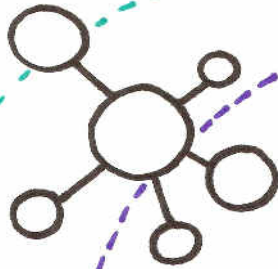


ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE

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Hubs Project

A United Way Neighbourhood Hubs Convening Project

• May 30 2016 •

NETWORKING



SHARING IDEAS

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

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TAKING ACTION!

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Hubs Project

A United Way Neighbourhood Hubs Convening Project

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For Ray Oldenburg, author of *The Great Good Place*, ‘third places’ or hubs as we’re calling them in this report, are where people of all backgrounds can mix and mingle in a way that is foundational to the creation of active community life, and democracy itself.

The fact is many neighbourhoods are losing their ‘hubs’; places where people can meet and connect as part of the fabric of what we think of when we talk about ‘community.’ In a *MacLean’s* magazine article, *The End of Neighbours*, the tag line for the piece is ‘how our increasingly closed-off lives are poisoning our politics and endangering our health.’ This is exactly the concern that has a variety of organizations – and even some governments – across Canada looking at how we can revitalize the core of neighbourhoods, and re-build that sense of community that is so essential to our well-being.

To this end, the United Way of Halifax launched the hubs convening project as part of their strategy to create the conditions where residents have the skills and supports they need to build strong, vibrant neighbourhoods. The goal of the project was to build relationships among a diverse range of potential ‘actors’ from community, government, academia and business to bring a variety of perspectives to bear on the question of how to build strong neighbourhood hubs as a means to building strong, vibrant neighbourhoods.

Over 75 people were engaged from a broad range of sectors, and over 6 months explored: what hubs roles in community building could be, what is a hub, the challenges hubs face, how could we start to address some of those challenges, how we could encourage and support the development of more hubs, where those hubs should be located and how to prioritize various resources for hub development.

At the end of this ‘pilot’ project, participants said they were keen to continue to meet, share best practices and brainstorm ways to enhance the development of neighbourhood hubs. Some of the specific things they said they’d like to do in the future include: visiting more individual hubs in Halifax to learn more about their distinct characteristics, producing a short video to explain to potential new partners why hubs are important in community development, and ensuring there are a variety of learning opportunities for people involved in various stages of hub development.

Other recommendations include: United Way looking at all of its potential roles as a means to continue to support hub development, moving forward with an asset-based community development approach, and doing a review of all the literature collected during this project to help participants develop their own ‘cases’ for why hubs are important for building strong neighbourhoods.

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Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

-- Margaret Mead

Organization [though]... is an advanced stage in the development of community and 'before it can arise and be maintained, the substance of community must be present.'

-- Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*,
quoting sociologist Newell Sims

INTRODUCTION

So, what is the 'substance' of community, and how do we develop it so that community members can then organize to create change in their communities as needed? Oldenburg argues in *The Great Good Place* (1999) that what is needed everywhere is that 'association of the simplest kind - that of casual, incidental, informal and temporary meeting for the purpose of extending and deepening acquaintance.'



In his seminal book, Oldenburg says cafes, coffee shops, bars, hair salons and other hangouts at the heart of community are also at the heart of democracy. He calls these 'third places.' He says 'where third places are not provided, individual's active friendships are greatly diminished, as is the ease with which he or she can make contact with friends... What urban life increasingly fails to provide is convenient and open-ended socializing - places

where individuals can go without aim or arrangement and be greeted by people who know them and know how to enjoy a little time off.'

For Oldenburg, third places where people of all backgrounds can mix and mingle are foundational to the creation of active community life, and democracy itself. He calls 'free assembly' at its most spontaneous and informal occurrence 'an anathema to fascist rule.' Quoting David Mathews, Oldenburg says:

Good political talk creates and reflects an 'enlarged mentality.' It is where we recognize the connectedness of things - and our own connectedness. It is where we develop the capacity to understand the structure and functioning of the whole social body, which is the capacity to govern ourselves democratically... Good political talk is also where we discover what is common amongst our differences.

Third places (hubs) create the conditions for the parenting of other forms of community affiliation and association that eventually coexist with them.

Oldenburg focused his work on the ‘natural’ hubs that one used to be able to find in many communities and neighbourhoods. In a report from the United Way in Calgary, we find a response to a growing decline of ‘natural’ hubs as the creation of more ‘intentional’ hubs designed to duplicate some of the ideals of Oldenburg.

How do we bring people together more to re-create the coffeehouses and salons of the past that led to various kinds of more formal social clubs and associations of a ‘more carefully organized type’ -- reading circles, shooting clubs, choral groups, bands, fraternities, home guards, volunteer fire departments and other organizations that lent substance and fabric to the life of the community and to its members.

Many communities are looking for ways to bring this kind of association back to their neighbourhood - both in the form of ‘natural’ and more ‘intentional’ kinds of hubs.

This report looks to explore that process in the city of Halifax.

BACKGROUND

In 2012, the United Way Halifax noticed there was a growing inequality between neighbourhoods in the city, and a ‘hollowing out’ of neighbourhoods as many services were centralized across the city. It was at this time, the United Way Halifax developed a neighbourhood strategy to help encourage neighbours to get to know each other better, to facilitate the development again of local services that people need, and to develop neighbourhood hubs where people can do all of these things and more.

In 2015, a United Way Halifax Neighbourhood Hubs Convening Project was announced. The project would run for six months as a means of exploring what was already happening in the city in terms of ‘hub’ development, and bring people of various backgrounds together to develop a learning network to better understand what is a hub, best practices of how different hubs function, where hubs are (and are not) and what is needed for a hub to be successful and sustainable. This project was initiated as part of the United Way Halifax’s goal to help build strong, vibrant neighbourhoods.



Neighbourhood Hubs	Residents know their community and are valued members.	Residents engage with each other through networks and community hubs.	Neighbourhoods have services and activities that meet daily needs of residents.	
	<i>Neighbourhoods Activities</i>		<i>Community Impact Outcome</i>	
	Fund Action for Neighbourhood Change in priority neighbourhoods.			People have the skills and community supports they need to build strong, vibrant neighbourhoods.
	Convene a coalition of neighbourhoods to link the experiences and learnings of community building.			
	Fund projects that improve connections between residents and/or neighbourhood organizations.	Fund neighbourhood hubs that support and improve the daily lives of residents.		
	Advocate for common measures of neighbourhood hubs and set benchmarks.		Advocate for organizations to work in partnership at the neighbourhood level.	
	Research priority hub locations.			

SCOPE

The scope of the project was to explore several key questions then related to hubs, and to encourage project participants to explore ways of sharing, experimenting and prototyping best practices. Other goals for the project included:

1. Building relationships / learning network
2. Increasing knowledge about hubs and role in community building
3. Building stronger neighbourhoods

The scope of this report relates directly to the nature of the hubs convening project. While several reports and other material from other places related to hubs were posted on the project website, this report will not include a general review of that material.

METHODOLOGY



Some principles of social lab methodology were used in the framing of the project. The purpose was to bring a broad range of stakeholders together - business, community, academia, government - to create a rich tapestry of skills, knowledge and experience to draw on. The reason for this approach was to try something new and an approach that might be more beneficial to addressing the complex nature of hubs and

neighbourhoods. For more on social labs, watch the following video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLd3kaByib8>.

Some of the key principles of social lab methodology that we tried to incorporate into this project involve the idea of experimentation and prototyping. So, rather than working towards a 'plan' of some sort, participants were encouraged to identify priorities for action to improve their hubs in whatever way they thought helpful, and to look for ways to work together to improve the whole environment in Halifax for hubs right away.

This formed the basis for most meetings over the six month period. Other than the launch and close of the project, every meeting would start with an overview of what the group had covered in the past, and then reviewed various 'action priorities' they had established for themselves during the last period of a month. Meetings were held monthly. Also, early on the group decided to keep participation in the group open to include more new people. So, anyone interested in hubs were welcome and generally at each meeting there were approximately one-third new people, one-third consistent and one-third who showed up as they were able.

Meetings would actually start with coffee and informal time to build relationships and enable people to connect at 9am. The structured part of the meeting would start at 9:30. Participants would gather on their own around one of the four themes that emerged during the launch of the project: accessibility, community engagement, partnership and sustainability.



Introductions, a general overview of the project, and accomplishments to date would kick off each meeting at this time. Participants would then review action priorities from the last month, and plan action for the next 'sprint' period (the next month). This process generated a lot of discussion in the group and help to build a variety of close relationships. After this 'check in' process, time was spent on whatever more detailed investigations the group was interested in; mapping of hubs, developing questions for story collection, discussing how limited resources and support for hubs could be prioritized. The meeting was then closed by noon with a check out and evaluation of what worked well, anything participants would like to see change and what was most valuable for them.

Doing evaluations for every meeting was very valuable as it enabled the facilitators to learn with the group, and plan future meetings to try to meet whatever the needs of the group were. It also led to the development of a project website (<http://hubsproject.wix.com/unitedway>) that evolved as the interests of the group grew.

It started with being a place to collect various background resource materials and reports from across the country to include stories collected by survey of various Halifax hubs. The project website also became a place where new people interested in joining the group, or people who had to miss a meeting, could get caught up before a meeting on what the group had covered so far.

LIMITATIONS

For the facilitators, the social lab methodology was new. The budget was limited, so the project could only run for six months (with 2 additional months for recruitment of participants). Participants time was also limited. The initial idea was to meet every two weeks, but the original participants at the launch of the project felt they could only participate once a month.

The decision to keep the group ‘open,’ was challenging for the group, but also allowed for a constant flow of new energy. It was also a very homogenous group culturally to start, and despite attempts to address this - the range of diversity in the group in that respect never really took off.

Using some social lab methodology was also new to the group. Originally, the idea of using the social labs method was to encourage experimentation and prototyping solutions to challenges right away. There were some challenges though to this approach in that it seemed the building of relationships really needed to happen before people felt comfortable taking action. Ironically, it was at the end of the project, when many participants, in their evaluation of the process, called for more ‘concrete’ opportunities for action.



KEY QUESTIONS AND FINDINGS

One of the key goals for this project was to build strong relationships and connections among a diverse range of people interested in building strong neighbourhoods and using hubs as a tool to do that. In the course of this project though, we were also looking for answers to several key questions including: why hubs are important, what is the role of hubs in community building, what is a hub, how does one create a hub, what are some of the challenges hubs face, what’s working well in hubs, when is a hub appropriate, where does it make sense to develop a hub, what might a hub cost in terms of start up and working capital, how can a hub develop sustainability for the long-term and how might we prioritize neighbourhoods for hub development.

Why a hub? What is the value of a hub?

In Ontario’s Community Hubs: A Strategic Framework and Action Plan, hubs are identified as a concept that both communities and policy-makers agree make sense. Programs and services offered by the government need to keep pace with the complex needs of our growing and diverse population. In addition, the current fiscal environment requires a disciplined focus on finding smarter, better ways to deliver the best possible value for every dollar spent.

Some of the benefits of developing and supporting hubs mentioned in the Ontario report include:

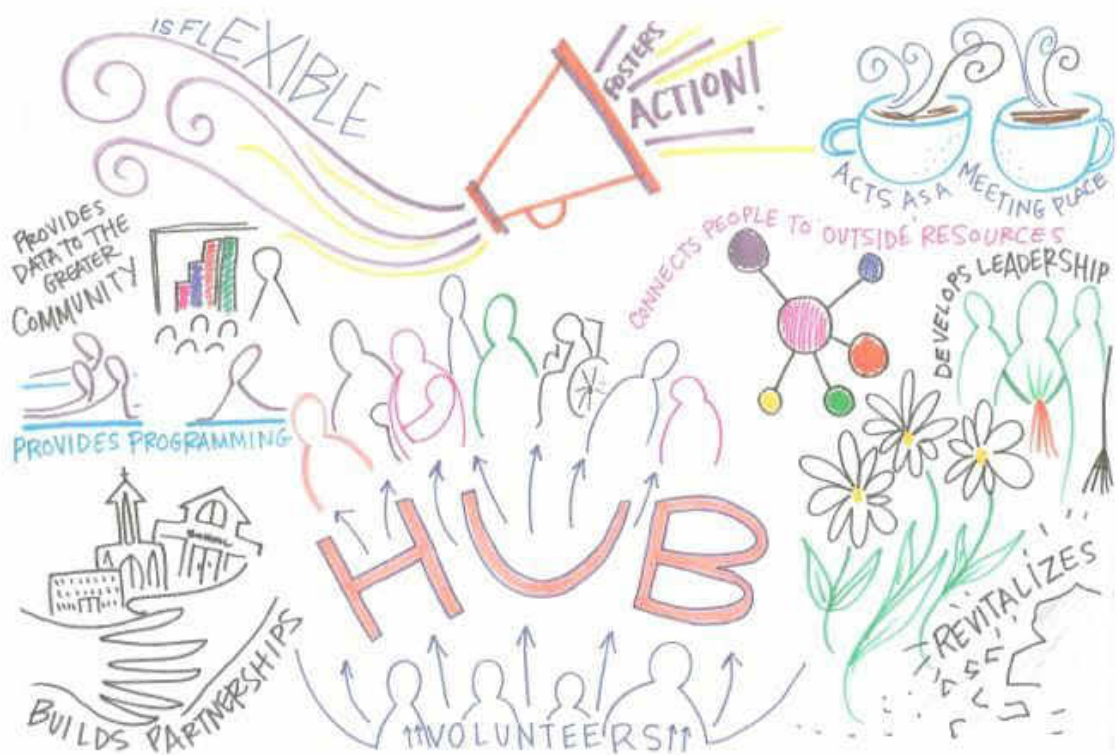
- Increasing the ability of community and government to work together to respond to local needs. The collaboration between different community agencies and service providers puts residents first and is part of what makes this model truly unique.
- Making access to services more efficient and sustainable – providing access to local early-intervention programs can also forestall more intensive and costly programs later. Some economies of scale can also be achieved through shared back-office duties. Funders also benefit from co-location of service providers, increasing service access and reducing duplication.
- Improving access to services makes for better outcomes for people – co-locating and/or providing wrap-around services through a community hub provides individuals with access to a broader range of services through increased connectivity leading to improved results.
- Increasing return on investment – integrated service delivery models can save money in other sectors and generate a Social Return on Investment (SROI). There is currently a lack of evidence-based research on community hubs; however, SROI is an emerging model for measuring the social value relative to the resources invested. Social Return on Investment is a combination of social, financial and environmental value. It’s designed to ensure the perspectives of all stakeholders are taken into account.

During the launch of this project, participants also mentioned the idea that hub development must be responsive to the needs and interests of community; it must be ‘community-driven’. To that end, the roles of hubs in community building are broad-ranging. Participants identified the following as just a few of these roles:

Acting as a convenor Fostering belonging Providing data for community	Providing space for expression thru art Facilitating / enabling connections Reducing isolation
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Acting as a partner Supporting community Meeting / gathering place Supporting leadership development Being all inclusive	Fostering empowerment Encouraging / supporting partnerships Supporting the sharing of resources Acting as a catalyst for action
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It is this identification of a broad range of roles for hubs that seems to speak to the ‘power of hubs’. Within these roles, hubs can leverage ‘energy’ in communities that otherwise may lay dormant. One of the simplest ways hubs can do this is to provide ‘space’ for people to connect and build the relationships that Oldenburg talks about as being foundational for community action.



“This has given me an opportunity to reflect on the concept of community hubs and how my organization can support this...”

-- Project Participant

What is a hub?

Just as the value and roles of hubs can be very broad ranging, so then is the definition of a hub. In Ontario, the province's new strategic framework and action plan for hubs says...

When people think of community hubs, they think of places where people come together to get services, meet one another and plan together. We've heard that community hubs are gathering places that help communities live, build and grow together. No community hub is like another, as each brings together a variety of different services, programs and/or social and cultural activities to reflect local community needs. It is this diversity of activity that allows community hubs to play a critical role in building economic and social cohesion in the community.

In Calgary, distinctions were made between 'natural' and 'intentional' hubs.

Examples of natural hubs are a coffee shop, a dogs' park, a community garden or a shopping centre/mall. These hubs serve a particular purpose and need in the community that naturally bring people into contact with one other. People are social by nature and there is a natural tendency to group around shared activities and issues. These natural hubs do not usually require an external intervention to create interaction, although some of them can be designed towards better access and engagement.

They will be shaped and reshaped by people's interests and needs. While many things can be learned from the natural hubs, this project is particularly interested in intentionally developed hubs that emerge or evolve in response to a need(s) and/or to build social capital and social networks.

In Halifax, participants in the hubs convening project developed their own definition represented by the following wordle.

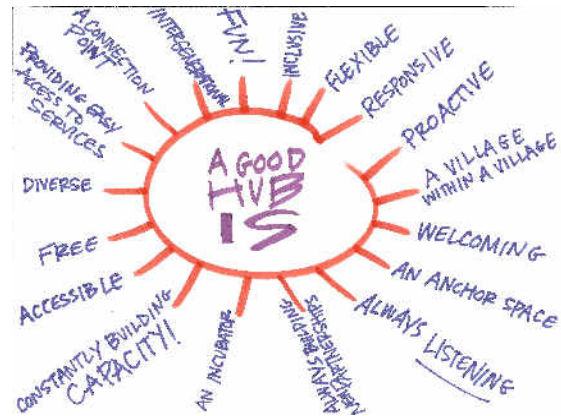


United Way Halifax’s working definition of an intentional hub was also presented to the group, and was well-received.

“Neighbourhood hubs bring diverse groups of people in communities together, connect them to the services they need, connect them to other residents, foster the development of resident organizations, and grow resident leadership.”

What is a hub - practically speaking?

So, we’ve talked about what a hub is generally. But what is a hub ‘practically-speaking?’ Sometimes defining a hub can be difficult because they can vary so much depending on what each community needs - and the ‘bricks and mortar’ they end up working with. But participants were very clear on what a hub is when you get down to basics. A good hub:



- Is inviting, welcoming, comfortable and inclusive. The built environment is bright and attractive. There is a ‘wow’ factor - and various reasons for people to come visit and hang out. There is lots of engaging art on the walls - produced by community members to reflect their dreams for their community or neighbourhood. Community members can see themselves in the hub. Anyone coming in the door sees people they identify with and feel safe with, and there are no language barriers. Visual images are used to guide people around instead of words to enable a broad range of people to navigate the hub.
- Is accessible. People of all different abilities can access the hub, and there are many different ways to get there (bus, walk, bike, drive). It is open and available for regular hours of operation, and those hours are posted so everyone can know when the hub is open.
- Is flexible. So it can provide space for a variety of rotating ‘services / programs’, and have spaces that can be rented.
- Has various ‘zones’. Lingering space where people can just come and hang out, stay awhile, be social or just be quiet - and spaces for various kinds of events, programming, energy.
- Has food available either in the hub, or nearby. If possible, a good kitchen for making food on site. Food, music and art were recognized as key ingredients for bringing people together.

- Has purpose. A clear reason of why someone would come visit. It should meet some practical needs first, and then also provide space for other uses.
- Is an information clearing house. There should be a community calendar, and information available about the community / neighbourhood it serves.

“I have learned so much about what neighbourhood hubs are. I came here with a very minimal idea of what we were going to be discussing and now I feel enlightened.”

-- Project Participant

What are some of the challenges hubs face?

- Engaging all the community
- Building grassroots use & support
- Inclusion / access; especially in rural areas
- Minimizing barriers
- Funding / sustainability
- Government support; all 3 levels
- Outcomes not easily captured
- Proving worth; need quantitative & qualitative evidence
- Developing community level outcomes
- Vulnerable to changes of leadership or funding
- Rigid funding requirements that don't support innovation
- Connecting with local businesses
- Communities evolve and change

What's working well in hubs? What could we be doing to address challenges?

In terms of what's working well in hubs, participants noted several things.

Under community engagement, they mentioned providing on-going opportunities for community members to have input. Supporting organic, natural hubs to expand to tackle greater community issues. Collaborating and building partnerships among service providers. Finding out what under-represented groups really want or need.

Under accessibility, participants mentioned including arts and culture as a means to reach out to people. Internal community hiring; building capacity and trust. Having staff with the skills to reach out, build partnerships, act as a point person / navigator / connector / convenor, ability to evaluate, knowledge of community development and an innovative mindset.

Under partnerships, they mentioned third-party hosting - offering space for resident led activities. Actively recruiting community members with different skill set to help develop hubs. Taking the time to build partnerships.

Under sustainability, participants noted making the 'case' for hubs was very important. Proving the value of hubs and building a base of support beyond that of the United Way. Some key ways they identified to build that support included: talking about them more - especially with government, learning about evidence from other cities about what's working, building partnerships, visiting other hubs, and building capacity in community. Also, developing a broader awareness and knowledge base of business planning and social enterprise as another means to accomplish goals of the hubs and generate additional revenue.



Where does it make sense to develop a hub?

One of the key questions for future hub development is where, and how might we prioritize limited resources. Participants in the group said:

- There must be a need or opportunity recognized by the community, and a readiness by the community to take on this work. There should also be partnerships in place to help make the place viable and relevant.
- There should be a strong Social Return on Investment, and a plan for evaluation of the hub that also recognizes the complexity of evaluating the impact of such an entity.
- There should be a sustainable action plan for getting the hub going, and a 'business' plan for long-term sustainability.
- There should be support for communities / neighbourhoods that are lacking services and hubs of any other kind.

Students from St. Mary's University also started to develop a map of existing natural and intentional, and in-between hubs – and overlaying those maps with socio-economic data, transportation routes and income levels. This initiative is not finished, but there is potential there for it to be an additional guide as to where hubs might be need, and to help identify the range of potential hubs and where there are 'hub deserts'. To check out the interactive map online, go to: <http://hubsproject.wix.com/unitedway#!hubs-map/qdown>.

What might a hub cost in terms of start up and working capital?

Since there is no one approach to developing a 'hub' because it is best if driven by the unique needs of each neighbourhood or community, the potential costs in terms of start up and working capital can range broadly as well. One key component besides some sort of 'space' for people to gather in though includes people / staff to enable the building to be open and accessible for a broad range of activities throughout the day and evening.

“Currently working in a hub. I am still learning and this has been very beneficial to attend these meetings. Thank you!”

-- Project Participant

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



The hubs project engaged about 75 people from a variety of backgrounds - building a strong network of people interested in hubs, and initiating a conversation and increasing awareness of the range of hubs in Halifax, who they are now and what they could be; how various 'hubs' could increase their role in community building in their neighbourhoods. The goal of this project was to build relationships and a learning network for hubs, increase knowledge about hubs and best practices and to encourage people to experiment more in how they go about building strong, vibrant neighbourhoods.

The final evaluation at the end of six months of the project was favourable with many people noting they did get to know a lot more people interested in hubs and several partnerships were formed. They also noted they would like to meet again on a regular basis, and are now ready for action in very concrete ways.

What needs to happen next?

In terms of what needs to happen next, participants were clear that more support from government and a variety of other partners was needed. One idea was to develop a short video and communications strategy that would tell the story of the difference hubs are already making in their communities / neighbourhoods. This could be used to help demonstrate the value of hubs, and why they should be supported.

There was also talk of the need for a 'toolkit' for emerging hubs to help them engage community, build support and not 'reinvent the wheel' - but rather to learn from existing hubs and adapt what they need to be able to develop more quickly.

There was also a strong desire to visit other hubs and to be able to learn from best practices and ideas of what others are doing. Maybe also a 'hub conference' of some type where people could be brought in from other parts of the country to share their own learnings, and build broader support for hubs in general.



Participants also felt there needs to be broader conversation in the media about hubs to raise awareness. One idea was for a ‘hub hop’ day and an ‘app’ that could help people find and connect with hubs in their own neighbourhoods. 211 was also mentioned as a key resource that all hubs should be registered with, and keep information up to date.

Other opportunities for developing increased awareness of the value of hubs was the current Centre Plan process underway in central Halifax, and the development of a new planning team for rural Halifax. Participants said hubs need to be ‘written into policy’ and regulatory barriers need to be removed.

Active mentoring and peer support were also mentioned as means of building capacity among hubs - sharing what’s working well on a regular basis.



“Thank you for this opportunity. The information presented, the topics discussed and the resources provided will certainly have a positive impact on my continued work.”

-- Project Participant

Some key recommendations for the future then include:

1. Producing a short video over the summer to help hubs tell their story, and how they are making a difference in their neighbourhoods. This could then be used in conjunction with a communications strategy to increase awareness, and attract more partners and resources. The video would be made available to all partners and participants in the hubs project network.
2. Meeting again in late September and developing a variety of learning opportunities for established hubs that could include customized or peer support for senior leadership team members and front line staff, starting to develop a toolkit for emerging hubs, and more learning in relation to developing long-term sustainability plans.

3. Using the Halifax volunteer conference in November as another learning opportunity for things such as strengthening board governance and other issues that are often challenges for any volunteer-driven organization.
4. Future meetings should include using different hubs that have the capacity to host meetings of about 30 people, and ideally have break out space for different sessions for people at different stages of learning about hubs.
5. A 'hub hop' tour(s) should be organized to enable 'learning journey's' for anyone interested in learning more about different hubs.
6. A resource person(s) should be engaged to help support communications for the group, and update the website to be more of an online 'toolkit'.
7. There also needs to be a 'steering committee' developed to help build the hub network further, diversify the leadership of the group and ensure meeting agendas are fulfilling the key interests of the group for 'concrete action.' This should be made up of a variety of supporting partners and a diverse range of people from a variety of backgrounds who have been involved in the hubs project from the beginning on a regular basis (ie. people from hubs / community, government, academia and business).
8. To help people develop persuasive 'cases' for why hubs are needed and how they can provide a strong social return on investment, there should be a literature review done of all the documents collected during the hubs project, and short synopsis done for each to be include on the project website for easy reference.
9. United Way should consider how it can use all its roles as funder, convenor, partner, researcher and advocate to support hub development.
10. An asset-based community development (ABCD) approach to hub development should be considered as well. One of the findings of the project was that there are many different hubs along a broad spectrum with different needs, and ready to play different roles in community development. A future strategy for hub development also needs to consider this. Phase 1 in the future might be to focus on strengthening existing hubs, Phase 2 might look more at helping to establish emerging hubs, and Phase 3 might look at where there are no hubs now and how can United Way Halifax help to cultivate hubs in those areas.



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