2012 Community Summit
A Dialogue with Business Leaders
Sept 20, 2012 Report

connecting in the city
Introduction 3
Background 3

Process 3
Overview of the Vancouver Foundation's Research and Preliminary Findings 4

Facilitated Dialogue 5

Conclusion 7
Special Thanks 7
Introduction

On September 20th, the SFU Public Square and the Vancouver Foundation hosted a dialogue with Vancouver’s business leaders as part of the Alone Together: Connecting in the City Community Summit. The goals of the dialogue were to:

• provide the Metro Vancouver business community with insight into the Vancouver Foundation’s recent research on isolation and community connectedness in the city,
• consider the roles members of the business community could and should play to help address these issues.

Background

This event was presented by SFU Public Square; a program born out of the University’s vision to become the institution to which the community looks for education, discussion and solutions. SFU Public Square represents SFU’s commitment to nurture and support safe, inclusive and productive conversations. Its inaugural community summit, Alone Together: Connecting in the City, consisted of a week-long series of events inspired by the Vancouver Foundation’s research, which indicated that a significant number of Metro Vancouver residents suffer from a sense of isolation and disconnection.

An essential component of the Alone Together community summit, Connecting in the City was intended to encourage open and solutions-oriented conversation by focusing on two areas of inquiry:

• Does business have a role to play in creating greater connectivity among citizens in the region? And if so, why, and what is that role?
• What are other initiatives that should be taken to address isolation and build greater connectivity in our cities? Who should take the lead?

Process

The Connecting in the City: A Dialogue With Business Leaders event process included:

• An overview of the Vancouver Foundation’s research and their preliminary findings by Faye Wightman, President and CEO, Vancouver Foundation and Gord MacDougall, Chair of the Board, Vancouver Foundation;
• A Question and Answer period, moderated by SFU Chancellor Carole Taylor;
• A dialogue session facilitated by Shauna Sylvester, Executive Director, SFU Public Square

Find out more about SFU’s new strategic vision at www.sfu.ca/engage
The remaining sections of this report provide a detailed summary of each of these process components.

OVERVIEW OF THE VANCOUVER FOUNDATION’S RESEARCH AND PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Faye Wightman, President and CEO, Vancouver Foundation, presented the following key points:

• The Vancouver Foundation engaged in an extensive research process (some of the people present at the luncheon were among the 100+ community leaders across Metro Vancouver who participated in their initial consultations) and found:
  • Residents feel they are increasingly living in silos, separated by ethnic background, language, income, age and even geography.
  • People are retreating from community life, and feeling a growing civic malaise.
• The Foundation was concerned about the negative impact this is having on our community.
• The Foundation contracted Sentis Market Research to conduct a survey on connections and engagement in Metro Vancouver; looking at the scope and strength of relationships between friends, neighbours and the larger community. Over 3800 people from across Metro Vancouver took part in the survey, and offered insight into their participation in activities that make neighbourhoods and communities better places to live, their attitudes towards others and the barriers that prevent them from connecting and engaging.
• One of the alarming facts discovered during the research process was that: in 1981 Canada had six ethnic enclaves (defined by Census Canada as neighbourhoods where more than 30 per cent of the population belong to a visible minority), and today there are 260, with 110 of those enclaves located in Metro Vancouver. No major Canadian region has more enclaves as a proportion of its population.

Key Points presented by Gordon MacDougall, Chair, Board of Directors, Vancouver Foundation:

• According to the Vancouver Foundation’s measures of connections and engagement, over 70 per cent of residents across the region are less connected and engaged in activities that can help make our community a better place to live.
• Young people (25–34) feel more isolated than other age groups. Their attitudes about how Vancouver is changing reflect greater resentment. Most 25 to 34-year-olds think there is too much foreign ownership of real estate.
• In neighbourhoods where a number of different languages are spoken, there is less trust, less optimism that people can work together to solve local problems, and a decreased sense of belonging.
• People who live in high rises are more cut off from their neighbours.
• The Vancouver Foundation plans to expand the Neighbourhood Small Grants (NSG) program as a key initiative to counteract the decline in our social fabric. The NSG program provides grants, up to $500, to residents who have submitted ideas for activities such as holding block parties, arts events, neighbourhood festivals, building community gardens, lending libraries and running workshops for children, youth, families and seniors that aim to connect and engage neighbourhood residents.
• Businesses are at the centre of a seismic shift.
  • Consumers expect business to go beyond earning a “license to operate” to earning a “license to lead.”
  • Businesses are evolving, and understanding the need to be socially conscious. The 2012 Edelman Trust Barometer annual survey that examines trust in four key institutions including business, government, media and non-profit showed 73 per cent of consumers would switch brands if a different brand of similar quality supported a good cause, and 86 per cent said companies should place at least an equal emphasis on their social interests as on their business interests.
• Business success today is being measured on more than profitability—it is also measured by being a decent business and a good neighbor. A real life example is Connor, Clark & Lunn, who believe in the philosophy of community engagement, and have established a foundation that invests 8 per cent of their investment return into their clients’ community causes.
• Businesses should be good neighbours in the communities in which we do business. It’s about growth and community, social and economic prosperity. Architect Bing Thom says, “Cities exist as gardens of economic, social, and cultural possibilities.”
Facilitated Dialogue

Following the presentations, Shauna Sylvester, Executive Director, SFU Public Square facilitated a dialogue that included roundtable and plenary discussions. The dialogue was divided into three rounds. A guiding question was posed for each round.

Question #1: Does business have a role in creating greater connectivity among citizens in the region?
Tom Syer, VP, Policy and Communications at Business Council of British Columbia opened the dialogue:

• Businesses do have a role to play in creating greater connectivity through marketplace imperatives
• Creating greater connectivity with employees and communities is often tied to a company’s value proposition or “social license to operate”.
• Most companies have a corporate social responsibility policy that outlines their commitment to their community and their employees. Healthy communities are seen as essential to healthy businesses.

Responses from other participants:
• What about the quality of connectivity? E.g. Facebook: Are there certain kinds of connectivity that are missing some community values?
• Connectivity must be respectful, personalized and not commercialized.
• What is a community? Is there a geographic and/or cultural element to connectivity that we must examine? If a family sends money back home to another nation for example, they are connecting with their own community and culture, but are they connected with this geographical community? What is the definition that we are looking for?
• The workplace is a key part of most employees’ community; many people are spending too much time in the workplace to the point where they may not have the lives they want. Without employers investing time into creating connectivity in the workplace, employees may face isolation both at work and at home.
Question #2: If you think business does have a role to play in creating greater connectivity, what is that role? What are some of the concrete steps business can take?

Charles Gauthier, CEO, Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association provided the first response:

- The notion of co-creators is important. Businesses can create opportunities and do what businesses do best—create environments, public spaces, and host events such as the Lunar Festival, Taiwanfest, tree-lighting ceremony sponsorship, chili cook-offs—events that bridge the gap between consumers and companies, managers and non-managers, employees and the public.
- Business involvement does not have to be cash but can be any kind of valued support.
- Businesses can establish creative win-win solutions e.g. funding in the form of scholarship or a marketing campaign fostering a creative product or a service.
- Businesses can work together outside of the work environment—for example work together to change attitudes towards the poor and misunderstood.

Other ideas raised in the broader dialogue:

- Business should give employees credit for volunteering.
- Do businesses have CSR policies; do most businesses need it?
- It is the year of the dragon, year of the water dragon—there will be a spike in birth rates (60yr increase), which means more connectivity! Businesses can create more breastfeeding friendly businesses.
- Vancity’s inaugural cash mob, a social media driven event with Facebook fans voting to support a local business (80 people attended a Vancity cash mob at East of Main café)—produced energy and engagement.
- There is an important parallel between community engagement and innovation, exemplified by Google. Google allows their staff one day per month to do whatever they want as long as they report back to the company on how they spent their time. A number of great things such as Google Docs emerged simply by allowing staff to spend some time being creative.

What is the role of developers in enhancing our connectivity?

Gordon Harris, CEO, UniverCity

- It is easy to build a house, but hard to build a community. It is easy in the development sector to build buildings but the connection of communities is a different undertaking. What people really want and how they think about building homes is not linear.
- As developers, it’s important to keep working with people and think through how they can make communities better. For example, where do we put and construct
laundry facilities? Can we use this community amenity to create community connections.

• Newly developed school boards and elementary schools must be opened as soon as possible in any new development; developments must become part of the real community with childcare centres and engage citizens.

• Developers have a huge responsibility. We need to look at how to animate the sites of development—ensure that it is part of a real community with schools, child care centres, access to transit and spaces which come alive and are liveable.

Other ideas:

• What is paradise in community development?
  Paradise is creating connective communities. The goal of design and architecture is to create places for little old ladies with dogs to go and buy flowers.

• Transit hubs create lateral connections—they are the places of interaction and engagement, but we need to ensure that they are designed to create those dynamic connections.

Question #3: What are other initiatives that should be initiated to address isolation and build greater connectivity in our cities? Who should take the lead?
Kelly Pollack, CEO, Immigrant Employment Council of B.C. initiated the dialogue

• Initiatives need to be sustainable and involve businesses, academics and policy makers in the co-creation process.

• The focus should be on acting as a catalyst—convening and creating spaces for community.

We need greater support for our community festivals—e.g. folk festivals, children’s festival

• We also need to push boundaries and think within a regional mindset. We have 21 separate communities in Metro Vancouver—we need to collaborate more—eg. we have different police forces that don’t come together. To address isolation we need to think more broadly and regionally. Transportation is key to connecting people and communities.

Responses from other participants:

• We can’t eat a whole pie, in the sense of the broader community; it must be tackled one piece at a time. It is important to deal with the sense of community at a granular level and start small. It is important to own a community block and grow, take ownership of it, and then move up to the broader community.

• We need Mayoral support on these issues.

• The Olympics was an important connecting moment for Vancouverites. What did we learn through this experience? How can we translate this into building greater connectivity?

• What is the role of our community centres? Are they evolving and moving outside of just a building? Does this create an opportunity? As we move forward, the conversation about how to address greater connectivity has to engage families and children, not just community leaders.

• We are not going to change right away, this will take time

CONCLUSION
As SFU President Andrew Petter stated in his closing remarks, overcoming the issues of isolation and disconnection that threaten the social and economic fabrics of our communities will take time, but raising consciousness within our own neighbourhoods is a great starting point. The business community, academic institutions and government bodies alike need to modify their practices to engage our communities. It is crucial that we leverage our understanding and our strengths to make a change and to make a difference.

SPECIAL THANKS
This event could not have happened without the generous support of our co-sponsors—Business Council of British Columbia, the Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association, Immigrant Employment Council of B.C., Business in Vancouver, and the Community Summit partners—the City of Vancouver, Vancity and the Vancouver Sun.