
The Entrepreneurial Learning Circle®

An 11-month planning project for social enterprises

PURPOSE

To help each organization complete a specific entrepreneurial project in a concentrated period of time.

PARTICIPANTS

The learning circle consists of senior managers from four to six organizations (the size of an organization is not a deciding factor in whether it is eligible to participate).

Members of the circle

- Receive two half-day site visits from the lead facilitator
- Participate in three additional 90-minute face-to-face consultations with the lead facilitator
- Participate in 11 full-day peer group sessions (*sites rotated among the members*)
- Serve as an *ad hoc* advisory committee for all the projects being mounted by the learning circle participants
- Receive remote consulting from the lead facilitator and on-site consulting from the assistant facilitators throughout the project

TASKS

The tasks chosen by the members of a learning circle are typically related in some way to the creation of a social sector business: Designing and implementing feasibility studies, developing business plans, acquiring financing, forging strategic partnerships, and so on. However, the tasks might also include such things as creating a strategic marketing plan (deciding which programs to expand, nurture, harvest or kill); entrepreneurial strategic planning (simultaneously analyzing the organization's programs from both a social impact and a financial perspective); developing and implementing a marketing plan to generate earned income (either for an entire organization or for a specific program); or any number of others.

LEAD FACILITATOR

The lead facilitator for the learning circle is Jerr Boschee, the Founder and Executive Director of The Institute for Social Entrepreneurs. He is responsible for visiting each site twice; for conducting three additional face-to-face consultations with each organization; for facilitating six peer group meetings; and for providing remote counseling to circle participants by e-mail, FAX and telephone.

ASSISTANT FACILITATORS

Consultants based in the local community work closely with Mr. Boschee and the learning circle participants throughout the project (and later become lead facilitators for subsequent circles).

TIMETABLE

The half-day site visits take place during months one and eight, the face-to-face consultations during months three, five and ten.

The peer group meeting during month 11 includes final reports, celebrations and planning for the future (one possible outcome might be a decision by the participants to continue meeting independently, without a facilitator).

All site visits and peer group meetings are scheduled for weekdays except for the final peer group session, which takes place on a Saturday to make it more convenient for Board members to attend.

FOLLOW-UP

At the conclusion of the project, Mr. Boschee and the assistant facilitators work with the learning circle participants to prepare a final report for widespread dissemination; in this way, the non-proprietary lessons learned by the participants in the project benefit other nonprofits as well as themselves.