



Building community:

A strategy for community, business and local government interaction



in cooperation with



**BUILDING COMMUNITY: A STRATEGY FOR COMMUNITY, BUSINESS AND LOCAL
GOVERNMENT INTERACTION**

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This report was commissioned by STEPS Disability Queensland for the purposes of investigating how regional development on the Sunshine Coast could be strengthened through the better integration of community, business and local government relationships.

Community groups working in all of the sectors on the Sunshine Coast spend a considerable amount of time applying for support for programs or acquitting them. Large organisations employ professional people purely to obtain and acquit grants and support packages. Smaller and more grass roots community groups are not in a position to do this and consequentially often miss out on opportunities.

The private sector, an important group in the support of programs, is sometimes at a loss as to know how to use their diminishing resources most effectively. Developing community programs is not their core business, consequentially they would rather not support programs, than support one that has a negative outcome or has limited benefit.

This research paper highlights some of the barriers that exist between the community groups and private sector and endeavours to find ways that could be found to reduce some of these barriers for a better outcome for the community. It was found that 74% of the business sector respondents had supported community groups in the past, although 19% of these said they would not do it again. With regard to community groups 60% stated they had received funding and support from the business sector and 10% of those would not do it again.

This paper examines some of the potential barriers identified by both groups, and on a positive note gives some suggestions as to how these barriers could be broken or their impact reduced.

This report recommends that:

A working party made up of individuals skilled and experienced in the establishment of private sector/community group partnerships should be formed to develop and deploy a focused strategic framework for building cooperative community partnerships on the Sunshine Coast.

A series of forums should be designed run to bring together members of the business and community sectors for the purpose of enhancing their understanding of the potential mutual benefits of sustainable cooperative partnerships.

A series of workshops on Triple Bottom Line reporting should be offered to businesses focusing on assisting them in identifying how they can incorporate strategies for community partnerships which are aligned to their overall business plan and incorporate measurable goals leading to positive community and business returns.

A series of workshops to assist community groups in building their capacity for entering into mutually beneficial and sustainable partnerships with the business sector. These could focus on areas such as governance, financial accountability and negotiation and contractual agreement writing skills.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report was commissioned by STEPS Disability Queensland for the purposes of investigating how regional development on the Sunshine Coast could be strengthened through the better integration of community, business and local government relationships.

The concept of community is in some ways difficult to describe. An understanding of what makes a community is important in order to address some of the issues facing the Sunshine Coast in the coming years. Traditional values such as looking after neighbours and supporting young people's development are seen as the exception as opposed to the norm.

There is a famous quote from Bill Clinton former President of the United States of America when examining community in America:

'In Florida last week, Governor Lawton Chiles said that the central question of our time was whether we were going to be a community or a crowd. The Hispanic community in America has always been a community, always tried to live by family values, not just talk about them. Now a crowd is a group that occupies the same piece of land, but really has no particular connection to one another. So they elbow and shove and go to and fro until the strongest win and others are left behind.

A community is a group of people who occupy the same piece of land, and recognise their obligations to one another; people who believe they are going up and down together; people who believe they should help protect children and do honour to the elderly and help people make the most of their lives; people who believe in freedom and responsibility; people who believe that we have an obligation to find common ground and sometimes to do the right thing because it's right, even if it's unpopular in the short run' (My Life, Bill Clinton, Vintage 2005)

Driven by rapid growth the Sunshine Coast is approaching a watershed in its history where people are asking 'are we becoming a community or a crowd'? Population increase, lack of infrastructure, companies failing in sectors once thought immune to the up-and-down of the markets are both indicators and drivers of a lack of security in the population. The current "system" promotes a crowd mentality by encouraging community groups to compete with each other for funding, often with no sharing of ideas and working in isolation.

This STEPS Disability Queensland funded research paper explores some of the fundamental problems facing key partners in developing community, the business sector, local government and the not-for-profit community sector. The survey was undertaken for the purposes of identifying any barriers to effective and efficient cooperation between these sectors. STEPS anticipates that discussions resulting from this paper will eventually inspire a more synergistic processes and better outcomes in all areas of Sunshine Coast community development.

2. STUDY METHODOLOGY

A survey to assess the history of support for community groups by the private sector and local government was undertaken. The questionnaire used assessed what potential barriers there were to a new or continuing relationship between the various stakeholder groups and what strategies could be put in place to remove or mitigate the negative impacts relating to the barriers identified.

The survey was a web-based questionnaire using Zoomerang.com. A link to the survey was located on the STEPS Disability Queensland website (STEPS were the sponsor of this research). Emails were sent to potential 4000-5000 respondents through the Community Information Service (CIS) database, local chamber of commerce for distribution to its members and a number of other business and community databases.

At the close of the survey, analysis of the data revealed that some respondents had only partially completed the survey, and some had given a response to more than one of the multiple choice questions. These responses did not reduce the validity of the answers to the questions; in fact it gave greater depth. To standardise the responses, to make them comparable and meaningful, each result is given as a percentage of the total responses to that particular question.

3. RESULTS

A total of 199 respondents accessed the questionnaire, 45% of which were from the business sector and local government and the remaining 55% were from community groups. The questionnaire then directed each respondent into the questions particular to their stakeholder groupings. The following results commence with the business sector responses.

To ensure the responses come from a broad section of the business sector the first question addressed the number of employees the companies employed. The graph below illustrates the percentage of respondents that employed from 1-5 staff to greater than 50 staff.

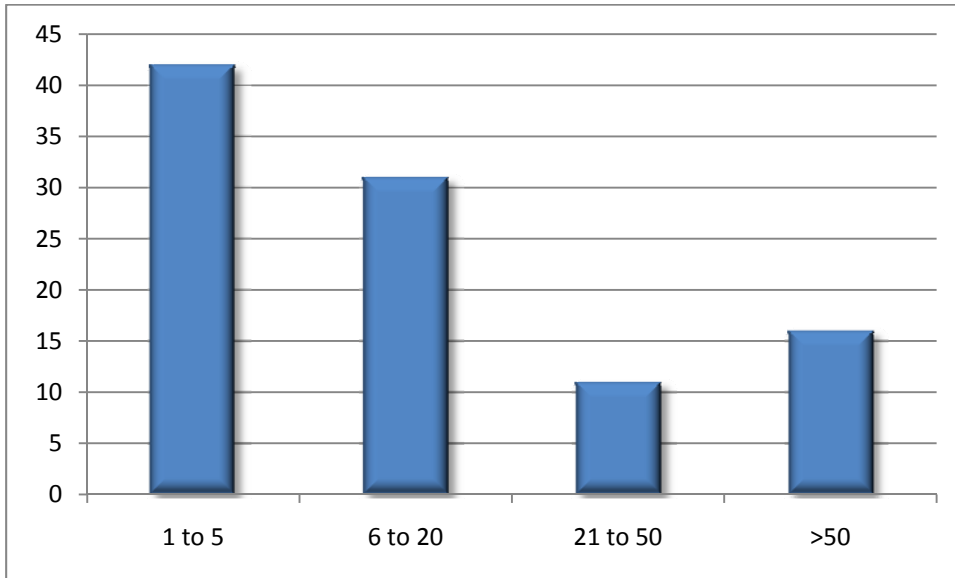


Fig 1: Business respondents – number of staff in organization.

Results from the questionnaire indicated that 65% of the companies involved with the survey were based exclusively on the Sunshine Coast. To get an indication of the variety of business areas the companies were involved in the following results were obtained from the questionnaire.

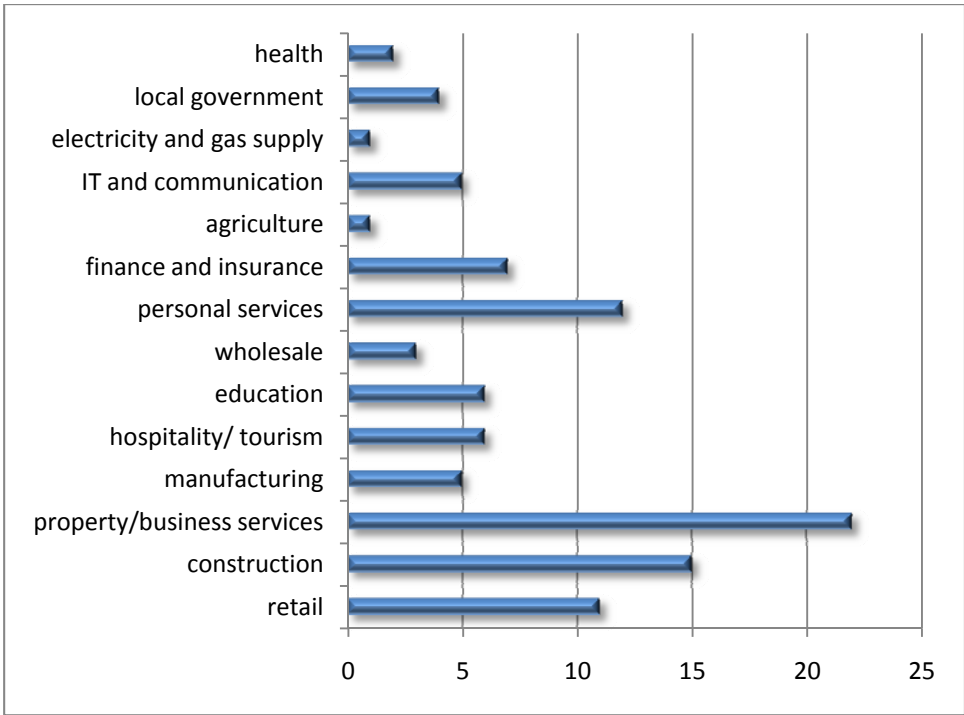


Fig 2: Types of businesses.

To get an indication as to the company’s history in actively supporting community groups the next few questions asked a number of questions concerning the type of support, and if they were happy with the outcome and would they consider supporting groups in the future. Of the total number of businesses involved in the survey 74% indicated they had supported community groups in the past. The graph below indicates the type of support each company gave.

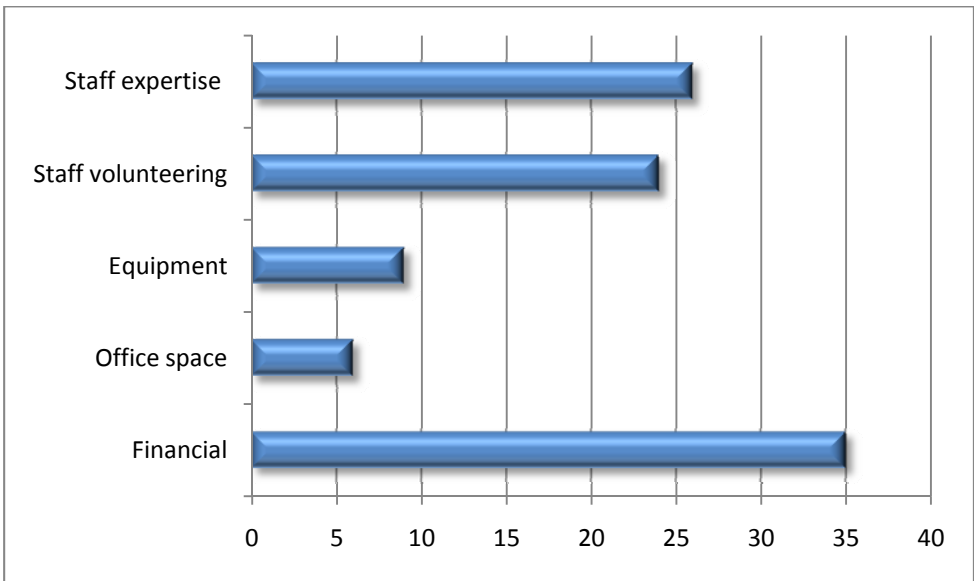


Fig 3: Type of support offered previously by business sector.

Twenty one percent of the companies supporting community group said that their experience with community groups was negative. In a question to all the business respondents, (regardless of whether they had supported groups in the past), 19% said they did not intend to support community groups in the future. To try and learn more about the reasons for not wanting to support groups in the future, a question followed that looked at possible barriers to company support prospects. The following graph illustrates answers to this question.

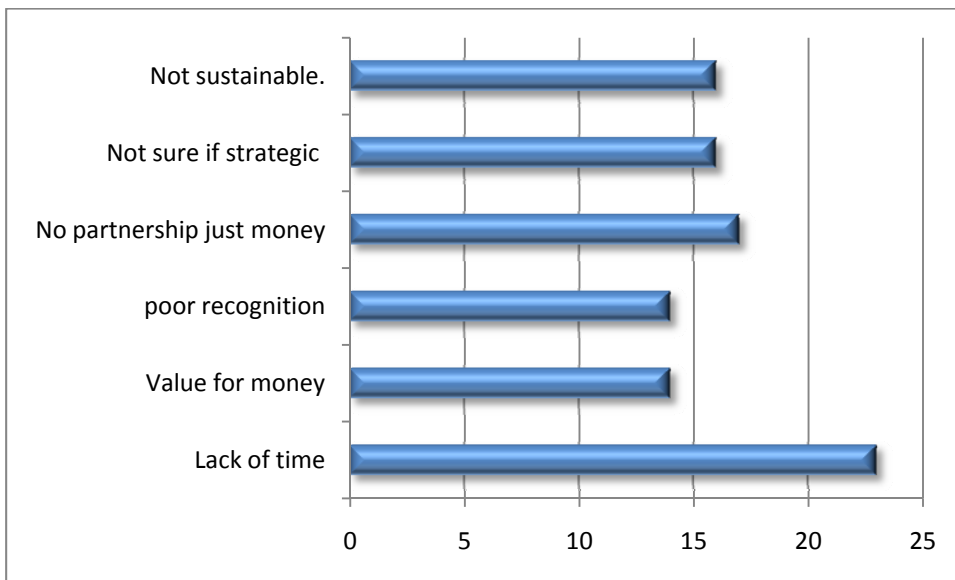


Fig 4: Potential barriers to company support prospects

Business respondents were asked to provide other barriers they have experienced that would prevent them from future support of community groups.

Barriers that stop businesses forming partnerships with community groups:

- Lack of volunteers
- Mainly cost, as my business is quite small and has limited spare capital
- Poor community group set up and actual achievements. Direction provided needs to be strong and committed to stated goals.
- The credentials of the community group, in delivering to the community what they promise.
- Don't know; perhaps perceived political?
- Financial
- Lack of enough governance
- A lack of common understanding of what was being delivered.

- We get nothing back from the community. But it can make you feel good to make a contribution.
- Lack of awareness of what we do and where the partnership opportunities exist
- Ethos
- Need to validate real value of the group to the community.
- Knowledge of community groups and them knowing about us
- Must be in alignment with our KPI's and strategy.
- Quantum of input required
- Disability, work/study timeframe, other family commitments, lack of interest
- To fulfil their end of the partnership, my "partners" would need to trade something of value to my business, expertise, time, or promotion.
- Unreliability and lack of communication.
- We suffer from a severe lack of funding ourselves, so try to provide support for community groups in other ways, eg. promoting them through our website, encourage our members to provide reduced cost for services such as accommodation and dining.
- None at all as long as we can work together and keep it fair for all.

The survey questionnaire then asked the business respondents how important were certain attributes in a community group when making a decision to support them. The following graph illustrates their responses.

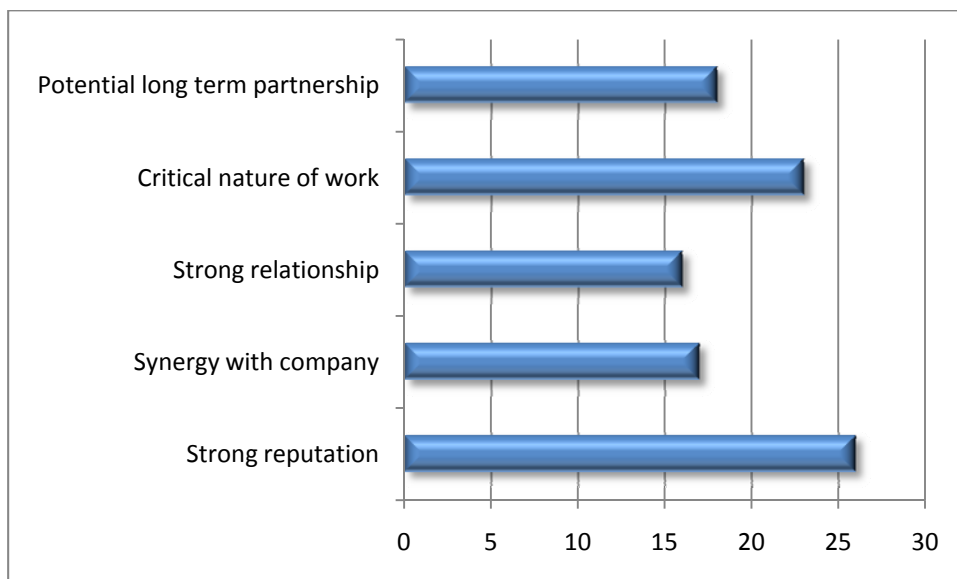


Fig 5: Desirable attributes of community groups when considering support.

Additional comments from the business respondents suggested how improved interaction between the business sector/government and community groups could be achieved.

Suggestions from business community who interaction between the business sector/government and community groups can be achieved:

- Availability of contact details, description of activities and objectives / vision of the community groups so we can ascertain whether they are groups we would like to partner with.
- Community groups should seek suitably qualified mentors to help them interact with the private sector
- Trust and Commitment
- By the provision of a formal means of advertising and understanding specific needs of relevant community groups.
- More information at the formation of the community group to allow private sector people on boards etc to get some entrepreneurial thinking.
- Community Groups will ask companies to sponsor their events etc but most of the time it is sold to us in the form of advertising payments, the more contribute the more you are advertised at the function, this causes medium & small business such as myself to have the view that our contribution will be outweighed by large companies ie Banks etc. Considering our financial positions our contributions are at times larger than those mentioned above when considered on a pro-rata basis. Community groups need to recognise and value smaller business contributions just as much as they do larger ones, this will improve our interaction with them.
- Community groups need to market themselves more, and if they do, to do so in a more professional manner; we hardly ever get approached by community groups.
- Recognition by groups
- Groups should be trustworthy
- An appreciation that long term relationships bear fruit and that understanding the value that the company provides for the community group is measured over the long term but built in the short term.
- Perhaps that it is not possible for the private sector to keep providing for free.
- Guest speakers visiting the school

- Greater understanding of business drivers and commercial outcomes by community groups. Not that there necessarily has to be a commercial outcome for business, but community groups need to understand basic business drivers in order to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.
- Private sector should adopt some corporate responsibility goals and report progress to these in their annual reports.
- Food is good
- Direct approach to senior management work best
- Increased awareness of needs of community groups, ongoing personal contacts established, liaison people employed to do this work, project sharing (not just funding)
- We currently conduct information sessions with groups on our business model, our vision and principles and our management structure to improve understanding and awareness of what we do and how we fit into the community. I believe this has a positive effect on our relationship with the public
- A community group needs longevity and sustainability, so that they have impact in the community, and are also therefore relevant to the business sector.
- This can be difficult as generally people are open to it or they are not. It is finding a way to let people see things from a different perspective which in turn will make them interested to participate
- More education about the organisation ie: let them know the whole picture on the product that you are providing.
- More face to face interaction and not so much over the phone, we got caught in a fraud a couple of years ago which has made us wary of donations and providing things when approached via the phone. Also having head offices locally not at the Gold Coast so if necessary the company can be checked out.
- Providing a list of like-minded organisations on Council's website, so that organisations can meet with others to see whether or not a cohesive partnership can be formed.
- Maybe lots of Open Day complimentary nibbles and drinks or children days to form a relationship and welcome the private sector into their community group. I once went to a progressive dinner where everyone had to change seats to a different table with every course and introducing ourselves and meet everyone, Otherwise just like weddings, everyone keeps to themselves and don't mingle.
- More recognition

That concluded the questions given to the business sector and local government. In turning to the community organisations it was important get a clear picture of the groups in a similar way to the companies. Unlike the business sector, where the majority of respondents were from the Sunshine Coast, with the community groups 54% were located outside the region as well as the Coast. The graph below indicates the number of paid staff and volunteers in the organisations responding to the questionnaire.

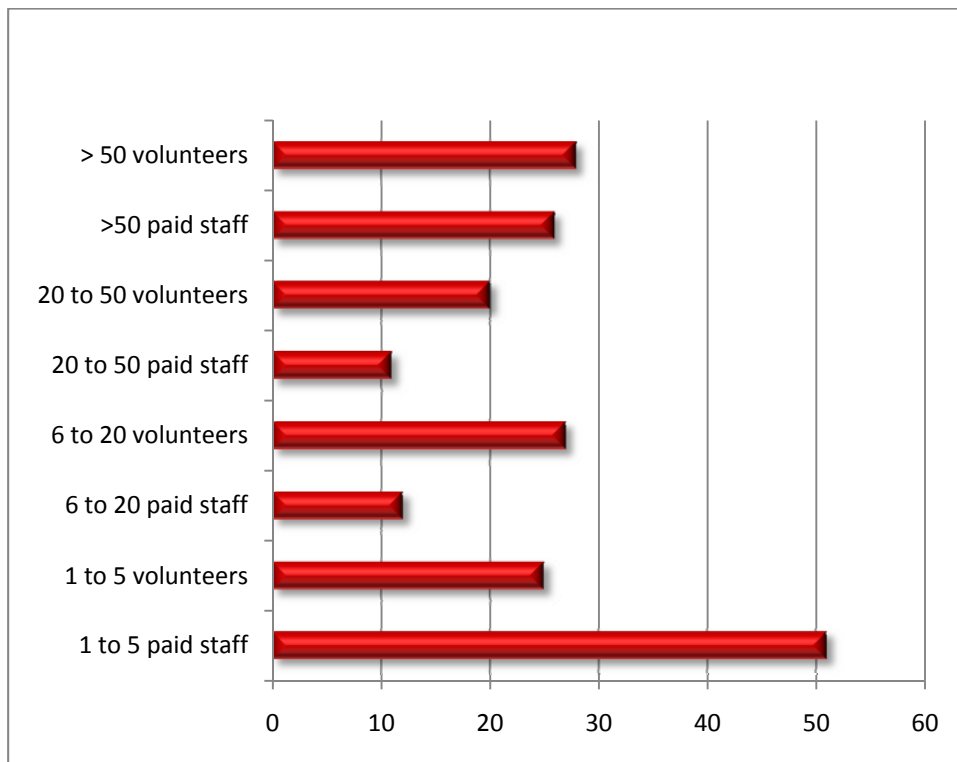


Fig 6: Community group respondents – number of staff and volunteers

The range of community groups responding to the questionnaire was quite broad and graph below illustrates that.

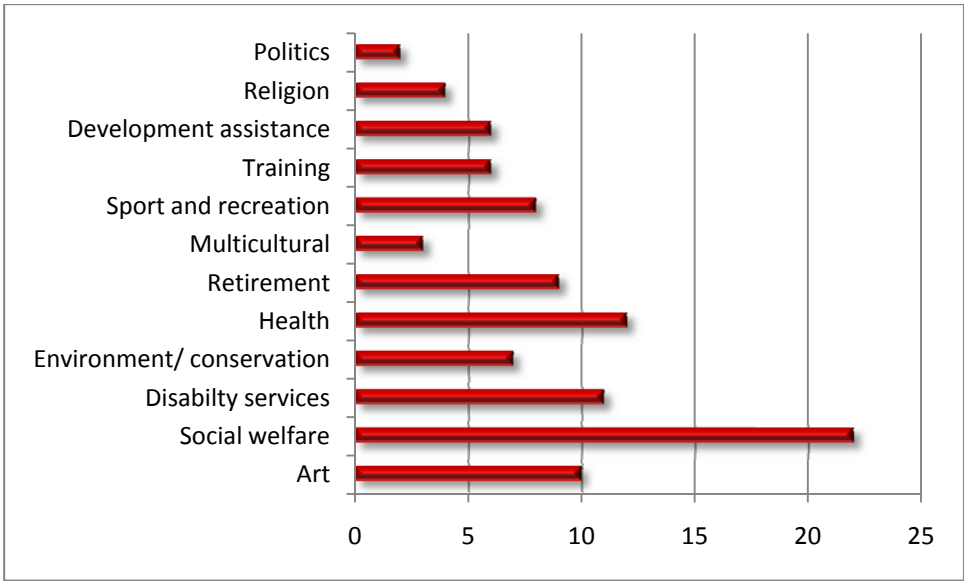


Fig 7: Types of community groups.

The questionnaire continued with a view to trying to ascertain the extent of community groups working with the business sector; the type of assistance provided and their assessment of the value of the assistance. Surprisingly only 60% of the community groups had received support from the business sector. The next graph indicates the type of support they received.

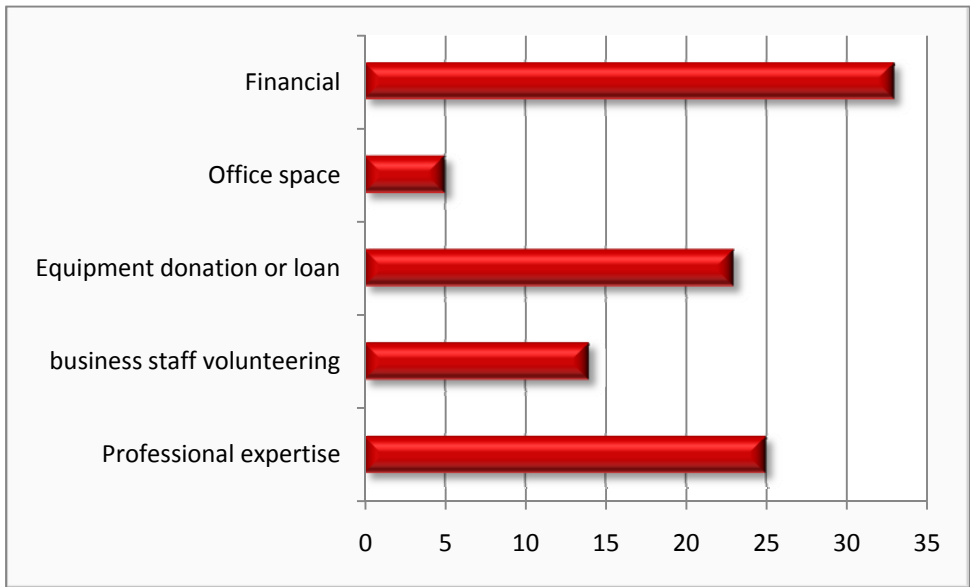


Fig 8: Types of support received by community groups.

Of the 60% who had received support from the private sector only 10% reported a negative experience in the process. Community groups were asked if their organisation would be interested in partnering with the business sector in the future 84 % said they would. In an

attempt to find out how they would get that support a question was asked if their organisation actively looks for potential partners in the business sector only 65% said they did.

Taking financial support out of the equation the vast majority 25% considered they needed professional support to make their organisations more effective. The respondents were then give a list of potential barriers to working with the business sector and asked to select those most likely to be a barrier to them. The graph below illustrates the findings.

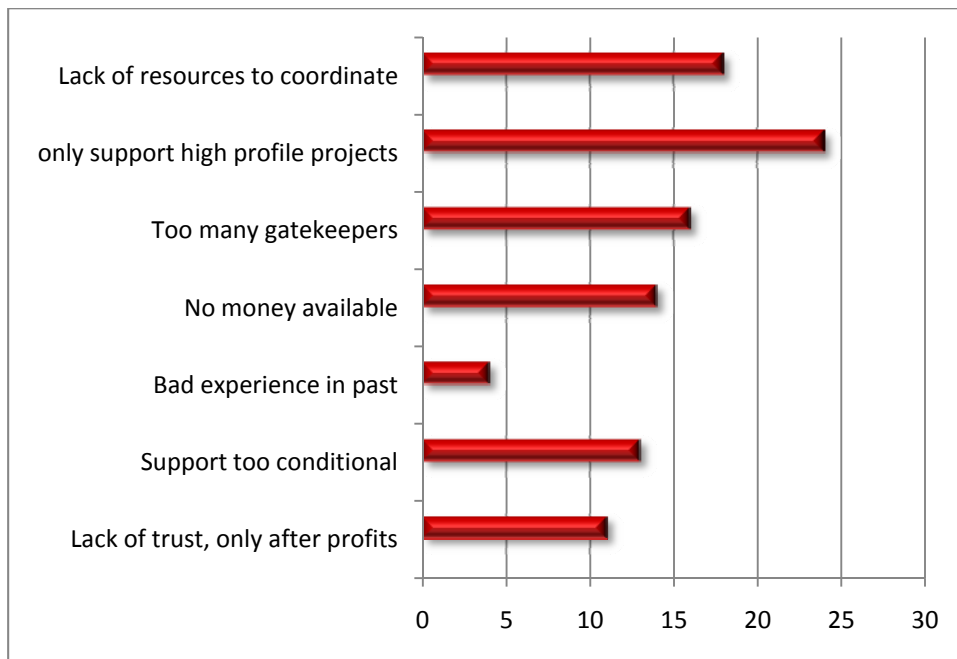


Fig 9: Potential barriers to seeking business sector support.

In a similar way to the business sector questions the community group was asked to provide a list of other barriers that would stop them going for or receiving support from the business sector.

Respondents listing possible barriers that stop community groups partnering with the private sector:

- Possibly there are community groups in competition for funding or business and they do not see the benefits of collaboration. Also some history between orgs.
- We are a not for profit organisation
- Return on investment factors
- Lack of time to make connections

- The myriad of community groups seeking the same outcome. There is in my view a crying need to rationalise and strengthen the community groups on the Sunshine Coast. The current situation creates inefficiencies and a waste of scarce resources. How can we expect private business to support such a situation?
- Ours is a religious group who try to support the needy but religious groups do not attract as much support as charities
- Most of these questions do not apply to a church - so very difficult to answer
- Availability of time as a volunteer
- Conflicting values
- We are not high profile enough for business to be interested
- Philosophy and values not consistent with ours
- Too many charities for such a small area.
- Ethics
- Don't know what we can offer to a private business to make it worthwhile to partner with us

To forge better relationships between groups it is proposed that each group must seek to understand the perceived desirable and undesirable qualities of each side of the relationship as these attributes can make or break partnerships. The graph below identifies several attributes of potential business partners deemed desirable by community sector partners.

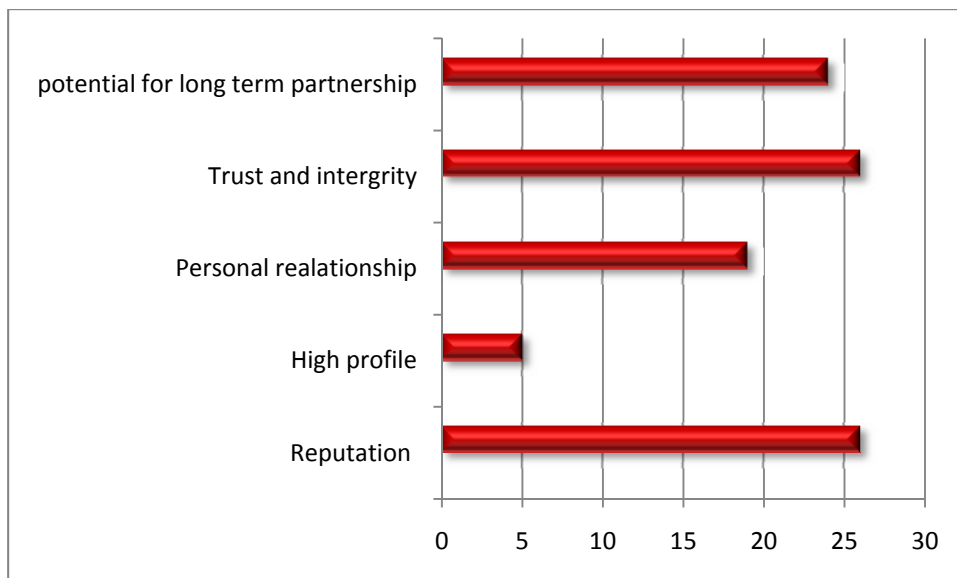


Fig 10: Importance of particular attributes of potential business partners

In concluding the survey the community groups were asked to provide ideas as to how interaction between them and the business sector could be achieved.

Suggestions from community groups as to how to improve interaction between themselves and the private sector:

- More consultation
- Funding is always necessary
- Presentations must empathise the ROI to the Private Sector Co. Stay away from a "bleeding heart" approach. Give them something that is extra and they weren't expecting. Seek to have a 4 to 6 month feedback meeting where we can ask them, "Are we pleasing you?", "What else can we do?"
- Identifying common goals in the community.
- Continuously managing and growing relationships and partnerships to achieve common goals to grow the region
- Liaise with School Groups and Councils
- Private companies should come and visit
- Heard of an event that was held in Brisbane to which private sector was invited to view a range of not-for-profit organisations that may initialise partnerships - maybe this could be duplicated for the Sunshine Coast area
- Private sector attending community meetings to network with orgs
- More education and advocacy. Some way of advertising cheaply and getting information out there. Having bigger benefits for private sector. Better coordination and interaction between community groups. Standardised ways of receiving funding so no lack of fairness.
- Regional gathering of business leaders from both sectors. It is interesting that in recent business awards the criteria has excluded community not for profit groups.
- Personal approach
- More promotion of private sector companies interested in support community sector
- I've found that there can be an 'us and them' attitude which does not allow for positive partnerships
- "Getting to know programmes" that focus initially on relationship building with individuals in both organisations

- Less formal meetings, more incentives for private sector e.g. advertising, wider community involvement
- By presenting financial information to show \$\$\$s contributed to a community by volunteers. Encourage private sector to feel moral obligation to contribute in kind
- Communication between parties
- Opportunity for companies to come along to events as part of their social club/Christmas part etc
- Maybe a networking opportunity to share requirements and opportunities
- Community workshops

4. SURVEY VALIDITY

Data collected as a result of the survey indicates a broad distribution of businesses and community groups have a variety of current and past partnership arrangements. A majority of community groups also have a relationship with local government (Sunshine Coast Regional Council). The number of employees and volunteers indicates a distribution in-line with ABS statistics for the Sunshine Coast. The type of activities and enterprises the organisations were involved in covered all similar spectrum of activities to national averages (ref....). Overall findings indicate that the survey sample produced a reproducible set of results and hence the results in other sections of the survey could be relied on as being typical of most community groups and private enterprises on the Sunshine Coast.

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 BUSINESS VIEWPOINT

- 74% of businesses had supported community groups with 35% of that support being in the form of cash donations.
- 23-26% of support was in the form of staff volunteering or staff expertise.
- Only 19% of the respondents indicated they would not support community groups again in the future.
- The most common reason for not supporting activities in the future was lack of time.

- There was a general feeling that projects appeared to be non-sustainable and not conducive to forming a partnership (just giving money).
- Many were not sure if the project were strategic for the Sunshine Coast.

Poor community group set-up and actual achievements. Direction provided needs to be strong and committed to stated goals.

We suffer from a severe lack of funding ourselves, so try to provide support for community groups in other ways, eg. promoting them through our website, encourage our members to provide reduced cost for services such as accommodation and dining.

- Indications from this section of the survey are that community groups need to be innovative in their requests for support.
- In many instances, support other than finance is far more sustainable.
- The most important attribute the private sector were looking for when deciding if they were going to support an activity was reputation.
- General interest in supporting activities provided there is a level of accountability, and project methods and intended outcomes are known.

Community Groups will ask companies to sponsor their events etc but most of the time it is sold to us in the form of advertising payments, the more contribute the more you are advertised at the function, this causes medium & small business such as myself to have the view that our contribution will be outweighed by large companies ie Banks etc. Considering our financial positions our contributions are at times larger than those mentioned above when considered on a pro-rata basis. Community groups need to recognise and value smaller business contributions just as much as they do larger ones, this will improve our interaction with them.

Greater understanding of business drivers and commercial outcomes by community groups. Not that there necessarily has to be a commercial outcome for business, but community groups need to understand basic business drivers in order to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

Perhaps that it is not possible for the private sector to keep providing for free.

It would appear that what is required is to look at ways to be innovative, transparent and honest in approaches to the private sector then there could be a better outcome not only for community groups but also for the Sunshine Coast community.

5.2 COMMUNITY GROUP VIEWPOINT

In examining the data of the responses from the community group sector, a reasonable picture as to how the sector looks at business sector support on the Sunshine Coast has been identified.

- 60% of the respondents had received private sector support, primarily in the form of financial contributions.
- Some organisations were being innovative in receiving in-kind support, such as staff expertise and volunteering.
- A similar number to the private sector had a negative experience with the support arrangements.
- While 84% said they would be interested in support from the business sector only 65% actively looked for that support.
- 20% would like business support but are not prepared to actively look for that support. This maybe an indicator of a more fundamental problem that exists in this sector, lack of time, lack of knowledge of the private sector, both big and small, and capacity to present their material in a fashion that would be attractive to donors.
- The perceptions by this sector as to the barriers that would stop them getting funding from the business sector gives another indication of lack of understanding of the donors groups and highlights stereotypical perceptions.
- Nearly 25% considered that the private sector only supports high profile projects.
- Larger companies tend to support high profile activities
- The majority of small-to-medium enterprises, along with some larger businesses, support local and small activities.
- Both the community and business sectors identified a critical lack of resources to coordinate their activities.

The myriad of community groups seeking the same outcome. There is in my view a crying need to rationalise and strengthen the community groups on the Sunshine Coast. The current situation creates inefficiencies and a waste of scarce resources. How can we expect private business to support such a situation?

Don't know what we can offer to a private business to make it worthwhile to partner with us

Knowing existing barriers can be a good first step to understanding how to break them down. There are a lot of opportunities to break down the barriers between the business and community sectors providing they acknowledge each other as equals seeking mutually desirable outcomes for the Sunshine Coast community in cooperation with government.

It is interesting to look at Figure.10 and see that most favourable attributes a business can have in the eyes of the community sector are reputation, trust and integrity, which is exactly what that private sector seeks for in community groups they support. There were positive indications from the community sector that they recognized the need to improve the relationships between the groups.

Presentations must empathise the ROI to the Private Sector Co. Stay away from a "bleeding heart" approach. Give them something that is extra and they weren't expecting. Seek to have a four to six month feedback meeting where we can ask them, "Are we pleasing you?", "What else can we do?"

Heard of an event that was held in Brisbane to which private sector was invited to view a range of not-for-profit organisations that may initialise partnerships - maybe this could be duplicated for the Sunshine Coast area

More education and advocacy. Some way of advertising cheaply and getting information out there. Having bigger benefits for private sector. Better coordination and interaction between community groups. Standardised ways of receiving funding so no lack of fairness.

There are many way that the sectors can work together in a more effective way, not just to make projects more efficient, but to improve the “state of the region” as far as social and overall community development is concerned.

6. MOVING FORWARD - RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve the outcomes for people in the community on the Sunshine Coast will require an innovative and proactive approach from all sectors of the region. Positive change will occur by fostering and sustaining conditions under which cooperation across social sectors can be achieved. It must be recognized that a commitment to building community is the key balance to economic and environmental considerations when planning for sustainable growth on the Sunshine Coast. In fact, history shows that growth without building of “community” is unsustainable.

The first but perhaps most difficult objective to achieve is to break down divisions within our community. That is recognise that people, business, community groups, government, education etc, all make up the community. Take away one and it does not work. All parties contribute a different skill set none of which is more important than any of the others. There must be recognition that they are all part of the community and stop working in isolation and in sometimes in opposition.

RECOMMENDATION 1

A working party made up of individuals skilled and experienced in the establishment of private sector/community group partnerships should be formed to develop and deploy a focused strategic framework for building cooperative community partnerships on the Sunshine Coast. The appropriate body to auspice this would be the Sunshine Coast Regional Council.

RECOMMENDATION 2

A series of forums should be designed run to bring together members of the business and community sectors for the purpose of enhancing their understanding of the potential mutual benefits of sustainable cooperative partnerships. The appropriate body to auspice this would be the University of the Sunshine Coast in liaison with the working group in recommendation 1 above.

The provision and receiving of non-financial (in-kind) supports (for example, staff volunteers, professional expertise, office space) is rarely considered and/or misunderstood by both sectors. There is a pre-disposition towards financial exchange as the only means of partnership on both

sides. Many businesses are also becoming increasingly interested in the accountability of community groups, and how their financial support is being used.

RECOMMENDATION 3

A series of workshops on Triple Bottom Line reporting should be offered to businesses focusing on assisting them in identifying how they can incorporate strategies for community partnerships which are aligned to their overall business plan and incorporate measurable goals leading to positive community and business returns. The appropriate body to auspice this would be the University of the Sunshine Coast in liaison with the working group in recommendation 1 above.

RECOMMENDATION 4

A series of workshops to assist community groups in building their capacity for entering into mutually beneficial and sustainable partnerships with the business sector. These could focus on areas such as governance, financial accountability and negotiation and contractual agreement writing skills. The appropriate body to auspice this would be the University of the Sunshine Coast in liaison with the working group in recommendation 1 above.

It is recognized that the above recommendations have direct and indirect resourcing issues and that contributions for all sectors with interests in the Sunshine Coast Region would need to be sourced to realise the proposed way forward.

In closing, it is clear that this research provides only an elementary snapshot of the current state of cooperation across the sectors surveyed on the Sunshine Coast. Further research focused on the critical concerns expressed by respondents will build on the understanding gained, and increase the likelihood of effective strategic planning and action.