

You Can Make Smart Growth Happen in Your Community



Or, How to Start a Citizen Organization In Your Neighbourhood or Town



Congratulations!

You are interested in ensuring that growth and development in your community maintains quality of life, protects the environment, and uses tax revenues wisely. And you want to join with other like-minded individuals and organizations to make it happen.

This guide will give you a brief introduction to the key steps you'll need to take to start a local citizen organization, including:

Learning About Smart Growth	page 2
Finding Your Fellow Members	page 3
Creating Your Vision	page 4
Deciding on Your Activities	page 5
Forming the Organization	page 6
Funding Your Work	page 7
Further Resources	page 8

The very first thing you should do is check out the **Smart Growth Toolkit**. The Toolkit has been an invaluable resource for citizens across BC, and includes information on:

- An introduction to smart growth (Part 1)
- Smart growth tools (Part 2)
- Strategies for citizen involvement, including community organizations (Part 3)
- Additional resources (Part 4)

You can download the Toolkit for free from the Smart Growth BC website:

www.smartgrowth.bc.ca/index.cfm?Group_ID=3383

Or, you can buy a hard copy by contacting the Smart Growth BC office at 604.915.5234 or info@smartgrowth.bc.ca.



Learning About Smart Growth

Smart Growth is development that maintains quality of life, protects the environment, and uses tax revenues wisely. The following resources will help you learn more about smart growth. Then, you can think about the ways that smart growth can be applied to your community.

Smart Growth BC backgrounders, publications and reports:

www.smartgrowth.bc.ca

Smart Growth Toolkit and the Smart Growth Primer:

<http://www.smartgrowth.bc.ca/Publications/tabid/58/Default.aspx>

Learn why citizens are a key ingredient in Smart Growth:

<http://66.51.172.116/Portals/0/Downloads/EOCEpolicy.pdf>

Smart Growth Canada:

www.smartgrowth.ca/home_e.html

Smart Growth in the US:

www.smartgrowthamerica.org/

www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/

Online Courses on Smart Growth:

www.moodleserv.com/smartgrowthca/

www.planetizen.com/courses/smartgrowth

Join the Livable Communities Listserv to receive all the latest news and views on smart growth in BC and beyond:

Go to www.smartgrowth.bc.ca and enter your email address under "Stay in the Loop"

Check out the programs offered by Smart Growth BC

(<http://66.51.172.116/Programs/tabid/57/Default.aspx>) to see if your organization or community is eligible:

- Community Assistance Program (CAP)
- Community Assistance Program Plus (CAP+)
- Smart Growth on the Ground
- Smart Growth Advisory Services
- Voter Education Campaigns



Finding Your Fellow Members

There is strength in numbers, so you'll want to find fellow citizens who share your smart growth vision. Plan a meeting at someone's kitchen table or at a local coffee shop. Or, if you already know lots of folks will be coming, see if you can get a free space at a local library, school, place of worship or community centre.

Here are a few strategies to **raise awareness** about your activities:

- Put up flyers on community bulletin boards, at the library and recreation centres and at municipal hall. Hand your flyers out at local sporting events, farmers' markets, and other local festivals.
- Write a media release about your first meeting and send it to the local newspaper and radio stations. Follow it up with phone calls.
- Review lists of existing community organizations (often available from your Chamber of Commerce or a local volunteer centre). In the Smart Growth Toolkit (page 24 of Part 3), you'll find a list of the kinds of groups that are potential allies.
- Write submissions for newsletters and e-bulletins of local organizations.
- Make presentations at meetings of local organizations.
- Attend public hearings on local development issues, and talk to the other audience members.
- Establish a website, blog (e.g. www.blogger.com), or email listserv (e.g. groups.google.ca) for your organization.
- If you have funds available, consider advertisements in your local paper. Many newspapers have reduced rates for non-profit or community groups. Or, check out Unaddressed Admail from Canada Post.

Be sure to talk to the Planning, Community Development, or Social Planning department at your municipal or regional government. They may have resources or even funding available for community organizations, and can help you spread the word.



Creating Your Vision

Now that you've brought together a dedicated group of individuals, you'll need to decide on your goals and how to achieve them. This may change over time. Many groups form in reaction to a development proposal, but soon find they are most effective as an on-going, proactive organization.

First, tackle the creation of your **mission and/or vision statement**.

What do you visualize as the outcome of your work?

What do you hope to see as the future of your community?

In what geographic area (neighbourhood, town, region) are you planning to work?

Here are some examples to get you started:

Committee for a Strong and Sustainable Salmon Arm:

CASSSA members share a vision of a strong, vital community where engaged citizens proactively share in the decision-making for land-use, transportation, building, environmental and other policies that will result in the best possible quality of life and sense of community for Salmon Arm citizens.

The Friends of Cortes Island believe in:

- *Research and education about the marine and land environment that is our island home*
- *Living in harmony with our wilderness areas*
- *Cultivating and strengthening the connection between people and place*

Next, you'll need to consider the **goals** of your organization. Clear goals will enable you to see where you are going and measure whether you've gotten there. Ask:

How will you measure success for your organization?

Be sure that your goals are SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound).



Deciding on Your Activities

Next, you need to decide what your organization is interested and capable of doing. What will help you achieve your vision and goals? Part 3 of the Smart Growth toolkit outlines some of the activities your group may do. Here are some general ideas, in order of increasing involvement:

- **Sharing Information:** Keep members informed about upcoming public hearings, meetings, planning processes (like an update to an Official Community Plan) and developments. This simple exchange of information can be done with a website, listserve, or newsletter.
- **Responding to Proposals:** Respond to development proposals and community planning processes, by attending and speaking at hearings and meetings, or preparing written submissions.
- **Becoming a Proactive Community Voice:** As your organization gains members and credibility, it may become one of the accepted representatives of the community. Your group and the local government could agree that developers must consult with your organization during early stages of development proposals. Your organization can also offer to participate in and even lead processes like neighbourhood planning, community mapping, and design charrettes.
- **Monitoring:** Help the local government keep track of its smart growth performance. Your members can monitor direct decisions on development proposals, to make sure they fit with the Official Community Plan and smart growth principles. You can also look at decisions that indirectly affect smart growth, like budget allocations between bike lanes and road widening.

Whatever your chosen activities, be sure to approach all your work in a **positive, respectful spirit of collaboration**. Research shows that people respond much better to positive wording and messages. Be sure to avoid just complaining - bring ideas and solutions to the table.

Take some time to learn about communications, to ensure that your message is clear and well received. Although the organization is no longer active, IMPACS has excellent communication resources on their website: www.impacs.org/publications. Positive messages will ensure that your organization becomes an effective and respected voice for smart growth in your community.



Forming the Organization

As your organization gets rolling, you'll need to consider how it will be financed and run.

You should decide whether it would be advantageous to incorporate as a non-profit society, become a registered charity, or both. You may have more "clout" as a formal organization. Many funding agencies require recipients to be a non-profit agency or charity, and you may have more luck attracting membership dues and donations if you have charitable status. However, there is some expense and paperwork involved with both options, and charities are subject to rules that limit advocacy activities.

You will also need to decide how your organization will be run. Would it be useful to have a board of directors, committees, and/or paid staff?

These excellent resources will help you consider these and other "governance" issues:

- Charity Village – Starting a Non-Profit or Charity
www.charityvillage.com/cv/guides/guide4.asp
- BC Government – Information on Forming a Society
www.fin.gov.bc.ca/registries/corppg/forms/reg20.pdf
- Volunteer Vancouver – A to Z Directory for Board Governance
www.volunteerbc.bc.ca/tools/governance.html

Also, be sure to check with your local United Way, local or regional government, and local volunteer or social planning organizations.



Funding Your Work

Most community organizations rely mostly on a wealth of passion and energy from dedicated volunteers. But sometimes, a little cash doesn't hurt. A few tips on raising money:

- Remember, many funding agencies require recipients to be a non-profit and/or charity. If you decide not to incorporate, you may want to find an existing organization that has, and partner with them on fundraising activities.
- Consider charging dues or a small membership fee.
- Check to see if there is a Community Foundation in your area: www.cfc-fcc.ca/who_we_are/list.cfm?id=2
- Contact local credit unions and banks; many have programs to fund community events and activities. For example: www.valleyfirst.com/about/community.php
www.td.com/fef/
- Talk to local businesses and umbrella organizations, such as the Chamber of Commerce, local Economic Development Society, or the local chapter of the BC Homebuilder's Association. In addition to becoming potential allies, these groups may be interested in sponsorship opportunities.
- Contact your local and/or regional government. They may have funding resources, and will also be potential allies that you'll want to cultivate.
- Look out for government funding opportunities, such as:

Eco-Action

www.ec.gc.ca/ecoaction/index_e.htm

Canadian Rural Partnership

www.rural.gc.ca/programs/networking_e.phtml



Further Resources

Your organization has a committed core of volunteers, a succinct mission, clear goals, a good sense of what to do, and ideas on governance and funding. What's next?

- **Learn from Other Organizations:** There are plenty of local smart growth organizations in BC. Contacts groups in your region for inspiration, ideas, and to share resources. Some examples:

Association of Citizens for Summerland
<http://summerlanders.blogspot.com/>

Committee for a Strong and Sustainable Salmon Arm
www.casssa.ca

Fraser Valley Conservation Coalition

Friends of Cortes Island
www.cortesisland.com/cgi-bin/tideline/show_bizsponsor.cgi?ID=144

Kaslo and Area Residents' Association

Squamish Downtown Neighbourhood Association

- **Keep Informed.** Join the Smart Growth BC Livable Communities listserv to keep abreast of smart growth news and events in your area. You can also submit your own postings, to spread the word about your activities or ask for assistance from our 800+ members. Go to www.smartgrowth.bc.ca and enter your email address under "Stay in the Loop"
- **Share Your News.** The Smart Growth BC website contains inspiring stories of citizens like you, who are helping to make smart growth a reality. Share your success stories with the world – connect at <http://66.51.172.116/Contact/tabid/59/Default.aspx> and tell us what you've achieved.

