

# The Project

The Ambassadeur project aims to meet the information needs of citizens and employers so that they can fulfill them on their own through CACs and local organizations. By hiring information officers in the community, who would be responsible for distributing information about government products and services, the project will make it possible to identify needs and make people aware of the new information technologies, "a decisive stage for informed decisionmaking by the community", according to one participant.

With a goal of development and individual autonomy, the project aims "to foster the community taking charge of the development of its potential" (Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC, 1999b) by establishing follow-up and feedback mechanisms for communities and individuals. According to some HRDC officials, the project would make it possible "to adopt communication strategies, follow-up and feedback mechanisms for the community" and consequently "improve our ability to target our efforts in the community more carefully and develop products adapted to what people need."

The main partners were HRDC and the Fjord, Haut-Saguenay, Lac Saint-Jean Est, Lac Saint-Jean Ouest, Maria-Chapdelaine and Chibaugamaou CFDCs(8). Although the latter lies outside the Saguenay-Lac St-Jean administrative region, its proximity and interest in the project led it to join.

The project officially got underway with the process of hiring the information officers (the "Ambassadors") in December 1999. The citizen phase was planned to have a three-year span, but with no guarantee at the outset because there was none that the funding would continue. In fact, every year the Minister decides on whether or not this fund is available and the rules for its allocation. Lastly, the grants received from the Pan-Canadian Activities Fund will total some \$300,000 and cover operations until March 31, 2001.

## Mandate

The general thrust of the mandate was defined with the partners. Initially, HRDC stated its intention of acting as mobilizer in setting up the project, with the idea of gradually withdrawing and handing it over to the community. As the organization managing the main source of funding, the Pan-Canadian Activities Fund, it handled project administration with an expected three-year timeframe while phasing in community control. It coordinated project activities, helped train the personnel and provided the stakeholders with all the necessary documentation. It also hired a project coordinator.

Meanwhile the CFDCs managed the activities and resources in the field based on the needs identified in their communities and with their local partners. They hired the information officers ("Ambassadors") for their territory and contributed in terms of logistics, administration and training. The information officers were CFDC employees but required to focus their activities on the Ambassadeur project.

For the citizen phase, while each CFDC was given leeway to carry out its activities based on local characteristics, the partners agreed on the following regional objectives:

- To disseminate socioeconomic information while meeting citizen needs through the CACs and various organizations active in the region;
- To get more people to go to the CACs and use the information technologies through which the partners were distributing products and services, and;
- To publicize the partners' products and obtain feedback on them from people.

The target clientele were citizens, present and future CAC users as well as their leaders and the various organizations in the region. The preferred means were presentations and training sessions with various groups at the CACs or in their own communities. Each CFDC adopted the project and some developed their own subprojects (webpage, contest, etc.).

The approach to the employer phase was different. It was managed by HRDC with the participation of some CFDCs and other regional partners. At first activities focused on updating the database of businesses available at the Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC site and creating an "employers on-line" website (since this phase was less developed at the time of our study, it is simply summarized in the Appendix).

In December 1999, the CFDCs received the first slice of the subsidy to cover until March 31, 2000. It enabled hiring two information officers for each CFDC and conducting a promotional campaign. Next, an application was submitted for renewal of the funding for the period from April 2000 to March 2001. The response to the request was slow in coming. Most of the stakeholders were convinced the funding would be renewed, but this still led to

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uncertainties in some quarters. Confirmation came in May 2000, but the grant was less than the amount applied for. This forced the CFDCs to employ only one information officer each.

For the third year, it was no longer possible to use the Pan-Canadian Activities Fund. HRDC felt another fund seemed more suitable for the thrust of the project. It therefore referred the CFDCs to the Office of Learning Technologies (OLT) for 2001-2002 funding. HRDC would no longer be responsible for the grant, which henceforth would be managed by the CFDCs for the citizen phase. For the project to continue, the CFDCs are waiting for confirmation from the OLT because they believe in the value of this project. Unfortunately, given the uncertainty surrounding its continuation, some of the Ambassadeurs are leaving for other positions.

## Phases

After preliminary negotiations between the CFDCs and HRDC, the project officially got underway by hiring a coordinator at HRDC and the partners establishing regional objectives. Next the information officers were hired by the CFDCs. They became part of their CFDC staff, received training from HRDC, drew up an action plan with their CFDC management in keeping with regional objectives, developed presentation tools and crisscrossed their territory to meet people.

Since the citizen phase of the Ambassadeur project is essentially based on the circulation of information and training, each CFDC set its own objectives for each type of clientele. For the period that ended March 31, 2000, i.e. a three-month phase, the CFDCs had all the latitude required to select target clienteles. Some emphasized seniors, others youth, the unemployed, CAC users etc. The results were then generally considered very interesting by all the stakeholders (Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC, 2000a, 2000b).

The second phase of the project, from April 2000 to March 2001, got off to a slow start. The uncertainty about continued funding, confirmation of its renewal coming slow in May 2000 and the staff cutback to one information officer per CFDC because of the smaller budget resulted in few activities being carried out between April and August 2000, a period that also encompassed the summer holiday business closures (Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC, 2000c). The rules also changed a little by shifting the emphasis to employability, information about the job market and employment prospects. The target clienteles therefore became employment insurance and income security beneficiaries, workers with no job nor benefits, as well as students. Some CFDCs had already started working with these groups in the first year, but for others it was a new clientele to approach.

Also, to develop a profile of the people encountered, a system was set up with follow-up and feedback mechanisms to track their progress (Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC, 2000d, 2000e). Although this reorientation is much more in line with the CFDC's mission, it forced some information officers to rebuild their network of contacts in the community.

In this regard, some organizations expressed concern about the potential duplication of services for the same clientele (Carrefour Emploi-Jeunesse, CLE, etc.). Relations were smoother in the territories of some CFDCs than others, but on the whole the officers were able to demonstrate their specific role and the complementary nature of their work in relation to what was already being done by various government and community agencies.

## Management Framework

For the Ambassadeur project, the partners opted for a management framework intended to be simple, and essentially based on two communication networks (see Figure 1). The first consisted of the directors who mapped out the project's general orientation and determined the division of responsibilities. It was made up of CFDC management, the Director of Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC, and the Coordinator. A Canada Economic Development representative occasionally provided guidance and serviced as a resource person for the project.

The second network was made up of the "Ambassadors". It was a structure for coordination, exchange and communication related to activities in the field. This network encompassed the HRDC Coordinator and CFDC information officers.

After a few months of experimentation, the direct relationship between the coordinator and the information officers made the CFDCs somewhat uncomfortable. The executive directors wanted to be better informed about the strategies proposed to their personnel (the "Ambassadors"). A steering committee was therefore set up, consisting of the HRDC Director, two CFDC directors, and the Coordinator. This also ensured closer contact with HRDC, enabled more in-depth work and provided a better framework for the project to gauge its results. Thus the committee ensured that all documentation about the project in circulation took into consideration both local

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realities and the administrative rules governing the project.

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(8) Chibougamau-Chapais CFDC, [www.reseau-sadc.qc.ca/chibchap](http://www.reseau-sadc.qc.ca/chibchap); Fjord CFDC, [www.royaume.com/sadc](http://www.royaume.com/sadc); Haut-Saguenay CFDC, <http://www.sadchs.qc.ca/>; Lac-Saint-Jean Est CFDC, [www.reseau-sadc.qc.ca/ljsjest](http://www.reseau-sadc.qc.ca/ljsjest); Maria-Chapdelaine CFDC, [www.mrcmaria.qc.ca](http://www.mrcmaria.qc.ca); Lac-Saint-Jean Ouest CFDC, <http://www.sadclacstjeanouest.com/>