

Partners

A number of partners were involved in the Ambassadeur project, but its pillars were Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC, the project instigator, and the CFDCs, the organizations directly involved in the communities.

Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC

In the context of the new citizen-focused service philosophy of HRDC management in Quebec and the orientation of the "Connecting Canada" program, the Ambassadeur project was a bridge between the information and the tools for accessing it. HRDC put itself in the position of a "socioeconomic information broker", and the project provided an opportunity to bring the CACs to life, demystify and adopt technology, hold discussions, and convey information about HRDC and federal government programs and services in tight communities." In fact, informatics is a pretext for putting people in touch with the information," said one Department official.

DRHC is involved in various partnerships with local organizations and stakeholders in conducting joint studies to identify the needs of youth, updating a database of employers, and training people in use of the Canadian government's website. Its partners include Chambers of Commerce, school boards, CEGEPs, the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, local employment centres (CLE) and industrial commissioners.

The strategy of HRDC officials for this project was to "drop the puck," "sink solid roots" and then let each community run it. Their objective was to get as close as possible to citizens and their needs, and "to organize a chain starting from the information to make it friendly and convey it to the CFDCs."

CFDCs

CFDCs are community organizations established in rural areas and largely subsidized by Canada Economic Development. Their mission is twofold. The first is economic and involves providing primarily counselling services for business creation, expansion and consolidation. The CFDCs also provide financing in the form of loans, loan guarantees or equity investments to create and maintain lasting jobs in the community. The second has to do with community development by fostering partnership and influencing the orientation and future of communities within their territory.

As part of the CAP, which is administered by Industry Canada, they manage the CACs within their boundaries. Run by volunteers, the vitality of CACs and the condition of their hardware varies from one location to the next.

For many CFDCs, the Ambassadeur project breathed new life into the CACs not only as a forum for sharing but also as a potential business place. It is also attractive because of the funding that comes with it and having an additional employee in the field.

Other Partners

Involved as the departmental sponsor of CFDCs, the Saguenay-Lac St-Jean office of Canada Economic Development (CED) initially served as the bridge between HRDC and the CFDCs. For CED, the employer phase of the Ambassadeur project provided an excellent opportunity to survey and reach all the businesses in the region and especially make very significant progress in the realm of transactional e-commerce at local enterprises.

A number of government departments and agencies are active in the Saguenay-Lac St-Jean area. The project also aimed to network with them and give them an opportunity to gain publicity through Ambassadeur. The project was therefore presented several times at the regional panel of federal partners. This panel consists of representatives from about ten departments and agencies: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Business Development Bank, Passport Office, Canadian Forces Recruiting Centre, National Defence, Economic Development Canada, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Industry Canada, Le Régiment du Saguenay, Heritage Canada, Natural Resources Canada, Revenue Canada, the Solicitor General, Public Works and HRDC. "The panel is based on uniting our means to provide better service for the public as well as to carry out the mission of each of our departments" (Saguenay-Lac St-Jean HRDC, 1999a).

It is a special forum where the various participants discuss their concerns and projects. Unfortunately, the frequent turnover of some federal department and agency representatives sitting on the panel prevented participants from having a clear understanding of the Ambassadeur project and effectively exploiting all of its potential as well as the showcase it provided.

Finally, it should be noted that in each community the CFDC developed meaningful relations with local partners

including school boards, Carrefours emploi-jeunesse, local employment centres, etc.
