



STEWARDSHIP CENTRE  
FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

# STEWARDSHIP WORKS!

A CORE FUNDING PROGRAM FOR  
STEWARDSHIP AND CONSERVATION  
ORGANIZATIONS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

EVALUATION SUMMARY REPORT

October 22, 2012



**STEWARDSHIP CENTRE**  
FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

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## Preface

*Stewardship Works!* was a pilot project initiated and managed by the Stewardship Centre for British Columbia (SCBC) from 2008 to 2010. During these three years, the project provided core funding of \$5,000 per year to eight stewardship groups and \$2500 to two stewardship groups in the province and evaluated the impacts of this funding. This is a summary report of the *Stewardship Works!* pilot project. A full project evaluation report can be found at the SCBC website [www.StewardshipCentre.bc.ca](http://www.StewardshipCentre.bc.ca).

As a result of the *Stewardship Works!* pilot project, it was found that:

- Financial capacity is essential to organizational capacity, health and sustainability;
- Overhead is an essential part of running an effective non-profit organization;
- Accountability of the uses and outcomes of core funding can be effectively measured;
- Core funding can be used to increase groups' organizational capacity, leading to greater stability and viability; and
- Small amounts of core funding can be distributed economically and tracked effectively, and can generate a wide range of measurable impacts.

This summary report is organized into four main sections, beginning with an introduction to the *Stewardship Works!* program and its objectives. Section Two provides an explanation of the fundamental importance of the core funding *Stewardship Works!* was designed to provide, while Section Three gives a description of the *Stewardship Works!* pilot project and results achieved. Section Four discusses lessons learned and Section Five offers recommendations for the future.



## Acknowledgements

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A huge thank you to the project Advisory Committee: Liana Ayach, Lindsay Gardner, Gretchen Harlow, Sue Hempill, Edwin Hubert, , ZoAnn Morten, , Liz Stanlake and Naomi Tabata. The ten participating stewardship groups also deserve recognition both for their input and commitment to the pilot project and reporting requirements and for their passionate dedication to stewardship. Our thanks go out to: Alouette River Management Society, Christina Lake Stewardship Society, Como Watershed Group, Delkatla Sanctuary Society, Mid-Vancouver Island Habitat Enhancement Society, Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance, Sea Change Marine Conservation Society, Vanderhoof Fish and Game Club, Williams Lake Field Naturalists/ Scout Island Nature Centre, and the Salmon River Watershed Roundtable. Thanks also to the evaluation consultant, Sue Staniforth, for her tireless efforts and expertise in evaluation. The project evaluation report was written by Sue Staniforth, DG Blair and Edwin Hubert.

The report was produced by the Stewardship Centre for British Columbia, 2012.

The Stewardship Centre also supports and delivers other capacity building programs, including a Capacity Building Resource Directory and our stewardship group Capacity Building Tool. Information on all the Stewardship Centre programs and videos profiling *Stewardship Works!* are available at: [www.StewardshipCentre.bc.ca](http://www.StewardshipCentre.bc.ca).



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## 1. The Story of *Stewardship Works!*

*Anne is a dedicated stewardship volunteer in the Interior of BC. She helps coordinate stream and lake monitoring, and is a facilitator in education programs for school groups and the general public. Her group plays a key role in protecting and conserving her community's natural heritage.*

*Anne knows the importance of these activities. She realizes that people need direct, hands-on experience through programs like hers in order to care about lake and stream habitats. Anne also knows that governments can't plan and regulate land use properly without the leadership and data provided by stewardship and conservation groups. But Anne is worried. As project funding becomes increasingly scarce and the lack of core funding leaves many groups struggling, her volunteer work, her group and, most importantly, her community's sensitive habitats are all in jeopardy.*

*Stewardship Works!* was created to help support organizations like Anne's — organizations that are the heart, hands and legs of stewardship and conservation across British Columbia. They directly and indirectly provide valuable conservation services and lend assistance to local communities and all levels of government.

Currently, stewardship groups in BC tend to be funded on a short-term, project-by-project basis with limited or no allowance for administrative costs. Groups are left with few resources to fund critical core organizational activities such as proposal writing, strategic planning, project and volunteer coordination, partnership building, communications, networking and volunteer training. These are currently not eligible for funding because they are considered "core organizational expenditures." Yet, they are vital to the success of every stewardship organization. Surveys and interviews spanning the past ten years confirm that diminishing access to funds that support core activities greatly inhibits the effective delivery of existing stewardship projects and programs (Anderson, 2003; Gardner, 2003; Harvey, 2004; Smailes, 2006). The *Stewardship Works!* program grew from the research that identified lack of core funding as the number one barrier faced by stewardship groups.

*Stewardship groups in British Columbia ... directly and indirectly provide valuable conservation services and lend assistance to all levels of governments and their communities.*



On May 23, 2007, over thirty representatives from the federal and provincial governments, local stewardship groups and their funding partners participated in a one-day workshop designed to give them input into the design of the *Stewardship Works!* program. The workshop participants came up with the following desirable outcomes for a core funding program:

- Increase social and organizational capacity (health) of stewardship groups, resulting in an increase in conservation and protection of natural values;
- Increase volunteer involvement in stewardship activities;
- Recognize the contribution of local stewardship organizations;
- Enable organizations to leverage additional contributions; and
- Evaluate stewardship effectiveness.

From these beginnings, the SCBC developed, tested and evaluated a model that directly supported basic organizational needs instead of providing project-based funding. The aim was to test whether providing stewardship groups with small amounts of regular core funding over a sustained period of time would result in more effective on-the-ground stewardship for established, motivated organizations. The SCBC also recognized the challenge of building capacity within stewardship organizations without creating reliance on a core funding program for permanent assistance.

## 1.1 Stewardship Works! Program Objectives

The *Stewardship Works!* program aims to:

- Increase the number of volunteers participating in stewardship, resulting in increased watershed and habitat conservation activities;
- Showcase the increase in habitat protection, conservation and restoration works resulting from providing stable core funding to community stewardship groups;
- Evaluate and communicate the benefits and impacts of the *Stewardship Works!* core funding model; and
- Strengthen existing and build new partnerships for on-going delivery of the *Stewardship Works!* program.



## 2. The Fundamental Importance of Core Funding

The *Stewardship Works!* program defines core funding as “small amounts of ongoing financial support for community-based groups to maintain and build capacity associated with administrating and operating the organization and managing volunteers”. Generally, core funding supports operational capacity and is not directly related to projects. Currently, the amount of overall granting funding devoted to core funding is very small. While no specific data are available for British Columbia, a major U.S. study found that less than 20% of grants from the largest 1,200 private and community foundations were earmarked for general operating support (Foundation Center, 2005, cited in GEO, 2007). Research shows that grant-makers rarely cover all the associated direct and indirect costs of funded projects, making core funding that much more essential (York, 2005).

*“[A]n underlying assumption in many funder grantee relationships is that the funder can’t trust its non-profit partners to not misuse unrestricted funds. Yet, the result of a steady diet of restricted project-based funding is non-profits hobbled in their ability to strengthen their infrastructures, have flexibility to respond to new or changing conditions, plan for the long term, invest in staff and technology — all those things that any business...needs to do to be successful over the long haul.” (GEO, 2007)*

Knowing that many funders will not cover core costs, non-profit organizations traditionally under-report this type of expense. The *Non-profit Overhead Cost Study* (2009), which completed over 1,500 in-depth surveys of non-profit organizations, found that the persistent under-funding of core or general operating costs is widespread. This leads to two problems: First, non-profits, feeling pressured to meet expectations, spend too little on overhead and under-report their expenditures, thus perpetuating funders’ unrealistic thinking. Second, funders expect grantees to do more and more with less and less—a cycle that slowly starves non-profits.

### Measuring the Impact of Core Funding

*It is difficult to measure the impact of providing core funding to an organization – which is one of main reasons funders are reticent to provide it. Many grant-makers object to the perceived loss of control that comes with unrestricted funds. Not knowing how the monies will be spent makes it difficult for funders to assess results and impacts. Some grant-makers are concerned about a potential loss of accountability, and others have concerns about being overwhelmed with proposals if core funding was offered (GEO, 2007). Another concern is that providing core funding might set up a “maintenance role” for funders: one that may make a non-profit overly reliant on the funder and therefore unable to sustain operations if the funds are withdrawn (Brest, 2003). Moreover, many funders seem to regard overhead or basic operating costs as a poor use of their funding, making the acquisition of these funds that much more difficult.*





*“The general view of donors, the media, and even many of the organizations that evaluate and rate nonprofits is that overhead is bad and therefore less overhead is always better. While understandable, such thinking is self-defeating – and it represents one of the major obstacles to remedying the leadership deficit.”*  
(GEO, 2007)

*Over time, funders expect grantees to do more and more with less and less—a cycle that slowly starves non-profits.*

Providing stable core funding has been identified as a tangible action that would have a positive impact on the stability of stewardship groups. This would result in groups being better able to effectively and efficiently deliver a variety of projects and programs (Beaumont, 2007).

### 3. Stewardship Works! Pilot Project

The *Stewardship Works!* three-year pilot project (2008-2010) provided core funding to ten selected stewardship groups across British Columbia. Its goal was to assess and document the impacts of a core funding model that supports the basic needs of a stewardship organization. The intent of the pilot project was to frame the discussion around how to best fund stewardship organizations for success.

#### 3.1 Stewardship Works! Advisory Committee

In the fall of 2007, following a review of current research and stewardship group needs assessments, a Project Advisory Committee was formed. The Committee, which was made up of experienced stakeholders including representatives from stewardship groups, other non-profits, funding agencies, government ministries and an evaluation consultant, was a key element in providing administrative and logistical support to the pilot.



### 3.2 Evaluation Methods

The SCBC saw this project as an opportunity to develop a methodology to effectively track, document and demonstrate core funding impacts without onerous reporting requirements. An evaluation consultant was contracted to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the pilot in order to document and quantify the effects of core funding expenditures and ensure that accountabilities for core funding were kept separate from project-related funds. The evaluation and documentation tools and templates were developed collaboratively with input from all participants and stakeholders, and have been made available to encourage similar initiatives. The consultant used a mixed-method evaluation framework using developmental and participatory evaluation methodologies and qualitative and quantitative assessments of program objectives and outcomes. The small number of non-profit groups (ten) who participated in the *Stewardship Works!* initiative is a limitation of this study, as it precludes extensive quantitative statistical analysis of the data.

*The SCBC saw an opportunity to develop a methodology to effectively track, document and demonstrate core funding impacts...*

### 3.3 Selection of Participating Stewardship Groups

To be eligible for participation in the *Stewardship Works!* pilot project, stewardship groups had to:

- Demonstrate at least five years of active, continuous operation;
- Have sufficient ability and resources to undertake projects and activities over the pilot's three-year timeframe;
- Be a non-government community-based conservation/stewardship organization with a solid base of active volunteers; and
- Be able to provide baseline data on core funding costs.

The selection criteria specified groups with:

- A clearly defined vision and mission
- An established and accountable governance structure
- A demonstrated need for core funding
- A clear plan as to how core funding would enhance volunteer recruitment and retention
- A plan for increasing and/or supporting volunteers
- A willingness to participate in focus groups and/or workshops to help design the evaluation framework and interpret data collected.



*Stewardship Works!* grants also had to be matched one-to-one with cash, donated materials, volunteer labour, and/or other contributions. This criterion was established to ensure that the participating groups were established and viable. Application forms were sent out to selected groups and completed applications were compiled by the SCBC Coordinator. Thirty applications were received and nine participating groups were selected by an Advisory Committee, the evaluator and SCBC staff at a meeting in mid-March, 2008 (Table 1). One group joined the study later and received funds for two years.

The *Stewardship Works!* pilot program provided core funding amounts of \$5,000 per year to ten groups in nine regions for three consecutive years: 2008 – 2010 (Table 1). Two Vancouver Island groups opted to split these funds and received \$2,500 each annually. During 2008, no group from the Upper Fraser Region was selected due to a lack of applicants; however, the Vanderhoof Fish and Game Club was selected to participate in 2009 and received equivalent funding at that time.

Acceptable uses of *Stewardship Works!* core funds included:

- Volunteer management
- Data entry (keeping track of volunteer time, finances, etc.)
- Project application writing and/or promoting the NGO to funders
- Reporting/outreach/education/websites
- Representation at events, meetings, etc.
- Strategic planning (vision, goals, and objectives of the non-profit)
- Financial audits
- Building broad community presence and membership

Table 1: Stewardship Groups Participating in the *Stewardship Works!* Pilot

Region	Stewardship Group	Acronym	Funding \$\$ Total
Okanagan Region	Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance	OSCA	15,000
Vancouver Island	Sea Change Marine Conservation Society	SC	7,500
Vancouver Island	Mid-Van. Island Habitat Enhancement Society	MVIHE	7,500
Fraser Valley	Alouette River Management Society	ARMS	15,000
North	Delkatla Sanctuary Society	DSS	15,000
Kootenays	Christina Lake Stewardship Society	CLSS	15,000
Upper Fraser	Vanderhoof Fish and Game Club	VFG	10,000
Cariboo	Williams Lake Field Naturalists/ Scout Island Nature Centre	SINC	15,000
Vancouver Region	Como Watershed Group	CWG	15,000
Thompson Region	Salmon River Watershed Roundtable	SRWR	15,000
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>135,000</b>



### 3.4 Use of Pilot Funds

*Stewardship Works!* core funding was used in a variety of ways depending on the needs of each organization (Table 2). Expenses for participation at community events topped the list of fund use, followed by volunteer support, community project coordination and support and strategic planning sessions. Specific key uses of funds included: staff time (volunteer and paid), supplies and materials for community events, refreshments and materials for volunteers working on projects, and planning sessions (both strategic and financial).

Table 2: Use of *Stewardship Works!* Core Funding

Use of Core Funding by Groups	Total # of Groups Selecting Indicator
Attendance at community events	9
Volunteer support	8
Community projects coordination and support	8
Strategic planning	8
Support for Board of Directors	7
Grant applications completed	6
Development of community partnerships	6
Media contacts, media articles, press releases	6
Volunteer coordinator support	5
Conference fees and travel costs	4
Volunteer training	4
Participation at regional conferences and meetings	3

### 3.5 *Stewardship Works!* Pilot Results Achieved

#### 3.5.1 A positive perspective

As a result of the *Stewardship Works!* core funding, 8 out of 10 participating stewardship groups noted an improved ability to recruit, manage and retain their volunteers – the people who carry out the stewardship work on the ground (Table 3). Three groups spoke about the core funds enabling them to retain a volunteer coordinator who, with core funds, also had resources to recruit, engage and support volunteers. The core funds also provided support to liaise with community members; recruit volunteers and keep them informed of current projects; host appreciation events; and provide refreshments, recognition certificates and thank-you gifts. All of these core activities played an important role in volunteer satisfaction and increased or stabilized volunteer numbers. Groups also noted that they spent

*As a result of the *Stewardship Works!* core funding, 8 out of 10 participating stewardship groups noted an improved ability to recruit, manage and retain their volunteers.*



more time on core stewardship activities and less time justifying legitimate core funding needs to other funding organizations. Ultimately, volunteer stewards had a more positive perspective about their own organization and the work that they do.

*“...the (Stewardship Works!) resources helped us to fund ...a consistent voice at the end of the phone who recognizes volunteers and shows appreciation for their work goes a long way to ensure they’ll come back...” (CLSS)*

*“ Just a bit of money makes all the difference... Stewardship Works! core funding was used to cover costs such as volunteer insurance, materials like biodegradable twine and gloves, coffee and hot chocolate on those cold days...” (SRWR)*

*“For 2010, Stewardship Works core funding has enabled us to continue the Volunteer Coordinator Position... (her) primary goals are to focus on Society capacity building in the form of bringing in new directors, members, and volunteers, and to aid us with all of our programs and projects.” (CLSS)*

Table 3: Qualitative Indicators of Core Funding Impacts, in order of frequency cited:

Qualitative Indicators	Total # of Groups Selecting Indicator
Improved positivity among long-time stewardship volunteers	8
Increased profile and support of the group in the community	8
Increase in staff skills, volunteer satisfaction and partnership development	6
Increase in number of changes in OCP’s, bylaws, policies that support sustainability and conservation values	6
More reflective practices and evaluation in the groups	5
More social marketing programs	4
More documentation and learning from success stories and case studies	4
Increase in skills in the volunteer community	4
Increased skills and knowledge transfer from stewardship work to job and home life	4



### 3.5.2 Increased volunteer numbers

Eight of the ten *Stewardship Works!* pilot groups reported an increase the number of volunteers over the period of the initiative (Graph 1). Groups felt that one important impact of the core funding grants was their increased ability to engage volunteers in well-planned, relevant and satisfying stewardship activities, versus having volunteers engage in “survival” activities, such as fund-raising, to keep a group viable. Many of the groups spoke to the importance of being able to provide a bit of money to volunteers for small, miscellaneous purchases that made a big difference in volunteer participation. Two groups reported that their volunteer numbers had stayed the same (or were slightly less) but noted that simply increasing volunteer numbers was not directly relevant to their sustainability and success.

*Eight of the ten Stewardship Works! pilot groups reported an increase in the number of volunteers over the period of the initiative.*

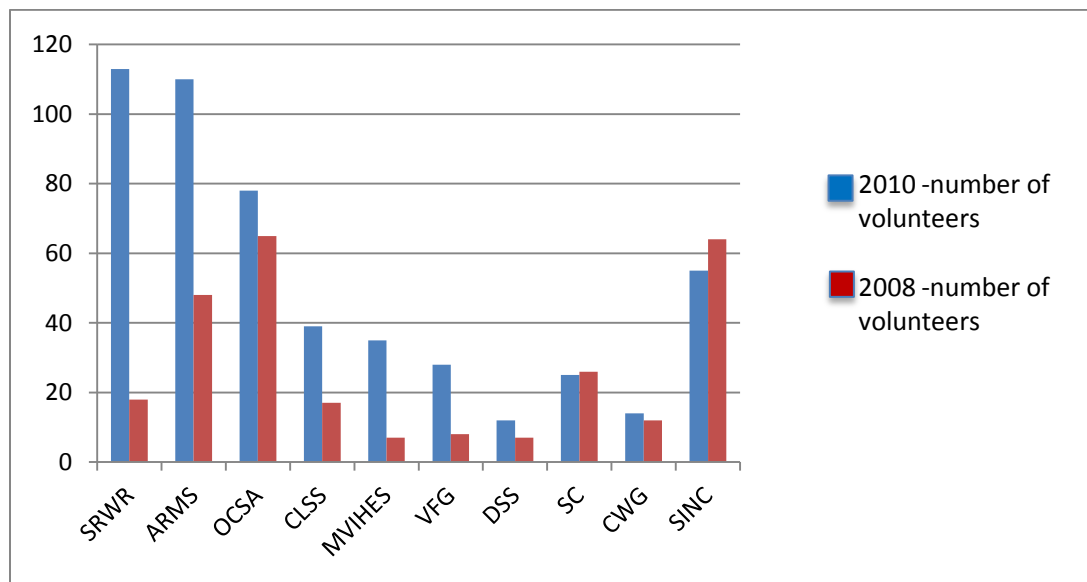
Having the capacity to support volunteers with the required tools, attention and refreshments ensured a better volunteer experience overall, positively impacting stewardship project outcomes, volunteer satisfaction, and resulting in the retention of those volunteers over the *Stewardship Works!* project timeline.

*“ARMS was able to overall attract three new board members.. . In 2009, we had an accountant join the team, who has now taken over the role of treasurer. The Stewardship Works! has increased our [EcoCamps] volunteer base every year ....also, over the three years, we have recruited 15 new volunteers [for the fall spawner surveys] that have remained involved in the project from year to year.” (ARMS)*

*“Our volunteer numbers have increased over the past three years because we had the base funding to be assured that a dialogue with the community could be maintained. As a result, the SRWR has expanded its rapport into areas of the watershed using Stewardship Works! funding... which are critical to the water management issue currently being addressed.” (SRWR)*



Graph 1: Number of Pilot Group Volunteers: 2008 – 2010



### 3.5.3 Increased skills, volunteer satisfaction and partnership development

Groups used some of the *Stewardship Works!* funds for volunteer training, which ranged from formal, technical skills training (such as aquatic invertebrate identification and book-keeping) to less formal skills (such as staffing a nature house and setting up a visitor booth). Funding was also used for planning and conducting more stewardship activities and creating more media submissions and improved websites. All these activities improved the groups' skill base, led to a higher community profile and partnership options, and increased volunteer satisfaction. In the last year of the pilot, a related indicator was noted: the increased ability of several groups to offer support and resources to other stewardship partners within their region. This "paying it forward" is a sign of increased group capacity, and indicates how important it is that core funding be flexible in its targets.

*This "paying it forward" is a sign of increased group capacity and indicates how important it is that core funding be flexible in its targets.*

*"This [training volunteers] is most important for us, as we have time to train volunteers that can then help with displays, programs and hosting." (SINC)*

*"[Volunteer Coordinator]... also continued her training in donation and fund raising activities via grant writing and contact work with businesses, foundations, and individuals." (OCSA)*



### 3.5.4 Increased outreach and community programs

All of the *Stewardship Works!* groups spoke of the “gift of time” that the core funds provided them. These funds were used for public outreach: attending community meetings and public planning sessions and building new relationships and partnerships. Nine of the ten groups indicated an increase in the number of meetings and events attended, and eight groups increased the number of new programs they provided. Other outreach activities included writing newspaper and newsletter articles, submitting press releases, updating their websites, and submitting events calendars to the local media. These outreach activities increased the groups’ community profile and were also effective volunteer recruitment tools. Groups spoke of being able to deliver more existing programs due to an increase in volunteers and/or a stable staff base, and of being able to use the funds to leverage additional dollars that enhanced and increased their own programming.

*“The Stewardship Works! funding has allowed us to increase our capacity in taking on new and significant projects. Some of these projects have gained considerable media attention, which makes the community more aware of our activities. This, along with our website that is being used more and more because of the added funding from Stewardship Works!, has drawn many volunteers to our Society.” (MVIHES)*

*“Core funding has allowed us to expand and enhance our “Students Learning and Working in the Watershed” program that partners high school science enthusiasts with working scientists to do actual research in the watershed. This year 22 students spent 3 days in the Quesnel Lake watershed with Fisheries and Oceans staff, local biologists, and researchers.” (SINC)*

### 3.5.5 Increased profile and community support

Eight of the ten groups noted an increased capacity to participate in community and regional planning, e.g., government advisory planning councils, watershed committees, sustainability committees and Official Community Plan councils and to have input into local and regional decisions. Furthermore, seven of the ten groups noted that they participated in government decision-making processes through their involvement in planning events, policy reviews and community meetings.

*“Currently working on Riparian Area Protection Guidelines ...to incorporate into the OCP for Area C... the Christina Lake watershed plan and implementation strategy (and stakeholders that have signed an MOU) agree to follow recommended action items. The foreshore inventory and mapping project database is used by the provincial and regional government agencies for foreshore and riparian protection” (CLSS)*

*“The city now seeks our advice on various topics. We are working with local governments through the sustainability committee and ICSP involvement” (SINC)*





### 3.5.6 Grant writing and donations success

The provision of core funding enabled the pilot groups to apply for and win additional grant funding. Many groups spoke of the benefits of being able to use the *Stewardship Works!* funds to pay staff members to write grant proposals - an activity that requires a large amount of time, effort and research. Nine of the ten groups noted an increase in their grant writing frequency and success as an important impact of the *Stewardship Works!* dollars. Groups also spoke of how core funding allowed them to successfully leverage additional funding from several new sources and partners such as local community groups and businesses. One group noted that core funds enabled them to keep operations going during a funding contract delay – a common challenge for non-profits.. Finally, groups noted that *Stewardship Works!* funds enabled them to solicit and receive local donations and provided a level of security that encouraged other donors to fund ongoing projects.

*“We were successful in attracting \$27,000 worth of new grants, and mounted appeals to local businesses which yielded approximately \$12,000.” (SINC)*

*“Yes, because we had a grant from Stewardship Works! we could find matching funds from Gwaii Trust, a local island trust, who won't fund projects or programs unless we have matching funds.” (DSS)*

Table 4: Quantitative Indicators of Core Funding Impacts, in order of frequency cited:

Quantitative Indicators	Total # of Groups Selecting Indicator
Increased number of grant applications	9
Increased number of meetings and events attended	9
Increased number of new programs	8
Increased volunteer base	8
Increased number of new relationships	8
Increased participation in public planning processes	7
Increased number of public events / workshops held	7
Increase in number of partnerships	7
Increased ability to secure multi-year funding	7
Increased local knowledge of stewardship issues	7
Increased number of volunteers trained	6
Increased number of people group attracted to meetings	6
Increased number of land owners contacted	5
Increased number of media releases / coverage	5
Increased membership	5



## 4. Lessons Learned

### 4.1 Financial capacity is essential to organizational capacity, health and sustainability

Because they have varying needs for developing and maintaining organizational capacity, stewardship groups require flexibility in their funding use. Overly cumbersome restrictions on how groups can spend their money do not allow groups to adapt and take advantage of opportunities.

The *Stewardship Works!* funds gave participants the ability to direct their spending where it was needed most, leading to stronger, more financially capable stewardship organizations. Core funds were seen to be the “working capital” that stewardship groups needed to sustain their day-to-day operations. In the business world, working capital is considered to be the difference between an organization’s assets and liabilities, and it is a key barometer of business health (GEO, 2007).

The *Stewardship Works!* pilot gathered data on the many significant activities, impacts and outcomes of what stewardship groups can do with small amounts of flexible, core funding dollars. **Almost all the pilot groups documented an increase in their ability and success in reaching out to community partners and finding new funding.** This led to an increased feeling of long-term organizational viability and a greater sense of security, with corresponding reductions of staff anxiety and burnout. **All pilot groups were successful in matching grants from *Stewardship Works!* on at least a 1:1 basis with cash, donated materials, volunteer labour, and other contributions.** None of the funds had to come out of project-based funding – allaying concerns that matching the core funds might detract from project deliverables.

*Core funds were seen to be the “working capital” ... in the business world, working capital is the difference between an organization’s assets and liabilities, and it is a key barometer of the health of a business.*

*“Within the 2009-10 budget year, this amounts to a 6.5:1 leverage obtained from the *Stewardship Works!* funds.” (SRWR)*

*“Volunteer time allowed us to do this project for half the cost estimates from government agencies.” (SINC)*

*“The *Stewardship Works!* funds were regarded as high value dollars ... [that] generated a very large return because they were secure and could be spent incrementally over the year when the greatest opportunities for high value small cash injections into an ongoing process became apparent.” (SRWR)*



## 4.2 Overhead is an essential part of running an effective non-profit organization

All *Stewardship Works!* pilot groups emphasized the importance of the core funds they received to maintaining their stability and viability. This was expressed as having the dollars on hand to “keep the lights on, the phone bills paid, the coffee pot perking and the important community meetings happening” (VFG). Having a small but reliable cash flow was leveraged and translated into big deliverables. This was due, in part, to the efficiencies of stewardship groups, who possess great skill in stretching dollars through their culture of volunteerism and their dedicated staff.

The *Stewardship Works!* core funding dollars that were spent on administrative costs and volunteer management directly supported each organization as a whole. The core funding dollars enabled several groups to examine their internal needs for Board member expertise and sustainability planning, and the resulting recruitment of skilled Board volunteers contributed to the groups’ overall health and viability.

*Having a small but reliable cash flow was leveraged and translated into big deliverables.*

*Engaging in reflection and an assessment of the groups’ goals and objectives, and implementing strategic and financial planning, is critical for non-profit evolution and sustainability (Sherlock, 2009).*

*“The Stewardship Works! grant allowed us to hold formalized strategic planning sessions with staff and board members. This was very important in giving direction and cohesion to the society. Certainly no other funding agency that we know of would fund something like that.” (MVIHES)*

*“One activity that doesn’t fall under any other category is financial planning. The Stewardship Works! funds allowed us to prepare budget forecasts, cash flow projections, and financial templates for each of the programs we run. We are so much better prepared for the future.” (OSCA)*

*“Even a small amount of core funds makes such a difference in organizational capacity... the reduction of stress for me as a staff member has been huge and ...has reassured volunteers that we are here for the long term,(that) we have a role and a presence.” (SC)*

## 4.3 Accountability of the uses and outcomes of core funding can be effectively measured

The success of this initiative has provided a framework for establishing and monitoring core funding grants. This project demonstrated that groups are able to use core funding to increase their internal capacity, that groups can be selected to participate in an efficient way, and that the groups’ successes can be effectively measured against these self-identified indicators.



The *Stewardship Works!* Pilot Project demonstrated positive impacts for stewardship organizations in the areas of:

- Assisting stewardship groups to more effectively and efficiently meet the mandate of organizations and donors that fund their projects
- Addressing the stewardship organizations' well-documented core funding barrier and stabilizing the groups over the project time-frame
- Revitalizing volunteer interest in stewardship activities
- Providing the capability to leverage additional monies to support the conservation project work of stewards, and
- Providing a more focused, coordinated, and consistent approach to stewardship.

*Stewardship Works! Pilot Project measurably benefited all participating stewardship groups, and by extension, the communities and natural habitats they serve.*

Testing a model that provides small amounts of core funding showed that motivated groups could build capacity in a myriad of ways, from increasing their volunteer bases to enabling future planning.

#### 4.4 Core funding can be used to increase groups' organizational capacity, leading to greater stability and viability

The additional time provided to groups as a result of not having to scramble for core funding dollars enabled their staff to develop additional partnerships with local organizations, businesses and other stewardship groups, and also to engage the media by submitting more press releases, stories and photographs of activities. This increased group profile in turn helped attract the additional volunteers needed for the resulting increase in stewardship activities.

Core funding impacts that were seen to influence the stability and viability of organizations are:

- The growth of a groups' capacity, which enabled more planning and conducting of stewardship activities with volunteer participants
- A higher community profile through increased participation in events and meetings, more media submissions and improved web sites, and
- An increased ability to engage new volunteers, support long term volunteers, and celebrate the groups successes.

All participating groups noted that core funding supported their ability to attract and retain volunteers and directors, and the majority (eight of ten) noted an increase in volunteer numbers. Ironically, the lack of volunteers limits many groups' ability to carry out more project work and many spoke of the "Catch-22" of not having the time or staff capacity to solicit, train, support and retain the volunteers that they need. ***Stewardship Works!* core funds enabled the groups to tackle all these limiting factors by focusing on the recruitment, recognition and retention of volunteers.**

The majority of the pilot groups used some of the core funding dollars to train volunteers – a key factor in long-term volunteer retention (Volunteer Canada, 2005, 2009, 2010). People are motivated to



volunteer to build social networks, learn new skills and contribute their expertise. Ensuring that volunteers are an integral part of an organization by using targeted training activities is critical to sustaining their participation. Being able to maintain a stable, consistent, professional presence in a community also reassures volunteers and community members of the groups' long-term viability and therefore encourages more volunteer involvement and longer term commitment. All these varied factors contributed to more numerous, happier and more productive volunteers. With this comes a sense of recognition, accomplishment and positive action that is critical for volunteer-run groups to survive and flourish, and also demonstrates that fundamental capacity building at an organizational level has occurred.

*“Our volunteer numbers have increased over the past three years because we had the base funding to be assured that a dialogue with community could be maintained. As a result, the SRWR has expanded its rapport into areas of the watershed using Stewardship Works! funding... which are critical to the water management issue currently being addressed.” (SRWR)*

#### **4.5 Small amounts of core funding can be distributed economically, tracked effectively and generate a wide range of measurable impacts.**

The *Stewardship Works!* pilot project demonstrated that a funding program can be designed to efficiently administer small grants. This was done by making the application process straightforward, providing tracking templates which were easy to complete, and developing indicators of success that would both effectively track the groups' progress and reflect meaningful capacity building outcomes.

Providing small grants to a large number of organizations offers some challenges. For the funder, it means processing a large number of grant applications, making decisions on which groups get funded, evaluating how those funds are spent by groups, and reporting out on how those funds were spent. For the stewardship groups it means submitting an application and reporting out on impacts and successes for a small amount of funds.

Assessing and tracking core funding requires a different set of criteria than what would be used for assessing and tracking project funding. Assessing project funding impacts mainly involves determining if the organization did what they set out to do, assessing core funding mainly involves determining if the organization has increased their stability and viability. This challenge required designing an evaluation process in which groups determined how they could best spend their funds and what their measures of success would be. The development of reporting templates and qualitative and quantitative indicators by the participating groups enabled these results to be captured in an efficient and timely manner.



## 5. Conclusion

The *Stewardship Works!* program was created as a reaction to several research studies which demonstrated that stewardship and conservation groups were struggling with core funding and ongoing expenses. *Stewardship Works!* was able to demonstrate that small amounts of core funding resulted in many short- and medium-term benefits, including: an increase in volunteers, better staff and volunteer training, greater ability to fundraise, increased organizational capacity, enhanced programming, more community engagement, and increased participation in policy-making. All of these benefits result in stewardship groups having a significant increase in their ability to be more effective in watershed and habitat conservation activities.

*Stewardship Works!* also developed and demonstrated a funding model and governance structure that can effectively distribute and document core funding impacts without creating onerous reporting requirements for stewardship groups, thus making the distribution of small amounts of funds viable.

Enabling small amounts of funding to go to many stewardship groups would have a significant impact on their viability and the ability of the stewardship community to deliver on conservation outcomes in the province. The next step is to explore options for implementing the *Stewardship Works!* model in order to address the long term success of our stewardship community. The Stewardship Centre for BC will continue to facilitate discussions and seek partnerships to implement *Stewardship Works!*, but in order to ensure success, a shift in thinking around how grant funds are currently distributed in BC will be required.



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