

Summary Report of Consultations

on Proposals for the National Volunteerism Initiative

Overview of consultations

Purpose and background

The purpose of the consultations was to obtain comments from members of voluntary organizations throughout Canada on proposals for the National Volunteerism Initiative (NVI). The key reason for seeking the comments was to tap into the experience, expertise and insights of voluntary organizations to help design the NVI.

The goals of the NVI, designed to be a lasting legacy to the International Year of Volunteers, are to:

- *encourage Canadians to participate in voluntary organizations; and*
- *improve the capacity of organizations to benefit from the contribution of volunteers and to enhance the experience of volunteering.*

The proposals for the NVI were developed over the last year on the basis of discussions with selected organizations and experts, meetings of the NVI Joint Table, discussions with other Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) Joint Tables and the results of the 2000 *National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (NSGVP)*.

The draft proposals were outlined in a document entitled, *Sharing Views on Proposals for the National Volunteerism Initiative* that was used as the basis for presentations and discussions at the consultations. This document can be found on or through the NVI web site [here](#).

Process and participation

The consultation document, *Sharing Views on Proposals for the National Volunteerism Initiative* was distributed to participants before the consultations and also at the sessions themselves. The document outlined the major challenges, solutions, mechanisms and principles that had been identified as relevant to designing the NVI.

At the sessions, participants were asked whether the right types of challenges to meeting the goals of the NVI had been identified, and whether the proposals for solutions, mechanisms, and principles offered an adequate basis from which to

develop and implement the NVI in response to the challenges. Participants were also asked whether the overall approach to the NVI seemed sensible and appropriate, and whether other questions and concerns needed to be addressed.

People from more than 350 diverse organizations participated, including administrators of volunteer resources, managers, executives, members of boards of directors, front-line volunteers, trainers and support specialists. The NVI Joint Table co-chairs or their representatives participated in all sessions. Comments from each session were recorded by a member of the NVI Secretariat and generally by a local voluntary sector representative as well.

In all, 26 consultation sessions averaging 15 participants each were held in 11 cities from St. John's, Newfoundland to Vancouver, British Columbia, between August 28 and October 16. The consultation schedule and the names of participants who gave written permission to be identified are listed at the end of this report.

In most cities, half a day was devoted to taking note of the comments of representatives of a cross-section of voluntary organizations from the city and surrounding region, and half a day to voluntary organizations representing specific interests or groups (e.g., sport and recreation, faith communities, Aboriginal peoples, visible minorities, health, seniors, youth) from the same areas.

In addition to the consultation sessions, stakeholders had the opportunity to provide input via the consultation workbook posted on the VSI web site at . at http://www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/joint_tables/nvi/consultations.cfm.

Overall results and perspectives

Evaluation forms from all sessions indicate virtually unanimous agreement that the consultation allowed for a productive exchange of views and that participants' ideas and comments were heard.

There was broad agreement, and hence a strong national consensus, that the proposals (relating to challenges, solutions, mechanisms, and principles) were appropriate and would provide a useful foundation for developing and implementing the NVI. Participants from each session also shared many new ideas and insights to help further refine and define the proposals.

Many participants expressed the view that by significantly improving the capacity of voluntary organizations to engage and support volunteers, these organizations will be better equipped to fulfill their missions. Participants agreed that one of the underlying, and oft unrecognized, roles of voluntary organizations is to provide a solid foundation for volunteerism. Volunteerism, in turn, makes a vital contribution to maintaining the civic participation, compassion, and respect for diversity that

characterize Canada's democracy and that are particularly important in a post-September 11 world.

Participants also expressed interest in remaining involved and keeping apprised of follow-up activity in the development of the NVI.

Summary of comments by participants

The summary below paraphrases the key comments made most often by participants under the main sections of the presentation, *Sharing Views on Proposals for the National Volunteerism Initiative*. Participants sometimes put forward opposing views, and these are reflected in this report. The comments listed below also include issues not covered in the presentation but put forward by participants.

Since the sections in the presentation on 'challenges', 'solutions' and 'principles' raise some of the same issues (e.g., importance of supporting inclusiveness), in the interests of brevity, this summary report tries to avoid unnecessary repetition of comments on issues that arise under more than one section.

Comments on challenges

- The *NSGVP* results do not necessarily indicate a major problem with volunteering; there may be many reasons (e.g., lower unemployment in 2000 than 1997 and various methodological errors) to explain the decline in numbers of volunteers, etc.
- On the other hand, even if the *NSGVP* overstated the decline in volunteering by as much as 20% – an unheard of error in serious surveys – we would still have 800,000 fewer volunteers than in than 1997, and the numbers would not point so consistently downward across virtually all categories (e.g., age, gender, education, income bracket, province).
- Since the time crunch facing most Canadians is unlikely to disappear any time soon, dealing with it will remain a challenge.
- Finding volunteers, matching their expectations with organizational needs, training and retaining them certainly are major challenges – more in some sectors such as health care and social services where demands are typically year round and even 24/7, than say, sport and recreation.
- Volunteer burn-out is a growing problem even though volunteering is about giving your time and energy freely to activities that are meaningful to you.

We can't continue operating and meeting new challenges without some new resources from somewhere.

There's a lot of stuff on the Net about volunteering, but I need to be able to talk to a real live person who understands my community and how to help my organization; and that's the way it should be across Canada.

- Voluntary organizations are facing new and increasing costs (e.g., liability and other types of insurance, higher salaries for administrators of volunteer resources, re-imbusement of out-of-pocket expenses)
- Recognizing volunteers appropriately is always a challenge, particularly when the value of volunteerism is not well appreciated in the broader society.
- Volunteering costs money (e.g., bus fare, lunches, childcare)
- Many organizations lack the capacity (including money) to be able to engage and support more volunteers.
- Public, governments and the private sector don't really understand what volunteering is all about and how important it is.
- Collaboration and dialogue are important but they consume a lot of energy and time and travel costs that few organizations can afford.

New challenges identified

- Providing a consistent level of information, tools and other support services to voluntary organizations – particularly on a face to face basis at the community level and surrounding region – throughout Canada is a major challenge.
- Ensuring that the information, tools and support services meet the diverse needs of the many different organizations serving Canadians of all ages, cultural and social backgrounds, including immigrants, whether they live in large cities or rural and remote communities adds an important dimension to the challenge.
- Similar challenges exist serving Aboriginal peoples who wish to integrate into non-Aboriginal communities.
- Promoting understanding of what volunteerism is all about and why it is vital to our democracy and quality of life will be an on-going challenge.
- Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of voluntary organizations without losing the initiative, passion and altruism that are among the hallmarks of volunteerism is a difficult balancing act.
- Engaging the 'next generation' of volunteers – particularly children and youth - is proving to be an increasing challenge.

I started volunteering when I was 5 years old when my parents took me door to door selling apples for the Beavers.

My parents go to church, and volunteer there, and I just got into the habit of volunteering as a kid.

Comments on solutions

- Design programs, volunteer positions and management systems with volunteers in mind; don't automatically use private or public sector management approaches.

- Collaborate at the community level to raise local awareness of what voluntary organizations do and why they're important.
- Consider adjusting roles and management styles so that voluntary organizations can attract volunteers – especially young people, retired people and people with special skills.
- Since much of the information, tools, guides, etc., already exist, focus on making them accessible (e.g., outreach) in a consistent way throughout Canada and ensure they're adapted to the diversity of cultural, sectoral, geographic and other needs.
- Recognize that front-line volunteers, administrator of volunteer resources, and board directors all have distinct needs in terms of screening, orientation, training, recognition, etc.
- Operating transparently in an accountable way is a good way to ensure that voluntary organizations remain relevant to their community.
- Voluntary organizations are going to have to become a lot more professional if they're going to be taken more seriously.
- If you make volunteering professional you'll kill it; volunteering is something that anyone should be able to do just because they want to.
- Ensure that volunteering can remain an activity that people can do out of sense of altruism and commitment to their community.
- Extend 'mandatory volunteering', especially in schools so that young people can get into the habit of volunteering.
- Work toward eliminating 'mandatory volunteering' because, if volunteering is to continue being vital to our society it needs to be an activity that is freely given.
- Ensure that volunteers contribute to designing surveys and research on volunteerism.
- Provide support to groups that provide advice and services to voluntary organizations (e.g. police who help in the screening process).
- Encourage more research on volunteerism, including further analysis of the results of the NSGVP.

We invest a lot of time trying to understand what prospective volunteers want to do and what they have to offer, and then we develop a role that fits them and our mission.

Promoting public awareness of volunteerism is essential.

Making information, tools, advice and other forms of support of a consistent standard easily accessible across Canada is very important.

Sure we need to invest more in national security, but we also need to invest in improving the capacity of voluntary organizations to engage Canadians and contribute to the kind of democracy that has made Canada number 1.

Comments on mechanisms

- Build on existing mechanisms by providing more resources to enrich the offerings of voluntary sector organizations and to extend their reach, particularly to isolated/rural/remote groups and communities.
- Establish mechanisms to support collaboration and dialogue – including face-to-face dialogue -- among voluntary organizations and between voluntary organizations, governments and the private sector.
- Avoid new centralized federal mechanisms.
- Strengthen the federal role – in collaboration with the provinces – in promoting volunteerism, and supporting measures to enhance engagement and support of volunteers.
- Ensure support for recognizing and celebrating volunteers and volunteerism.
- Ensure that increased funding is made available one way or another to meet the needs of voluntary organizations.
- Avoid federal-provincial squabbles in the process of establishing any new mechanisms.
- Ensure that resources get to the local level and are not eaten up either by government or voluntary sector bureaucracies.

Let's not have some new bureaucracy for the NVI; there are lots of good voluntary organizations out there that can share in doing the job.

I really hope that whatever the government is going to be doing under the NVI, it's going to find a way of doing it with less paper and red tape.

Ensuring adequate financial support for the NVI is essential.

Comments on principles

- The NVI should recognize that the meaning and goals of volunteering and volunteerism vary substantially among organizations, sectors, and social and cultural groups throughout Canada.
- The NVI should recognize that for some geographic and cultural communities, volunteering is much more than 'a nice thing to do'; it's essential for 'survival'.
- The NVI should not aim at a 'one-size-fits-all' solution; it should be sensitive to differences relating to culture, location (urban/rural/remote), evolving community needs, and the approach to volunteerism by other levels of government.
- The NVI should strongly support efforts to help ensure that volunteering remains a rewarding experience.

I volunteer because I like to, not because I have to. But I didn't appreciate that for many cultural and other communities, volunteering is like an essential service; if people don't volunteer, the community doesn't survive. Period.

- The NVI should promote reaching out to all groups in the community and designing programs and volunteer positions that are truly inclusive.
- The NVI should recognize that voluntary organizations can be important agents of change, particularly by tapping into the experience and expertise at the community level.
- It is important to ensure that provinces have a genuine role in the NVI because many of them have legislation, policies and programs that affect volunteerism and voluntary organizations in fundamental ways.

Maybe September 11 is going to help us realize how important volunteering is not only for dealing with emergencies and providing services, but also for bringing us together.

I don't feel 'at home' unless I'm volunteering.

Next steps

The analysis of these consultations, as well as other research used to develop the NVI, will be incorporated into a final report. The report will summarize overarching themes and make recommendations for development and implementation of the NVI. A copy of the report will be sent to every consultation participant.

Acknowledgements

The NVI Joint Table would like to thank all those who gave their time and their feedback during the consultation process. Their comments will be instrumental in shaping the direction of the NVI.

Schedule of NVI Consultations

Date	City	Morning Cross Section of Voluntary Sector	Afternoon Sector-Specific	Host Organization(s)
August 28	Ottawa	Cross Section of Voluntary Sector		NVI Secretariat
September 12	St. John's	Cross Section of Voluntary Sector	Sport and Recreation	Community Services Council Newfoundland and Labrador
September 26	Vancouver	Cross Section of Voluntary Sector	The Administrators of Volunteer Resources of B.C.	Volunteer Vancouver
September 28	Winnipeg	Cross Section of Voluntary Sector	Aboriginal Groups	Volunteer Centre of Winnipeg
September 29	Winnipeg	Aboriginal VSI Reference Group		Aboriginal VSI Reference Group
October 2	Calgary	Cross Section of Voluntary Sector	Faith Communities	Volunteer Calgary
October 4	Regina	Cross Section of Voluntary Sector	Rural Organizations	Volunteer Regina
October 4	Quebec City	Cross Section of Voluntary Sector	Health and Social Services Organizations	Fédération des centres d'action bénévole du Québec
October 10	Ottawa	National Voluntary Organizations	International Voluntary Organizations and Arts and Culture Organizations	National Children's Alliance NVI Secretariat
October 11	Kitchener	Cross Section of Voluntary Sector	Seniors	Voluntary Action Centre of Kitchener-Waterloo and Area
October 11	Montreal	Cross Section of Voluntary Sector	VSI Reference Group on Visible Minorities (Local level organization)	Chinese Family Services of Greater Montreal VSI Reference Group on Visible Minorities
October 12	Fredericton	Cross Section of Voluntary Sector	Youth	Youth Council of New Brunswick
October 12	Sudbury	Cross Section of Voluntary Sector	Corrections, Justice, Environment	Sudbury Women's Centre
October 15	Ottawa	National Reference Group of Visible Minority Organizations		NVI/VSI Secretariat
October 16	Ottawa	Board Volunteers and Executive Directors		NVI/VSI Secretariat

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