

Talking Social Enterprise...

Can it be a path to sustainability for non-profits?

What is Social Enterprise?

The buzz in many non-profit board rooms today has to do increasingly with the quest for sustainability... how to protect and generate funds without mission drift. Funders, grantmakers and donors have shifted their approaches and priorities over the years. Their portfolios are vulnerable to financial market volatility. Funders continue to pressure non-profits to diversify and match funds, to be more 'business-like' and to align with funder priorities. As a result, non-profits seek independence, impact and sustainability. There is more and more talk of 'social enterprise' (sometimes termed social purpose enterprise, social venture or social entrepreneurship) as a vehicle for income generation *and/or* social impact. The different names in use today reflect the range of approaches to and ideas about social enterprise.

One of the most cited definitions of social enterprise comes from the United Kingdom's Department of Trade and Industry who define it as "*a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners.*"

The term 'social enterprise' can be applied to a variety of socially-oriented business ventures operated by both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. The term is at times applied to traditional for-profit businesses that operate in a socially and/or environmentally responsible manner (e.g. The Body Shop and Ben & Jerry's). Since their objectives are not *primarily* social, these examples might more accurately be characterized as examples of corporate social responsibility (CSR).

The concept of non-profit organizations generating income is not new. Hospital gift shops and parking lots have been subsidizing hospital operations for decades. This form of enterprise might be termed an 'earned income strategy' and follows the concept of creating a for-profit business venture.

In an interview ("*The Coming Transformation of Social Enterprise*"), Kasturi Rangan of Harvard Business School was asked whether creating a for-profit business is the way to go to secure a reliable stream of funds. He replied, "I don't think so... [while] it is not that hard to put together a for-profit arm... to have it be a significant contributor to the mission requires considerable strategic work". For the purposes of this article we limit the discussion of social enterprises to those established by non-profit organizations.

To truly embrace the social enterprise concept, in addition to generating funds, a venture *should* help an organization achieve its mission and expand its social impact.

Forms of Social Enterprise

Many of our clients in the non-profit sector have raised questions about social enterprise as they consider strategies for sustainability. In response, we have attempted to clarify and categorize the forms of social enterprise to inform these conversations.

In the charts below we profile three types of social enterprise operated by Canadian non-profit charitable organizations. All of these examples have, to some degree, been successful in achieving the ‘double bottom line’ of profits plus social impact.

These categories may assist organizations in designing an enterprise that reflects their goals and interests.

- I. EARNED INCOME STRATEGY: STANDALONE VENTURES
- II. EARNED INCOME STRATEGY: RELATED EXPERTISE AND/OR SERVICES
- III. BLENDED PROGRAM AND BUSINESS VENTURES

I. These first examples profile enterprises that are quite distinct from the organization’s main work – yet each of the enterprises is aligned with and supports its parent organization in a variety of ways – e.g. generating revenues for the organization, enhancing the organization’s public profile and strengthening the organization’s network of supporters.

I. EARNED INCOME STRATEGY: STANDALONE VENTURES		
Organization	Social Enterprise	Status
<p>Habitat for Humanity Canada</p> <p><i>Mission: To mobilize community partners and volunteers in building affordable housing and promoting homeownership as a means of breaking the cycle of poverty.</i></p>	<p>56 Habitat ReStores sell donated building supplies – new and used.</p> <p><i>Marketplace advantage: donated goods (from manufacturers, retailers and the public) and significant number of store volunteers</i></p>	<p>Restore revenues (C\$8 million in 2008) subsidize the construction of homes built by Habitat and operating costs. The stores also help Habitat develop and strengthen relationships with members of the building trade and the wider public.</p> <p>Grants have been used to improve ReStore operations in recent years.</p>
<p>Free the Children (FtC)</p> <p><i>Mission: The primary goals of the organization are to free children from poverty and exploitation and free young people from the notion that they are powerless to affect positive change in the world</i></p>	<p>‘Me to We’ is a separate and distinct social enterprise that includes: Responsible style clothing line; books; volunteer trips; speakers; and music.</p> <p><i>Marketplace advantage: products are designed to appeal to and engage young consumers who are specifically interested in supporting FtC’s work: e.g. clothing is ethically manufactured; trips help to connect youth with FtC’s international work.</i></p>	<p>50% of revenues are directed at bringing FtC’s administrative costs down to \$0 (so that donations can go directly to projects). The other 50% is re-invested in the enterprise. To date, Me to We has lowered FtC’s overall administrative rate by 18%.</p> <p>‘Me to We’ measures the bottom line, not by dollars earned, but by number of lives changed, contributions to support FtC, and the positive social and environmental impact it makes.</p>

I. EARNED INCOME STRATEGY: STANDALONE VENTURES

Organization	Social Enterprise	Status
<p><u>New Path</u> Foundation</p> <p><i>Foundation Mission: To lead and inspire change – we develop and manage philanthropic investment and mobilize community support to meet the mental health needs of children, youth and families.</i></p> <p><i>New Path Youth and Family Services Mission: To lead and inspire change – we provide an innovative multiservice approach to meet the mental health needs of children, youth and families.</i></p>	<p><u>The Common Roof</u> is a community-based social enterprise providing sustainable and professional work space for human-service non-profit agencies. (mission)</p> <p><i>Marketplace advantage: 165 Ferris Lane in Barrie is a stable, affordable and highly visible facility that enhances the mission of the partner organizations; allows efficient use of resources; and provides an opportunity for cross-organizational collaboration. Founding partners enjoy a ten year, fixed rate rent based upon 2006 market value, as well as full participation in decision making.</i></p>	<p>This enterprise was initiated by NewPath but structured in partnership with other organizations. Through co-location, organizations have an opportunity to combine and leverage their program, administrative and community strengths to achieve increased efficiencies, cross-sectoral programming and more coordinated planning.</p> <p>Rents and venture income (NP does maintenance and cleaning through a social enterprise model) generate ~\$100K net income annually. Once the mortgage is paid off in 2018, each founding partner organization will receive an “unrestricted sustainability grant”. Real estate appreciation (significant in the first three years) is another key benefit of this enterprise model.</p>

II. Some income generation strategies are launched with a view to expanding an organization’s reach and/or improving efficiency by leveraging investments in research, program development or administration. Larger, more mature organizations are often better positioned to package and earn revenue by selling their expertise – whether in the form of an evidence-based program, consulting/training service or a ‘back-office’ service. With today’s increased electronic connectivity, packaging and marketing programs at home and abroad is easier than ever.

II. EARNED INCOME STRATEGY: RELATED EXPERTISE AND SERVICES

Organization	Social Enterprise	Status
<p><u>Kinark Child and Family Services</u></p> <p><i>Mission: Caring, helping, healing - so children and youth can live socially and emotionally healthy lives.</i></p>	<p><u>Kinark Information Database System</u> (KIDS) is a case management system for non-profit organizations</p> <p><i>Marketplace advantage: program was developed to meet the unique needs of a non-profit organization and can be customized to suit other agencies</i></p>	<p>The first version of KIDS was developed in 1990; another version has recently been released. There are 40+ social services agencies across Ontario successfully using the system.</p> <p>It operates primarily as a cost-recovery model. This model enables Kinark to develop enhancements and deliver some training.</p>

II. EARNED INCOME STRATEGY: RELATED EXPERTISE AND SERVICES		
Organization	Social Enterprise	Status
<p>Child Development Institute (CDI)</p> <p><i>Mission: To promote and support the healthy development of children and to strengthen the families and communities in which they live.</i></p>	<p>SNAP[®] (Stop Now and Plan) is an award-winning evidence-based model that has been shown to help children make better choices and control impulsive and aggressive behaviours that could lead to future contact with the police</p> <p><i>Marketplace advantage: award winning, evidence-based program</i></p>	<p>SNAP has moved from a philanthropic financial model (i.e. CDI raised funds to give it away) to an earned income model (license fees and training). After nearly 30 years of research and extensive partnering, 1000s of professionals have been trained in its use and the enterprise is at a breakeven point.</p>
<p>St. Stephen's Community House (SSCH)</p> <p><i>Mission: St. Stephen's works with individuals and communities in downtown west Toronto to identify, prevent and alleviate social and economic problems by creating and providing a range of effective and innovative programs.</i></p>	<p>SSCH delivers professional mediator training to approximately 100 organizational clients annually.</p> <p><i>Marketplace advantage: SSCH was an early entrant to the marketplace; other mediators have since followed so SSCH is currently developing a marketing plan with help from SiG@MaRS (a non-profit innovation centre that connects social entrepreneurs with business skills, networks and capital).</i></p>	<p>Since its founding in 1988, the training division has generated \$2 million.</p> <p>The fees from the service mostly subsidize SSCH's free community mediation service which handles ~400 cases/ year.</p>

III. Perhaps the best-known examples in the non-profit sector are those social enterprises structured in the form of 'programs' where job skills training or employment transition programs for hard-to-employ populations are delivered and revenues are generated. These 'blended programs' tend to be more closely linked to the organization's mission and emphasize social impact over profit.

III. BLENDED PROGRAM AND BUSINESS VENTURES		
Organization	Social Enterprise	Status
<p>Eva's Initiatives</p> <p><i>Mission: to work collaboratively with homeless and at-risk youth to help them reach their potential to lead productive, self-sufficient and healthy lives by providing safe shelter and a range of services, and to create long term solutions for homeless youth by developing and implementing proactive and progressive services.</i></p>	<p>Eva's Phoenix Print Shop is a socially and environmentally responsible commercial printer that supports Foundations of Print, an award-winning training program for homeless youth. The print shop is located at Eva's Phoenix, a transitional housing and employment facility for homeless youth.</p> <p><i>Marketplace advantage: positioning as a 'socially and environmentally responsible commercial printer' (what they refer to as a blended value model). High customer satisfaction. Was chosen by Social Venture Partners Toronto's as their first investee in 2008.</i></p>	<p>Since 2002, Eva's Phoenix Print Shop has connected over 100 youth with career building opportunities in the graphic communications sector. Over 80% of youth who complete connect with full-time work, and many return to school via a Scholarship Fund.</p> <p>It was initiated with a grant from Rotary Club and HRSDC funding. Since inception it has aimed to achieve sustainability; it has covered all its business costs in 2008 with sales of \$369K.</p>

<p><u>The Salvation Army Gateway (SA)</u></p> <p><i>Mission: Offering, encouraging modeling and teaching community in Christ as a Gateway to meet the holistic needs and develop the gifts of adults in our community.</i></p>	<p><u>Gateway Linens</u> (GL) is a social enterprise program that hires 6 individuals from Gateway’s Shelter to work in its industrial laundry service. The formerly homeless individuals receive training in job and life skills; finance; and the laundry trade. The business was originally started to bring the industrial laundry needs of SA’s five shelters in-house.</p> <p><i>Marketplace advantage: Existing market – shelters operated by SA and others in Toronto that value the service and related social return on investment.</i></p>	<p>After graduating from GL’s 6-month program, staff transition to a job at K-Bro Linens, a local organization that hires all GL program graduates.</p> <p>Employees are paid \$350 weekly in a combination of cash and savings account deposits. Start-up investment of \$250K; GL is currently at capacity and seeking additional investment to enable it to expand services.</p>
<p><u>St. John the Compassionate Mission</u></p> <p><i>Mission: To be and to build an inclusive community through the gifts and the needs that each of us brings.</i></p>	<p><u>St. John’s Bakery</u> is a place where people of varying capabilities and social backgrounds come together to do something constructive and creative: bake and sell artisanal organic breads. The bakery’s outreach program trains people coping with addictions, disabilities and other hardship to work the ovens or the store.</p> <p><i>Marketplace advantage: first entrant into the market with high-quality, artisanal organic breads</i></p>	<p>The Bakery bakes ~ 6000 loaves of bread weekly; products are sold via 35 outlets in the GTA. It is supported by volunteers and 30 full- and part-time staff who are paid competitive wages.</p> <p>The Bakery is funded in part by the <u>Toronto Enterprise Fund</u>, a funding partnership between United Way of Greater Toronto and the three levels of government.</p>

Interestingly, an organization’s emphasis on social impact may put them at a disadvantage in a competitive commercial marketplace that focuses primarily on the financial bottom line. A desire to pay fair wages to employees, to give hard-to-employ individuals employment opportunities, and/or to price products so that they are affordable to low-income populations can compromise an enterprise’s ability to compete. Eva’s Phoenix notes in their Toolkit that it is particularly important to distinguish between the training and the business elements of the enterprise. And that “it is very helpful to separate the business and training costs and revenues in your budget and financial statements to clarify how each part of the operation is performing.”

As with traditional programs, these enterprises are typically subsidized from a variety of sources, particularly during start-up. While these enterprises may generate some revenue that contributes to their operating budget, the income is rarely sufficient to cover the true costs of the program. This is even true of Goodwill, one of the oft-cited success stories in the field. These results suggest that long term sustainability may not be a realistic goal.

Although the possibility of generating funds is compelling, most research has shown that social enterprise is unlikely to be the ‘magic bullet’ that puts an end to funding challenges. One expert in the field with whom we spoke, John Baker of Aperio, advises the organizations he works with to think of a social enterprise strategy as ‘one tool in their toolkit’.

RESEARCH

The number of non-profit organizations engaging in social enterprise has been growing over the last decade, with much of the activity and research taking place south of the border. There is limited research available on how successful social enterprises are in terms of social impact; and when it comes to assessing the profitability of these ventures, research findings vary.

Who's Enterprising

A 2008 survey of nearly 1000 social sector organizations by Community Wealth Ventures, Inc. and the Social Enterprise Alliance provides the most current snapshot of social enterprises in the United States and Canada. They found there has been steady growth in the number of enterprises established over the last 20 years and that:

- 54% of social sector organizations today operate a social enterprise and almost half of those have more than one
- 60% indicate that they plan to launch another social enterprise in the next 3-5 years
- 60% operate their social enterprise as a division of the parent organization
- 48% of these organizations are equally motivated by the chance to increase revenue as well as extend the mission of their organization
- Foundation grants were the most common source of start-up capital
- 57% of social sector organizations who do not currently operate a social enterprise are considering launching their first social enterprise

The same study noted that the top five social enterprise venture types include:

1. Education and training
2. Retail/thrift shops
3. Consulting services
4. Food services/catering
5. Art ventures.

On Profitability

There is a lack of consensus in the research about the profitability of social enterprises. Initial reports were promising and have, combined with encouragement from some foundations, propelled continued growth in the field. Two American surveys reported that half to two-thirds of ventures were either profitable or breaking even. Community Wealth Ventures' 2003 survey* of US-based initiatives found that:

- 90% of successful ventures relate to the non-profit's mission
- Profitability is reached in 2.5 years on average
- Planning matters
- The largest benefit is the creation of an entrepreneurial culture (58%).

**Powering Social Change: Lessons on Community Wealth Generation for Non-profit Sustainability' was released July 2, 2003 by Community Wealth Ventures Inc. who surveyed American non-profits operating business ventures*

Subsequent studies have been less encouraging. In their 2005 HBR article, “Should Non-profits Seek Profits,” authors William Foster and Jeffrey Bradach interviewed U.S.-based social sector organizations with a variety of business ventures and found that 71% of those ventures failed to earn a profit. In addition, half of those reporting profits (24% of those surveyed) failed to fully account for indirect costs related to the business (e.g. management time, facilities costs and other overhead expenses). While they may have generated revenues, they may not have been truly profitable.

A 2007 Seedco Policy Center study concurred with Foster and Bradach, noting that few non-profit social ventures are self-sustaining and fewer still are profitable. Their field study found that most enterprises are sustained by a variety of subsidies. They concluded that **the most successful enterprises tend to have simple structures and some kind of marketplace advantage over their for-profit competition.**

The last word on profitability goes to John Baker, CEO of Aperio. He noted that, in his experience, non-profit organizations that focus strictly on the revenue generation potential of social enterprises are rarely successful. He suggested that organizations increase their chance of success by building on work they are already doing and by ensuring the revenue is connected to their charitable purpose.

Benefits of Adopting an Entrepreneurial Culture

When fully embraced by a non-profit, social enterprise can be a transformative strategy that can effect a more entrepreneurial culture and create a stronger organization. *(Alter and Dawans 2006)*

“In some cases [a strategy such as] earned income actually enhances mission impact... When mission-appropriate, even simply charging fees for programs may enhance impact through empowering clients, increasing their commitment, and pressuring non-profits to provide truly valuable services.” *(Anderson 2005)*

Entrepreneurs constantly consider ways to improve service delivery by assessing the viability of their product/service offerings to determine whether it's most appropriate to suspend, re-design, sustain or expand the offerings *(Boschee 2006)*. Foster and Bradach note that non-profits, in contrast, have a tendency to ‘escalate commitments’ by continuing to scrape together patchwork solutions to sustain struggling ventures.

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS AND RISKS

Almost every study identifies factors that influence the success of social enterprises – this list is our attempt to consolidate some of the most commonly mentioned factors.

Success Factors	Related Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt a business/entrepreneurial mindset: identify a real marketplace/social need and clearly define your customer base 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identity crisis: social enterprises can blur the line between non-profit and for-profit activities. Loss of tax benefits can result when non-profits stray too far from their original mandate.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure mission impact: confirm that the marketplace need identified will contribute to your mission and will align with your values. Foster and Bradach recommend that organizations "... put their missions first rather than starting with a venture's financial potential." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distraction: social enterprises have the potential to distract an organization from its mission and core programs and to negatively affect the organization's relationship with clients and donors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be clear about your vision and objectives: design the enterprise to meet multiple objectives: e.g. mission/social impact, revenue generation, satisfying your chosen customer, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Naivety: there is a tendency for organizations starting their first venture to be overly optimistic about revenue potential; to discount the challenges of running a commercial venture; and to underestimate true costs (<i>Foster and Bradach 2005</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan for success: develop a comprehensive business plan to anticipate and mitigate risk; and as an analytic tool for converting ideas to action. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failing to plan: failure to invest enough effort into the development of the business plan and market research often leads to failure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure your house is in order: an organization should be in "good shape" financially and administratively before it considers developing a social enterprise. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rescue goal: expecting a social enterprise to rescue the organization from financial and other distress is unrealistic.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build on your strengths: identify your competitive advantages and incorporate them into the enterprise. "Chances of success increase when social sector leaders focus on opportunities that [are] a natural fit." (<i>Dees et al 2001</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Competitive challenges: failure to recognize how your social values may put your enterprise at a competitive disadvantage may put pressure on the organization to revise or neglect its values
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate up front: assess whether the enterprise is the best way of using your limited resources (i.e. financial, human and physical). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holding on too long: failure to make the tough decisions down the road if evaluations show that programs or services aren't adequately contributing to the double bottom line may lead to larger deficits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure sufficient capital: be realistic about the time it takes for any business to achieve sustainability, let alone profitability, and remember that at the start-up stage, cash flow is more important than profit (<i>Community Wealth Ventures</i>). Determine how you will fund the venture... through start-up and beyond. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delusional accounting: failure to account for indirect operational costs (e.g. the use of scarce managerial resources, physical space and other overhead costs) or underestimating the resources required to take the venture to profitability can place the organization at financial risk

Success Factors	Related Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hire required skills and expertise: be realistic about the skills/expertise you have and those you need to bring in. “Innovators are the dreamers... Entrepreneurs are the builders... Managers are the trustees”: all are needed at different points in organizational development. (<i>Boschee and McClurg 2003</i>) Consider partnering with experienced entrepreneurs; engaging industry experts (e.g. on an advisory board); and hiring individuals with specific entrepreneurial skills (e.g. sales, management and service innovation). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Skill gaps: A Hauser Center survey found that 75% of respondents felt they did not have the right people on staff when launching their venture.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Get buy-in: ensure there is passionate leadership and support from key staff and board members, particularly from individuals in charge of resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Leaderless: ventures that did not have a champion were significantly less likely to be profitable (<i>Cohen, Kohl and Van 2008</i>).

Research suggests that one of the biggest challenges is managing the cultural tension associated with integrating entrepreneurial thinking into the existing organizational culture.

To enterprise or not... it’s not a decision to be taken lightly. Particularly considering that the journey from idea to incubation to implementation demands substantial time, resources and energy. In deciding whether or not to create a social enterprise, keep in mind that it is not just ‘another project’. In addition to realistically assessing the venture’s double bottom line potential, carefully consider the implications that embracing this direction will have for your organization’s culture and social impact. Succeeding in social enterprise ultimately requires organizational transformation – accompanied by calculated risk taking – with a healthy dose of investment – will your stakeholders welcome it?

AUTHORS:



[Ruth Armstrong](#) and [Sandi Trillo](#) of [VISION Management Services](#) co-authored this article in November 2009. VISION Management Services is a Toronto-based consulting firm specializing in governance, strategic planning, leadership development and strategic alliances. Ruth and Sandi can be reached at: 416-691-7302 or by email (please click on names above).

INTERVIEW

John Baker, Partner and CEO of Aperio, kindly shared his extensive experience in Social Enterprise with us in an interview. Aperio has been consulting to social sector organizations in North America and the UK for nearly ten years inspiring, fostering and supporting social entrepreneurship and innovation. John works out of Aperio's Toronto office and can be reached at: 800.479.1782 / 416.304.0016 or by email at info@aperio.ca.

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18. Websites of organizations profiled and Toronto Enterprise Fund case studies

RESOURCES: ADDITIONAL READING

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2. Enterprising Nonprofits: A Toolkit for Social Entrepreneurs, by J. Gregory Dees, Jed Emerson, and Peter Economy, Wiley, 2001
3. Entrepreneurship in the Social Sector, by Jane C. Wei-Skillern, James E. Austin, Herman B. Leonard, Howard H. Stevenson, Sage Publications, 2007

RESOURCES: ONLINE

Canadian

[Centre for Social Innovation](#) and [Enterprising Non-Profits Toronto Program](#)

[Social Venture Partners Toronto](#)

[Toronto Enterprise Fund](#)

[Enterprising Non-profits Canada](#)

[Social Enterprise Ontario](#) – network of social entrepreneurs

[Green Enterprise Toronto](#)

[Ontario's Social Venture Registry](#) – profiles of local examples

Other

[Social Enterprise Reporter](#)

[Seedco Policy Center](#)

[Stanford Social Innovation Review](#)

[Public Innovators](#) – interesting online Case studies (mainly US)