

An Accord

Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector

December 5, 2001

I. PURPOSE OF THE ACCORD

The purpose of the Accord is to strengthen the ability of both the voluntary sector and the Government of Canada to better serve Canadians.

The strength of this Accord derives from the joint work that produced it. While the Accord is not a legal document, it is designed to guide the evolution of the relationship by identifying the common values, principles and commitments that will shape future practices. It focuses on what unites the two sectors, honours the contributions of both, and respects their unique strengths and different ways of working.

The Accord represents a public commitment to more open, transparent, consistent and collaborative ways of working together. When working together, the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector seek to fulfil the commitments set out in the Accord and in so doing enhance the quality of life of all Canadians.

II. VALUES

The Accord is based on the following six Canadian values that are most relevant to the relationship between the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector. These values are interrelated and together create the climate for improving and enhancing the lives of all Canadians:

Democracy – upholding the right to associate freely, to express views freely and to engage in advocacy.

Active Citizenship – welcoming the active involvement or engagement of individuals and communities in shaping society whether through political or voluntary activity or both.

Equality – respecting the rights of Canadians under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, and the rights of individuals worldwide as defined by the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

Diversity – respecting the rich variety of cultures, languages, identities, interests, views, abilities, and communities in Canada.

Inclusion – welcoming the expression and representation of diversity and upholding the right of each to speak and be heard.

Social Justice – ensuring the full participation in the social, economic and political life of communities.

III. PRINCIPLES

The Accord is based on guiding principles:

Independence

The Government of Canada and the voluntary sector are autonomous, have unique strengths and separate accountabilities, and agree that:

- The Government of Canada is accountable to all Canadians for its actions and has a responsibility to identify issues of national concern and mobilize resources to address them, establish policies and make decisions in the best interest of all Canadians;
- Voluntary sector organizations are accountable to their supporters and to those they serve in providing services, organizing activities and giving collective voice at the local, national and international level;
- The independence of voluntary sector organizations includes their right within the law to challenge public policies, programs and legislation and to advocate for change; and
- Advocacy is inherent to debate and change in a democratic society and, subject to the above principles, it should not affect any funding relationship that might exist.

Interdependence

The voluntary sector and the Government of Canada recognize that:

- The actions of one can directly or indirectly affect the other, since both often share the same objective of common good, operate in the same areas of Canadian life, and serve the same clients; and
- Each has complex and important relationships with others (business, labour, provincial, territorial and local governments, etc.) and the Accord is not meant to affect these other relationships.

Dialogue

The voluntary sector and the Government of Canada, recognizing that sharing of ideas, perspectives, and experiences contributes to better understanding, improved identification of priorities, and sound public policy, agree that:

- Dialogue should be open, respectful, informed, sustained, and welcome a range of viewpoints;
- Dialogue should be carried out in a way which respects each party's confidential information, and builds and maintains trust; and
- Appropriately designed processes and governance structures are necessary to achieve sustained dialogue.

Co-operation and Collaboration

The Government of Canada and the voluntary sector agree that the social fabric of communities is strengthened and civic engagement is increased when they work together to address issues of mutual concern, and that:

- Working together to identify common priorities or complementary objectives will help facilitate co-operation and collaboration; and
- Working relationships should be flexible and respect what others contribute and the challenges and constraints under which they operate.

Accounting to Canadians

In addition to their separate accountabilities, the voluntary sector and the Government of Canada are accountable for maintaining the trust and confidence of Canadians by:

- Ensuring transparency, high standards of conduct and sound management in their work together; and
- Monitoring and reporting on the results.

IV. COMMITMENTS TO ACTION

The values and principles of the Accord are the starting point for the development of the relationship. Success in building the relationship will depend on the actions and practices of both the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector for the benefit of all Canadians. In moving into the future the following commitments will be essential.

Shared Commitments

The voluntary sector and the Government of Canada commit to:

- Act in a manner consistent with the values and principles in this Accord;
- Develop the mechanisms and processes required to put the Accord into action;
- Work together as appropriate to achieve shared goals and objectives; and
- Promote awareness and understanding of the contributions that each makes to Canadian society.

Government of Canada Commitments

The Government of Canada commits to:

- Recognize and consider the implications of its legislation, regulations, policies and programs on voluntary sector organizations including the importance of funding policies and practices for the further development of the relationship and the strengthening of the voluntary sector's capacity;

- Recognize its need to engage the voluntary sector in open, informed and sustained dialogue in order that the sector may contribute its experience, expertise, knowledge, and ideas in developing better public policies and in the design and delivery of programs; and
- Address the issue of ministerial responsibility for the continued development of the relationship with the voluntary sector.

Voluntary Sector Commitments

The voluntary sector commits to:

- Continue to identify important or emerging issues and trends in communities, and act on them or bring them to the attention of the Government of Canada;
- Serve as a means for the voices and views of all parts of the voluntary sector to be represented to and heard by the Government of Canada, ensuring that the full depth and diversity of the sector is reached and engaged; and
- Address the issue of responsibility for the continued development of the relationship with the Government of Canada.

V. TAKING THE ACCORD FORWARD

The Accord is the beginning of a journey. Measures are needed to implement its provisions. The voluntary sector and the Government of Canada agree to develop in a timely fashion:

- Appropriate organizational structures in the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector to give effect to the provisions of the Accord;
- Processes for monitoring the Accord, reporting to Canadians on the status of the relationship and the results that have been achieved, resolving disputes, agreeing on next steps, and discussing the strategic opportunities for future collaboration;
- Codes or standards of good practice to help guide interactions between government departments and voluntary sector organizations on aspects of the relationship such as policy dialogue, funding, and other issues as identified;
- A regular meeting between Ministers and sector representatives to discuss the results that have been achieved; and
- Ongoing actions to increase awareness about the Accord within the sector and the Government of Canada, and among Canadians.

The goal is that the Accord and its implementation plan will provide an enabling framework that will help the voluntary sector and the Government of Canada better serve Canadians.