

## Case Study: Grassroots Alternatives to Business



### Organization: Groundswell

Groundswell is a training network for young people starting alternatives-to-business together, and recreating the economy in the process. Groundswell supports community values and economic equality by fostering entrepreneurial and community building skills, providing mentorship, bridging sectors, and supporting an ecosystem of change making individuals and projects in Vancouver.

### Problem or issue: Youth unemployment and high post-secondary education costs

A lack of meaningful employment opportunities for youth, and increasingly prohibitive post-secondary education costs. These factors put greater pressure on young people from low to moderate income families, restrict community building and entrepreneurial spirit, and prevent young people from realizing their full potential.

### Project: Grassroots Alternatives to Business

Traditional approaches to addressing youth unemployment focus on working with existing employers and training providers to reduce barriers to entry and increase opportunities for growth and development beyond entry level positions.

## Case Study: Grassroots Alternatives to Business

Vancouver Foundation supported a completely different approach through Groundswell's training programs that focus on building skills and capacities for self-sustaining enterprises developed by young people, for young people.

Groundswell's low-cost six-month training programs for young people focus on creating opportunities such as co-ops, self-employment, social businesses, collectives, non-profits and other grassroots economic models. They specifically target vulnerable groups such as low-to-moderate income youth and immigrant youth.

The broader goal of these programs is to work with graduates on a long-term basis and establish a lasting and supportive network of community enterprises. This is made possible through collaborations with other local community groups. Over the next 3-5 years, the program will expand to serve 70 participants every year.

### Why this is a social innovation

Vancouver Foundation supported this project because it:

- Addresses the problem by creating opportunities for young people to help themselves, rather than relying on other institutions e.g. business, government, etc.
- Creates a low-cost alternative education and training opportunity for vulnerable groups of young people
- Delivers education and training via "learning by doing" where youth are able to share in the creation of both the process and the product of their learning experience
- Produces social enterprises that provide meaningful employment for young people
- Creates sustainable social enterprises, meaning education, training, and employment opportunities can continue without the long-term support of Vancouver Foundation

### Questions for your project

- What problem or issue are you addressing?
- How are you addressing the problem or opportunity in a way that is different to how it's been addressed previously?
- How will your project affect the rest of the social system that the problem or opportunity is located in?
- Will your approach involve groups that may have been previously excluded from participating or benefiting?
- How will your project adapt in the future to become sustainable?