and co-op staff to have strong relationships and routine interaction with ministry resources. As service co-ops bid on provincial contracts, however, some experienced challenges working with provincial ministries who did not understand the co-op model. Some service co-ops have proactively met with provincial leaders and ministries in order to strengthen their awareness of co-op model within the service sector.

Federal Government

Some service co-ops also received positive federal support and encouragement to pursue new service arrangements that would allow non-profits to adopt more collaborative relationships in rural regions. Others, however, had limited advice or interaction with federal stakeholders. In these circumstances, communication with federal contacts focused on ensuring co-op members were meeting service delivery obligations contained in contracts.

Governance

Service co-ops were formed to provide larger governance structures that could support broader co-operation and synergies at the local and regional level, while allowing member agencies to retain their own identity and relationships within their communities. Once service co-ops were formed, member agencies appointed one of their volunteer board members to form the governing board of directors for the service co-op. Some co-ops have member agencies appoint both a board member and their executive director to the governing co-op board. There were also co-ops that took advantage of a provision in the Co-operative Association Act to appoint a community member-at-large to the board who could guide neutral decisions. Some co-ops avoid having executive directors represent member agencies on their co-op board in order to ensure the co-op's mandate and goals remain central to key decisions. The governance structures of the service co-operatives provide each member with one vote. With considerable range in the size (staff and budgets) of co-op members, this was viewed as a critical piece for smaller agencies that feared having less power and influence than larger members.

During the early stages of development, co-op boards focused on managing the physical and organizational structural development of the co-op. These spaces would then be managed by one of the member agencies or through a hired management company in order to allow the broader co-op to focus on delivering services. Service co-operatives are also guided through a range of ad-hoc committees. Some co-ops have an Executive Director Committee to share information about key issues across rural communities as well as to share information about agency initiatives. There are also routine tenant board meetings to address maintenance and infrastructure issues. Service co-ops have also strategically used their governance structures to advanced key issues in rural regions. The Kootenay Boundary Community Services Co-operative, for example, has a Communications and Advocacy Committee that advocates for the regional service sector. If childcare needs become a key issue, the committee will advocate for action through policy, funding, or program changes on the members' behalf.

With limited resources, service co-ops in small communities are challenged with engaging multiple governance teams of member agencies to address different pieces or projects. These sub-governance or ad-hoc committees that support integrated or joint programs are integral, however, for agencies to test co-operative working relationships and build trust before pursuing other joint or shared initiatives (Zeemering and Delabbio 2013). In response, board executives are structured to obtain representation from different agencies in various positions each year in order to share the workload of the co-op. Engaging some co-op members, however, was impeded by an agency's strong focus on a particular issue or topic area. In regionally-based co-ops, travel and time constraints meant that some participation was limited to phone / on-line meetings, e-mail, and providing feedback on documents. With limited engagement, some sub-committees have not been able to sustain momentum and have become inactive.

Service co-ops have confronted concerns that their governance structure would be one more layer of bureaucracy for member agencies to maneuver (Lennie 2010). Co-op management teams have responded by focusing on lean operations, at times reducing administration fees on regional initiatives in order to engage more members. Co-ops have also developed governance and operational protocols to build trust across agencies and staff over time. Standard financial protocols have co-signers on cheques, as well as designated individuals to co-approve direct deposits for clients and suppliers.

Turnover at the board level impacted the long-term integration of member organizations and the potential stability of the co-op. During the early phase of development, service co-ops worked hard to develop strong relationships and support amongst existing board members. As each member agency's boards changed, buy-in and support for the co-op became fragmented. There is a need to continually re-invest in educating new board members about the importance of engaging in service co-ops in order to foster greater synergies and efficiencies with other agencies.

The governance of service co-ops was further challenged by administrative and staff turnover and the need to send proxy staff to meetings that did not have the same historical knowledge, drive, or power of executive directors. Decision-making and strategic planning processes have also been time consuming and difficult to work through as each member has different ideas, mandates, program requirements, business models, and priorities (Lawn *et al*. 2014). In some cases, these challenges are exacerbated by the engagement of both non-profit and for-profit member agencies in the co-op. Negative relationships or network biases can also hinder decision-making processes.

Sharing Roles and Responsibilities

With limited staff resources, the executive directors of member agencies assumed many roles and responsibilities either individually as a result of having specific skills and expertise or through their selection to specific committees. Time and resources were invested in research; interviewing and recruiting potential partners, staff, and board members; understanding the challenges and potential threats facing each member agency; assessing the capacity and potential synergies that could be obtained from each member agency; assessing the strength and gaps of internal and external relationships of each organization; building relationships and trust across potential and existing co-op members; writing grants and RFPs; strategic planning; selecting and designing a site for the co-op facility; developing governance and decision-making processes; developing a communications strategy; drafting operational budgets; assessing government contracts that could be moved to better align with members' mandates; drafting human resource management plans; drafting protocols, policies, and regulations; drafting the co-op agreement; and registering the co-operative with the province.

Strategic Planning

During the strategic planning process, members would make strategic decisions about the scale and scope of their operations, both in terms of the services that they provide and in terms of the geographic area that they would serve. The service co-ops engaged in this study represent a diversity of both local and regionally-based co-ops. For regionally-based service co-ops, strategic planning meetings were rotated across the communities. Service co-ops revisit their strategic planning on an annual or biennial basis.

Strategic planning activities involved researching different co-op models; completing feasibility studies; developing a business plan; and developing policies, protocols, and regulations. Study groups were organized to discuss specific issues, such as coordination around contracts and RFPs; subcontracting; exploring the potential for administrative services such as payroll, taxes, and audit costs to be shared; exploring the potential for program staff to be shared; and exploring opportunities to scale up to purchase insurance, software programs, office equipment and supplies. Some stakeholders did not pursue opportunities for sharing financial services, preferring to maintain the relationships in place with their local auditors. Others expressed concerns about the co-op's ability to manage intricate payroll systems of all the member organizations.

Strategic planning for such shared service structures was a longer process than anticipated for many stakeholders (Grant *et al.* 2007). Time was needed to address philosophical differences, build consensus, develop an organizational structure, and adopt a language in the co-op agreement and policies that was comfortable for everyone. Many underestimated the time commitment and complexity associated with developing a co-operative while maintaining other organizational structures. With high workloads and limited resources, some agencies left the co-op because of this time commitment.

Service co-ops also needed to reconcile different interests, values, and strategic directions that were being advocated by member organizations. Member agencies in smaller and more remote communities, for example, had a greater interest in transportation programs. Participants noted that some members thought the goal of for-profit service co-ops was to market co-op accounting services to a broader base of community organizations in order to generate a profit back to members. Others felt that the strategic goal of the service co-op was to support the development of social service agencies.

Strategic planning became more complicated as co-op members found themselves constantly responding to new announcements of changes in government policy directions, service reviews, funding cuts, program changes, and other forms of rapid restructuring in the service sector. As a part of strategic planning, service co-ops faced challenges defining, designing, and effectively communicating the benefits of the co-op to members. This was particularly problematic for service co-ops that had underdeveloped collaborative structures during this early period, and so many of the benefits promoted were too focused on mutual support that could easily be obtained outside the co-op.

There were challenges nurturing collaborative synergies across member organizations that had different mandates, capacities, and scope of operations. Service co-ops consist of organizations that focus on specific issues, such as family violence or youth programs, but also engage multi-service agencies that have broader mandates both in terms of the services that they provide and in terms of the geographic area and types of rural communities that they serve. Another concern was that smaller organizations[13] had fewer budget resources and more limited capacity that, at times, led to inconsistent participation in co-op initiatives and decision-making processes. There were examples, however, of small organizations that engaged more in their co-op because of their limited resources. Despite initiatives to scale up and collectively pursue government contracts that could be subcontracted out to member organizations, some members remained focused on preserving the independence of their organization and feared actions that would collapse the collective group into one super organization or co-operative.

Protocols

During the early stages of development, service co-operatives created several protocols to guide the operations and interactions of member agencies. To start, dispute resolution and conflict of interest protocols were put in place. These protocols were commonly required in order to obtain provincial government contracts. Dispute resolution protocols are designed to address conflicts amongst the member agencies and between any member and external clients of the co-op. Within the co-op, conflict resolution protocols are also designed to address disputes at three levels: staff, executive directors, and board members. Through these conflict resolution protocols, grievances are resolved through tenant meetings, board meetings, meetings with executive directors, or meetings with the building owner depending on the

[13] Smaller organizations generally had a budget of $500,000 or less. Larger organizations in small communities had annual operating budgets that exceeded $1 million.

nature of the issue. Veto protocols have also been put in place to guide decision-making processes. On occasion, veto protocols have been used due to board concerns about the quality and timeliness of financial information presented by co-op members. Other protocols, such as whistle blower protocols, confidentiality agreements, and code of ethics, have been put in place to guide staff and program operations. Despite concerns about competition, however, there were no discussions about data sharing agreements (Torres *et al*. 2014).

Reciprocity principles and protocols were put in place to guide the engagement and contributions provided by co-op members. Such acts of reciprocity have ranged from writing letters of support to providing staff coverage to sharing policy manuals (Carter 2010). While there was a clear recognition that agency contributions will vary at different times, there were expectations that those benefits will be realized over time.

For regionally based service co-operatives, specific policies were also developed around the delivery of regional services. There were non-compete protocols to guide the development of grant and RFP applications. Under such protocols, members are expected to share potential opportunities with the broader co-op. If there is potential for the opportunity to benefit more than one community, then the service co-operative would develop a bid instead of an individual organization. Service contracts would then be subcontracted out to members. Otherwise, a lead agency would pursue a funding or revenue opportunity based on how that opportunity fits with the mandate, values, location or service area, and capacity of that organization. This allowed member agencies to engage in a constructive dialogue about their needs, concerns, strategic directions, and proposed points of co-operation. If members are not able to come to terms with who should lead an application, then those parties follow a broader dispute resolution process guided by a vote or by a third party mediator from the co-op. These mediators are drawn from within the co-op; however, if the dispute is not resolved internally, protocols are in place to obtain an outside mediator. None of the service co-operatives have ever needed to hire an external mediator to resolve any disputes.

Protocols have also been put in place to guide the termination of co-op memberships. If a member chooses to leave, timelines are typically in place to guide the amount of notice needed to terminate the membership (typically one year). These extended timelines strengthen the stability of service co-operatives that often have many organizations engaged in complex government contracts and community relationships. In rare circumstances, some co-ops lost members due to philosophical differences and concerns about non-compete agreements. In these cases, the co-ops refunded their shares. Some participants noted, however, that co-op memberships could be terminated through a simple formal letter indicating that they would not renew their membership. Despite these issues, there was a general sense that termination protocols are rarely used due to the pressures created from service restructuring.

Changes in board membership amongst individual organizations also resulted in concerns for service co-ops when board members were not familiar or supportive of the co-op model. Formal contracts have been used to prevent new board members from opting out of the co-op within the first few months.

Risk and Liability

As service co-ops became operational, there are a number of risk and liability issues that needed to be addressed. By using shared staff to provide coverage and to access government software and public data, there is a need to ensure that staff have their security clearance at each location. In some cases, staff are required to complete their security clearance and sign confidentiality agreements on an annual basis in order to meet the terms of government contracts. Service co-ops are using reception areas to monitor visitor and client traffic in order to address potential safety and security concerns.

Financial Risk

Service co-ops engaged in discussions about perceived financial and debt risks associated with joining the co-op. The most significant financial risk concerned the initial investment that was needed to join the co-op. Annual membership fees were kept low in order to engage smaller organizations. In some cases, membership fees were waived for non-profits that were significantly impacted by funding cuts. Financial risks were also mitigated by co-ops who were able to acquire low cost or rent free space.

While members worked together to draft budgets for RFPs, there were times when some members were not able to participate in those discussions. This posed a financial risk to co-ops, prompting a need to meet with absent organizations afterwards to ensure all members were working within the budget. After being awarded government service contracts, there are risks associated with limited or fluctuating staff contributions provided by member agencies (Johns *et al.* 2007). This can jeopardize the contract renewal for other co-op members. While joint contracts allow co-op members to share risks, it can limit their independence and flexibility to respond to emerging needs for both their organization and their clients.

There were also open discussions about perceived benefits and risks that could impact the operations of these organizations. Some of the co-operatives adopted a for-profit structure, so discussions were needed to understand the risks that could impact the ability of non-profits to maintain their charity status. Questions were also posed about the risk of sharing and losing staff (i.e. accounting personnel). These risks were associated with the loss or failure to secure back-up files, prompting a need to reconstruct an agency's books. Service co-ops have responded by ensuring directors and liability insurance, as well as errors and omissions insurance, are in place. There were also discussions that weighed financial investment risks with efficiencies that could be gained through sharing resources across organizations. Executive directors also needed to weigh risks that could impact the assets and activities of their respective non-profit entities. Furthermore, members were concerned about the debt risk and collapse of infrastructure if the co-op failed, thereby threatening the credibility of each organization.

Funding

Being located in smaller communities has influenced the financial resources available to service co-ops. Government funding formulas are based on population counts. As a result of industrial restructuring, many small towns have a limited tax base to provide significant support for service sector initiatives. These financial pressures, however, only accentuate the need for service co-op models in rural areas.

Service co-operatives adopted a diverse funding strategy to support their development. To start, co-op members were required to purchase co-op shares and pay annual membership fees. Co-op shares were based on the annual operating budget of member agencies. Annual membership fees ranged from $20 to $250 per year. In the case of the Fraser Valley Employment and Community Services Co-op, each partner also contributed an investment of $25,000 in seed money to support its development. The contribution of shares, seed money, and grants was necessary to develop office space and purchase office equipment and supplies. With low membership fees, co-ops heavily rely on service contracts to supplement administrative support to members. Limited funding, however, has been available to support co-op infrastructure and shared programs, such as video conferencing infrastructure and joint training. Limited funds delayed the ability of service co-ops to find adequate office space and hire staff. While some co-ops drew upon shares and annual membership fees to address early development activities, there were also challenges with accessing these revenues. Some co-op members thought that the shares would be set aside as a term deposit representing their commitment to the co-op that could be obtained if they pulled out of the co-op. This prompted some co-op members to provide additional seed capital and gift donations to support early payroll needs and related development activities. There needs to be a clear understanding about the circumstances when co-op shares will be used.

Local Government

Service co-ops received financial support from local governments through grant-in-aids, tax exemptions, and special lease arrangements for co-ops and member agencies.

Provincial Government

Some service co-ops received provincial seed funding and support through the Ministry of Children and Family Development and through the Labour Market Partnership grant program administered through the Vancouver Foundation. Seed funding, however, was insufficient to support the early stages of development that were often time consuming and complex, resulting in many executive directors and board members doing co-op tasks off the side of their desks. One exception includes the Kootenay Boundary Community Services Co-operative that secured funding from the Ministry of Children and Family Development and the Columbia Basin Trust to build relationships and support their planning and development. This co-op was funded as one of the pilot projects associated with MCFD's Community Social Services Innovation and Sustainability Roundtable.

Eligibility

Unlike their members, service co-ops themselves are not eligible for a number of grants, including those offered, for example, through the BC Gaming Commission. As a for-profit organization, one service co-op was unable to pursue funding to create a volunteer bureau despite the program's intentions to service non-profit, charitable organizations.

Procurement

Some service co-ops experienced challenges throughout the RFP process. Agencies needed to explain why they chose to pursue the RFP through a co-op model versus a partnership approach. By comparison, however, service co-ops are ideally structured to respond to provincial policies requiring a portion of contract funds to flow through sub-contracted agencies.

Flexibility

Service co-ops provided non-profit agencies with power to negotiate greater flexibility with how funding cuts would be implemented. As new contract models were mobilized by provincial ministries, service co-operatives used their advantage as a larger collective to negotiate language and service deliverables. However, there was a sense that provincial ministries do not recognize the cost of running complex service models with several multi-service agencies from several small communities. Several advocated for more support and flexibility to address administrative costs. Provincial ministries also do not always address mileage issues within contracts, despite the large rural regions that are often served by these organizations, as well as provincial interests to encourage collaboration at the local and regional level.

Instead of being prescripted to deliver specific programs or supports, co-op members advocated for more flexible contract language in order to develop programs that would meet the ministry goals and objectives while supporting innovative and flexible approaches to programs. It was equally important to incorporate flexible contract language in order to allow co-op member to leverage resources to deliver services between agencies and not just within one particular organization. A final issue with provincial contracts concerns limited flexibility to transfer unused funds to the following fiscal year. Greater flexibility with unused funds would foster greater coordination within service co-op networks.

Reporting

Service co-ops face unique challenges with reporting on service contracts. Reporting quickly becomes more complex due to the different organizational structures and operations deployed by each co-op member involved in delivering contracted supports. These challenges are compounded by the absence of a standard reporting process as different reporting procedures and databases are used by each ministry. Reporting templates, procedures, and timelines are not designed to reflect the engagement of these new service models or arrangements. Service co-ops have advocated for a single government database to streamline reporting procedures for multi-service and multi-organizational arrangements.

Federal Government

Service co-operatives received federal funding through HRSDC and co-op innovation funding, as well as through the Status of Women Canada (policy research), Health Canada (HIV / AIDS prevention program), Department of Justice (Safe Kids and Youth Coordinated Response), and CEDNet (Community Development Initiative). Most of the funding, however, was provided for co-op members to deliver service contracts rather than strategic funding to support the development of co-ops themselves. Exceptions included short-term funding through HRSDC to examine human resource strategies for organizations such as co-ops. Federal resources are no longer available to support the early stages of development for service co-operatives. These resources, however, are needed to encourage non-profits to develop co-op relationships and to develop organizational structures that focus on streamlining and sharing administrative and operational resources. Some non-profits have successfully negotiated to allocate savings from federal contracts to partially support some of the co-ops administration and staff.

Flexibility

Some felt the federal government demonstrated greater flexibility to fund and support an abstract regional co-op model where members were not all tied to one building in one location. The federal government was also credited with providing contract flexibility to address mileage costs for co-op members that served and expanded into different rural areas.

RFP Processes

However, federal RFP processes provide short timeframes that are not conducive to developing collaborative partnerships to improve the quality and delivery of services in small communities. The contracts themselves rarely recognize the time and administrative and staff resources that are required to support shared service delivery models. Furthermore, short-term contracts (i.e. one year or less) create too much competition before, during, and after the contract is completed. Longer contracts would not only provide greater stability for programs and operations, but would also be more conducive to building effective collaborative relationships. Senior government contracts should also contain language that talks about collaborative approaches within the contract.

Other Sources of Funding

Co-ops also received support through other non-profits, trusts, and foundations including the Columbia Basin Trust, the Queen Alexandra Foundation (now the Children's Health Foundation of Vancouver Island), CCEDNet, and Carleton University's Community Economic Development Technical Assistance Program[14] in order to support the development of the co-op. In fact, the Queen Alexandra Foundation would eventually become owners of the Sooke CASA building and would play an important role to pursue architectural advice in order to improve the functionality of the shared facility. Service co-ops also relied on revenue generated from offering bookkeeping and related administrative supports to other community organizations. Opportunities were taken to generate revenue by providing a lease to co-op members or through room rentals to other community groups. Co-op members did pursue opportunities to generate extra revenue on their own through various social enterprises, such as operating daycares, after-school programs, and job crews[15]. In an effort to sustain these organizations, some co-op members are also creating for-profit subsidiary companies to support their engagement in economic and employment programs through the co-op.

Financial Impacts

While the savings obtained by engaging in some service co-ops were offset by reduced government funding, they enabled others to maintain stability and to become flexible and innovative. Developing new programs and services requires upfront investments that could be paid for through the savings of operating in the service co-op. Through service co-operatives, agencies have been able to meet government requirements for working with other organizations and sub-contractors in order to secure funding. Co-op members have also been able to leverage in-kind support provided by service co-ops, such as assistance with promotion and registration for training and other events, in order to secure more financial support in these communities.

Co-location in for-profit co-op facilities was perceived to be more costly for non-profits who previously benefitted from property exemption for their location. It was a change that was not budgeted for by impacted organizations. Others noted that while their costs in new facilities increased, the quality of their space and supports also increased; thereby, providing an important trade-off.

Human Resources

During the early stages of development, a number of service co-operatives completed a human resource strategy to support the integration or sharing of staff resources. Some co-operatives hired an executive director or manager to support the co-op development process and daily operations. With limited financial resources, some service co-ops were only able to hire a part-time manager to oversee administrative tasks, such as accounting, payroll, business services, and partnership development. Other co-ops distributed these management tasks amongst the executive directors of member agencies.

As service co-ops moved into operations, there were several key human resource issues that needed to be addressed. First, there was a need to examine wage parity. Service leaders realized that without confronting this task, they would be putting staff together that would quickly become aware of different pay scales and benefits, resulting in unintentional staff poaching as individuals moved from lower to higher paid agencies within the co-op. As a part of its strategic plan, for example, the Central Interior Community Services Co-operative assessed all roles and functions of staff and completed a wage grid

[14] The Community Economic Development Technical Assistance Program (CEDTAP) was a non-profit granting agency that provided funding to strengthen community economic development in community-based organizations. It was founded in 1997 by the JW McConnell Family Foundation and Carleton University in response to economic and social pressures being experienced in communities. Grants were allocated from 2001 to 2006 (http://carleton.ca/3ci/projects-and-initiatives/past-projects/community-economic-development-technical-assistance-program-cedtap) (last accessed January 5th, 2016).

[15] A job crew provides fee-for-service work in order to support employment opportunities for adults with development delays.

and template for job descriptions and competencies in order to address wage disparity issues. Despite these efforts, the co-op was not able to standardize the wage grid completely across union and non-unionized member agencies. These service co-operatives, however, did not encounter union related concerns since most were not sharing program employees.

There have been challenges working with different personalities. Member agencies can become very protective and concerned about pooling their finance and administrative staff. Concerns can be raised about bookkeepers viewing other agency's books. Co-ops are structured with multiple layers of volunteering that are producing new challenges to recruit board members for non-profit agencies. Directors are not only asked to volunteer as a board member for an individual non-profit agency, but to also represent that agency on the board for the co-op. It continues to be difficult to recruit board treasurers due to the work involved. The workload of executive directors can also be challenged by the need to engage in multiple governance and ad-hoc committees to support various initiatives. Co-ops are finding it increasingly difficult for individual organizations to deliver programs in multiple communities, and therefore, are looking for other types of human resources, such as mobilizing the skills of young retired professionals and other volunteers, to support their regional mandates. The challenge is that many small communities do not have volunteer centres to connect with these additional resources.

Capacity

One of the key benefits of service co-ops has been their ability to reduce feelings of professional isolation in rural regions. Service co-ops allowed non-profits to scale up in order to enhance their capacity and more efficiently use their resources. Some service providers warned, however, that being located in a small community influenced the capacity to support co-op maintenance and operations. Service co-ops did not always have the knowledge and capacity needed and had to obtain outside assistance to support their development and operations. Where possible, consultants and staff have been hired on a short-term or part-time basis to support projects and operations. In terms of access to trades workers and professionals, service co-ops in rural regions have struggled to connect with professional architectural advice to support infrastructure projects, as well as technology support for operations.

Administration

Shared administrative and financial staff has provided greater stability for day-to-day operations. Through their administrative support, service co-ops are able to provide members with support for communicating with all levels of government, writing grants, working through procurement processes, processing local government applications for property tax breaks, submitting invoices to senior levels of government, completing income tax returns, and reporting with government agencies such as Workers' Compensation Board. This has provided executive directors and staff with more time to focus on delivering needed supports in these small communities. Through shared administrative staff, however, service agencies in small communities are able to reduce costs for reception, finance, and administration.

Previously, individual organizations could only afford to have one person attend to finances and payroll. If staff were absent, the executive director's workload increased or the processing of finances and payroll was delayed or stopped. Shared administrative and financial staff has strengthened the stability and coverage of these aspects of operations. In some cases, shared staff positions are created in the service co-op as a separate entity from member organizations. In other cases, co-ops purchase services (i.e. reception) from one of its member organizations with the costs built into the lease agreement.

Engaging in service co-operatives has also enhanced the ability of smaller organizations in rural regions to afford professional expertise, such as legal advice and support from a certified general accountant.

With stronger financial resources available collectively to the service co-op, some have been able to do cost accounting in order to better understand their revenue flows and cost out programs and services.

After reflecting, some co-op members, however, did not feel that they acquired any financial savings by sharing administrative and financial resources through the co-op. Some groups needed to backfill responsibilities provided by former bookkeepers that were no longer provided by centralized financial staff. Others felt that savings from using shared financial staff were negated by the extra hours that executive directors spent attending to co-op business. Concerns were also raised about the third party status that co-op staff are assigned as they attempt to pay bills on behalf of their clients – co-op members. In these circumstances, co-op staff must obtain third-party authorization to access member accounts for various utilities and billing companies.

Shared Program Staff

After investing time to develop processes for secondment, service co-operatives have shared program staff to provide coverage for those who are away. For example, some organizations have shared workers to deliver youth programs or support fundraising events. Organizations also benefitted by being able to expand their staff as a result of the savings acquired by sharing other staff through the co-op.

Some staff found it difficult to adjust to changes in philosophy and organizational culture (Blue-Howells *et al*. 2008; Burke-Robertson 2002; Sloper 2004). Nurturing staff buy-in was an important piece of the early stages of development. A co-op newsletter and routine reports were produced to maintain communication amongst the staff of all member agencies.

Joint Recruitment and Training

Service co-op members also seized opportunities for joint recruitment and training on topics such as finance and administration, core training (i.e. first aid, occupational health and safety, conflict resolution, cultural sensitivity training), employment services, or different types of therapy. In addition to sharing job descriptions, service co-ops are using workshops and meetings to share best practices. By scaling up, members were able to access more affordable training opportunities for their staff.

In essence, the co-op becomes a tool to pool potential training participants. The Kootenay Boundary Community Services Co-operative, for example, started the REACH (Resource, Education, and Consultation Hub) Program, a capacity development program that provides consulting and training to its members for a reduced fee; although, other non-profits could access training provided through the program at a regular cost. This capacity development program benefitted from seed funding provided by the Columbia Basin Trust to support its development. Unfortunately, after five years, the co-op has not been able to secure the financial resources needed to sustain the program over time and is in the process of closing the program. Other co-ops have used cross training (Stein *et al*. 2011) in order to strengthen coverage for administrative and program needs.

Orientation

Smart service initiatives can take years to fully develop. During this time, there can be considerable turnover amongst key staff and leaders associated with engaged organizations. Few organizations, however, provided an orientation to new staff and leaders about service co-op initiatives. In some cases, there were no references to service co-ops during the job interview for new staff and leaders of member organizations. Instead, new staff and leaders found themselves doing their own research. There is a clear need to develop stronger job descriptions and orientations for new staff of both the service co-op and the individual member organizations. Some orientation tools that were used included debriefing meetings with former leaders, attending co-op meetings, reviewing local newspaper stories, reviewing co-op histories, and webinars.

Benefit Plans

Furthermore, some service agencies have pursued shared benefit plans. This has been particularly beneficial for smaller co-op members who previously had no benefit package for their employees. There are cases, however, where larger, unionized organizations have retained their own benefit plans and employee assistance program.

Infrastructure

Service co-operatives in this study pursued very different location models, including those that were:

- Based in a single community (Central Interior Community Services Co-operative, Sooke CASA);
- Co-located in two locations (Fraser Valley Employment and Support Services Co-operative); and
- Regionally engaged with a central office location (Kootenay Boundary Community Services Co-operative, Shuswap Community Resources Co-operative).

The Fraser Valley Employment and Support Services Co-operative pursued co-location with organizations that could compliment their employment supports by offering clients wrap-around services such as access to a food bank, counselling, and other social supports. Some co-ops slowly developed their space over time, starting first by operating in office space provided by a co-op member. The Central Interior Community Services Co-operative was able to use the building assets of the Cariboo-Chilcotin Child and Development Centre to locate three co-op members in their two-story office building. The lease is provided to co-op members below market cost. This enabled member agencies to reduce operational costs and eliminate the duplication of services. In regionally-based service co-operatives, organizations have provided in-kind space to allow other members to deliver programs in their community at no cost.

There were a number of design issues that needed to be addressed for co-ops. These design issues were greatly dependent upon the different tasks and services provided by both the co-op and any co-located members. By choosing co-location, accessibility issues needed to be addressed in order to meet compliances contained within RFPs. Co-op facilities were designed to provide dedicated space for member agencies, as well as common spaces, such as staff rooms, a shared kitchen, shared resource / training rooms, a shared board room, and public washrooms. For organizations that deliver youth, mental health, women's safety, and other resource programs, there were concerns about client cross-overs with kids, as well as concerns about safety and security issues (Lawn *et al.* 2014). This was addressed by installing separate entrances and enhanced security. Some service co-operatives also found it challenging to design space as organizations were determined to maintain the individual integrity of their organization. There were fears about collapsing organizations in co-located facilities. Early conversations were needed to design space that strengthened coordination while maintaining the integrity and independence of organizations. Furthermore, there is limited space to address all of the administrative, program, and storage needs of service co-ops in small communities. This has prompted the need to use storage space off-site.

Access to Space

Shared or common spaces in service co-ops have also been accessible to other community groups for meetings or training events. Community organizations typically book space through a central reception area or by contacting the lead service agency that acts as the primary building owner. In the case of the Sooke CASA, tenant organizations can sponsor other community groups to use shared / common spaces. In their reciprocal agreement, the community groups may assist tenant organizations to deliver programs such as Santa sacks at Christmas or Mother's Day packages for clients. If community groups are using the space after hours, the sponsoring organization must have a member on-site.

Maintenance

Janitorial and maintenance costs were addressed through two key approaches. Based on a triple-net approach, janitorial and maintenance costs have been redistributed to co-op members based on occupancy. A second approach involved transitioning to all-inclusive rents in order to simplify the management of these costs and enhance the stability of costs for co-op members. This required working with a real estate agent to develop a template to specify and simplify monthly janitorial and maintenance costs associated with lease agreements. While few service leaders in this study observed savings in energy or maintenance costs, some smaller agencies were able to use the co-op's maintenance needs as an opportunity to generate extra revenue or contain these types of rising costs for their organization by obtaining the maintenance contract for the facility.

Collaboration

Service co-operatives are providing small communities and rural regions with stable structures to support and strengthen collaboration and coordination of services. By engaging in a service co-operative, partnerships have become a routine part of the operations of smaller service agencies. Co-ops have used meetings, forums, and lunch events to support routine conversations about funding opportunities and coordination of services. Service agencies are reaching out and using the supports provided by other co-op members to address their clients' needs. These have ranged from food box programs to legal advocate supports that provide clients with better integrated and wrap around supports.

Collaboration has not always come naturally, however, and must be purposefully and continually nurtured given the turnover of executive directors and staff across member agencies. Member agencies have also found the points of collaboration limited by the different populations served across organizations, concerns about maintaining confidentiality, different accreditation processes for different sectors and categories of workers, auditing requirements, and different regulations guiding the range of services delivered. Some co-op members have continued to operate in silos, fed by ongoing concerns about competition amongst the members.

Sharing Information

One of the most prominent benefits noted was the ability of co-op members to share information about their programs and activities, to share job descriptions and human resource strategies, and to share policies, such as constitutions and bylaws, transportation policies, or social media policies, that can enhance their operations collectively and make wiser use of limited resources. Some felt that as trust was built over time, members felt more open and comfortable to discuss the details and management of contracts with government ministries. Service co-operatives have also developed information management tools, such as websites and newsletters, to support the sharing of information.

Networks

Organizations leveraged their co-op relationships to expand their networks, obtain letters of support for RFPs, strengthen mutual peer supports, and to mentor each other through issues emerging in these communities. By strengthening these relationships, some organizations have arranged to have other executive directors to provide coverage for their organization when needed. By routinely sharing information, co-op members feel comfortable to represent other members at tables or meetings they are unable to attend. Scaling up to be part of a larger network has also empowered organizations in smaller communities to feel that their voices are heard by government (Rural/Urban Cost-Sharing Task Force n.d.). Due to their scaled up capacity, service co-operatives have the potential for brokering relationships and strengthening networking mechanisms. The Shuswap Community Resources Co-operative, for example, has been playing an important role to annually support Together Shuswap, a gathering of Aboriginal bands, various government agencies, and other service providers. This workshop event brings stakeholders together to engage in regional social planning. Furthermore, some service co-operatives have been able to leverage their membership in other networks to improve their members' access to benefit and insurance plans available through the Federation of Community Services of BC.

Shared Programs

Shared programs are one example of the increased coordination supported through service co-ops. The Central Interior Community Services Co-operative delivered shared supports by forming an Integrated Youth Services Team to manage the youth service contracts they had received. The Kootenay Boundary Community Services Co-operative delivers a number of shared programs throughout the region, including the Early Years Program, the REACH Program, the Community Action Plan for Children, and the SKY Project (Safe Kids and Youth Coordinated Response). To support this regional approach to delivering services, co-op members work together and provide office space for youth workers in their communities.

Shared Equipment and Services

Through service co-ops, agencies have saved costs on marketing and communication by purchasing shared advertising; producing joint brochures in larger, and more cost effective, blocks; by producing one newsletter for the co-op; by using a pooled cell phone plan; by improving their technology infrastructure and upgrading their server capacity; by purchasing accounting software programs (i.e. Simply Accounting) through the co-op and prorating the costs for members; by using a shared website, and by using shared information management systems. Organizations are also able to access shared equipment such as photocopiers and printers.

Some service co-operatives, however, have not explored options for joint purchasing because the member agencies operate in different buildings and communities across rural regions. Some agencies, instead, feel that there is an advantage to using the provincial government's purchasing department. Another goal that has not been achieved by all service co-ops in rural regions is the development of transportation pools or shared vehicle fleets.

With mandates to serve non-profit groups, concerns were also expressed about a for-profit co-op's inability to qualify for TechSoup, which provides access to commercial software (i.e. Microsoft Office, virus protection) at reduced prices for non-profit organizations. Some co-ops have not pursued shared marketing resources or website supports as they obtain such supports through national affiliates. Moving forward, some of these challenges may be addressed through the work of the cross-ministerial Sustainability Roundtable that is examining innovative models of social service delivery, including tools such as common databases, regional databases, and other opportunities for gathering and analyzing data. Underdeveloped technology infrastructure in some smaller and remote communities has also impeded the ability of co-ops to use technology to improve communication and collaborative working relationships across co-op members.

Time and Distance

Time continues to be a limiting factor to strengthen collaboration. Some co-op agreements specific the number of hours that each executive director is expected to contribute to the co-op's development each month. Distance also continues to influence collaboration within regional service co-ops by raising travel costs and time for meetings (Blackburn 2014). Some co-op members routinely travel 2 hours to attend meetings. The distance that separates members engaged in regional service co-operatives means that some organizations do not attend meetings as regularly as others. It also means that members who are located in close proximity or the same location have more opportunities for sharing information and resources that can strengthen co-operation. While technology has helped to overcome some of these distance barriers, many service leaders feel that face-to-face meetings are still needed to build relationships that are so instrumental to the foundation of what co-ops are about. Regional service co-operatives have worked to address these issues by rotating meetings around the region. Co-op staff also visit rural communities to obtain a better sense of the issues and needs in each place. Service leaders admit that co-ops can sometimes forget about outlying communities in rural regions. Similar patterns are observed, however, with Realize Co-op where many meetings and supports are coastal-based.

Policies

Being located in a small community or rural region can also influence service co-op initiatives due to the distance between the co-ops and key ministry gatekeepers and policy makers. Distance makes it difficult to develop strong working relationships with government staff and to understand ongoing changes with processes and regulations associated with contracts and programs. While co-op members felt that frontline workers located in local or regional ministry offices had a good understanding of how rurality shapes the operations of service co-ops, there was a sense that provincial cabinet ministers and ministry staff located further away from rural regions failed to understand the diversity and needs of smaller communities. In particular, there were concerns that key policy makers failed to understand the distances that clients and service providers must travel across rural regions and the impact that these distances have on budgets, recruitment and retention processes, outreach supports, and safety during winter travel. This disconnect is further accentuated by the limited awareness of Broadband deficiencies that continue to exist in rural regions. Furthermore, there is a lot of uncertainty and confusion about how policies and regulations, such as the Co-op Act, uniquely impact social service co-ops that consist of non-profit organizations versus other types of co-ops that are typically composed of private enterprises. The Co-op Act needs to be revised to better communicate and reflect the unique differences between business and social service co-operatives.

Community Impact

Service co-operatives have produced many positive impacts in the small communities that they serve. Co-ops have enabled communities to improve and retain consistent services. Service co-ops have provided rural communities with the structure to be flexible and adaptable to emerging pressures and opportunities. Duplication of supports has been reduced over time. Service co-ops are providing residents with broader and streamlined access to supports as clients are quickly introduced to services provided by other co-op members who are co-located in their facility (Phillips 2012). Co-ops that have co-located members are also offering convenient one-stop shop for residents who may have limited resources and limited access to transportation. By reducing the need to refer clients to multiple locations, participants suggested that clients were more likely to remain engaged with supports (Williams *et al*. 2006). Through regional co-ops, community organizations and residents are also exposed to more resources as co-op members talk about other member organizations that are now delivering services, such as family law outreach, in their community.

There are concerns, however, that the service co-ops are not broadly known, thereby potentially impacting the level of support they may garner across the community. Instead, residents continue to know more about the individual agencies. This is because the co-op operates behind the scenes. Residents may not be aware that they are benefitting from contracts awarded to co-ops that are then sub-contracted to member service agencies in small communities. The business of the co-op is to support member organizations so they can focus on delivering services.

Service co-ops can also provide important timely supports to other community groups in need. For example, the Shuswap Community Resources Co-operative was able to provide bookkeeping and payroll services when one local agency suddenly lost their bookkeeper. The strength in the co-op's support was further grounded in their understanding of the bookkeeping needs and operations of social agencies.

Co-ops have provided structures to support collaborative relationships amongst member agencies. The co-operation nurtured through the co-op has provided a greater sense of comradery and mutual support amongst member agencies. By being grounded in the communities and regions that they serve, co-ops have also played a broader leadership role by serving on local committees to address issues such as community health, business improvement, or housing. They have also sponsored local and regional events to foster broader community visioning and co-operation.

Moving Forward

Service leaders pursued service co-operatives as a response to government restructuring pressures in order to enhance the viability of organizations. By scaling up, service co-operatives provided rural organizations with greater visibility within their communities and equipped them with a greater voice for engaging with senior government stakeholders. Service co-operatives, however, can be very time-consuming, complex and resource intensive structures to develop and maintain. Collaboration must be purposefully and continually nurtured given the turnover amongst staff and distance between some member agencies in rural regions. Service co-operatives also need to develop stronger orientation programs for new staff and board members of the co-op itself and for their member agencies.

Similar to co-location or multi-purpose initiatives, there is an underdeveloped knowledge base about the different types of models, agreements, protocols, policies and regulations that need to be considered for these types of shared service arrangements. A greater understanding is also needed about better design models for co-op facilities that can address the unique needs of clients and non-profit organizations, while maximizing the functionality of shared space and service arrangements. Advice and resources from local and senior levels of government varied as non-profits looked to develop the physical and organizational structures of these co-ops. At the local government level, a reinvestment in social planners would help to strengthen the support needed to guide these endeavors.

RFP processes provide short timeframes that are not conducive to developing collaborative partnerships. There is a greater need for provincial and federal levels of government to recognize the time and administrative resources that are required to support shared service delivery models. Longer contracts would also provide greater stability for co-op operations and effective collaborative relationships. Through the Community Social Services Innovation and Sustainability Roundtable, the provincial government is working to strengthen its understanding of new service arrangements in order to strengthen information management systems and common databases.

At the provincial and federal level, however, there is a limited understanding of these new service models, which only further undermines the capacity of senior levels of government to develop appropriate advice, funding programs, and reporting processes for these initiatives. There is a need to standardize senior government reporting processes as different reporting procedures and databases are used by each ministry. Short-term funding provided through various provincial and federal programs has been insufficient to support the early stages of development that were often time consuming and complex. Despite investments made in educational, health, recreational, and other forms of municipal infrastructure, there is also a lack of infrastructure programs to support investments in a stronger social service and co-op sector through co-location initiatives. Furthermore, there is a lot of uncertainty and confusion about how policies and regulations uniquely impact social service co-ops. There are a number of acts and regulations that need to be revised to better communicate and reflect the unique needs and differences of social service co-operative structures and operations.

ONE-STOP SHOPS / MULTI-SERVICE AGENCIES

One-stop shops or portals are being increasingly integrated in public sector policies and public sector government agencies across Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, and Australia (Blackburn 2014; Champion and Bonoli 2011). For example, in Canada, Service New Brunswick[16], the Government of Alberta, and Service BC have increasingly centralized supports in one-stop shop gateways in urban and rural regions (Blackburn 2014; Howard 2014). In this study, service leaders across rural BC have strategically developed one-stop shops or multi-service agencies in order to address service gaps, to streamline access points for clients, and to diversify funding sources and contracts in order to strengthen the resiliency of rural organizations (Evans and Grantham n.d.).

Advice and Support

Multi-service agencies face a number of challenges to strategic growth and development in rural regions. Despite concerns that there are no network hubs for one-stop shops or multi-service organizations, these non-profits have used a range of resources to guide the development and operations of their organization, including the Federation of Community Social Services of BC, REACH Child and Youth Development Society, the Northern Executive Director Network (northern BC), the BC CEO Network, program hubs through various ministries, local interagency groups, and other non-profits within rural regions. Rural agencies have also connected with provincial organizations, such as Inclusion BC and EVA BC, in order to share knowledge and obtain mutual peer support from organizations providing similar supports. An important limitation, however, is that many provincial networks focus on a specific area of need and often engage many single-service organizations. The Federation of Community Social Services of BC advocates for the needs of multi-service agencies; although, many members focus on family programs and do not always provide the same mix or breadth of services offered by rural multi-service agencies.

Some agencies have also obtained advice on human resource issues from the Community and Social Services Employers Association[17]. Unfortunately, as the CSSEA restructured its programs with more emphasis on fee-for-service, rates were no longer affordable for smaller agencies in rural regions. There is a need to strengthen provincial networks that have the resources to support service agencies in rural regions. While many rural organizations cannot afford professional human resource or financial planning experts, scaling up to support the provision of these supports in a provincial network would strengthen the overall capacity of the rural service sector.

Local Government

The relationships between local governments and multi-service agencies have been strengthened by their interaction with local government staff through meetings and various committees. In some cases, open communication has been fostered by the multi-service agency's ability to recruit a member of local council or staff to their organization's board of directors. Multi-service agencies received positive political and logistical support from local government staff to address many organizational and project needs, such as rezoning areas for daycare and social housing projects. Multi-service agencies can find it challenging,

[16] Service New Brunswick one-stop shops provide more than 200 government services through gateway sites (Blackburn 2014).
[17] The Community and Social Services Employers Association represent all unionized non-profits in contract negotiations. Non-union agencies may also belong to the organization as an associate member.

and at times confusing, however, to work with planning departments and the related processes to support major infrastructure development projects. Local government staff have also provided maintenance and repair support to non-profits located in municipal properties.

Provincial Government

Access to advice and support from various provincial ministries to guide the management and delivery of programs was not consistent across the rural stakeholders we spoke with. Some multi-service agencies were located in close proximity to senior government contract staff or regional managers. For the service leaders we spoke with, the Ministry of Children and Family Development offered the greatest presence of staff support in rural regions. Senior government staff resources for other agencies, such as BC Housing, Ministry of Justice, or CLBC, was more concentrated in larger regional centres such as Prince George, Kamloops, Vancouver, and Nanaimo. Despite the presence of senior government offices in smaller communities, however, staff turnover impacted the stability and continuity of working relationships with multi-service agencies (Sloper 2004). For other agencies, the distance to these government staff supports means that regional managers do not visit the community often.

Some multi-service agencies obtained advice and expertise from provincial ministries on topics such as procurement, finance and management, trouble shooting for client needs, and education and training for staff. Other multi-service agencies talked about information and training that BC Housing provided for their shelter workers (BC Housing 2015; MERX 2013a, 2013b). BC Housing also worked with many non-profit organizations and local governments to transfer housing assets following the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver-Whistler. Multi-service agencies have also attended annual workshops for transit operators (http://hub.bctransit.com/workshop) to seek advice for non-profit agencies delivering transit services in rural regions. Advice and guidance was particularly important for new executive directors who had no previous experience managing certain programs or engaging with different ministries through their agency's multi-service model. New executive directors appreciated the advice and flexible timelines provided by ministry staff to address reporting requirements.

With regional contracts, however, there are challenges for sub-contracted agencies to obtain timely and accurate advice from ministry staff. This is because inquiries are fielded and interpreted through regional contract holders and various levels of ministry staff. As a result, the communication of the original problem becomes less accurate. There were some multi-service agencies who did not recall any workshops or advice to build their capacity to manage multi-service program models. Previous research also highlights the failure of non-profit agencies to obtain provincial support for partnership building symposiums in order to prepare these organizations for new partnership and service arrangements demanded by provincial policies (West 2013).

Federal Government

At the federal level, Service Canada's program officers have provided advice about client issues. Despite the small population size of many rural communities, some will question why client numbers are low. Government staff may advise service providers to refer clients to government websites, without understanding that many clients have no computer literacy skills or equipment. Some federal program managers do not understand why cell phone towers do not work in mountainous terrain. Service leaders further suggested that local and senior levels of governments fail to understand how boom and bust cycles affect the demand and operations of non-profit programs. They fail to fully understand the role of the service sector to support economic renewal as residents access their supports in order to renew their skills and assist their households to cope with restructuring pressures.

Aboriginal

Multi-service agencies and Aboriginal organizations are continuing to develop their relationships in rural regions. Service leaders are working to strengthen these relationships by sitting with Aboriginal stakeholders on various committees to address youth, mental health, and violence. Some multi-service organizations allocated resources for their employees to complete cultural sensitivity training and awareness of the various First Nations protocols and traditions across their rural region. These protocols and traditions have not only shaped their interactions with First Nations clients and stakeholders, but also the broader operation of their facilities.

There are challenges building relationships and trust with Aboriginal stakeholders as some have been more insular and have worked to exclude non-Aboriginal members from certain committees. The process of initiating conversations about residential schools has, at times, exacerbated anger within the Aboriginal community and made it more challenging for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders to develop trust and collaborative relationships. There were also concerns that directives for Aboriginal organizations to focus on providing services to Aboriginal clients have only strengthened the territoriality and division of services in rural regions.

Funding

Rural multi-service organizations have experienced considerable growth as they have expanded their mandates and services. Many multi-service organizations have expanded their services in order to sustain the viability of their organizations in rural BC. Others, however, have acquired more contracts due to the lack of other service providers in the community. In some cases, administrators are managing more than 30 contracts on behalf of more than 10 different provincial and federal funding agencies.

There sometimes is an assumption that non-profits in rural regions can access more significant contributions from industry[18]. Industry closures and out-migration of high-income households have limited such fundraising options for smaller multi-service agencies as they increasingly compete with other organizations for a smaller pool of potential fundraising revenue. Resource-based industries are also increasingly stating that they already pay royalties and taxes to local and senior levels of government, and are resisting "calls to provide infrastructure and services that they see as being the responsibility of the government" (Haslam McKenzie and Rowley 2013, 376). At the same time, senior levels of government and regional trusts have been restructuring funding programs, resulting in a disruption in resources to support the continuity and stability of rural programs.

Local Government

Local governments have provided financial resources for multi-service agency infrastructure and programs in a number of ways. To start, they obtained revenue from local governments by obtaining contracts to manage and deliver programs (i.e. youth / recreation) in small communities. Local governments have made strategic investments to support emergency shelters and affordable housing projects spearheaded by multi-service agencies. Some local governments have better positioned themselves to make these investments by developing affordable housing funds with contributions from

[18] There are few examples of shared non-profit infrastructure projects that have been significantly funded by industry in rural regions. An important exception has been the development of Shell Place Shared & Non-Profit Space in Fort McMurray (SPWB 2014). This facility provides dedicated shared space for recreational and community services organizations (http://www.macdonaldisland.ca/shell-place/about) (last accessed January 5th, 2016).

developers over time. Local and regional governments have also provided financial support to multi-service agencies through permissive tax relief and grant-in-aid programs. The use of permissive tax relief can send a strong message to demonstrate the level of support and importance of public services. Despite the financial support provided by local governments, service agencies felt that grant-in-aid programs required an extensive investment of time to write grant application beyond the value of the amount that could be awarded by those small granting programs.

Local governments have not always been a potential source of support for multi-service organizations. Council and staff may not perceive that they are responsible for social issues. With fiscal constraints, there have been efforts to wean organizations off of municipal grants and to reduce granting amounts over time. There are also fears, however, that more services could be downloaded from senior levels of government. Local governments may not value or recognize the contributions service agencies provide to the local economy. As organizations have worked to strengthen the relationships and investments provided by local government, service agencies have found it challenging to explain how social and health indicators can inform local government policies and planning of buildings and community spaces.

Provincial Government

Multi-service agencies obtained provincial funding from several agencies, such as BC Housing, the BC Gaming Commission, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Children and Family Development, Social Development and Innovation, the Ministry of Education, Community Living BC, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism, and Skills Training, and BC Transit to support many initiatives such as homeless prevention programs, planning for housing projects, job creation, victim's services, family programs, youth development, transportation, and other needs. Provincial program funding cuts, however, have impacted the capacity and coverage associated with staffing levels for programs in smaller communities. Multi-service organizations need to have adequate funding levels to sustain a sound administrative team to support the multi-service model.

Short-term funding arrangements also pose challenges for planning multi-service operations. With short-term funding programs, there is considerable uncertainty guiding the operations of these organizations from year to year (Hultberg *et al.* 2005; Sloper 2004). This not only impacts the ability of organizations to develop long-term management plans, but it also affects the ability of staff to develop stable support plans for their clients. One year contracts, for example, only allow organizations to initiate new programs, only to establish community expectations that they are unable to follow through with if program funding is reduced or eliminated. Some ministries are starting to award longer contracts in order to bring more stability and certainty to planning and delivering services. For example, the Ministry of Children and Family Development provided four year contracts to support Early Years Centres. Furthermore, there tends to be a mismatch between funding programs and needs with limited funding available to support programming for men in smaller communities. In response, some organizations are addressing these gaps by being creative with establishing synergies with other programs.

Eligibility

Strict eligibility criteria have limited funding options for some organizations. Multi-service agencies are not eligible, for example, for funding from the BC Gaming Commission if they already have a provincial contract. Furthermore, organizations must already be operating programs for one year in order to be eligible for funding from the BC Gaming Commission. This is a difficult requirement for small organizations in rural regions to meet as they face challenges obtaining start-up funds in fiscally restrained settings that have experienced significant economic restructuring.

Staff must also maneuver constantly changing program criteria and eligibility requirements that some feel are designed to deny supports. Concerns were expressed, for example, about the seven-tier system used to assess the breadth of resources and supports that are provided to residents accessing employment services (West 2013). Resources are focused on those with extreme needs while limiting general supports. In some cases, there is a mismatch between the design of supports and the capacity of clients.

In some rural regions, multi-service agencies have had more limited opportunities to pursue additional contracts. Some, for example, felt they were ineligible to bid on service contracts targeting Aboriginal residents if they were not an Aboriginal service agency[19].

Procurement Process

Leaders of rural and remote multi-service agencies are concerned about looming changes in the procurement process. Some have been notified that they will soon be required to bid on contracts that they have held for many years, despite the absence of any other organizations in their area. This has prompted concerns that local contracts could be lost to larger organizations in distant regional centres and result in reduced service availability in smaller, remote places. There are also concerns that provincial ministries could combine several contracts into one bidding process, thereby placing local organizations in competition with each other. More procurement processes are also requesting information about the estimated value of in-kind supports, sometimes with little guidance on how to consistently assess or place value on these contributions. Unfortunately, the timeframes for RFP processes can be as little as two months (West 2013), despite the need to gather such information and carefully nurture appropriate partnerships.

Contract Management

Once multi-service agencies were awarded provincial contracts, service leaders found it complex to work with contract managers across various ministries that each had very different styles of managing contracts. These diverse styles meant that changes in policy and contract management were not always consistently interpreted and applied throughout the province. In response, service leaders advocated for the province to provide consistent training for contract management manuals. Contracts may also have outdated language that is no longer relevant to the services provided. Service leaders are hoping to see a change in the oversight of contractors who have established proven track records after delivering programs for a long period of time. This would allow both the service agency and the partnering ministry to more strategically use their staff resources.

Eligible Expenses

Another key issue is that eligible expenses negotiated in contracts seldom reflected the unique operating contexts of smaller communities and rural regions. For example, some contracts do not have adequate transportation costs built in to cover travel costs to regional meetings with ministry staff. Rural and remote multi-service agencies must also grapple with higher transportation costs to support outreach and regionalized models of service delivery. There was a general sense that provincial and federal government staff fail to understand the impact of mileage costs on program budgets as staff commute to different communities to deliver supports. Senior government staff may not fully understand or appreciate the distances involved for staff who commute up to 1.5 hours each way to connect with clients

[19] Aboriginal agreement holders with Service Canada are concentrated in Abbotsford, Bella Bella, Campbell River, Chilliwack, Cranbrook, Duncan, Fort St. John, Kamloops, Kelowna, New Aiyansh, Port Alberni, Prince George, Prince Rupert, West Vancouver, and Williams Lake (Service Canada 2015).

in other communities. These commuting challenges are exacerbated during the winter months when highway travel in mountain passes becomes more dangerous. With limited local and regional transportation supports, there are also geographic challenges for clients in rural regions to connect with the supports offered by multi-service or one-stop agencies. These transportation challenges, however, only reinforce the value of supporting one-stop or multi-service agencies in order to provide efficient focal points for clients to access supports.

Some agencies, such as the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children and Family Development, were lauded for their understanding of the transportation and operational challenges of working in rural locations. Positive understandings and relationships were strengthened with senior government staff that had previous living or working experience in small places. These relationships were also strengthened with routine communication about how economic restructuring processes were shaping program operations.

Some stakeholders felt that the applications themselves revealed the limited understanding of BC's diverse rural landscape. There are concerns that contract benchmark prices do not reflect the operating costs of northern communities where heating and utility costs can be higher throughout the year. Provincial service contracts fail to provide provisions to compensate travel and staffing costs in order to provide coverage in smaller communities that have experienced staff turnover. There is an assumption that service agencies should be able to address staff hiring and coverage needs on a local basis, but in some cases, these human resource issues have been supported through regional staffing pools until those local positions are filled. Organizations have relied on regional staff resources to maintain continuity and stability of supports for their clients. Unfortunately, multi-service agencies have not always been able to recuperate those travel costs.

Administrative rates contained in contracts no longer reflect rising operational costs. Several stakeholders expressed concerns that some ministries and Crown corporations are reducing administration rates for contracts, and therefore, threatening the capacity of small multi-service agencies to manage and sustain programs. With reduced eligible administrative fees, some multi-service agencies question the future feasibility of multi-service models. Within this complex debate, provincial ministries and Crown corporations also have different definitions about what can be included in administrative costs. Furthermore, these administrative rates vary across provincial ministries.

Wage and benefit increases were also commonly excluded as eligible expenses in government contracts. In some cases, multi-service organizations needed to complete paperwork each year to obtain the allowable annual increase for their employees. In these circumstances, annual rates of inflation have not been reflected as eligible expenses within contracts.

Flexibility

As multi-service agencies experience broad program demands and needs in small communities, an important issue concerns contract flexibility. While contracts specify the number of hours that need to be allocated towards delivering specific services, provincial ministries have allowed some flexibility to move hours from one program to another within the same contract for a single ministry. Others noted flexibility with expense increases (i.e. lease or utility costs); however, it has been more difficult to negotiate additional staffing. Such negotiations became more complex in agreements that involve multiple ministries and levels of government.

Multi-service leaders found that there is now more limited financial flexibility within their contract negotiations. Previously, through the provincial government's Co-operative Gains Mandate, multi-service organizations could apply savings within existing budgets to wage increases, benefits, or other aspects of recruitment and retention strategies (Ministry of Finance 2013). With some ministries, organizations can no longer retain any savings accumulated during the contract period.

Rapid growth associated with industries such as mining and LNG, however, can produce dramatic and sudden increases in operational expenses as non-profit agencies (Lennie 2010). Commercial landlords seeking to take advantage of industrial expansion have increased lease rates. Agencies can suddenly find it difficult to compete with industry wages in order to retain key administrative and program staff. Despite communicating challenges to meet budget deliverables, multi-service agencies have not been able to address these pressures by renegotiating contracts over fears that such demands could lead to reduced funding levels.

Provincial contract managers, however, have become more flexible with blended positions supported by funding from multiple contracts. At first, participants felt that provincial staff were hesitant to support blended staff arrangements due to uncertainties about how reductions in one ministry's contract could affect contracted services provided to other ministries. Regardless of changes in certain ministry programs, however, multi-service organizations must still meet contractual obligations for other funders. More recently, the Province, through the Ministry of Children and Family Development, launched several pilot projects through the Contract Efficiency and Flexibility Initiative to reduce the number of MCFD contracts with each agency, but also to explore more ways to provide organizations with greater flexibility to support their ongoing operations (Ministry of Children and Family Development 2015b).

Policies

A key barrier impeding greater synergies and collaboration between non-profits in smaller communities is rooted in provincial funding policies. By remaining separate entities, for example, more organizations are eligible to receive gaming grants. Service leaders noted that if they merged with another organization, they would only be eligible for one grant. This would then prompt further debates amongst the merged parties about how that grant would be used.

Reporting

Throughout the contract term, there were considerable variations in reporting requirements and procedures, ranging from annual to quarterly reports. Service leaders found some reporting procedures not only to be detailed and time consuming, but at times required more administrative work and operational resources than the grant or contract was worth (West 2013). These challenges were particularly difficult for smaller agencies that part-time executive directors. Policy changes are needed to ensure reporting requirements better align with the monetary value of contracts. Reporting periods also vary from fiscal to calendar years across provincial ministries and Crown corporations. These constant reporting pressures can impact the synergies and rhythms within an organization.

Reporting procedures can request too much information or require agencies to track too many indicators that agencies feel do not demonstrate the value or outcomes of the program. Some provincial reporting procedures have been streamlined. For example, reporting procedures on FASD contracts have reduced the number of indicators on each client from 30 to 5. There were also concerns about detailed reporting requirements that were perceived to impede client confidentiality. To track client progress, some ministries are requesting more details about client actions and barriers, prompting concerns about how reporting information is used and how provincial government staff are able to situate this information within the larger rural settings that these multi-service agencies serve.

With increased demands for accountability, some ministries are not only requiring detailed reporting for each service stream, but reporting is being done on an individual or client basis resulting in more pressure for strained administrative resources. Multi-service organizations are not equipped with information management systems designed to collect the level of detailed information required in some reporting procedures. Such information management structures are further challenged by different spending policies, software programs, and reporting procedures of each ministry (Lawn *et al*. 2014). These challenges can be exacerbated by ministry requirements for contract agencies to enter information into ministry software programs and databases that are frequently updated or changed with no training provided to contract agencies. With insufficient orientation and training, they are also experiencing challenges using new tools to support integrated case management. Multi-service agencies also find it difficult to obtain software (i.e. Simply Accounting, Sharevision, etc.) that can support communication and diverse reporting requirements and procedures with different government agencies and stakeholders.

Restructuring

Multi-service organizations face uncertainty with a number of programs that are being restructured and transferred to different ministries. Provincial ministries, such as BC Housing and CLBC, for example, are downloading or contracting the management of social housing assets and homeshare programs to private and non-profit agencies. These restructuring processes become more complicated as more ministries collaborate on specific programs. In some cases, services were repatriated from non-profit multi-service agencies back to provincial ministries. In a move to reduce the number of contracts that were being managed, some provincial ministries have been experimenting with regional service contracts.

In some rural regions, the Province has also been engaged in an extensive process of transferring programs, such as family support, from non-profit contract agencies to First Nations bands. With some processes still in progress after many years, this poses a difficult operational challenge for multi-service organizations who face ongoing uncertainty about when the final transfer will take place and thus whether they will retain Ministry contracts from year to year. Contract uncertainty makes it more difficult to strengthen job security, and thus recruitment and retention strategies, for qualified professionals.

Federal Government

Multi-service agencies obtained federal funding from several agencies, such as Service Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Public Safety Canada, federal infrastructure funds, etc. to support employment programs, crime prevention, housing initiatives, and programs for children. Through the Surplus Federal Real Property to Prevent Homelessness Initiative (SFRPHI)[20], federally owned building lots have also been transferred at very nominal costs to support housing initiatives in small communities.

Procurement Processes

There were concerns, however, that federal funding programs focus too much on studies for assessments and strategies with limited support to implement them, leaving organizations to their own devices to sustain the initiatives. Short-term federal funding programs were also viewed to be accessible for a

[20] SFRPHI is a program delivered by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) (Community Development and Homelessness Partnerships Directorate) in partnership with Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC) and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). The program provides surplus federal properties for $1.00 to eligible organizations and stakeholders working to address homelessness while using program funds to pay custodian departments for the sale of the property at market value (Employment and Social Development Canada 2014).

limited time. One year programs, for example, only allow organizations to get new programs up and running, only to establish community expectations that they are unable to follow through. Service Canada's short-term funding contracts are placing strains on limited administrative resources as multi-service agencies must re-apply for the contracts on an annual basis. The application processes themselves can be lengthy. Multi-service agencies are finding it challenging to assign values to in-kind contributions for their federal grant applications. These short-term arrangements, and sometimes delays or gaps in the timeframes to receive funding, are also impeding the ability of multi-service agencies to support the continuity and planning of many aspects of their operations from space to staff.

Contract Management

The use of regional contracting agencies with sub-contracted agencies can create multiple layers of bureaucracy that can impact the start-up, implementation, and reporting of federal programs. The process of sub-contracted agencies connecting with regional contractors for funding can be delayed by up to six months as those regional contractors work with federal agencies.

Eligible Expenses

There is considerable variation amongst federal ministries who cover increases in operational expenses, such as rent and salaries. As a result, multi-service agencies find themselves fighting against running programs in silos in order to address eligible staff expenses under different programs. Multi-service agencies were not able to recuperate supplies and operational costs erroneously excluded from contracts.

Service leaders talked about a number of assumptions used to guide grant or RFP submissions. As programs were delivered, however, many had learned and adopted new approaches to effectively deliver supports. Unfortunately, there was no flexibility built into the eligible expenses of some contracts to support learning and innovation.

Rural and remote multi-service agencies must also grapple with higher transportation costs to support outreach and regionalized models of service delivery. Similar to their provincial counterparts, there was a general sense that federal government staff fail to understand the impact of mileage costs on program budgets as staff commute to different communities to deliver supports.

Flexibility

Some federal programs have narrowly defined criteria for eligible clients, providing no flexibility to expand services to other people who are not identified in the contract. Such narrowly defined and specialized criteria does not suit the economies of scale in rural environments that are delivering more generalized supports. The problem is prompting some clients to lie about their circumstances in order to obtain badly needed supports.

Service providers also talked about federal programs that are not equipped with appropriate resources to be successful. The Women in Trades Program, for example, was widely promoted but service providers felt the program offered no financial support for potential clients to build their skills and capacity to make the transition into that sector. Instead, the program's effectiveness was suggested to be limited to providing information and encouraging women to pursue a new career in trades. In actual, the provincial program is supported with funding through the Canada Jobs Fund Agreement under the new Employment Services and Supports program (previously the Labour Market Agreement). The eligibility criteria associated with the program, however, is very restrictive. The program is open to those who are unemployed and have not collected Employment Insurance for the previous three years and / or those who have not received maternity / parental benefits for the previous five years (http://www.itabc.ca/women-trades/funding-eligibility) (last accessed on: January 5th, 2016)

Others noted that some federal agencies provide more flexibility; although, the agency must write to the federal government to request changes to any budget line item. Multi-service providers found that they were able to obtain greater flexibility to deliver supports contained in their contracts by working with older contract managers. Through their experience, older federal employees had confidence in their careers and knowledge about how to provide flexibility through contract requirements and processes.

Human Resource Challenges

At the federal level, burnout is producing a lot of turnover amongst mid-level government employees. Turnover of federal employees has compounded the administrative duties of multi-service agencies. With new contract managers, some service leaders noted they are required to resubmit their budgets and RFPs.

Reporting

Most of the stakeholders we spoke with felt that the federal reporting requirements were more simplified compared to their provincial counterparts. Reporting requirements were focused on the target client group and whether the goals were achieved. For some, however, there are considerable reporting requirements that must be met with grants and contracts. For example, there were discussions about the need to report on each individual bill for contracts with Service Canada. The Public Health Agency of Canada was cited as another agency with detailed reporting requirements. There are detailed reporting requirements about partnerships, including the purpose of partnerships, what the partnership entails, and the difference between varying partnerships. Federal funding agencies are also requesting more information about clients, client barriers, and client progress as part of their reporting and evaluation processes. This is prompting concerns about how those reporting requirements are infringing on client confidentiality.

There were concerns with how reporting requirements and processes will play out with regional contract agencies and sub-contract agencies. Service leaders we spoke with felt that sub-contractors do not always have stable resources to support the same level of administrative reporting as regional contract agencies. Sub-contracted multi-service agencies in smaller communities advocated for streamlined reporting processes that would allow them to submit one shared report with regional agencies. Another challenge for multi-service agencies is to understand how taxation policies are impacting the budgets and operations of their organization.

Restructuring

Furthermore, multi-service agencies are also challenged to respond to the changing jurisdiction of their programs. For example, a number of employment and housing programs have been transferred from federal agencies, such as CMHC and Service Canada, to provincial agencies, such as BC Housing and the Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation. Similarly, immigration services previously delivered through BC's Ministry of Jobs, Tourism, and Skills Training were transferred back to Citizenship and Immigration Canada[21]. These changes mean that multi-service agencies must learn and maneuver different reporting criteria and processes.

[21] The federal government stripped the Province's authority to deliver immigration services effective April 1st, 2014 after the provincial government failed to account for federal funds transferred for immigrant and refugee settlement services and did not spend all the funds on targeted groups (Dickson *et al*. 2013).

Other Opportunities to Generate Revenue

Rural one-stop shops have diversified their funding resources by turning to larger foundations, trusts, and other non-profit agencies for support. Community foundations, however, continue to be underdeveloped in rural regions. In northern BC, the Prince George Community Foundation[22] has been partnering with fourteen other incorporated and unincorporated communities to develop their endowment funds (http://pgcf.ca/about/regional-partnerships) (last accessed on: January 5th, 2016). Managing so many funds collectively through the PGCF allows each fund to grow more quickly. Some communities have experienced challenges establishing the grants committee and sustaining fundraising and marketing efforts. Some multi-service agencies have been investing financial resources into GICs in order to strengthen and diversify their financial capital assets. Programs are also supported through private sector donations and fee for service arrangements. Multi-service organizations, for example, have provided bookkeeping services and other office management services to community businesses and organizations.

While a number of multi-service agencies continue to explore social enterprises as a future source of revenue, these ventures remain risky for small multi-service agencies that already have high workloads. Some social enterprises have been unable to generate a large enough customer base to be viable, with some social enterprise initiatives generating deficits.

Some multi-service agencies have explored opportunities related to property management. High housing prices in rapidly growing resource and tourism regions make this a more difficult prospect for organizations with limited capital to consider. Some multi-service organizations, however, were able to generate the capital needed to purchase a house or building and thereby enhance the security of their organization by reducing operating costs. Asset ownership has provided an opportunity for organizations to generate revenue by leasing space to other organizations. Ownership has also allowed smaller multi-service agencies to remain competitive to recruit professionals because much of the funds that would have been allocated to facility costs are instead invested into staffing costs. Although there have been few alternative sources of financing for non-profit organizations (Burke-Robertson 2002; Conway *et al.* 2011), the alternative financing sector is growing. The Canadian Alternative Investment Co-operative, for example, provides financing to non-profit organizations and co-operatives to support mortgages for community-based projects, as well as loans for affordable housing and social enterprise initiatives (http://www.caic.ca/about.html) (last accessed on: January 5th, 2016). Capacity Canada has also provided support to guide strategic planning for new social innovation initiatives (SPWB 2014).

Governance

Small communities can shape the governance of multi-service agencies in many ways. To start, multi-service agencies in small places struggle to recruit and retain a diversity of new board members (Evans and Grantham n.d.). Recruiting men has been particularly difficult for these non-profit boards. In resource-based communities, a greater proportion of men are engaged in shift / rotation work. Retirement and out-migration have also limited the pool of potential board members in these small communities. This has prompted discussions to invite boards to come together to explore ways to reduce the number of people sitting on multiple boards. Cases are beginning to emerge where small organizations are seeking to develop partnerships or co-ops with larger organizations in order to benefit from the scope of influence and developed leadership team of larger agencies. Efforts to pursue co-ops for small organizations in rural regions have been unsuccessful due to fears of mergers and loss of local

[22] The Prince George Community Foundation charges a 0.5% administration fee on endowment funds for smaller communities.

supports (Burke-Robertson 2002). These fears have made it difficult to have conversations about how other shared arrangements could address capacity needs of multi-service agencies in rural regions.

While long-term board members can contribute a wealth of experience, their knowledge and contributions can also become stale. New board members bring new knowledge and a willingness to try new things that can lead to important innovations for these organizations. At the same time, however, the strong rural identity that can exist in small communities can foster a strong sense of social cohesion with common goals and interests that makes it easier to work together.

There are multi-service agencies that do not impose limits on terms for board members in order to encourage board members to build and contribute their capacity to the organization over time. There are challenges, however, with developing the capacity of board members. For service leaders, specific skills need attention to nurture their ability to operate in a culture of change, to be proactive to make decisions that are different and innovative, and to have confidence to make decisions that can establish new precedents or directions for the organization. Furthermore, despite adopting new directions to pursue regional service delivery, some multi-service agencies have not changed the geographic composition of their board.

Strategic Planning and Development

Multi-service agencies in small communities are increasingly viewed as a place to go to provide new services and lead new initiatives; thereby, producing more pressure on limited administrative resources. Some agencies, for example, apply for provincial and federal grants on behalf of, or in partnership, with other community groups that may wish to expand supports, such as seniors' programs, in their community. Service leaders are also struggling to manage "mandate creep" in order to address expanding service gaps and other related responsibilities / issues that are falling through the cracks in small communities. Multi-service agencies must confront challenges with managing community expectations as they grow. With few non-profit organizations in small communities, multi-service organizations can feel pressured to expand and provide new services that are beyond their human, fiscal, and infrastructure capacity.

Multi-service organizations constantly struggle with the question about the scale and scope of their operations. During the late 1980s, multi-service leaders spent considerable time writing grant and RFP proposals to provide services that had traditionally been delivered through provincial and federal government agencies. During this period, the service area for some multi-service organizations corresponded to the service contracts with senior government agencies. As the number of contracts expanded, the scope of their operations became more complex as organizations were delivering programs at multiple scales. Organizations also needed to expand and deliver multiple service contracts in order to be viable and to address important service gaps in rural regions. The scope of programs was also expanded to reflect the economic restructuring pressures or crises in these small communities.

Multi-service organizations were asked by struggling non-profits and provincial ministries to take over the responsibility for delivering supports both locally and in other small communities. Multi-service organizations have also expanded their services in response to development pressures in other sectors. School districts, correctional facilities, businesses, and industry have also reached out to multi-service organizations, for example, to resolve childcare shortages in small communities in order to support the retention of a broader workforce in these places.

With an increase in referrals and demand for services from nearby communities, several multi-service organizations expanded their mandates to deliver services at a regional level. Changes towards the regional scope and mandate of these organizations have also been shaped by new collaborative and regional service delivery models advocated by provincial government ministries and Crown corporations such as Community Living BC, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Housing and Social Development, BC Housing, and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs (BC Housing 2014; Ministry of Community Services 2007; Ministry of Municipal Affairs 2001; Province of BC and Community Living BC 2010). There are also a number of multi-service non-profit organizations in Clearwater, Smithers, and Penticton, for example, that are operating local and regional transit services formerly delivered by local governments and other non-profit societies. Due to the capacity of small service agencies and distances involved in large rural regions, senior levels of government, however, do not appear to be using regional service models as a broad solution to rural service delivery.

Some service leaders expressed concerns with regional growth, arguing that the strength in effective care is in knowing the unique characteristics and issues within the community. This knowledge can become lost when supports are planned and delivered remotely through outreach. There can also be a lack of supervision and monitoring of infrastructure and programs. Service providers need to be on the ground to talk to residents and stakeholders and be sensitive to concerns and issues that can emerge suddenly or accumulate over time. Some multi-service organizations have responded to these challenges by purposefully expanding their organizational infrastructure into the community by hiring local management and staff in satellite offices.

At the same time, there were concerns about the potential for organizations to become too large, thereby, impacting the quality of services delivered. Despite pressures for multi-service agencies to respond to service gaps and increased demand for services, organizations may not be able to create the organizational structures needed, and recruit or develop the management and program personnel necessary, to support that growth. Larger organizations needed to invest more time and care to communicate their vision and values with remote staff.

In some multi-service agencies, specialized programs evolved to form their own non-profit society or to be transferred to other community groups where programs could have greater synergies. As such, multi-service organizations recognize that their agencies have limits to what they are able to support in terms of growth, and instead can be an incubator to support the development of programs and new organizations in small communities (Kohm 1998; Zywert and Mattes 2013).

Protocols

Accreditation was credited with transforming multi-service agencies to think about policy and practice through the development of several protocols. Multi-service organizations have developed policies and protocols to address many issues, such as conflict resolution, media relations, interagency confidentiality, harassment policies, bullying, safety inspections, occupational health and safety, and licensing requirements.

Two important deficiencies remain. First, some agencies are experiencing rapid growth. This creates a very unique need to develop protocols around leadership training, succession planning, and defining clear roles and responsibilities. These issues can be exacerbated by the limited financial resources and expansive regions within which these organizations operate. There are also a number of multi-service agencies operating in rural communities that have large Aboriginal populations either locally or within the nearby surrounding region. In some cases, more than half of program clients are Aboriginal. This creates an expectation that these program staff will work more collaboratively with First Nations communities and other service leaders to address the unique and often complex needs of Aboriginal clients. The cultural awareness and protocols to guide such collaboration, however, remain underdeveloped.

Financial Risk and Liability

The governing boards of multi-service organizations are becoming increasingly concerned about the debt risk and liabilities that are being assumed to support the development of urgently needed programs in rural communities. As governing boards adopt a more business-oriented approach to manage the strategic development of multi-service agencies, management staff have been investing more time to assess the personnel capacity and economic viability of pursuing requests for proposals to deliver services to rural and remote communities. Assessing new entrepreneurial opportunities continue to pose challenges for multi-service organizations as these efforts consume limited staff and resources allocated to other needs within the current year's fiscal budget.

Human Resources

For many, rurality has influenced the need to pursue a multi-service model. Service leaders talked about how the multi-service model strengthened the agency's position to remain viable during periods of government restructuring and cutbacks. Some noted that their agency was able to grow despite these challenges because of the multi-faceted nature of their organization.

Despite their diverse programs and responsibilities, however, a critical challenge for multi-service agencies in small communities is that they do not necessarily have the business or human resource management skills to support these complex organizational structures (Beachy *et al*. 2010). During the early phase of development, for example, some service leaders had limited knowledge about managing and growing non-profits. Another challenge with managing a multi-service agency is the diversity in programming, which provides a steep learning curve for executive directors working with multiple funding agencies each with different regulations and reporting requirements. By starting with small contracts, non-profits in rural communities were able to slowly expand their capacity and organizational infrastructure to deliver more services.

Smaller multi-service agencies in rural communities have fewer administrative resources. As a result, quarterly and annual financial reports are more difficult to assemble as they do not have the staff to translate the requirements into snapshot information pieces for the funding agencies.

In small communities, advocacy becomes an important part of the day-to-day staff responsibilities for multi-service agencies. Such advocacy requires a greater strategic investment of time and planning than in larger communities in order to connect rural residents with regionalized and mobile services.

Leadership

One key benefit afforded through multi-service pursuits concerns the efficiencies and savings in administrative costs. Increased revenue streams generated through multiple service contracts allow rural-based organizations to retain a full-time executive director and support other administrative positions and departments. Small multi-service agencies, though, can suffer from a small leadership pool that can make their operations vulnerable. This left some service leaders arguing for the need to amalgamate more small organizations in order to recruit the level of management and leadership needed to support the continuity of high quality services.

Staff Resources

With more limited opportunities to offer full-time work and compete with industry wages, multi-service agencies struggle to attract strong qualified applicants for vacant postings. The boom and bust cycles associated with resource-based economies can make it more difficult for multi-service agencies to recruit and retain employees. During periods of rapid growth, these organizations find it difficult to compete with industry wages. During periods of decline, multi-service agencies find themselves at capacity responding to increased demands for multiple services. Building upon this, we argue, however, that, unlike single industry resource towns, rural and small town places that have multiple resource sectors may not experience boom and bust cycles, but rather regional waves as different sectors experience boom and bust at different times. In this context, multi-service agencies may be simultaneously responding to both the impacts of a boom and bust cycle across various resource sectors (Ryser *et al*. 2014). More contract flexibility is needed to ensure service arrangements remain viable in resource-based regions.

Multi-service organizations in smaller communities do not have the resources to retain administrative professionals to support their development and operations, such as human resource personnel, policy analysists, a finance director, occupational health and safety staff, IT staff, legal advice, etc. In some cases, there were challenges obtaining accounting and bookkeeping expertise. Many of these professionals must be hired from distant urban centres. Multi-service organizations are also finding it difficult to access contractors and trades workers to complete repair and maintenance work to their facilities, especially in isolated communities and in rapidly growing rural regions.

Another theme that emerged concerned the skills and development of professionals working for multi-service organizations in small towns. Unlike the specialized skill sets commonly found in urban-based organizations, the generalized nature of skills required to deliver rural programs has also shaped hiring and human resource strategies for multi-service agencies in small places. With limited resources to acquire specialized staff, service leaders are also placing a greater emphasis on general skills in order to maximize staff flexibility to respond to a range of needs.

The multi-service nature of their operations allows these organizations to combine part-time contract jobs into one position. By strengthening the stability of their staff through these human resource management strategies, these organizations are able to considerably expand their program offerings in rural and remote communities. By providing better incomes for employees, these agencies felt that they could retain higher quality, better educated staff.

There have been difficulties, however, recruiting full-time workers. Multi-service agencies find it difficult to recruit new staff with broad skill sets capable of addressing multiple programs either on their own or through job sharing arrangements; thereby, limiting the ability of agencies to advertise full-time work. As new service contracts approve funding for part-time positions in smaller communities, other service leaders noted that they are unable to offer full-time positions frequently sought by non-local applicants. In response, new strategies, such as cross training and job sharing, have been used to enhance job satisfaction. Some multi-service agencies have also bolstered their recruitment and retention strategies by adopting the living wage standard for their employees and providing an RRSP matching program. In Clearwater, the Yellowhead Community Services Society is exploring talks with the District to join the municipal pension plan in order to make the organization more competitive to retain staff.

Service agencies are facing a new challenge to renew their workforce as senior staff approach retirement. Concomitantly, multi-service agencies are facing HR challenges to sustain programs that were initiated by experienced senior employees. Multi-service agencies in small towns can have staff who have worked together for a long time. One service leader warned that the cohesion formed amongst staff can create strong cliques that can prevent outsiders from wanting to work for the organization.

Retaining long-term employees has been instrumental to develop an integrative, collaborative, team-based environment. Regional multi-service agencies have found it important to hire local program managers and staff in order to strengthen the presence in the community. Local staff would already be familiar with key pressures in the community, other service agencies and community networks of support, and local intricacies that would enable them to quickly respond to local needs. Residents were more likely to trust and identify with them, and thus, sustain their engagement in programs and services.

There are many challenges that remain with hiring or addressing human resource issues for multi-service programs in small communities. To start, accreditation has transformed hiring practices in order to obtain highly skilled professionals to meet those standards required in the social service sector. Small communities have found it difficult to attract key professional services, such as counsellors, early childhood educators, family support workers, occupational therapists, speech therapists, mental health therapists, and physical therapists. These challenges are compounded by rising benefit costs and difficulty competing against wage grids of hospitals, schools, and other unionized agencies.

Some service leaders suggested that there were challenges associated with varying funding levels provided across union and non-unionized contracts, with non-unionized agencies receiving less funding in their contracts for non-unionized staff. Despite the number of service organizations in small communities across BC, relatively little is known about the degree to which the sector has unionized in these smaller communities and thus the implications that such notions could have for rural areas. Some stakeholders suggested that their staff does not wish to unionize. It is unclear if this produces a further wage disparity between rural and urban-based service agencies.

Some agencies have also been unable to retain professionals after they have hired them due to high housing costs in rapidly growing tourism and resource-based regions. There are many assumptions that the cost of living is lower in small communities. Growth and speculation associated with amenity migration, tourism, LNG, and other resource projects, however, have meant that many small communities are experiencing a rising cost of living that has impacted the recruitment and retention of professionals in many service sectors (Measham *et al*. 2013). Stakeholders in some jurisdictions have argued that the absence of rent control legislation has fueled rising housing costs, prompting the out-migration of several residents, including working professionals. High turnover rates in communities that have struggled to resolve housing constraints have impacted the quality of services and long-term community development in these communities "as those who could not afford to stay have left, and those who came for the boom leave because the city is not attractive in terms of lack of services" (Ennis *et al*. 2013, 40).

In some cases, after struggling unsuccessfully to recruit new program staff, some agencies have increasingly turned to mobile labour to address regional service needs, resulting in higher unexpected operational costs. For regionally-based multi-service agencies, service leaders have faced challenges developing staff teams in other communities that have their own established networks and community culture. In some regions, there is a long history of communities that have been pitted against each other in competition for industry projects and government grants, making it difficult to recruit staff and develop the appropriate trust needed to serve clients in other communities. The geographic isolation and distance between smaller communities can also make it difficult to share staff (Malone and Anderson 2014).

Training

Multi-service agencies in small communities have limited continuing education resources to strengthen recruitment and retention strategies. General revenues are being used to support staff to obtain the training required in order to retain supports in smaller communities. Multi-service agencies are also using cross training, job shadowing, and job sharing to strengthen the coverage available to support administration and the delivery of programs. In fact, some multi-service agencies have incorporated cross training and succession planning as part of their risk management plan. Diversifying job skills and program areas for each employee has also helped to strengthen job satisfaction and retention of workers.

Multi-service organizations are also making wise use of their limited professional development resources by pursuing joint training with other groups on a number of topic areas (i.e. first aid). Through participation in Interagency Case Assessment Teams, for example, rural organizations have also accessed low-cost joint training provided by the Ending Violence Association of BC. It can be challenging, however, for multi-service agencies in small communities to address such diverse professional development requirements (i.e. counselling, social workers, etc.) across many programs. At the same time, there continues to be a competitive service environment that has impeded collaboration on joint training initiatives. Leadership and professional development continues to be fostered internally.

Infrastructure

Rural multi-service organizations have unique infrastructure needs. During their early phase of development, many of these organizations operated out of home offices or small commercial spaces until the number of contracts were expanded to warrant more visibility and space in the community. As multi-service agencies expanded their services, they quickly outgrew these spaces. Limited space, however, has impacted the ability of some service agencies to pursue additional program contracts.

Several multi-service organizations deliver supports across rural regions through satellite offices. The growth of multi-service agencies and their satellite offices, however, can be impeded by the limited availability, affordability, and adequacy of commercial space in both smaller and rapidly growing communities. This has prompted some organizations to purchase homes to support office and program space in small communities. Homes with basements, stairs, and split levels can remain inaccessible for parents with strollers, seniors, or those with disabilities, prompting the need for organizations to find other spaces in the community to deliver supports to accommodate clients with accessibility needs.

Multi-service agencies in small communities have long pursued the debate of owning versus leasing space. Owning a facility can provide these groups with more security and tax benefits (Matan 2008). Most organizations in this study rely on lease arrangements to support on-site and off-site programs. Compared to single service agencies, multi-service agencies with larger budgets and long-term contracts have been viewed by landlords as stable renters and have thus been able to negotiate better long-term lease rates. Affordable lease arrangements have also been used to support agencies that have been awarded local government contracts.

Recently, the province introduced funding to increase childcare spaces through capital grants (MCFD 2015a). This has supported the ability of organizations to pursue co-location or ownership and strengthen the long-term stability of their organization. Following the closure of the downtown courthouse in Squamish, the Sea to Sky Community Services Society took advantage of these capital grants to purchase the courthouse and relocate early childhood development programs and daycare supports into this new central space. These capital grants allowed the organization to replace their lease arrangements with a mortgage. Moving forward, some participants have advocated for the ability of rural multi-service organizations to incorporate mortgage debt servicing into their contracts in order to strengthen the social infrastructure in rural regions.

Although there is a growing trend to pursue one-stop service models, these models are not always suitable for small communities due to infrastructure deficiencies and unique program needs. Much of the infrastructure in small communities is simply too small, aging, or even too expensive. With infrastructure limitations, many multi-service agencies have been forced to operate off-site programs. There are important benefits to be realized by having some programs hosted off-site, particularly if there are opportunities to nurture greater synergies with other stakeholders and provide greater outreach supports to clients. Two common examples are the delivery of seniors programs in seniors' centres or senior care facilities, as well as the co-location of early years programs with schools. Several multi-service agencies have partnered with school districts to support Strong Start sites in small communities. These programs see parents and children frequently coming and going and the nature of the activities associated with these programs and clients can generate noise that is not always compatible with other services, such as disability programs, counselling, legal advocacy, and victim-based services. Some organizations also operate programs for homeless or at-risk youth / adults in other sites. Separating incompatible programs and administrative spaces has also made spaces more comfortable and accessible for those in need.

There are also concerns about the ability of aging facilities to create a supportive and positive work environment. Much of the aging infrastructure in small communities is not sound proofed adequately to address confidentiality. Operating in older facilities that had small windows, limited storage capacity, small offices, and the need for office sharing was deemed to impact staff morale. A number of facilities are also in need of renovations to improve the energy-efficiency and structural integrity of the buildings by investing in new roofs and foundations. As they look to renew their facilities, some are faced with higher costs for contractors and supplies due to the isolated location and lack of competitors.

Collaboration

With a smaller population and volunteer base, and more limited resources, the very nature of rurality has fostered the need for more collaboration between multi-service agencies and other community groups and stakeholders. Partnerships have become an important component of the strategic plans, grant applications, and performance evaluations of multi-service agencies. In smaller rural settings, however, other potential partners who can contribute funds and other resources do not always exist (West 2013). This can provide another stumbling block for smaller multi-service agencies to obtain public or private sector funding. Despite conversations to strengthen the sharing of resources within small communities, there are many organizations that are simply not ready to pursue these opportunities. In some cases, there has been a reluctance for non-profits to pursue collaboration or sharing resources with larger multi-service agencies even as they face potential closure. Unfortunately, limited collaboration has weakened the social infrastructure in some smaller communities. Other service leaders felt that high workloads and restructuring pressures have caused other service leaders to 'retreat' in their own organizations. As organizations became busier, it became more difficult to pursue change. Distance has also impeded regional co-operation (Blackburn 2014).

Local Government

Through funding policies, local governments need to play a larger role to nurture co-operation and reduce repetition across the social service sector. There were small communities, for example, where at least three separate organizations were tackling and competing for funds to address specific issues, such as seniors' needs or tourism. Another barrier impeding collaboration is that few small local governments have social policy frameworks, by-laws, or related policies to guide the development of non-profit initiatives such as social housing projects.

Provincial Government

When requesting funds, provincial ministries are encouraging contractors to demonstrate that they have explored opportunities for partnerships and sharing services through multiple organizations and across multiple sites. For example, in 2014, the Ministry of Children and Family Development used its Community Social Services Innovation and Sustainability Roundtable to advance many issues concerning the potential for partnerships and shared services (Ministry of Children and Family Development 2014). Provincial programs and funding formulas, however, do not always recognize the administrative and staffing costs involved with collaboration on multiple contracts.

There are barriers impeding collaboration between multi-service providers and school districts. Schools in small communities often do not have the enrolment levels needed to hire full-time expertise to address social work, mental health, and physical health issues for students. The provincial government could play a stronger role to encourage partnerships between school districts and multi-service agencies in order to support new models of outreach and service delivery for such services. Better communication and coordination is also needed across different ministries in order to streamline processes and reduce duplication of supports. The Early Years Centres, for example, is funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development. The Ministry of Education, however, has similar initiatives within their Early Learning programs.

Many multi-service agencies maintain routine communication with regional managers through telephone calls, e-mails, and occasional community visits. Site visits were viewed as a valuable tool to provide ministry contacts with more awareness of how rurality was shaping their operations. An important underlying communication problem, however, has been the exclusion of multi-service agencies from provincial government meetings with industry to resolve infrastructure and service issues. In rapidly growing communities, for example, some multi-service agencies were excluded from meetings between BC Housing and industry to examine housing issues despite their leadership role on local housing committees.

Multi-service agencies also find it difficult to develop strong, collaborative working relationships with provincial ministries and Crown corporations due to the high turnover amongst provincial staff. Frequent restructuring has also meant that provincial staff do not always have clear roles and responsibilities. Service leaders felt positive about the routine communication they had with regional staff, but felt that the staff seldom engaged in problem-solving. Instead, the responsibility to resolve issues was frequently diverted to someone else.

In the past, stakeholders valued the support previously provided through the Northern Development Commissioner's office. From 1998 to 2001, the Northern Development Commissioner's Office was equipped with staff, office space, and other resources to support advocacy, coordinate activities with other organizations, to independently advise various cabinet ministers, to consult with small communities, to broker relationships between rural stakeholders and various ministries, and to hire experts to support duties of the Northern Commissioner's office (http://www2.news.gov.bc.ca/archive/pre2001/1998/1050.asp) (last accessed on: January 5th, 2016). There is a need to once again strengthen rural structures in order to bring more visibility to rural issues. While the provincial government formed the Rural Advisory Council in 2014, there is no clear process or resources for rural stakeholders to move rural issues forward (http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/economic-development/developing-your-community/community-partners/rural-advisory-council) (last accessed on: January 5th, 2016).

Federal Government

Finally, federal policies do not adequately encourage co-operation. Federal programs diffuse limited resources, duplicate services, and enable smaller organizations to work in silos. Federal government programs need to be designed and deployed more strategically to nurture co-operation and strengthen the capacity and resiliency of organizations in rural regions. A number of service providers also reflected on the value of the federal government's Rural Secretariat that no longer exists. There is a need to strengthen rural structures in order to strengthen the voice and bring visibility to rural issues.

Community Impacts

Multi-service agencies have produced several positive impacts for small communities. Using a multi-service model has allowed smaller agencies to offer a broader range of services within their community and throughout rural regions. This model also allows small agencies to tailor programming to the specific needs of different rural communities. Multi-service agencies that largely incorporate a one-stop shop approach to their operations have streamlined access to supports for residents. Exposure to other programs and staff are easily fostered. The presence of multiple programs also allows these agencies to manage the complex needs of clients who are on waitlists for specific supports.

Locating multiple services and staff within one facility has not only streamlined referrals, but has strengthened collaboration on high caseloads. Consultations about client needs can happen quickly. It allows organizations in smaller communities to provide more comprehensive wrap-around supports for clients. As multi-service agencies, these organizations have developed relationships with many other business and industry, government, Aboriginal, and community stakeholders through their engagement on various committees.

Multi-service agencies are broadening community capacity by sharing expertise and information about governance regulations and issues with other community groups. The Smithers Community Services Association, for example, provided assistance to support a seniors' housing initiative in the nearby community of Telkwa by determining rental rates, developing tenancy agreements, and taking application forms. Some multi-service agencies have been sharing equipment and supplies with other service providers or initiatives in the community. In some cases, multi-service agencies have been asked to bring resources, such as videos, books, and toys, to community events.

Multi-service agencies have allowed broader community groups to use their meeting rooms and classrooms, largely through in-kind support or for a nominal fee to cover cleaning costs. Multi-service agencies are also renting space to other small organizations that do not have the staff or resources to function in their own space. In Clearwater, for example, the Yellowhead Community Services manages the Dutch Lake Community Centre that rents space to community and economic development organizations, such as the Clearwater & District Chamber of Commerce, the North Thompson Arts Council, and Wells Gray Community Forest that have only 1 or 2 employees. They also provide space for staff from organizations, such as Service Canada and Thompson Rivers University, who visit the community to provide outreach supports. In this way, multi-service organizations can leverage their space to function as an incubator for nurturing the development of other organizations.

Moving Forward

One-stop shops or multi-service models have streamlined supports for rural residents and strengthened the resiliency of rural organizations. Multi-service organizations, however, continue to confront challenges managing the scale and scope of their operations at both a local and regional level.

Similar to other forms of shared infrastructure and service arrangements, one-stop shops or multi-service agencies have received varied levels of advice and support from local and senior levels of government, and other stakeholders. As a result of social and economic restructuring, there are not always other partners (i.e. industry, non-profit) available to support initiatives in more rural and remote settings. Many groups further have limited expertise and resources to pursue other revenues, such as social enterprises. Alternative sources of financing to support investments in infrastructure and ownership are also underdeveloped. Provincial hubs need to be strengthened in order to provide the breadth of advice and support needed for multi-service / one-stop agencies. Partnerships with post-secondary institutions and senior government agencies need to be strengthened in order to provide training opportunities that can equip leaders and staff with the skills needed to manage such diverse and complex organizational structures. Senior levels of government also need to ensure that program policies requiring partnerships are accompanied with appropriate timelines and commensurate resources to effectively build those relationships in rural regions.

While in many cases, local governments have been strong supporters of new service arrangements in small communities, some do not always understand or value the contributions that community services make for community and economic renewal. Local governments need to ensure that social policy frameworks are in place to support one-stop shops and multi-service agencies. Local governments can also play a greater role to support multi-service agencies by donating or leasing space to non-profits below the market rate (Kohm 1998), encouraging new major commercial developments to allocate space for non-profits (Bubel *et al*. n.d.), as well as by engaging non-profits in multi-purpose facility projects.

Senior government policies have downloaded services without providing the flexibility and administrative resources needed to support these new service arrangements as small communities continue to experience fluctuations across many sectors (Askim *et al*. 2011). This should include attention to approving appropriate travel and staff resources to address the distances and regional contexts served by small multi-service organizations. Long-term funding arrangements need to be strengthened across more senior government programs in order provide more certainty for planning multi-service operations. An understanding of the limited financial and human resources available to multi-service organizations in rural regions can also be better demonstrated by streamlining reporting criteria and procedures with coordinated timelines and information management systems across various ministries. Finally, there is a need to strengthen rural structures within provincial and federal levels of government in order to strengthen the voice, visibility, and responsibility for rural issues.

CONCLUSION

In addition to the general challenges posed by a low density rural and small town setting, stakeholders in small communities are under stress from changes occurring within this context. Many resource sector activities that have been the foundation for rural and small town economies have been under economic threat from low cost supplier regions around the world (Hayter 2000). To meet that challenge, resource industries have aggressively pursued efficiency as a means to lower their costs of production and remain globally competitive (Edenhoffer and Hayter 2013). This often means a substitution of capital for labour, with the result that workforces today are much smaller and we are producing more raw material for export with far less labour. Population decline affects not only the mean level of human capital within the community, but also the limited base upon which groups can draw potential staff and volunteers. This limits organizational capacity, innovation and flexibility, and access to alternative resources.

Further, an increasing level of offloading, downloading, or outright closure of public and private sector services has exacerbated all of these issues (Halseth and Ryser 2006). In a context where private and public sector services or supports have been downsized or eliminated, the voluntary and non-profit sector has been increasingly called upon to fill the gap (Baines and Cunningham 2011). Not only does this increase the workload, but it increases the risk of burnout. As mentioned, if there is burnout, the possibility of renewing crucial human resources is limited by small community size.

It is vital to understand that rural and small town places have a very different context that affect the operations of local governments and community organizations compared to similar types of groups operating in urban or metropolitan settings. Distance is a considerable challenge for many small communities. There is distance involved in connecting with governmental agencies or key policy makers that may determine the fate and the success of initiatives and their funding applications. Distance exacerbates the possibility that policy-makers may not understand rural and small places. The opportunity to connect with wider networks of organizations or with government ministries and regionalized supports, is also negatively impacted by the friction of both social distances, that are created through increasingly lengthy bureaucratic processes and accountability procedures, and the physical distances within which rural voluntary groups operate (McKinney and Kahn 2004; Molnar *et al.* 2001). Distance also impacts exposure and access to information and different forms and types of innovations, ideas, options, and solutions. With limited external networks, rural stakeholders can become isolated and introverted; thereby, limiting their capacity for renewal (Wollebæk 2009). Rural and small town organizations know that a significant portion of their annual operating budget may be consumed by travel costs—costs either to deliver services in a low-density wide-reaching geographic area, or costs associated with connecting with policy and program offices (Harris *et al.* 2004).

In this report, we have examined how three new infrastructure and service arrangements are transforming the capacity and renewal of small communities, including co-location / multi-purpose facilities, service co-operatives, and one-stop shop / multi-service organizations. Moving forward, greater political leadership is needed by designating ministries to lead supportive policies that can shape the implementation of new shared infrastructure and service arrangements (Farquhar *et al.* 2006). Senior levels of government can also create shared services assessment teams or managers to provide advice and guide the development of these new infrastructure and service arrangements that are increasingly being requested through their policies and RFPs (Lennie 2010; Torres *et al.* 2014; Zeemering and Delabbio 2013). These changes will go a long way to equip and better position stakeholders in small communities to respond to the challenges and opportunities associated with rural change.

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

The research methodology consisted of literature reviews and interviews with key informants. The literature reviews consisted of academic articles, as well as reports and evaluations completed by government and other organizations. The literature and reports were drawn from smart services and infrastructure initiatives across Canada, as well as internationally in Australia, New Zealand, the US, and Europe.

In the spring of 2015, key informant interviews were conducted with leaders of community groups, service agencies, and local and regional governments around rural British Columbia. This included consultations with co-ops chairs, consultants, local / regional government staff, non-profit executive directors, staff of co-ops and multi-service agencies, and volunteers. Participants were recruited through publically available lists. There were a total of 51 interview participants in 35 communities (see Figure 1). A general breakdown of interview participants by community sector is shown in Table A1.

Figure 1: Smart Service and Infrastructure Project Locations in BC

Map credit: Kyle Kusch.

Table A1: Interview Respondents

Sector	Number of Respondents	% of Respondents
Community service co-operative	17	33.3
Co-location initiative	21	41.2
Multi-service agency	21	41.2
Other	3	5.9
Northern BC	26	51.0
Southern BC	25	49.0
Total	51	

Source: Learning from Smart Services and Infrastructure Projects in Rural BC, 2015.
*Note: some organizations are engaged in more than one type of service / infrastructure arrangement. For example, some one-stop shops or multi-service agencies belong to co-ops, while other multi-service agencies have pursued co-location initiatives with other groups.

Our research is bound by protocols at UNBC's Research Ethics Board. A key component to this protocol is to provide research participants with a copy of the consent form that outlines the purpose of the study, how the research process will protect their anonymity and confidentiality, and that their participation is voluntary.

The purpose of this project is to identify key benefits and lessons for developing smart, efficient service infrastructure that can enhance the capacity and resiliency of rural and small town places. Developing an understanding of these lessons is critically important as many organizations and communities respond to ongoing social, economic, and political restructuring with aging infrastructure and fewer human and financial resources. This report assembles a summary of key issues as identified from our interviews. In particular, questions were asked to explore:

- How people became involved and oriented with different service and infrastructure arrangements,
- The opportunities and challenges with developing different service and infrastructure arrangements,
- The influence of rurality on any unique or unanticipated issues, challenges, or opportunities that emerged,
- The types of support that were provided by various levels of government and other relevant stakeholders,
- The lessons that they learned throughout the process,
- The impact that new service and infrastructure arrangements have had for their organization and their community, and
- The types of changes that are needed to support these types of initiatives in small communities.

Following each interview, notes were provided to each participant for review. Qualitative analysis was done to identify, code, and categorize patterns and themes that emerged from open-ended questions.

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