



Building Opportunities  
with Business

2008 Stakeholder Engagement Survey

# Final Summary Report

Presented to BOB Stakeholders in January, 2009 by:

Helen M Sheridan, CHRP

Lead Consultant

The Bridge, Coaching & Strategy Inc

[Helen.sheridan@thebridgestrategy.com](mailto:Helen.sheridan@thebridgestrategy.com)



## INTRODUCTION:

The 2008 Stakeholder Engagement Survey strengthened Building Opportunities with Business's mission, "to champion and support inclusive revitalization programs for Vancouver's inner city that value existing businesses and residents." The process solicited feedback from businesses and agencies about their perceptions of the quality, visibility, support and therefore inclusiveness of programs and services that BOB currently offers.

In August 2008, design phase consultations began partnering BOB's management staff with an outside consultant. The expressed goal of these consultations was to design an inclusive, engaging, and repeatable process that would invite BOB's stakeholders to share open feedback about BOB's progress and impact as a resource and connector in the inner city.

The first phase solicited generalized on-line feedback from BOB's partners. The collated views from this survey provided baseline measurements of partner perceptions of service quality, program visibility, and overall support for BOB in the community it serves.

The second phase of the process involved face-to-face conversations with stakeholders aimed at deepening understanding of the generalized feedback.

Stakeholders surveyed included current community stakeholders including business and agency clients of:

### Employment Services

- Workforce Development Fund
- Employment Engagement & Job Posting
- Employment Readiness (Pre-Employment, CORE)
- Job Retention Support Services (SEP, Job Coach)
- BusinessLinks

### Business Development Programs

- Social Purchasing Portal
- Business Expansion Services
- Small Business Development Programs
- Business Loan Program
- CBA Procurement

### Investment Identification Program Clients

- Clusters Initiatives (Tourism & Hospitality, Construction, Creative Industries)
- Community Benefits Agreement

NOTE: The 2008 Stakeholder Engagement Survey measured BOB's relationships with partner agencies and businesses, but did not attempt to solicit feedback from community residents (other than those that are partnered with BOB through agency and business relationships).

## OVERVIEW

Of 450 potential survey respondents, 90 responded, giving the survey a respectable 20% response rate. The willingness of stakeholders to invest their time sharing feedback speaks to the progress that BOB has made in its community. Such a high response rate might be considered an indicator of the relevance of this agency to its stakeholders.

90% of these respondents believe that BOB's reputation in the community is remaining the same or is getting better. Over 92% of respondents believe that BOB's performance in partnering with their agency or business is either staying the same or getting better. 52% believe that partnering is getting better, or much better.

The life cycles of the various programs BOB offers is evident in the lack of knowledge and utilization of some of the newer business development programs. The more mature employment programs are both well known and are quite well utilized.

One of the limitations of the survey response group is a disproportionately high percentage of respondents in the agency category. There were few business partners that responded to the survey. This may explain why business development programs were less known to respondents as agency partners would have little knowledge of these programs.

## THEMES:

### Positive Staff Experience

Both on-line survey data and focus group participants report very positive experiences with BOB staff, especially in the supported employment program.

### Positive Momentum Building in Community Leadership

There appears to be good knowledge and emerging utilization of programs related to employment and of the Social Purchasing Portal (SPP). On the employment side, there is little knowledge of the Workforce Development Fund. Staff has reflected this program is only a year old and this may be the reason for lack of community knowledge. Other than the SPP, there is little knowledge of business development programs from the respondents. As previously noted, this may be due to the low response rate from business stakeholders. Investment identification programs are known, though tend to target specific sectors, and therefore responses reflect smaller numbers of stakeholders.

Over 55% of respondents rated the quality of BOB's programs and services as good or excellent, with 54% having "a lot" or "complete" confidence in BOB to act as a resource and connector in the community. Over half of respondents believe that BOB's performance is "getting better" or "much better". By receiving these kinds of results, BOB can be assured that the positive flywheel has gained significant momentum and that overall perception of BOB's contribution to the DTES is improving.

## Communication with Stakeholders

Despite largely positive results in the overall feedback to BOB, it was curious to see that over 61% of respondents suggested that BOB was “average”, “poor”, or had “no opinion” on its ability to meet overall project/performance objectives. When this disparity was discussed in the focus group setting, contributors reflected that they did not fully understand what BOB’s performance objectives are. This answer is consistent with survey results that reflect 30% of respondents having “no opinion” on this question. There is a definite opportunity to create communication tools and strategies clearly outlining BOB’s mission and objectives, as well as its results measured against these objectives, to its’ stakeholders.

## Key Stakeholder Relationships

Continued focus on developing relationships with key vocal DTES stakeholders would likely benefit BOB’s reputation. Consultation with the focus group suggested that increasing service levels to “friendly” stakeholders might yield more productive results.

It is apparent both from the on-line feedback, and from the focus group that street-level relationship building is critical to the emerging and continued success at BOB. Staff and leadership have made significant progress by walking the neighborhood and meeting face-to-face with stakeholders. This personal community-level partnering is expected in this particular environment and should continue.

## Stakeholder Engagement

A participation rate of 20% is encouraging. Overall, only 27% of those who responded represented businesses. Inclusion of more businesses as stakeholders is needed for accurate representation of BOB’s ability to achieve its mission over the long term.

## Leadership

Comments in both phases of the survey process indicate that the current CEO, Shirley Chan, has made significant in-roads in the community for BOB. Existing relationships predating her leadership tenure at BOB have been effectively leveraged in creating connections for existing community members and the staff at BOB.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

### Relationship Building in Community

To maintain the positive reputational momentum that BOB is currently enjoying, continued care to recognize all contributors should be given in any communications coming from BOB. There is also an opportunity to actively promote the successes of other partners, capitalizing on current local community interest toward the DTES.

There is recognition of positive and warm community relations between staff and stakeholders, yet there is a lingering perception of BOB's elitist image in the community. Possibilities to open the door to the residents and businesses of the community, both literally and figuratively, remain. A measurable and actionable plan might be developed to further remove the barriers between BOB staff and its partners.

Relationships within the community can be further fostered by developing more specific requirements for all staff to nurture relationships with their constituents and stakeholders within the DTES community. Inviting stakeholders to staff meetings aimed at staff education can break down more barriers between stakeholders and staff

### Increasing Agency Stakeholder Engagement

Increasing BOB's credibility with the agencies and businesses of the DTES will deepen by increasing engagement with local residents. Most of BOB's stakeholder agencies exist on the DTES to improve conditions for residents directly. Therefore, results BOB generates will be viewed largely through this lens. Some criticism has been directed at the employment programs currently being offered, which only offer full time employment options. These programs exclude arguably the bulk of DTES residents who are unable to work full-time for a variety of reasons including disability, recovery, family circumstances etc. It is recommended that BOB actively investigate expanding its employment programs to embrace part-time workers.

Increased credibility with stakeholders may also be impacted by extension of this survey process to residents who have benefited from the programs that BOB offers. Personal success stories of residents employed through the supported employment programs that are offered through BOB may increase levels of interest from otherwise uninterested stakeholder agencies and representatives.

### Building Stronger Relationships with Business

The success of the CBA and Cluster initiatives can be shared with other sectors. Lessons learned in the CBA initiative may be leveraged with other non-profit/business partnerships. Now that BOB has established trust in the DTES, increased promotion of the connectivity and resources BOB can provide between the established business community of Vancouver and those on the DTES could provide further leverage for inclusive revitalization programs for Vancouver's inner city.

There is an opportunity to leverage agencies more effectively to build relationships with businesses in the inner city. Possibilities for long term partnering to encourage entrepreneurialism within the community might be a first step. Many of the agencies on the DTES predate BOB and have strong relationships with local businesses. Providing education programs to agency team members on the services that Business Development offers will support further promotion of BOB programs at the grass roots level.

### BOB as Connector and Hub

54% of respondents show high levels of trust in BOB's ability to act as a resource and connector in the community. In the focus group, there was a great deal of interest expressed in BOB's continued evolution of this role. As an example, a focus group discussion involved BOB leadership taking a more active role with the Vancouver Board of Trade in promoting partnerships between businesses (as potential funding sources) and DTES initiatives like the Pantages project. It is recommended that further discussions be held with stakeholders over how BOB may deepen its role in this regard.

### Staffing

There is a strong belief that the current staff are excellent ambassadors for BOB's mission and mandate in the community. There is also some suspicion that further turnover might hinder progress. Care needs to be taken to maximize staff tenure and stability, especially front-line staff, to ensure continued positive relationship building in the community.

### Communication with Stakeholders

If there were to be only one priority area for focus, it would be on communication to stakeholders and the general public. There remains limited awareness of BOB and of what BOB does. One survey group participant suggested that BOB's name may defeat its purpose, as DTES residents may not see themselves as having opportunities to partner with business. Communication of successes might assist with building BOB's profile further. Agency representatives suggested status updates for placed candidates, although the scalability of this request is questionable.

One notable point is that communication do not appear to be as effective in this stakeholder group when done in the traditional "business" way (i.e. press releases, brochures, websites etc). Rather, connecting at the grass roots and personal level has been far more effective in increasing BOB's profile. Survey group participants suggested further outreach of employment programs to local housing co-ops, and promotion of BOB's services to the Vancouver Police Department as effective means to communicate services to the neighborhood it serves.

## FINAL COMMENTS

BOB's success in attracting an excellent staff has moved its mandate forward and has yielded positive results as reflected in survey data. Generally, there is a building positive regard for the work that BOB is doing in its community. Now that stability has been achieved with staffing and leadership, BOB may emerge from its infancy and begin to provide gentle and inclusive leadership within its stakeholder group. It should be noted, that many of BOB's stakeholder agencies have great insight and experience to share with BOB staff as they progress to the next developmental stage. BOB can act as a resource and connector for others, and can also remain open to receiving connections and resources from other agencies,

Communicating BOB's successes must be handled with care. The stakeholders of BOB are members of a closely knit and passionate neighborhood. Emerging as a recognized leader in this neighborhood will continue largely based upon personal, trusting relationships, created through networking and grass-roots involvement and support.

In general, the staff and leadership at BOB should be proud of the progress they have made this year, and also recognize that their building credibility is still in its early days and therefore should be treated with care. There are great opportunities for BOB to continue to progress its mission within its community. Staff members can continue to broaden their roles as resources and connectors in the DTES in the coming years.