



Building Community Capacity in Winnipeg's Inner City:



Exploring The Learning and Resource Needs of Volunteer Boards of Directors in Non-Profit Organizations

By Lynn Skotnitsky and Evelyn Ferguson
With Valerie Himkowski, Jackie Sokoliuk and Pat Wege



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Executive Summary

The work of volunteer boards of non-profit organizations makes a significant difference to the well-being of our citizens and our communities. Non-profit organizations are important vehicles for development in low income neighbourhoods. Scholars have examined community organizations in terms of the degree to which they increase citizen participation, enhance community capacity and revitalize neighbourhoods through the creation of social capital (Gitell, *et al.* 1999). Yet board members are largely left to their own devices in terms of ongoing leadership and skill development.

Within the Federal Government's Voluntary Sector Initiative, the Panel on Accountability and Governance (1999) has identified the need for capacity building as the first step toward better accountability and governance in Canada's voluntary sector.

In this study we explore elements that support the participation, learning and development of volunteer board members in inner-city community organizations in Winnipeg. In particular, we look at licensed childcare facilities, women's centers and family resource centers; organizations whose largely female volunteer directors are often consumers of those same services. The 4 primary objectives of the project were to:

- Explore the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for non-profit governance
- Enhance participants' knowledge of their own learning processes
- Increase the density of networks / build social capital
- Develop policy recommendations for optimizing learning for volunteer boards

We hope that the findings of this project will contribute to the Canadian literature on board development, and highlight some of the differences among boards in terms of the resources available to them and the privileges afforded them, while adding an explicit adult education perspective in terms of approaches to service delivery. We hope to draw attention to the importance of honouring and valuing the hard work and commitment of volunteer board members and to supporting their capacity building in ways that make the most sense to them. Additionally we hope to highlight some of the differences in women's approaches to developing leadership capacities within the community. Finally we want to acknowledge and draw on the strength and

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contributions of Aboriginal perspectives which have much to offer in understanding how best to build our communities.

Research Design. As researchers, community adult educators and feminists, we are influenced by theories that view adult education as having an important role and responsibility in transformative social change. The education approaches we have used are learner-centered; culture-, gender- and class-sensitive; and consider the multiple ways that learning takes place in non-formal education contexts. Data was collected through audio-taped workshop/focus groups, individual questionnaires and participant observation. Three groups (drawn from 53 non-profit organizations), each composed of 6 to 9 individuals, met twice for 7-hour sessions. We used analysis methods drawn from grounded theory and qualitative data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1973; Miles & Huberman, 1994; and others).

Profile Of The Participants. This sample of inner-city community board volunteers was made up of 92% women and 8% men; 56% Aboriginal, 40% white and 4% visible minority. The average age of participants is 41 with a range of 27 to 60 years of age. Over half are living with partners (64%); the remaining 36% are single, divorced, or widowed. In terms of education, 44% of the group has 15 to 16 years of schooling, equivalent to a university degree. Another 16% made up each of the groups 9-12 years, 12 to 14 years, and 16 years or more. Four percent of the participants have less than 9 years of schooling. The median household income before taxes for this group is \$30,000 to \$39,000; 56% are living at or below the poverty line. The total current and past board tenure of the 25 participants in the study is equal to 173.5 person years, reflecting volunteer contributions in 52 different community organizations over the last 10 to 30 years.

Networks and Social Capital. There is a great deal of overlap in the use of the terms “networks” and “social capital” in the literature. A **network** can be understood as “an extended group of people with similar interests or concerns who interact and remain in informal contact for mutual assistance or support” (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000). Networks are the basis of **social capital**, a term borrowed from economics, which captures the ‘value-added’ of trust and reciprocity that comes from active membership in a network. We think of financial capital as monetary resources; we can think of social capital as the value of participation that money can’t buy.

This study revealed ‘networking’ and ‘building social capital’ to be critical resources for learning for this sample of participants. Tapping into existing networks and promoting their further development was important as both a **community** building and a **capacity** building strategy. Board members were significant learning resources for each other. There are only so many training

dollars available, and the collective knowledge and experience of these volunteers is a rich resource from which to draw. We conclude that any program that promotes on-going learning through co-mentoring and network development, therefore, will have a ripple effect throughout the voluntary sector.

Within the training sessions, participants developed a comprehensive list of **67 types of Knowledge, 103 Skills and 54 Attitudes** they deemed significant for effective governance. They then prioritized the items and created personal learning goals related to the skill-sets most relevant to them. When data from the 3 meetings were brought together, the consistency among the 3 prioritized lists was immediately evident. We found that, collectively, board members knew what was fundamental to good governance, and they knew what they wanted and needed to learn. In fact, the emphasis was just as much on “how” as “what”. We found that group interaction drew each person’s wisdom out in a way that addressed their very specific learning needs and built relationships at the same time. In comparison with some of the normative literature on board development, we found that there were distinctions, based on the intersections of class, gender, and cultural differences, in what is valued, what investments board members feel entitled to, and how the work gets done.

Challenges Boards Face. Challenges experienced by this sample of board members emerged during discussion of the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for effective governance. They clustered around 10 main themes, some of which related to various needs for community capacity building, and others related to problems inherent in the system and assumptions upon which the current model is delivered for family and community services.

First, we observed that **board work doesn’t happen in a vacuum**; many board members are dealing with considerable challenges in their personal lives that make their volunteer commitments seem all the more remarkable. We identified at least two **barriers to participation, transportation and childcare**, that we feel could be easily remedied by acknowledging and reimbursing expenses associated with board and community leadership activities.

We also observed that, like in many boards, the participants in this study grappled with **tough decisions, sensitive topics, and ethical dilemmas** that involve balancing collective and individual needs within a moral framework. The board members also described challenges related to **understanding their roles as board members**. Many expressed a sense of feeling unprepared for what they were getting into, and of having little guidance in their positions. Participants also mentioned the challenges in

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understanding their roles vis-à-vis those of the executive director. Although some people reported having a mutually supportive relationship with their director, just as many people talked about their discomfort with some of the power dynamics between the E.D. and the board.

This led to challenges shared related to **evaluating the performance of the Executive Director**, in which participants quite unanimously voiced that they could use greater guidance. **Managing conflict** was another common theme of discussion when it came to challenges, especially when differences of opinion were not encouraged or respected. Some of the conflicts that people experienced as ‘personal’ are actually **structural contradictions** within the system.

Another of the challenges faced by board members is a heavy onus on volunteers for **fundraising**. Some participants had experienced a protracted sense of fragility from having to operate from grant to grant on a yearly basis. One of the heaviest burdens on volunteers in the childcare sector in particular, is trying to raise money for buildings and play structures, since there is no provision for building childcare facilities within the provincial budget. Other challenges that participants raised related to the month-to-month “**job of governing**” including unproductive meetings, recruiting and retaining volunteers and building commitment. Finally, some participants lamented that board development had not been treated more seriously as a legitimate task by advisors.

Finally, an on-going challenge, particularly for women with children, related to juggling numerous responsibilities and maintaining **balance** in their various roles. Balance is also a key message in the teachings of the Medicine Wheel. Many Native women have been leaders in the work of healing their communities from the effects of colonization. Keeping a balance means that the caring work done by women includes caring for themselves.

Reviewing these challenges allowed us to see the powerful constraints imposed on this sample of board members and also their tremendous commitment and motivation to build their communities.

Designing Learning: Because the project had dual purposes of research and training, we used a multi-layered design, with the hopes of achieving a number of objectives simultaneously. Turning now to the training aspect, from a content perspective we were exploring ‘how we learn’ within the domain of volunteer board experiences and governance issues. However, from a process perspective we employed specific strategies to put us in a microcosm of board life. This was done with the intention of modeling some of the communicative and interpersonal skill-sets of governance, such as: positive norm setting, respectful communication, appreciation for diversity,

creating a climate of trust, making room for different viewpoints in group discussions, building bonds and nurturing instrumental relationships, self-reflection and learning from our experiences, developing political awareness and critical inquiry, being transparent about agendas, balancing individual and collective needs, and respecting the context of people's lives.

Learning to Learn, Self-Knowledge and Collective Knowledge. David Kolb's (1991) Learning Style Inventory was used to explore the individual learning styles of participants, and discussion of the inventory was utilized as a strategy for group building. We used small groups and scheduled 2 sessions per group, approximately 3-4 weeks apart. The size and spacing of meetings mirrored that of board meetings.

Using a Learning Style Inventory in the context of exploring the requirements for, and challenges of, board governance work enabled people to reflect on their learning processes while trying to solve real-world problems. The use of Kolb's Learning Style Inventory showed great potential and was useful for a variety of inter-related purposes including as an icebreaker, for increased recognition of one's skills and talents; for development of self-confidence; as a method for affirming people's diversity and the different ways they might learn and/or solve problems; for team building, and for the model's parallels with the Medicine Wheel.

Another of the research objectives was to explore the extent to which the participants thought that their learning had been enhanced by the various design elements. We were interested in knowing what aspects of this model were useful to participants, since these would feed directly into considerations for training design and influence policy recommendations. The **elements deemed most beneficial** by participants included:

- Interaction with peers, opportunities to network
- Opportunity to discuss current issues and concerns
- Exploring *as a group* the knowledge, skills and attitudes for effective board governance
- Opportunity to hear multiple viewpoints and problem solving strategies on issues of interest
- Development of trust within the group, a climate of safety for learners, and affirming diversity
- Opportunity to develop self knowledge and self confidence
- A self-assessment instrument with team building applications
- Humour, mixing up activities, being able to move around
- Flexibility with schedules and agendas
- Having a workshop 'series' with time to apply the learning between sessions and reflect

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- Being respected as adults with multiple responsibilities – no shaming!
- Feeling pampered, worth “investing in”

We conclude with a number of recommendations to more effectively support and strengthen the abilities of volunteers engaged in non-profit governance.

Recommendations to individual board members include 1) Build networks, 2) Learn how you learn, 3) Discover your board’s strengths; recruit to round out the skills of the group, 4) Take advantage of training opportunities, and 5) Acknowledge your contributions. **Recommendations**

to boards of non-profit organizations include 1) Create a budget line for board expenses, 2) Encourage volunteers to attend workshops and seminars to build skills and knowledge; get conflict management training, and 3) Seek out consultants for guidance on key aspects of governance.

Recommendations to provincial, federal and other policy makers include 1) Acknowledge the legitimacy of a budget line for board expenses, 2) Provide consultants to work with boards, 3) Develop a multi-media package of resources which appeals to different learning styles and includes an interactive web site, a comprehensive manual (on-line and in a binder), and a training video, 4) Provide for conflict resolution training, and 5) Develop a board training & development ‘series’ with interactive workshops and networking events.

Conclusions. There is enormous potential for community capacity building inherent in the board leadership of non-profit organizations. These are people deeply embedded within their communities with great potential to influence others. Board members are long term resources for the community worthy of significant investment. We believe the above recommendations to boards, provincial governments, the Canadian government, and those supporting the Voluntary Sector Initiative if implemented will greatly enhance the potential of the voluntary sector. Effort and commitment are required from individuals fulfilling many different roles in the system. The first step is to remove barriers to participation. The expenses associated with volunteering must be acknowledged and reimbursed. Training models for board members should use interactive, community building approaches that appeal to a variety of learning styles and be customized to the particular needs of each learning group. Further, they need to be inclusive, and sensitive to cultural, gender and class differences. Finally, they must capitalize on and deepen existing networks while fostering the development of new networks and co-mentoring relationships. In this way we will encourage a learning culture which promotes ongoing development and lifelong learning for those who hold our families and communities together.

Introduction

Board members are as conscientious and as giving a group as one could ever hope to find. [They] interrupt their personal and occupational lives to support something in which they believe... Their personal drive has accomplished formidable tasks. Their perseverance has surmounted seemingly intractable barriers. Their patience has outlasted drudgery. Their generosity has made the impossible possible...

Though possessed of ultimate organizational power, the governing board is understudied and underdeveloped. Here we confront a flagrant irony in management literature: where opportunity for leadership is greatest, job design for leadership is poorest.

John Carver, Boards That Make a Difference

It is timely to be exploring better means for supporting volunteers, particularly in low-income communities (Reitsma-Street et al., 2000; Reitsma-Street & Neysmith, 2000; Cameron, 1997; Potapchuck et al., 1997; McKnight & Kretzmann, 1998; Horch, 1995). The work of volunteer boards makes a significant difference to the well-being of our citizens and our communities. Yet board members are largely left to their own devices in terms of ongoing leadership and skill development. Moreover, boards vary dramatically in terms of the resources available to them and the privileges afforded them.

In this study we explore elements that support the participation, learning and development of volunteer board members in inner-city community organizations in Winnipeg. In particular, we look at licensed childcare facilities, women's centers and family resource centers; organizations whose largely female volunteer directors are often consumers of those same services.

The main purpose of this study was to discover ways to enhance community capacity in inner-city organizations that serve women, families, and children. The 4 primary objectives were to:

- Explore the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for non-profit governance

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- Enhance participants' knowledge of their own learning processes
- Increase the density of networks / build social capital
- Develop policy recommendations for optimizing learning for volunteer boards

There are 4 terms we will use throughout this report that merit explanation at the outset: social capital, community capacity building, community development and community building.

In this project, we use **social capital** to mean the many relationships and networks of people accessible to one another, with common interests and goals, who can share skills and resources. Because our purpose is community building in this case, the notions of 'building networks' and 'building social capital' are often used interchangeably.

Community capacity refers to all of the resources that can be brought to bear on a community's process of working towards their desired future, including financial resources, technology, people, skills, plans, networks of relationships and shared commitment (Frank & Smith, 1999).

Community development is an ongoing process, and an approach, that draws on local wisdom, culture and traditions as it supports opportunities for people and organizations to connect, to build and to strengthen their communities. The goal of community development is improved quality of life for everyone.

Community building is a term that encompasses a whole array of activities that support community development. The 'people and skills' part of **community capacity building** involves ongoing learning.

"In order to do their work, voluntary organizations need resources, infrastructure, skills, knowledge, support and understanding" (Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector, 1999, p.iii.).

Drawing on a "research as empowerment" framework (Ristock & Pennell, 1996), this project integrated research and community capacity building. Data was collected by means of audio taping three workshop/focus groups (drawn from 53 non-profit organizations), each meeting twice for 7-hour sessions. Data was also collected through individual questionnaires and participant observation.

The first section of this report will lay out the **Rationale** for exploring ways to best support board members of non-profit organizations, and why this sector is worthy of our attention.

The next section, **Research Design**, will explain our theoretical orientation to this project, describe the target population and research design for the project, and briefly explain how data was collected and analyzed.

The **Findings** section begins with a demographic **Profile Of The Participants**, including their board experience and tenure. We continue with a discussion of **Networks, Social Capital and Community Learning**, where we will convey what we learned about the importance of attending to network development in community work and why it's important as an educational strategy.

Next we highlight the **Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes** board members deemed most significant for effective governance and discuss the findings in relation to current literature on board development.

This is followed by a discussion of **Challenges** related to volunteering that participants conveyed to us in the course of our work together.

The **Learning Design** section explains the basis of the thinking that went into designing the workshops, and the strengths and weaknesses of it from the participants' perspectives.

We conclude with a number of **Recommendations** to individual board members, to boards of voluntary organizations, and to provincial and federal policy makers, to more effectively support and strengthen the abilities of volunteers engaged in non-profit governance.

In the final sections of this report you will find Appendices which include a **Glossary of Terms** used throughout this report; a list of **Resources for non-profit boards** including books, articles, websites and training programs, and the full list generated by the project participants of the **knowledge, skills and attitudes** necessary for effective governance. The **References** section contains a full list of the books, reports, and journal articles cited in this report.

Rationale

In June 2000, the Federal Government launched the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI), which has focused on the voluntary sector as one of the three pillars of Canadian society, equal in importance to the public and private sectors. The federal government is investing \$94.6 million over five years in 5 key areas, including developing new knowledge, skills and means for

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voluntary organizations to respond to Canadians' needs (web-site www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/about.cfm accessed 03/09/02).

Within the VSI, the *Panel On Accountability And Governance in The Voluntary Sector* (1999) has identified the need for capacity building as the first step toward better accountability and governance in Canada's voluntary sector. The problems of organizational governance echo across the sector:

...they are largely due to the nature of volunteer boards, who often have limited time to devote to the task, are poorly informed about the nature of their responsibilities in the first place, or do not have access to the right tools to improve their own performance. Such problems are compounded ... [by] the pressures of rising demands for services and shrinking resources (p. 22).

The Panel points out that "capacity building includes support by corporations, governments and funders for intermediary associations, research and training, technology, and board and management development" (p.iii.).

In Winnipeg, several studies have called for the need for revitalization and capacity building in the core area (Carter, 1999; Lezubski et al., 1999; Silver, 1999; 2002; Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 1998; 2000; 2001). In the inner city 20% of the population is made up of Aboriginal people, a concentration not found elsewhere in Canada; and more than one-third are aged 15 or younger. Visible minorities account for another 20%. There are many single parent families that struggle with low incomes and high shelter costs. Poverty rates are among the highest in Canada (Canada & Manitoba, 2002).

Non-profit community organizations are important vehicles for development in low-income neighbourhoods. Scholars have examined community organizations in terms of the degree to which they increase citizen participation (Faris, 1998; 2000), enhance community capacity (Gittell et al., 1994) and stabilize and revitalize neighbourhoods through the creation of social capital (Temkin & Rhoe, 1998). Temkin and Rhoe's 1998 study concluded that neighbourhoods with high levels of social capital thrive and develop, while those with low levels do not.

In neighbourhoods with significant decline there is an urgency to meet human needs and build capacity. Gittell, et al. (1999, p.65) argue that for such communities "participating in organizations and nurturing one another is not simply a civic exercise, nor a leisure activity. It is an emergency response to

the failure of the economic and political systems to meet their most basic needs”.

Residents of low-income communities who volunteer are among the most marginalized within the voluntary sector itself, where they often face the multiple barriers of inner city neighbourhoods: racism, unrelenting poverty, reduced opportunities for education and training, poor health, substance abuse, unemployment, and crime. Yet, they carry on, deeply committed to their communities and doing their best to make a difference.

The vast majority of volunteer directors of community organizations such as women's, family resource and childcare centers are women. Women's participation is pivotal to community development, due to their central roles in holding their families and communities together. In Aboriginal communities women's roles in nurturing families, developing community networks, and protecting the culture are respected in both rural and urban settings (Monture-Angus, 1995; Anderson, 2000; Anderson & Lawrence, 2003).

Studies on women-led groups have found that they define their community development efforts broadly and holistically, and emphasize participation and local democracy. Gittell, et al. (1999, p.8) point out: “to the extent that women-led groups contribute differentially to the development of social capital by increasing community participation and trust, and by creating community networks and civic action, they represent a model for community development”.

However, women's participation in governance of community organizations has not been studied extensively, and gender has not often been used as a major analytic variable (Ianello, 1992; Gittell et al., 1994; Ristock & Pennel, 1996). Literature directly related to volunteer board development in childcare contexts is even more scant (Ontario, 1993). Yet “women and children are disproportionately concentrated among the poor and face most acutely the problems of poverty that [community] development organizations seek to address” (Gittell et al., 1994 p. 2). In their study, *The Difference Gender Makes: Women in Neighbourhood Development Organizations*, Gittell et al. further point out that “gender-related research (see Martin, 1992; Freeman, 1982) has shown that institutions and public policies not only mirror but also reproduce the inequalities of larger society” (p.2). They concluded that representation of women on boards is far more important in having the needs of women and children represented, than the representation of women CEOs or staff.

It is our hope that the findings of this project will contribute to the Canadian literature on board development, and highlight some of the differences among

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boards in terms of the resources available to them and the privileges afforded them, while adding an explicit adult education perspective in terms of approaches to service delivery. We hope to draw attention to the importance of honouring, valuing, supporting the hard work and commitment of volunteer board members and to supporting their capacity building in ways that make the most sense to them. Additionally we hope to highlight some of the differences in women's approaches to developing leadership capacities within the community. Finally we want to acknowledge and draw on the strength and contributions of Aboriginal perspectives which have much to offer in understanding how best to build our communities.

Research Design

Theoretical Influences

As researchers, community adult educators and feminists, we are influenced by theoretical perspectives that view adult education as having an important role, and responsibility, in transformative social change (Brookfield, 1991; 2000; Caffarella & Merriam, 2000; Freire, 1970; Merriam & Simpson, 1989; Quigley, 2000). In particular we draw from a 'community research as empowerment' framework, developed by Ristock & Pennell (1996, p.98.) which enables us to "acknowledge complexity, diversity, and incompatibility without losing sight of the feminist objective of advancing women as a group". From a postmodernist perspective, 'Community Research As Empowerment' is a framework that forges both 'links and interruptions', it allows us to build inclusive communities while examining power relations and disrupting fixed ideas and prescriptive categories.

The educational approaches we used are learner-centered, culturally and gender sensitive and consider the multiple ways that learning takes place in non-formal education contexts. We draw from a community development tradition that views volunteers as long term resources for the community (Ontario, 1993), and non-profit community organizations as important vehicles for social development (Gittell et al., 1994; 1999; Temkin & Rhoe, 1998). Further, we are strongly influenced by feminist and Aboriginal women's perspectives in a context highly relevant to women's differential styles of learning, leadership, community participation and empowerment (Belenky et al., 1986; Ouellette, 2002; Ely et al., 1991; Maguire, 1987; 1993; Anderson, 2000; Monture-Angus, 1995; Neilsen, 1998).

Target Population

We developed a purposeful sample (Patton, 1990) of 53 non-profit inner-city¹ community organizations that offer supports to families: licensed childcare facilities, women's and family resources centers². We drew from a target population of inner city residents who volunteer on non-profit boards of directors, who are also consumers in those organizations.

Identification and Selection of Research Participants

From the target population, boards of directors were contacted via their organizations. Participants then self-selected based on their interest in board development. We also relied on the extensive networks of 2 community practitioners who both have lived and worked in the inner city for more than two decades.

Three focus groups, ranging from 6-9 members each, resulted in a pool of 25 participants (23 women and 2 men). Prior to the first meeting, participants were sent an "informed consent" letter outlining the purpose and goals of the research, the various steps in the process, and the potential risks and benefits of participating in the project. The letter pointed out each participant's right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Participants also completed individual questionnaires providing demographic information and expressing their interests related to board development. We verbally reviewed all of the items in the "informed consent" document with participants and outlined the expectations of confidentiality during the first meeting. All participants agreed in writing to keep confidential information within the group.

Focus Groups/ Workshops

We facilitated audio-taped meetings on two occasions per group; each session was both focus group and workshop. Participants in each group were presented with Kolb's (1984, 1991) model of experiential learning and had the opportunity to reflect on their personal learning processes, identify learning and resource needs and explore how understanding learning styles can enhance their roles as board members and aid in team building. The

¹ Based on geographic boundaries developed by the Winnipeg Core Area Initiative, 1980. See www.winnipeg.ca/census1996/pages/wpg.htm, click on Inner City.

² The targeted organizations included licensed childcare facilities, women's resource centers, family resource centers and community centers. However no community centers chose to participate in the study.

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groups also discussed issues and challenges related to their boards, and explored knowledge, skills and attitudes helpful in fostering optimal board performance and in building social capital in the community. Participants then set individual learning goals based on their identified needs and interests. In keeping with community development principles the sessions were designed to be learner-centered and responsive to the specific interests of the learners. Participants were offered a variety of choices for meeting dates including 2 week-day evenings per workshop or full-day Saturday workshops. Three different venues were chosen for their location within the inner city. In recognition of people's contributions of time and expertise, as well as to reimburse expenses such as childcare and transportation, each participant was paid an honorarium of \$60 per full-day session (equivalent to about \$8.00 per hour). Food and refreshments were provided for each session.

Participant Observation

Two inner-city research assistants, chosen for their interest in and experience on boards and for their "embeddedness" within their communities, used participant observation to gather additional non-verbal data. The research team's debriefings of each session were audio-taped and formed part of the data set.

Follow-Up And Development Of Recommendations

During the second meeting of each group, participants further discussed board concerns and challenges, policy dilemmas and role expectations; reviewed and gave feedback on preliminary findings; reflected on their learning as a result of participating in the study; and worked together to draft policy recommendations. Each participant is to receive a summary of the final report.

Transcriptions

All of the 8 meetings and 6 debriefing sessions, together with questionnaire responses and written participant evaluations, were transcribed, coded and analyzed using Atlas/ti™ software and methods drawn from grounded theory and qualitative data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1973; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Kirby & McKenna, 1989). In an iterative process, each document was reviewed and coded for themes related to the research questions. Those codes were then further analyzed and grouped according to emerging patterns, which laid the foundation for the descriptions that follow in later sections.

Findings

Profile Of Participants

This section will offer a description of the board members who participated in the study, based on their gender, age, relationship status, family characteristics, cultural diversity, educational attainment and household income levels. We will also describe the types of board positions and number of organizations represented in the project, as well as current and past tenure on boards.

Gender, Age, Relationship And Family Characteristics

The study group was composed of 23 women (92%) and 2 men (8%). They range in age from 27 to 60; the average age is 41. In terms of relationship status, the majority of participants (64%) are living with partners, married or common-law. Slightly more than one-third of the group are without partners, either single (16%), divorced (16%), or widowed (4%). The participants have an average of 2.4 children, although two participants have no children, and four participants have five children each. Many of the participants also have grandchildren.

Cultural Diversity

On individual questionnaires, participants were asked to list which ethnic, racial or cultural groups they belong to. Table 1 shows the composition of the group.

Ethno-Racial Groups	Study Participants
Aboriginal (including Metis, Ojibway, Cree & Non-Status Indian)	56%
Visible Minority	4%
Caucasian	40%

Table 1: Ethno-Racial Groups

Education

Among those who answered the question about education levels (24 out of 25 respondents), participants have had an average of 14.9 years of schooling. The minimum reported was 8 years and the maximum was 24 years. As depicted in Table 2, in our sample 4% of participants have less than 9 years of schooling, 16% have between 9 and 12 years of schooling (up to high school equivalency), and another 16% have completed up to 14 years (roughly equivalent to a post-secondary diploma). Forty-four percent of the participants in this study have completed up to 16 years of schooling (equivalent to a university degree), and another 16% have completed more than 16 years of schooling.

Years Of Schooling	Study Participants
< 9 years	4%
9 to 12 years	16%
13 to 14 years	16%
15 to 16 years	44%
More than 16 years	16%
No response	4%

Table 2: Years of Schooling

Income

Table 3 below shows the annual household income distribution among the study participants. The median annual household income before taxes was in the range of \$30,000 - \$39,999. However, accounting for the number of people per household, a comparison with Low Income Cut-Offs (LICOs) based on household size revealed that 56% of the participants are living at or below the poverty line³. By comparison, the City of Winnipeg reports the incidence of low income for economic families in the inner city at 41%.

³ Incidence of low income refers to those who live at or below the Low Income Cut-Offs established by Statistics Canada 1996. Source: City of Winnipeg web-site accessed 23/10/03 www.winnipeg.ca/interhom/about_winnipeg/profile/

Household Income (Category)	Study Participants
Under \$10,000	12%
\$10,000-\$19,999	24%
\$20,000-\$29,999	8%
\$30,000-\$39,999	16%
\$40,000-\$49,999	12%
\$50,000-\$59,999	4%
\$60,000-\$69,999	16%
\$70,000 and over	8%
Incidence of Low income (adjusted for number in household).	56%

Table 3: Household Income

Board Positions

Of those who responded to the question about board position (22 of 25 respondents), 8 people hold the position of president, chair, or co-chair; 2 each serve in vice-chair and secretary positions, and 3 people serve as treasurers. In total 13 participants currently serve as members-at-large on their boards, as illustrated in Table 4 below⁴.

Board Positions	Number of Participants	Percentage
President, Chair, or Co-Chair	8	32%
Vice-Chair	2	8%
Secretary	2	8%
Treasurer	3	12%
Members-at-large	13	52%
No response	3	12%

⁴ These totals do not correspond with the total number of participants because 3 board members currently serve on 2 or more boards.

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Table 4: Board Positions

Organizational Representation And Tenure

In total, the 25 participants in this study currently serve in 30 board positions (3 people serve on 2 or more boards), in 20 different non-profit organizations in the inner city. Seven of the organizations represented had 2 or more board members attending. The tenure of participants on their current board(s) ranges from 2 months to 5 years; the average is 2 years. The group's total person-years of board tenure amounts to 53.3 years.

Past Volunteer Board Experience

In addition to current tenure, participants have served on the boards of 32 other non-profit organizations, ranging from 3 months to 10 years duration, as shown in Table 5, below.

Tenure	Number of Participants	Tenure, % of Group	Time, person-years
< 1 year	1		.25
1 year	5		5
2 years	6	0 to 2 years: 48%	12
3 years	5		15
4 years	4		16
5 years	5	3 to 5 years: 56%	25
6 years	2		12
8 years	2		16
9 years	1		9
10 years	1	6 to 10 years: 24%	10
Total person – years:			120.25

Table 5: Tenure of Past Volunteer Board Experience

Twelve participants (48%) reported having served between 3 months and 2 years on previous boards, while 14 participants (56%) have served between 3 and 5 years. Six participants (24%) have served between 6 and 10 years on previous boards.

Tenure and Network Density

While some of these board terms will have been served concurrently, the total person-years of previous board involvement is 120.25. If the total current tenure is factored in to this equation, the volunteer work of the 25 participants in this study would bring the total person-years of board experience to 173.5 years and reflect volunteer contributions in 52 different community organizations in Winnipeg over the last one to three decades.

Summary of Participant Profile

In summary, this sample of community board volunteers is 92% women and 8% men. The ethno-racial composition of the group is 56% Aboriginal, 40% white and 4% visible minority. The average age of participants is 41 with a range of 27 to 60 years of age. Over half are living with partners (64%), the remaining 36% without partners are single (16%), divorced (16%) or widowed (4%). In terms of education, 44% of the group has 15 to 16 years of schooling, equivalent to a university degree. Another 16% made up each of the categories of 9-12 years, 12 to 14 years, and 16 years or more. Four percent of the participants have less than 9 years of schooling. The median household income before taxes for this group is \$30,000 to \$39,000 and 56% are living at or below the poverty line. The total current and past board tenure of the 25 participants in the study is equal to 173.5 person years, reflecting volunteer contributions in 52 different community organizations over the last 10 to 20 years.

In short, this sample of inner-city community board volunteers was, for the most part, a low-income, middle-aged group of mothers, many Aboriginal, with several years of experience working in non-profit organizations in a variety of different leadership capacities in Winnipeg's inner city.

Networks, Social Capital and Community Learning

There is a great deal of overlap in the use of the terms "networks" and "social capital" in the literature; we will offer some brief clarification of these concepts

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here. A **network** can be understood as “an extended group of people with similar interests or concerns who interact and remain in informal contact for mutual assistance or support” (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000). Networks are the basis of **social capital**, a term borrowed from economics, which captures the ‘value-added’ of trust and reciprocity that comes from active membership in a network. We think of financial capital as monetary resources; we can think of social capital as the value of participation that money can’t buy.

As a concept, social capital has been in the literature for about half a century, and was brought to the forefront by the works of social thinkers such as Jane Jacobs (1961), Pierre Bourdieu (1983), James S. Coleman (1988) and Robert D. Putnam (1993; 1995). Putnam (2000, p. 19) defines social capital as follows:

*Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called “civic virtue.” The difference is that “social capital” calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous, but isolated, individuals, is not necessarily rich in social capital. **In other words, interaction enables people to build communities, to commit themselves to each other, and to knit the social fabric** (emphasis ours). A sense of belonging and the concrete experience of social networks (and the relationships of trust and tolerance that can be involved) can, it is argued, bring great benefits to people.*

There are numerous accounts of the importance of networks in community building (Sperling & Bretherton, 1996; Gittell et al., 1994; 1999; Gittell & Vidal, 1998; Naparstek & Biegel, 1981; Naparstek & Dooley, 1997; Biegel & Naparstek, 1979; Webster, 1997; Sorter & Simpkinson, 1979; Moore & Whitt, 2000; Torjman et al., 2001; Putnam, 1993; 1995; Coleman, 1988), yet, ironically, often little attention is paid to deepening networks in the design and delivery of services that support community organizations.

Both terms - ‘networks’ and ‘social capital’ - have been shown to have sub-components that serve different functions. Moore & Witt (2000), who looked at gender and networks in the voluntary sector, distinguished between two

types of network relationships: a “structural network” of overlapping board memberships, and a “social network” of collegial ties and friendship.

In research on social capital and community development, R. Gittel & Vidal (1998) made the distinction between two types of social capital. Similar to Moore & Witt’s “structural network”, Gittel & Vidal identified “outwardly focused connections to resources and political networks” which they called “bridging capital”. And, similar to Moore & Witt’s “social network” they also identified strong relationships between people and groups in communities⁵, which they called “bonding capital”. In this project we were aware of the importance of both “bridging capital” and “bonding capital”.

From an adult education perspective, Smith (2002, Conclusion, para. 3) points out that informal education’s “interest in dialogue and conversation, and the cultivation of environments in which people can work together, take [us] to the heart of what is required to strengthen and develop social capital”.

Finally, it is increasingly mentioned in the literature that social capital is a major factor influencing community learning (Faris, 1998). After an extensive literature review on community learning from a wide range of disciplines, Torjman (2001, p.3.) concluded: “the literature explicitly or implicitly points to the importance of social capital in facilitating learning”.

Since this project approached community capacity development from a learning perspective, one of the goals was to broaden and deepen relationships among the participants (ie. develop networks) and to enhance social capital. These goals were primarily achieved through an interactive training design and ‘setting a democratic tone’; then facilitating discussion and supporting people to co-create the conditions of a well-connected learning community. In essence, as opposed to a top-down, one-way transmission of knowledge, it meant creating a constructive container for interaction and then ‘getting out of the way’ to let people do their work.

Analysis of the transcripts revealed an entire web of activities promoting network development and the sharing of ideas and resources among the participants. These included a range of facilitation interventions, and a number of behaviours enacted by the participants that fostered relationship

⁵ Gittel *et al.* draw on the earlier work of Granovetter, (1973) who referred to bridging capital as “outwardly focused connections to resources and political networks” and “weak ties” (in Gittel *et al.*, 1999 p. 104).

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development, group bonding, and the deepening of the network. These will be discussed in turn below.

Promoting Network Development

An interactive training design included elements such as setting up meeting rooms so that people were facing each other; creating the time and space for participants to engage with each other during the sessions; proactively discussing democratic group 'norms'; sharing a contact list so people could connect outside of the meetings; informally mapping the groups' assets in terms of learning strengths, skills and previous board experiences (McKnight & Kretzmann, 1998; Kolb, 1984); encouraging participants to respond to each other with ideas and solutions rather than channelling all communication through the facilitator; and serving lunch on-site, enabling people to relax, eat and have unstructured time together.

There were many incidents of encouraging people to seek out others and 'tap into the network'. For example, here is an illustration of an interaction between 2 participants (P1 and P2) and the facilitator (Fa)⁶ in the context of participants sharing their skills and learning goals:

P1: ... I put down political & economic allies, funders & government. Some of those skills I have. I can write letters and proposals, that's not a problem, but what I need to learn is, who exactly in the community to contact. Sometimes you know what to do, but you don't know where to send it, or who are the decision makers.

P2: Right! Who are the movers and the shakers, right?

P1: Yes. And learning resources, I would probably seek advice from past treasurers, or maybe an executive director, or somebody that has some past experience applying for grants and doing proposals and stuff like that.

Fa: Great idea, and could I invite you to tap into some of your newer networks too, like some of the folks you've just met around this table or some people they know? Someone who knows somebody, who knows somebody, can often lead you to a very interesting place.

P1: Yeah.

⁶ P1 = Participant #1 P2 = Participant #2 Fa = Facilitator

There are a whole array of strategies and interventions a facilitator can employ to promote participation and group development, some of which are discussed in the section entitled Designing Learning, beginning on page 47. It is the facilitator's primary role to set the tone for democratic participation and to create a climate where people feel safe to participate without fear of humiliation. Many people are unaccustomed to participating in groups so it's very helpful to make participation norms explicit at the outset. It is equally important to affirm diversity, to be comfortable with multiple viewpoints, and to encourage open dialogue and respectful critique of different perspectives. This includes the facilitator being open to critique her- or himself.

Network Building Among Participants

We were pleased and surprised to discover, upon analysis of the demographic information participants provided, that a high degree of network density already existed within the pool of participants, well beyond what we had initially presumed. As mentioned in a previous section, **the 25 participants are presently or have been connected, remarkably, with at least 52 different non-profit organizations within the inner city**⁷. During the sessions, the research team also made observations about the presence of existing network connections, such as the following:

Yeah I noticed two people from different boards both mentioned that they had participated in the ___ training together. So they may know each other from there, yeah.

The presence of existing networks enabled us to 'take a good thing and make it better'. We also found that having inner city residents with board experience as research assistants gave the project credibility. Their standing within the community (ie. their 'social capital') helped to create a climate conducive to developing trust. In fact, the participants needed little encouragement to interact with one another.

Several people commented that the opportunity to connect with other board members and discuss concrete issues of concern within a climate of trust was highly important to them.

I think the thing that really is important is getting to know more people. The networking process.

⁷ Some respondents indicated there were more organizations on whose boards they had served, but they didn't name them or say how many. The '52' reflects the number of organizations that were named.

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I like to just get ideas from other people - it's just so important to network.

Getting advice, because I did find that helpful, because we're struggling with an issue and so are you. But just to be able to share that in confidence

Participants having the opportunity to share their background experience and their gifts was a good way for people to get to know each other and ultimately to become aware of their collective resources, the beginnings of what McKnight & Kretzmann (1998) refer to as 'asset mapping'. The following exchange is rich in micro examples of the many ways that building a group and a network can happen. A participant (P1) is sharing information about herself ('breaking the ice'), others (P2, P3, Fa) are affirming and being supportive to her, and there is lots of humour.

P1: ... well I don't have many talents or gifts (laughs).

*P2: Oh but you **do!***

*Fa: (echoing); Oh, but you **do!** (group laughter)*

P1: (Laughing) I know how to shop real good. (Laughing) I know how to make people laugh, I guess!

*P3: You'll have to take **me** shopping!*

Fa: What would you say is a gift you currently share with your board?

P1: I always give them stuff to talk about, like if a problem comes up, is that fair? Do we have to do things that way? I'm always looking at different ideas and exploring different angles of things.

Fa: That's good, that's definitely good. Thanks [name].

P1: You're welcome.

As discussions unfolded throughout the sessions, we noted how participants linked their comments to points made earlier by other participants, often referencing and building on what others had to say. It gave us the sense of 'weaving a tapestry'. Here, another participant is sharing her gifts with the group and, in an affirming way, relating back to the speaker (P1) in the example above.

And my main talent that I share with my community is: I'm like Radar from M.A.S.H., I have tons of ideas! I go to bed at

night thinking of things and ideas (group laughter). When someone needs something I can either find it or think of something that can take its place, so that's probably one of my greatest talents (laughter). So, I know how to shop [looks at P1], not only for myself, but for all kinds of things, fundraisers and you name it (group laughter).

There were many features of the participants' behaviours that promoted relationship development, group bonding, and the deepening of the network. There was extensive use of humour and we observed people expressing empathy, admiration, and inspiration towards other members.

As participants shared their challenges and concerns related to their boards, others offered stories of what worked, often pointing out resources and offering advice:

And if we know who we can tap into, like two months from now I might be struggling with something around trying to get people out to a community meeting and I'll think "Moose tickets"! I remember that. And I go back "Oh, who was that?" (pointing to the person who told the story about using Moose tickets) and phone them up and say "how did you do that Moose ticket thing?" (group laughter). And all of a sudden you have a resource, you've got somebody who's been through the ropes that can tell you about that particular thing, you've solved a problem, you've got a new idea. That's the kind of thing that really makes community work easier.

People often think they don't know how to network, or they feel awkward about doing it. But that's what they are doing every time they connect with someone they don't know well in conversation and discover interests they have in common. Gilchrist (2000, p. 272.) points out that "informal processes are just as important (and often not so risky or intimidating) as formal occasions in providing the means and the motivation for networking". Keeping sessions light-hearted helps to take the pressure off people.

The networks within the community are the foundation for the creation of social capital. "Community networks hold a repository of common sense, experiential knowledge and shared wisdom (often mediated by women)" (Gilchrist, 2000, p.266.). They provide opportunities for active on-going learning. As one participant from a women's resource centre said:

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I think that a common thread is really important here, to feel comfortable to be able to share. To me what works is sharing, hearing other people's stories....and [having] a chance to meet childcare board members. So to me, that's good networking.

Networks are gold mines for peer mentoring and problem solving, mutual support, learning partnerships, and other benefits. Two participants remarked on the importance of networks as a source of inspiration:

*P1: When F. was talking about how good resource centers are for communities, I'm hoping that in a few years somebody will be saying that about **our** centre.*

*P2 (from the same board): Yes, and, I was just speaking with F. during break time, and so much of what it sounds like they're doing at _____, sounds like something that **we** should really look into exploring for our centre. That's energizing and stimulating and rife with possibilities! The ideas that get generated from talking to each other.*

Discussion and interaction appeared to be a key element in participants' learning, both in terms of the talking and listening (ie. learning process), but also in terms of learning about what other boards do, what their strengths and challenges are, and how they solve specific problems (ie. content). In essence, 'working one's network' can be understood as an 'interpersonal learning style'. It is a method for getting information, and it can often be a very pleasant experience interacting with someone else.

I feel I met valuable people, good contacts and got very useful info regarding specific people to talk to and where to go for the info I seek to become a better board member / asset to community.

Finally, networks were understood as a significant learning resource, as these participant comments illustrate:

Something I'd like to learn today is to tap into the resources of the rest of the boards....

You can explain a problem and then get other people's input.

Using networking as a learning resource leads to potentially rewarding, reciprocal relationships. There is a holographic quality to explicitly using networking as a strategy for community capacity building: Whatever builds

relationships in an inclusive way, also builds the group as a learning and resource network for itself. Each individual is also a node connecting the present group to an exponential number of other people outside the group who are resources and members of their own networks.

In conclusion, it seems that tapping into existing networks, and promoting their further development is important as both a **community** building and a **capacity** building strategy.

Board members are significant learning resources for each other and they bring a wealth of experience with them. Our findings reinforce the conclusion made in the study of non-profit childcare boards in Ontario that these volunteers are long term resources for the community (Ontario, 1993).

Further, we concur with Belenky, *et al.*'s (1986) work, *Women's Ways of Knowing*, who found that women's ways of learning, which pay particular attention to the importance of relationships and being grounded in one's community (i.e. aspects of social capital), are key resources for community development. One participant captured this notion in a note she wrote to us:

One particular idea I have been thinking about is consensus and collective models for boards. After our last session it occurred to me that perhaps we should instead be thinking about how we operate as women and the unique insights, experiences and strengths we bring as women – rather than fitting ourselves into predetermined structures... [In these meetings] you brought so much of what is valuable and valued by womenit is possible to go to meetings that are rejuvenating rather than draining... the new information and ideas have made me feel lighter rather than burdened with more work to do."

In terms of designing board development programs we therefore conclude that networking is of great consequence to participants. We are not surprised that this study revealed it to be a critical resource for learning for this sample of inner city volunteers. Consequently, networking is also an efficient approach to community capacity building. There are only so many training dollars available, and the wealth of knowledge and experience of these volunteers is a rich resource from which to draw. **Any program that promotes on-going learning through co-mentoring and network development, therefore, will have a ripple effect throughout the voluntary sector.**

Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes for Effective Board Governance

In our workshop/focus-group sessions we asked board members what they see as the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for non-profit governance. The groups produced a comprehensive list of 67 types of knowledge, 103 skills, and 54 attitudes necessary for the effective functioning of boards. (The full list can be found in the Appendix section).

During the generation of these items participants shared relevant stories and examples from their experiences. Then they prioritized the items and created personal learning goals related to the skill-sets most relevant to them. Later when the data from the 3 groups were brought together, we immediately noticed that the priorities were remarkably consistent from group to group. For example, with the KNOWLEDGE set, each group said “understanding the mission, philosophy and values of your organization”, and “knowing the policy manual and understanding the roles and expectations of the position” were key. Within SKILLS, some of the common themes deemed essential were communication skills (speaking and listening, sharing ideas constructively, influencing others, etc.) teamwork, planning and goal setting. Among the ATTITUDES of most importance were “commitment”, “remembering who you represent”, and “respect for others”. Table 6 on page 23 illustrates the top priorities determined by each group.

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Key Knowledge for Effective Boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding the roles and expectations of the Board and the Executive Director Knowing the policy manual and knowledge of policy development Knowing the needs of your stakeholders Philosophy, goals and objectives of your organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Know your organization (philosophy & goals) and your membership Know your roles and responsibilities (legal, financial, insurance, etc.) Know the players: funders, political allies, policy makers Know how to evaluate your work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Know the Board's roles and responsibilities (legal, financial, insurance, etc.) Know the mandate, mission, vision, goals, services, programs and policies of the organization Financial knowledge: policies, budgets, how to read financial statements.
Key Skills for Effective Boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication skills: ability to express yourself effectively, openly and positively Keeping people interested and motivated Teamwork Running meetings and staying on topic Problem-solving skills Planning, researching, and setting goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing the dynamics of the Board team Communication skills, presentation skills, public speaking Defining and working toward goals Community capacity building (helping others develop) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating an environment that's conducive to participation / helping others; team skills Communication skills – VERBAL (listening, public speaking, constructive Board/Staff communications) and WRITTEN (writing letters, grant proposals, keeping minutes accurately) Networking/ tapping into your network.
Key Attitudes for Effective Boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commitment Willingness to learn new things Empathy Sense of Humour Remembering who you represent Professional Attitude Fairness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being willing to work as part of the team Being respectful of other cultures and of people's differences (including lifestyles) Understanding that the Board exists to serve the community Persistence and strength to carry on and to achieve your goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Honouring, valuing, and representing the community you serve (your stakeholders) Being committed to the organization's mandate Commitment to showing up for meetings Empathy & respect for people's safety issues and boundaries; confidentiality.

Table 6: Summary of Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes for Effective Board Governance

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A great deal has been written on the skill-sets and requirements for effective non-profit governance. John Carver and his wife, Miriam Mayhew Carver, have certainly led the movement in board development, especially in the last decade, with dozens of publications to their credit, in particular John Carver's book *Boards That Make a Difference* (Carver, 1997). The 'Carver Governance Model' has succeeded in bringing much attention to the importance of developing boards and improving accountability (Gil, 2001). However, the prescriptive nature of the model has also met with criticism for its inapplicability to the context of many smaller organizations that have found it "too distancing from the rest of the organization" and resting on assumptions of resources that many smaller non-profits simply don't have. Unfortunately, as Gil (2001) points out, "alternatives to this model are not well known, well-articulated, or broadly publicized", or in the case of feminist models of organization (Ristock, 1987; 1991; Iannello, 1992, for example) are overlooked, as Gil himself did.

Much of the 'practice' literature includes discussions of on-going development models, identifies fundamental practices, and provides various tools for self-assessment and improving effectiveness, in particular Nordhoff *et al.* (1982), Ontario (1984), Deloitte & Touche (2003) and Alberta (1995). These materials present theoretical frameworks that describe organizational functioning as dynamic processes, within which boards can intervene at various points to improve and enhance their work. Additionally, the Institute on Governance's report, *Governance Do's and Don'ts: Lessons From Case Studies in 20 Canadian Non-Profits* (Gil, 2001) concludes with 12 exemplary practices. It will be described more fully on page 26.

While this body of literature offers something of value to the self-development of all volunteer boards, it appears limited by several assumptions. First, much of it seems to assume a certain level of knowledge of organizational development and skill in facilitating adult learning. As we discovered in our project, board members may have a lot of concrete experience but often feel a lack of theoretical knowledge about organizational functioning and frustrated by their skills in running meetings and educating board members about their roles and responsibilities. As Gil (2001, p.27) concluded:

There is clearly a need to develop, and broadly disseminate, additional 'user-friendly' governance resources and tools to meet the needs of busy board members and CEOs. The governance models ... need to be further elaborated and some guidance provided to boards to assist them in extracting, from [the] models, those governance practices that will best suit their organizations.

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Second, much of the literature assumes that board members homogeneously start from the same place: one that is relatively educated, with white, male-centred, middle-class values. Unfortunately this has the effect of making invisible, on one hand, taken-for-granted middle-class privileges (such as having someone at home to care for your children while you attend a board meeting, or having board meetings during the workday because you're not punching a clock, or having secretarial support to delegate work), and on the other hand, under-appreciating the wealth of diversity that exists in communities and on boards.

The result is what Fine *et al.* (1997) refer to as "othering": where the categories of white, male, middle-class, heterosexual, and able-bodied are granted the status of normalcy, so that those who do not fit those categories are always referred to as 'the other'. In reality, board volunteers start from different places and move in different worlds, struggle with different governance issues, and experience different degrees of privilege. Hence, their development and resource needs are diverse. Like others (Gittel *et al.*, 1994), we found there are gender, class and cultural differences in what is valued and how the work gets done.

Women, for example, are not necessarily drawn to board participation because they are interested in participatory democracy, governance, organization development, or enhancing their *curriculum vitae*, all liberal middle class "leadership" assumptions about the motivations for board participation. Gil (2001) also noted that those kinds of assumptions did not appear to be true for all of the organizations in his study.

Although the literature directly related to board development in childcare and family support organizations is scant, several studies have examined parental involvement in child care settings (Mayfield, 1990; Doherty, 1991; Shimoni, 1992a; 1992b; Prentice & Ferguson, 1997; 2000; Ferguson & Prentice, 1999; Ferguson, 1991; 1998; 2003).

Among these, Prentice and Ferguson (1997) highlighted some of the contradictions of mothers' participation. They found that control and decision-making, expressed through traditional forums such as board participation, was not a meaningful axis of concern for a large number of mothers. Instead they found that mothers' perceptions of volunteer involvement seem strongly tied to the imperative of "motherhood". Further, low income "client" mothers (those who received a subsidy) paradoxically volunteered **substantially more time** at their daycare centre than did "consumer" mothers (those who paid full fees), possibly suggesting a form of "shadow payment". In either case, contrary to the managerial assumptions in the literature, they found that mothers "devote their time, energy, skills and creativity towards making their

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centre a more ‘caring’ place” for their children. In essence, these mothers were focusing on developing social capital.

Similarly, many participants in our study, also women, expressed the desire to be connected with their immediate community and wanting to make a difference, akin to the “focus on building profound relationships” that Reitsma-Street *et al.* (2000) found in their study of community resource centers for children.

As mentioned briefly on page 65, the Institute on Governance in Ottawa conducted research on 20 Canadian Non-Profits (Gil, 2001, p. 49.). The case studies in their research included a range of small, medium and large non-profit organizations. Their findings included the following 12 “keys to success” among the boards they studied (p.49):

1. Strong board and staff leadership.
2. A positive working relationship between the board and CEO.
3. Role Clarity.
4. Strong agreement of key stakeholders on organizational values, mission and objectives.
5. Respect for organizational norms, board policies and decisions.
6. High levels of trust and low levels of conflict.
7. Constructive resolution of conflicts and ‘conflicts of interest’.
8. Consensus or ‘near-consensus’ decision-making.
9. Effective management of meetings and board work.
10. Good board development practices and teamwork.
11. Regular, objective assessment of board, CEO and organizational performance.
12. A good balance between organizational stability, flexibility, innovation and enterprise.

The Institute on Governance study included a broad cross-section of boards ranging from community clubs to school boards to health authorities, with significant variations in size, age and resources within the organizations. Given the diversity of organizations compared to our more delimited sample, it is no surprise that there are both similarities and differences between the ‘keys to success” and what we termed “knowledge, skills, and attitudes for effectiveness”. In particular, one of the criteria for selection within our sample was that participants be consumer board members, who on one hand may be finely tuned to the needs of their constituents, but who also may be vulnerable to structural contradictions in the system that create a ‘conflict of interest’ position.

Generally speaking, our findings showed similarities with many of the twelve items above, with a few exceptions which we will explain below.

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First, because we were identifying required **knowledge, skills, and attitudes** rather than **practices**, the participants' focus within our sessions was on 'teamwork' (in item 10) as opposed to "good board development practices", and on "maintaining a constructive, positive relationship with the E.D." (in item 11) as opposed to "regular, objective assessment of the board and CEO". These observations bring four additional points to light:

- 1) The board members in our study appeared to put their focus on interpersonal and communication skills, those related to developing relationships (ie. building social capital).
- 2) The participants in our study did not display a sense of entitlement in terms of investing money in board and organizational development activities.
- 3) Board members expressed feelings of both inadequacy and role conflict in evaluating the E.D., and thus tended to avoid doing it, even though they were aware that it is an important responsibility. The role conflict exists because board members are both employers and consumers of the same organization caught in a structural contradiction created by the current system (see pages 37 to 40 for further discussion). Unfortunately, as in 2) above, it hadn't occurred to them that they might be able to hire a consultant to provide guidance with evaluation activities.
- 4) Discussions about a "good balance between organizational stability, flexibility, innovation and enterprise" (item 12 of 'keys to success') did not come up in any of the sessions in this study, nor did "regular, objective assessment of board and organizational performance" (item 11).

What emerged as a contrast between the Gil study and this one, was the sense that this sample of inner city board members was, for the most part, in 'survival mode' - their inner and outer realities more constrained than expansive. Further, it appeared that neither they nor others had provided a 'sense of permission' that key aspects of governance, such as facilitated board orientation, team building, strategic planning, and evaluation activities, might be worthwhile and legitimate investments in themselves as an organization. These were perceived as luxuries beyond their reach.

The second distinction, which was predominant in our study, but not salient in Gil (2001), were attitudes of "being respectful of other cultures and people's differences" and a strong value around "understanding that the board exists to serve the community it represents".

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Once again, what stood out was a lack of entitlement to anything that might be perceived as a “benefit” on one hand; and a deep sense of commitment to the community on the other hand.

In summary, in exploring the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for effective board governance, we found that, collectively, board members knew what was fundamental to good governance, and they knew what they wanted and needed to learn. In fact, as we will explain more fully later, the emphasis was just as much on “how” as “what”. Group interaction drew each person’s wisdom out in a way that addressed their very specific learning needs and built relationships at the same time, echoing Ewert & Grace’s (2000) conclusion that in community development an emphasis on knowledge transfer seldom works; it is relationships that matter. Finally, we found that there are distinctions, based on the intersections of class, gender, and cultural differences, in what is valued, what investments board members feel entitled to, and how the work gets done.

Challenges Boards Face

In the context of discussing the “Knowledge”, “Skills”, and “Attitudes” required for effective governance of non-profit organizations, the participants in this study shared a number of issues, concerns and challenges they have experienced in their capacity as board members. This was rich data allowing us to see both the powerful constraints imposed on this sample of board members, but also their tremendous commitment and motivation to build their communities.

We identified 10 main themes among the challenges, some of them related to various needs for community capacity building, and others related to problems inherent in the system and assumptions upon which the current governance model is structured for family services in Manitoba. The themes are entitled: “Board Work Doesn’t Happen in a Vacuum; Barriers to Participation; Tough Decisions and Sensitive Topics; Understanding Our Roles; Evaluating the Executive Director; Managing Conflict; Challenges Inherent in the System; Beyond Fundraising; The Job of Governance and Building Capacity; and Balancing Our Responsibilities.

Board Work Doesn’t Happen In A Vacuum

In “Linking the Individual Learner to the Context of Adult Learning”, Caffarella & Merriam (2000) point out that the context within which adults learn is an essential component of the learning process. The contextual approach to adult learning has two important dimensions, what they call “interactive” and “structural”. The “interactive” dimension recognizes that the most effective learning takes place in authentic, real-life situations where people are

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interacting within their learning environments. The “structural” dimension acknowledges the many structural arrangements that have long been part of our society (and education system). These are social and cultural factors that impact on learning: for example race, class, gender, ethnicity, power and oppression.

When people are invited to bring their “whole” selves to learning environments it is notable how they blossom individually, and how they connect with each other. We were struck by the situations that people were dealing with in the backdrop of their lives while carrying out their volunteer commitments. Although these comments were made in passing (ie. not a focal point of the discussions), and not everyone made personal disclosures, the overall sense we came away with was that their commitment and continued participation in their communities is remarkable, given the demands on them in other areas of their lives. For example, there were sick relatives:

I'm going through a very hard time right now. It was very hard for me to come here. I have a very sick sister in the hospital right now...I've been spending a lot of time and have a lot of family [here] and I was just telling J I'm glad to be here because I have so much going on at home... I have tons of people at my place cooking and cleaning and chasing kids (laughter). Actually, it will be a break for me to be here today.

This woman was supporting extended family for a period of time:

She's gone back to work, and I'm keeping her two kids and ... otherwise I'd have been here early. But I have to look after them. I feed them in the morning. So, I told her that I would look after them until the end of the school year so she could go back to work. So, I'm very busy at home and I even put my supper in the oven before I left.

Another participant worked all night at a crisis unit before attending the first meeting, and arrived tired and stiff and sore.

During the course of the project, one woman left her abusive partner and was living at a women's shelter with her 3 children. Several participants commented on how inspired they were to see that she continued to attend our meetings, in spite of what we imagine would be extreme stress in her life. It was heartening to hear her express confidence:

I've learned a lot, like I've learned how to handle conflict with other co-workers in the workplace and it's opened doors for me already, ... like standing up to being in an abusive relationship.... And I'm standing up for myself because then I believe in it, so [this project's] had an affect on me then. ...

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I've also started exercising, and doing things for myself and my children.

From a group building perspective, it was very important to acknowledge and affirm the context of learners' lives for at least 3 reasons: one, because it begins to build individual trust when people experience being able to bring their "whole" selves to the sessions; two, it builds group trust when people see that personal disclosures are affirmed and respected; and three, it has the effect of removing some of the 'baggage of oppression' when learners experience themselves being treated as "adults" with a full range of responsibilities, and respected for the many roles they juggle. This resonates with Cajete's (1994, p.34) observation in his work with indigenous peoples. He states: "the integration of the inner and outer realities of learners must be fully honoured." One of the participants expressed how it was important to her to keep a sense of compassion when working with her fellow board members:

And the other thing is [a board member] might be having all kinds of problems that you don't know, like their husband's left or whatever. They [may] seem right off the wall to you, or just really out of character. You know, there's a whole number of things behind some of [the] reactions and behaviours of some of those board members, that you've got to keep in mind.

We have all been raised in a racist, classist, and sexist society and therefore socialized to 'not see' white, middle-class, male privilege (McIntosh, 1990). It's important to interrupt the mainstream assumption that there are no socially organized barriers around board participation and development. We found that there is a mismatch between middle class norms regarding board development, and the context for learners in inner-city community organizations.

Middle class boards function at the level they do partly because they may be more skilled, but mostly because they are more affluent (organizationally and personally). They have the ability and the resources to delegate, whether these are administrative and secretarial tasks; expense accounts; the means to hire consultants and contract workers; sufficient staff to carry out the work of the organization (ie. grant writing, fundraising); or all of the 'household support' work carried out by a spouse, or by someone for hire, that enables people to be available to volunteer on boards.

Many of the participants in this study are living at or below the poverty line and they are in survival mode. The fact that they choose to volunteer at all is commendable. They give of their time, energy, talents and commitment, but they are less likely to have the financial resources to absorb many of the

costs of volunteering. As Torjman (2001, p. 4.) points out in “Reclaiming our Humanity:

While most Canadians are free to make choices, many cannot. Or at least their choices are different. They must decide between feeding the kids and paying the rent. They can choose to upgrade skills or buy a heater for the winter – but they cannot do both.

The boards in this study might be best defined metaphorically, as “chop wood, carry water” boards; they not only have the “visioning, decision making and policy development” work, but because of lack of organizational resources, they also end up carrying out much of the implementation. There is no one else to do the work.

In light of the many structural constraints on board members due to their less advantaged positions, their resilience and willingness to do whatever needs to be done is even more remarkable. So is their light-hearted humour. The resourcefulness packaged up in the metaphor of a “chop wood, carry water” board, in the Winnipeg context, was jokingly referred to as a “chop wood, shovel snow” board:

P1: [We] chop wood, carry water. (laughing).

P2: I shovel snow in the winter!

P3: Do you do windows? (general laughter).

In summary, it is important to recognize the context within which board members operate, because it is an essential component in the learning process. Affirming people’s experiences and acknowledging the reality of social barriers around board development enables participants to bring their ‘whole’ selves to sessions, it builds group trust and it removes some of the ‘baggage of oppression’. Finally, we must acknowledge that the functioning of many inner city non-profit organizations relies on “chop wood, carry water” boards.

Barriers to Participation

Apart from some of the behind-the-scenes challenges participants deal with in the context of their volunteer commitments, two of the most specific (and we believe, easily remedied) barriers to their participation are transportation problems and insufficient childcare. Winnipeg does not have a particularly extensive or frequent public transportation system. It can take up to two hours to travel a relatively short distance. Not everyone has a vehicle at their disposal, as the following participant (who borrowed her mother’s car) pointed out:

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[Attending board and community meetings] is really good when you have a vehicle, but I know that if I had to bring my kid to someplace this far away ...it would have taken at least two buses to get here, if I didn't have a car. But I had the car.

There is a tendency in our society to not take into account the time and extra care children require. It's invisible, 'women's work'. Children (depending on their ages) need to be home, bathed and in bed so that they get at least 10 to 12 hours of sleep per night. Dragging them out to evening meetings, across the city and back on public transportation, is not easy in good weather, let alone during a Canadian winter. It's hard on them and it's hard on the parent. Moreover, many people have a very limited social life because they can't afford to go out, never mind pay for childcare in order to volunteer (Reitsma-Street et al., 2000).

These same challenges also make it hard for volunteers to take advantage of further training and development opportunities, as these women lamented:

P1: Well, I started at the board last September and there have been three of those orientation meetings [by the Child Day Care office]. And I've missed all three because my husband was either working, because he would teach at night, or they're always in the evening on a weekday...

P2: Now there's an oxymoron, eh? There's an orientation on board development for a daycare, and you can't go because you don't have childcare.

P3: And I've [also] tried three times. I missed the last meeting, there was just one last week, and I couldn't go.

As Mailloux et al. (2002, p.iv.) point out: "Women's volunteer work in formal situations only scratches the surface of what women contribute [to the economy] without pay, on a day-to-day basis". Our findings reinforce their conclusion that the voluntary sector "must do more to promote women-friendly practices to enable females among volunteers and staff to participate without incurring extra costs".

In summary, two of the biggest, and most easily remedied, barriers to participation for volunteers (especially women) are the costs associated with childcare and transportation.

Tough Decisions and Sensitive Topics

Board members wished they had access to more resources and guidance in developing policies to handle the difficult ethical decisions they are sometimes required to make in their roles as stewards of the organization. Several participants mentioned difficult decisions they have had to struggle

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with on their boards. Many of these were ethical dilemmas that involve balancing collective and individual needs; that involve compassion and caring for their community members while setting appropriate boundaries.

The biggest thing for me is how to deal with difficult topics without offending anyone. This seems to be happening in the daycare. We have biters in the school, we have assaults, we have kids coming in improperly dressed, not fed properly. How do we address these issues without offending these parents? ...Like consistent biters, what are the parents' responsibilities if your children are biting constantly and we're trying to beat it at the daycare and then they go home and wrestle with dad and biting, and fighting? ... I mean, we have a lot of single moms who are going to school and sometimes it gets hard on them...to go home and deal with this child. It's easier just to let the child do what they want to do. And so we need ...to get the message across to these parents without offending them: "No, you're not a bad mom but we've got to learn to curb this because I don't want your child coming in and biting my kid's eyelid off".

Inevitably these decisions involve wearing more than one hat and reconciling competing values, such as when children have severe behavioural challenges:

Also to make decisions, like sometimes it's so hard, if you have to get a child removed from the daycare. You all have to agree on it and be able to say just "for the safety of the other kids".

Cases such as the one above are often the most 'gut-wrenching' because board members know the childcare system is underdeveloped, waitlists are long, and their decisions may result in a child 'falling through the cracks'. The implications may well be that a mother has to quit her job or schooling because she can't get alternative care for the child; meanwhile, the behavioural problems may go uncorrected.

Participants raised a number of complex problems they had to make decisions about, running the gambit from those mentioned above to substance abuse to sexual harassment. One participant's comment captured the ambivalence of having to develop policy around sensitive issues. It's one thing to set policy on an inner-city board when you live across the city, but another when you live and work with the people who are impacted by your decisions:

And being able to sort those things out and if you're wearing two hats and you all live in the same community like it's very, very, difficult.

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One board member expressed her frustration and angst as her board tried to deliberate on and choose the best course of action in a charge of sexual harassment:

We just had one member raising issues of sexual harassment [by a person of the same sex in the community]. When it comes up, that member is very sensitive and saying “Well, if it was done to you how would you feel?”, and yet [while trying to manage confidentiality] not divulging enough information. So we don’t really know enough. I want to know, how can you deal with this? Because this thing is affecting us, a lot of time has been spent on this. Meeting to meeting, no resolution is made of this problem. And as a board, how do we go to a community person? This is what the one person expects that we as a board should do, tell them to back off, but still not knowing the extent of this problem.

What makes this case particularly difficult, apart from the fact that the board doesn’t feel it has all the facts, are contrasting perspectives: what the plaintiff (for lack of a better word) experiences as ‘harassment’ may be, from another perspective, his or her unacknowledged homophobia⁸.

A final example of ‘tough decisions, sensitive topics’ in policy development relates to the board of a women’s centre and their struggles around how their feminist organizational philosophy should best be enacted:

Without policies it is very hard to execute those things. So the policy is what helps you do that. We had a very interesting discussion that followed, about policies that we are struggling with. And R had a very interesting one about how you define or write a policy that deals with having men in a women’s centre. How long can they be there? Or, should they be there at all? And if they are there, under what conditions?

In summary, we observed that, like in many boards, the participants in this study grappled with tough decisions, sensitive topics, and ethical dilemmas that often involve balancing collective and individual needs within a moral framework.

Understanding Our Roles As Board Members

A good many of the challenges participants raised related to trying to understand their roles as board members. Many expressed a sense of

⁸ Homophobia is prejudice against (fear or dislike of) homosexual people and homosexuality. (Princeton University, www.cogsci.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/webwn accessed 01/04/04).

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feeling unprepared for what they were getting into, of having to “sink or swim”, and of having little guidance in their positions:

It was my first time ever being on a board, like I've served on committees, but I've never been on a board before, so its something new and it was really scary. And ... the chairperson last year couldn't be there; I found out 5 minutes before the annual general meeting, so I ran the annual general meeting and it was like holy smokes! That was scary! (group laughter).

At least 3 participants mentioned the enormous amount of work they had to do to learn as they went along and to ‘make a trail’ for others. They had developed terms of reference for board positions and materials that could be used to educate current and future board members:

Well my personal experience ... when I first sat on the board...there was none of this (hand fanning the room) to guide you, at least there wasn't on our board. And so over time, we decided ... that it was only fair to other board members, cause a lot of people have never been on a board and have no experience, that there should be some kind of notes, like ... what the chairperson's duty is, what the secretary's duty is, what the treasurer's duty is, and so we created these binders with all the job descriptions and the minutes. And I think that would have been great when D and I first joined because we didn't know anybody on the board, we didn't know what had happened in the past, we were unsure of what exactly our goals were.

Many participants expressed a sense of vulnerability, both in terms of how daunting their responsibilities sometimes seemed, but also because getting and keeping skilled, committed volunteers is hard work that never seems to go away:

P1: Yeah, because I think our board has been lucky so far, as most people on the board have been there for a few years. But I mean, luck can always run out.

P2: You have to orient yourself, and then provide orientation for future members. And if you have 3 members on the board that were existing members with strong board skills, you were fine. But as soon as the members retired or whatever, or you had a whole new board that knew nothing, you were in big trouble.

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The last comment above points to an important strategy for countering some of the vulnerability ‘because boards come and boards go’: that of having overlapping terms of service. If the organization’s board terms are 2 years in length, for example, then each year only half the board is comprised of new recruits. This is a policy that would be set up in the organization’s by-laws. This practice helps provide continuity in the organization, although it doesn’t account for turnover when people don’t serve out their full terms.

Another challenge that participants frequently mentioned was negotiating their respective roles vis-à-vis the role of the executive director, and managing that relationship. Although some people reported having a good, mutually supportive relationship with their director, just as many people talked about their discomfort with some of the power dynamics between their E.D. and the board. For example:

And this is something I want to talk about here: When do you become a token board? When are you an active board? ... Because a token board is: your E.D. tells you what to do. You’re there as a puppet, you’re only there as a figurehead, and that’s it, and all the business goes around without your input...

Similarly, the Institute on Governance study of 20 non-profit organizations (Gil, 2001, p.4) reported that one of the major concerns of boards was “developing clarity between the respective roles of board and senior management”. This seems to be a relatively widespread problem, and it seemed to have been a consolation for the board members in our project to discover that they were not alone. It again speaks to why developing networks is important. Board members are able to see that the board/executive relations are complex and that many people grapple with these issues.

The other side of this issue is the reality that the burden often falls upon Executive Directors to recruit and train board members – essentially providing orientation and guidance for their employers. Undoubtedly some of the power struggles and concerns over either ‘puppet boards’ or ‘micro-managing boards’ would be diminished with greater investment in board training within the non-profit sector.

In summary, many of the challenges that participants mentioned related to trying to understand and learn what was expected of them in their roles as board members, including negotiating the relationship with the E.D. Many people expressed the experience of having to ‘sink or swim’ and wished they had had more guidance when they were first starting out.

Evaluating Executive Performance

Several participants in this project expressed difficulties and unease around evaluating the performance of the Executive Director. This was also an area of substantial concern reported by The Institute on Governance (Gil, 2001, p.23.) who found:

Rigorous, let alone formal, processes for evaluating the performance of the executive director were the exception rather than the rule. This was the cause of considerable concern to most of the CEOs in the sample. This is an area of responsibility acknowledged by most boards as needing substantial attention.

Executive performance evaluation is a board responsibility that is carried out to varying degrees in the non-profit sector, and one area in which the participants in our study quite unanimously voiced that they could use greater guidance:

P1: Yeah, one of the things that the personnel committee reviews is the evaluation of the director, which never got done. And I'm sure other people have that problem too.

P2: Yeah, [A director's evaluation] is supposedly happening right now, and at the past 2 meetings I've been asking [the chair] "When is this going to happen"? Because 3 meetings ago, 3 months ago, [the E.D.] asked "Where's my wage increase? Because I've been here one year." And the chair of board said "Well, we have to do your evaluation". So, at the [following] meeting I said, "Where is the evaluation"? He said, "Oh well, I'll get back to you". Last meeting I said, "Where is the evaluation"? He said, "Oh well, I'll get back to you. We're stilling working on that". So I don't even know what kind of process that is or how involved I can be.

Giving negative feedback was said to be particularly challenging, and some participants shared their impressions of issues either being swept under the rug, or a tendency of avoiding evaluations altogether if they couldn't do a good job.

I have a feeling that it's just going to be him [the chair] and he's on his way out. He'll give [the E.D.] good marks and go. It's uncomfortable for a lot of boards and I think that might be one of the reasons why people often avoid doing the

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evaluation process. Even though it's our responsibility as board members to evaluate the director.

In summary, evaluating the director was a challenge that caused considerable unease for some participants. Executive performance evaluation was acknowledged as one of the most important, and least adhered to, responsibilities that boards have.

Managing Conflict

Managing conflict was another common theme of discussion when it comes to the challenges that boards face. A number of participants mentioned how difficult it was when cliques formed, or when differences of opinion were not encouraged or respected. Some people had been ostracized for 'being the dissenting voice'.

This shouldn't be happening that nobody listens to you. And I think that's the worst thing that some board members do is they sign up together, and to hell with the other board members. And you become alienated, isolated, criticized, just because you have a different opinion.

And I think if you dread going every time there's a meeting, because you know there's going to be conflict... like when I was on the ___ board, my views were fundamentally different than the rest of them... So I would go, but a lot of times, what they decided, I didn't agree with. And since our community is a small community, and we all sit on a lot of the same boards, it's not easy to disagree with somebody. Your disagreement on the board may be taken someplace else. Your children go to the same school and you're serving on this committee, [and] that committee. It's not easy to say I don't agree with that or I don't think that's right.

Certainly this is one of the down sides of 'social capital' when in-group/out-group dynamics begin to take over. Community workers, consultants and facilitators in particular have an important responsibility to model inclusion and tolerance for diversity in their interventions, but everyone has a role to play in making sure groups and communities are not oppressive and exclusionary. As one participant expressed:

And that's the piece to keep in mind is that you don't want to have your networks to the point where there's ... no sense of democratic participation, right? So that you create an in-group and an out-group and all those things... That kind of thing can happen so quickly and I think that's one of the

biggest risks, you know. It was always a risk of the political old boys network and... we don't want to create old girls networks either, frankly, from my point of view.

In summary, managing conflict was another challenge for board members, in particular when cliques formed or differences in opinion were not encouraged or respected.

Challenges Inherent in The System

Some of the conflicts that people experience as 'personal' are actually structural contradictions inherent in the system. In Manitoba, in licensed childcare, for example, parental "voluntary" participation on boards is legislated. A minimum of 20% of each board must be made up of parents, and often the vast majority of childcare board positions are held by parents. This structure creates a situation whereby consumers of the service (parents with children in daycare) are also in the position of ultimate responsibility in the organization, and in fact, have formal authority over the staff. Parents who get involved on boards of directors are rarely aware that the parent board/staff relationship is one of a structural conflict of interest, which can often lead to difficult situations.

For example one board member found that relations with staff soured when she found out her child had been injured at the daycare by another child whose mother happened to be a staff member. (Normally a protocol is followed when a child gets hurt):

So my little guy came home one evening with a scratch below his eye and a bump on his forehead. My husband ...right away phoned the director. And, nobody knew what happened at the daycare. So we sat [our son] down and asked him what happened. I was trying to [find out] from him how he got [hurt]. He started naming a couple of the kids, who happen to be the staff's children. So, I spoke to the director the next morning and I spoke to this staff parent. I have been on the board for about three years now and I've never had any problems with the staff before... Well, this staff parent was saying "no you shouldn't be blaming my child" ... And, for about two months nobody wanted to come near me. Recently they're just slowly, slowly getting back to me now...

The following account is a classic example of one of the risks of having childcare delivered within this kind of model, where board members felt virtually 'held at ransom' because of role conflict:

[The E.D.] would say "This is what the pay scale rate should be", and he would get these huge pay raises every single year.

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And, when a couple of us thought it wasn't fair - you know the aides were getting \$7.50 an hour - and we're like "Well, can't we at least give them \$8.00 an hour?" ... "Oh, no, no, no", but wanting these huge pay raises himself. And he would start to bully and threaten that he was going to quit as the director of the daycare. "And if we don't have a director, the daycare could close down" and all this kind of stuff. And as a single parent with kids in that daycare, I keep my mouth shut because I'm a student and I don't have alternative childcare. And I can't take the time to find another daycare; it's not that easy. In the middle of the year, and there are no daycares that have spots available. So then you just keep your mouth shut.

Whereas parental involvement on boards speaks to the ideal of democratizing services, at the same time board members are vulnerable to power dynamics, such as above, that show how the formal structure is inherently contradictory. On one hand, the director is legally answerable to the board, but the process can get co-opted if there is an informal source of power. On the other hand, parents are in a position of vulnerability, as they worry about the continuity of their children's care at the centre.

Parent board members' vulnerability is exacerbated by the wider political milieu of service delivery. Certainly in a province where 1 child in 10 has access to licensed childcare (Prentice, 2000), where waitlists are more than a year long, where there is a severe shortage of Early Childhood Educators⁹, and where parents with young children are already overextended, challenging one's director causes people to stop and think. As one participant aptly put it:

You can put up with an awful lot of really bad stuff before you want to quit your kids' care.

Clashes, such as the ones above, expose the kind of conflict that is inherent in the system; it is conflict that is structural, quite removed from questions of personality, character, and 'good will', and, short of systemic change, will never go away.

Beyond Fundraising

Another of the major challenges faced by board members is the heavy burden on volunteers for fundraising. It is one thing to be expected to fundraise for

⁹ In a recent labour market study funded by Manitoba Education, Training & Youth, the shortage of personnel has reached crisis proportions, which is negatively impacting the functioning of the childcare system. The report suggested that as many as 700 early childhood educators are needed by 2004 (Mayer, 2001).

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extracurricular activities, but another thing entirely to experience a protracted sense of fragility from having to operate from grant to grant on a yearly basis, as in the example of this family resource centre:

...You know, like we're struggling ...like I'm a participant worker and we don't know if we will get funding, we still don't know yet, and we're always at the board [meetings] where, "can we find the money to keep them on?" and it's hard, you know, we have to write proposals and they're only [good for] a year, and it's ... a hard thing to do, and then I gotta tell the other participant worker, that we might not have a job. So, that's hard, but they try to keep us on, and you know, they try to find the money elsewhere, so they can keep us on and keep the centre open.

One of the heaviest burdens on volunteers in the childcare sector in particular, is trying to raise money for buildings and structures, since there is no provision for capital expansion within the provincial budget, nor within provincial - federal infrastructure agreements. It's incongruous that there are funding mechanisms for a fire or police station, a swimming pool or an arena, but a licensed childcare facility (one of the most fundamental of community services) would not qualify for funding. In spite of a dramatic shortage of licensed spaces, it is on the shoulders of volunteers to fundraise for and build the structures to provide quality childcare. Many volunteers see one of the biggest struggles is with people's mind-sets – that they just don't perceive childcare as a community service, as an investment in the future. They still see childcare as the private responsibility of parents, mostly mothers. Their hard work is often met with resistance. Two participants discussed their recent experiences:

P1: It would be so nice not to have to worry constantly about where the money's coming from. (Group agreement)...To do what should be done, instead of what can be done with what you've got...[people] are knocking themselves out fund-raising for things that they shouldn't have to fund-raise for. And parents are shelling out money like crazy. We have daycares that are trying to fund-raise for structures, for buildings! So I don't understand why our provincial government, the three departments of Health, Education, and Family Services, why they can't work together to capture synergies. So that you have a school that houses a daycare and you fundraise for one building and play structures and you share them.

P2: We tried this. The daycare my daughter is in is in the basement of a church, across the street from the school. But, because of the Pine Falls fire [in which a child died], daycares

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have got to get out of church basements... On one corner of the school property was a bus garage ... being bulldozed down...They [also] had three temporary huts behind the school that were condemned, and we said: "We will build a daycare and enough [licensed childcare] spaces to replace the huts. We are a pre-school centre but we will also add infant spaces and school-age spaces in exchange for enough property to put the building on", if the school division was to give us this piece of land [where the former bus garage was located]. They would not do it. They just absolutely refused. And, we would have paid for the building, which would have been worth more than this little tiny piece of land but we can't get any land close to the school.

P3: That way you could share services and you'd provide the after-school or before-school programs?

P1: Yes, and they could get the kids out of these huts that are condemned. But no.

In summary, the short terms of some core-funding grants (which require frequent re-application) and large-scale fundraising for infrastructure development are examples of challenges that place an inappropriate burden on volunteers, take enormous amounts of time and perseverance, and detract from the regular job of governing their organizations.

The Job Of Volunteer Governance And Building Capacity

There were a number of other challenges that participants raised, related to the month-to-month "job of governing". For example, unproductive meetings were a cause of frustration for many people, who felt that time was squandered in relation to what was accomplished.

P1: Our last meeting went from 5 to 9 ... the length of time, our meetings never seem to end!

P2: Absolutely, there's a lot of stress there. And I agree with S. Our last board meeting went till 8:30 and I didn't have dinner. And a lot of people were really wordy and that was a long day for me. And my husband was fuming when I got home, "Grrr, it's 8:30. It's time to put the kid to bed". He was mad that it wasn't a shorter meeting. And, in reality, there was an agenda, but there was no time frame and it could have been shorter.

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Others lamented the unending effort of recruiting and retaining volunteers, getting people involved and building commitment.

I think the biggest concern right now is, looking back on our last board year, we had, for the first time since I've been involved, a real hard time getting quorum at meetings.

We're still having problems with a couple of people on the board, how to keep them interested, and get them back at meetings on a regular basis.

Within many of the scenarios participants described, the image emerged of people trying to solve a particular problem while at the same time trying to build the skills required by the situation. It always seems to be a small group that shoulders most of the load, and getting people to follow through with tasks is usually the hardest part:

One of the things we've experienced on our board is that there's people willing to be on absolutely every committee, but don't do anything! (Group Laughter). A lot of people saying they will do stuff and it doesn't happen.

One group of participants said that, knowing what they know now, they wish that board development had been treated more seriously as a legitimate task by advisors when they were starting up their women's centre:

P1: What if it was validated by saying, "yes, this is something that you [can] do and you can ask for a certain amount of money to do this job [referring to board development activities]?" I mean, that would be a big difference, because it feels like we're doing all [the work] we said we were going to do, plus the board development stuff on the side. But if [board development] would have been recognized as an important task in itself... we did just write a proposal... [but] it's four years after we started that we're actually thinking about board development. Because it was never mentioned, and we didn't have the vocabulary or the thinking about it because we were so guided by the funders and professional agency people. And it's what we needed. If we had thought more about this, I think we would be in a much better position right now.

P2: Yeah, we began thinking programs and stuff like that before we thought about [how the] board [could work together].

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P3: We thought: "Oh, we'll just hire staff". But (laughing) we don't have the board that can support them, we don't have the capacity to know what we should be doing for them. ...So it's made it very difficult because we didn't know this stuff until after we had gone through it.

This last point was well made in the "20 case studies" report by the Institute on Governance (Gil, 2001, p.22); they found that the majority of boards "expressed a desire to do a better job of building team spirit and trust, but available time [and costs] were repeatedly cited as an impediment. Although there were some notable exceptions, funders did not typically provide adequate resources to support key aspects of governance such as team building and orientation".

In summary, another cluster of challenges related to the month-to-month "job of governing" including dealing with unproductive meetings, and perpetually having to recruit volunteers and build commitment. Participants lamented that they often were trying to accomplish their tasks while trying to develop the required skills and board capacity at the same time, yet explicit support for board development was rare.

Balancing Our Responsibilities

Finally, an on-going challenge, particularly for women with children, relates to juggling numerous responsibilities and managing their time around them, and maintaining some sort of balance in those roles. As one participant articulated:

It's a high expectation being the chair. I'm being pulled in different kinds of meetings and I have my own job to do at work and sometimes I'm volunteering a lot more time during the day and that can't be helped because people work between 9 and 5. We can't do stuff during the evening so, being a chair, it's very difficult for me...I have to figure out how to juggle that and keep it balanced and still be able to be a part of that.

Balance is a key message in the teachings of the Medicine Wheel. In *Connect, Respect, and Understand: Addressing Cultural Needs and Sensitivities in Our Community* (The United Way, n.d.) it is pointed out that the Medicine Wheel can be interpreted in many ways, depending on the teachings that people receive and how they apply it in their lives. The most important objective, however, is to strive for balance.

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Striving for balance includes setting limits and taking care of one's own needs - hard habits to develop in a culture that socializes women to always be caring for others, as this participant described:

Well, I have 2 small children, so I'm tired pretty much all the time (group laughter in solidarity). And, it's one thing I found to recognize your limitations but to actually act upon them and situate things so that you're, well so that you are caring for yourself. But also I have a hard time delegating, and to actually finally go to my husband: "Okay I can't do everything. I need help".

The task for women is to hold themselves equally in the picture. The caring work done by women **includes** caring for themselves and knowing their limits.

Setting that limit ... and getting respect from others. Also the importance of your volunteer time on these boards, like you really have skill and experience that's important to boards. So recognizing those things in the community. So I thought it was very honouring that you [have done] that. Sometimes you go through life and you don't really realize that about your attitude, and if you miss a few meetings [because you're burned out] and that's not characteristic of you, then honouring that and saying "Yeah, great you're taking some time off for yourself". ... Know that as women we do a lot of things and just recognize those limitations... You're a human being first.

Another participant mentioned the importance of learning to read her internal signals, and showing some self-compassion:

Understanding, on my part, tiredness, [because] when you get tired or burned out, you don't have the greatest attitude (laughing).

Silvia Maracle (2003, p. 79), writing on Native women, leadership and community development, observes that many of the natural leaders who have worked to heal their communities from the effects of colonization have been, in overwhelming numbers, Native women. And she reminds women:

As the numbers of Aboriginal people on the healing path increase, there will be questions and challenges about what to do after the healing is completed. We are not used to living life to its fullest, but rather to healing and helping others. We will need to learn how to balance the numerous aspects of life that we juggle: academic and lived experience, traditional

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culture and new forms of cultural expression, professional and personal life, and nurturing others versus nurturing ourselves.

In *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood* (2000), Kim Anderson draws on the life-giver teachings of the Medicine Wheel in recalling that women's ability and responsibility to nurture is only as strong as the care that they receive. "In other words", she writes, "if we don't take care of Mother (be it Mother Earth or the human mothers), she can't take care of us". The life-giver teaching encourages women to take the time to look after themselves without apology (since women tend to feel guilty about doing so), to take breaks from the sense of 'having to do it all'. "The life-giver teaching further reminds us that we need to build a community of helpers who know how to help us without controlling us" (p.254). In their leadership roles on boards of community childcare facilities and resource centers for women and families, that is what these women are demonstrating.

Summary of Challenges

In summary, the challenges experienced by this sample of board members in doing their volunteer work clustered around 10 main themes. Some of the challenges related to various needs for community capacity building, and others related to problems inherent in the system and assumptions upon which the current model of service is delivered for family services.

First, we observed that **board work doesn't happen in a vacuum**; many board members are dealing with considerable challenges in their personal lives that make their volunteer commitments seem all the more remarkable. We identified at least 2 **barriers to participation**, transportation and childcare, that we feel could be easily remedied by acknowledging and reimbursing expenses associated with board and community leadership activities. We observed that, like in many boards, the participants in this study grappled with **tough decisions, sensitive topics**, and ethical dilemmas that involve balancing collective and individual needs within a moral framework. The challenges described as **understanding our roles as board members** related to a sense of feeling unprepared for what they were getting into, of having to "sink or swim", and of having little guidance in their positions. Understanding and negotiating the respective roles of the board and the executive director, and managing that relationship was source of discomfort for some, as was unease around **evaluating the performance of the Executive Director**.

Managing conflict was another common theme of discussion when it came to challenges. We noted that some of the conflicts that people experience as 'personal' are actually structural **contractions inherent in the system**. Parents who get involved in boards of directors in licensed childcare, for

example, are rarely aware that the parent board/staff relationship is one of a structural conflict of interest, which can often lead to difficult situations. Other challenges faced by board members are: the heavy burden on volunteers for **fundraising**; and the month-to-month “**job of governing**” including dealing with unproductive meetings, and perpetually having to recruit volunteers and build commitment. It was noted that funders “do not typically provide adequate resources to support key aspects of governance such as orientation and board development” (Gil, 2001, p.22).

Finally, an on-going challenge, particularly for women with children, relates to juggling numerous responsibilities and maintaining some sort of **balance** in their various roles. Balance is a key message in the teachings of the Medicine Wheel. The caring work done by women needs to include caring for themselves. Reviewing these challenges allowed us to see the powerful constraints imposed on this sample of board members and also their tremendous commitment and motivation to build their communities.

Designing Learning

A recent literature review (Torjman et al., 2001, pp. 2-3.) explored the theme of community learning from a broad cross-section of disciplines, ranging from highly theoretical to practice-based perspectives. Despite the diversity of approaches to the subject matter, the overall conclusions showed surprising consistency, which embraced 3 major themes:

First, there is a significant **difference between information and knowledge – information cannot be considered knowledge until someone engages with it** in a meaningful way.

Second, the concerns, **interests and needs of the learners are as important** a factor in the learning equation as the material being learned.

Third, the linear, unidirectional model of learning (when it is the *only* approach used) is ineffective. Ideally, **learning takes place through interpersonal interaction where people are actively involved in exploring a given challenge.**

We approached the design of this project with those guiding principles in mind. In essence, the structure for learning was less a prescription for board development and more about creating space for people to come together to share their wisdom and collectively deepen their capacities as board directors. Clearly, board orientation and development is not something you do once and be done with. It is an ongoing process, much like community development is an on-going process. And, as Gilchrist (2000, p. 269.) metaphorically describes: “community development involves human horticulture rather than social engineering”. The ‘planting seeds’ imagery is an apt one. The shift in emphasis in policy discourse in recent years from

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adult 'education' to the 'promotion of lifelong learning' is part of a growing interest with understanding the processes of learning how to learn and with reflection on the self and one's personal experience (Miller, 2000).

Because the project had dual purposes of both research and training, we used a multi-layered design, with the hopes of achieving a number of objectives simultaneously. In terms of the training aspect, from a content perspective we were exploring 'how we learn' within the domain of volunteer board experiences and governance issues. However, from a process perspective we employed specific strategies to put us in a microcosm of board life. This was done with the intention of modeling some of the communicative and interpersonal skill-sets of governance, such as: positive norm setting, respectful communication, appreciation for diversity, creating a climate of trust, making room for different viewpoints in group discussions, building bonds and nurturing instrumental relationships, self-reflection and learning from our experiences, developing political awareness and modeling critical inquiry, being transparent about agendas, balancing individual and collective needs, and respecting the context of people's lives. The next section describes some of the tools and interventions we used and the respective design motivations to which they corresponded.

Anti-Oppressive Practice

We paid attention to adult, feminist and anti-racist education principles through the following practices:

- We promoted a sense of safety for participants through unconditional respect and affirmation towards all individuals, and through attending to people's physical and emotional comfort.
- We used proactive norm setting at the beginning of sessions making principles of inclusion and respect for multiple viewpoints explicit. The guidelines¹⁰ included:
 - Everyone has wisdom (regardless of their job experience or education levels).
 - We need everyone's wisdom for the wisest result.
 - There are no wrong answers.
 - What we can accomplish together is better than what any one of us could do alone.
 - Everyone has the right to be heard, and the responsibility to listen to others.

¹⁰ Adapted from the Institute of Cultural Affairs Canada (Stanfield, 1997).

- Participation “looks” different to each person. Some of us are verbal, some of us are quiet observers. We respect the different ways people choose to participate.
- We agree to keep confidential information in the group.
- We modeled critical inquiry (Brookfield, 1991; 1995) through explicit conversations about power dynamics and about our racial differences; by making assumptions and perspectives about the workshops transparent; and by inviting participants to openly disagree if something didn’t resonate for them.

Meta-Learning, Self-Knowledge and Collective Knowledge

Meta-Learning means ‘learning how to learn’. We used Kolb’s Learning Styles Inventory (Kolb, 1991) to explore the individual learning styles of participants and discussion of the inventory as a method of group building. We presented Kolb’s model of experiential learning as one way, among a number of possible ways, we can understand how we learn and we applied it to the informal learning context of volunteer board work. We used small groups (maximum 12 participants) so that participants would feel more comfortable listening and discussing, and we scheduled 2 sessions with approximately 3-4 weeks in between so that participants would have time to incubate the learning from the first session. The group size and spacing of meetings mirrored that of board meetings.

Meta-learning: Learning is inherently messy work. Using a Learning Styles Inventory in the context of exploring the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for effective board work enabled people to reflect on their learning processes while trying to solve real-world problems. Our assumptions are somewhat emancipatory, akin to the adage of ‘teaching a person to fish rather than giving her or him a fish’. The idea is that once a person is more aware of *how* they learn, they can enact more conscious, more self-honouring, more self-determining (and likely, personally effective) learning strategies in the future.

The use of the Learning Style Inventory (LSI) showed great potential and was useful for a variety of inter-related purposes, highlighted below.

Icebreaker: The Kolb Learning Style Inventory provides the ‘topic’ for people to begin talking about themselves and how they best like to learn. It gives them a framework to begin getting to know each other better. One participant made this observation:

I like it [exploring our learning styles], and first of all I thought when we got together and compared the way we learned, that was an ice breaker too. There were some funny

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parts about that (laughing) and I like it that way in the group.

Increased self-knowledge: Increased knowledge of the self is often accompanied by increased self-confidence, especially important for women, given our socialization (Belenky et al., 1986; Arapakis, 1993). One participant pointed out how she had begun to more consciously recognize her own strengths as a result of exploring learning styles.

At the time I didn't realize that...that's my forté, that's what I do well: to mentor, to handle conflict. I do that well and I've never taken credit for that before, so, I think the other thing that I'm going to use [this for]is to give credit where credit is due, even if it's to myself and to say: "you know what D? You did that O.K."

A method for affirming people's diversity and the different ways they might learn and/or solve problems: People gained awareness of their own talents and strengths as well as those of others. The emphasis was on "there is NO ONE RIGHT WAY" to be. This was reported by participants as leading to greater self-acceptance as well as increased appreciation for differences.

I think you did very good about telling people that there's no right and there's no wrong [learning style]. However you are is ok.

Team building: Once people understand the value of different learning styles and the different ways people contribute, they can begin to consciously map the resources within their group and draw on people's particular strengths. People begin to feel valued for their unique contributions, and at the same time there is a shift to a more transcendent perception of the group's value. There is the potential for experiencing the whole as "greater than the sum of the parts". As participants began to bond as a group, we pointed out the potential for using this or similar models with their own boards.

Excellent modeling in how to manage a group of people. It was really useful to think about diversity in a group in terms of a model of how learning happens.

Cultural parallels. Another benefit of using Kolb's model of experiential learning (in particular) is its many parallels to the Medicine Wheel. For example, like the Medicine Wheel, Kolb's model is a circle with 4 quadrants that emphasize cycles and phases of learning, an emphasis on the strengths each phase has, and the many complimentary talents people bring to situations. Just as with the Medicine Wheel, the focus is on people's

strengths and skills as well as on their instinctive tendencies to strive for balance. One participant commented on these interesting parallels between the models:

Just briefly, where I work we have an evaluation that's based on the medicine wheel concept and this [Kolb] is pretty much that concept as well. It's pretty close... Our evaluation is based on gifts of each of the directions that we carry, and that's how we are evaluated during our evaluation. It's really not a negative thing, it's really a very positive thing because you look at all those gifts and you build on them because everyone has gifts in all four directions. As well here we all have gifts. And how do you learn and sometimes you're more on one side, you know, um one direction as opposed to the other, but how do you start building and balancing that wheel?

Although Kolb's theory of experiential learning and the learning styles inventory has several benefits, it is not without its limitations, which will be discussed in a later section.

Benefits of an Interactive Learning Design With a Focus on 'Learning to Learn'

One of the research objectives was to explore the extent to which the participants thought that their learning had been enhanced by a model of training based on small group interaction, utilizing a 'learning to learn' tool (Kolb 1984;1991), and entailing two day-long sessions spaced a few weeks apart to provide time to reflect. We were interested in knowing what aspects of this model were useful to participants, since these elements would feed directly into considerations for training design and influence policy recommendations.

During the second meeting, we asked participants what they thought about various aspects of the training design. We used verbal and written formats to collect their responses. The main benefits participants reported fall under 5 themes: 1) the value of interaction; 2) a positive learning climate and responsiveness to group members' needs; 3) increased knowledge of self and others, conflict management; 4) help with board work, increased knowledge of the roles of the board; and 5) the value of small groups, a series of meetings, and incubation time.

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1) The Value Of Interaction

The value of interaction with peers emerged as the most significant element of this project. Within the transcripts the greatest abundance of comments related to the importance of building networks, discussion about concrete issues, being able to draw on other people's experiences, comparing how others do things, sharing struggles, and creating new opportunities for partnerships.

Network building and learning from others was understood by the participants as a fundamental reason for attending the sessions. Participants felt it was an efficient way to learn more about board work.

P1: Sharing with these groups, you can sure get the shortcut (laughing).

P2: Yeah (laughing) that's true!

P3: That's a very observant point!

P1: Yeah and sharing ideas [is] great. And well, if you don't have anything that you'd like to share in particular, there's no pressure to do so.

The 'value of networking' theme was reiterated throughout the time spent together. The opportunity to network was stated among the reasons for attending the sessions, among the hopes of what would happen, and among the benefits received.

I feel I met valuable people, good contacts and got very useful info regarding specific people to talk to and where to go for the info I seek to become a better board member/asset to community.

Having the opportunity to interact with other participants was cited as the most valuable thing people took away from the training sessions.

It was nice that we were encouraged to participate and then after that receive feedback from people in the group, like there was a chance for response.

You have an opportunity to have a discussion about something very focused. And then I like coming back to the bigger group and having everybody have the chance to share some of what they were discussing, because I already know what my thoughts are about something and I find it's always good to hear what other people think about something. Get their perspective on it.

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People especially found it useful to get specific answers to concerns they were currently grappling with, in an arena of mutual problem-solving and support.

Getting advice, because I did find that helpful because we're struggling with an issue and so are you. But just to be able to share that in confidence.

Good advice. [What] I think I carried from here that is essential is the advice I got from other people. I can take it back and use it. And I feel more strongly than ever that it is something I will do.

It was not only advice, ...it's support, it's validation.

Interactive sessions enabled people to compare how other people handle similar situations, which they reported as being very helpful, as the interaction between these 2 participants indicates:

P1: Some people like...a description of things that they're supposed to do (referring to board position descriptions shared with the group) and I think that giving that out [to my board] will be great. I think they even just like to know what they do as opposed to what somebody else does.

P2: Because sometimes it feels like you can't find examples. Or there is no one to talk about what does a treasurer do over at your group? What does a treasurer do over at your group? (pointing to different participants).

Many people expressed pleasure in the interactive aspect of learning and how it expanded their own thinking.

I did like discussing the many different points with you because I can get stuck in my own point of view of things... I do like to hear from others, be able to see how others [approach issues]. I do like discussing about the different things that we've been going over. I really liked that part.

It was helpful to see my learning style and compare it with others' preferred styles.

I enjoyed hearing others' experiences and then relate it back to my situation.

In addition to comparing how others view issues and/or solve problems, participants also said that it was very useful to go over **together** the results of the evaluations of the first session. Participants explained how hearing what

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other people got from the session enhanced their awareness of their own learning and gave them a sense of collective learning as a group.

I liked...the summary of the evaluations... I was able to connect what I was learning with what other people [were learning].

Finally, people mentioned that interaction was of benefit in that it enabled 'discovering our common ground' and opportunities for new partnerships:

P1[from a resource centre board]; Here's a chance to meet childcare board members. So, to me, that's good networking.

P2: It's good overlapping between sectors.

And even what you raised this morning, about ... all these under-supported childcare facilities and, you know, this trend in our society with children having more violent behaviours at a younger age. And maybe we can work together. Maybe there's something here that hasn't been thought of before...some new ground to share resources and to work together. And, you know, that's where ideas come from, when you get people together in forums like this and discover our common ground.

In summary, the value of interaction with peers emerged as the most significant element for the participants in this project.

2) A Positive Learning Climate And Responsiveness To The Group's Needs

From an adult education perspective, there are a number of elements that go into the creation of a positive learning climate. These have been mentioned elsewhere (see page 48) and include: affirming and encouraging participants in all their diversity; creating a sense of safety and confidentiality, attending to people's physical needs, responding to the group's energy levels, and using humour, among other factors.

Adult educators who seek to strengthen community must be committed to inclusivity (Ewert & Grace, 2000) and unconditional respect for participants. Affirmation and acceptance were among the most important stated benefits of the sessions, as these board members commented:

Well, that helped me express myself last night and for me it was like, I remember that I can be crazy like this [here at this meeting] and people [in other situations] they would not accept me. See, to me ...this is a place where I can just be myself.

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And it was very democratic. Like you made everyone feel equal. I don't think you were exclusive of any one person's opinion or input.

I really enjoyed the first session and think the most useful thing that came out of it was thinking that I don't have to try and do everything perfectly (group laughter).

Establishing a sense of safety and confidentiality was critical for participants' willingness to share concerns or problems.

P1: Yes, it's nice that's it's safe everything is confidential and that you can vent a problem and then get other people's take on that.

P2: I really agree with that one.

An important aspect of creating a positive learning climate requires attending to participants' physical needs. It includes items such as ensuring an adequate supply of food and beverages, checking comfort levels with the room temperature, and letting people know about the location of parking, telephones, washrooms, etc. It's good to let people know the day's agenda and the planned breaks ahead of time, and also to encourage them to take care of their own needs as the situation requires, get up and move around if they need to, and so on. Participants told us all of these elements were beneficial to them:

P1: What I found was that the last time we had the session after lunch I felt so sleepy, remember that? But today, I don't know if it has to do with the temperature or whatever it is, I feel more alert.

Fa: It was the dietary intervention! (all laughing). You asked for what you wanted and you got it! (all laughing). [This person had commented in the first meeting's evaluations that she would have appreciated more salad. We added salad and more vegetables at lunchtime for the second meeting.]

Being attentive to and responding to these needs can go a long way in establishing a comfortable atmosphere where people can feel free to "be themselves" and therefore free up their creativity.

I think what worked for myself personally was, even though we paid a lot of attention to detail, it was still a very casual environment, and, [one] that drew on people's personal experiences... and because of the way I learn that really helped me and it made me feel comfortable and it made me feel like I had more to contribute.

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Other aspects that fed into the learning climate included acknowledging the context of participants' lives, offering lots of choice about meeting dates, responding to the group's energy levels and adjusting the agenda accordingly.

It's helpful... you run a number of groups so then people can pick and choose.

And you know one of the other things? The willingness to cut things short, do things a little differently than you'd planned maybe, but what works for the group "let's go for it". Like being able to leave earlier than one day... That kind of flexibility.

Being flexible with the [agenda] and being able to take care of our own needs.

A few of the participants commented expressly that the honorarium was what made the difference for them in whether or not they would have been able to participate.

I was going to say the 60 bucks made a difference convincing my husband that this was worth my time (all laughing). I don't know if he would have agreed to it if I was ... just purely volunteering. He would have said "No, no I'm not spending my Saturday watching [their son], I've got work to do". So it really helped make an argument with him... [And the other option] if childcare was provided [directly], I probably could have done it without his permission. I would have said "Sorry honey, it's something I want to do. I'm taking E with me he'll be watched, don't worry about it. We'll be gone for the day". And he would have been left to work.

Humour, "having some fun while we work" and "getting to move around" were also important elements for a positive learning climate. (In fact, there were 238 instances of humour identified within the transcripts of the sessions.) Many commented on the importance of playfulness and fun in maintaining their interest:

Sense of humour and fun and being able to play is essential now a days, ... because I'm out of a place right away if it's too stiff. I haven't got time for that.

The surprise was that I actually enjoyed this, I never thought I would.

[Most beneficial?] The time for humour and exercise. Getting people to move around.

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Yeah it's not boring, lots of times you go to these things and you just walk in the door and think "Oh why did I even say I would even do this?" because it's going to be so boring or so dry, but this isn't.

Finally, there were a number of people who expressed a sense of feeling "pampered and appreciated" because we attended to these kinds of details¹¹.

It was very welcoming, everything you did was very welcoming.

Well I think since we all volunteer it's important to feel supported by your community. Thank you.

Enjoyed feeling validated for my contributions to the board and community.

Feeling affirmed was the most beneficial aspect for some participants. They mentioned that feeling valued for their contributions re-energized and inspired them and also helped them reconnect to why volunteering was important in the first place.

P1: I felt like the information that was shared was incredibly valuable that you're just not going to get from bumping into someone at the supermarket. It's the ideas and knowledge, it makes volunteering seem more important and more doable.

P2: Yes, I agree.

Sometimes you get into the volunteer mode and you just feel like you're not valued and you [wonder] "Why am I doing this?" To me it just introduces you back to this important subject and what you do counts.

You made us feel like our input was valuable.

In summary, affirming and encouraging participants in all their diversity; creating a sense of safety and confidentiality, attending to people's physical needs, responding to the group's energy levels, and using humour were all factors that contributed to a positive learning climate which participants said they greatly valued.

3) Increased Knowledge Of Self And Others; Conflict Management

In *The Unfinished Revolution: Learning, Human Behaviour, Community and Political Paradox*, Abbott & Ryan (2001, p.18.) assert that in order to reflect the actual nature of human learning an emphasis is needed on systems that

¹¹ We point out that we did this on a limited budget, offering very basic fare.

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make children [and adults] “become independent problem-solvers capable of understanding their own thinking and learning”. Torjman (2001) notes that this is the advantage found in ‘learning by doing’.

Learning to learn is defined as “the capacity adults possess of becoming self-consciously aware of their learning styles and being able to adjust these according to the situations in which they find themselves” (Smith, 1982; Tuijnman & Van Der Kamp, 1992; in Brookfield, 1998, p. 294).

Another significant theme then, in terms of what participants thought was highly beneficial to them, relates to the opportunity to reflect on how they and others learn. This resulted in enhanced self knowledge and awareness of others, which led to an increased sense of being able to manage potential conflict. But it began with self awareness:

I like it [exploring our learning styles]... because it could help you and I think it could help understand other people. So, I thought it was good.

Self-awareness I think is good. It's easy enough to blame everyone else for your problems when you're sitting on a board, like that person over there is the problem, but maybe you're contributing. So I mean knowing what you do good or what you do best and ... what your weaknesses are.... I had a hard time understanding it when you first started, but afterwards I get it.

Reflecting on their learning styles and processes not only increased their own self awareness, but it also increased their understanding of other people. This participant reported a greater appreciation for the different ways people approach situations:

It was helpful to realize, to understand why some people need more time to process things and analyze. It was just an appreciation ... I use to think “boy it takes a long time, why don't you hurry up?.” But now I realize their style, the way they process, so I'm not as impatient. The meetings are long, what's changed is that I don't look at the people as creating that problem... And, even appreciating someone for the degree they like to go into depth or analyze something. It's great to have people like that around, and we can all learn how to be more concise and get to the point sometimes (laughing). And I'm talking about myself included, I realize that there are things I have to do, too, to make it more productive.

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Some participants pointed out in particular how they felt that they came away with increased tolerance and more skill in conflict management than they had before.

I have one more thing about my ... learning style: I found that at the last board meeting I was far less critical of all the other board members. Because that tends to be my nature as I'm very protocol at analyzing different things and different people's contributions... But I was much more accepting of what they had to contribute this time.

Absolutely! Very valuable self-analysis re learning styles which provided a [positive] approach to board [development] and allowed me to value the input of everyone on our troubled board!

In summary, another theme in terms of what participants thought was highly beneficial to them, related to the opportunity to reflect on how they and others learn. This resulted in enhanced self knowledge and awareness of others, and also led to an increased sense of being able to manage conflict.

4) Help With Board Work; Increased Knowledge Of Our Roles

Participants conveyed that getting help with their board concerns was of great benefit to them, as well as gaining an increased understanding of their roles as board members.

The first layer of value was related to the fact that, instead of listening to someone present the "10 important points" about being an effective board, they worked together as a group to expand their understanding of the requirements. They tapped into their existing knowledge of good governance, and through a collective process, broadened and deepened it.

I enjoyed the brainstorming sessions about how to have more effective boards i.e. Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes. I enjoy hearing others' experiences and then relate it back to my situation.

Within the context of brainstorming knowledge, skills, and attitudes they explored various challenges and concerns, which led to conversations and problem solving about concrete issues that board members were currently struggling with, and where to turn for resources.

Yes, absolutely! I learned new ways of dealing with board issues, and more about roles and responsibilities.

Yes ...insight into my learning style...this will help me as I sit on my board and work with people in bringing out their skills and learning.

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[I found out about] the resources that are out there that can help build a better board of directors.

One spill-over benefit from having explored learning styles is that some participants expressed a new appreciation for not just tolerating differences, but *striving for diversity* on their boards. They were seeing how the ‘whole can be greater than the sum of the parts’, as this participant conveyed:

All this information is really important for us because we're developing a board...It's given me some insights about the kinds of dynamics that could happen on a board. And how, ...if you don't have some kind of understanding of the different learning styles, people might feel critical of one person's way of doing things as [compared] to another person's... It's a good thing to know that we need each other. We need all kinds.

.... And then being able to take what we've learned here about attitudes and skill-sets and apply that now to recruiting people... to say O.K. what kind of people, what kind of skill-set do we now have to look for to strengthen the board...? I've learned a lot from this and I'm very appreciative of that.

Very importantly, participants also expressed that it helped them see their board in a new light, and appreciate the existing strengths, all of the things they have going for them.

*I've made some observations ... coming out of our group sessions here ... and, having served on [my] board [for]two years... But, knowing what I do today, I recognize that our organization ... really has a lot of good things going for it. We've had ___ years to develop and perfect policy and to put procedures in place. And, so where a lot of boards that are new are struggling to find their way, we **have** that, and we just need to tweak it.... And so I've developed a whole new appreciation for our organization and some of the people who have served on the board, and for those people who have stayed on and have worked very hard and have worn numerous hats.*

In summary, participants conveyed that getting help with their board concerns was of great benefit to them, as well as gaining an increased understanding of their roles as board members, both of which came from shared exploration of the issues.

5) Small Groups, Series Of Meetings, Incubation Time

Some of the other design elements of this project included small groups (maximum 12 participants) and 2 meetings spaced approximately 3 to 4 weeks apart for incubation time. We asked participants their opinion on the efficacy of these dimensions.

The size of the groups in this study ranged from 6 to 10 participants. While there was no consensus on the optimal group size, it was crystal clear that all the respondents felt that interaction was a key piece of the success of the training for them, and that smaller groups enabled discussion, increased their comfort levels to interact with each other, and promoted networking.

P1: I really liked the number of people that was in attendance because it gave everyone the opportunity to speak. And it didn't take that long to get around the table and give everybody an equal opportunity to voice they're opinion.

I do feel like I've gained more from yesterday and today's sessions than I did from the first two. I didn't realize that even just that bit bigger group kept me from being able to ... get as involved. I feel like it's been the interactive talking back and forth with each other, being able to be specific about our personal board situations has been good for me.

P1: So size does matter? P2: Size matters (general laughter).

There was no consensus on the length of sessions or the day of the week programs ought to be offered. In fact, it was clear that people prefer options from which to choose, because their situations, needs, and availability to take advantage of training opportunities vary widely.

Yeah, I think that it was nice that it was defined...it had units, it was a four-session [evening] series that worked for me ... And when you offered this you gave different sorts of time slots: days, two days, two weekends and so then people could pick which worked best for them. That was a nice option.

In terms of the number of meetings, most people felt at least 2 meetings were necessary to cover all the material, and many people asked for more sessions. Some people suggested an ongoing series with themes would be most appropriate.

Having time to process ideas was essential for me. A condensed meeting would have been overwhelming and would require eliminating too much content. The timing allowed for a greater involvement of group participants in defining what was of most interest and urgency.

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Yes [beneficial]; and I hope we can have future follow-up sessions with the group.

Almost everyone agreed that having incubation time between sessions was valuable, as was having the opportunity to apply what they learned and then reflect upon it again in the next meeting.

Oh yeah, I liked that there was 2, because it gave me time to process and we also had a board meeting in between, so I was able to take some of the ideas and things that I learned about myself as a learner to that meeting. And I noticed right away that it made a difference in how I thought about other people's contributions at that meeting.

2 sessions were better; gave time to digest info and bounce it off other people / board.

Definitely keep 2 sessions! It was most valuable for my learning style to have time to think about / process information - research resources. Thank you!

In summary, other design elements of this project that participants thought were beneficial included small groups (maximum 12 participants), and 2 meetings with enough time between the meetings for incubation, a chance to apply the learning, and an opportunity to reflect upon it again.

Summary Of What Was Most Beneficial For Participants

In summary, the elements of the sessions that board members reported as most valuable were:

- Interaction with peers, opportunities to network
- Opportunity to discuss current issues and concerns
- Exploring as a *group* the knowledge, skills and attitudes for effective board governance
- Opportunity to hear multiple viewpoints and problem solving strategies on issues of interest
- Development of trust within the group, a climate of safety for learners, and affirming diversity
- Opportunity to develop self knowledge and self-confidence
- A self-assessment instrument with team building applications
- Humour, mixing up activities, being able to move around
- Flexibility with schedules and agendas

- Having a workshop ‘series’ with time to apply the learning between sessions and reflect.
- Being respected as adults with multiple responsibilities – no shaming!
- Feeling pampered, worth “investing in”

What could have improved the sessions?

The challenge of doing training and research in the same project requires balancing the needs for learning with needs for collecting data, and ultimately there are trade-offs for either. Although we were unable to address all of the training needs in this study, we asked participants to tell us what would have improved the sessions for them, with an eye on future design considerations. There were four main themes: 1) spend even more time discussing board concerns; 2) Role-plays would help in applying the learning; 3) Help us educate our boards; and 4) Have slightly shorter sessions, spaced 2 to 4 weeks apart. Following a discussion of these themes, we take up some of the limitations of Kolb’s (1991) model of experiential learning and the learning styles inventory.

1) Spend even more time discussing board concerns.

Several people commented that they would have liked to spend more time discussing the issues that they were currently grappling with on their boards, and problem solving with fellow group members. They also would have appreciated more extensive discussions about roles and responsibilities, as the following feedback illustrates:

Make sessions as short as possible on theory and maximize the time spent on concrete problem-solving.

More information on the roles of a board in a non-profit organization, and more discussions around resolving problems.

More about board duties, and problems and solutions encountered during board meetings.

In summary, it was clear that maximizing the time spent discussing and problem-solving around concrete issues would be of great value to participants.

2) Role-plays would help in applying the learning .

One of the main tenets of experiential learning is the notion that learning cannot be separated from the context in which people live out their daily

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realities. Role playing is one such learning method that attempts to approximate real-life experience.

I think probably having examples of how a converger, a diverger, etc. [learning styles] can affect your board, and maybe even having a few people do role plays, and having the rest of the people try to figure out who's who. Like who's doing what on this board and why? That's if you have a lot of time.

The second meeting could be strengthened by ...role-playing a conflict [scenario] from our committees or board. I appreciate experiential learning.

I find it helpful to have an actual situation to work with and do problem solving together as a group. Perhaps point out how the different learning styles approach a situation - so it's not so abstract, since that's an area I'm not as familiar with.

Well thought out and relevant role plays and case studies can be effective learning activities, as these participants have indicated.

3) Help us educate our boards.

Some participants communicated that, while they derived satisfaction from what they learned in the sessions, they felt dismay in how they would be able to implement what they learned with their boards.

We need to talk more about the individual problems faced by our boards, and how we can implement these new ideas into our boards.

Help us educate our board members.

How do you bring this information back to the other board members... educating them as to what they will learn?

The anxieties expressed by these participants about how to educate their boards are understandable and point to the importance of recognizing that board development is an ongoing endeavour that requires inputs at regular intervals.

4) Have slightly shorter sessions, spaced 2 – 4 weeks apart.

While the vast majority of people said 2 sessions were best, several said they would like to see them spaced closer together. The spacing of sessions enabled them to apply what they had learned and return to the group to reflect on what happened. The optimal time seemed to be somewhere between 2 and 4 weeks – long enough for incubation of learning, but not so long that important ideas were forgotten.

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I think 3 half-day sessions about 2 weeks apart would give time to reflect but still keep it all fresh.

Other participants noted that sessions shorter than a full day would work best for them, but they felt that a ½ day was too short. A “¾-length” day on a Saturday, for example, would enable them to attend to shopping and other household responsibilities.

Many felt that a board training initiative similar to the “**Feed The Board**” program offered by the Manitoba Child Care Association at their annual conference would be highly effective. In the “Feed the Board” program, board members meet over dinner for a networking evening. There are several tables, each headed by a facilitator who presents and/or guides discussion on a theme of interest. Some of the themes have included board of directors’ liability and insurance, evaluating the executive director, employment standards, committees, succession planning, developing budgets, fundraising, and so on. People circulate at the tables, having an appetizer at one table, the main course at another, and dessert and coffee at another, all the while pursuing their learning interests and having the opportunity to explore topics and connect with other board members.

In summary, the main themes around what could have improved the training relate to application, application, application! These included spending more time discussing current concerns with fellow board members, engaging in role-plays and practice scenarios, exploring methods for helping members educate their boards, and having a series of meetings with time to apply and reflect on the learning in between sessions.

This is consistent with adult education literature that points out that adult learners are problem-solving beings whose learning is most effective when it is situated in the real world (Abbott & Ryan, 2001). There is a time and place for theory, but when you are in a proverbial swamp full of alligators you just want to know how to survive, not worry about how or why swamps are created and maintained. And that makes sense: these volunteers are in the trenches and they are most interested in programs that are practical and have immediate application.

Limitations of Kolb’s Model of Experiential Learning

Overall the feedback about the use of the Kolb Learning Style Inventory was very positive. The majority of participants found that it was useful to explore their learning styles within the context of board development. However, Kolb’s model is not without its limitations, which have been documented extensively over the years (see bibliography of research on experiential learning theory and the learning styles inventory, Kolb, 1991). Here were the main limitations in relation to this project:

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Kolb's model of experiential learning is a function of the time and social location it comes from. The model is too academic for non-academic circles and thus takes significant time to “unpack”. Terms like converger, diverger, accommodator and assimilator are not user-friendly for a general audience. It requires a considerable investment in time for people to adjust to the language of the model and begin to work with it in a meaningful way. Moreover, the model carries with it several middle-class assumptions that also should be deconstructed with participants.

The instrument raises questions about accuracy, validity, and reliability. The inventory itself has directions that are counter-intuitive, increasing the potential for misinterpretation if the form is filled out in a way that differs from the intentions of the author. Moreover, it asks a number of the same questions with variations on the wording, leading a respondent to feel somewhat manipulated. The following excerpts of transcripts illustrate how 2 participants dealt with these points:

P1: I just recall that as I was reading these questions, I read the first few and then I figured “I can see where they're going with this”. I remember feeling kind of resistant, and I think it probably skewed some of my answers like, “No, I'm not going to put a 1 there again!” (Group laughter). Fa: You can't trick me! (Group laughter). P1: Well, it actually felt like I was being pegged, and I know that I resist that. And I had the experience with some other...questions, and as I read them, I thought, “I don't even know what that means really”, like it's so brief, and I thought “well, what I'm thinking it means could be very different than what Kolb intended when he put it down”.

P2: I did the same, but unlike [P1] I didn't try to resist. In fact, I did the complete opposite where I thought, “Why am I being asked the same question over and over again?” and I must be sure to respond similarly so that I... (Group laughter) ...I better do the same thing, otherwise, they're gonna think I'm psycho. Right? (laughter). Fa: This is what all these tests and models have done to us, it ends up we feel like they're playing with our minds. (Group laughter). P2: You catch on very, very quickly that you're being asked the same question, sixteen different ways. So, it's how you respond to it, but nonetheless, the results I know were right, because that's the thing that I got out of it. The result was right, because that is who I am, that is how I learn, and I know it.

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The facilitator has an important responsibility to de-construct the model to circumvent some of its oppressive tendencies. It's very important to acknowledge and to process participants' resistance to these elements of the instrument. Especially in communities that have experienced marginalization and/or colonization, it would be easy to understand people's suspicion that this might be another tool of oppression. One participant expressed the sense of caution the tool raises:

In the end, the desired result of it, and this whole idea of models... I think models are really useful, because they give our simple brains a way of making sense of the world, but I think the tendency is, once we create models, then we try to fit things into it and, although you've been saying so many times that we use all [skills from all quadrants], and that the model needs to be flexible [to us, and not the other way around], we have to be very careful with the interpretation.

We found it very important to encourage people to openly reject aspects of the model that did not ring true for them (or the whole thing, if that were the case), continually reaffirming that each person's autonomy and self-identity are more relevant than whether or not the model 'fits'.

It's important to reiterate to people that there is no one right way to be. It's equally important to offer the tool as a self-assessment instrument and to emphasize that people should only take from it what is useful to them or feels true for them, and not feel that they are stuck with a label. Moreover, people change over time.

The model is also useful in helping us understand the behaviour of others through general patterns among learning styles. However, another caveat for facilitators and learners is that it's important not to pigeon-hole or stereotype other people. There are no "pure" types; we all use all of the skills in all of the quadrants of the model to a lesser or greater extent.

Kolb isn't for everyone. This model, like any self-inventory or learning model, doesn't appeal to everyone. In fact, in this study 2 participants did not feel that a discussion of learning styles was of benefit to them.

What type learner I am, although interesting, did not really provide me with the information I was expecting to come away with.

I found that Kolb just didn't work for me. Like, I still found it interesting but I haven't made the connection yet to boards. I guess when I'm thinking about all the things I'd like to know, issues and current situations that we're in, I guess thinking about learning styles doesn't seem to be getting to any kind of blatant (noise in background). But, I really like the idea of

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having a model and thinking it through, to do something with it. It would be useful to have some type of model, but (noise in background) [perhaps not this one].

Whereas many appreciated the model for the “self-knowledge” aspect, some found it hard to make the connection to its team-building potential. Fortunately, Kolb’s Learning Styles Inventory comes with a booklet which contains several suggestions and exercises for application in areas such as team building, conflict management, and career planning.

It was helpful to see my preferred learning style and compare it with other’s preferred styles. I’m still not really sure if I understand what my type of learning style means-how it translates in a meaningful way. I’m glad we have a copy of the Kolb Learning Style Inventory to refer to for further self assessment.

Recommendations

At the outset of this report we pointed out that the Voluntary Sector Initiative’s Panel on Accountability and Governance (1999) has identified the need for capacity building as the first step towards better accountability and governance in Canada’s non-profit sector. Capacity building requires “support by corporations, governments and funders for intermediary associations, research and training, technology, and board and management development” (p. iii). It requires effort and commitment on the part of individuals in many different roles in the system.

The recommendations in this section therefore are directed to individual board members, to boards of non-profit organizations, and to provincial and federal policy makers and others involved in setting policies that affect governing boards. The recommendations reported below were co-developed with the participants in this study.

Recommendations to Individual Board Members

The recommendations to individual board members flow from the reflections by participants on the learning design and what they felt was valuable about the project. These items are described in full on pages 51 - 62. In brief, they are:

1. Build networks

Seek out other board members to exchange ideas and advice, develop 'learning circles' and support groups.

2. Learn how you learn.

Explore and learn about learning styles and how to capitalize on your strengths.

3. Discover your board's strengths; recruit to round out the skills of the group.

Take time to discover the learning styles of your board members and 'map' the group's talents and strengths; embrace diversity and recruit new people with an eye to rounding out the skills within your group.

4. Take advantage of training opportunities.

Invest in yourself as an important asset to the community. Take advantage of training opportunities. (See resource section on page 80 for ideas).

5. Acknowledge your contributions.

You are an important long-term resource for the community. Give credit to yourself and your peers for making regular contributions to the well-being of the community in spite of many systemic disadvantages. What you do does make a difference. Protect your own energy and commitment through regular rest and renewal.

Recommendations to Boards of Non-Profit Organizations

1. Create a budget line for board expenses.

The primary recommendation to non-profit boards and their organizations was to create a budget line for board expenses. Research participants felt strongly that such expenses should have a legitimate place in organizational budgets. It was acknowledged that many middle class boards did this, although inner city board members did not feel entitled to do it.

Items to be included in this budget line characterize support to attend regular meetings, such as food (since people frequently meet over the dinner hour), providing childcare or reimbursement for childcare costs when board members attend meetings, and reimbursement of transportation and parking expenses. Other legitimate expenses include volunteer recognition programs (throughout the organization) and board development.

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2. Encourage volunteers to attend workshops and seminars to build skills and knowledge; get conflict management training.

Members also thought board support should go beyond attendance to the development of the board itself. This included opportunities for individual board members to attend seminars related to their particular roles and responsibilities, and to get training in effective conflict management. It was a widespread opinion that as many people as possible should have access to conflict resolution training.

Some members had pointed out that rather than wait for funders to legitimize those expenses, they had done what they could with the resources they had to work with, including applying for small grants for board development and strategic planning retreats.

3. Seek out consultants for guidance on key aspects of governance.

Besides taking advantage of external training opportunities, boards need to be able to hire consultants who can provide expertise on key aspects of governance. By the end of the sessions, participants were clear that hiring consultants was sometimes critical for solving specific problems, for important activities such as board and executive evaluation, and for ongoing organizational development and planning.

Recommendations to Provincial and Federal Policy Makers

The specific recommendations to various levels of government were influenced by the fact that different sectors of service were represented in the project. For instance, a significant proportion of board members were from licensed childcare centers for which the provincial government has a responsibility to provide support but concurrently constrains individual centers. For example, in Manitoba licensing authorities limit/prohibit budget line items related to board expenses.

There was wide variation among board members as to their knowledge about such supports, but some participants had attended board orientation workshops hosted by the Child Day Care branch of the Department of Family Services and Housing. These sessions, also attended by the authors themselves, are usually 2-hour presentations held 4 times per year. Due to the large numbers of attendees and a full agenda, there are limited opportunities for interaction among board members. Those who had attended these orientations were aware that Child Day Care has a mandate to provide supports to childcare centre boards, but others were not aware.

The childcare sector is licensed by the provincial government which also mandates parental participation on childcare boards. However, other services such as women's centers and family resource centers have less stringent licensing requirements. Some have funding or support from different levels of government or specific agencies (such as Manitoba Family Violence Prevention under Family Services and Housing, or The United Way, for example). Their board members had not received much training or guidance related to board development and were unsure to whom they should direct policy recommendations.

The following recommendations, therefore, are directed to those who might have jurisdictional authority, in most cases provincial governments for childcare centers, but also the federal government or its designates as part of the Voluntary Sector Initiative.

1. Acknowledge the legitimacy of a budget line for board expenses.

Although boards have the legal authority to create a budget line for board expenses, funders who disallow board expenses have enormous clout because they have the power to withhold financial resources upon which these organizations rely.

This recommendation flowed out of an acknowledgement of the personal financial challenges participants experience while carrying on with their civic responsibilities to their community as board members. What board members ask for is basic fare, not luxury items; the necessities that "ease the load" and remove barriers to their participation. As one participant commented:

Being frugal is important. I think we have proven we can be frugal. But being frugal does not have to mean excessive self-sacrifice and further subsidizing of the organization and the sector than we, as women, already do.

2. Provide consultants to work with boards.

The participants recommended the hiring of community development facilitators/advisors to provide consultation to boards. This might be a more cost effective measure in the long run than providing additional funding to organizations to contract services individually. However, having been patronized in the past, participants were wary about the attitudes of those hired for such positions. In the words of these participants:

P1: I hope that the government would have the attitude that it's the people in the communities on the boards that know best what they need. So we're not looking for somebody to come in and... "bestow all that knowledge and wisdom on us",

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but to be responsive and to provide what's really being asked for. We want to be able to meet these people ...as peers.

P2: When we started we had various [government] people helping us and ... a typical response was "Well we have to look at the language and we have to bring it down to the level of the community". So, I went to these people and started saying "Well, we need to bring you guys up to the level of the community (all laughing). That is the voice that needs to be heard.

In essence, participants wanted to ensure that a government employee providing consultation would approach their role in more of a peer relationship than a hierarchical one.

3. Develop a multi-media package of resources.

Participants also recommended developing a package of resources that would appeal to a variety of learning styles. This could include:

- a. An interactive web-site with various sub-categories related to governance and links to other relevant sites (ie. fundraising opportunities, financial management, conflict resolution, insurance, etc.). As one participant commented:

I would like to see the board orientation resources, like policies, bylaws and all those kinds of explanations on the web so they're there when you need them, not just when the sessions are offered, so that you will have a tool to refer to at your convenience. Also, a posting of when the trainings are offered. I would also like to see them have a web page linked to fundraising, so people don't have to search all over the web like I did.

- b. An up-to-date comprehensive manual (on-line and in a binder), with templates and samples: by-laws, policies, volunteer position descriptions, minutes, and "especially an index"¹².
- c. Produce a training video:

¹² Manitoba Family Services and Housing has a document entitled: The Roles, Responsibilities and Functions of a Board: A Board Development Guide (updated Feb, 2002). This document is "prepared by the Department for the boards and staff of provincially funded social service agencies; the guide is not intended to be a detailed procedures manual, but to provide awareness of the basic responsibilities and functions expected of a governing board and its members". See www.gov.mb.ca/fs/index.html, click on Child Day Care. It has recently been made available on the main page under Publications.

I think if they could put together a good video, that has humour in it, that has people telling some stories, as an orientation for people that sit on boards...Videos are a wonderful tool, because people like visuals... and they're not listening to the same person talk...You can get the maximum amount of information across in a pleasant way.

4. Provide for conflict resolution training.

Members felt that every board should get community-based conflict resolution training, so that good conflict management skills are developed from the start and intractable conflicts are prevented or minimized. They felt that there is a very large burden of responsibility on the shoulders of well-meaning, but not always well-trained, volunteers of community organizations, as it is. There is too much at stake when organizational conflicts arise and jeopardize the well-being of many people who rely on the services provided. There are too many examples of organizations who have had to close their doors because boards folded (CUPE, n.d.).

5. Develop a board training & development 'series' with interactive workshops and networking events.

Focus group participants believed regular (perhaps monthly or quarterly) training and/or networking events could be offered, featuring topics such as liability insurance, executive evaluation, budgets & financial statements, proposal writing, volunteer recruiting & retention, and so on. The Manitoba Child Care Association's annual "Feed the Board" event offers an excellent model. (See page 65 for further details).

Not surprisingly, given the overall positive feelings about the training they had just attended as part of this project, they recommended the provision of workshops for board members that are interactive and utilize community development principles. These included elements such as opportunities to discuss current board issues and concerns within a climate of trust, affirming diversity, opportunities for self-reflection and developing self-knowledge, using humour, offering a variety of learning activities and being able to move around frequently, and most importantly, creating the space for dialogue and networking among participants.

Conclusions

Canada's voluntary sector plays a central role in building vibrant communities, providing important services to Canadians and engaging citizens in the democratic life of the country.

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Panel on Accountability and Governance, 1999, p. vii.

Our experience in this research project has clearly demonstrated to us the enormous potential for community capacity building inherent in the board leadership of non-profit organizations. These are people deeply embedded within their communities with great potential to influence others.

Board members are long term resources for the community worthy of significant investment. It is important to capitalize on the interests and commitments of community members. For example, for many over-extended working parents with young children, their licensed childcare or resource centre becomes their most immediate community support network – there simply aren't enough hours in a day to develop networks elsewhere. Findings elsewhere (Ontario, 1993) have suggested that board and committee work related to their children's care is frequently an entry point for people into the world of community work. If we are to take the long term view of community capacity building we need to understand the importance of providing supports and resources at this key moment of leverage in the lifespan of volunteers' contributions in their community.

We believe the above recommendations to boards, provincial governments, the Canadian government, and those supporting the Voluntary Sector Initiative if implemented will greatly enhance the potential of the voluntary sector. Effort and commitment are required from individuals fulfilling many different roles in the system. The first step is to remove barriers to participation. The expenses associated with volunteering must be acknowledged and reimbursed. Training models for board members should use interactive, community building approaches that appeal to a variety of learning styles and be customized to the particular needs of each learning group. Further, they need to be inclusive, and sensitive to cultural, gender and class differences. Finally, they must capitalize on and deepen existing networks while fostering the development of new networks and co-mentoring relationships. In this way we will encourage a learning culture which promotes ongoing development and lifelong learning for those who hold our families and communities together.

Appendices

Appendix A – Glossary of Terms

Here's a great tip! If you have access to the Internet, go to GOOGLE (www.google.ca). In the search box, type in . The definition(s), several reference dictionaries and other sources will come up.

Accountability is the “requirement to explain and accept responsibility for carrying out an assigned mandate in light of agreed upon expectations. Accountability in the voluntary sector is multi-layered – to different audiences, for a variety of activities and outcomes, through many different means” (Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector, 1999).

CEO Chief Executive Officer, often used interchangeably with **E.D.** (Executive Director).

Co-mentoring: mentoring and supporting each other; helping each other learn in a peer-to-peer relationship.

Community building is a term that encompasses a whole array of activities that support community development. The ‘people and skills’ part of **community capacity building** involves ongoing learning.

Community capacity refers to all of the resources that can be brought to bear on a community’s process of working towards their desired future, including financial resources, technology, people, skills, plans, networks of relationships and shared commitment (Frank & Smith, 1999).

Community development is an ongoing process, and an approach, that draws on local wisdom, culture and traditions as it supports opportunities for people and organizations to connect, to build and to strengthen their communities. The goal of community development is improved quality of life for everyone. (See www.aspenmeasures.org/html/glossary and www.communitydevelopmentworks.org/glossary)

Community learning is defined as “an activity through which a group identifies and then solves common problems while acquiring knowledge and skills... It operates in a horizontal, networked fashion and often is associated with lifelong learning” (New Economy Development Group, 1998).

Curriculum Vita: another term for résumé. The plural is curriculum vitae.

Emancipatory: a core intention of emancipation is oriented toward enhancing human freedom. Related concepts are personal empowerment, autonomy, and self-determination. See tortoise.oise.utoronto.ca/~tlcentre/insights/criticalpsychology.html.

Et al.: Latin for “and others”, usually used in citing references. If there are more than 2 authors, the shortened form *et al.* is used (Jones et al., 2001).

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Formal education: education or training provided in educational institutions such as schools, universities, colleges, etc. or in a workplace, usually involving direction from a teacher or instructor. (See www.anta.gov.au/gloftol.asp)

Homogeneous: sameness. All of the same kind, or similar in nature; "a close-knit homogeneous group" See www.cogsci.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/webwn.

Inclusion/Inclusivity: Manitoba Education, Training, and Youth's Philosophy of Inclusion states: "Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued and safe. An inclusive community consciously evolves to meet the changing needs of its members. Through recognition and support, an inclusive community provides meaningful involvement and equal access to the benefits of citizenship. In Manitoba, we embrace inclusion as a means of enhancing the well being of every member of the community. By working together, we strengthen our capacity to provide the foundation for a richer future for all of us". See www.edu.gov.mb.ca .

Incongruous: lacking in harmony or compatibility or appropriateness; for example: "a plan incongruous with reason"; See www.cogsci.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/webwn

Informal education: the acquisition of knowledge and skills through experience, reading, social contact, etc. (See www.anta.gov.au/gloftol.asp)

Iterative: A term used to describe a process in which some operation is performed repeatedly. In research it refers to the repetition of a cycle of processes while moving ever more closely toward desired results. See www.nifl.gov/lincs/collections/eff/eff_glossary.html and support.erdas.com/Glossary.htm

Learning culture: an "environment in which opportunities for learning are openly valued and supported and are built, where possible, into all activities". (See www.anta.gov.au/gloftol.asp)

Lifelong learning: the process of acquiring knowledge or skills throughout life via education, training, work and general life experiences.

Methodology: "The way in which you find out information; a methodology describes how something will be (or was) done. The methodology includes the methods, procedures, and techniques used to collect and analyze information" See www.synergyaids.com/lacriaids/glossary.asp .

Microcosm: a miniature model of something. See www.cogsci.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/webwn

Non-formal education: "organized education and training outside of the formal education system". (See www.anta.gov.au/gloftol.asp)

Policy: a plan or course of action intended to guide and determine present and future decisions. Rules, regulations and guidelines embracing the general goals and acceptable procedures of a governing body (board, council, government, etc. (Webster Dictionary, 2000).

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Postmodernism: There are volumes written on postmodernism. Here is one paragraph! “A cultural and intellectual trend of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries characterized by emphasis on the ideas of the de-centeredness of meaning, the value and autonomy of the local and the particular, the infinite possibilities of human existence, and the coexistence, in a kind of collage ...of different cultures, perspectives, time periods, and ways of thinking.” [In other words, one-size-does-not-fit-all]. See fajardo-acosta.com/worldlit/glossary.htm

Prescriptive: “Laid down as a guide, direction, or rule of action... Usually implies instructions that are given step by step in some detail and that are to be followed without question”. See www.projectauditors.com/Dictionary/P.html

Reiterate: to say, state, or perform again. www.cogsci.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/webwn

Social capital: the many relationships and networks of people accessible to one another, with common interests and goals, who can share skills and resources.

Tenure: the length of time, or the term which some position is held. In this context, tenure refers to the length of time a person has served on a board of directors. See www.cogsci.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/webwn.

Appendix B: Resources for Boards

Books, Articles, Reports & Guides on Board Development

- Alberta (1995). *Board Building: Recruiting and Developing Effective Board Members for Not-for-Profit Organizations*. Edmonton: Alberta Community Development.
- Deloitte & Touche (2003). *The Effective Not-for-Profit Board: Governance of Not-for-Profit Organizations*. Deloitte & Touche Tohmatsu International.
- Manitoba Family Services and Housing (February 2002). *The Roles, Responsibilities and Functions of a Board: A Board Development Guide*. Manitoba: Ministry of Family Services and Housing. **See:** <http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/publications.html>
- Ontario (1993). *Study of Non-Profit Child Care Boards in Ontario*. Toronto: Ministry of Community and Social Services.
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- Manitoba Child Care Association (1999). *Human Resource Guide for Early Childhood Programs*. Winnipeg: Manitoba Child Care Association.
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- Block, Stephen R. (1998) *Perfect Non-profit Boards: Myths, Paradoxes, and Paradigms*. Needham Heights, Mass: Simon & Schuster
- Carver, John. (1992) *Boards That Make a Difference*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass. **See** <http://www.carvergovernance.com/home>.
- Carver, John. (1992). When Owners Are Customers: The Confusion of Dual Board Hats. *Non-profit World*, 10, 11-15.
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Nordhoff, N., Larsen, J., Barber, P., & Craig, D. P. (1982). *Fundamental Practices For Success With Volunteer Boards of Non-profit Organizations*. Seattle, WA.: Funprax Associates.

Ontario (1984). *Working With Volunteer Boards: How To Improve Their Effectiveness*. Toronto: Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector (Feb, 1999). *Building on Strengths: Improving Governance and Accountability in Canada's Voluntary Sector*. Ottawa. See <http://www.vsr-trsb.net/pagvs/> .

Web-sites

The United Way of Canada has a web-site devoted to board development: www.boarddevelopment.org

The Institute on Governance has extensive information on board development and links to other sites. See www.iog.ca .

Voluntary Sector Initiative: www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng a wealth of resources available.

Institute for Community Research: www.incommunityresearch.org

The Transformative Learning Centre: This centre is part of OISE/UT (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education /University of Toronto). See <http://tortoise.oise.utoronto.ca/~tlcentre>

Training Programs & Other Resources

David Kolb: A full explanation of Kolb's theory of experiential learning and the Learning Styles Inventory Version 3 are available on his web-site: <http://www.learningfromexperience.com> . To order the Learning Styles Inventory and many other learning tools see: <http://www.hayresourcesdirect.haygroup.com/> .

Debra Mayer, Teachable Moments: Debra is a consultant to early childhood programs in the areas of staff and volunteer development. Areas of focus include staff/board role definitions, strategic planning, team building, and participatory management processes. Contact her at 204.489-6897 or debramayer@shaw.ca

Gemmel Consulting & Training: Barb Gemmel is a consultant in non-profit and volunteer management. She publishes a monthly email newsletter on timely topics related to the voluntary sector. To subscribe to her free mailing list or inquire about her other services contact her at 204-253-6638 or by email: bgemmel@mts.net.

Heather Erhard, Erhard Associates: offers an array of organizational development consulting services including board governance. Phone: 204-488-4348. Email: erhardh@mts.net.

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ICA Canada – The Institute for Cultural Affairs Canada offers a training series “Towards a Culture of Participation”. Themes relate to board and team building, organization development, facilitation, community consultations, etc. See website: www.icacan.ca or contact **Helen Wythe & Associates** at 204-992-2562. Email: helenwythe@hjwythe.com .

Lynn Skotnitsky, Consulting & Research for Organizations & Communities offers client-centred consulting, training & facilitation, and research services. She can be reached at (416) 429-7116. Email: lynn.skotnitsky@primus.ca .

Manitoba Child Care Association offers board development workshops during their fall & winter seminar series, a newsletter, and a networking and board development event at their annual conference (usually in May). They also have a resource library. Website: www.mccahouse.org.

Volunteer Centre of Winnipeg: offers a variety of workshops related to non-profit governance, and a resource library. Get on their mailing or email list! See www.volunteerwinnipeg.mb.ca

Political Representatives

For listings of your representatives (by city ward, and provincial or federal riding) see:

City Councillor. See www.winnipeg.ca/interhom/council/

Provincial MLA. www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/members/

Federal MP. See <http://www.parl.gc.ca> Click on Senators and Members (below the pictures).

For explanations and descriptions of the roles of various government representatives, and a wealth of other information see <http://canadaonline.about.com/library/elections/blelmpfed.htm> .

Funding Sources for Board Development Activities

Assiniboine Credit Union Community Project Fund
<http://www.assiniboine.mb.ca>

Co-operative Development Services (under MB Intergovernmental Affairs)
http://www.gov.mb.ca/ia/programs/brochure_intro_coops. See financial programs.

The Winnipeg Foundation: www.wpgfdn.org

The Thomas Sill Foundation: <http://www.thomassillfoundation.com/>

**Appendix C:
Knowledge, Skills
and Attitudes for
Effective
Governance
(complete list)**

Knowledge.

1. The mandate, mission, vision, board history, goals, services, programs and policies of the organization
2. Legal aspects e.g. insurance, liability and legal responsibilities
3. The “players” political allies, funders, policy makers
4. Evaluations
5. Procedures for running meetings
6. Policies and by-laws
7. Knowing different resources and networks
8. Should be representative of your stakeholders and community
9. 5 W’s, who are we, why are we here, purpose of organization
10. Know your staff, how much money do we have, what are limitations
11. How to develop a budget
12. Recognize your board’s skill sets
13. Understanding the power dynamics, (within board and within organization)
14. Fundraising (ideas and how to)
15. How to put together an agenda
16. AGM, know how to plan, organize, and carry out
17. Robert’s Rules
18. Advertising
19. Different models of decision making
20. Have a realistic sense of what’s involved, what’s doable
21. What’s board/what’s management responsibilities
22. Labour laws
23. How to present ideas and make presentations
24. Strategic planning
25. The “rules”
26. Understanding of media /PR
27. Knowledge of incorporation and charitable status
28. How to read a financial statement
29. Knowledge of the roles and expectations of the board and executive director
30. Ongoing policy development
31. Knowledge and understanding of the policy manual
32. Understanding the needs of your stakeholders
33. Multicultural awareness
34. Understand the importance of your job
35. Board should be representative of your population/constituents, (including race, gender, class, religion, age, interests, family, work).
36. How to chair a meeting
37. How to take minutes

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38. Knowledge of Board packages and training resources
39. Understanding conflict of interest issues
40. Conflict resolution
41. Union agreements
42. Confidentiality
43. Human resources
44. G.S.T.
45. Problem solving
46. Know your rights
47. Know that mistakes don't mean failure
48. Pay scales
49. Knowing what questions to ask/what you can and can't ask
50. Strategic planning
51. Board roles and responsibilities
52. Financial knowledge: policies, budgets, how to read financial statements
53. Community resources
54. Understanding the staff's world and staff dynamics
55. Volunteers' needs as human beings
56. Confidentiality
57. The limitations of the board's roles/boundaries
58. Employment standards, employment checks and criminal records
59. Researching
60. Drafting by-laws
61. Your community/volunteers' commitments
62. Job descriptions
63. Governance models/styles
64. Funding sources/needs
65. Appropriate fundraising for your community
66. Political context/issues

67. Know what you do know and know what you don't know

Skills

1. Managing the dynamics of the team
2. Defining and working towards goals
3. Community capacity building
4. Presentation skills
5. Time management
6. Balance teamwork/leadership
7. Giving clear directives
8. Be supportive to staff (especially E.D.) without interfering
9. Observing/intuition about people
10. Tapping your networks
11. Mediation
12. Knowing when to say no
13. Following through
14. Making informed decisions
15. Encouraging quiet people
16. Give and receive praise
17. Give constructive criticism/feedback
18. Think outside the box/and better inside the box
19. Skill-building/people development
20. Educating your board
21. Being and getting yourself known in the community (networking)
22. Good transfer of skill and knowledge to succeeding board members
23. Motivation skills (self and others)
24. Developing personnel policies
25. Being sensitive

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26. Recognizing what you need to learn
27. Reading and managing community dynamics
28. Being tactful
29. Supporting others
30. Organizational skills, breaking down tasks, delegating, staying organized
31. Be and keep being creative
32. Taking and managing minutes
33. Sense of humour, ability to play
34. Multi-tasking
35. Develop a budget
36. Unpacking or clarifying expectations
37. Setting realistic goals
38. Educating your staff
39. Consensus building
40. Being responsive to the needs of your stakeholders
41. Helping people be congruent
42. Considering various points of view
43. How to hire people/developing job descriptions, interviewing, evaluations
44. Developing allies in government
45. Recruiting/advertising
46. Selecting as a group/candidates
47. Being able to explain processes to groups/change can take years
48. Knowing how to work with others
49. Having a Pulse!!
50. Keeping people interested and motivated
51. Problem solving skills
52. Running meetings and staying on topic
53. Conflict resolution skills
54. Ability to get others involved
55. Showing up faithfully, or notifying if you can't make it
56. Getting and seeking professional advice / consultants
57. Being Accountable
58. Confidentiality
59. Fundraising/creativity/"doing"
60. Reading correspondence
61. Listening
62. Being assertive
63. Encouraging /empowering others
64. Ability to separate your feelings and needs from others
65. Doing what you say you'll do
66. Remembering
67. Punctuality
68. Being Respectful
69. Managing board and staff roles
70. Representing the organization in a businesslike and positive manner
71. Building on success/learning from mistakes
72. Managing board dynamics and accountability, sharing and informing within the board
73. Managing power dynamics appropriately
74. Developing an agenda
75. Chairing / sharing roles
76. Dealing with and paying staff appropriately
77. Delegating meaningful work to others and committees

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78. Communication skills:
VERBAL: listening, public speaking, constructive board/staff communications
WRITTEN: writing letters, grant proposals, keeping minutes accurately
79. Facilitating meetings
80. Celebrating/honouring your volunteers
81. Mentoring
82. Making decisions for the benefit of the group
83. Know your limitations/when to back away
84. Not overloading your volunteers
85. Taking responsibility for a board role
86. Ability to think differently without taking things personally
87. Setting a constructive tone
88. Self awareness
89. People skills
90. Job / role sharing, turn-taking
91. Research skills
92. Staying on task
93. Confidence
94. Outreach
95. Knowing who's who in key positions
96. Sharing power/ sharing the workload
97. Knowing when it's important for board renewal/retreats
98. Honouring your staff
99. Inspiring others
100. Regular reviewing of plan, policies, etc.
101. How to lose and win gracefully
102. Resisting gossip
103. Diplomacy

Attitudes

1. Honouring, valuing, and representing the community you serve (your stakeholders / constituents)
2. Willing to work as part of the team/ being team-minded
3. Respectful of people, other cultures and differences (e.g. lifestyles)
4. Persistence and strength to carry on/achieve your goals
5. Should reflect the organization's guiding principles
6. Learn to accept criticism
7. Focus on the common good
8. Non-judgmental
9. Willing to contribute
10. Honesty
11. Integrity
12. Kindness
13. Compassion
14. Patience
15. Sense of humour
16. Thinking outside the box (and thinking well inside the box!)
17. Ability to celebrate
18. Being self-responsible / Accountable for your own actions
19. Thick-skinned
20. Able to deal with tough situations
21. Willing to forgive (mistakes)
22. Believe that mistakes are allowed
23. Give people space to grow (not staying stuck with labels)
24. Strong beliefs, spirituality, a bigger perspective
25. Being true to yourself

26. Being committed to the mandate
27. Commitment to meetings and to showing up
28. Empathy and respect for people's safety issues and boundaries
29. Willingness to learn, openness to grow and expand
30. Adaptability and flexibility
31. Positive attitude/believe in the best
32. Inspiring people to join up
33. Courage to dissent
34. Welcoming
35. Cooperative
36. Value other's contributions
37. Transparency/ not hidden agendas
38. Respecting confidentiality
39. Confidence
40. Risk taking
41. Objectivity/ perspective
42. Believe in your convictions/manage discouragement and setbacks
43. Know you can't do everything! Being open to receiving help
44. Fairness
45. Being supportive vs. patronizing
46. Professional
47. Enthusiastic
48. Encouraging
49. Curious
50. Trusting and trustworthy
51. Confident
52. Courteous
53. Approachable
54. Treat others the way you want to be treated

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