

**BUILDING COMMUNITIES SYMPOSIUM '07:
DESIGNING A NETWORKING EVENT FOR WOMEN IN
ENGINEERING IN BC**

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Abstract

Current research shows that building a supportive environment for women within the engineering community, where women can achieve personal and career satisfaction, will lead to an increase in the number of women attracted to engineering as a career, and reduce the number of women leaving the profession¹. The Building Communities Symposium '07 (BCS) was a two day event for 120 women in engineering in British Columbia from all levels of the profession; approximately 60 students, 20 new immigrant engineers/women returning to work and 20 established industry professionals were targeted to attend.

The vision of the Building Communities Symposium was to develop a network of women in engineering in BC, where students, new immigrant engineers, women returning to work and established industry professionals alike could have the opportunity to build and participate in a supportive and inclusive community. The number of women in engineering in any school or workplace in BC is so small that women often feel alone and isolated. This feeling of isolation tends to increase as women progress through their career and often leads to attrition². The symposium aimed to address this issue and to strengthen the number of women in the field, by bringing women together to achieve a sense of “critical mass”.

The Building Communities Symposium programming was intentionally designed to provide a catalyst for network establishment of women across engineering workplaces, industries, and university faculties. Sessions held on the first day of the event focused on such topics as: a)

leadership skill development, b) mentoring relationships creation, c) outreach and advocacy work required to bring women into the profession, and d) the need to develop support networks that allow more women to advance to senior positions in their industries. On the second day of the symposium, participants self organized, planned, and developed action plans for their respective network, established through previous programming on the first day, via online websites.

In this paper, we report on the logistical planning, program design and implementation of this event, the results of the attendee survey, and make recommendations for future events of this nature. The authors hope that by reporting on their experiences' outcomes that this will serve as a helpful guide to others who wish to take on a similar exciting and worthwhile challenge.

Index Terms – Women in Engineering, Networking, Symposium for women in engineering.

1 Planning the Event

The planning for the symposium started approximately 18 months before the event, through the writing of a proposal for seed funding from the Jade Bridges Program, sponsored by the NSERC Chair for Women in Science and Engineering, BC/Yukon. This seed funding, matched with funding from the student Work Study program at UBC, was used to fund a 4th year undergraduate student, supervised by a volunteer faculty member, to develop the event. Appendix A lists the committees that were established to implement various phases of the planning. Figure 1 shows a timeline for the planning of the event.

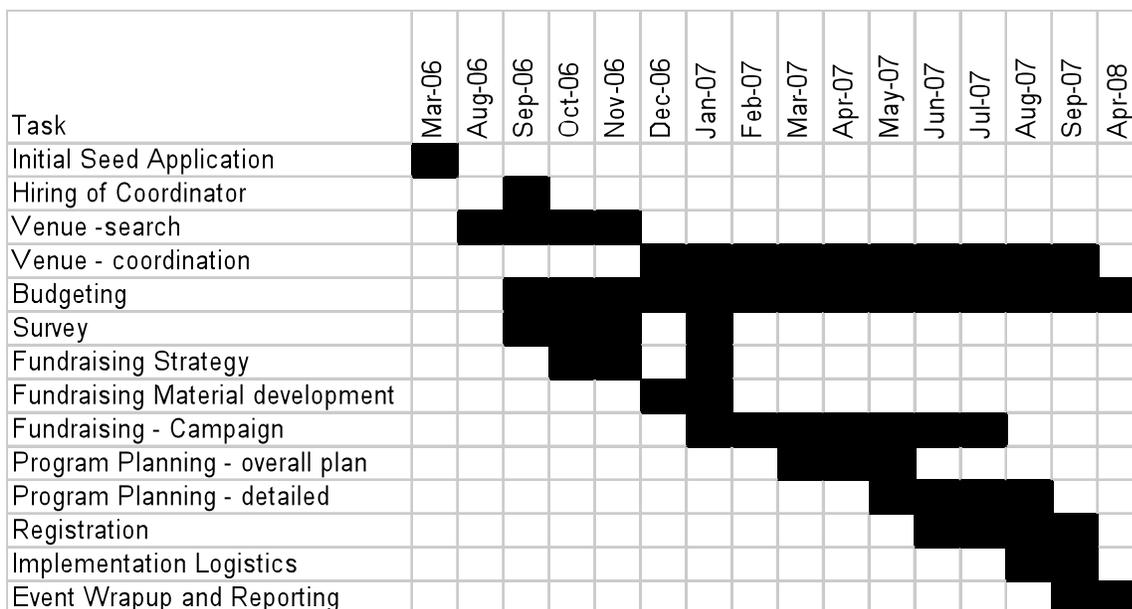


Figure 1: Planning Timeline

1.1 Early Phase Planning – Venue, Budget, and Awareness

One of the keys to this early phase of planning was the securing of an appropriate venue for the event. A second important step was the establishment of a set of three budgets for multiple funding scenarios for the event. One budget was based on what was felt to be a realistic amount of revenue, one included extras that would only be possible if the fundraising targets were exceeded, and one was a contingency budget based on receiving no sponsorship and relying solely on registration fees. These options provided some security to the planning committee that the event could be successfully implemented.

The third important step was to establish a combined advertising/awareness and fundraising strategy targeting agencies, organizations, and companies to support the event. Great care was taken in developing a clear message about what the event was about, and the value that would be provided to both the sponsors and the participants. A website was developed to support this effort. As much as possible, personal contacts were utilized to forward the fundraising requests to key decision makers at companies and agencies. This effort was well rewarded by a successful fundraising campaign supported by both industry and government agencies. Finally in the early stages of the planning, a survey of women in engineering at the undergraduate, graduate and industry stages of their career was conducted to identify desirable locations, time frames, programming content and personal goals for such a networking symposium. This survey had the consequence of building expectations for the event and helped to identify potential volunteers and participants.

1.2 Mid-phase Planning – Fundraising

In the second phase of the planning process, fundraising switched into high gear. A letter writing campaign with follow up contacts was implemented to attract funding. A smaller campaign was implemented to attract giveaway prizes (pens, keylights, etc) as well as door prizes for the event. At the same time, the program planning got underway based on survey information obtained in the first phase of the planning stages. Based on the strength of the fundraising campaign, the moderate level budget was adopted, with the plan to partially reimburse registration fees to volunteers if fundraising was more successful. The final budget is given in Appendix B. As it turned out, a large amount of the funding arrived after the event was implemented. These moneys were used to fund spinoff events from the symposium. Sponsors are listed in Appendix C.

1.3 Final phase Planning – Program planning and Logistics

In the final phase, detailed planning of the event and program was undertaken. This was a very intense time for the planning committee and program chair. At this stage, assistance with registration from the professional association group (DAWEG - The Division for the Advancement of Women in Engineering and Geoscience) was very much appreciated, and the countless hours of work by volunteers was invaluable. The online payment system allowed the committee to keep the handling of fees and cheques to a minimum and process the lump sum of attendee fees after the registration process.

The program planning started with brainstorming topics by grouped ideas into themes. Effort was made to select a variety of speakers, workshops and panelists to represent the diverse interests of women in engineering. The goal was to offer sessions that were sure to inform, energize and inspire the many wonderful women attending the symposium. The program overview and planning guide was designed to allow for "streamed" networking opportunities with and for women at all levels of their career path in engineering under the categories of:

- Leadership (L)
- Career Advancement (CA)
- Transition (TR)
- Work / Life Balance (WLB)

A condensed version of the program is shown in Appendix D.

In canvassing for speakers, the program planning coordinator relied on an establish network of women in industry and academia. As an interesting note, only one out of all selected speakers was male. And only two of the more than two dozen presenters, panelists and keynote speakers were paid for their sessions. The organizers offered to cover travel costs for these individuals and invited them to join the group for meals in those cases that they were only attending for part of the day.

2 Symposium Implementation

On September 15 and 16, 2007 approximately 120 women engineers, engineering students and faculty gathered at the Loon Lake Research and Education Centre in Maple Ridge, British Columbia to participate in the Building Communities Symposium. The registration data for the event is shown in Table 1 and includes volunteers and speakers.



Figure 2: Symposium Group Photo

Numerous volunteers were needed to implement this event. Overall, the program chair was able to draw from about 37 women that indicated willingness to assist with the planning of this event and about 10 of these women were involved with the crucial core implementations. It should be mentioned that not all volunteers were available throughout the duration of the 18 months planning and especially during the intense planning in the summer months leading up to the September event, the majority of volunteers were only sporadically available, which put an

additional burden on the planning committee to continue to recruit new volunteers to oversee sections of the work.

Table 1: Symposium Registration by Category

Symposium Registration by Category						
Undergraduate Students	Graduate Students	Engineers in Training	Faculty	Professional Engineers	Seeking Employment	Others
56	29	10	8	4	9	16

The symposium had an information booth set up with two staff support volunteers from the University of British Columbia, however, in hindsight, there could have easily been 3 or 4 full-time help to relieve the volunteers from their stressful duties. Setup on the day of the event was organized by 10 volunteers as well as 4 out-of-town early participants who spent the night before the symposium at the Loon Lake Venue. The setup preparation was way into the night in order to have all the rooms ready for the early arrival of the buses with the participants to start the symposium at 9am.



Figure 3: Participants network in the Loon Lake Dining Hall

The event featured a number of keynote speakers. On the first day, Anne Condon, NSERC/GM Chair for Women in Science and Engineering opened the event with a discussion on the Art of Networking, and Ms. Janet Benjamin, recently elected President of the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of BC, closed the day with a directed and empowering talk on marketing and engineering. On day two, Ann English, Director of the 2010 Olympic Initiative at BC Hydro, gave a very compelling personal account of her career path and management experience within several engineering companies, and Elizabeth Croft, Associate Professor of Mechanical Engineering, UBC challenged the attendees to Believe, Calculate and Succeed in their engineering endeavors and career paths.

Participants took part in a wide variety of breakout workshops and panel discussions designed to meet the needs of women engineering professionals at all stages of their career. The closing session of the symposium provided an engaging opportunity for further networking: new and established groups were formed and expanded around various communities including DAWEG (Division for the Advancement of Women in Engineering and Geoscience), Women in Engineering UBC, Women in Academia, Internationally Trained Engineers, GEERing Up! UBC Engineering & Science for Kids, etc. This activity provided a venue for these women to envision and plan community activities, with access to supporting funding from remaining funds of the Building Communities Symposium.

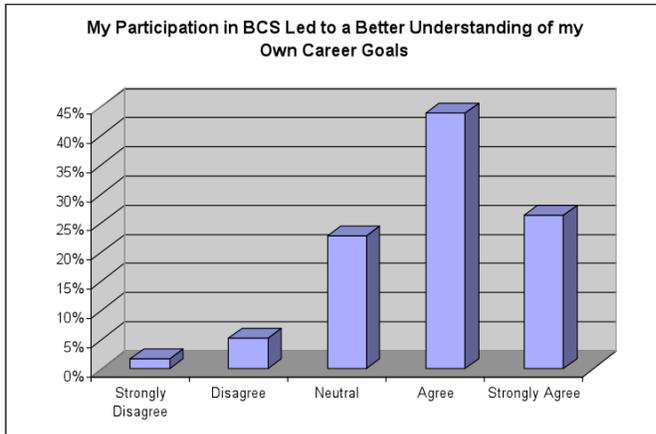


Figure 4: Speaker Sally Halliday listens while young women engineers navigate change

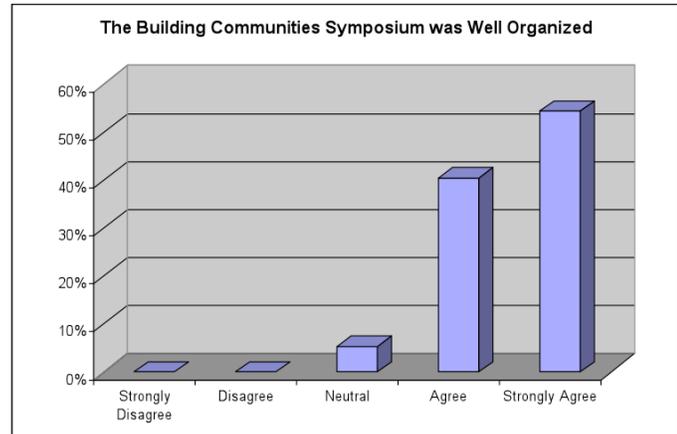
3 Outcomes

Building Communities was a resounding success, due to the hard work of the organizing committee as well as a large number of volunteers. An anonymous web survey was run the week following the event. Almost 50% (57) of the registrants responded to this survey (a very high voluntary response rate) and the results were overwhelmingly positive. In our post event survey, 98% of respondents felt that the event should be repeated, over 90% of respondents agreed that they had strengthened their engineering network, and almost 80 % were more confident in their ability to succeed. Graphs of responses are compiled in Figure 5 below. Of the many anonymous comments received, the following statement is representative.

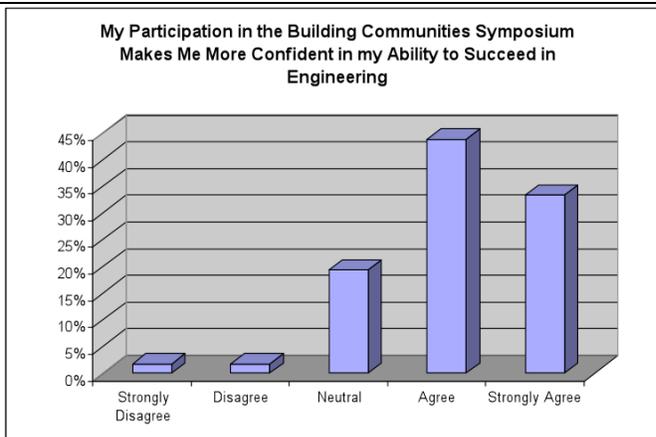
“This was a wonderful weekend. Having the opportunity to meet with women of all different backgrounds and places in their career helped me to feel less isolated in my own life. I appreciated that there were workshop options for both those in school and out of it.”



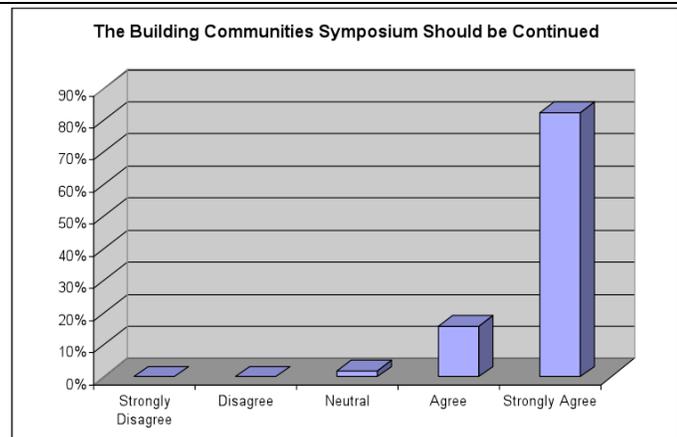
(a) Symposium led to better understanding of career goals.



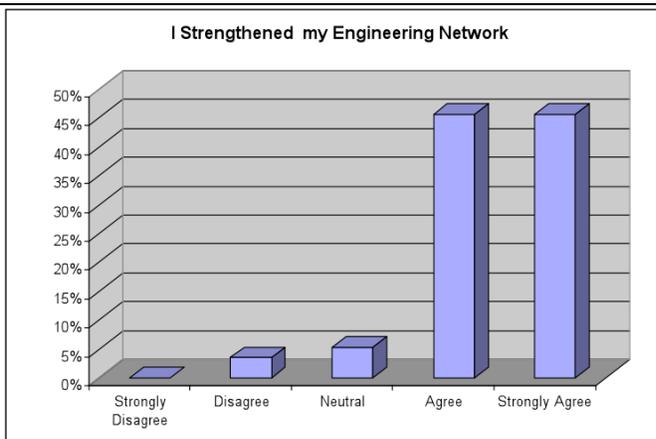
(b) Symposium was well organized



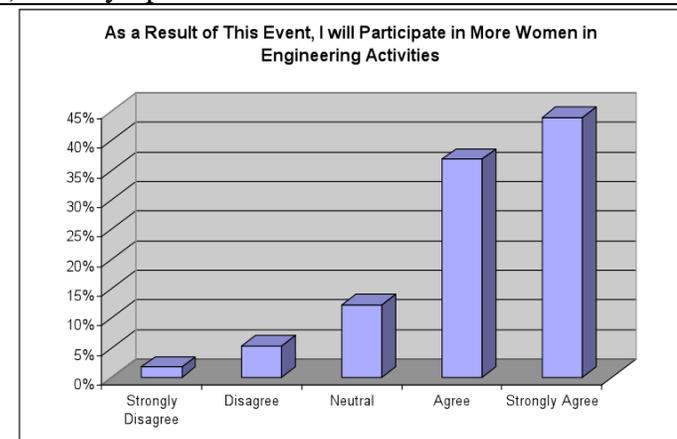
(c) Participation lead to higher confidence.



(d) The symposium should be continued



(e) I strengthened my engineering network



(f) I will participate in more WIE activities

Figure 5. Post event survey outcomes.

4 Next steps

Due to the overwhelming success of the Building Communities Symposium, and the proof that more opportunities for networking and learning for women in engineering of all levels are needed, the symposium chair together with some planning committee members created a new group that will organize networking as well as professional development events for women in engineering in the Vancouver region - WIE (VR).

The aim of this initiative is to give women in engineering from various institutions and engineering industry in the Vancouver region the opportunity to come together, network, and share ideas through both fun events and professional development workshops.

The program is divided into two main categories: a) social networking and b) professional development. The social networking part of this initiative covers fun events which will include board game nights themed as educational and a fun way to network, potlucks, movie nights which will show documentaries of women in engineering or science who have become accomplished in both their careers and community activities or other documentary or educational topics of interest to the women in engineering community, and BBQs.

The plan is also to hold workshops and speaker sessions for the professional development category of programming. The workshop topics will range from project management, team building, leadership, motivation, conflict resolution, to career related topics. Further to this, previous anecdotal information tells us that many women are interested in holding seminars that are related to financial management. In order to cater to this interest, there will also be an investment workshop or workshops. The topics of the workshops could be real estate, early retirement, budgeting, and other such financial topics. Speakers from the engineering community or academia will also be invited to speak on such topics as entrepreneurship, technical expertise, and their experiences which will be of interest to the women. As part of the goals, the group tries to recruit female speakers and workshop facilitators as much as possible in order to promote the successes of women and to inspire the women engineering community.

These workshops and events will give an opportunity for leadership, networking, and mentorship activity for all participants and team building and organizational training for the committee members. Additional workshops to the ones listed above will be considered as the program develops.

5 Recommendations

After the event, valuable insight was gained into the planning of a first-ever grass roots event such as the Building Communities Symposium. As planning progressed, the organizing committee realized very quickly that planning this huge undertaking would have benefited from more staff support from other BC universities as well as industry or other organizations in order to not “burn out” its volunteers. Since this type of event had never been attempted on such a large scale in British Columbia before, and because women in engineering initiatives were lacking the exposure, support, and expertise at the university level as well as in industry, the organizing committee undertook an incredible risk in this initiative which, however, has paid off

by establishing a solid reputation for any future event of this caliber. The goal is to gain institutional support at the major universities in the region. More specifically, the key to sustaining a program like BCS requires university support in the form of personnel and finances. We are happy to report that, by building upon the success of the Symposium, this support is slowly unfolding.

In addition, building a committed, responsible volunteer base is crucial for events of this type. Working mainly with initially untrained volunteers, much time was spent on training. Due to the short time frame of the final planning stages and the demographics of women's work locations over the summer, the volunteers and chair often had only email as a means of training, which was very time consuming. Building a volunteer base in advance and providing training at earlier stages would have alleviated this problem. However, the training of these newly recruited volunteers paid off as many of them have now moved on to volunteering with new or established women in engineering committees and organizations.

In an ideal world, the organization for this enormous event would have begun earlier. However, it can be concluded, and backed up by the participant's responses, that the symposium was well organized and that the planning went as smoothly as it could under the circumstances. Since the core organizing committee drew from key members who had previous experience in specific areas of planning, attention could be focused to areas that needed to be planned early and moved ahead quickly. It is recommended that the initial planning of events of this nature should start at least 12 – 18 months in advance. In addition, it is crucial to have the venue and core committee members established at a very early stage and ensure the core committee can commit time and energy for this long-term project.

Lastly, not enough can be said about staying optimistic, focused, and well supported both financially and emotionally with such a new ambition. The experience through this event has shown that, even though carefully crafting supporting and promotional materials, fundraising initiatives can sometimes take a long time, but by staying positive and persistent, funding may come through at a later date or even after the event has taken place.

The Organizing Committee would like to thank all volunteers, sponsors, British Columbia universities, and organizations for their support and trust, and would like to add that a well networked and mentored 'women in engineering' group, can and will put together such a successful event.

6 References

1. Actua Foundation. (2003). *Literature report for CEMF*. Retrieved March 28, 2008, from <http://www.cemf.ca/Outreach/StatisticsResearch/LiteratureReview.pdf>.
2. Ramdin, T. (1998). *Identification of factors which facilitate and hinder the career adjustment of women engineers*. Unpublished master's thesis. University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia.

Biographical Information

Anja Lanz, an Engineering Physics student at UBC, chaired the Building Communities Symposium, spearheaded the creation of the first-ever female representative to the department of Engineering Physics, and is currently leading a new networking group of engineering women in the Vancouver region.

Elizabeth A. Croft received her B.A.Sc. in mechanical engineering in 1988 from the UBC, her M.A.Sc. from the University of Waterloo in 1992 and her Ph.D. from the University of Toronto in 1995. She is currently an Associate Professor and Assistant Head in Mechanical Engineering and her research interests include human-robot interaction, industrial robotics, and mechatronics.

Jennifer Pelletier is a past Director of GEERing Up! UBC Engineering & Science for Kids, and is currently the Advising, Recruitment and Undergraduate Program Assistant for UBC Mechanical Engineering, where she works to recruit, retain and support women in engineering.

Bernadette Currie (Mech UWO '95, M.Eng UVIC '06) once worked in the consumer products industry for IBM and P&G. in Ontario. For a decade she taught mechanical technology at BCIT and recently lectured at SFU. She is the chair of DAWEG and proud mother of three daughters.

Erin Biddlecombe (M.Ed, B.Sc) oversees the “Women in Engineering” program (a centralized program that works to recruit, retain, & support women engineering students at UBC), as part of her portfolio of Student Development Officer for UBC’s Faculty of Applied Science.

Appendix A – Planning Committees

Pre-Symposium Committees	Responsibilities
Venue / Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify venues • Establish suitability and costs • Select best venue candidates • Conduct site visits to venues • Select final venue • Make arrangement for venue bookings • Liaison between chosen venue and committee • Select food menu • Book equipment and extra activity rooms with venue
Outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct online survey for initial symposium planning inquiring about desirable locations, time frames, programming content (ie. activities, workshops) and personal goals • Liaison with engineering groups and organizations and schools for raising awareness of symposium
Sponsorship/ Fundraising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create sponsorship levels • Apply to government grants • Write sponsorship letters and develop sponsorship information packages • Create mailing list with details on companies (including contact information, contact person, etc.) • Print and mail out letters • Correspond with potential sponsors • Promote symposium to organizations • Record sponsorship received and make copies of each cheque that comes in for later reference • Write thank you letters • Follow up regarding tax receipts
Budget/ Accounting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create budgets for multiple revenue scenarios • Monitor expenses • Advise committees about appropriate expenditures • Liaise with sponsorship committee to track donations and sponsorship • Adjusting budget to account for unexpected revenue or expenses • Handle reimbursements and invoices • Report on final spending
Speaker Selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit and collaborate with speakers • Book speakers • Negotiate remuneration of speakers • Select speaker gifts • Liaison between speakers and committee • Organize A/V equipment and materials for workshops
Program Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create layout of program (number of concurrent sessions, session

	<p>timeslots during the day)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate on planned activities and workshops with committee • Propose topics to perspective presenters • Allocate sessions into rooms • Seek out minimum of three keynote speakers • Discuss goals and target audience with confirmed keynote speakers • Liaison with speakers and venue • Write final program • Prepare program agendas for posting at venue
Advertisement/ Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create brochures, posters, and electronic materials for advertisement • Develop list of advertising contacts • Circulate material for promotion
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and update website • Update online program and sponsor list • Obtain logos from sponsors for website
Registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create registration guidelines • Organize online registration • Track payment of registration fees • Obtain updated registration information • Correspond to inquiries about registration • Accommodate special needs registration (such as meals, transportation, accommodation, etc.)
Name Badges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create name badges layout • Obtain all information to be printed onto badges • Colour code badges by groups (such as organizers, volunteers, and presenters) • Print badges • Collect badges at end of event
Giveaway Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create letters for giveaway sponsors • Visit potential stores that might like to donate items for giveaways • Tabulate all items collected • Write thank you letters • Follow up with tax receipts if applicable
Volunteer Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect volunteer information • Advertise openings for volunteering • Train volunteers • Correspond with volunteers as needed • Thank volunteers for their time and energy

Symposium Committees	Responsibilities
Bus Helper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist with organization of participants for bus transportation to venue • Display signs at bus stop locations for pick up on day of event • Assist with questions regarding traveling
Photographer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain photo release form from all participants • Organize indication on name badges for participant that don't like their photo taken • Take as many photos as possible during event • Transfer photos to central file folder for use in reports, promotional materials, and website
Workshop Session Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist speakers with workshop sessions • Ensure workshop materials being printed out ahead of time • Circulate materials as needed • Present speaker with thank you gift
Accommodation Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist participants with room location • Act as contact person for any accommodation need
Greeter/Floater	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greet participants • Be available to assist either organizing committee or speakers during event.
Set-up/Cleaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrive early to set up venues and workshop areas • Clean up during and after meals • Clean up accommodation and workshop rooms after event, if needed
First Aid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect medical forms for participants (in sealed envelopes) • Make first aid assistance available in case of emergencies
Logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate the efforts of event volunteers • Maintain a central information booth • Distribute schedules • Coordinate materials and supplies • Greet late arrivals • Provide support and troubleshooting.

Appendix B – Budget

Revenue			
Registration			
	Students @ \$35		
	Back to work/Immigrant @ \$45		
	Industry @ \$75		
	Subtotal		2,420.00
Grants			
	NSERC		7,000.00
	JADE		3,000.00
	Subtotal		10,000.00
Sponsors			
	Industry Sponsorship		13,100.00
	DAWEG - APEGBC		1,500.00
	UBC Dept. of Mechanical Engineering		1,500.00
	UBC Engineering Physics Program		200.00
	UBC Applied Science Professional Fund		1,000.00
	UBC Walter Gage Fund		2,000.00
	SFU Faculty of Applied Science		500.00
	Private Donor		200.00
	Subtotal		20,000.00
Total Revenue	All Sources		32,420.00
Expenses			
Accommodations and Meals			
	Friday Night Stayover for Volunteers	\$	540.00
	Overnight with meals - 100@ \$68	\$	6,800.00
	Snack Catering	\$	1,000.00
	Food for stayover and extra snacks	\$	228.09
	Subtotal	\$	8,568.09
Facilities	AV costs	\$	-
			Equipment loaned by UBC Mechanical Engineering
Travel	Ferry Costs	\$	202.35
	Bus Charter, return	\$	1,224.30
			1,224.30
Administrative Expense			
	Stationary and printing	\$	75.00
	Web survey hosting	\$	62.30
	Miscellaneous	\$	102.75
	Subtotal	\$	240.05
Advertising			
	Brochures and posters	\$	-
	Ads	\$	500.00
	Website Hosting	\$	-
	Subtotal	\$	500.00
			Photocopying provided in-kind Provided in-kind by DAWEG Provided in-kind by UBC Mechanical Engineering
Speakers/Workshops			
	Presentation Fee	\$	482.21
	Speaker Gifts	\$	160.19
	General logistics supplies	\$	41.42
	Workshop Materials and Programs	\$	540.67
	Tote Bags	\$	706.68
	Subtotal		1,931.17
Coordinator Funding	Sept 06-Sept07	\$	6,809.00
Volunteer Reimbursements		\$	430.00
Spinoff Activities		\$	5,917.39
Carry-over Funding	To fund coordinator for next Symposium	\$	6,800.00
Total Expenses		\$	32,420.00
Revenue - Expenses		\$	-

Appendix C – Sponsors

Building Communities Symposium Sponsors

Diamond

NSERC/CRSNG Pacific

Platinum

The Jade Project

Gold

Teleflex Canada

Toyota CAPTIN

UBC Mechanical Engineering

BC Hydro

JV Driver

UBC Walter Gage Memorial Fund

Silver

Faculty of Applied Science Professional Activities Fund

UMA/AECOM

Stantec

Klohn Crippen Berger

SFU Faculty of Applied Science

Associated Engineering

Glotman Simpson

The Langley Concrete Group

Robert Allan Ltd.

Read Jones Christoffersen

Convergent

MMM Group

FortisBC

YVR

Penticton Foundry

Bronze

UBC Engineering Physics

Sandwell

Appendix D - Program Session Overview

Saturday Sessions

Timeslot	Workshop Title	Theme	Location
11:00 - 12:15 pm	Path to success through real world experience.	CA	Student Centre Lounge
	Mentoring 101- What it is and how it can help you!	CA	Staff House
	Your interview: The 5 Minute Impression	CA	Dinning Hall
LUNCH			
2:00 – 3:00 pm	Dressing for Professional Success—Make the Right First Impression	CA	Staff House
	Making a Difference – Engineering Opportunities in Developing Countries	L	Student Centre Lounge
	Making Life Shaping Decisions – Navigating Change	TR	Dinning Hall
BREAK			
3:15 – 4:15 pm	Making Life Shaping Decisions – Navigating Change Cont...	TR	Dinning Hall
	It is possible to have the life and career you dreamed of?	WLB	Staff House

Saturday Afternoon Activities

Time	Theme	Activity	Meeting Location
4:30 - 5:30 pm	Rest	Lie down for an hour	Your Room
		Sit on dock for a chat	Dock 1
	Relax	Write a biographical story for self or others or read.	Student Centre Lounge
		Make centerpieces for dinner tables	Dinning Hall
	Recreate	Swim in lake	Dock 2
		Hike along forest trail - .5km	Ferry

Sunday Morning Sessions

Timeslot	Workshop Title	Theme	Location
9:15 – 10:15 am	Genuine Self Confidence	L	Dinning Hall
	Navigating the journey from school to work ... and from work back to school again	TR	Staff House
	Entering the workforce; new to the region or county	TR	Student Centre Lounge

Networking Break Out Groups

10:30 - 11:30 am	<p style="text-align: center;">“Networking Group Name” <i>Meeting Location</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">APEGBC <i>Student Centre South</i></p>
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	Future BCS Planning Committee <i>Staff House</i>	Engineers Without Borders <i>Student Center Lounge</i>	DAWEG <i>Student Center Deck</i>
	Internationally Trained EIT or P. Eng <i>Student Center North</i>	GEERing-Up! <i>Amphitheatre</i>	Academia / Faculty <i>Friends & Alumni Cabin</i>
	Graduate Students <i>Dinning Hall</i>	Looking For Work <i>Dinning Hall Patio</i>	NEW@UBC <i>Gymnasium</i>

CA – Career Advancement
WLB – Work / Life Balance
L - Leadership
TR –Transistions