

# Non-Profit Sector Employers' Council

## Early Learning – Executive Career Development Program Design

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The **Federation of Community Social Services of BC** (FCSSBC) has been contracted to design an executive career development program for community social service employees.

While a number of non-profit management and leadership skills training courses and programs are offered around the province there are some barriers to engagement. The sum of these offerings does not as yet present a reliable roadmap of short and long term educational steps, clear channels to formal and informal coaching, mentorship and peer networking, and networks in which individuals can signal leadership aspirations and find opportunities for advancement.

The objective of the Executive Career Development Program Design is to leverage existing high-quality development resources to design an executive career development program that provides a roadmap for current and potential non-profit sector management and leaders. The project used an evidence-informed, co-creative and generative curriculum design approach that brought together emergent and legacy leaders. Participants thus both utilized the learning and tools identified and available, and also contributed to the design process through their participation.

The **Federation of Community Social Services of BC** (FCSSBC) is working on four fronts to build both knowledge and resources in support of leadership development in the sector:

1. *Document what is currently available in BC:* A publicly accessible, searchable database of leadership development programs and courses that are suitable for people working within the BC social service sector will be available in early 2012. Included will be courses and programs offered in the publicly funded colleges, institutes and universities.
2. *Identify what is called for in leadership practice into the future:* An online consultation process has engaged over a hundred leading thinkers and strategists from around the world with the simple question, "What leadership knowledge, skills and qualities will be needed by the leaders of the future?" This information will help the sector determine what else might be needed to prepare current and future leaders for success.
3. *Identify and develop self-assessment tools:* The tools assess leadership strengths and talents and areas for further leadership development. The results may be used to inform the development of an individual learning plan.
4. *Propose key elements to be incorporated into leadership development offerings for the sector, and test different delivery approaches:* The findings from the thought-leaders' survey and contemporary research have been shared with a group of BC advisors and educational designers, who have worked together to build a framework and design for leadership development in the BC sector. The prototype design is being tested and evaluated with a group of emergent and legacy leaders from FCSSBC agencies. Through this 'action research' approach, more is being learned about what emergent leaders are looking for and how best to deliver the learning material. Online and face-to-face approaches are being applied.

All of the findings from the project will be available in early 2012. However, the following early learnings may be of interest to organizations and departments that are interested in leadership development:

- There is a high level of interest in leadership development amongst mid-career professionals in the non-profit sector. Leaders described efforts to access other leadership

development opportunities and found what is available to either be not relevant or too costly to attend.

- Some prospective participants have noted that their supervisors/directors have not been able to support their participation due to terms of their contracts for service delivery. Many funding contracts stipulate minimum direct service hours and do not allow for staff/professional development time. As a result, agencies are unable to cover wages or expenses for those staff who are delivering direct services under some service contracts.
- The current fiscal context for non-profits within the social services sector is tenuous and funding for professional development is limited or non-existent, therefore employees are often unable to participate in the available programs. As such, we are collectively challenged to achieve two things: promote the value of and essential need for leadership/executive development to funders and boards; and develop non-traditional delivery and engagement strategies that make leadership learning more accessible across the province.
- Thought leaders and contemporary researchers suggest that leadership capacity needs to be developed throughout organizations, and not just in those with senior positions. The most effective leaders will be self aware and able to discern what leadership is called for in diverse situations, and adapt accordingly. They will be skilled in coaching (to support their staff and build on strengths); collaborative practice and community engagement; and adaptive organizational/systems learning. They will be knowledgeable about social innovation and entrepreneurship and will be culturally attuned and competent.
- The design project has brought together emergent and legacy leaders in one program. This is greatly appreciated by the participants and their agencies as well as the thought leaders consulted. This opportunity for co-learning and mentoring is one of the most promising aspects of an executive leadership development program
- The design project action research component extends for nine months. A longer time frame, and mixed delivery model is appreciated by participants because it allows for sustained learning over time, builds a 'community of practice' amongst the participants so that they can support each other's learning and development. The mixed online/face-to-face model is also more affordable and feasible within the context of limited time and resources.