

Case Study: ACCION International

Snapshot

Name of Organization:	ACCION International
Type of Organization:	International Development
Type of Engagement:	Strategic Opportunity Assessment and Business Plan
Social Impact Area:	Innovation

Background

ACCION International is a 45-year old, \$24MM award-winning microfinance organization whose mission is to give people the tools they need to overcome poverty. ACCION's partner lending organizations help micro-entrepreneurs climb the economic ladder with dignity and pride by granting them small loans to start their own businesses.

As a part of its strategic planning process, ACCION management sought to establish an action-oriented thought leadership “Center” to bridge the gap between microfinance institutions and the private sector in advancing the provision of quality, universal access to financial services for low-income populations. Beth Rhyne, ACCION’s Senior Vice President of Policy, Research and Development, invited CWV to analyze the market opportunity for the Center and collaboratively develop a business plan that would guide ACCION in the Center’s design and implementation. Beth envisioned CWV adding a critical strategic perspective to the structural development and integration of the Center into the overall organization.

“CWV provided a unique skill set that we needed to develop the project before us. Their manner of presenting and engaging with people across the organization was very strong and they had the specialized expertise to accomplish our goals.” – Maria Otero, Executive Director

CWV’s Solution

CWV completed two phases of work for ACCION International: a strategic opportunity assessment and a business plan. The first phase of work analyzed the competitive environment of thought leadership activities within the microfinance community—specifically in the realm of research, publications and conferences. For this phase, CWV considered best practices among action-oriented think tanks in other industries in order to supplement research and create recommendations. The principal tasks completed during this four-month phase of work included:

- Facilitating goal setting by senior leadership
- Assessing the marketplace for trends, competition, and best practices
- Determining organizational assets best leveraged with the Center
- Facilitating decision-making process on approach to be pursued by Center

CWV’s recommendations from the first phase of the engagement were focused on strategically positioning ACCION’s Center in the competitive marketplace. CWV suggested that ACCION focus on research areas such as commercialization of microfinance and scaling microfinance models. By focusing on areas that build upon the organization’s internal strengths, the Center is positioned to complement existing thought leadership activities within the microfinance community. .

During the second phase of the engagement, CWV developed a business plan to be used by ACCION staff as a guideline for the launch and growth of the Center. A critical aspect of the plan was the definition of three core issue areas and corresponding projects to advance the field of inclusive finance. Other components of the plan included a robust competitive analysis, a marketing and operations plan, and risk assessment for the proposed Center. The plan also featured a three-year budget including the amount of investment capital needed for the growth of the initiative. Specific objectives accomplished in this phase were the following:

- Definition of market offerings and competitive positioning for the Center
- Creation of marketing/outreach, staffing and operations plans
- Creation of a financial model with earned and contributed revenue assumptions, as well as expense projections (including new activities/existing work transferring to the Center)

CWV consultants completed the business plan with the help of various working groups in areas such as marketing and finance that were formed within the ACCION organization. The business plan provided ACCION a detailed roadmap of the existing landscape in microfinance thought leadership, while also defining a clear path for their initiative to succeed as a new player in this arena.

Results

CWV's materials and documents were immediately used by ACCION in its fundraising efforts for the Center. CWV's perspective allowed ACCION to discover the need for more thought leadership in microfinance, and was able to successfully articulate its role in contributing to this space. Recommendations helped ACCION's leadership conceive of the Center as a platform to communicate their deep knowledge and research of microfinance.

Less than a year after the completion of the engagement, ACCION's results include:

- Utilization of business plan to inform Center's fundraising efforts.
- Implementation of CWV's recommended strategic direction and financial plan for the next three years.
- Reorganization of internal department responsibilities to accommodate the new initiative.
- Launch of the new *Center for Financial Inclusion* in September 2008.

"Since the creation of the Center came out of the work that ACCION was already doing, it was very important to us to structure the initiative well and position it to improve the overall industry. CWV helped to create our strategic concept for the center and think through the different pieces that needed to be in place—including the structure for the center and its relationship to ACCION."

—Maria Otero

Lessons Learned

This engagement emphasized the importance of examining existing models in the same market as a proposed venture before defining an organization's strategy and positioning amongst the competition. Additionally, engaging a broad selection of staff members in the business plan writing process through working groups is an excellent way to achieve organizational approval before launching a new venture.

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