COCo
Centre for Community Organizations
ANNUAL REPORT
2011
Table of contents

1 Message from board and staff
2 Highlights from 2011

Who we are
3 COCo’s mission
   The COCo team

Recent Activities
4 Info-COCos and contracts
6 COCO’s Impact Inquiry
7 In the Know research
8 Legal information services
9 Just Practice: An anti-oppression project
10 C’est en franglais project
11 Strategic Alliances
12 Communications

13 Funders
COCo hits its teens!

Physical changes? New feelings? A tendency to take risks?

Yes, it’s true. Twelve years on, COCo officially entered our adolescence in 2011. It’s only natural, then, that while we plunged into our first year of actively implementing the strategic directions we developed back in 2010, we also took time to think critically about how we and community groups in general evaluate the actual impact of our work. You can get more details in the pages that follow, on our website, or just by getting in touch with us, but in the meantime, here’s a panoramic snapshot of what we’ve been up to, and how it connects with our overall steerage...

Supporting social justice movements

From promoting the Quebec-wide mobilizations of the Coalition Against User Fees and the Privatization of Public Services (http://www.nonauxhausses.org) to adding our voice in support of the Occupy movement, 2011 saw us take our fledgling footsteps into supporting broader social justice movements in Quebec and beyond. We’ve had lots of positive feedback from our membership around this work, and we hope to deepen it in the year to come.

Increasing anti-oppression capacity

As our Just practice, c’est pratique project took off this year, we had the opportunity of collaborating with other staff, volunteers and board members from community groups across the province to increase our collective capacity to prevent oppression and work through conflict in constructive ways. We shared this work and related resources in our December 2011 ebulletin.

Our C’est en franglais project also created the opportunity for us to consider with our communities the ways in which everyday language(s) in Quebec can reinforce systems of structural oppression - as well as strategies we can use to empower ourselves and each other.

On an internal level, we conducted an anti-oppression needs assessment and contracted AORTA (etc) to do a training with our staff and board team, and began the process of creating a living Statement of Anti-Oppression which we plan to share via our website in 2012.

Promoting community-based action research (CBAR)

2011 marked the third year of our own groundbreaking In the Know community-based research project, which has revealed some of the startling realities of Quebec-based, English-speaking, bilingual and ethno-cultural community groups. We also spent some time behind the scenes this year, scheming and dreaming up ways to create more opportunities for CBAR in the Anglophone and ethno-cultural Quebec community sector.

Raising awareness of collaborative organizational structures

We continued to connect with other collaborative structure organizations in Quebec and beyond, and to introduce the model to new groups. We also devoted our June 2011 ebulletin to a rumination on non-hierarchical work structures.

Promoting organizational health and development

Our top three most popular info-COCo (information and assistance requests from community groups throughout Quebec) subjects in 2011 were boards and governance, general organizational development and funding and grant-writing. Meanwhile, our highest demand areas for contracts with community groups were planning and visioning work, governance and board development, and conflict resolution and communication skills. In September 2011, we channelled some of our learnings from the field into an ebulletin on work-life balance and healthy organizational practices.
Continuing to develop our own organizational model and infrastructure

In the fall of 2011, we began the first internal review of our COCo structure. We seized the opportunity to connect in a more focused way with a few other organizations that work within a collaborative leadership model, in order to provide ourselves with a frame of reference for how we’re doing, as well as to pick up some ideas on how we can fine-tune our set-up to be more effective. The results so far are illuminating, and we look forward to sharing our tweaks in 2012!

In the works...

We’re thrilled to have been a part of COCo’s unique, cutting-edge journey this year, and we’re deeply appreciative of our membership, who give shape to our efforts. We can’t wait to reap the fruits of those efforts in the year to come, and we’re really looking forward to doing it in collaboration with all of you.

- Laila and Claire on behalf of the COCo Board and Staff

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Highlights from 2011

**Bilingual/French info-COCos rose by 14% since 2010.**

**Contracts with groups with an ethno-cultural focus, rose by 4% since 2010.**

**COCo’s Just Practice project** convened 20 community groups from across Quebec for a two-day anti-oppression skills-building training, followed up with a wrap-up session six months later, where participant groups shared their planning, strategies and challenges, and ways in which they can keep these connections alive.

**COCo’s legal project** increased organizations’ awareness and knowledge of legal obligations and parameters on issues relating to boards, membership, employment standards, by-laws, AGMs, and more, as well as critically engaging them to reflect on their structure and practices.

290 groups across 14 regions of Quebec participated in COCo’s *In the Know* research, revealing a wealth of new insights into Quebec-based, English-speaking, bilingual and ethno-cultural community groups and their relationship with the Government of Quebec.

As a result of our *In the Know* project, 68 new groups (most of whom work with ethno-cultural communities and have historically had a difficult time finding funding from the Quebec Government) learned that they are eligible for global mission funding.

COCo broke new ground with its *C’est en franglais* project, working to build community and solidarity across linguistic divides.
COCo’s mission

COCo’s mission is to promote social justice, active citizenship, democracy, and just socio-economic development by supporting the development of healthy organizations and strong communities. Toward this end, COCo is a provincial, nonprofit organization that works primarily with English-speaking, bilingual, and ethnocultural organizations to develop organizational health and promote community sector development through: organizational development and leadership training, information dissemination, social analysis, research, and by strengthening links between organizations and sectors.

Who we are

Board members
Claire Abraham
Jenn Clamen
Shannon Franssen
Jean-Noé Landry
Michael Lenczner
Line St-Amour
Rosemary Thomas

Staff members
Sarah Blumel
Loralie Bromby
Laila Malik
Spencer Mann
Sabrina Mc Fadden
Alex Megelas
Chris Lau
Frances Ravensbergen
Tara Santini

Support Staff
Kurth Bemis
Manoj Chandarana
Françoise Magne
Steve Roy

Volunteers
Kate Arthur
Steve Baird
Shane Bill
Helen Bradley
Izaak Branderhorst
Erin Brown
Karen Brown
Jeremy Clarke
Ian Dahlman
Helge Dascher
Eryn Fitzgerald
Pierre-Louis Fortin-Legris
David Gault
Angela Kelly
Kirby Leigh
Reisa Levine
Parker Mah
Bhavya Raju Mandya
Darren Marshment
Neale McAvitt-Van Fleet
Isabelle Petit
Steve Roy
Mario Stinziani
Sebastian Sanchez
Lorena Sierra
Sandy Sjollema
Shannon Smith
Stephanie Troeth
Dmitri Vitaliev
Frances Waihe
Craig Webster
Andrew Wiley
Dexter X
Info-COCos and contract work

COCo staff respond daily to requests for information or support from community groups through info-COCo sessions and contracts. Free consultations are conducted by phone, email or in person and last from a couple of minutes to a couple of hours. Staff provide information, critical reflection on issues and referrals to other resources or tools.

Info-Cocos

In 2011, 260 info-COCos took place with 115 groups. Of these info-COCo sessions, 71% were conducted in English while 29% were conducted bilingually or in French.

Approximately 60% of sessions lasted less than 30 minutes while 17% lasted over 60 minutes. Staff collectively spent 2.5 hours weekly on info-COCos. The most common topics covered were:

- **Boards and governance (17%)**;
- **General organizational development (9%)**;
- **Funding and grant-writing (7%)**;
- **Human resources (6%)**;
- **AGMs/membership (5%)**;
- **Conflict prevention/resolution and mediation (5%)**;
- **Job-seeking (5%)**;
- **Charitable status (4%)**.

Although the total number of info-COCos, number of groups reached and the weekly average number of hours devoted to info-COCos dropped compared to 2010, a reduction of staff team size throughout the year likely accounted for a good part of this reduction. An increasing proportion of info-COCos were conducted bilingually or in French (up from 15% in 2010).

Contracts

COCo offers in-depth support in the form of training, facilitation and coaching. Given contracts require greater time, they are offered on a sliding-scale hourly fee. Contracts range from one three-hour session to several sessions over many months or, in some cases, spanning more than one year.

In 2011, COCo was involved in 50 contracts, 36 of which were completed during the year and the remaining 14 were still on-going by the end of the year. COCo contracted with a total of 47 groups but reached 84 groups and 725 individuals (participants from more than one group sometimes attend sessions). A total of 16% of contracts were with groups that have a focus outside of Montreal, 10% were with groups with an ethnocultural focus and 4% with groups with an Aboriginal focus. A sliding scale fee was applied to 34% of contracts. The most common areas of focus were:

- **Planning and visioning work (24%)**;
- **Governance and board development (19%)**;
- **Conflict resolution and communication skills (15%)**;
- **Evaluation (12%)**;
- **Human resources (5%)**;
- **Coaching (5%)**;
- **Funding and fundraising (5%)**.
COCo offered the following types of support:
- **Facilitation (52%)**;
- **Training (32%)**;
- **Organizational coaching (14%)**;
- **Individual coaching (2%)**.

Compared to 2010, fewer contracts happened with groups with a focus outside of Montreal. However, we worked with more groups having an ethno-cultural focus. Increasing areas of focus included: governance and board development, evaluation and organizational coaching.

**Evaluation project with Centraide groups**
At the end of 2011, COCo joined Le Centre de Formation Populaire (CFP) in a “walking-with” impact evaluation project with Centraide-funded groups. These groups were invited to critically evaluate their work, with COCo’s support, under a results-based evaluation framework. If your group is funded by Centraide and is interested in reflecting on notions of change that would potentially allow you to expand on service provision and move towards a deeper level of social impact and mobilizing, or reflecting on the qualitative nature of your work, get in touch as we are looking for new participating groups for 2012-2013. Evaluation occurs during monthly sessions spread over six months to a year and is grounded in principles of critical reflection and analysis. For more information, contact Sabrina: sabrinam@coco-net.org.

**Other highlights**
- Support towards two existing movement-building initiatives;
- Organizational coaching by providing support around planning, proposal writing and charitable status application;
- Design and on-going implementation of a program evaluation strategy;
- Development of a first-ever strategic plan for a volunteer-based group working with a marginalized community.

**Future considerations**
- Reach out more to groups working outside of Montreal;
- Continue reaching out to groups working with ethno-cultural communities;
- More clearly define and promote our coaching service.
COCO’s Impact Inquiry

In 2010-2011, after a series of internal discussions reflecting on how COCo evaluates its work, we approached Centraide du Grand Montreal to fund an impact evaluation. The process was open-ended, drawing from qualitative research methodology built around internal exploratory conversations at COCo, one-on-one interviews, larger conversations with partners and other lived experiences in COCo work. This has included individual interviews with two dozen representatives of partner community organizations, a public event on the notion of social movement-building and the lived experiences of COCo staff in supporting social movement-building work spearheaded by other organizations.

This impact inquiry has allowed COCo to 1) reflect on the process of impact evaluation, 2) learn about our own practice 3) name priorities that we want to explore further in our work, and 4) appreciate the broader importance of reflecting on social impact and the need for critical analysis in community organizing.

The summary below shares key elements of what we have learned about our practice with groups. It also identifies priorities related to this work. The full report is available from COCo (info@coco-net.org).

What we learned about COCo’s practices

COCo is perceived as having an impact on the organizational health of groups in the following ways:

• Connecting people to capacity support and reducing isolation;
• Helping groups become stronger, build sustainable structures and processes (inter-organizational communication, conflict resolution, planning and evaluation);
• Supporting individuals/groups to develop a language around what they do and where they are headed.

COCo adds value in the sector by:

• Modeling and mirroring how to live social change values in organizational settings;
• Walking with groups using a flexible, sensitive, process-oriented, coaching-based approach;
• Providing an arena for starting important conversations, facilitating knowledge creation;
• Encouraging organizations to “get out of their bubbles and to meet and share around critical issues”;
• Modeling being an expert in “peer learning.” COCo experiments and takes risks for the sector to learn from;
• Living and sharing an Anglophone perspective is different and interesting for the Francophone sector.

Priorities for future work with groups

• Make more explicit the links to social justice work; in our public image, with contract work (during assessment, doing the work and in the follow up evaluation process), and by holding more events (particularly smaller gatherings and virtual events) for strategic convergences;
• Carry out a Listening Tour (inspired by Highlander Research Institute);
• Explore benefits of connecting to large “regroupements” and increase the scope and depth of our advocacy work;
• Reach out to non-traditional groups (neighborhood, citizen and advocacy).

Recent activities
In the Know: Identifying the multiple facets of Quebec’s community sector

The purpose of this research was to develop a better understanding of Quebec-based, English-speaking, bilingual and ethno-cultural community groups and their relationship with the Government of Quebec. It began in 2009 and data collection ended in the Fall of 2011.

We will be producing a series of reports on the findings, presenting the results at conferences and writing a summary article on the findings. As well, there is follow up work being conducted with groups on funding and network involvement. Meanwhile, here are a few interesting findings from the data analyzed to date:

- 290 groups participated in the study by filling in a detailed survey.
- 14 regions of Quebec were surveyed. Highest levels of participation were from Montreal (144 groups or 50%), groups serving all of Quebec (32 or 11%), Estrie (20 groups or 7%), Laval (18 groups or 6.3%), Lower North Shore (16 groups or 5.6%), Quebec City region (12 groups or 4.2%).
- Most groups work primarily in the area of health and social services (74 groups or 32%), followed by immigration and cultural communities (48 groups or 21%), education (36 groups or 15.7%), and arts 24 groups or 10.4%). Most groups identified multiple areas they work in.
- 97 groups (35.4%) of groups have the ability to function in a language other than English or French. They speak Spanish (36 groups), South Asian languages (22 groups), Arabic (13 groups), Filipino dialects (10 groups) or Creole (9 groups).
- 36% of people identifying themselves as English speakers in Quebec (473,250 people) are involved in the groups surveyed (using the Federal Government’s definition of ‘first official language’ to identify English-speakers, Statistics Canada 2006 census data).
- Most groups have existed for 11 years or more (188 or 67%) and 87% (250 groups) are registered non profits.
- 14% of groups (33) have no budget while 29.5% have budgets of under $100,000. 98 groups (41.4%) have budgets between $100,000 and $500,000. 15.2 % of groups (36) have budgets over $500,000.

What is this data telling us? In part, it suggests that the community sector working in English is diverse and hardy. It is active in many regions, working on many issues, has the ability to function in a diversity of languages, reaches large numbers of citizens over many years yet works with small budgets. In relationship to funding:

- Over 80% (193 groups) of the groups reporting on funding (242) identified diversified sources of funding (the federal government, foundations, independent fundraising, fees for services or products, municipal government).
- 134 groups (55% of the 245 groups reporting on this) receive project funding or have service agreements with the Government of Quebec.
- 98 groups (40.3% of the 242 groups reporting on this) receive global mission funding. However, very few groups have secured global mission funding since 2003 (20 groups).
- 106 groups who do not receive global mission funding from the Government of Quebec responded to the section to see if they might qualify. Of those, 68 groups appear to meet the criteria. Most of these groups work with ethno-cultural communities and have historically had a difficult time finding funding from the Government of Quebec for their work.

There are lots more rich findings emerging from the data. Please check the COCo website on a regular basis for updates or contact francesr@coco-net.org for more info.

Thanks to Coasters Association in the Lower North Shore and CAMI (Council for Magdalen Islanders) for working with us on data collection.

1. The research is funded by the Secrétariat à l’action communautaire autonome et aux initiative sociaux (SACAIS).
2. The regions surveyed are Montreal, Laval, Estrie, Outaouais, Montérégie, Abitibi Temiscamingue, Quebec City region, Laurentiens, Lanaudière, Chaudière Appalaches, Cote Nord, Gaspésie, Ile de la Madeleines, Lower North Shore.
Legal information services at COCo

This year, the legal project continued to provide information and opportunity for community organizations to develop their capacities to govern themselves and function efficiently.

The goal of the project is to offer accessible, bilingual legal information tools, training and consultations for community groups in Quebec. We do so with an approach that not only increases organizations’ awareness and knowledge of legal obligations and parameters, but critically engages groups to reflect on their structure, functioning and practices.

Specifically, the project assists groups in increasing participation, accountability, and transparency within their organizations, and satisfying both their legal and funding requirements. We do so by providing information and critical support on issues such as boards, membership, employment standards, by-laws and assemblies. We provide this in three ways:

1. COCo’s Legal Info-Sheets, which are available for download on the COCo website; (http://www.coco-net.org/en/node/236);
2. One-on-one Information Sessions;
3. Public Legal Information Workshops.

The project, which began in 2008 with funding from the Canadian Heritage’s Community Life fund, has since been supported by Centraide.

Please note: COCo does not provide legal advice. COCo staff are facilitators, trainers and coaches, but we are not lawyers and as such will not provide you with legal advice. We will not tell you what to do but we will give you information which may be useful in helping you determine how to move forward. If you do need legal advice, COCo can refer you to lawyers who specialize in non-profit and charity law.
Just Practice: An anti-oppression project

*Just practice, c'est pratique* is a project that was developed in collaboration with other staff, volunteers and board members from community groups across the province. The project has increased the capacity of workers and volunteers in ethnocultural, bilingual and English-speaking community groups in Quebec to prevent oppression and to work through conflict in constructive ways.

We worked with 20 community groups to design a 2-day training, which took place in June 2011, to build skills around:

- Conflict Prevention (interpersonal communication skill building, active listening, etc.),
- Conflict Resolution Basics (skills to help us intervene in times of organizational conflict, conflict related to issues of oppression, etc.),
- Anti-oppression (thinking systemically about preventing oppression through policies and other measures, awareness raising, addressing bias and power imbalances in our orgs, etc.)

Groups and individuals who participated in the training exchanged these transferable skills - skills that help address communication obstacles, encourage accessibility and anti-oppression practice in our groups. Some groups were previously strong advocates of this work, others may not have formalized their commitment to anti-oppression practices. COCo facilitators and participants then worked together during the year to build on their learnings and take action within their communities, such as developing anti-oppression training and dialogue, and transforming internal practices and policies.

In December 2011 we held a wrap-up session where participant groups shared their planning, strategies and challenges, and ways in which they can keep these connections alive. This project has demonstrated the interest from various communities to do anti-oppression work and stay connected!

Meanwhile, this year at COCo we have undergone our own internal anti-oppression needs assessment, working sessions and training with the wonderful Jenna Peters-Golden from AORTA (Anti-Oppression Resource Training and Alliance: http://aortacollective.org/). We have also drafted a living *Statement of Anti-Oppression* which we hope to finalize and share via our website in 2012.

This project has supported groups interested in more than simply managing or encouraging “diversity.” *Just Practice* has assisted groups’ in engaging in critical analysis of power imbalances on interpersonal, organizational, societal, institutional and other systemic levels.
C’est en Franglais: Bridging the linguistic divides

This year, COCo has thought critically about the significance of language through our project C’est en Franglais: A series of reflections and tools on the Quebec linguistic divides.

As a building block to meaningful dialogue, language is more than just a simple communication tool. As the cornerstone of our perception of the world, language needs to be understood as having a deeper purpose. It is important to recognize how it is shaped by a historical context and power structures. How is language used by some to further a particular social agenda and a specific way of understanding the world? Why is the mastery of language a privilege which some take for granted? How can language create implicit barriers between people whose interest may, in fact, be similar?

We engaged our membership through a survey, focus groups and planning sessions to address the following questions:

1. Is language a form of power? How so?
2. Over the course of your community organizing, what are the aspects of bridging the linguistic gap that have felt especially frustrating or challenging for organization?
3. What are some solutions you’ve come up with in your work that have made it easier for you to work in languages that aren’t your first?

We are in the process of compiling participating groups’ feedback into concrete tools to be launched at an all-day public forum in March 2012.
COCo’s Strategic Alliances

COCo recognizes the need to think strategically about the decisions we make as part of our work with community organizations across Quebec. The Strategic Alliances hub maps, monitors, and guides COCo with respect to the groups, coalitions, initiatives and other bodies with whom we need to forge and maintain connections in order to meet our objectives most effectively.

Over this past year, the Strategic Alliances hub has helped COCo explore its commitment to social movement building by making links with La Coalition opposée à la tarification et à la privatisation des services publics. Along with disseminating information and community-based analyses of alarming provincial budgeting and privatization trends through our ebulletin and other outreach materials, we also organized popular education sessions on the subject in Montreal and Bedford. We continue to explore ways to connect, engage and mobilize with our members around these critical developments.

COCo has also been involved with the network COCAF (Coalition des organismes communautaires autonomes en formation) and has helped to redefine its mission, vision and values for the future. COCAF will be launching some new promotional strategies in 2012 as well as organizing a summer event in the spring months to come.

As the Occupy movement took off around the world in the fall of 2011, we also took the opportunity to reflect amongst ourselves and within our network on some how some of its critiques and demands relate to our work. We explored some of these links in our November ebulletin, and continue to engage in an ongoing dialogue about community-based service and advocacy for social change with groups in our network.

Finally, by way of connecting with social justice movements across borders, COCo staff member Spencer Mann headed down to Atlanta, Georgia in July 2011 for a year-long learning exchange with the Peoples Movement Assembly. This US-based movement-building effort brings together grassroots movements from across the country to develop common analysis and to commit to collective plans of action. Spencer has been sharing lessons from the US and helping COCo develop a stronger understanding of how movement-building strategies could be applied in the Quebec context. See peoplesmovementassembly.org for more information.
COCo communications

On the communications front, 2011 was a time of consolidation for COCo. Following a couple of years of strategic organizational development and technological transition, we began to hit our stride this year, both in terms of output as well as collecting and analyzing performance-related data. Through this process, we discovered the following:

- The median monthly open-rate (the number of people who opened our emails) of COCo’s ebulletin has held consistently at 16% above the industry average since our 2009 upgrade;
- The annual growth rate of our mailing list has also remained steady since the upgrade;
- Both the number of visits and unique visitors to our website grew this year, with our home page, ebulletin and toolbox as the most popular pages;
- The number of visitors accessing our website using a mobile device more than doubled in 2011.

We also continued to explore the social media world via Facebook and Twitter, using the “slow media” approach to social media (like the “slow food movement” - choosing ingredients mindfully and preparing them in a concentrated manner).

We were thrilled to be able to share some of this kind of knowledge with other community groups, as well as much more, in the second and final year of our Spread the Word Web and IT project. Spread the Word was a response to the needs of Quebec community groups for more training and support in relation to communication and information technology (IT). For years at COCo we have seen community groups struggling with websites, servers, social media communication strategies, basic office work stations, open source software, etc. To begin to address this lack of capacity, we organized a community web and IT needs assessment, followed by an open community training. These were subsequently made available to the public via the COCo website.

Finally, in terms of our internal communications work, we made the official transition to CiviCRM, a free, open-source constituent relationship management system, and are now in the final stages of that process - migrating our email list management to CiviMail. We look forward to sharing that process with you in the months to come - be it as an info-COCo, a resource in our toolbox, or an ebulletin reflection!
COCo would like to acknowledge the support of its funders and community partners:

Council for Magdalen Islanders (CAMI)

Canadian Heritage

Centraide du Grande Montréal

Coasters Association in the Lower North Shore

Mission du Ministère de l’Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport

Secrétariat à l’action communautaire autonome et aux initiatives sociales (SACAIS)

YMCA du Grande Montréal