

Voluntary Sector Initiative

Taking the Accord Forward:

The First Report to Canadians
on Implementing An Accord
Between the Government of Canada
and the Voluntary Sector

Report of the Joint Steering Committee
December 2003

Voluntary Sector

Canada

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A Message from the Joint Steering Committee

In many ways, this report is an important milestone. First and foremost, it fulfills the two sectors' commitment to report on progress in implementing *An Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector*. As the first formal accounting since the Accord was signed in December 2001, it also provides a benchmark for measuring future progress as the two sectors put in place the products, processes and spirit of good will that the Accord envisioned.

In one sense, the Accord and Codes of Good Practice were the culmination of more than two years of collaboration, effort and enthusiasm. Working together, the two sectors identified values, principles and practices that would guide their relationship into the future. In another important sense, however, the real work of implementing the Accord and Codes has just begun. That work will be in making the kind of cultural changes in both sectors that support a vibrant, mutually supportive relationship benefiting all Canadians. And, as experience has taught us, the kind of changes we envision cannot be achieved quickly or easily.

MEMBERSHIP

- Eileen Sarkar, Canadian Heritage (Co-chair)
- Monica Patten, Voluntary Sector Forum (Co-chair)
- Yvonne Atwell, Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health
- Darlene Bessey, YWCA of Canada
- Scott Broughton, Health Canada
- Mary Carman, Industry Canada
- Gordon Floyd, Canadian Centre for Philanthropy
- Marcel Lauzière, Canadian Council on Social Development
- Bill McCloskey, Canada Customs and Revenue Agency
- Mike Sheridan, Statistics Canada
- Shauna Sylvester, IMPACS
- Andrew Treusch, Human Resources Development Canada

Clearly, one of the challenges will be to identify the funds that are needed for implementation initiatives to proceed. Another is meeting the diverse needs of organizations with a range of mandates, cultures and experience. For example, we've heard from many organizations in both sectors that they already devote time and energy to the relationship, collaborating with the "other" on key issues, sharing information and resources, and exploring new ways of drawing on each other's unique insights and skills. Others are seizing the day, using the information and tools provided to elevate the relationship to a new level.

Over the past year, we've put in place some of the building blocks for change – our governing bodies are up and running, training tools

and approaches have been developed and we've started to get the word out to government departments and agencies, and voluntary sector organizations across the country. On the federal government side, the Clerk of the Privy Council has taken a strong stance in support of implementation, making deputy heads of all departments and agencies accountable for putting the Accord and Codes into action.

Because we're in it for the long haul, one of the principles that has guided this recent work is that it's not always about doing *more*, but about doing *better*. With that in mind, we've taken an incremental approach to achieving our vision, one that allows us to review progress, build on our successes and move forward with conviction.



Monica Patten
Co-Chair



Eileen Sarkar
Co-Chair

A. The Context for Change

A vital pillar of Canadian society, the voluntary sector is a major social and economic force in this country – for example, consider that the sector

- employs approximately 1 million people
- is supported by 6.5 million volunteers
- includes 180,000 incorporated organizations
- has annual revenues of \$90 billion and assets of \$109 billion

In June 2000, the federal government announced the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI), a joint endeavour designed to better serve the needs of Canadians by strengthening the capacity of the voluntary sector and enhancing its relationship with the Government of Canada.

Unique in its “jointness,” the VSI invited more than 125 representatives of both sectors to sit at joint tables that focussed on key areas, such as strengthening the relationship between the two sectors, enhancing the capacity of the voluntary sector and improving the regulatory environment in which the sector operates.

About the Accord

From the outset, a major focus of the VSI was the development of a joint accord, or framework agreement, that would provide visible and concrete recognition of the importance of the relationship between the two sectors. Over its almost two-year lifespan (September 2000 to July 2002), the Accord project was guided by the Joint Accord Table, a collaborative working group composed of an equal number of senior executives from the federal government and the voluntary sector. The Table was assigned responsibility for two tasks: developing an accord between the two sectors and creating implementation tools and mechanisms to give it life.

THE VSI: A BIG PICTURE VIEW

As it moves towards the end of its five-year mandate, the VSI continues to make progress on its commitments. Following is a sampling of recent initiatives:

- In today's information-driven age, voluntary sector organizations need to be able to collect and manage data effectively. *Information management/information technology (IM/IT)* projects are under way to deliver technology training and support, change funding practices, facilitate access to funding, build a portal and raise IM/IT awareness.
- Recommendations on *streamlining the regulatory framework* for charitable organizations were developed by federal government and voluntary sector representatives in a joint process. Of note as well is a simplified tax reporting form for charities and new policy guidelines on political activities.
- The first program to be developed as a follow-up to the work of the VSI's joint tables, the *Canada Volunteerism Initiative*, showcases the potential of a joint relationship between the two sectors. Designed jointly, it will improve the capacity of organizations to benefit from the contribution of volunteers; encourage Canadians to participate in voluntary organizations; and enhance the experience of volunteering.
- A number of initiatives are under way to *build capacity* within the voluntary sector. For example: a Web site (www.hrvs-rhsbc.ca) provides valuable human resource information; voluntary sector organizations can now access information on the skills and competencies that sector leaders require; an exchange program between the federal government and the voluntary sector offers both sectors a unique on-the-job learning opportunity; and best practice case studies provide a wealth of information on financing/resourcing issues for voluntary sector organizations.
- More information is needed on the people, organizations and processes that power the voluntary sector. Two *major national surveys* are helping to build an inventory of facts and figures on the sector.

Signed on December 5, 2001, *An Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector* is a landmark agreement signaling the beginning of an enhanced relationship between the two sectors. For the first time ever, the Accord identifies common values and principles to guide the working relationship between the sectors and commits each sector to building that relationship. The product of extensive research and consultation, as well as spirited, informed debate and discussion, the Accord strengthens the ability of both sectors to enhance quality of life in Canada and provides a legacy that will last well into the future.

EXTRACT FROM THE SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

It [the Government of Canada] will put into action the accord it signed with the voluntary sector last December, to enable the sector to contribute to national priorities and represent the views of those too often excluded.

(September 30, 2002)

THE BUILDING BLOCKS

The Accord sets out common values and principles to shape future practices:

Values:

- democracy
- active citizenship
- equality
- diversity
- inclusion
- social justice

Principles:

- independence
- interdependence
- dialogue
- co-operation and collaboration
- accountability to Canadians

Making it work

Part of the Accord's strength is its recognition of the need for practical measures to move its provisions forward. With this in mind, it calls for organizational structures, processes and tools for implementing the Accord, and monitoring and reporting on progress in specific areas. In particular, section V, "Taking the Accord Forward," commits the voluntary sector and the federal government to achieving results in five essential areas. These activity areas form the basis of the reporting framework for this report:

- *A solid foundation:* setting up organizational structures in the federal government and the voluntary sector to put the Accord into action;
- *Awareness is key:* raising awareness of the Accord within the voluntary sector and the federal government, as well as among Canadians;
- *Putting the Codes to work:* developing codes of good practice to help guide interactions between the two sectors;

- *Tracking our progress:* establishing processes for monitoring the Accord, reporting to Canadians about progress and moving forward on priorities; and
- *A shared journey:* holding regular meetings between ministers and sector representatives to discuss progress and plans.

The following section provides an overview of the two sectors' progress in each of these five areas.

B. Our Achievements So Far

Over the past year, the voluntary sector and the Government of Canada have made progress in bringing the Accord to life. Most of their efforts in this early stage of implementation have focused on laying the groundwork for successful implementation of the Accord across the federal government and in the thousands of voluntary sector organizations around the country. That means building the structures and processes required to oversee both joint and individual initiatives. It also means raising awareness about the importance of renewed working relationships and the essential role that the Accord can play in moving those relationships forward. Much of the two sectors' work in this area has focussed on the Codes of Good Practice, practical tools designed to guide the sectors' evolving relationship as they explore new ways of working together in the areas of funding and policy dialogue.

The following is a description of the two sectors' major accomplishments in the five priority areas set out in the Accord. Many of the progress markers indicated in the sidebars summarize key findings from separate research initiatives conducted by each of the sectors during the summer of 2003

(see *Tracking our Progress*, p.15). For a more detailed accounting of these and other achievements of the federal government and the voluntary sector, see the background papers to this report, which are available on the VSI Web site at www.vsi-isbc.ca.

A SOLID FOUNDATION

Appropriate organizational structures in the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector to give effect to the provisions of the Accord

(An Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector, December 2001)

Effective organizational structures – both joint and separate – are essential to guide the work of implementing the Accord and the Codes of Good Practice. In reflecting on the structures and processes that would best serve the VSI's interests during its second phase, both sectors took into account the lessons learned during the Initiative's first years.

- ***Ministerial Consultative Committee (MCC):*** Led by the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the Honourable Sheila Copps, the MCC has a mandate to meet annually with the voluntary sector to review results, report to Canadians on the status of the relationship and guide future work. The Honourable Jane Stewart, Minister of Human Resources Development Canada, is vice-chair of the Committee.
- ***Voluntary Sector Forum:*** Composed of 22 voluntary sector leaders from across Canada, the Forum oversees the continuing work of the VSI – including implementation of the Accord and Codes. Chaired by Monica Patten, the Forum also co-ordinates the sector’s response on key issues and directs outreach activities to enhance the sector’s involvement in the VSI.
- ***Assistant Deputy Minister Steering Committee:*** Committee members, representing key departments and all central agencies, provide advice to the MCC and horizontal leadership for the VSI. The Committee also offers strategic direction to government members of the Joint Steering Committee and ensures that the interests of the broader federal community

are taken into account in VSI initiatives. Eileen Sarkar, Assistant Deputy Minister, Canadian Heritage, and Andrew Treusch, Assistant Deputy Minister, Human Resources Development Canada, serve as chair and vice-chair, respectively.

PROGRESS MARKERS

In the federal government:

- Most federal departments/agencies have named a champion responsible for implementing the Accord and Codes.
- In April 2003, an inter-departmental meeting brought together 41 federal institutions to discuss implementation measures.

In the voluntary sector:

- The Voluntary Sector Forum established a sub-committee specifically charged with monitoring progress on implementing the Accord and Codes.

- *Joint Steering Committee (JSC):* Made up of 12 senior representatives, six from the federal government and six from the voluntary sector, this group co-ordinates and oversees the work of the VSI. In addition to guiding implementation and monitoring the Accord and Codes of Good Practice, the JSC serves as a forum for identifying and exploring important new issues that arise in either sector. The JSC has met in February, June and November 2003 and is scheduled to meet quarterly until the VSI comes to an end in March 2005.

As a measure of the Government of Canada's commitment to implementing the Accord, the Clerk of the Privy Council has made departmental deputy ministers accountable for progress through their performance agreements. To assist them, each Deputy Minister has been called on to identify a senior official or champion responsible for promoting the Accord and Codes, and for leading by example. Champions are now in place in virtually all federal departments and agencies.

On the Government side, staff support for voluntary sector issues and for promotion of the relationship between the two sectors is housed in Canadian Heritage. For its part, the Forum is assisted by a small staff with responsibility for providing strategic advice, research and administrative support.

AWARENESS IS KEY

Ongoing actions to increase awareness about the Accord within the sector and the Government of Canada, and among Canadians

(An Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector, December 2001)

One of the first steps to implementing the Accord – and the Codes of Good Practice – is to raise awareness among voluntary sector and government representatives of how the Codes can be used to enhance the working relationships between the two sectors. With this in mind, the two sectors have focussed much of their attention over the past year on developing materials designed to promote understanding of the Accord and some of the practical ways to put its principles and commitments into action.

PROGRESS MARKERS

In the voluntary sector:

- Many organizations use the VSI Web site and the Forum's Web site and newsletters to get information about the Accord and Codes.
- Other information sources include voluntary sector networks and member organizations, and resource centres. Some respondents to the sector's 2003 survey said they obtained their information first-hand, by serving as members on VSI committees and Joint Tables.

In the federal government:

- More than three quarters of the departments/agencies responding to the 2003 questionnaire have developed a departmental awareness strategy or are planning to do so.
- Many departments/agencies have contacted the federal government's focal point, Canadian Heritage, to obtain tools and resources for building awareness.

Practical tools

One of the tools available to departmental champions – and voluntary sector representatives – is a 10-minute video that provides background on and context for the Accord, as well as some case study examples on how to make the Codes work “on the ground.”

Other tools to raise awareness include a plain-language workbook on the Codes of Good Practice, which offers checklists and a variety of exercises to help voluntary sector and government apply the Codes in their daily work. *The*

Rubber and the Road: A Workbook for Implementing the Codes of Good Practice is a resource that was developed jointly by Canadian Heritage and the Voluntary Sector Forum. A CD-ROM containing the workbook, the video and a training presentation on the Accord and Codes has been distributed to all departmental champions. The tools are also available to voluntary sector organizations through the Voluntary Sector Forum.

Training the trainer

This past summer, Canadian Heritage and the Voluntary Sector Forum collaborated to develop training materials and workshops and to design “train the trainer” sessions on bringing the Accord and Codes of Good Practice to life. In addition to giving participants essential background information, the interactive workshops provide a detailed introduction to using *The Rubber and The Road* workbook. More than 100 people from both sectors took part in the first of these workshops, held in Fredericton early in the fall of 2003.

PUTTING THE CODES TO WORK

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

(An Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector, December 2001)

When the federal government and the voluntary sector signed the Accord in December 2001, they knew their work was just beginning. The Accord built a strong foundation for a renewed relationship between the two sectors. But how would it play out in the hundreds of daily interactions between the sectors?

ON FUNDING

Grounded in the recognition that the sectors must be accountable to Canadians, *A Code of Good Practice on Funding* also acknowledges the need to ensure the voluntary sector’s sustainable capacity. The Code identifies specific measures to make funding arrangements between the two sectors more flexible and consistent. Over time, and supported by continuing communication between the sectors, these practices will become the basis of a renewed funding relationship between the two sectors.

Bringing the Accord to life

That's where the Codes of Good Practice come in. Developed in a joint process and endorsed by both sectors in October 2002, the Codes of Good Practice are designed to guide the sectors' evolving relationship as they explore new ways of working together in the areas of policy dialogue and funding. The Codes are a resource of tangible, concrete ideas about how to take the spirit and guidelines of the Accord and make them real in both

government and voluntary sector organizations. Tools to achieve positive and lasting change, the Codes are about building relationships, improving practices, looking for common ground and accepting one another's differences. They're also about making Canada a better place to live by improving policies and programs for Canadians. As "living documents," the Codes will evolve over time to reflect the daily work experiences of government and voluntary representatives.

ON POLICY DIALOGUE

The best practices set out in *A Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue* are based on the premise that the Government's policies and programs are better when they benefit from the voluntary sector's experience, expertise and knowledge. They describe practical ways in which government departments and agencies, and voluntary sector organizations can deepen their policy dialogue and improve public policies.

Among the good practices cited is striving for a better understanding of one another's broad policy objectives. The Code also commits the federal government to reviewing its major policy and program proposals using a voluntary sector lens or analytical framework.

A network of champions

One way the federal government is getting the message out is through its network of champions. Made up of senior officials charged with putting in place the Accord and Codes of Good Practice, the network met in the spring of 2003 to discuss departmental implementation plans, as well as some of the major challenges and opportunities that

departments are likely to encounter as they work to implement the Accord and Codes. These champions will continue to play an important role in implementation initiatives across the federal government.

PROGRESS MARKERS

In the voluntary sector:

- Awareness in the voluntary sector is relatively low. Among those who responded to the sector's 2003 survey, awareness was highest for the Accord, lower for the Code on Funding and lowest for the Code on Policy Dialogue.
- The suggestions that respondents offered for building awareness focussed on, for example, targeting additional groups and using a range of mechanisms to reach out to people.

In the federal government:

- The Government's 2003 questionnaire showed that, over the past year, about half a dozen departments/agencies have made exceptional progress in implementing the Accord and Codes. For example, they have conducted extensive reviews of funding agreements with the voluntary sector to improve their efficiency and effectiveness, circulated good practices within the department and initiated projects aimed at engaging non-traditional and diverse groups in the policy making process.
- Among the suggestions departments/agencies offered for improving implementation was to ensure that successes and good practices are shared across the Government.

A collaborative effort

Working together, the two sectors have developed practical tools for putting the Codes to work, including a 10-minute video highlighting case studies of the Codes in action and a plain-language workbook to help voluntary sector and government understand how to apply the Codes in their daily work (see Awareness is Key, p.10).

Documenting good practices

A preliminary scan of both federal departments and voluntary sector organizations has helped identify a number of good practices in individual organizations. These practices illustrate some of the creative and practical ways that organizations in both sectors are applying the Codes. Summaries of the good practices will be distributed in the coming year to serve as a catalyst for changes in other departments and agencies.

TRACKING OUR PROGRESS

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

(An Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector, December 2001)

The Accord commits the federal government and the voluntary sector to monitor their progress as they move toward an enhanced relationship. To meet this commitment, each sector has put in place monitoring processes and a reporting framework geared to its unique needs and characteristics. As well as informing the two sectors' governing bodies – and Canadians – about how implementation efforts are progressing, the reporting strategies are also designed to provide essential input as the sectors set priorities for future work.

WHO WE HEARD FROM...

...in the voluntary sector

- 110 representatives of sector organizations
- about half operating at the local level, nearly a quarter at the national or provincial levels and a small number with an international focus
- the majority provide programs or services, public information and education, or advocacy
- wide geographic representation
- annual budgets ranged from less than \$1500 to \$130 million

...in the federal government

- 49 departments and agencies
- the majority described vibrant, meaningful interaction with the sector; a minority reported limited or non-existent relationships
- reporting institutions reflected the broad scope of relationships with the voluntary sector – in terms of both policy dialogue and the funding relationship

Hearing from federal departments

On the government side, a questionnaire, based on the five key areas set out in the Accord, was distributed to 57 federal institutions in July 2003. By the fall, a total of 49 departments and agencies had responded. The results, highlighted in this report, provide a preliminary measure of how well the Accord and Codes are being integrated into federal government business. For a more detailed review of the federal government's findings, see *Background Paper: Government of Canada Implementation* at www.vsi-isbc.ca.

Talking with the voluntary sector

For its part, the Voluntary Sector Forum conducted a survey of Canadian voluntary sector organizations to determine awareness levels about the Accord and Codes and whether organizations used them in their day-to-day work. The survey was sent to over 2000 individuals who subscribe to the Voluntary Sector Forum newsletter. In addition to providing baseline input on areas of strength and weakness, the results have been used to help identify the sector's future priorities for implementing

PROGRESS MARKERS

In the voluntary sector:

- The majority of sector respondents characterized their relationship with the federal government as “good.”
- More than half said there had been either “no change” or an improvement in the relationship over the past year.
- Concerns raised included: increased demands (e.g., reporting, deadlines); reduced funding; increased bureaucracy; and relationship difficulties (high staff turnover in government).

In the federal government:

- Most departments/agencies responding to the questionnaire indicated they have regular meetings with voluntary sector organizations at the program level.
- Many responding departments/agencies reported that the Minister or Agency Head had met with representatives of voluntary sector organizations during the past year.

the Accord and Codes. Some of the major findings from the voluntary sector survey are presented in this report. For more details, see *Background Paper: Voluntary Sector Implementation* at www.vsi-isbc.ca.

A SHARED JOURNEY

A regular meeting between Ministers and sector representatives to discuss the results that have been achieved

(An Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector, December 2001)

Both sectors are committed to meeting at the highest levels to review their progress in implementing the provisions of the Accord. A forum for this review, the first annual meeting between the Ministerial Consultative Committee and members of the Voluntary Sector Forum is planned for 2004. When they meet, ministers and voluntary sector representatives will take the opportunity to review the progress made and to renew their commitment to the plans and priorities identified for the upcoming year.

C. Priorities for the Future

Over the past year, the federal government and the voluntary sector began the process of implementing the Accord and Codes of Good Practice. As this report describes, the two sectors have succeeded in building a strong foundation for the work that lies ahead. Looking to the future, the sectors will continue their joint commitment to implementation, working together to put in place essential tools and processes, and to promote a spirit of good will across the federal government and in Canadian voluntary sector organizations. More specifically, the two sectors will:

- continue to build the relationship;
- identify, use and promote good practices and lessons learned;
- hold a regular meeting between the Ministerial Consultative Committee and voluntary sector representatives;
- hold a meeting between voluntary sector representatives and departmental champions;
- continue to advance collaborative work with respect to regulation and taxation of charities, capacity building and strategic investment; and
- collaborate to advance other commitments including an agreement on next steps, the development of a voluntary sector lens and the examination of models for dispute resolution.

