

County Outreach Strategy – Otonabee-South Monaghan

Includes:
Final Report

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TCCBE

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Thank you!

- Paul McCarney & Alex Valoroso.

Introduction

We are Alex Valoroso and Paul McCarney, two fourth year students at Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario. Alex is completing an Honours Degree in International Development (IDST), and Paul is completing a Double Major in International Development and Indigenous Studies. As fourth year students in IDST, we chose the option to participate in IDST 422 – Assessment of Development Projects with Professor Chris Beyers. This course examines techniques for analyzing and assessing projects for industrial, rural, and social development within Canada and abroad. It focuses on selected case studies which include Canadian projects for development assistance in the South, and incorporates issues and challenges for evaluation, including project design, methodology, and ethics. The second semester of this course involves a project hosted by the Trent Centre for Community Based Education (TCCBE). Projects vary greatly and students complete the projects in pairs based on shared project interest and availability. We both have previous experience working in community development within an international context; Paul participated in the Thailand year abroad in 2006/07, and Alex participated in the Trent-in-Ecuador Program, also in 2006/07. This course provides an opportunity to experience community development within a Canadian context, and the projects offer experiential learning with local organizations.

Students are introduced to Barbara Woolner, Projects Coordinator of TCCBE, in the first semester to investigate potential projects. Once a project is chosen, a representative of the organization, Chris Beyers, and the students begin to develop a project agreement and timeline for the project. We chose Project #874 - County

Outreach. The goal of this project was to help develop partnerships between organizations in the Township of Otonabee-South Monaghan and TCCBE. Although short in duration, this project has great opportunity for growth and will continue beyond our specific role. Through their many resources, TCCBE will work with students and community members to continue to expand and develop each segment of this project in the future.

We decided on this project for several reasons; it offered community and project development in the initial stages which will continue to grow and expand and be put to use, rather than sitting on a shelf. A number of learning outcomes were identified – facilitation, event management, the use of popular education, and an alternative to traditional research and survey methods. The first task was to identify a county within the area, and then highlight some of the issues through various research methods which would culminate in a focus group to be hosted in the second semester. We decided on the Township of Otonabee-South Monaghan because of proximity, and also because the municipal website identified a number of issues which we felt could lead to discussion and action for the project. The focus group was intended to allow community members to voice their opinions, thoughts or concerns about previously identified issues or newly raised concerns in a collective, dialogical way

Background

Organizational Profile:

The Trent Centre for Community Based Education:

“Bringing local organizations and academic resources together for community-inspired projects”

The Trent Centre for Community Based Education (TCCBE) was officially established in 1996, and represented the culmination of an initiative which began 1989 by two Trent University professors. The idea behind the initiative was to connect students at Trent University with community organizations that lacked the capacity and resources to conduct research. In this way, students would be provided with the chance to gain experiential learning opportunities and contribute to the “ecological, cultural and economic development of the surrounding region while completing research projects” (TCCBE website, About Us). The establishment of the TCCBE was the result of a partnership between three organizations in the Peterborough region, and developed a broad goal of providing a “mechanism for students, faculty and local organizations to pool their resources and work together on community-inspired research projects that enhance the social, environmental, cultural or economic health of our community” (ibid.). In 2001, the TCCBE and U-Links created the Community-Based Education (CBE) Program at Trent University.

The CBE Program operates within the Peterborough and Haliburton Counties and is intended to partner students with community organizations to assist those organizations in completing and conducting research projects. The CBE Program is a way for students

to gain academic credit, as well as experience in their fields of study and the broader community. The Program aims to provide reciprocal benefits for both students as well as the community organizations, and to enhance relationships and partnerships between Trent University and the broader communities in general. Organizations which wish to become involved submit project proposals to the TCCBE (for Peterborough) or U-Links (for Haliburton) and upon approval, the projects are then offered to students to consider. Students can become connected to the CBE Program through a range of courses at Trent University, including International Development Studies 422, Evaluation of Development Projects.

Project Profile:

Project # 874 – County Outreach Strategy:

This particular project is part of a broader effort of the TCCBE to expand its involvement to additional townships in the Peterborough County in order to establish partnerships with organizations beyond the City of Peterborough. TCCBE's goal is to create outreach strategies for each of the townships it is not currently operating in by assessing opportunities for potential connections and then subsequently building on those connections and expanding its services. Our specific project goal was to design an outreach strategy for the Township of Otonabee-South Monaghan (OSM) and make recommendations for TCCBE in expanding to this township. The tasks of this project will be elaborated in more detail below, but in general were to contact key individuals and organizations in the OSM region and assess areas of focus or concern for the

community; to attempt to identify any current processes or organizations addressing those concerns or issues; then to organize and facilitate a community event to gather individuals and organizations together in order to discuss and narrow down potential opportunities for TCCBE to become involved in the Township.

Specifically, the goals of this project were to:

- Pilot an outreach event/community consultation in one township in Peterborough County in the fall/winter 2007/8;
- Research some of the current issues within the community of study;
- With support of organization, determine the community organizations or key individuals to invite to a public event;
- Create an agenda for the event using participatory methods;
- Co-facilitate the event with organization staff;
- Create an evaluation for participants and write an event summary report;
- Based on the outcomes of this event, make recommendations for “taking the show on the road” to other communities in the county;
- Map out a realistic Outreach strategy for the organization to undertake in the Spring/Summer 2008.

Community Profile:

Township of Otonabee-South Monaghan:

In order to appropriately approach the OSM community and better appreciate the goals of the project, it was important to conduct preliminary research and gain an introductory understanding of the broader characteristics of the community. The Township of Otonabee-South Monaghan is located on the north shores of Rice Lake, south of the City of Peterborough (See Appendix A). OSM advertises a wide variety of tourist events and opportunities, and expresses a desire to continue to expand the potential of the tourism industry. The Township promotes outdoor activities such as cross country skiing and hiking, cottage rentals, shopping, golf, and many local shops and businesses available to tourists. In addition to tourism, the OSM Township is a largely agricultural-based region. The Economic Development plan, as outlined on the Township website, states that, “In an effort to promote the health, safety and well-being of its residents, the Township will strive to preserve and enhance the environmental integrity of the land, water and air, while balancing the economic needs of the Township as a whole” (OSM Website, Economic Development).

Prior to starting this project, we recognized that it would be important for us to have a basic familiarity with the profile of the community, including demographic and economic statistics, for example. As we continued to conduct our preliminary research we discovered that it was rather difficult to obtain this information, and were in fact informed by a number of sources that township-specific demographic information (including population, age, and gender characteristics) is not available - it would be possible to review County-wide information on these topics, but information on the Township specifically wasn't available. However, after more extensive research we were able to find a source that offered this information (See Appendix B); this also made us

mindful of the fact that the Township and members of the community are not generally aware of an in-depth community profile. In addition, while the Township website provided a broad outline of the community's economy – mentioned above – the information was not in substantial detail regarding the breakdown of different industries; this information was obtained from Statistics Canada (See Appendix C). Therefore, as this project progressed, establishing a more detailed knowledge base of the community, from community members, was an ongoing effort.

Methodology

In addition to the principles guiding this particular project, it was important for us to bear in mind the broader context within which this project was situated. In choosing a methodological approach for this project, it was important to remember that although this outreach strategy was a task in of itself, it was also one component in a larger project extending beyond the completion of this one. Therefore, it was important to consider the broader methodology of TCCBE's approach to their County Outreach projects in general. This consideration affected this project in two ways. First, the fact that this project was a part of a broader, ongoing effort by TCCBE meant that we needed to determine a methodological approach that would be compatible with their broader County Outreach initiative. Second, it was important to consider the future goal of which this particular outreach strategy was a part and to approach this project with a consciousness for how it would most effectively complement and be of use to this broader goal. In other words, our final report is not in itself the purpose of this project ; rather, our final report is intended to inform the next step in TCCBE's outreach strategy for the Otonabee-South Monaghan Township and will contribute to the action taken in this strategy.

Participatory Research:

Participatory research methodology as understood in this project refers to an approach which assumes fundamentally that "[e]ffective public policy and programs depend on strong advocacy and input from people with first-hand experience of the issues" (Women's Research Centre, n.d.: 10). Therefore, researchers and social scientists

are not assumed to be the keepers and organizers of the knowledge they seek; rather, “[t]he focus is on learning about how people actually experience the specific issue or problem. This knowledge is the key to knowing what actions will make a practical difference to people’s lives and why” (ibid., 9). In this regard, participatory research is underpinned by the understanding that participants in a research project are already the experts on their own situation, and the purpose of the researchers is therefore merely to provide and facilitate the means through which participants will express this experience and knowledge.

Consideration of the future direction of TCCBE’s County Outreach strategy was another aspect of this project we were conscious of, and is related to a second methodology which we can subsume within the participatory approach. Along with participatory methodologies and methods, this project was designed according to action-oriented values, meaning that it was understood that the true importance of this project would be the usefulness it contained in informing TCCBE of relevant action to be taken in becoming involved in the Otonabee-South Monaghan community. We therefore understand participatory action research as “the systematic collection and analysis of information for the purpose of taking action and making change” (ibid., 9). This was significant in our project as we undertook to design the approach and particular methods according to the understanding that this project would need to have practical relevance for the future direction of TCCBE in this community. In particular, it entailed a conscious consideration of the use this project would have for the participants themselves, and derived its ethical considerations from the basic principle that the project should ultimately serve the interests of the participants.

Research as Practical Knowledge:

This project also involved a broader set of conceptualizations embedded in the approach we took concerning the practical value research should serve. Our methodology was also influenced by Bellah's (1983) conception which "thinks of social science in terms of practical rather than technological reason", according to which principle we "assert the primacy of moral practice over both social and moral theory" (Bellah, 1983: 45-46). This principle underpinned our theoretical and conceptual approaches to the project, whereby our research - in being action-oriented - was concerned with the ethical implications involved in our project. We approached our project within a paradigm of social science which views the researcher as inherently involved with participants, rather than removed and involved in a purely scientific way.

We considered Schwandt's (1997) discussion on the place for value within social research as insightful to this project. Central to Schwandt's value-critical framework is the concept that participant reflection contributes to their own critical understanding of their situation based on the values embedded in their everyday life experiences. As Schwandt explains, the value-critical framework is about "redefining social inquiry as a dialogical and reflective process of democratic discussion and philosophical critique" (Schwandt, 1997: 10). This project was grounded in the idea that valuable information can be obtained through participants' engagement in a reflective process of self-analysis of their community situation. Our aim was to facilitate critical reflection among community members in order to identify needs and thoughts relevant to the community

as a whole¹. A value-critical approach also “removes professional social inquiry from the center of society and replaces it with a focus on praxis and the cultivation of practical wisdom” (ibid.). We followed this principle in the sense that our project was intended to develop practical wisdom about the community which would be acted upon in future steps undertaken by TCCBE.

Finally, Schwandt discusses the way in which a value-critical approach conceptualizes the issue being evaluated. He states that a value-critical framework “does not regard what is to be evaluated as an object about which theoretical knowledge must be generated”, but rather, “what is to be evaluated is a human practice or action in which human beings are engaged” (ibid.). While we were developing a participatory framework that could be used by TCCBE in future outreach strategies and were intending to expand an understanding of participatory methodologies, the goal of this project was not theoretical advancement, but the practical use of theory to generate what Schwandt calls practical wisdom, and subsequently, action.

Validity of Data:

In adopting a participatory framework for this project, it was important for us to consider the issue of validity and how we were to address this according to our methodological approach. Silverman (1993: 149) discusses two types of error which threaten a project’s validity, “Type 1 error is believing a statement to be true when it is

¹ It should be noted here that the use of the term “critical” refers to a specific understanding of the concept. While ‘critical understanding’ and ‘critical reflection’ can be used in various ways, we understand these terms as involving a process whereby participants reflect on their own lived realities from their subjective positions in those realities. We are not specifying to what degree reflection must be “critical”; rather, we understand that through engaging in a process of observing and analyzing their own reality from their own perspective, participants are involved in what we see as an inherently critical process.

not; Type 2 error is rejecting a statement which, in fact, is true". We had to consider the concept of "truth" as it is conceptualized within our methodological approach. We did not conceive of truth in positivistic terms, but rather as the product of dialogical and reflective processes. In this respect, our approach to validity departed from Silverman's, notably because the participatory methods we used were intended to engage participants in a setting where they were able to express their thoughts and knowledge according to the way they experience them in everyday settings. On this issue, Silverman notes that "what people say in answer to interview questions does not have a stable relationship to how they behave in naturally-occurring situations" (ibid., 150). While this may be true, the purpose of our research was to avoid this disconnection between participants and their naturally-occurring situations; rather, a participatory approach as we used it attempts to encourage reflection on participants' naturally-occurring situations and enable them to speak from an inherently subjective perspective, rather than an objective, detached one. Truth, therefore, is inherently subjective and is the result of subjective reasoning and dialogue.

Silverman's discussion of validity was also somewhat unsuitable for this project in his explanation of the analysis and presentation of data. Silverman says that in reviewing qualitative data, he was,

struck by the 'anecdotal' quality of much of what I was reading. Much too frequently, the authors had fallen foul of two problems identified by Fielding and Fielding (1986): 1) a tendency to select field data to fit an ideal conception (preconception) of the phenomenon; 2) a tendency to select field data which are conspicuous because they are exotic, at the expense of the less dramatic (but possibly indicative) data (32) (ibid., 153).

However, participatory research is premised on the concept that the researchers are not choosing, arbitrarily or for their own ends, which data to present. On the contrary, within our approach participants' information is meant to speak for itself and provide the most valuable data obtainable precisely because it has been expressed by those most knowledgeable of the situation. This does not mean that a rigorous analysis of data is not necessary. It means firstly that the data provided by participants must be conceptualized differently than data according to other methodological approaches; and secondly that our approach to data analysis must also follow the understanding that the project is not intended to prove a preconceived idea but will present the information provided by participants as valid knowledge.

In reviewing Silverman's approach to the issue of validity, we wished to adopt an alternative approach. While Silverman criticizes certain methodological approaches for their tendency to "sidestep the issue of validity", he fails to account for different epistemological foundations underpinning these methodological approaches, and thus sidesteps a meaningful discussion of other approaches to the issue of validity. In this project, we acknowledge that "[o]ne way of dealing with the whole question of values and bias is to recognize that research cannot be value-free and thus try to ensure that values in the research process are acknowledged and so exhibit what is called reflexivity²" (Bryman and Teevan, 2005: 18). Thus, we considered the concept of 'external validity', which "asks whether social scientific findings are applicable to people's everyday, natural, social settings or whether social research sometimes produces findings that, while technically valid, are artificial and would not occur in real life" (ibid.,

² According to Bryman and Teevan (2005: 386), 'reflexivity' is defined as: "a term used to refer to reflections by social researchers about the implication, for the knowledge of the social world they generate, of their methods, values, biases, decisions, and mere presence in the very situations they investigate".

26). The idea of using participatory methods in our project was intended to facilitate the collection of data from participants according to their experiences in everyday settings. We achieved external validity through a direct focus on people's everyday, natural, social settings; it was the recounting of these everyday settings that formed the data for this project.

An additional note on achieving validity is the strategy of respondent validation. Again, Silverman discredits this approach as opening the potential for participants to actually obscure data by changing their minds, rather than validating it. For example, Silverman's reticence to accept this approach centres around "whether respondents are able to follow a report written for a sociological audience and, even if it is presented intelligibly, whether they will (or should) have any interest in it" (Silverman, 1993: 159). However, this belief in fact contrasts directly with participatory approaches, which see participants as their own experts and providing the expertise on their own situations. Therefore, this project was designed with the understanding that it derives much of its value from the fact that participants do have an interest in its outcome, and therefore are fully competent to follow the report. We used respondent validation in this project as a means of confirming both what participants were expressing to us at the time, as well as returning to the data after its collection and confirming with participants that we had analyzed and interpreted it appropriately. In this regard, we used what we call 'formative respondent validation' and 'summative respondent validation'. By formative respondent validation, we are referring to the dialogical nature of this project. During the focus group event that was organized, facilitators of the project responded in person to the thoughts expressed by participants at the time they were shared to confirm that the ideas

had been understood correctly. Summative respondent validation refers to the process whereby upon the final collection and summary of the data, a brief report was sent to participants to which they could respond and confirm that we had interpreted the information accurately.

Methods and Design:

The design of this project utilized popular education methods, referred to by Choules (2007) as critical pedagogy in North America. She states that “[critical] pedagogy is employed as a tool for engaging people to transform unjust social, economic, and political conditions” (Choules, 2007: 160). While our project was not about unjust conditions per se, the fundamental idea is to engage people in identifying and addressing their own situations in a critical way in order to bring about transformative, grassroots, and participatory action. In addition, popular education is “rooted in the real interests and struggles of ordinary people” and “[i]ts pedagogy is collective and democratic, focused primarily on group rather than individual learning and development” (ibid., 162).

As discussed above, this project and its methodology were premised on the idea of using critical reflection as a tool for participatory action. Bartlett (2005: 346) discusses Freire’s concept of ‘praxis’ as “reflection and action upon the world to transform it”. Our project utilized this philosophy in that our purpose was not to address predetermined issues within the community, but rather to engage with community members and provide a forum for them to reflect upon and identify their own perceptions of their community. Our role, and the subsequent future role of TCCBE, then, is to

follow up on the issues and thoughts recognized by community members and act on the opportunities identified by them.

This project was centered on qualitative data collection methods, primarily interviews and a community focus group. These particular methods allowed the most potential for the critical and personal engagement with community members that was necessary for this project in consideration of its methodological groundings. Initial interviews and conversations utilized a generally informal interview schedule, whereby we approached individuals with a broad set of questions and topics to discuss and then allowed the conversations to chart their own course, to a certain extent. While we maintained a general direction to the interviews and conversations, it was important to bear in mind that the fruit of this project would be revealed through participants' own self-reflection on their situations; thus, it was important for us to allow participants to express their thoughts on the broader topic. This did not mean, however, that this project was not rigorous in its approach. The project was guided by a clear purpose and overall research question; however, the informal interview guide approach was most useful in providing the flexibility and adaptability necessary for this project. In addition to interviews and conversations, we organized and facilitated a community focus group to gather community members and participants together and provide a forum for collective reflection and discussion on community issues and thoughts. This event utilized popular education tools such as brainstorming and activity-based data collection to facilitate and encourage collective information sharing.

Participation and Confidentiality:

Using multiple types of data collection methods raised the issue of confidentiality and how this would be addressed according to our methodology. An important consideration in this project was “what constitutes ‘participation’?”. In other words, our initial interviews and conversations were seen as establishing a basis of knowledge about issues and thoughts relevant to community members, with the focus group being the primary event in which participants would discuss collectively their thoughts and ideas. However, we also recognized that a substantial amount of valuable and valid data was generated through our initial contacts with organizations and community members, and a fundamental belief of our methodological approach maintained that knowledge provided by community members in participatory approaches is valid by virtue of the fact that it has been generated through reflection and experiential knowledge. As such, it was necessary for us to establish a specific conceptualization of what constituted participation in this project, and thus how confidentiality issues applied.

Therefore, according to our participatory methodology, we needed to ensure that all of the input provided to us by participants in varied settings and by various modes of communication was considered valid. In considering all data as valid, it was important that we therefore applied the same standards of confidentiality to all participants. Thus, in our project, the term participant is used to refer to anyone who provided us with information or data in any way or by any means; this will ensure that despite their level, depth, or duration of involvement in this project, all participants were ensured the same level of confidentiality. We felt this would be most appropriate in following with our stated methodological approach: in order to incorporate participatory principles, it was

important for us to not discount any information as invalid or outside of the research project and therefore outside of official involvement and confidentiality considerations.

A final aspect of our methodology worth mentioning concerns the working relationship between the researchers, the host organization, and the community, as well as how this relationship was conceptualized. It was important that we maintained a close working relationship and constant dialogue with TCCBE to ensure that we were continuing to design the project and gather data within the methodological approach that they had outlined for their broader County Outreach project. In addition, this project was not intended to operate in a top-down way, but rather to integrate the researchers and TCCBE to mutually achieve the results while benefitting all concerned. Furthermore, we felt it was important that we forge trusting and honest working relationships with participants so that they felt comfortable working with us and sharing their experiences. Because we adopted a participatory methodology, it was imperative that participants trust the project before they would be willing to divulge information on their own experiences. The nature of these working relationships was therefore a continuous consideration for us throughout the project.

Findings and Reflections

Overview of Event Exercises (have an appendix of the schedule?):

“Pass it On”, the first exercise, derived themes from a compilation of index cards filled out by participants during registration. Each participant was provided with one index card, and the cards then determined a number of themes to be used for the event into which we grouped the issues and thoughts that were raised; we tried to limit the themes to less than five. The original plan for the focus group called for people to be arranged in groups of five or less, with the number of themes developed from the index cards determining the number of people in each group. Each theme identified was given a single sheet of paper, and each group was supposed to have a sheet of paper for each theme. The page was divided in half and each half of the page for a different round of the exercise. The first round was meant for participants to identify “Issues”, similar to those they identified on their index cards. For example, if a number of issues pulled from the index cards at the beginning had the environment as a common theme, a sheet of paper would be labeled as “Environment”. Each person at the table started with a different theme, and would have four minutes per theme, after which each sheet was then passed around to the next person in the group. This first round was intended to last roughly twenty minutes in length. The goal of this round was to have participants list any thoughts or concerns within a particular theme. The second round of this exercise, on the other half of each piece of paper, focused on “Community Strengths”; this is where participants listed the community strengths in regards to the “Issues” written in the first

round including, for example, other organizations in the area already working on an issue. This round is slightly faster, with roughly three minutes per theme.

The second exercise was the “What do you need to know?” segment facilitated by TCCBE staff members, Barb and Adam. This narrowed down specific questions for each theme on what the community needs to know about the particular issues to be addressed. This also allowed for any issues or thoughts to be raised which were not cited during the first round of “Pass it On”. Information was catalogued on chart paper, in order to help facilitate the final exercise.

The next exercise was titled “Dotmocracy”. Participants were provided with three self adhesive dots and instructed to place them next to whichever particular issues or thoughts they felt were the most important. In three short minutes, “Dotmocracy” helped to prioritize and validate the data gathered over the last two exercises.

Our interactive evaluation was a collective wrap-up of the event and helped to synthesize and confirm the data presented to us. Based on the questions asked, it was also an informal way of assessing the efficiency of the event and why or why not it was deemed successful.³

³ For the purpose of this project, and keeping in line with our methodological views, we deemed “successful” as a) engaging participants and gaining insight through discussion about themes which were raised throughout the project; b) if participants felt they were able to voice issues in a welcoming and comfortable environment; c) the objective or the purpose of the event clear; and d) if this format for community outreach is a suitable template which could be used in other communities. We also considered challenges as a positive because of the opportunity to further develop the project. For example, the unclear nature of the event poster may have affected the attendance of participants, however, with this feedback, the County Outreach project will be able to address the issue and be more cognizant with the next event poster, which is a success in expanding the project.

Observations:

Integral to this project is a careful analysis of the data, and of the project as a whole. As a community-based participatory project, it is important to ensure the data from the event has come directly as a result from the participants themselves and not from any one researcher's preconceived bias towards or against the project. We have analyzed the data and broken it down in three areas for our conclusions on the project as a whole. The first section focuses on observations prior to and during the event itself; the second area is more technical, and relies on statistics and information gathered during the event; the third section discusses the challenges we met in facilitating/completing/implementing the project.

Part of the initial research for the project looked at understanding some of the potential areas of concern within OSM. A contact list of familiar partner organizations and former contacts which serviced the region was provided by TCCBE, and additional resources, mainly from the OSM Township website (add website info?) provided additional organizations to build up our contact list. Cold calls and brief introductory emails (appendix ?) were carried out to establish a contact base, interest in the project, and to garner information about the community. A number of informal emails and interviews were conducted with service organizations; these initial contacts provided a general scope of issues and thoughts likely to come out in the focus group. For example, a few contacts mentioned the annual flooding of the Otonabee River, the waste removal site at the Municipal dump, and a lack of services for seniors. These issues were the three main thoughts we were introduced to in our introductory research. We then had a basis for postulating which community concerns would arise during the event.

In order to gain a sense of how the community is spatially constructed, we felt it important to familiarize ourselves with the township of Otonabee-South Monaghan. A drive along the township border introduced us to a number of important factors, such as the vast use of agricultural space; the distance between services and neighbors for some residents; how community centres, such as Keene, were concentrated in a small area; the types of business and services available within the township; and the importance of local businesses to the area. We stopped in at many of the local businesses, the tourist office, public libraries and service clubs to post out event poster (see appendix #). There were subtle hints from community members that they were not clear on the purpose of the project or the focus group. At the time, we did not fully realize the vagueness of the poster and its description of the project; this became clearer to us when participants at the focus group pointed out they weren't aware why they were really at the event or what it was intended to accomplish.

During the start of the event, participants were invited to register and mingle as they helped themselves to complimentary beverages, finger sandwiches, and cookies.⁴ It is interesting to note that not one participant helped him- or her-self to these items until the *middle* of the first exercise. Participants were asked to make a name tag, sign and read the consent form, and fill out index cards during the registration period. Right away, we observed that participants were uneasy with the consent form, and were reluctant to sign. This was due to a lack of understanding of the event itself as well as anxiety over the possibility that their names would be linked with certain comments or views about Otonabee-South Monaghan. Further concerns about confidentiality became apparent as not one single participant agreed to sign the release for TCCBE to use their image, photo,

⁴ These items were catered by a local café in Keene, The Tea Room.

quote, name or voice recording while in attendance of the event. The lack of clarity in the purpose of the event, coupled with what we soon realized was a genuine concern for confidentiality would not have been made clear if we were not able to observe and interact with the participants. Taking part in casual conversations with participants during the registration period allowed us to gain a sense of how participants were feeling about taking part in the focus group, i.e. apprehensive and unclear as to the purpose of the event. These conversations also allowed us to gauge some of the concerns of participants within the community. This was especially helpful since participants were, a) hesitant to fill out the consent form; and, b) some index cards, which were to be used to create headings for the “Pass it On” exercise, were initially left blank (however, the exercise still worked as very clear themes came up verbally during registration, and these themes were used for the event).

During a short break between exercises, some participants voiced concern over not having a theme for their issue, and so during the second exercise – “What do you need to know?” – we provided a “Miscellaneous” chart to record any additional information. This heading encapsulated many points of interest and created dialogue amongst the participants and ourselves, the researchers. In fact, many concerns about Otonabee-South Monaghan service delivery models, youth, and sustaining businesses during the non-tourist season were expressed and addressed in this segment. Areas of interest which generated the most discussion involved seniors and their lack of accessibility to services in the area, the need for youth to have an opportunity to be involved in sports and find employment, flooding of the Otonabee river, how to keep

local businesses sustainable, and how to appeal to a changing tourist demographic in the region.

Creating a relaxed and amicable environment, through joking around and making small-talk with the participants, helped to diffuse much of the tension the participants were feeling. Attentively listening and asking questions in a non-threatening manner, such as questions pertaining to the informal conversations in the introductory phase of the event, helped to establish a sense of familiarity and trust for both researcher and participant. This became apparent as we drew on local information gleaned from the initial drive through Otonabee-South Monaghan and spoke of our impressions of the area. Paying attention to what was being said in earlier discussions, and referring back to points of interest, also allowed for participants to open up and feel more relaxed as the event proceeded. The “What Do You Need to Know?” exercise really allowed participants to open up and provided the most insight; this was also reflective of the themes gleaned from the first half of the event (which theme – I meant all themes from the first exercise). The format of event itself and the exercises gradually built on each other and gave the participants a sense of cohesiveness when finishing off the final exercise, “Dotmocracy”. Surprisingly, the themes and topics which generated the most discussion, such as Youth and Environment, did not receive the most dots. This exercise helped to identify the most pressing issues for the community at the moment – the themes of Seniors, Funding/Event Participation, and Miscellaneous (promotion and sustainability of local businesses) garnered the most dots.

During the wrap-up and informal evaluation, participants provided contact names and suggestions for promoting further TCCBE events and ideas for subsequent events in

Otonabee-South Monaghan. For example, participants suggested having a promotional booth at the annual business expo, as well as offering ideas for different locations around the community to host events.

Data:

Overall, the data indicates that participants are concerned with the following themes and subheadings, but in varying importance:

Environment:

- 11 % of votes; all votes for “How do we meet changing needs of clients?”

Health/Health Care:

-33% of votes; all votes for “Needs of the senior population” and subsequent bullets.

Funding/Event Participation:

-33% of votes; 22% of votes for “Strategies for a (more) effective municipal website”,
11% of votes for “Strategies of ‘best practices’ implemented in other communities”

Miscellaneous:

-23% of votes; all votes for “Sustainability of local business & keeping it going; Promotion”

Challenges:

Our informational poster confused rather than made clear our objectives for the focus group, although the event itself was successful in the eyes of the participants. During the wrap-up session, informal discussion about the event format, purpose and promotion were brought up; participants felt the event did discuss community thoughts and themes in a format which allowed for open dialogue. Due to the exercises and discussion formulated over the duration of the event, participants felt there was opportunity to expand TCCBE’s outreach into the area and made suggestions for additional events in different communities. Many suggestions were made for simplifying and clearly stating what the objective of the event and project were. There was also an issue with language, both in the consent form, and in the event activities themselves. Participants expressed that consent form was too long and too intimidating; we did not take into consideration the use of language and how it may intimidate some participants. Although reduced to one page from the original two, it was not easy for participants to digest, and it gave participants a feeling of secrecy or ulterior motive. Confidentiality was a genuine concern among participants; this warranted quite a bit of attention, especially in a community where generally everyone knows one another. Again, this was due to what the participants felt was the unclear nature of the event.

For the event exercises, certain words created a negative tone and this was brought to light by a participant, with others quickly agreeing. Although we did not associate “issues and concerns” with negative connotations, these words were clearly interpreted this way within the community and for the participants. A participant suggested the use of “thoughts” to convey any ideas or points of interest for discussion for the event. We felt it was important to have the participants feel comfortable both during the event, and also with TCCBE and a future partner organization. It was also important for us to validate and acknowledge concerns participants felt over language. We quickly changed over from “issues and concerns” to “thoughts”. Therefore, overall the format of the event went over very well and allowed for participants to engage with each other and actually discuss “thoughts” about their community.

The event agenda, although scheduled in advance, did not suit the number of participants in attendance at the focus group. The “Ice Breaker” segment of the event was quickly dropped as participants settled into discussion and made introductions on their own. We also felt it may not be the most opportune time to utilize this process as participants were already feeling hesitant about the nature and purpose of the project. Overall, responding to the sensitivities of the participants in consideration of our methodological approaches, the event accomplished a starting point for dialogue, research and future TCCBE projects within Otonabee-South Monaghan.

Conclusions

Interpretation of the findings was a careful process in this project as we recognized that in choosing the methodologies and methods we did, it would be important to analyze and interpret the data in a way that we could make conclusions but not impose our own values on the project. In addition, using the qualitative methods we did provided a wealth of valuable and useful information, but that information needed to be interpreted into meanings that could be used to generate a set of conclusions about the project. Therefore, this section needed to reconcile our goals of allowing the data to ‘speak for itself’, while also categorizing it and determining the overall findings of the project. As we noted in our reflections, participants discussed different issues on their minds at the focus group and rated certain issues as most important to them. We also gathered ideas from individuals we spoke with at organizations who mentioned their perceptions of community needs, based on their position at a particular organization.

Given the different sources of information that contributed data to this project, it was important that we consider all perspectives equally and organize the data so it would be represented but not forced into categories. In this way, we are approaching the conclusions of this project by looking first at the “Dotmocracy” exercise of the focus group and which specific thoughts and issues were identified as most important by participants; second, we are examining the other information gathered to assess whether it fits with any of these thoughts and issues brought out by “Dotmocracy”.⁵ With this

⁵ It should be noted that in using the “Dotmocracy” exercise as our starting point, we are not devaluing the other exercises of the focus group; however, the participants were present for the entire event, so we feel that “Dotmocracy” simply represents the culmination of their collective and individual brainstorming. Therefore, the outcome of “Dotmocracy” reflected participants’ feelings as they were formed throughout

approach, we feel that it offers the most effective and thorough way to incorporate the information gathered from our introductory emails, telephone calls, and meetings, as well as the focus group, while still allowing data to be considered autonomously.

Health/Health Care:

During the “Dotmocracy” exercise, the theme of Health/Health Care received 33% of participants’ votes. This section had previously been narrowed down specifically into “needs of the senior population”, which included “how to access/find transportation for seniors?” and “what is the profile of the senior population?”. Participants explained that they are aware that there may be shortcomings to the services provided to seniors in Otonabee-South Monaghan, in particular seniors’ access to transportation to access services and facilities. In addition, it was explained to us that there used to be a Community Care office in Keene, which left a couple years ago, but participants were not aware of the reason for this, including whether or not Community Care was needed. In a meeting with another participant prior to the focus group, this issue was raised as well. This participant explained that he/she was aware that seniors in Otonabee-South Monaghan needed better transportation services to travel to appointments, etc. However, it seemed to us when we inquired that participants were not clear of the actual demographics of the senior population in their community. Participants knew that there were not extensive services for seniors, but were unaware of the particular needs of seniors, which services were lacking, and how seniors are distributed throughout the community.

the whole event. This also provided us with a way to consider data gathered outside the focus group in relation to a particular exercise and clearly stated set of categories.

Funding/Event Participation:

Funding/Event Participation referred to events held in Otonabee-South Monaghan, often aimed at tourists. Participants explained to us that the community has a thriving tourism industry in the summer, but is very slow in the winter. There are events held in the community to attract tourists and local people, but there are difficulties with fund raising for these events and publicizing them to bring the full potential of attendees. One area that was identified as important for event participation is understanding the demographics and profile of the tourist market in the community. Participants explained that tourism has changed over the years, and that the community is largely unaware of the current profile of tourists, including what they wish to do, what they do, and where they go and stay in the community. It was recognized that in order to effectively improve event participation, specifically among tourists, this information would be important to determine.

This theme also received 33% of participants' votes, divided into two sub-groupings: 22% to "strategies for a [more] effective municipal website"; 11% to "strategies of 'best practices' implemented in other communities". In discussing strategies for a municipal website, participants expressed to us that the website needs to contain more information about events and attractions in the community. We were told that the website is not updated regularly, and information is inadequate and does not represent the range of activities in Otonabee-South Monaghan. Determining strategies of best practices meant finding out what other communities are doing to raise money for events, as well as how to make events widely publicized and accessible. Participants

explained that it would be useful to learn from other communities and build on each other's strengths in fund raising for events and attracting people to them.

Miscellaneous:

The Miscellaneous theme received 23% of votes in the “sustainability of local businesses and keeping them going; promotion of local economy” sub-category. This issue arose out of participants' concern for local businesses, primarily in the tourism off-season (generally winter). Participants explained that businesses in Otonabee-South Monaghan essentially need to generate enough revenue in the summer to survive for the winter. Participants were concerned that local businesses are not able to sustain themselves year round. This was another point at which participants identified the need to better understand the profile and needs of their tourist clientele. Furthermore, there was a concern about employment opportunities within the community as youth generally have to leave to find work.

The fact that this category was developed and received votes by participants is worth commenting on for another reason. The issue of sustainability of local businesses arose primarily out of a side conversation with participants about the local café that catered the food for the day. During an informal conversation with participants about this particular business, one participant commented on his/her hope that the business would be able to sustain itself. Through this conversation, it was recognized that this concern was not specific to this one café, but applied to many of the businesses in the community.

Environment:

The environment category was divided into sub-categories, one of which concerned questions participants raised regarding changing fish stocks in the area. Otonabee-South Monaghan has a lively tourist fishing 'industry', and in the past few years residents have noticed a change in fish stock composition, but are unaware what has caused these changes. This thought was raised for two reasons, a) participants wanted to know what has caused fish stock changes in an environmental sense; and, b) what impact has tourism had on this, and what impact has changed fishing had on tourism. Therefore, participants identified the sub-category questions "what has caused changes in fish stocks?" and "what do we need to know about the changing tourist profile?" Specifically, participants needed to know how to "meet or "enhance" the changing needs of new tourist clients". This theme received 11% of votes during "Dotmocracy", and did not seem to have been identified by participants during initial discussions and meetings.

Summary:

Overall, this project identified a number of themes, issues, and thoughts that are clearly important to participants and community members. For the purpose of this project, our intention is to narrow down a starting point for TCCBE to engage with community members and organizations in order to address some of the questions and areas of focus expressed throughout this project. Therefore, we conclude that the themes of Health/Health Care and Funding/Event Participation appear to be the most important areas of focus for the participants in this project. It must be remembered that this project

dealt with a community and community perspectives and as such the findings are not necessarily 'rankable' for community members in the sense that they are divided into a hierarchy of importance, but rather all relate to one another. However, participants collectively identified these two areas as those which they feel should be addressed first and foremost. In addition, the issues expressed relating to Health/Health Care during the focus group were also supplemented by information expressed by participants during our initial contacts and meetings.

Therefore, we would conclude from this project that the two themes of Health/Health Care and Funding/Event Participation should be approached by TCCBE to determine possibilities for partnerships within the Otonabee-South Monaghan community. A point of interest, however, is the direct next step in TCCBE's outreach project in this community in order to address these themes of thoughts or issues. In both of these themes of focus, participants expressed the need to understand a particular demographic of their community. In order to address the needs of seniors, for example, it is important that community members and organizations obtain a better understanding of the profile of the senior population in the community. Similarly, to begin addressing questions or concerns related to event participation and tourist activities, there will need to be more information gathered on the profile of tourists in Otonabee-South Monaghan. More detailed community demographic information will be necessary in order to effectively answer questions related to these two areas of focus.

In terms of a next step, then, extrapolating from the data, preliminary research on community demographics will be an important step on the way to conducting research on the needs of seniors or possible ways to improve event participation. Ultimately, though,

this project would conclude that Otonabee-South Monaghan community members who participated in this project have identified the needs of the senior population, designing a [more] effective municipal website, and networking with other communities to determine best practices for fund raising and event participation as the most important and relevant thoughts on their minds.

Recommendations

In addition to what has been highlighted in the report as being beneficial or successful for the project, there are a number of recommendations which could lead to a more effective (successful / enhanced?) project. Based on empirical data, supported by our methodology, and input from TCCBE, along with OSM community members, the following recommendations are as follows:

Research & Event Promotion

- Better promotion of TCCBE in general; its mandate, research opportunities and projects. Although the purpose of the County Outreach is to expand TCCBE's reach, very few participants were familiar with the organization as a whole.
- Utilizing different sources to identify potential organizations within a township. For example, the Blue Book. This will lead to expanded opportunities to work with community partners as well as add onto the expanding contact list.
- Advertising on the Municipal website.

- Clear and concise posters. Perhaps doing an informal survey to see if people who are not involved with the project (i.e. landlord, roommate, etc.) understand the context of the poster.
- Host more than one event in the township. For example, participants suggested hosting events in each township rather than only Keene.
- Promote TCCBE events at the annual Business Expo.

Event

- Ensure consent forms are no more than one page in length and are written in a clear manner and can be easily understood by a wide range of participants.
- Be conscience of language within the event; be aware of how participants are responding to various words.
- Establish a check-list and double check for each other, as not to forget any items for the event (do we need this...I don't think we mentioned forgetting stuff for the event in the paper, did we?)

Future Projects⁶ with County Outreach in OSM:

- Research or create demographics of tourism and tourists, seniors, youth, and of (un)employment. Many of the themes brought up in the event require information which is not available or easily accessible to community members. The basic

⁶ These projects are a starting point and can be initiated within the next phase or two of TCCBE's County Outreach within OSM.

demographic information is an important starting point in addressing the issues discussed by the community.

- Updating the Municipal website; possibly with an “events’ section to encourage wider community participation in events. (do you think this is too touchy of a subject?)
- Creating an online registry and manual for the Fire Department.
- Research Community Care programs in the region (from the Peterborough office).
- Research partnerships or opportunities between volunteer organizations and high school youth who are required to complete volunteer hours for graduation. (I don’t know what this program is technically called...it was after my time ;)

Anything else?

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