



FROM SEED TO HARVEST

A PLAYBOOK FOR MOBILIZING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

**Lessons from a journey to address food insecurity
in Shelburne, Nova Scotia**



CENTRE FOR LOCAL PROSPERITY
Reconnect. Relocalize. Regenerate.



**Sobey School
of Business**
Saint Mary's University

CLARI



COMMUNITY GARDEN
AND FOOD LIBRARY

**This playbook is dedicated to
John Davis & Mike Hartigan,
whose passion and leadership inspired
a vision that continues to grow.**



Photo provided by Tania Smith



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Find the online playbook on
the Centre for Local
Prosperity website



From Seed to Harvest: Mobilizing Community Engagement



“Seeds of the idea for a community garden in Shelburne, Nova Scotia, were sown [...] at a conference hosted by the Centre for Local Prosperity, and then —quite literally— in a plot of land beside Shelburne Regional High School in the spring of 2023. Thanks to citizen engagement, a team of volunteer gardeners is already reaping far more than produce.” [1]

Do you have an idea for how to address a challenge facing your community, but aren't sure where to start? Or maybe you're already deep into a project and are encountering barriers you didn't foresee?

Mobilizing grassroots community change efforts is hard work. Really hard. So many great ideas get started and then fizzle out over time as barriers are encountered. Finding the resources needed, sustaining the energy to keep going, and navigating different perspectives are just some of the reasons it can be difficult to move ideas to action.

We were inspired by a community-led effort to address food insecurity in Shelburne, Nova Scotia. What started with an idea and conversations between a local municipal staff member and the Principal of the community college nearly a decade ago led to the completion of the town's first greenhouse in 2026, operated by volunteers. This journey is not just about the construction of the greenhouse; it's a story of how long-time residents, community newcomers and institutions came together to take matters into their own hands. There's still a long road ahead, but a foundation of trust has been formed to build from.

Through sharing the Shelburne greenhouse story, we hope to inspire and offer tangible tips to changemakers working to make a positive impact on their community. We've framed their journey as a series of phases, from the first spark of an idea to boots on the ground, shovels in the dirt, and hands in the soil. Those involved graciously shared their experiences, obstacles, mistakes, and lessons learned to help others increase their chances of success.

This playbook includes context about the project partners, the Shelburne community greenhouse story organized by phases, and lessons learned. At the end, you'll find a list of practical resources for supporting community projects.

[1] Nova Scotia Journal of Sustainable Community Development: Sowing the seeds of food security in Shelburne County.
<https://sustainablens.ca/2023/12/sowing-the-seeds-of-food-security-in-shelburne-county/>

Project Partners

The **Centre for Local Prosperity** has a mandate to assist small, local and rural communities in gaining greater agency over their economic future and community well-being. Hosting events related to local prosperity and addressing food insecurity are key activities of the Centre. The 2015 Local Prosperity conference was the catalyst for community-led work addressing food insecurity in Shelburne.

Dr. Annika Voltan, a researcher at **Saint Mary's University Sobey School of Business**, and Taylor Davies, a recent MBA graduate, led the data collection and analysis for the project. The School has a strong commitment to sustainability and a purpose to advance knowledge and develop leaders to shape a better world.

Funding for the project was provided by the **Change Lab Action Research Initiative (CLARI)**. CLARI helps connect researchers with community projects to contribute to concrete outcomes that help people and communities across Nova Scotia.

The Centre's work is guided by the principle of Community Wealth Building, which is rapidly gaining momentum around the world as a response to the fragility of globalized systems. First introduced by the **Centre for Local Economic Strategies** in the UK, it incorporates 5 pillars, several of which are key components of this Shelburne process.

Spending: Develop local supply chains

Finance: Harness local investment and recirculate wealth

Land and Property: Generate financial and social gain through assets held by anchor institutions

Workforce: Exercise fair employment practices to improve the wellbeing of local people

Build the Generative Economy: Grow locally owned enterprises, locking wealth into place

The **Community Garden and Food Share Association of Shelburne County** was established to advance community efforts to address food insecurity in Shelburne. Its volunteer board members shared their story to help make this research project and playbook happen.



The Shelburne Greenhouse Story

The greenhouse in Shelburne is the result of a vision of community empowerment – not just to construct a building, but to gain food sovereignty.

Shelburne county is a rural region on the south shore of Nova Scotia with a population of less than 15,000 people. The area is a food desert, exhibited by the fact that the Town of Shelburne is served by a single grocery store that is perceived as costly and unreliable for fresh produce, and much of the surrounding land is not well-suited to farming.

In 2015, a municipal staff member (who later became the Warden) attended a regional conference hosted by the Centre for Local Prosperity and became inspired to do something to address her community's challenges with food insecurity. Early conversations led to a community meeting at the firehall where the idea for a greenhouse first emerged. An example existed already at the local community college to learn from, and people became energized by the possibilities. Community members began asking new questions: What if Shelburne had something like a community garden? What would it change? Who could it serve? Those early conversations were full of hope, curiosity, and were rooted in a shared feeling that something was missing, and that the community itself might be capable of filling that gap.

Research Process

In November 2025, our small research team from Saint Mary's University and the Centre for Local Prosperity conducted 11 interviews with individuals directly involved in the project at different phases. We visited the greenhouse site, the local high school and Coastal Grove Farm. The goal of the interviews was to capture the story of the Shelburne greenhouse project and identify common themes, challenges, and lessons learned that could be applicable to other community projects. This playbook is an opportunity to share back what we heard and what might be applicable lessons for others embarking on a journey to address the challenges facing their communities.



About this Playbook

The following sections are organized by a series of phases that we observed in how the Shelburne story was shared with us. On the next page you'll find a visual summary of those phases, then a summary of what each entails, including a description of what happened in Shelburne, key events, potential risks and skills and roles needed. The playbook concludes with overarching themes about lessons learned and resources for getting started with your own community project.

Phases of Community Mobilization



Image credit: Alexandra Theroux

Phase 1: The Spark is Ignited - Excited, hopeful, optimistic

Phase 2: The Idea Takes Shape - Structured, tedious, moving uphill, overwhelming (and exciting!)

Phase 3: Plans Come to Life - Fast-paced, exhausting but rewarding, hands-on, full of new learning

Phase 4: Fatigue Sets In - Heavy, depleted, disengaged, nostalgic

Phase 5: Energy is Renewed - Hopeful, rejuvenating, exciting, fun

Phase 6: Ongoing Sustainability & Maintenance - Routine, predictable, gratifying

While the phases are presented in a linear format, in reality, people are typically moving in and out of phases depending on emerging needs and changing plans.



Phase 1: The Spark is Ignited

What this phase feels like: Excited, hopeful, optimistic

The Shelburne Story

Every project begins with an idea; a spark of inspiration that helps shape a vision for a different future. In Shelburne, the spark was ignited between two friends and colleagues, Penny Smith (municipal Councillor and Warden) and Mary Thompson (then principal of the local Nova Scotia Community College). They were excited by the idea of a greenhouse that emerged in a community meeting and spent time together to brainstorm how it could come to fruition. Mary had experience with a greenhouse at the College being run by students and Penny was familiar with the inner workings of the Municipality. It was an exciting time, full of enthusiasm and possibility.

Key Event #1: Early ideas were developed by community leaders with knowledge, influence, skills and experience. The cross-sector roles of the initial collaborators was a key strength.

The initial ideas clarified into something more tangible when Penny and another community leader and visionary, John Davis each visited Coastal Grove Farm. Matt Roy and Cynthia Bazinet, who operate Coastal Grove, moved to the region in 2020 from the US, just before the borders closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Matt had designed solar-powered, geothermal greenhouses suited to the local climate and terrain. This was a lightbulb moment for Penny and John, who realized that this method of growing was exactly what they were looking for, and that a newcomer to the community had the skills to help them design and build it.

“*When we get together, we get all of these wonderful ideas!*”

- Mary Thompson

In late 2022 and early 2023, Mary and Penny hosted meetings to advance discussions about the greenhouse, including the local food bank, growers, municipal staff, nonprofits, and a group of agricultural students at NSCC, who added new perspectives about how the greenhouse might come to be, and how it could best benefit the community. Following the meeting, a survey was distributed via Facebook to spread the word and recruit volunteers. Twenty-seven people expressed interest in doing everything from joining the committee, hosting educational workshops, helping with equipment, to participating in meetings. This was an important initial step toward the eventual formation of a nonprofit organization to lead the work.

Key Event #2: Community volunteers were recruited through the distribution of a public survey. The greenhouse idea moved from being stewarded by a few people to many more with different roles and perspectives.

As word spread, the project garnered support from a wide range of organizations. In addition to the Municipality and the NSCC, the following groups became involved in a variety of ways: Shelburne Regional High School, Shelburne County Youth Health and Support Association (Our House), Sou'West Transit, Shelburne Food Bank, Tri-County Women's Centre, South Shore Family Resource Association, Southend Environmental Injustice Society, Shelburne Senior Safety and Services, Home Visitor Program of Public Health, the Wasoqopa'q First Nation Shelburne Sub-office and the Shelburne County Exhibition Association.



Phase 1 Insights

Signs you're here

- Energy and excitement are high
- Everything feels possible
- The vision is still fluid
- You're explaining the idea a lot

Important considerations

- Early engagement of community leaders (formal and informal) who can access resources and inspire others to get involved
- Early involvement of the broader community to help shape the idea
- Connections with people who have experience and skills related to the project idea



Skills and roles needed

- **Visionaries:** Creative thinkers and dreamers who can imagine what is possible and articulate a compelling vision
- **Community connectors:** People who know the community well and have relationships across different groups
- **Researchers:** People who can critically examine the idea and its feasibility, gather data, and research similar projects
- **Organizers/Project Managers:** People who bring structure to the group and set up meetings, take notes, track decisions, and keep momentum going
- **Communicators:** Storytellers who can build excitement and spread the word

Potential risks

- **Assuming a shared vision:** Even if people seem on board, very different ideas may still exist about what the project is or should become.
- **Early scope creep:** The vision keeps expanding before anything concrete has been accomplished. This can make the project feel overwhelming, and like nothing is getting done.
- **Neglecting engagement with the broader community:** A small group charges ahead without checking whether the wider community actually wants or needs the project.
- **Lack of inclusivity:** The founding group doesn't reflect the diversity of the community, which can create blind spots and alienate potential supporters.



Phase 2: The Idea Takes Shape

What this phase feels like: Structured, tedious, moving uphill, overwhelming (but also excitement associated with progress!)

The Shelburne Story

As projects move beyond the initial spark, work is needed to shift from ideas to action. But before shovels can hit the ground, plans and resources are needed, which require funding proposals, cost estimates and permits, etc. Reality starts to set in about the scale of the work entailed and new skills are needed. In Shelburne, what had once been an idea between friends now required structure, governance and money. In early 2023, a new nonprofit called The Community Garden and Food Share Association of Shelburne County (CGFSASC) was formed to help guide the project, manage assets and develop funding proposals. This marked an important shift in the work, requiring a Board of Directors with defined roles and responsibilities, including a Treasurer to do the bookkeeping and track spending. An initial effort to secure charitable status for CGFSASC was unsuccessful, meaning it was unable to offer tax receipts to donors. This was a disappointment since it put the organization at a disadvantage for receiving some forms of donations.

Key Event #3: A nonprofit organization was formed to manage the project, requiring a Board of Directors with defined roles.

One of the first major steps in bringing the idea to fruition was site selection. The Municipality of Shelburne leased 2.77 acres of land next to the local high school for the greenhouse to CGFSASC for \$1 per year. An anonymous donation of \$40,000 was received to help kickstart the project.

Key Event #4: Critical assets of land and funds were donated to help kick-start the project. A tangible path forward was becoming clear.

“*Having the municipality on board helped because they provided the land and helped with all the ins and outs of things. What you're allowed to do, what you're not allowed to do kind of thing.*”

-Jody Jensen



Photo: Land leased by the Municipality of Shelburne

At the same time, the vision for the greenhouse structure itself was taking shape. Materials lists and blueprints were compiled and funding quickly became a central focus of the project. CGFSASC applied for multiple government grants to cover construction costs. Two federal government funding proposals were pulled together with extensive effort from multiple people. In 2023, as cost estimates from local contractors were being collected, the region was hit by the largest forest fire in Nova Scotia's history, burning over 23,000 hectares of land, and dozens of structures. This made it difficult to secure quotes, as some of the contractors were actively assisting firefighters in their efforts to control the wildfire. The proposals were finally submitted at the last hour and one grant was awarded in early 2024 through the Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund, totaling \$142,000.

At this stage of the project, grant writers, project managers, and those with specialized knowledge about building a greenhouse and drafting construction plans became critical. Key skills included tracking deadlines, interpreting funding criteria, managing budgets, and coordinating moving pieces. The grant writing was spearheaded by John Davis and Cynthia Bazinet, with help from the Centre for Local Prosperity. Sadly, John passed away suddenly in early 2024 before learning about the award of the grant. He was a charismatic leader who had helped advance the project with passion and determination and was instrumental in securing the anonymous donation. When the approval came through, Penny and others realized they needed to continue to carry things forward and Michael Kozak agreed to step in as board Chair.

Key Event #5: A significant government grant is awarded to fund the greenhouse construction



Phase 2 Insights

Signs you're here

- Meetings are more structured and roles are more defined
- Discussions are focused on acquiring assets and funding
- Progress feels slow

Important considerations

- A registered nonprofit organization (or partnership with an existing organization) may be needed to advance the project
- Acquiring financial resources can take significant time and energy
- Major events in rural communities, like the forest fires, can consume peoples' availability to contribute to the project



Skills and roles needed

- **Grant writers:** People who can take on the task of collecting quotes, letters of support and drafting grant applications
- **Treasurer or bookkeeper:** Someone with strong financial literacy who can track revenue and expenses and administer financial reports
- **Fundraisers:** People with connections to potential donors and skills for developing fundraising materials
- **Technical experts:** Contractors, tradespeople and others with specific skills and knowledge related to the project

Potential risks

- **Death by meetings:** Too many meetings that aren't productive and don't lead to action can make it feel like nothing is happening
- **Volunteer fatigue:** Once the initial excitement of a new idea wears off, energy can fade
- **Getting caught in the nonprofit starvation cycle:** Nonprofits and their associated projects require funding, often in the form of grants that are not always available and can be driven by outside interests



Phase 3: Plans Come to Life

What this phase feels like: Fast-paced, exhausting but rewarding, hands-on, full of new learning

The Shelburne Story

Once plans are in place and funding is secured, the work of bringing ideas to fruition begins. Energy picks up now that all the effort of planning feels like it's going to pay off and come to life. After CGFSASC received its grant funding the community could begin the phase of building the physical structure of the greenhouse. The days of filling out spreadsheets and writing grant applications were behind them (at least for now), but new tasks and skills were needed. Clearing trees, levelling ground, ordering construction materials, coordinating tradespeople, setting posts, and raising walls became the new activities to focus on. The greenhouse was no longer just a blueprint; it was becoming something that people could see and touch.

Many community volunteers pitched in time and equipment to help construct the greenhouse. Someone brought an excavator to clear out a section of trees on the property, while others lent their wheelbarrows, ladders and other tools.

The work of building the greenhouse required careful coordination. Volunteers arrived with enthusiasm, but not always with construction experience. Much of the progress depended on the patient guidance of skilled experts and the volunteers' willingness to learn. Matt Roy from Coastal Grove became a key player during this stage, helping to guide the building process.

“It was amazing to see the clarity and the way he [Matt] could tell us, "This is exactly what you have to do." And here we put up this huge, high wall, which, for someone who has no carpentry skills whatsoever, I was mind-boggled at how that all happened.”

- Kathleen Glauser,
community member and Volunteer

Key Event #6: Construction begins - vision, planning and broad community support begin to become reality.



As construction progressed, the number of moving pieces multiplied: material deliveries had to be scheduled, volunteers needed direction, and unexpected challenges appeared regularly. It became clear that they were in desperate need of a project manager with the skills to coordinate the various steps.

“*And finally, midway through, we discovered that we were in desperate need of a project manager.*”

-Dale Richardson

Harry Penn had recently moved to Nova Scotia, a little over an hour away in Bridgewater. He was looking to build his network and give back to the local area and had experience managing similar types of projects elsewhere. He was introduced to the CGFSASC through a mutual connection at the Centre for Local Prosperity and agreed to step in as a volunteer project manager. More than once in the interviews, community members commented on what an important piece of the puzzle this was.

Key Event #8: Cost realities set in, requiring budget, construction and other planning adjustments

Key Event #7: An experienced project manager joins the team, coordinating volunteers and the numerous aspects of the project.

With the construction process underway, the bills started coming in. The team working on the original funding proposal had collected quotes from contractors, but time had passed since the application was submitted and they found that costs had risen. Additional unexpected costs were incurred such as a \$1400 installation cost for a new electrical pole. Having a project manager earlier may have helped with more accurate and updated budget planning, thereby mitigating some of these unexpected costs. Upon reflection, Dale Richardson, CGFSASC board member and municipal councillor, realized that hiring a project manager from the beginning would have made the building process much easier. Even though it would have cost more upfront, there would likely have been cost savings in the long run. As it was, the group realized they were going to fall short of the full construction costs with their current grant budget, so they had to put the installation of solar panels on hold until they could come up with more funds.

“*Originally, we didn't have him [Harry Penn] on board. I don't know anything about getting grant funding and building greenhouses, because that's not what I do. We were trying to figure all that out and figure out where we're getting the land from and get the land done, and there are all these moving parts to get it [the greenhouse] to actually come together. So the project manager has helped with that!*”

-Jody Jenson



Phase 3 Insights

Signs you're here

- There is something physical to show
- Funds are being spent
- Timelines feel real and urgent
- Exhaustion and exhilaration co-exist

Important considerations

- The types of skills needed start to shift as work moves from planning and fundraising to implementation so new people with different skill sets may need to be recruited.
- No matter what type of project it is, having a project manager to help coordinate tasks and keep an eye on the big picture can make a big difference in keeping things on time, identifying efficiencies, and managing costs.
- Delays between the time when funding applications are developed and when funds actually come through can be long. It's important to consider the potential for increased materials costs and develop a contingency plan in advance.



Potential risks

- **Burnout:** As the initial excitement wears off and work becomes more demanding, burnout can creep in
- **Skills mismatch:** Those who spark a vision are not always the ones who bring it to life. Additional people may be needed to bring different skills and perspectives
- **Uncertainty:** Unpredictable weather, availability of tradespeople (or other specialized roles), changing prices, etc., can all create challenges and delays

Skills and roles needed

- **Project Manager:** Someone to guide and track the overall process
- **Volunteer Coordinator:** Someone to keep in touch with volunteers and find people with time and equipment to contribute as needed
- **Technical Experts:** People with the skills and experience to implement the plans
- **Communications:** To keep the community up to speed about progress and recruit additional volunteers
- **Treasurer:** Ongoing role to track spending and prepare grant reports



Phase 4: Fatigue Sets In

What this phase feels like: Heavy, depleted, disengaged, nostalgic

The Shelburne Story

A reality that plagues most community projects is that energy among those involved fluctuates and inevitably drops at times. While we present fatigue here as a specific phase, it's more realistic to expect it to pop up at any stage of a project – especially when the workload is high, new external pressures emerge, or it feels like wheels are spinning without enough evidence of progress. As is typically the case, many of the people driving the Shelburne greenhouse project already had full lives including jobs, family responsibilities, and other competing priorities.

During the summer of 2025, the greenhouse was not yet ready for food production, but the community volunteers were keen to keep the momentum going and find other ways to address food insecurity in the interim. Grants were secured to hire a summer student to manage the community garden at the high school and to deliver produce grown there to people in need in Shelburne and neighbouring communities. Jody Jensen, the agriculture teacher at the high school, was very involved in harvesting, cleaning and packaging food for delivery, and coordinating with Sou'West Nova Transit Association, who were doing the drop-offs. While the work was impactful and appreciated, it left Jody and others feeling tired by the end of the summer.

That fall, work on the site slowed due to wait times for contractors and the cooling weather. Several board members indicated that they would be stepping down from CGFSASC at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in February, 2026. By the time interviews were conducted in November, there was a general sense of depleted energy and concern about how the project would be finished.

Key Event #9: Board member turnover and need to maintain critical volunteer energy levels

“People power is the issue with everything around here. Everybody wants stuff to happen, but only like 10 people are around to do it.”

-Megan Christie

Fatigue often surfaces in periods where volunteers are difficult to recruit and retain, resulting in few people bearing the brunt of the load and being stretched thin. Once the energy and excitement from the early phases die down, persistent labour imbalances can lead to burnout.

“We can have all the most wonderful ideas in the world, but there has to be people who can make these things happen, who have the time to make them happen.”

-Penny Smith

Fatigue can also be triggered during times of change, such as in the case of board member and volunteer turnover, changing task and skill needs, and external events that cause additional stress. As mentioned, Shelburne residents faced major challenges unrelated to the greenhouse, such as COVID-19, forest fires and deaths of friends and community leaders. Each of these caused setbacks and drained energy. Coupled with slowed progress and momentum, these conditions can create scenarios where people no longer feel they can contribute to the project.



Phase 4 Insights

Signs you're here

- People are pulling back
- Meeting attendance is low
- The same few people are doing everything
- Conversations are challenging and disagreements are more common

Important considerations

- Fatigue can set in at any point in a community project's lifecycle. Volunteers have competing priorities in their own lives and when additional external challenges are faced, the project may fall to the back burner.
- Finding ways to reenergize the group may be helpful when signs of fatigue emerge. For example, planning social events for people to reconnect with each other and the shared vision, and recruiting new people to inject fresh energy.
- It's important to expect that energy will ebb and flow during a project. Planning for this reality by incorporating periods of slower activity could help with burnout over the long term.

Skills and roles needed

- **Volunteer recruiter:** A key role, someone willing to help find new community members to get involved and onboard them into the project.
- **New volunteers:** New community members who can bring fresh perspectives and energy.
- **Group cheerleader:** Someone who can help inject fun and joy into the work, organize opportunities for connection and celebration.



Potential risks

- **Quiet quitting:** People stop showing up without ever formally stepping back.
- **Normalizing burnout:** People start treating exhaustion as the norm instead of a problem that needs to be addressed.
- **Forgetting to celebrate:** Achievements go unacknowledged because everyone is too busy or burnt out.
- **Neglecting relationships:** When people get tired, their focus can shift to simply completing tasks and going through the motions, and relationships go un-nurtured and can break down.



Phase 5: Energy is Renewed

What this phase feels like: Hopeful, rejuvenating, exciting, fun

The Shelburne Story

For many of us, the spring season is one of optimism. The longer days, sunshine and new growth are welcome after the slower energy of the winter. In community projects, a similar phenomenon occurs when the crunchiness of working through challenges subsides and people can finally see the fruits of their labour. In early 2026, Connie Lamm stepped in as chair of Foodshare, bringing new energy and excitement for the next phase of the project. By the spring, the Shelburne community greenhouse was finally ready for growing food!

To kick off the growing season, Matt from Coastal Grove Farm supplied tomato transplants for three rows of tomatoes, lettuce and other varieties of transplants. Bob from the Centre for Local Prosperity also provided peppers and other plants. This first crop was planted, and the greenhouse and early harvests were underway, creating tangible excitement. Foodshare members also recognize the ongoing need for volunteers and are communicating with the community via Facebook to promote opportunities. Students from the nearby high school are being offered volunteer and summer job positions as well. Google Calendar is being used to coordinate volunteer schedules.

As the produce is harvested, the group plans to sell a portion at the Shelburne Guild Hall Market to generate some revenue. This income will help provide some unrestricted funding for future expenses that are not tied to a grant, or as matching funds for other grants. The remainder of the harvest not sold at the farmers market will be given to people in need within the community.

Key Event #10: A social enterprise model is started and begins to show some staying power



Signs you're here

- Goods and/or services are being produced and delivered
- If you're using a social enterprise model, revenue is being generated
- The broader community is showing interest and getting involved

Phase 5 Insights

Important considerations

- When the project is finally operational, it's time to celebrate the success and the journey. It's also important to be mindful that this phase will come with a need for new skills, partnerships and roles, and will bring different kinds of challenges.
- Social enterprise activities (generating unrestricted revenue through the sale of goods and/or services) are a great way to help diversify and stabilize funding and alleviate the need to rely on grants and donations. The proportion of revenue generated can vary, but even a little bit of money to help with unforeseen costs can be extremely helpful.



Skills and roles needed

- **Volunteer coordinator:** Someone to communicate with volunteers, train new recruits and manage schedules.
- **Communications lead:** Someone (or multiple people) with communications skills to draft key messages, develop social media posts and posters, etc., to recruit new volunteers and keep the community up to speed about what's happening.
- **Strategic planners:** People who can help develop a strategic funding model for operations, develop partnerships to support the social enterprise activities and think about future growth potential.

Potential risks

- **Diverging goals and expectations:** As the project becomes more established, people may have different expectations about how things should be managed and future growth potential. It's important to keep the lines of communication open and continue to evolve the vision.
- **Community resistance:** Hopefully at this stage community members are seeing the value of the project, but now that it's more visible there's potential for more opinions to surface about what's being done and how. It's important to communicate frequently about what's happening using a variety of channels.



Phase 6: Ongoing Sustainability and Maintenance

What this phase feels like: Routine, predictable, gratifying

The Shelburne Story

At some point, things start to hit a groove and become more predictable. Not everything feels as new and uncertain as it did in other phases of the project and a more manageable pace can start to be experienced. Unfortunately, the reality for most nonprofit community organizations is that the search for funding is ongoing and sometimes it can be challenging to find grants and donations to support maintenance of existing activities rather than something new and shiny.

The Shelburne community greenhouse is still too new to be considered in a maintenance phase. However, the group is conscious that ongoing work is needed. There are future plans for outdoor gardens around the greenhouse that will need to be prepared, and funds are being sought to address the shortage from the construction budget so that solar panels can be installed on ground mounts. They're also hoping to install an electric deer fence and to find ways to sell produce on site, especially after the farmers market closes in October.

Managing a greenhouse and community garden operation takes ongoing knowledge, planning, logistics and volunteer coordination. Relying solely on volunteers is risky, so ideally the group will be able to hire a project manager in at least a part-time paid position. The CGFSASC board is currently seeking funding to support this role and to contract professional advice related to various aspects of managing the food production over time.



Volunteers at a local food bank distributing donated produce from the greenhouse.



Phase 6 Insights

Signs you're here

- Work is starting to feel predictable and less chaotic.
- People are coming to you to hear about what you did to make the project happen.
- You're more focused on securing funds for operations and long-term sustainability.

Important considerations

- Some people may thrive in the exciting energy of starting something new. They may be less willing to stay on as the project moves into a maintenance phase, and that's ok – their energy could be used elsewhere.
- Even in maintenance, people need to be looking ahead to the next round of funding needs, the next season of planting, etc. Repairs are also part of the regular work cycles and have associated costs.
- Dedicated paid staff can be difficult to sustain but they are critical to the longevity of a project.
- Consider institutional partnerships where existing staff time may be allocated, or other ways that wages could be subsidized or shared.

Skills and roles needed

- **Project manager:** Ideally, a paid staff member who can manage the day-to-day operations (consider sharing a full-time role with other projects!).
- **Volunteer coordinator:** Someone to continue to recruit, train and support volunteers.
- **Engaged board members:** People who remain committed to the project's vision and who can help with fundraising, partnership development and strategic planning.



Interest from local politicians like Jessica Fancy, Member of Parliament, have helped increase awareness and support for the work.

Potential risks

- **Not securing the next round of funding:** Funders often don't like to fund the same project twice, which can make it difficult to secure grants.
- **Turnover without succession:** While it may make sense for some people to move on at this stage, it's important to have a plan for who will replace them and to be actively recruiting in preparation.

Conclusion: New Sparks Are Ignited



Projects like this often create inspiration for others. This ripple effect is already evident in neighbouring communities close to Shelburne. The Town of Lockport, about half an hour away, is following Shelburne's lead by installing five raised beds around town to be used for vegetable production. Other communities in the region have also started to approach CGFSASC to learn about how they can start taking action to address food insecurity. It's common for communities who've successfully implemented projects to become inspirational advisors for others and be referenced as examples that can be learned from.

Word is spreading! This article was written by Darcy Rhyno for [bluedotliving](#) about the Shelburne greenhouse: [An Oasis in a Nova Scotia Food Desert](#)

It is also worth noting that these phases rarely unfold in sequence. Some projects stay in the ongoing maintenance phase indefinitely, and others continue to evolve and grow. It's not unusual for the cycle to start again as new ideas are sparked for how to deepen community impact and reach more people. Similarly, projects might jump between phases in different orders and cycle through several phases more than once. You could even find yourself in two phases at once, for example, helping to bring an idea to life while simultaneously fighting fatigue. The phases presented here should be considered more as a compass than a detailed map, to help you recognize where you are so you can make informed decisions about how to plan for your project's success.

Lessons for Community Changemakers

This playbook focuses on the story of the Shelburne community greenhouse but aims to offer insights for community changemakers at large who are keen to bring a project to life for positive impact. The challenges, infrastructure, capacity and available resources will be different based on the local context, but there are some themes that emerged in this research that have potential replicability in multiple settings.

New voices can be transformative



Newcomers to communities bring new perspectives, experiences and skills, and can inject energy and hope into projects at critical points. Over time, even the most passionate groups can get stuck in familiar and comfortable patterns that act as barriers to innovation. When people move into a new community, they often bring a readiness to get involved and a desire to give back that can be contagious. In psychology, this is a phenomenon known as the “fresh start effect”, where people tend to be more open to adopting new habits and behaviours after a significant life change like a move. Community development projects can tap into that momentum by making it easy for newcomers to get involved and feel welcome.

Institutional partnerships can unlock resources

Having people connected to the Municipality and the NSCC in the early days led to access to land, experience with greenhouse projects, project management skills and strong community networks. It is worthwhile to consider a cross-sector approach that includes residents and representatives from local institutions and nonprofits to co-design the approach and contribute diverse perspectives, knowledge and skills.



Relationships are essential for building excitement, creating a sense of ownership and community buy-in

This project was developed from an idea that ignited between friends but grew to include many people and organizations. Often, community development projects run on volunteer energy and people are more likely to show up if they feel a personal connection to the purpose or others involved. Trust and relationships are key ingredients in moving from ideas to action.

Lessons for Community Changemakers



Proactive, intentional and transparent communication is essential

Without regular and accessible communication about what's happening with the project and why, misunderstandings can occur and community support and trust can be eroded. In Shelburne, some community members questioned the cost and the location of the greenhouse, wondering why the money wasn't simply being used to buy groceries for people in need. The questions may be fair on the surface, but reflect a gap in understanding the project's long-term purpose and vision. When people don't understand the “why”, they tend to fill in the blanks with their own assumptions. Communicating early, often, and with clarity about what the project is and why certain decisions are being made helps build trust and understanding and can help keep the community on board.

Getting Started

Take stock of the skills, assets, services and programs that already exist in your community. Is your community ready for what you're proposing? Are there opportunities for collaboration to address the need you are trying to fulfill?

Start small. Having a big vision is important, but feasibility and practicality also need to be considered. You don't want to burn out early on and it's important to allow space for making mistakes, learning and adapting while the project is a manageable size.

Use this playbook to think about who you want to recruit to get involved in your project. Identify which phase seems closest to where you are, the roles you'll need to fill, and which risks you'll want to aim to mitigate. Good luck!

Resources

Links to help you get started by project phase. Remember - this list is just a starting point, there are many available templates and resources for nonprofits online!

Phase	Description	Resources
Phase 1: Spark	Develop a compelling vision and get early buy-in	- Start with why you are doing what you're doing and what you hope to achieve. Consider Developing a Theory of Change (The Annie E. Casey Foundation) - Get clear on your vision: 12 Vision Questions to Guide Organizations (indeed) - Develop a clear and concise way to communicate what you're doing and why: Are You Elevator-Ready? The 6 C's for a Dynamite Nonprofit Pitch (Social Impact Architects) - Consider mapping your community's assets to build on the strengths that already exist: Asset-based Community Development resources (Tamarack)
Phase 2: Idea	Engage community members, find resources	- Be intentional about how you inclusively engage with the broader community. Check out this Community Engagement Toolkit and Resources (Tamarack) - Use social media to build awareness of your work. Find strategies here: Social media for nonprofits: 14 expert-backed tips for success (Hootsuite) - Engage volunteers. Find resources for attracting newcomers, youth and older adults to your project at: Engaging Volunteers (Volunteer Canada) - Canva is a user-friendly online program (with a free option!) for designing communications content. Explore: The ultimate guide to create your own flyer design (Canva) - During this phase and throughout your project lifecycle you'll need to apply for grants. Here are some helpful sites: Grant Writing Tips (Central Okanagan Foundation) 5 Ways To Use Ai In Grant Writing (DoGood) Nonprofit Budgeting: How to Get Started + Template (Jitasa) Grants 101: A How-To Guide for Nonprofits (Imagine Canada) - You'll want to record your meeting discussions, decisions and action items. This site has helpful tips on Board Meeting Minutes for Canadian Charities and Nonprofits (OrgHub)
Phase 3: Plans	Design, build, implement	- Think about the skills needed on your team at this phase and try out Role-mapping exercises (Hilary Jane Grosskopf on Medium) - Develop a project plan to bring your ideas to reality: How to make a project timeline (Forbes) - Explore ways to organize your volunteer schedule more efficiently through free software like the ones on this list: Top Picks: Volunteer Scheduling Software Free for 2026 (Litter Caterpillars)

Resources

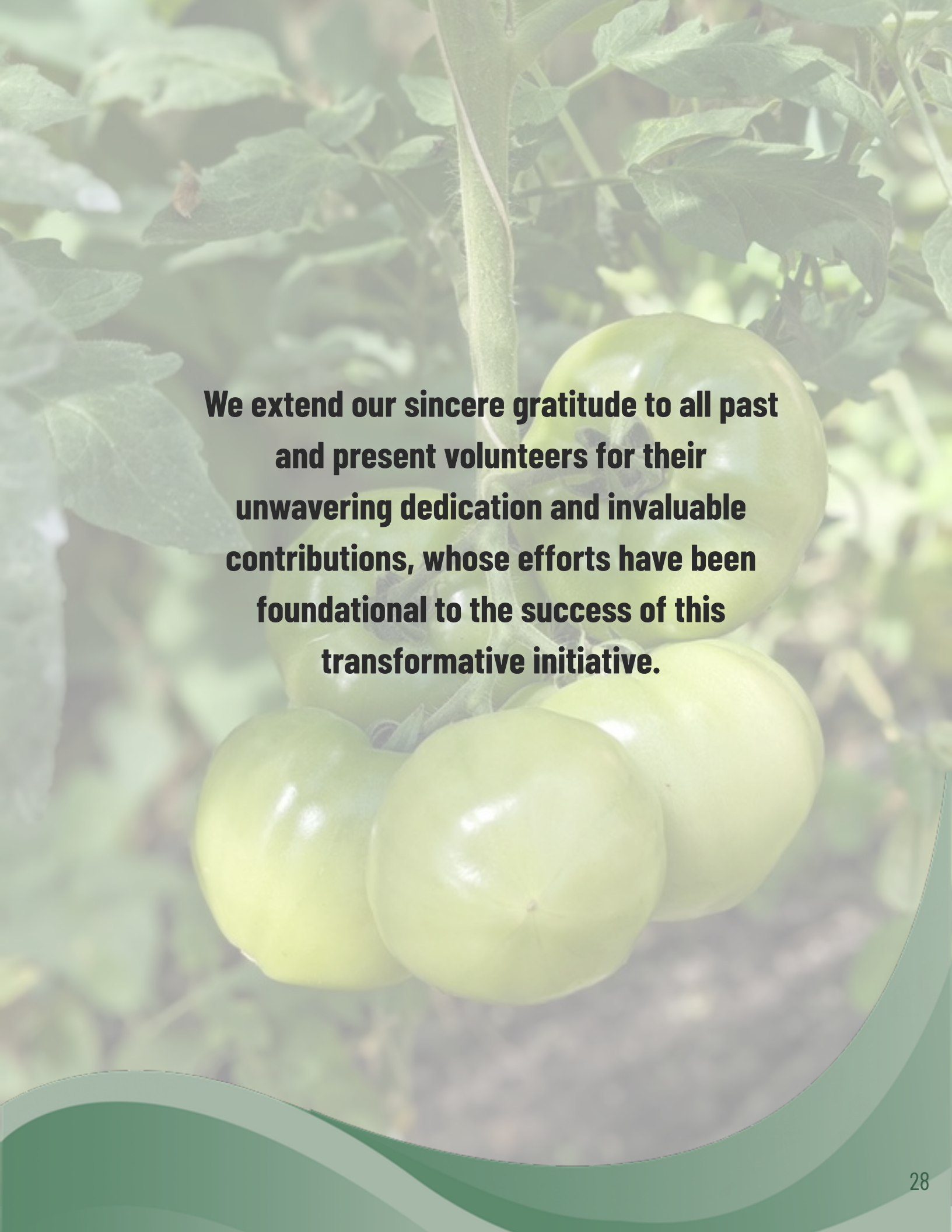
Links to help you get started by project phase. Remember - this list is just a starting point, there are many available templates and resources for nonprofits online!

Phase	Description	Resources
Phase 4: Fatigue	Navigate burnout and turnover	- Burnout can show up differently in different people. This resource helps break down how to identify it: “Psychology Works” Fact Sheet: Workplace Burnout (Canadian Psychological Association) - When energy is low and people need to reconnect with why they got involved, taking space at meetings to check in about how people are feeling can be helpful. Examples of questions to use can be found here: Questions for check-ins (The Circle Way) - As people become fatigued with admin work, considering how AI can help lessen the load is worthwhile. There are pros and cons, and human oversight is critical, but it may mean the difference between moving toward renewal and fizzling out. Make every minute count—how nonprofits can use AI to simplify daily tasks (Zoom blog)
Phase 5: Renewal	Produce goods/ services, re-engage community	- Revisit your social media strategy and share what’s happening! A Social Media Checklist for Non-Profits (CanadaHelps) - Capture images and stories about your impact and use them to attract new resources and engage community members. Check out: An introduction to nonprofit storytelling (Shorthand)
Phase 6: Maintenance	Refine procedures, plan for sustainability	- Implement standard operating procedures (SOPs) to take out the guess work: Steps to Create Effective SOPs for Not-for-Profits (The Forever Agenda) - Plan early for succession to avoid being taken off-guard: Nonprofit Succession Planning: A Step-by-Step Guide (Wild Apricot) - Consider implementing a project management tool to keep files and plans organized and shareable. Here’s a list of Free Project Management Tools for Nonprofits (Whole Whale)

Additional Resources for Any Phase

Description	Resources
Starting a nonprofit	Explore Imagine Canada's resources for choosing what type of organization to start (nonprofit or charity or something else) and how to begin. In Nova Scotia, familiarize yourself with requirements of the Registry of Joint Stock Companies for starting and operating an organization.
Hiring consultants and staff	Sometimes your team may need access to different skills. When resources permit, hiring external consultants can be very helpful. Impact Organizations of Nova Scotia (IONS) maintains a consultant directory to help you find service providers. Hiring staff? Check out Charity Village and IONS' job board and consider focusing your search where people are looking for nonprofit opportunities. If you are managing people, HR Intervals has many resources for recruiting, developing policies and assessing performance.
Finding funding	Ongoing access to financial resources is a key challenge affecting the sustainability of community projects. Try using AI, networking with peers, and regular visits to funder web sites to keep on top of new opportunities. Here are a few resources that might be helpful: • Guide to Finding Grants (Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities) • Fundingportal (Invest Nova Scotia) • If you're a charity, get set up with CanadaHelps



A photograph of a cluster of green tomatoes hanging from a vine. The tomatoes are round and have a light green color with some yellowing at the bottom. The leaves are green and have a serrated edge. The background is blurred, showing more of the plant and some soil.

**We extend our sincere gratitude to all past
and present volunteers for their
unwavering dedication and invaluable
contributions, whose efforts have been
foundational to the success of this
transformative initiative.**