

Voluntary Sector Forum (VSF) and The Government of Canada

May 19, 2004

Building the Relationship Between the Voluntary Sector and
the Government of Canada Session

A Report

Prepared by:

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Description of session:

ALB Human Outlook was contracted by the Voluntary Sector Forum (VSF) to facilitate a session with people from the voluntary sector and the Government of Canada. A session was also given in French on May 20th.

The **objectives** of the session were as follows:

1. To explore ideas for **strengthening the relationship** between the voluntary sector and the Government of Canada by using the Accord.
 - Talk about how to have closer linkages between the two sectors.
 - To network with others with similar interests from national voluntary sector organizations & federal government departments.
2. Build and/or explore a **desired future, i.e., The Accord - Values & Principles** (Year 2014)
3. To influence the voluntary sector and government approach to **implement** the Accord and Codes of Good Practice.

The notes that follow represent the information that was captured on the flipcharts. They do not represent a detailed report of the whole session. Refer to Addendum A-1 for a copy of the agenda for the session held in English. Both days started with opening comments from Ms Marlene Deboisbriand, Voluntary Sector President, and Ms. Debra Young, DG, Social Development.

The day was divided in two parts: During the first part of the day, we used the *Appreciative Inquiry (AI)* approach and for the second half of the day, we used the *“Relationship Café”* approach.

First Part : Appreciative Inquiry Process

The participants applied the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach to explore how they could build and/or maintain a good relationship between the Government and the Voluntary Sector. The AI approach allowed the group to look at itself and to build from a constructive basis, rather than starting from a deficit-based one.

Development of themes, qualities and/or wishes

Description of activity:

In pairs, participants interview each other, based on questions in Annex A provided at the end of this document (10 min each participant). Each participant presents at his/her table, the essential information he/she received from his/her colleague during the interview. At each table, participants identify the themes, the qualities and wishes that are common throughout the stories (this information is captured on flip charts). A representative at each table posts all flip chart sheets on the walls. Each participant receives three sticky dots and places them on the themes, qualities and/or wishes written on the flip charts, according to what she/he feels is important to build/maintain the relationship

(Note: The number in parentheses indicates how many sticky dots were assigned by participants during the individual “voting” process.)

Themes:

- Trust/reciprocity
- Shared mission
- Consensus building
- Shared leadership (1)
- Regular communication
- Mutual respect and understanding
- **Creativity/innovation (5)**
- Permeability (1)
- Engagement of decision-makers
- Clarity on access to information and decision-making (ers)
- Results focused
- Culture of shared learning (2)
- **Mutual respect and understanding of different roles and functions (8)**
- Shared knowledge and communication to reach a common vision to build awareness (2)
- **Flexibility (3)**
- Commitment (1)
- Informal interaction
- Continuous evaluation – where we are
- Common mutual interest (1)
- **Strength in collaboration (3)**
- Consensus building (2)
- **Committed to common cause (4)**
- **Non-traditional partners (3)**
- Relationship building – trust
- Recognition of each others' expertise
- Translate Accord into action (1)
- Political and bureaucratic levels in synch (1)
- Consensus building
- **Collaboration (3)**
- Working cross sector (1)
- Interdependence
- Open dialogue
- Common goal/project
- Willingness/flexibility to listen and respond to other perspectives
- Relationship building
- Collaboration → broad based (Collaborative mechanisms and partnerships)
- Government as facilitator
- Mutual respect for roles and responsibilities of government and sector
- Flexibility/responsiveness → ability to address emerging issues (1)
- Commitment at both political and bureaucratic levels
- Learning from success → need for mechanisms for knowledge transfer (1)
- Opportunities for innovation
- Adequate funding and resources to influence policy development (2)

- Good relationship possible (many successes)
- Common objectives (2)
- Complementarity (2)
- Adequate resources
- Working together over a period of time; commitment to ongoing dialogue
- Institutionalize the partnership (1)
- Link policy and funding policies and procedures (1)
- Honest communication and trust
- Voluntary sector participation in policy development (formal and informal)

Qualities:

- Listening skills (1)
- Flexibility, open minded (2)
- **Vision (4)**
- Sustainability (e.g., funding) (1)
- Feedback from government on NGOs (2-way street) (1)
- **More transparency in policy development (openness of government) (5)**
- Mutual respect (1)
- Appreciation of operating realities, e.g., resource issues for NGOs (2)
- Critical thinking
- Openness
- Experience across sectors
- Planning skills
- Trust (1)
- Credibility
- Communication skills
- Enthusiasm
- Good/frequent communication
- Patience (2)
- Trust
- **Willingness to be creative in finding solutions (4)**
- **Fearlessness (3)**
- People-oriented
- Task-oriented
- **Commitment to improving the lives of people (6)**
- Communication (honest, open) (1)
- Common sense of purpose
- Trust
- Commitment on both parts

Wishes:

- **Consistency in values (becomes part of culture) (3)**
- Shared knowledge (1)
- Better understanding of sectors (2)

- Valuing individual contributions
- More on-going dialogue (1)
- Focus on what we are for as opposed to against
- Job exchanges (2)
- Medium term program (1)
- Cross functioning/cross organization teams (1)
- **Government to show as much respect for voluntary sector as they do for industry stakeholders (3) – Mechanism to ensure representation in policy development processes (4)**
- Broader inclusion
- More proactive in identifying emerging issues
- Removing “us/them” and “funder/client” view
- **Mutual understanding (3)**
- Focus on broader social goal
- Building network/personal contacts (2)
- Social Development Council (like the Health Council) (1)
- Mutual accountability to citizens
- Adequate resources to allow knowledge/intelligence showing grass roots engagement leading to policy development (2)
- Workable clearing house for Sector
- Joint policy development from beginning
- Less bureaucracy
- **User-friendly funding process (3)**
- Codes of good practice are in place
- **Government and NGO’s value each others’ differences and they are focused on a shared mission to achieve positive outcomes for Canadians (5)**

Development of statements

Description of activity:

Each group chooses one theme/quality/wish and develops one statement* describing what this would look like in an ideal relationship between the Government and the Sector. Each group presents its desirable statement (including the corresponding image, if applicable) on how to build/maintain the relationship hence move us closer to the 2014 vision.

*A statement can be words (images, sound, and/or other depending on what the group is inclined to do).

Group #1

« Social Development Council »

Purpose: Formalize creative thinking around social development.

- Monitoring role/progress of federal/provincial commitments (e.g., poverty)
- Creates a forum to bring together different views
- Reports back to Canadians

- Strong role for Voluntary Sector
- Coordinates policy development and implementation

Structure:

- Must include sectors most affected by social issues
- Mechanisms for knowledge exchange among sectors
- Consensus building capability
- Includes grassroots and national voluntary organizations
- Must be adequately funded by government etc...
- Legislative support

(Image : Social Development Council Circle surrounded by icons of Federal Government/Parliament building, Provincial/Territorial Governments, Corporations and Citizens)

Group #2

"Having a Common Goal: Improving the Lives of Canadians Together"

Vision:

"We are working as equals in cross organizational teams in a dynamic and creative environment of mutual respect which is improving the quality of life of Canadians."

(No Image)

Group #3

(Image : Canadian Flag with big Muscles)

Group #4

Common Goal : Fitting together to improve the lives of people (G + VS)

- Respect
- Understanding
- Commitment
- Global citizenship
- Trust
- Us/They => We
- Collaboration
- Complementarity
- Communication
- Network
- Creativity and Innovation (risk-taking)

(Image : Puzzle)

Group #5

"Both Parties Commit to Finding and Implementing Creative Responses to Community Needs"

(No Image)

Group #6

Respect and Shared Knowledge and Understanding from both parties
(Image : Scale)

Group #7

« Working Together for a Better Canada...
Engaging Canadians in Governance”

Indicators:

- Level of Voluntarism
- Level of Voter Turnout

Group #8

Transparency

(Image: Vertical wall with 2 arrows going in opposite direction)

Information written (before the image was drawn) included:

Dream:

Much greater transparency in policy development. For more effective 2-way communication, there must be :

- On the part of Government:
 - o Articulate a policy agenda – platform, budget etc...
 - o Honesty about differences of opinion within government itself
 - Among civil servants
 - Between minister's officers and department
 - o Outreach to non traditional groups
 - o Established consultative mechanisms*
 - o Staff continuity (politicians and department staff)
- On the part of Voluntary Sector:
 - o Pay attention to key government documents
 - o Understand what documents really mean (read between the lines) and talk to civil servants
 - o Develop effective coalition mechanisms so government does not have to relate to myriads of groups
- Give more attention to getting real experts rather than arbitrary categories for committee memberships

Second Part: The Relationship Café

The Relationship Café format was used to generate discussions. Rules of engagement are simple:

- Participants choose their café table (easel theme). A host/hostess stays at the table for continuity and recording.
- There are 3 different rounds. Participants are free to change tables and go to another café.
- Ideas are captured and shared with the full group.

The two chosen themes were:

- 1- Building/Maintaining a Strong Relationship that Works!
- 2 -Implementing the Good Practices to Use – Making Them Real!

The Café is divided into three rounds:

Round 1 – Challenges relating to a theme (15 min)

People choose a café/theme.

Brief welcome by host or hostess

All list challenges relating to theme phrased in the form of a question.

Select the “Question of the Day”.

Round 2 – Broad Solutions (15 min)

New participants arrive.

Welcome by host/hostess who briefly goes over the essence of the prior dialogue.

List answers to the “Question of the Day”.

Round 3 – Specific Solutions (15 min)

Move to another café (or stay at the same one).

Host/hostess summarizes previous dialogue.

Discuss the results of the previous group and list more answers to the Question of the Day.

Prioritize to identify the top solution.

15 min Debrief (5 min each)

Return to your seat.

The host/hostess briefly goes over the essence of the prior dialogues and reviews the solutions and the priority solution identified (Plenary).

Theme #1 – Group 1:

Building/Maintaining a Strong Relationship that Works!

List of Challenges Phrased in the Form of a Question

- Who would be the appropriate person to talk to?
- How do we maintain continuity?
- How can the Voluntary Sector and Government shape priorities together? *
- How can we build trust and understanding?
- How do we maintain an equal relationship and correct assumptions about the Voluntary Sector

- How can we identify and focus on common objectives?
- How do we ensure programs relevant to needs?

Question of The Day

How can the government and sector shape priorities together in order to ensure sustainable results and longer engagement?

Solutions

- Communicate/dialogue
- Consult each other –build a regular progress review
- Collaborate
- Integrate long-term/on-going dialogue in mechanism
- Build systems that ensure that the relationship survives changes and thrives (team building/staff orientation)
- Understanding roles and responsibilities
- Record and track the relationship
- Make the relationship flexible
- Promote regular workshops/seminars together (training)
- Gain consensus on priorities and set-up formal process (steering committee)
- Plan succession

Chosen Solution

Build in systems that ensure that the relationship survives, changes and thrives

- Teams on both sides
- Educate staff
- Joint training sessions
- Succession planning

Theme #1 – Group 2:

Building/Maintaining a Strong Relationship that Works!

List of Challenges Phrased in the Form of a Question

- How do we increase understanding between sectors?
- How do we build trust between partners?
- How do you effectively communicate?
- How do we get senior management to buy-in? To walk the talk?

Question of the Day

- How to maintain lasting dialogue and involve Sector in policy development?

Solutions

- Connecting points
- Policy groups

- Advisory groups
- Reference groups
- Min. Councils
- Existing meetings venue
- Parliamentary committees
- Traveling road shows
- Media - cross country check-up
- Needs focus / Decision making/ Feedback
- Need to be honest about limitations
- \$\$ to enhance capacity
- Timing
- Joint processes
- Interchanges – feedback expectations
- * Do your homework
- Board network with appropriate levels of government
- * Make grassroots people aware

Chosen Solution

**** Formal on-going framework/committee to ensure ongoing dialogue built in

Theme #2 – Group 1:

Implementing the Good Practices to Use – Making Them Real!

List of Challenges Phrased in the Form of a Question

- Where do we find the time/resources and expertise?
- How to integrate good practices into culture of both sectors?
- How do we sustain momentum in an ever changing environment, i.e., personnel changes
- How do you build on existing expertise?
- How do we share knowledge and strengths?
- How do you effectively market good practices in both sectors?
- What are Forums for engaging the good practices?
- How to document results of good practices and benchmarks for success?
- How do you report on results, i.e., what mechanism?
- How to identify what is already being practiced?
- How do I walk the talk?
- How do I get to the results?
- How do you get sustained action to implementing the good practices?

Solutions

- Have a policy in place/core value that has a commitment to implementing good practices
- More mid-term funding
- Establish round tables or other mechanism to sustain a dialogue between sectors
- Ensure good practices are in all new employee manuals and on the web site

- Educate all levels of sector on the good practices, i.e., grass roots
- Talk about good practices in all situations/all levels –re-iteration
- Make good practices a core competency for employees in both sectors – employee evaluations
- Share success stories and models
- Measure employees and organizations – results related to good practices (when decisions are made)
- Share success stories to make them real and get exposure
- Share success stories and results of good practices to get buy in

Chosen Solution

Acting and reporting on good practices and results are entrenched in planning cycle of both sectors; short, sharp and succinct that they have an impact, i.e., effective, accessible communication

Theme #2 Explored by Participants (Facilitator=Linda): Implementing the Good Practices to Use – Making Them Real!

List of Challenges Phrased in the Form of a Question

- How do you convince the partner that this is a good practice?
- How are the good practices getting circulated, promoted?
- What support exists (in both sectors) to promote/inform about the good practices? Financial? HR? etc...
- How do we ensure people know about and use the codes?
- Are there incentives to use these good practices?
- Is there an oversight body, watchdog when good practices are not happening?
- What are the roles of the champions? What are the responsibilities?
- How can the power differential be changed?
- How will compliance be measured?
- How do you get success stories “out”?

Question of the Day

How will compliance be ensured and disputes resolved?

Solutions

1. a) Every Minister Department should have a dispute resolution process b) Formal/Informal/A range of processes
1. Having a mechanism to prevent multiple interpretations
 - A joint mechanism also dealing with promotion, education, interpretation
 - A next step when the departmental process is failing – with proactive role
2. Compliance sign-off for new funding models – possibly at TBS
3. Ombudsman office agreeable to both sectors
4. Transparent self-reporting system (e.g., 360 degree) for both

5. Annual joint review for each department
6. Work plans that sustain the relationship
7. Place in performance reviews at all levels
8. Formal training to support compliance
9. 1 – 3 combination – A person in each department accountable, leading efforts (DR – joint)

Chosen Solution

A multi-pronged (jointly agreed to) strategy that includes:

- A watchdog => ombudsman
- Monitoring and reporting => Report card/Action plan
- Accountability – sign off, performance review supported by training

Last Exchange Among Participants (Ending)

Last question asked to participants:

What will you do to move the Accord Forward?

- Make sure Board and staff are aware of the Accord and Codes
- Use the Code of good practice on funding in next negotiation
- Put in K.C.
- Present information at Branch meeting
- Training
- Take a copy of Accord and Codes to my next meeting with Government
- Will make a presentation on Accord and Codes at a Branch meeting
- Read and learn material
- Research on implementation process → what can actually work?
- Test some of the ideas before trying
- Distribute handouts
- Share information with colleagues
- Federal/provincial working group
- Share with network
- Share examples (input in VSF website)

Feedback

Here are some of the comments from participants on how the day unfolded:

- Afternoon was very useful
- Liked the participation aspect
- Good mix of voluntary sector and government participants
- Capture notes in report
 - One person said to tell the group at the beginning that this will be done
 - Another person said not to tell the group at the beginning
- One person said to scrap the morning session and have more discussions/examples
- Sharing on next steps was appreciated
- Brief overview on Accord and Codes was needed / Case study
- Bring together the champions

Ideas to Discuss and Explore (By the Facilitator)

It might be very appropriate and timely (good momentum) to continue what has been launched during the session, including:

- Training: Do more training to increase the understanding of the importance, meaning and implication of the Accord and Codes. Continue with the bringing up to date of new members of the Government and the Voluntary Sector as they join. Bring up to speed people in the Government who occupy senior positions. This would be particularly useful to do with Senior people such as Assistant Deputy Ministers, Directors General and Executive Directors. As they move around in the Government, they can spread the knowledge of the Accord and Codes, hence the Voluntary Sector will not have to re-start the training from scratch as much.
- Communication process: This is highly important and was stressed by several groups/participants. It might be highly pertinent to explore this theme during the next session (or before) to help participants know more about themselves, their sector, and their partners. (The Interview part of the Appreciative Inquiry process was much appreciated and reinforces the communication point.)
- Strategic Plan: It might be in order to do some strategic planning together (if not done already) to factor in important changes on the political scene and other types of changes. If this has been done already, then it might be appropriate to do some follow up session(s), and revise what is currently available.
- End-User: Keep asking who the end-user is, and how s/he benefits from the Accord and the Codes.
- Relationships: Assist Departments and Agencies in setting up meetings/sessions to build/develop/maintain the relationship between their staff and their respective Voluntary Sector partner(s); example: Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Addendum A-1

Building the Relationship between the Voluntary Sector and the Government of Canada

Volunteer Place, 330 Gilmour Street (Corner of Gilmour and O'Connor), Ottawa

Objectives:

1. To explore ideas for **strengthening the relationship** between the voluntary sector and the Government of Canada by using the Accord.
 - Talk about how to have closer linkages between the two sectors
 - To network with others with similar interests from national voluntary sector organizations & federal government departments.

2. Build and/or explore a **desired future** (Visioning of 2014)

3. To influence the voluntary sector and government approach to **implement** the Accord and Codes of Good Practice.

Agenda – Thursday, May 20, 2004

Time	Activity	Responsibility
9:00 am	Socializing – Coffee/Tea (optional)	All
9:30	Opening Comments/Welcome	- Debra Young - Marlene Deboisbriand
9:45	Presentation of Participants and Agenda	Andrée Bergeron
10:00	Getting to Know Each Other Better / Appreciative Inquiry (Including Health Break)	Andree Bergeron
12:00 pm	Lunch 12:30 – showing of Accord video (optional)	
1:00	Success Stories (15 min each presentation) (15 min Q/A for each presentation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul Davidson • Karen Bron
2:00	Moving to Action (Relationship Café)	All
2:45	Health Break (Including Optional Walk About)	
3:00	Relationships Café - Debrief (5 min each)	Brenda, Barbara, Linda and Nadine
3:15	Implementation of the Accord <u>Question to participants:</u> What will you do to move the Accord forward?	Brenda C. Couch and Linda Savoie
3:25	Evaluation/ Participants' Reaction to the Day	Andrée Bergeron

Addendum B-1

**Building the Relationship Between the Voluntary Sector & Government of Canada
Appreciative Inquiry Approach**

Phase/Time (Approximate)	Activity	Responsibility
<u>Definition Phase</u> Step 1 (5 min)	<p>Talk about the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) process</p> <p>Review the objectives</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> To explore ideas for strengthening the relationship between the voluntary sector and the Government of Canada by using the Accord. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talk about how to have closer linkages between the two sectors. To network with others with similar interests from national voluntary sector organizations & federal government departments. Build and/or explore a desired future, i.e., The Accord - Values & Principles (Year 2014) To influence the voluntary sector and government approach to implement the Accord and Codes of Good Practice. 	Andrée
<u>Discovery Phase</u> Step 2 (20 min)	In pairs, participants interview each other, based on questions in Annex A provided at the end of this document (10 min each participant)	All (In pairs)
Step 3 (20 min)	Each participant presents at his/her table, the essential information he/she received from his/her colleague during the interview of the Discovery Phase	All (In group, at each table)
Step 4 (15 min)	At each table, participants identify the themes, the qualities and wishes that are common throughout the stories (this information is captured on flip charts)	All (In group, at each table)
Step 5 (15 min)	A representative at each table posts all flip chart sheets on the walls. (15 minute health break)	Representative from each group
Step 6 (5 min)	Each participant receives three sticky dots and places them on the themes, qualities and/or wishes written on the flip charts, according to what she/he feels is important to build/maintain the relationship	Each participant (Individually)
<u>Dream Phase</u> Step 7	Each group chooses one theme/quality/wish and develops one statement* describing what this would look like in an	All (In group, at each

(15 min)	ideal relationship between the Government and the Sector. * <u>Statement</u> can be words (images, sound, and/or other depending on what the group is inclined to do).	table)
Step 8 (25 min)	Each group presents its desirable statement (including the corresponding image, if applicable) on how to build/maintain the relationship hence move us closer to the 2014 vision	Group representative
(60 min)	Lunch	
Design Phase	Refer to Agenda	All
Delivery Phase	This <u>last</u> Phase of the Appreciative Inquiry process will be achieved when participants will be back "home"	All

ANNEX A
Appreciative Inquiry Approach
Discovery Phase

(Questions relative to "**Building the Relationship Between the Voluntary Sector and the Government of Canada**" for the participants to answer.)

In pairs: Each individual asks his/her colleague the questions listed below (10 minutes each).

- 1 Best Experience:** Looking at your experience within the Sector /Federal Government, tell me a story about your best experience working together with another organization (can be any organization: Private, Public or Semi-Public).
 - What made it highly stimulating and energizing?
 - What role did you play? How did you contribute to this experience being so memorable?
 - How were decisions made?

- 2 Personal Qualities:** Without being too humble, what are the personal qualities you bring to your relationships in the context of family, friends and work?

- 3 Core Value (or Factor):** Looking out to the year 2014, you discover that many things have changed, and that the relationship between the Sector and the Government is very strong. Step outside and look at the relationship. You really, really like what you see. (Pause)
 - What do you see?
 - What seems to drive this exceptional relationship?

- 4 One Wish:** If you had one wish to make that would move the Sector and the Government a step closer to achieving the kind of relationship that you described in the year 2014 (Question 3 above), what would it be?