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ABSTRACT

Purpose

This paper examines the formation of a cross-sector partnership in which a collaborative response addressed the issue of affordable housing and homelessness in Melbourne, Australia. Factors leading to the formation and evolution of the relationship reveal how social partnerships in the housing/construction industry can be formulated.

Design/methodology/approach

Semi-structured interviews were held with representatives of the three sectors involved in an innovative social housing model, the *Elizabeth Street Common Ground* project. Supported with background documentation, interviews were coded and the results contrasted against theories pertaining to cross-sector collaboration.

Findings

Several factors contributed to the formation of this partnership, most notably the strong social imperative found within the organisational ethos of participating organisations. The opportunity to replicate a well-trialled and successful model coincided with the desire amongst all partners to be part of the solution.

Originality/value

The results provide an insight into the ingredients pivotal to the formation of a successful multi-sector partnership. It highlights the value in sharing best practice and the importance of networks when tackling major global problems such as affordable housing and homelessness.

Introduction

Homelessness and affordable housing are global issues without fast and simple solutions. Faced with a rise in the number of people without adequate housing, government organisations are welcoming the involvement of the private sector alongside nonprofit sector input. Sectors have traditionally worked collaboratively for many years, yet there are few academic contributions that have examined complex cross-sector arrangements where financial and knowledge resources are shared within a partnership agreement. One form of cross-sector collaboration, namely social partnerships, is the focus of this paper.

Social partnerships, as defined by Waddock (1991, p.481-482), are "the voluntary collaborative efforts of actors from organisations in two or more economic sectors in a forum in which they cooperatively attempt to solve a problem or issue of mutual concern that is in some way identified with a public policy agenda item". Participating partners share sector-specific resources and involve an active commitment of time and effort (Waddock, 1988). Through involvement in social partnerships the costs and responsibility are shared.

The purpose of this research paper hence was to examine one prominent and successful case where partners representing the private, nonprofit and public (government) sectors, collaborated in a social partnership targeted at decreasing homelessness. This paper contextualises the problem of homelessness in Australia, highlights a successful collaborative model used to address homelessness, and identifies key collaboration literature, before presenting the case research design. This is followed with a brief presentation and discussion of the key findings and concludes with recommendations and areas for further research focus.

Housing Affordability and Homelessness in Australia

House prices in Australia are becoming more expensive and those under financial stress are not only unable to enter the property market but cannot afford the rental charges (Berry, 2005; Worthington, 2012). In a recent paper, Worthington (2012) outlines in significant depth the

housing affordability problem in Australia and he identifies the scarcity of available housing for those on low incomes and calls for urgent action. Displacement is one of the potential problems directly associated with housing affordability which will only contribute to the existing homelessness problem that is prevalent in Australia.

In 2008, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimated that there were 105,000 homeless Australians. The number includes 16,375 experiencing primary homelessness, which includes those forced to sleep on the streets (ABS, 2008). In the State of Victoria, where this case is set, it is estimated that there are 20,511 homeless people with 1,801 in the primary classification (ABS, 2008). A detailed report by Reynolds (2008) identifies that there are limited opportunities for homeless people and suggests a re-configuration of government funding combined with linkages to affordable housing. Past attempts at addressing primary homelessness have been described as expensive and short-term (Reynolds, 2008). Even though these past solutions responded to the immediate needs of homeless people, the Commonwealth Government has declared that a long-term intervention is essential to end homelessness (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008).

As a response to the high number of homeless people in Australia, the Federal Government's white paper (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008) committed "to a 55 percent increase on the current investment in homelessness services" to be sourced from several funds pertaining to homelessness including $800 million under the National Partnership on Homelessness, $400 million under the National Partnership on Social Housing, and $300 million under *A Place to Call Home* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008: 16), to be distributed over the five year period from 2008-2009. Such funding was in addition to the financial support committed by State Governments. In Victoria, the Office of Housing was actively seeking practical solutions "through partnership and capacity building arrangements with developers and community housing organizations, supported by state government budget allocations" (Berry, 2005:16).

Cross-sector collaboration was considered a viable option to fulfill the vision and commitment put forth by the Federal and State governments. A cross-sector approach provides an opportunity for resources and knowledge to be shared, along with risk and responsibility. The purpose of this research paper is to exhibit one prominent and successful case where the three sectors, nonprofit,

private and government, collaborated in a project targeted at decreasing homelessness and providing affordable housing.

The Common Ground Model

The Common Ground Model arises from the United States (US). This model uses a holistic approach to end homelessness and seeks to provide permanent housing for low income and homeless individuals (Common Ground, c. 2010). Under this model, disused buildings are converted into affordable and supportive housing (Reynolds, 2008), incorporating a range of social services for tenants including employment, medical services and 24 hour assistance. Successfully trialled in the US, the model has also shown a reduction in the amount of government funding required to service the needs of the chronically homeless. The actual cost savings identified by the USA Common Ground were explained (in USD):

> Our housing costs approximately $40 per night to operate – significantly less than public expenditures: $54 for a city shelter bed, $74 for a state prison cell, $164 for a city jail cell, $467 for a psychiatric bed, $1,185 for a hospital bed. (Common Ground, 2009)

The Common Ground Model identifies cross-sector partnerships as the most appropriate and effective mechanism to deliver solutions to homelessness. As Reynolds (2008: 15) proposed, a "community wide approach" remains essential to successfully resolve homelessness.

The success of the Common Ground concept has attracted interest from numerous countries including the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia. In Australia the Common Ground model has been embraced by multiple sectors in several states. Purposefully built accommodation has been provided for tenants in South Australia, New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland through the newly created *Australian Common Ground Alliance*.

In the state of Victoria, the *Elizabeth Street Common Ground* partnership adopted the US Common Ground Model. This social partnership has been selected as a unique case demonstrating this community wide approach to social housing. Involved in this social partnership are two housing associations, a building developer, and the State Government of

Victoria. The partnership incorporates a combination of social sustainability for low income and homeless clients, and environmental sustainability, incorporating green initiatives into building design and construction. With call for more proactive solutions in the social housing sector (Berry, 2005: Monk, 2009; Reynolds, 2008) it is important to explore successful solutions.

Cross-sector collaboration becomes the underlying foundation of this investigation with the main focus on how relationships form and begin to evolve. The next section introduces academic work in the area of cross-sector collaboration, in particular problem identification and the formation of social partnerships.

Social Partnerships

Cross-sector collaboration exists in various forms ranging from a simple philanthropic exchange to more complex compositions where financial and knowledge resources are shared within a partnership arrangement. Of the more complex relationships are those defined as social partnerships. Social partnerships involve sectors working collaboratively and cooperatively to solve a societal problem (Waddock, 1991). Social partnerships are formed on the basis of shared values or beliefs and a willingness to become involved in a complex societal issue.

It is important to identify why organisations become involved in an issue in the first instance. The problem identification process requires organisational leaders to acknowledge the relevance of a social issue and frame it within their value system (Brown & Timmer, 2006; Gray, 2007). Sometimes the problem identification process involves external bodies or stakeholders, which draw attention to relevant issues. For example, nonprofit organisations may raise public awareness, articulate frames of reference, and amplify certain issues, thereby attracting private sector attention (Brown & Timmer, 2006). Pressure from stakeholders may be the necessary 'trigger' (Grayson & Hodges, 2004) or 'hook' (Waddock, 1988, 1991) to begin the partnership process.

Four mechanisms in which to meet potential partners have been commonly proposed by social partnership researchers: systematic searches, market makers or brokers, chance and, champions

(Austin, 2000a; Madden, Scaife & Crissman, 2006; Samu & Wymer, 2001; Wymer & Samu, 2003). A systematic search sees private sector organisations and nonprofit organisations search for particular information on a potential suitor such as perceived similarity and reputational consequences (Samu & Wymer, 2001). An external organisation may be utilised in order to find, negotiate and advise potentially suited partners. Chance may be pure coincidence where one organisation has noticed an opportunity to form a relationship with another, evidenced through terms such as 'serendipity' and 'happenstance' (Austin, 2000a). A fourth mechanism is that of an internal key figure who may amplify an issue and bring this to the attention of their organisation, or may seize an opportunity to champion existing causes supported by employees (Madden et al., 2006). Champions act as change agents (Reynolds, 2008) and tend to occupy leadership roles (Hartman, Hofman & Stafford, 1999). The most effective are well connected individuals with solid networks within their own organisation (Berger, Cunningham & Drumwright, 2006).

The value of entering a social partnership in preference to other relationship types has been endorsed by researchers as a better path to solving large scale societal problems (Austin, 2000b; Edwards & Onyx, 2003; Foster, Meinhard, Berger & Wright 2005, Lyons, 2007). A shared interest in a societal issue is the common link between partnering organisations seeking to activate their collective resources towards a novel solution. Social partnerships, however, offer additional organisational benefits for all sectors involved. A nonprofit organisation not only secures investment and commitment to resolving a key social issue, but also raises the profile of their cause and organisation (Rondinelli & London, 2002; Samu & Wymer 2001). Private sector organisations have an opportunity to engage their employees whilst enhancing and enacting their social responsibility agenda (Austin, 2000a; Berger et al., 2006; Cardskadden & Lober, 1998; Googins & Rochlin, 2000; Samu & Wymer, 2001). The public sector has insufficient resources to be able to solve societal problems alone thus requires the collaborative support of the nonprofit and private sectors (Austin, 2000a, 2000b; Googins & Rochlin, 2000; Waddock, 1988).

This research sought to investigate the formation of a social partnership whose focus was on homelessness and provision of affordable housing. The key research question was how do partners come together and form a collaborative partnership?

Research Design

This research adopted a case study approach in order to examine the present-day, alliance phenomenon, within its real-life context (Yin, 2003). Ethics approval was obtained from the University and consent to use the participating organisations' names was obtained from a nominated gatekeeper within each organisation. Data were collected and analysed through semi-structured interviews, archival records, documentation, and observations as proposed by Eisenhardt (1989). *Elizabeth Street Common Ground* was purposefully selected because it represented a significant, successful and innovative project addressing a major social issue. Yin (2003) endorses single cases where they can illustrate rare circumstances or signify a revelation.

Organisations adopting the Common Ground methodology employ a collaborative approach to the design and construction of properties. This research concentrated on the dynamics of the collaboration by examining the viewpoints of the nonprofit, private and government sector organisations involved. Four organisations represented the primary partners in this partnership, two nonprofit organisations, Yarra Community Housing and HomeGround Services; private sector organisation, Grocon Pty Ltd (Grocon); and the Victorian State Government.

Yarra Community Housing is one of eight registered housing associations in Victoria, Australia. Established in 1996, they develop and manage new and rented accommodation for low income tenants. Their aim is to end homelessness and provide affordable housing for those people that require such assistance. HomeGround Services is a housing support provider which offers services for people in need such as outreach support, crisis support and mental health programs to name a few. Formed in 2002 their overall vision is to "end homelessness in Melbourne" (HomeGround Services, c. 2009). Grocon is described as "Australia's largest privately owned development and construction company" (Grocon, 2009). Established in the 1950s they have a commitment to social investment with a particular focus on youth employment and educational opportunities (Grocon, 2008). The Victorian Government's involvement primarily is managed through the Office of Housing, a division of the Department of Human Services. The Office of Housing "works directly with not-for-profit service providers to strengthen their capacity to

deliver efficient and effective homelessness support services" whilst trying to prevent the issues that cause homelessness (State of Victoria, 2009).

Additional interviews were conducted with nonprofit organisations with knowledge of the Common Ground Model and a private sector organisation who was invited to participate in the project, CJ Arms and Associates/Eco Harvest P/L. They are a "specialist consultancy in hydraulic design in water and drainage" (CJ Arms and Associates, 2008) and were involved in this project 'at cost' or 'probono'.

Interview questions commenced with an opportunity for participants to describe their role in the partnership and their opinion on the initiative to date. This then allowed for their experience and knowledge to unfold which addressed the a priori codes that were informed by the literature. Questions focused the process of problem identification, how the potential partners were identified and how this led to the formation of a partnership. Information describing why and how partners formed a relationship and factors they considered essential to the success and growth of the partnership were studied.

Between January and August 2009, fifteen semi-structured interviews were undertaken, transcribed and coded (Table 1). Interviewees were selected based on their involvement and/or knowledge of the initiative. As the questions relied on participants having detailed and specific knowledge of the initiative, gatekeepers from the organisations involved contacted potential participants. Those interested in becoming involved made contact and participated voluntarily with the knowledge that they had the right to withdraw and screen their interview transcript before the coding commence; this screening process is endorsed by Stake (1995). Although a range of employment classifications were represented, their job titles were replaced with the generic 'Manager' and 'Employee' titles as a way of ensuring confidentiality. This is an adaptation from methods used by McQueen (2002) and Seitanidi (2006).

The software program NVivo was employed as a data storage, management and retrieval system. Additional information was selected from Web sites, including annual reports and media articles

for coding, in a process consistent with those used by Edward and Onyx (2003) and Rondinelli and London (2002) in their cross-sector collaboration investigations.

Table 1: Employment Classifications of Participants

Organisation	Sector	Industry or Classification	Annual Turnover (Aus$)[1]	Approximate Number of Employees	Interviewees	
					Manager	Employee
Grocon Pty Ltd	Private	Construction	220,373,000[2]	300-1200[3]	2	2
Yarra Community Housing	Nonprofit	Development & Housing & Social Services	3,661,237[4]	50[5]	2	-
HomeGround Services	Nonprofit	Development & Housing & Social Services	9,991,092[6]	100[6]	3	-
Victorian Government	Public	Housing	-	-	2	-
CJ Arms and Associates	Private	Construction	-	-	2	-
Other Nonprofit Organisations	Nonprofit	Development & Housing & Social Services	-	-	2	-

Based on Annual Reports for financial year 2007/2008[1]

Source: Careerone.com.au (2009) [2]; Grocon (c. 2010) [3]; Yarra Community Housing (2008) [4]; Nonprofit Manager (2009)[5]; HomeGround Services (2008)[6].

Results and Discussion

The *Elizabeth Street Common Ground* partnership was developed between 2005 and 2007. By 2007 there was a confluence between all the partners and a firm commitment of their future involvement. The data reveal information regarding issue selection, identifies the motivational determinants for inclusion in the social partnership and, the mechanisms involved in partner selection.

The first theme to emerge as a motivational factor was the importance of generating or creating *social value* (see Table 2). Grocon's involvement was, in part, a realisation that homelessness

was a problem in Melbourne and they had an opportunity to participate in the solution. Establishment of the Dina Grollo Foundation, historical accounts of community investment, and a moral argument put forth by the participants can be linked to the values and ideology passed down through the founders and current CEO. The drive to generate social value led to a proactive search for a suitable project. This proactive approach (Porter & Kramer, 2006) supports Gunningham's (2007) theoretical proposition that argues that some organisations propel themselves into social crises requiring alternative solutions.

Table 2: Summary of Participant Coded Responses

	Variables	Sub Categories	HomeGround Services			Yarra Community Housing		Other Nonprofit Orgs		Grocon				CJArms		Vic. Govt	
			Mgr A	Mgr B	Mgr C	Mgr A	Mgr B	Mgr X	Mgr Y	Mgr A	Mgr B	Em A	Em B	Mgr A	Mgr B	Mgr A	Mgr B
Problem identification	Organisational Vision		1	1		1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
		Shared Vision	1				1	1		1		1					
	Cross-sector Marketplace	Networks	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			1		1	1
Motivational Determinants	Social Value Opportunity		1	1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Resource Dependency		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1					1	
	Employee Engagement		1	1		1		1	1	1	1						

Legend: | 1 | = participant identified the variable in the interview

Mgr = Manager

Em = Employee

Source: McDonald, 2012

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The desire to become involved in a societal issue that demonstrated close alignment with an organisation's core business or aims provides insight into issue selection, represented as *organisational vision* in Table 2. Homelessness provided Grocon with a societal problem demanding the use of their core business skills to deliver a solution. Employees were able to apply their skill set to a "*different framework*" yet deliver "*a community outcome rather than a financial outcome*" (Grocon Manager). As such, an alignment to core business operations was demonstrated. One Grocon manager summarised this:

> *... all too often building companies build great buildings, and they leave a good physical footprint but we have to think more about the social footprint that we leave behind and how do we help the communities that we live in? We have the expertise; we have the people who can help to build these buildings so I think it is a good fit.* (Grocon Manager)

For the two nonprofit organisations, their core business and core vision was to end homelessness. The philosophy of both nonprofit organisations included a strong desire to find solutions to homelessness and cross-sector collaboration was considered a viable means to accomplish their goals. Such direction was clarified by one nonprofit participant:

> *...we are going to end homelessness and we are going to do it by supplying housing or increasing the supply of housing... We need to have partnerships that facilitate that, not just pay for it.* (Nonprofit Manager)

The fourth core partner was the Victorian Government's Department of Housing. As part of their overall strategy to resolving housing issues and their responsibilities towards the homeless, the Victorian Government (VG) works closely with housing associations. They were proactive in financing the initiative for they saw the Common Ground concept as a solution towards ending homelessness "*rather than sustaining people in their homelessness ... It was an evolution in terms of ... the way governments deal with homelessness*" (VG Manager).

Although Grocon may not have begun with the same vision as the two nonprofit organisations, they were prepared to share the common goal to reduce homelessness and incorporated this within their social investment strategy. A Grocon employee identified their perception of Grocon's overall commitment to creating social value: "*...they have a genuine concern about*

homelessness and I think they want to get involved in community projects and address such a serious issue" (Grocon Employee).

One nonprofit manager said that Grocon, *"really came on board with our vision [and] that works for them as well. It meets a number of needs for their organisational development"* (Nonprofit Manager). Three nonprofit sector participants also spoke of "alignment" and "common goals" in relation to the vision they shared.

A resource dependency argument also emerged from the data and became another dominant motivational factor in partnership formation (See Table 2). Resource dependency can help explain the desire expressed by partners to pool resources including expertise and finances to achieve a better outcome (Rondinelli & London, 2002). The nonprofit sector imparted expertise about homelessness and the private sector contributed extensive construction knowledge. Financial resources were pooled from all sectors, particularly the public and private sectors. Collectively the State and Federal Government contributed 75 per cent of the overall cost of the project. The remaining 25 per cent was funded by the housing association which sought support from the private sector to raise necessary funds.

A culture building motive (also see Austin, 2000a) was highlighted by Grocon, with the project providing their organisation with the opportunity to engage their employees (see *employee engagement* Table 2). One nonprofit manager surmised:

> *... my sense is that one of the things that has really motivated Grocon's involvement in this project is to develop a corporate culture that includes a strong sense of social responsibility – so that everybody at Grocon can feel good about themselves, not just about building huge, beautiful buildings, but actually contributing to meeting the needs of marginalized people as well. That is very evident.* (Nonprofit Manager)

Engaging in a social initiative encouraged a sense of ownership amongst the employees', thus providing an opportunity to boost morale.

The process of finding potential partners, with compatible motives and objectives was another aspect of this research. The nonprofit sector played a pivotal role in the formation phase, using a

formal launch to engage members of the private sector to amplify the issue (Brown & Timmer, 2006). Using valuable networks, leaders from private sector organisations across Victoria were drawn to the launch via invitation. Indeed, one nonprofit organisation employed personnel for the initiative based on their ability to bring with them their own list of contacts or personal networks (see Table 2). While other studies have associated the building of networks with chance meetings (Austin, 2000a; Wymer & Samu, 2003), invitations to this launch were well planned. An additional hook (Waddock, 1988) that was important to successful partnership formation in this early phase included a visit and support from homelessness champion, Rosanne Haggerty.

All sectors in this case entered the partnership in the knowledge that they were investing into a well-trialled model. Previous success of the model was therefore an important mechanism to attract and unite the four core partners. Representatives from the four core partners involved in the *Elizabeth Street Common Ground* partnership spoke with organisations, government officials and tenants involved in the US Common Ground Model. Observers of the US Common Ground complex saw the model working successfully for the client group but importantly there was "*a lot of evidence to support that not only was it cost neutral it was actually cost saving as well*" (Nonprofit Manager).

Once the partnership was underway, key representatives from each organisation ensured the lines of communication both within their own organisation and between the partnering organisations remained open. All sectors operate with different timescales and expectations so there was a continual process of problem identification, compromise and resolution between the partners. All organisations felt that they had learnt valuable insight into how other sectors worked and the importance of expressing evolving organisational needs and requirements. All agreed that greater clarity early in the process would help the separate organisations understand each other's needs. A suggestion for future cross-sector partnerships was to incorporate a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or pre-contract outlining what each organisation would contribute and how that contribution would be implemented.

Outcomes

Elizabeth Street Common Ground has now been operational for two years. This form of supportive housing is designed for vulnerable people experiencing significant barriers to stable housing. This may be caused through extended periods of homelessness, the impacts of impaired physical and/or mental health, substance abuse, disability, entrenched disadvantage, and significant trauma (HomeGround Services, 2012). In total, 131studio apartments occupy eight floors of a purpose built building. In addition, there are 30 apartments for low income families who have access through a separate entrance (HomeGround Services, 2010). Overall, the aim was to have a tenancy balance of 50% formerly homeless and 50% low income households (HomeGround Services, 2010).

As a consequence of their circumstances, tenants have a complex set of needs that in order to improve, must to be accommodated. Traditionally, homeless people have face difficulties in accessing both mainstream and specialist homelessness services and come across several barriers including awareness, eligibility, location, access and cost to name a few (Black & Gronda, 2011). Upon arrival at services, they can feel confused, unwelcome and excluded (Black and Gronda, 2011). The success of the Common Ground model in the US demonstrates value and function of providing essential services in a centralised location. The Elizabeth Street housing complex adopts this centralised on-site approach providing a comprehensive array of essential services within the one building, listed in Table 3.

Table 3: Service provision at Elizabeth Street Common Ground

Elizabeth Street Common Ground Services
24/7 concierge service, front desk and support provision Recreational programs Educational programs On-site nurse (4 days/week) On-site psychiatrist (1 day/week) Psychologists Podiatrists Remedial massage (1 day/week) On-site general practitioner (half a day/week) Alcohol and drug counsellor (half a day/week) Physiotherapist (fortnightly) Dietician (fortnightly)

(HomeGround Services, 2011; 2012).

As per the Common Ground model, the buildings are managed by the tenancy management and services (Common Ground Australia). The management of these essential on-site support services, as well as the management of tenancies is and ongoing operation performed by the two nonprofit partners, HomeGround Services and Yarra Community Housing. In addition, there are a host of partners including, "Royal District Nursing Service Homeless Persons Program, Melbourne GP Network, Centre for Adult Education (CAE), Brotherhood of St Laurence, Second Bite, Rotary Club of Melbourne, North Richmond Community Health, North Yarra Community Health, Doutta Galla Community Health, Turning Point, Green Collect and Wesley Mission", who are all contributing to the initiative (HomeGround Services, 2012).

To date, there are many positive outcomes reported by HomeGround Services including the improvements in the quality of life for tenants, sustained tenancies for formally homeless tenants, engagement in programs, use of supportive services. This client-centred approach reduces the barriers previously mentioned. HomeGround Services acknowledge however, that this model has not worked for all tenants and those who left where provided with other supportive services (HomeGround Services, 2011).

Although those directly involved in Elizabeth Street Common Ground can see firsthand the value of the initiative, outcomes will be independently evaluated by The Victorian Department of Human Service and the University of New South Wales over four years. In the meantime, success may be measured in terms of the number of people that have sustained their new living environment and how they are rebuilding their lives. The success of the model can also be measured by the level of replication; Adelaide already trialled the model and new developments have been constructed in Sydney, Brisbane, and Hobart. Perth and the ACT are considering adopting the model (HomeGround Services, 2011).

Conclusion

Three core themes have been identified, *social value*, *resource dependency* and the opportunity for *employee engagement.* All provide insight into the motives that encouraged inclusion. In addition, alignment of the societal issue with the core activities of each organisation was imperative. A further aim of this investigation was to determine how the motivated organisations actually formed a tangible partnership.

A key contribution of this research is that pre-collaborative conditions are interlinked and shape the direction an organisation wishes to proceed. Organisations move into the cross-sector marketplace where their likelihood of finding a suitable partner is heightened through the strategic use of established networks which builds upon selection methods presented by Austin (2000a) and Wymer and Samu (2003). In making the connection between issue and partner selection, this research found that nonprofit organisations need to be strategic by enhancing their visibility with corporate leaders or tapping into established networks to raise issue and organisational awareness.

The Common Ground model works around the premise that all sectors have a part to play in resolving community issues. The founders of Common Ground have adopted an inclusive approach, sharing their intellectual property and encouraging new social partnerships to replicate or refine the partnership initiative. The *Elizabeth Street Common Ground* partnership team can

be seen as a product of a growing partnership cluster whose core lies with the US Common Ground nonprofit organisation and its founder, Rosanne Haggerty.

Articulation of the Common Ground concept allowed interested partners to frame the problem and potential solution (Gray, 2007). Partners built associations (Brown & Timmer, 2006) and benefited from the shared experiences of those that had implemented the Common Ground model elsewhere. Such uptake, or what participants referred to as 'buy-in', presents similarities to cases investigated by Austin (2000a), in which a successful social partnership acted as a catalyst for initiative replication. Uptake of the Common Ground Model supports the importance of an effective program design that includes measurable outcomes.

Inclusion in existing social partnerships may provide the impetus to create industry-wide acceptance and change. Successful social partnership models act as catalysts in soliciting further support and generating positive change. Further research could investigate the impact social partnerships with multiple partners have on societal issues.

As an overarching contribution to the problem of affordable housing and provision of homes for the homeless, this paper highlights one possible solution. Organisations from each sector have learnt from this process and are now better positioned to find further innovative solutions to what has become increasingly recognised as a problem for a community to resolve, not just one sector.

Acknowledgements

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