

COCO's In the Know Project:

A community primer

The Centre for Community Organizations (COCO) began the community-based action research project **"In the Know: Identifying multiple aspects of Quebec's community sector"**, in October of 2008 to help develop a better understanding of the diversity of groups working for social change in Quebec. The study, funded and supported by Quebec's Secretariat à l'Action Communautaire Autonome et aux Initiatives Sociales (SACAIS), aimed to survey English-speaking, bilingual and ethno-cultural community groups across Quebec over a 3 year period. The research was carried out between 2009 and 2012.

Why this research?

COCO works with about 400 ethno-cultural, bilingual and English-speaking community groups a year. Over time, we have noticed that these groups are more diverse in their services and programs, less connected to formal networks in Quebec and work with less government funding than their francophone counterparts. After organizing two forums about government funding, we realized that most groups in our network have little knowledge of SACAIS, Quebec government funding or the formal network system that exists among community groups in Quebec. Discussions between COCO and SACAIS officials identified the need to more fully document the reality of English-speaking, bilingual and ethno-cultural groups. *In the Know* has sought to do this.

What we did

Objectives:



Locate Anglophone, bilingual and ethno-cultural community groups in Québec.



Develop a portrait and understanding of Anglophone, bilingual and ethno-cultural community groups working in Québec.



Identify the characteristics and patterns that emerge about the recognition of groups by the Québec government, and the types of activities and structures of these groups.



Advance and test the hypothesis about why these groups are marginalized or excluded.



Propose strategies to support the recognition and inclusion of these groups in the Francophone community sector.

Our approach: Community-based action research

COCO decided that a community-based action research (CBAR) approach would be the most participatory way to improve the relationship between the English-speaking, ethno-cultural and bilingual community groups and the Quebec government. CBAR requires meaningful participant involvement in all phases of the research.

So we developed, tested and analyzed a questionnaire with study respondents, leader organizations in the English-speaking sector, the research funder (SACAIS), and Deena White (a researcher from the Université de Montréal who had published an evaluation of the *Politique de l'action communautaire autonome**). The survey asked for information about the following areas:

- regions the groups work in,
- demographic information of the groups,
- language capacity of the group,
- legal status,
- sources of funding,
- eligibility for Quebec government global mission funding
- and network affiliations.

We carried out this three-year survey in 14 Quebec regions where there is a presence of English-speaking, bilingual and ethno-cultural groups. We launched the questionnaire via COCO's e-bulletin in April 2009, and followed up with more targeted phone calls to specific organizations. Altogether, we identified close to 800 community groups, 290 of whom completed the questionnaire.

What we learned

Locations

Just over half of the respondents were located in the Montreal region (146 groups). We also noticed strong participation in the following regions: Laval, Capitale Nationale, Estrie, Côte Nord, Îles-de-la-Madeleine and Outaouais.

Profile of the groups

- Longstanding, with a majority of the groups in existence for 11 years or more.
- Small, with most groups having between 0 – 5 part time and full time employees.
- The groups serve a large variety of populations, respond to many different social needs and involve a wide range of sectors of activity.
- A strong minority (33.9%) of the 290 groups can offer services in languages other than English or French. The languages include: Spanish, South Asian languages (Tamil, Urdu, Hindi), Arabic, Filipino dialects (Tagalog and other), and Creole. Over two-thirds of these groups work in the Montreal region.

Language capacities:

- The highest percentage of groups uses English as a primary language at work.
- Language capacities in English are very strong.
- Many groups also appear to have a functional to very good level of French.

Annual yearly budget

The overall budget of most of the groups is small: 103 out of 237 reporting groups (43.5%) have an annual budget that is less than \$100,000, while 53 groups (22.4%) have an annual budget of between \$100,000 and \$250,000. 33 groups (13.9%) have no real budget at all and are mostly comprised of volunteers.

Funding: non-Government of Quebec sources

Groups are funded in many different ways, from both government and non-government sources that include: the federal government, foundations, independent fundraising, fees for services and products, municipal government and in-kind support. However, as the survey did not ask how much of groups' budgets were covered by these sources, it is impossible to tell how important these kinds of funding actually are to the groups.

Funding: Government of Quebec sources

Groups can get one of two types of funding from the Quebec government: *project or service funding* which is short in duration, responds to government (and not specifically community) priorities and which must be renewed. The other type of funding is *global mission funding*, which is recurring and covers basic salaries, rent and the basic activities of fulfilling the mission of the organization. Global mission funding is a more stable source of funding, in which the organization has more control over its activities.

Groups find themselves in a tricky position in terms of receiving funding from the Quebec government: 41% report that project/service funding accounts for more than half of their budget. At the same time, for 56.6% of groups, global mission funding accounts for less than half of their budget.

Since 2003, groups have had a much harder time getting global mission funding. Of 99 reporting groups, 60.6% (60 groups) began receiving global mission funding before 2003. This is due to little new funds being made available for global mission funding.

Funding: Eligibility for Quebec government global mission funding

A very high percentage of groups have not applied for this source of funding in the last three years: of 119 reporting groups, 80.7% (96 groups) have not applied for global mission funding in this time period. Many of these groups don't seem to have much information about this type of funding. Of the original 106 groups that expressed interest in knowing more about the criteria for Quebec government global mission funding, 71.7% (76 groups) seemed to meet the criteria after answering a series of eligibility questions. Of these 76 groups, 30 work with ethno-cultural communities.

It is especially hard for ethno-cultural groups to receive global mission funding. When these groups do not specifically define their work as 'integration into Quebec society', they seem to have difficulty getting funding from the Ministry of Immigration and Cultural Communities. But when they connect their work with a specific ethno-cultural community, there is resistance from funders, who are mostly unwilling to fund specific populations (RIOCM, 2008).

Networks

Many groups seem to be active in networks. While some groups belong to only one network, most groups indicated belonging to two or three networks. Of 290 groups, 75.2% (218 groups) indicated belonging to a first network, 55.5% (161 groups) to a second network, and 41.4% (120 groups) to a third network.

The highest rate of participation is in regional networks, and English-speaking networks.

The relatively low response rates for participation in Quebec-wide networks (73 responses compared to 225 responses for involvement in local or regional networks) raises questions about whether there is adequate leadership of groups in the English-speaking, bilingual and ethno-cultural community groups at the decision-making and policy influencing networks. More action research into this area is needed.

How have we responded?

COCo has responded to what we've learned through this study in a few different ways over the past three years. The following is a summary of some of these actions.

- *Increasing groups' online presence:* We designed a google map, allowing groups to showcase their coordinates along with a summary of their activities on the web. We did this because 34% of the groups with whom we connected do not have a website. Altogether, 249 of the 290 participating groups have joined this google map. See (<https://maps.google.ca/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=en&msa=0&msid=103546236201983514608.0004704004b59e3619c25&z=7>).
- *Providing groups with information on Quebec government funding:* We have continued to provide information to groups on funding from the Government of Quebec. Specifically, free consultation sessions (info-COCos) have been given to groups to explain funding requirements and informative briefings are available in the monthly COCo e-bulletin (<http://coco-net.org/current-e-bulletin>).
- *Sharing the research findings with groups and with the government:* We shared the emerging data with government staff at a Comité Interministériel* meeting in January 2011 and at a SACAIS event in the fall of 2011. Emerging data was also presented 10 times to community groups and networking events connected with COCo's work. In April 2010, COCo partnered with the Réseau québécois de l'action communautaire autonome (RQ-ACA) to hold an information session on the history and current context of funding from the Government of Quebec. Finally, COCo presented the research data at the Action Francophone Pour le Savoir (ACFAS) conference in 2010, 2011 and 2012. An article was published with the *Journal for Eastern Township Studies* in April 2011 and a summative article is being written about the overall findings of the research.

What else needs to be done?



More actions are needed. Some strategies could include:

- **Fuller participation** of members of the English-speaking, ethno-cultural and bilingual community sector in places of greater leadership in the francophone community sector. This could be done by building relationships between leaders in the two sectors and through identifying key *regroupements* (networks) where the voice of the English-speaking, ethno-cultural and bilingual community sector can be more fully heard.
- **Increased education** of groups in the English-speaking, ethno-cultural and bilingual community sector about the history, organization and participation in the francophone community sector.
- **Fostering links and dialogues** between the Government of Quebec (for example, its legislative assembly members and key staff) and the English-speaking, ethno-cultural and bilingual community sector through increased exchanges. These would create a stronger recognition of the work this sector does for Quebecers and possibly a better opportunity to receive funding from the Government of Quebec.
- **Deeper investigation** into the English-speaking, bilingual and ethno-cultural community sector to identify the number of groups, their legal status, funding details, the contribution to Quebec society made by these groups and the monetary value of their work.
- **Documentation** of the history and contribution of the English-speaking, bilingual and ethno-cultural community sector to the overall development of the community sector in Quebec. Not much has been documented so far, and the history is being lost as community members pass away.

For a copy of the full report, please see (<http://coco-net.org/in-the-know-final-report/>)