

Joint Coordinating Committee

Final Report

March 2003

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Executive Summary | 3 |
| Foreword | 5 |
| Context | 6 |
| Mandate and Objectives..... | 7 |
| Committee Membership | 8 |
| Key VSI Players..... | 10 |
| Reference Group of Ministers..... | 10 |
| Voluntary Sector Steering Group..... | 11 |
| Assistant Deputy Minister Executive Committee..... | 11 |
| Terms of Reference and Operating Principles..... | 12 |
| Evolution of the role played by the Joint Coordinating Committee | 12 |
| Vision..... | 12 |
| Coordination | 13 |
| Tracking progress and course corrections..... | 14 |
| Lessons Learned | 15 |
| Establishment of the Joint Coordinating Committee | 15 |
| Relationships with other joint tables..... | 16 |
| Overall performance of the Joint Coordinating Committee | 16 |
| Next Steps: Passing the Torch | 17 |
| New structures | 17 |
| New challenges | 18 |
| Relevant Documents List..... | 19 |
| Appendix A - Voluntary Sector Initiative Governance Structure | 20 |

Executive Summary

Launched in the spring of 2000, the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) is a unique and complex joint undertaking between the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector. Its purpose is to enhance the relationship between the two sectors and to strengthen the voluntary sector's capacity to meet the challenges of the future.

Unique in its "jointness", the VSI invited more than 125 representatives of Canada's voluntary sector and from federal government departments to sit at "joint tables," each of which was co-chaired by a government and a voluntary sector representative. The Joint Coordinating Committee (JCC) was created to oversee the VSI, including the work of its six joint tables:

- The Joint Accord Table;
- The Awareness Joint Table;
- The Capacity Joint Table;
- The National Volunteerism Initiative Joint Table;
- The Information Management and Information Technology Joint Table; and
- The Joint Regulatory Table.

These tables focused on how to improve the relationship between the two sectors in key areas, specifically by:

- Developing a framework agreement that articulates a vision and principles;
- Building the voluntary sector's capacity (i.e., knowledge, skills and means) to respond to Canadians' needs;
- Streamlining reporting requirements and regulations that affect the voluntary sector;
- Proposing a new approach to financing the voluntary sector that is long term and sustainable;
- Enhancing knowledge about the voluntary sector, its scope, nature and operations;
- Increasing recognition of the voluntary sector's contribution to Canadian society; and
- Promoting and supporting volunteerism.

In addition to structures to conduct the joint work, the VSI also required vertical and horizontal organizational structures within the government and the voluntary sector to provide their internal coordination. Members of the JCC, particularly the co-chairs, were responsible for ensuring the linkage between these joint and separate processes.

The JCC's initial mandate evolved over its two and a half years of existence from one of coordination to one of creating a strategic vision for the VSI. This eventually included closely monitoring the progress of the joint tables and providing guidance and direction

where necessary to move towards the goals of the VSI in a coherent and more integrated fashion.

As with any new endeavour, the JCC experienced setbacks and false starts. Nevertheless, once its members agreed on their role and developed an effective working relationship, the JCC oversaw important accomplishments by the individual joint tables and fostered greater trust between the voluntary sector and government. It laid the groundwork for continuing progress under the guidance of the new Joint Steering Committee.

Foreword

Launched in the spring of 2000, the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) is a joint undertaking between the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector that is designed to enhance the relationship between the two sectors and to strengthen the voluntary sector's capacity to meet the challenges of the future.

The Joint Coordinating Committee (JCC) was the joint leadership structure created to oversee the implementation of the VSI up to its mid-point in the fall of 2002. On October 8, 2002, members of all the joint tables and collaborative mechanisms established to undertake work under the VSI came together for a third and final time to review progress made and lessons learned. Most of the joint tables had completed their work and submitted their recommendations. In addition to their substantive recommendations, all joint tables and collaborative mechanisms were asked to submit a final report recording their activities and achievements, including an account of funds expended.

In addition to recording and assessing the work of the JCC, this report may offer some guidance and insight to others who engage in similar joint exercises between the Government of Canada and large and complex sectors of Canadian society.

Context

The JCC was established in the summer of 2000 as part of the VSI. The VSI is a five-year undertaking between the federal government and the voluntary sector with the goals of increasing the capacity of the voluntary sector to meet future challenges and strengthening the relationship between the two sectors.

This initiative was a new step in the continuing process of renewing the relationship between these two sectors. It built on substantial work undertaken both jointly and separately over preceding years.

The 1997 Red Book included a commitment to engage the voluntary sector.

In 1999, the Voluntary Sector Roundtable (comprised of twelve national umbrella voluntary organizations) sponsored an independent inquiry on issues of accountability and governance in the voluntary sector. The final report entitled [Building on Strength: Improving Governance and Accountability in Canada's Voluntary Sector](#) made 41 recommendations designed to enhance the voluntary sector's effectiveness.

Leaders from both sectors joined together in "joint tables" to explore three issues of common concern: building a new relationship; strengthening the capacity of the voluntary sector; and improving the regulatory environment in which it operates. The recommendations in the August 1999 report entitled [Working Together: A Government of Canada/Voluntary Sector Joint Initiative](#) became the basis of much of VSI's work.

In October 1999, the [Speech from the Throne](#) emphasized the Government of Canada's commitment to the voluntary sector, stating:

"In 2001, Canadians will mark the International Year of Volunteers — a time to celebrate the achievements of Canada's everyday heroes. The Government recognizes the need to build partnerships with communities and to renew its relationship with the voluntary organizations that serve and sustain them. The Government will enter into a national accord with the voluntary sector, laying a new foundation for active partnership with voluntary organizations in the service of Canadians."

In June 2000, the federal government announced that it would invest \$94.6 million over five years in a Voluntary Sector Initiative. The organizational structure established to manage the VSI included the Reference Group of Ministers on the Voluntary Sector, the JCC, the Assistant Deputy Ministers' Executive Committee and the Voluntary Sector Steering Group. The Voluntary Sector Task Force (the Task Force) and the Voluntary Sector Initiative Secretariat (the Secretariat) provided strategic and operational support jointly to the JCC and to the Joint Accord Table and independently to the two sectors. (See Appendix A for the Voluntary Sector Initiative Governance Structure.)

In addition to the JCC, six joint tables and a number of collaborative mechanisms started work in September 2000.

Joint tables:

- Joint Accord Table;
- Awareness Joint Table;
- Capacity Joint Table;
- National Volunteerism Initiative Joint Table;
- Information Management and Information Technology Joint Table; and
- Joint Regulatory Table.

Collaborative mechanisms:

- International Year of Volunteers Coordinating Group;
- Federal Funding Study;
- Experts Group on Nonprofit Law and Director's Liability;
- Advisory Committee on Satellite Account; and
- Steering Committee – Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating.

Mandate and Objectives

Although Working Together did not specifically prescribe the process and structure by which the work of the VSI would be coordinated and managed, two documents were used by the JCC to develop its mandate and mode of operation. [Partnering for the Benefit of Canadians: Government of Canada-Voluntary Sector Initiative](#) (June 9, 2000), developed by the Task Force in the Privy Council Office, and Guidelines for the Independent Selection Committee (August 4, 2000), commissioned by the Voluntary Sector Roundtable, provided strong reference points.

The JCC was a new oversight body. From the outset, it struggled with defining its role and its relationships to the other components of the VSI. During the Working Together period there had been little coordination among the three joint tables and no formal coordinating mechanism existed. Joint tables functioned quite independently in developing and executing their mandates, focusing primarily on policy development. However, the VSI was a much more ambitious and complex process. Coordination was necessary to ensure greater coherence, to avoid overlap and to measure overall progress.

Committee members held varying opinions about the scope of the JCC to intervene in the work of the newly constituted joint tables. Many felt that it should focus on coordination and dispute resolution, leaving the joint tables with as much autonomy as possible. Other members sensed that a more directive role would be needed to effectively steer the work of the joint tables within the anticipated timeframes.

This difference of views contributed to a lengthy exploration of the committee's mandate before members reached an agreement on its role. As it was ultimately framed in June 2001, the JCC's mandate set out three main functions:

- To provide overall coordination to the component initiatives/projects and joint tables of the VSI, particularly for joint activities related to the harmonization of consultation, communication and research (including those that involve the voluntary and private sectors, the federal and provincial governments and the public);
- To help manage the collaborative process on behalf of the government and the voluntary sector; and
- To provide a mechanism for dispute resolution.

Some of the corresponding activities included:

- Receiving reports from departments, the voluntary sector and joint tables (i.e., workplans, budgets, research, communication and consultation plans);
- Providing a forum to discuss goals, objectives and results of joint tables;
- Providing a forum for identification and advice on resolution of gaps and overlaps;
- Convening regular meetings to include all the chairs and leads of component initiatives/projects and joint tables to ensure overall coordination;
- Providing feedback and advice to the federal government and the voluntary sector on the progress of the VSI and resolution of issues that might arise;
- Continuing to explore horizontal and emerging issues affecting the government's and sector's ability to work together; and
- Promoting collaboration in all aspects of the VSI.

To locate the complete JCC mandate, see [Joint Coordinating Committee Terms of Reference](#), July 2001.

Committee Membership

From the outset, the JCC was composed of an equal number of government and voluntary sector representatives. Government members were drawn from the ranks of assistant deputy ministers of departments and agencies involved in the VSI, although they did not fully mirror the Assistant Deputy Minister Executive Committee, which was responsible for overall government leadership of the VSI. The voluntary sector representatives held a variety of senior positions in a wide range of organizations across the country and were all members of the VSSG, the senior sector reference group for the VSI. There were some changes in membership over the life of the JCC, with one voluntary sector representative resigning and several government members rotating. The final membership was as follows:

Voluntary Sector Representatives

Patrick Johnston, Co-chair

President and CEO
Canadian Centre for Philanthropy

Ann Mowatt

Senior Policy Advisor to the Assistant
Deputy Minister
Human Resources Development Canada
Income Security Programs
(note: JCC membership based on prior
voluntary sector involvement)

Martha Parker

Executive Director
Volunteer Calgary

Monica Patten

President and CEO
Community Foundations of Canada

Lucie Rémillard

President and Executive Director
St. Justine Hospital Foundation
Montreal

Penelope Rowe

Chief Executive Officer
Community Services Council
Newfoundland and Labrador

Michael Weil

President, Chief Executive Officer
YMCA of Canada

Government Representatives

Kathy O'Hara, Co-chair¹

Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet
Machinery of Government
Privy Council Office

Margaret Biggs⁵

Assistant Deputy Minister
Nationally Delivered Programs
Human Resources Investment Branch
Human Resources Development Canada

Scott Broughton²

Assistant Deputy Minister
Population and Public Health Branch
Health Canada

Florence Ievers

Coordinator
Status of Women Canada

Bill McCloskey

Assistant Commissioner
Policy and Legislation Branch
Canada Customs and Revenue Agency

Eileen Sarkar⁶

Assistant Deputy Minister
Citizenship and Heritage
Canadian Heritage

Mike Sheridan³

Assistant Chief Statistician
Social Institutions and Labour Statistics
Field
Statistics Canada

Josée Touchette⁴

Vice President
Canadian Partnership Branch
Canadian International Development
Agency

Voluntary Sector Initiative Secretariat

Susan Carter

Executive Director

Voluntary Sector Task Force

Nancy Wildgoose⁷

Executive Director

Jacqueline Gonçalves⁸

Director, Operations and Engagement

¹ Replaced Michelle d’Auray

² Replaced Dr. Robert McMurtry

³ Replaced Stewart Wells

⁴ Replaced Janet Zukowsky

⁵ Filled Kathy O’Hara’s Committee position when she became Co-Chair

⁶ Replaced H  l  ne Gosselin

⁷ Replaced Susan Fletcher

⁸ Preceded by Barry MacKillop, Wayne Stryde, Louise Delorme

Documentalist

Dr. Kathy Brock, Director

Public Policy and the Third Sector

School of Policy Studies

Queen's University

Dr. Brock acted as an independent observer and documented the process undertaken by the JCC. She also provided advice to facilitate the process. The JCC commissioned Dr. Brock to produce two reports based on her role: *Observations on the Joint Tables Process: A Centre-Out View* and *A Final Review of the Joint Coordinating Committee of the Voluntary Sector Initiative, 2000 - 2002*.

Key VSI Players

While the primary task of the JCC was to oversee the work of the joint tables and the collaborative mechanisms, it also worked directly or indirectly with a number of key groups in both sectors to advance work on the VSI as a whole.

Reference Group of Ministers

In early 2000, the Prime Minister appointed a Reference Group of Ministers on the Voluntary Sector (RGM) to provide strategic policy direction and coordination for the government, stewardship of the relationship and a locus for dialogue between government and voluntary sector leadership. One of the RGM’s key responsibilities was oversight of the Accord development.

Chaired by the Honourable Lucienne Robillard, President of the Treasury Board of Canada, the RGM originally included:

The Honourable Herb Gray, then Deputy Prime Minister
The Honourable Sheila Copps, Minister of Canadian Heritage
The Honourable Allan Rock, Minister of Health (now Minister of Industry)
The Honourable Martin Cauchon, Minister of National Revenue and Secretary of State
(Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec) (now Minister of Justice
and Attorney General of Canada)
The Honourable Jane Stewart, Minister of Human Resources Development
The Honourable Maria Minna, then Minister for International Cooperation
The Honourable Hedy Fry, then Secretary of State (Multiculturalism)(Status of Women).

RGM membership was adjusted as a result of subsequent Cabinet changes. The following replaced ministers Gray, Minna, Fry, and Cauchon:

The Honourable Anne McLellan, Minister of Health
The Honourable Claudette Bradshaw, Minister of Labour and then Secretary of State
(Multiculturalism)(Status of Women)
The Honourable Elinor Caplan, Minister of National Revenue
The Honourable Jean Augustine, Secretary of State (Multiculturalism)(Status of Women)

Although the JCC was not directly accountable to the RGM, members of the VSSG (i.e., JCC voluntary sector members) met on occasion with the RGM to discuss issues and priorities. In addition, the JCC co-chairs were invited to meet with the RGM twice to present their analysis and advice for government consideration.

Voluntary Sector Steering Group

The VSSG was formed in November 2000 as a successor to the Voluntary Sector Roundtable. It was designed to be more reflective of the voluntary sector involvement in the VSI. The VSSG gave political and strategic direction to the voluntary sector and oversaw the work of the VSI. Its 26 members were drawn from the Voluntary Sector Roundtable, voluntary sector joint table co-chairs and chairs of the sector-only working groups, as well as voluntary sector members of the JCC. Later in the process, one participant from each of the two reference groups representing Canada's Aboriginal and visible minority organizations were added to the VSSG.

The role of the VSSG was to:

- Serve as the senior reference group in the voluntary sector for the VSI;
- Develop and move forward sector positions on broad issues across the VSI as required;
- Address issues of broad concern to the voluntary sector regarding the unfolding of the VSI; and
- Address cross cutting issues affecting the voluntary sector members of the joint tables, working groups, or advisory bodies.

Assistant Deputy Minister Executive Committee

A steering committee of assistant deputy ministers from the departments whose ministers were members of the RGM provided government leadership to the VSI. This ADM Executive Committee provided advice and strategic direction to the VSI, policy coordination in areas that

crossed departmental mandates, and guidance to the Task Force. It was supported by an ADM Advisory Committee and by three interdepartmental working groups (Operations, Policy and Communications) composed of departmental officials. Most members of the ADM Executive Committee also sat on the JCC.

As a rule, the ADM Executive Committee would meet before JCC meetings to share information and to develop a shared understanding of the issues to be discussed.

Terms of Reference and Operating Principles

Evolution of the role played by the Joint Coordinating Committee

One of the consequences — and requirements — of working in uncharted territory is the need to be nimble, to adapt as circumstances dictate. As the body responsible for providing guidance and oversight for the VSI, the JCC had the challenge of ensuring effective co-ordination and accountability while, at the same time, supporting the efforts of the various joint tables. Over the first two and a half years of the VSI, that balance shifted subtly but perceptibly.

By the end of the VSI's first year, it was becoming increasingly clear that although joint tables were making progress towards their individual goals, their loosely defined mandates and lines of authority were resulting in some inefficiencies and duplication of effort. Given only a “soft” coordinating role — with few levers of overall financial control and no possibility of reallocating funds — the JCC responded by developing an overall strategic vision for the joint tables' work and establishing a set of concrete outcomes for evaluating progress. As well, the JCC addressed several crosscutting themes, for example communication, consultation and research, and put in place a system for monitoring the progress of individual joint tables.

Vision

In the spring of 2001, in response to joint table feedback and observations by JCC members, the JCC began working on a long-term vision that would define success and help communicate the contributing factors of success to all components of the VSI.

A preliminary discussion document was assembled. It was based on presentations from the joint tables at the all-tables meeting in November 2000 and on interviews with voluntary sector and government representatives on the JCC. This document was used at a facilitated workshop for JCC members that was designed to further refine the vision. A working document was distributed to JCC members for comment. Once finalized, it was presented at the all-tables meeting in May 2001.

The vision document outlined how the voluntary sector and government could work together more effectively and strategically to improve the quality of life of all Canadians. The vision had three key objectives:

- Building a sustainable relationship between the government and voluntary sector;
- Strengthening the capacity of the sector; and
- Improving the regulatory framework for the voluntary sector.

The document also outlined desired outcomes of the VSI process and the deliverables that would help to achieve the desired results.

Once the JCC finalized and approved the vision, it was shared with all joint table co-chairs and published on the VSI website. This document became the benchmark against which progress on the VSI was measured. The Progress to Plan report, which the JCC later adopted as a means to track progress against objectives, was based on this vision.

Coordination

The JCC struggled with the definition of its role for some time. While JCC members were intent on allowing the joint tables as much autonomy as possible, maintaining effective communication posed a significant challenge. The founding documentation did not provide a formal means for receiving information from the joint tables. Because the JCC was concerned about how it could acquire adequate information and interact with the joint tables, it considered how to establish a link with the joint tables and communication channels.

One early suggestion was to implement a “buddy system” with a JCC member tracking and reporting on a particular joint table. Joint table co-chairs resisted this suggestion as being overly intrusive. Given the need for better coordination, the executive directors of the two supporting secretariats — the Task Force and the Secretariat — were asked to play a stronger monitoring and reporting role. Lack of resources and indirect reporting relationships continued to challenge the JCC in its attempts to coordinate a large and complex initiative.

In the fall of 2000, the JCC recognized the need to review joint table workplans and timetables. However, the request for workplans and timetables went out to joint table co-chairs only in March 2001. By this time, joint tables had already done a significant amount of planning and decided on their course of action. Although it was difficult for the JCC to intervene and redirect, by May 2001 the joint tables themselves recognized the need for greater direction and coordination. At this point, the JCC acted more decisively. Still, the question of its authority to intervene continued to be debated.

However, the JCC did achieve significant results, especially when it came to harmonizing consultation, communication and research. By January 2001, the JCC had finalized a Communications and Consultations Plan, which was distributed to all VSI members at the all-tables meeting in May 2001. This plan was intended to ensure that all the joint tables involved in consultations with the voluntary sector and government used consistent messages about the VSI and that consultation efforts were as coherent and coordinated as possible.

Initially, most consultation work focused on the draft Accord, the National Volunteerism Initiative, funding and financing issues, and engagement activities for hard-to-reach groups in the voluntary sector. By the fall of 2001, pooled consultations were used by many of the joint tables to avoid “consultation fatigue”, and to share resources, cut costs and avoid duplication of effort. Regional representatives were hired to assist with the consultations in each province and territory and to keep regions informed. This decreased some of the burden on local nonprofit organizations. At the same time, the Task Force and the Secretariat staff collaborated in engaging other important stakeholders — business, labour, academia, Aboriginal political groups — in information sessions on the VSI.

Many of the joint tables pursued research as the logical first step to better understand the situation and requirements of the voluntary sector before undertaking any work. This research tended to be analyses, surveys or scanning activities carried out in relation to the mandates of particular joint tables. Examples include work on information management and information technology trends, assessing regulatory options, and looking at funding and financing issues. To avoid duplication, overlap or oversight, the JCC tasked the Capacity Joint Table with a coordinating role for all empirical work to be conducted under the VSI, while the Awareness Joint Table was charged with coordinating all attitudinal or opinion-based work.

Over its lifetime, the JCC hosted three all-tables meetings (November 2000, May 2001, October 2002) to bring all members of the VSI family together to discuss challenges, progress and exchange vital information. These meetings often provided the JCC with a valuable barometer reading on new ideas and directions, quickly highlighted concerns and information gaps and allowed the JCC to adjust course when necessary.

Tracking progress and course corrections

When all members of the JCC and the six joint tables met for the first time in November 2000, the co-chairs from the JCC and each of the joint tables presented their work to date, mandate, future plans and areas of concern.

In December 2000, the JCC followed up with letters to all co-chairs. The letters thanked participants for their presentations, outlined the key themes drawn from the presentations and provided generic guidelines for workplans. Preliminary workplans were requested for January of 2001. The letter also included the terms of reference that formalized the JCC's relationship with the individual joint tables.

In April 2001, the joint table co-chairs presented their workplans at a JCC meeting. After the discussion, the JCC further analyzed the workplans and sent individual letters to the co-chairs providing feedback and guidance.

Documentation used by the JCC to track the work of the joint tables evolved to meet its needs and changing role. Starting in the spring of 2001, a monthly update outlining the work of the individual joint tables was prepared. At the same time, a critical path document was created based on the workplans submitted. This document outlined all projects being undertaken by joint tables, the type of activity (i.e., communications, consultations, research, deliverable or other) and timelines. These two documents were then amalgamated and evolved to become Progress to Plan Reports. These reports matched desired outcomes from the JCC's vision document with actual projects and deliverables being worked on at the joint table level.

By the fall of 2001, the JCC began to express concern about the pace of work. While a number of joint tables were making progress, a few were at risk of missing important deadlines.

These Progress to Plan Reports were the final formal reporting system developed to enable the joint tables to communicate information to the JCC. They were updated and reissued periodically. The information enabled the JCC and the two supporting secretariats to analyze the work and needs of the joint tables. For example, when the Progress to Plan Reports identified a need to strengthen communications activities in the regions, funds from the Awareness Joint Table were reallocated to hire regional communications advisors. These advisors helped tailor

messages about and from the VSI and significantly increased the flow of information to local and regional organizations.

Over the course of the VSI, new issues that were of considerable concern to the voluntary sector emerged and were brought to the attention of the JCC — specifically the impact of the new government accountability measures and the consequences of new measures triggered by the events of September 11, 2001.

Many JCC members agreed that the JCC was most valuable in dispute resolution. The forum allowed the JCC to discuss several significant issues at length and to identify options for resolving differences or to channel further discussions.

For example, the implementation of the Sectoral Involvement in Departmental Policy Development initiative was referred to the JCC for consideration. At \$28.5 million, this initiative was the largest single component of the VSI. An initial call for proposals was managed in a way that the voluntary sector viewed as closed, unclear and unfair. The JCC asked for analysis of the first round process and suggested revisions before the call was made for the second and final round of proposals.

In another instance, the Joint Regulatory Table did not have a mandate to conduct a joint examination of the issues around the definition of charity and advocacy. Consequently, a sector-only working group was established and, after much discussion, the JCC arranged for these issues to be discussed in an informal process between federal officials and voluntary sector representatives.

Lessons Learned

Several key themes emerged during discussions of lessons learned through the JCC process. All the VSI participants who were interviewed before the final JCC meeting stressed that this was the first time such a broad collaborative effort had been attempted between the government and the voluntary sector. The members of the JCC were “pioneers, breaking new ground” and the results were overwhelmingly positive despite some real challenges. The overall sense of the lessons learned tends to be quite mixed, recognizing the extent of the innovation in the process itself, but also acknowledging some frustrations about how it worked in practice.

The lessons learned fall into three broad categories: establishment of the JCC; relationships with the joint tables; and overall performance.

Establishment of the Joint Coordinating Committee

Overall, the voluntary sector members of the JCC considered that their team was well chosen and professional but, with limited places available, it was difficult to accurately reflect the voluntary sector as a whole. Women’s groups, visible minorities and Aboriginal peoples were underrepresented. This is also reflective of the selection process, for despite the high calibre of people chosen, there was not always an obvious rationale for the choices made, and the selection process did not seem entirely transparent.

The government representatives were deemed to be well chosen and senior enough to move the agenda forward. However, their lack of consistent availability created delays and lack of continuity.

It might have been helpful to have the joint table co-chairs as JCC members, especially for information sharing and decision-making. At the time the JCC was established, however, the view was that this would have placed too great a demand on them.

When the JCC was established, its mandate, goals and authority were not specified in any detail, which led to a range of expectations and confusion both at the JCC and with the individual joint tables. Many, particularly members of the other joint tables, did not know whether the JCC's mandate was to advise or direct. While the JCC assumed a more strategic role over time, this shift led some joint table members to argue that the JCC was impinging on the authority of the joint tables.

Relationships with other joint tables

Members of the JCC found the feedback from other joint tables to be sporadic and piecemeal. As the JCC was often asked for input when problems occurred, it was frequently placed in a reactive rather than a proactive role.

The JCC had to rely on moral suasion to redirect efforts, if and when necessary. It spent almost a year determining its relationship with individual joint tables.

Overall performance of the Joint Coordinating Committee

Trust was key to the overall success of the VSI. Participation on the JCC was an enriching learning experience for all those involved. Each sector developed a greater understanding of the other's culture, goals and ways of doing business. For example, voluntary sector members had to develop a sense of how Ottawa works. The turnover of government officials on the JCC caused some delays and frustration among the voluntary sector representatives. According to government members, this turnover was a result of the inherent characteristics of government operation.

Voluntary sector representatives also had concerns regarding secrecy. Government members who reported back to respective departments could not in turn always share or report on the directions they received. This sometimes reduced the sense of transparency and team effort.

On a number of occasions, (for example during the development of the Accord) the role of the Department of Finance in decisions affecting the VSI was discussed in the context of interventions that were not always understood.

Government members had an opportunity to discover first hand just how diverse and complex the voluntary sector really is and consequently the importance of reaching out to regions and local organizations. The few JCC members from outside central Canada had the added burden of having to leave their home organizations for extended periods of time to travel to Ottawa and of having to play the role of standard bearer for the VSI at home. These members were able to bring regional issues to the JCC, thus enriching the VSI.

Both sectors are now, in general, far more knowledgeable of and sensitive to their respective goals and pressures. Specifically, the VSI and the voluntary sector achieved a higher profile within supporting departments. There were also some tangible achievements: the Accord and its government funding, Canadian participation in the UN International Year of Volunteers, and a set of capacity-building tools. There was general acknowledgment that, despite the setbacks and the number of lessons to be learned, the undertaking is still a “work in progress” and that it is “early days yet”.

One of the greatest lessons learned was that not all issues concerning the voluntary sector and its relations with the federal government need to be explored jointly. It is sometimes more effective for each sector to work separately, as appropriate, one example being issues surrounding advocacy.

There is also scope for further reflection on what type of work is best suited to a joint process model.

In retrospect, the experience of the VSI demonstrated the importance of providing a “strong enough” centre, and adequate direction and accountability in terms of mandate, objectives, lines of authority and responsibilities. Clarity in this regard is necessary to promote effectiveness and efficiency, as well as to avoid potential misunderstandings about “where the buck stops.” This includes clear communication of federal government accountabilities and the need for any agreement binding the Government of Canada — for example, the Accord and the Codes of Good Practice — to be approved beyond the level of a joint table.

Next Steps: Passing the Torch

New structures

In the spring of 2002, as the work of the joint tables began to draw to a close, the VSSG presented a Leadership Model for a new voluntary sector oversight body for feedback to the voluntary sector. Significant changes were made based on feedback from individuals, board members and focus group participants.

On October 8, 2002, the final all-tables meeting took place in Ottawa. With the majority of joint tables having concluded their work, the VSI entered into a new phase, with a new governance structure and a focus on further developing the voluntary sector–government relationship through implementation of the Accord.

That same day, the Prime Minister announced the appointment of the Minister of Canadian Heritage as Minister Responsible for the Voluntary Sector and for leading the Government of Canada’s efforts to strengthen its relationship with the voluntary sector. The Minister of Canadian Heritage was tasked with convening a consultative committee of ministers to be supported by a mirror committee of assistant deputy ministers. A new Joint Steering Committee will carry on oversight of the remainder of the Initiative much as the JCC had done. The voluntary sector also revitalized its key organizational structure. The VSSG was succeeded by the Voluntary Sector Forum (the Forum).

The new body, the Voluntary Sector Forum which will carry on until 2005, has three primary responsibilities:

- Overseeing the remaining work of the VSI;
- Coordinating a sector response to key issues; and
- Building and engaging the broader voluntary sector.

The Forum will consist of at least 18 members, with half of them to be drawn from the existing VSSG to provide continuity and experience; the other half to provide new ideas and fresh approaches. A selection committee composed of voluntary sector leaders was appointed and the Forum members were announced in early October 2002.

New challenges

- Implementation and monitoring of the Accord;
- Implementation of the Codes of Good Practice;
- Delivering the work of the Capacity, Awareness and IM/IT Tables; and
- Further developing the relationship beyond the VSI.

Relevant Documents List

Building on Strength: Improving Governance and Accountability in Canada's Voluntary Sector
http://www.vsr-trsb.net/pagvs/Building_on_Strength.htm

Working Together: A Government of Canada/Voluntary Sector Joint Initiative
<http://www.vsr-trsb.net/publications/pco-e.pdf>

Speech from the Throne – October 1999
http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/default.asp?Language=E&Page=InformationResources&sub=sftddt&doc=sftddt1999_e.htm

Partnering for the Benefit of Canadians: Government of Canada-Voluntary Sector Initiative
(June 9, 2000)
http://www.vsr-trsb.net/publications/pub-june09_e.html

Joint Coordinating Committee Terms of Reference (July 2001)
http://www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/relationship/jcc_terms_of_reference.cfm

Appendix A - Voluntary Sector Initiative Governance Structure

