



Clare Clark Memorial Symposium



Voluntary Action and Organization in Canada

The Last Decade and Beyond

November 1999

*The Carold Institute
George Brown College of
Applied Arts & Technology*



March 2000

At the end of the 1990s it seemed that the fears expressed by **Robert Putnam** in his 1995 article **The Strange Disappearance of Civic America**, **American Prospect Journal**, were equally inevitable in Canada. His extensive research spanning the previous 95 years showed that a sudden and rapid decline in civil society and associational life in the United States began in the 1970s and continued unchecked, driven by a heightened pursuit of individualism. He warned that civil society was threatened, perhaps doomed.

This certainly seems to be the case in Canada as we face the new century. Deficit reduction rules. Governments are eliminating much financial support at all levels, devastating some voluntary organizations and crippling others. Governments are reducing and even abandoning various services, intensifying the voluntary sector's sense of responsibility to fill the gaps that are left. At the same time, Canadian society is experiencing the increase in individualism described by Putnam. All of these factors threaten to overwhelm associational life as we know it. If Canadians no longer choose to come together to do something about issues they care about, what will be the future of Canada's voluntary sector? And what will become of our civil society?

The **Carold Institute** and **George Brown College of Applied Arts & Technology** set out to try to understand those developments and what they would mean for Canada's voluntary sector in the future. Together, we sponsored The **Clare Clark Memorial Symposium** entitled **Voluntary Action and Organization in Canada: The Last Decade and Beyond** in November 1999. We brought together leaders in the voluntary sector from across Canada to reflect upon the last decade and discuss what needs to happen if the voluntary sector is to continue to contribute to Canada's civil society.

This report is the outcome of the symposium's three days of presentations, discussion and debate that wrestled with these critical issues. Although we didn't totally confirm Putnam's foreboding, what we did conclude allows little room for complacency. This report offers important perspectives on the future of Canada's voluntary sector and outlines principles that should stimulate further discussion and inform the policy debate. We believe that it is a significant contribution to the groundbreaking work being done about the voluntary sector and its role in Canadian society.

A healthy civil society rests not just on the existence of a vibrant voluntary sector, but on a self-conscious voluntary sector that is not afraid to examine itself systematically. We look forward to your comments and invite you to contact us to continue the discussion.

Yours sincerely,

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Website Access:

This report and the complete text of the papers presented at the symposium will also be available on the website of The Canadian Centre of Philanthropy: www.ccp.ca

**The Carold Institute
George Brown College of Applied Arts & Technology
March 1999**

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Executive Summary

Voluntary action is critically important in maintaining a strong civil society. However, the past decade of tumult, crisis and cutbacks has brought Canada's voluntary sector to a critical point.

In response, The Clare and Harold Clark Institute for the Study of Charitable Activities in Canada and George Brown College of Applied Arts & Technology co-sponsored The Clare Clark Memorial Symposium entitled **Voluntary Action and Voluntary Organizations in Canada, The Last Decade and Beyond** in November 1999. They invited selected leaders in Canada's voluntary sector to come together to explore and deepen their understanding of the key issues facing the voluntary sector through presentations and discussions. In return, the ideas generated would be captured in a report to be sent to interested leaders in the voluntary, corporate and government sectors in order to contribute to and help determine the direction of government policy and future initiatives within Canada's voluntary sector.

Discussion during the three days of the symposium was informed by five papers addressing issues facing Canada's voluntary sector:

- ↳ **Voluntary Action and Voluntary Organizations in Canada: Progress and Prospects**
Michael Hall, The Canadian Centre for Philanthropy
- ↳ **Gaming and the Non-Profit Sector: Is it a Gamble?**
Jason Azmier, Canada West Foundation
- ↳ **Reflections on Democracy, Communities and Advocacy**
Pramila Aggarwal, George Brown College
- ↳ **Administration Issues in the Third Sector: Building Vibrant Civil Society Organizations**
Debbie Field, Foodshare Metro Toronto
- ↳ **New Voices, New Perspectives: Voluntary Action in the Nexus Generation**
Robert Barnard, d-Code

The Issue of Definition

Public policy targeted toward the specific needs of Canada's voluntary sector requires a shared definition of what the sector encompasses. However a single definition does not adequately address the wide diversity among voluntary sector organizations. Meaningful work on understanding the similarities and differences among voluntary sector organizations and on determining useful categorizations is essential for developing public policy that recognizes the value and contributions of the many types of voluntary organizations in Canada.



A Vibrant But Vulnerable Sector

Despite the challenges of the past decade, Canada's voluntary sector is vibrant. The voluntary sector continues to make vital contributions to Canadian life and displays creativity and adaptability in pursuing its objectives. Changing demographics may offer new pools of talent from which to recruit volunteers and staff: technologically adept youth, a growing population of immigrants and an aging cohort of baby-boomers soon to enter their retirement years. While recent widespread and dramatic changes in the environment present challenges, they also offer opportunities for voluntary organizations to re-examine their mission, re-evaluate their operations and forge new relationships with governments, corporations and other voluntary sector organizations.

Although vibrant, Canada's voluntary sector is also very vulnerable. Image problems and poor communication are obscuring the voluntary sector's achievements. Governments at all levels are increasingly relying on the voluntary sector to provide services formerly provided through the public sector, and yet government funding has been cut. In fact, competition for scarce funding is the biggest issue facing voluntary sector organizations, often draining resources that were formerly directed toward direct service or advocacy. This intense competition combined with the fragmented nature of the voluntary sector form real barriers to collaboration for many organizations. In addition, organizational problems combined with resource constraints threaten the viability of many voluntary organizations. While lack of relevant data impairs the voluntary sector's ability to plan meaningfully for the future, it is becoming increasingly apparent that demographic trends may have alarming implications for voluntary sector organizations as an aging population places more demands on health, social service and community agencies and there is no certainty that there will be enough volunteers to meet their needs.

Collaboration and Commitment to Build a Meaningful Civil Society

If Canada's voluntary sector is to successfully meet these challenges, voluntary organizations need to commit to deliberate, strategic action toward collaboration, communication and a cohesive vision of the role of the voluntary sector in Canadian society.

Although citizenship is the driving force within a civil society founded upon democracy, citizenship in Canada today is at risk as never before. Canadians need to know why the voluntary sector matters in a civil society, and why citizenship, participation and associational life are essential. The corporate, government and community sectors all have important and distinct roles to play, while a healthy voluntary sector empowers individuals and contributes to the critical associational dimension of citizenship. Finally, Canadians need to understand that participating in all dimensions of citizenship ensures a healthy voluntary sector.

Clare Clark

Clare Clark spent most of her adult life volunteering for Canadian organizations.

*During World War II, Clare worked with the national YWCA and immediately after, she joined the **Canadian Association for Adult Education** under the leadership of Roby Kidd. During her years there, she managed the **Joint Planning Commission**, a non-membership, non-constitutional, non-voting organization that functioned as an early version of voluntary roundtables as leaders of most of the voluntary organizations in Canada met three times annually to consider projects and strategies. Later, Clare formed the **Indian-Eskimo Association of Canada**, an organization that provided a much-needed voluntary voice for aboriginal Canadians.*

*Towards the end of her life, Clare wanted to ensure support for the principle of voluntary action in Canada. **The Carold Institute** is Clare Clark's legacy to the Canada's voluntary sector.*

The political and legislative factors that are eroding the voluntary sector's ability to fulfill its role in a civil society must be addressed. Governments are off-loading services to the voluntary sector at the same time as government funding is decreasing. In addition, governments are using the voluntary sector to justify a series of policies relating to gaming without tying the revenues earned directly to the communities involved. Public policy for the voluntary sector has been driven by large, quasi-public organizations without considering the needs of the wide diversity of organizations within the voluntary sector.

While voluntary organizations must maintain their passion, vision and commitment to action, they need to be open to new ways of achieving their goals. Establishing leadership that is visionary and flexible, adopting a collaborative and balanced management model, and building enabling structures will help overcome the organizational crises affecting many voluntary sector organizations in Canada today.

Voluntary organizations must seek opportunities to collaborate rather than compete. Collaboration based on commonalities will be important in building a healthy civil society, and this must be driven by a new kind of leadership that values collaboration among voluntary sector organizations and across sectors. Local consultation networks could provide a forum to inform and support voluntary sector leaders and provide opportunities for collaboration on many levels.

Positive and strategic communication needs to be a priority for voluntary organizations. By clearly articulating an action-oriented vision, voluntary organizations can create a 'brand identity' to help Canadians better understand their unique role in society. In addition, voluntary organizations need to better understand the importance of image and how to influence public perception. A managed communication strategy should include cultivating a positive relationship with the media as well as with other voluntary organizations, government and the public.

A workable plan for the future depends upon developing a better knowledge base that builds understanding about the voluntary sector. Although more data will be useful, it is important to make the data meaningful by developing political self-understanding and engaging in critical thinking about what the data reveals. In building this knowledge base, those who are gathering and analyzing the data must ensure that the definitions, terms and measures are relevant and meaningful, and that they adequately address the multi-faith, multi-cultural context of Canadian society. Finally, the knowledge base should be oriented toward helping policy makers and the public better understand the actions that need to be taken to ensure a healthy voluntary sector.

The voluntary sector plays a critical advocacy role, and it is important that this role be preserved as it is one that neither the corporate sector nor governments can play. However, it is essential that the voluntary sector focus on effective methods of



advocacy, using media coverage to reinforce its advocacy efforts rather than subvert them. Advocacy is difficult if voluntary organizations are engaged in a daily struggle for survival. As such, the voluntary sector needs to lobby for stable, long-term funding to help maintain a proper role for advocacy.

Policy Directives And Future Actions

Public policy must address several key issues if the voluntary sector is to move forward:

- ↳ **Provide clear definitions.** Clear definitions of its subsectors will enable policy to address the specific needs of the wide range of voluntary organizations in Canada.
- ↳ **Value research and analysis.** Policy development must be based on sound data and research about the voluntary sector.
- ↳ **Ensure stable, long-term funding.** A comprehensive, co-ordinated policy review must address the need to provide stable, long-term funding while examining the role of individual and corporate taxation policies and provincial gaming policies.
- ↳ **Protect advocacy.** Policy development must not impair or restrict the voluntary sector's ability to advocate.
- ↳ **Promote collaboration.** Government policy must not put voluntary sector organizations into direct competition against each other, but should encourage collaboration within the sector and with government itself.

It is hoped that the ideas captured in this report will help inform leaders in all sectors about the issues and challenges facing the voluntary sector in Canada, and will provide a thoughtful contribution in examining the policies that affect it.

Voluntary Action and Voluntary Organizations in Canada

The Last Decade and Beyond

THE CLARE CLARKE MEMORIAL SYMPOSIUM

Rationale and Objectives

Clare Clark

Clare Clark spent most of her adult life volunteering for Canadian organizations.

During World War II, Clare worked with the national YWCA and immediately after, she joined the **Canadian Association for Adult Education** under the leadership of Roby Kidd. During her years there, she managed the **Joint Planning Commission**, a non-membership, non-constitutional, non-voting organization that functioned as an early version of voluntary roundtables as leaders of most of the voluntary organizations in Canada met three times annually to consider projects and strategies. Later, Clare formed the **Indian-Eskimo Association of Canada**, an organization that provided a much-needed voluntary voice for aboriginal Canadians.

Towards the end of her life, Clare wanted to ensure support for the principle of voluntary action in Canada. **The Carold Institute** is Clare Clark's legacy to the Canada's voluntary sector.

Voluntary action is a foundation of a strong civil society. Communities large and small, urban and rural rely on voluntary action as a primary expression of associational life in order to build strong democratic societies through participation and citizenship. Through volunteering time, money or goods, Canadians reach out to each other to help things happen through advocacy, fundraising, social change, program development and delivery across the country and around the world.

Moreover, voluntary action raises important questions for each of us about being, becoming and belonging in Canadian society. It calls us to become someone different because we choose to make a difference in how people live their lives. Moreover, we make this choice freely because it contributes to something we feel is worthwhile.

Increasing attention has been focused on the voluntary sector in Canada in recent years. Several ground-breaking initiatives have helped propel the voluntary sector in Canada to an unprecedented level of prominence:

- ↳ in 1998, Statistics Canada, in conjunction with the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, published **Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians**, highlights from the 1997 National Survey Of Giving, Volunteering And Participating,
- ↳ in 1999, the Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector, chaired by Ed Broadbent, published its report entitled **Building on Strength: Improving Governance and Accountability in Canada's Voluntary Sector**, and
- ↳ also in 1999, the Joint Tables established by the federal government in partnership with Canada's voluntary sector published *Working Together: A Government of Canada/Voluntary Sector Initiative, Report of the Joint Tables* outlining its policy recommendations for strengthening the voluntary sector's capacity, its relationship to government and the regulatory framework in which it operates.

At the same time, the past decade of tumult and crisis has had a dramatic impact on every facet of Canada's voluntary sector. Drastic cuts to government funding in health care, education and social services have placed an increasing burden of service on many voluntary organizations who have been expected to fill in where government services have been discontinued. Increasingly scarce government funding has escalated competition among voluntary sector organizations and forced most to look for new sources of funding from gaming or the private sector.



Struggling to survive in this climate of cutbacks, managers in the voluntary sector have been under increasing pressure to do more with less and to concentrate on providing direct services rather than serving as advocates of the public interest.

In response to these developments, The **Carold Institute** and **George Brown College** co-sponsored The Clare Clark Memorial Symposium in November 1999 entitled **Voluntary Action and Organization in Canada: The Last Decade and Beyond** to examine and reflect on the state of voluntary action in Canada during the last decade and beyond. By bringing together leaders in the voluntary sector from across Canada, the co-sponsors hoped the symposium would explore and deepen understanding of the key issues facing the voluntary sector from a Canadian context. The symposium offered participants a rare opportunity to reflect on what the last 10 years have meant and, as a result, what the future may hold. The co-sponsors felt that through sharing experience and learning from each other the participants would take what they had learned back to their organizations and communities.

Moreover, by ensuring wide distribution of a report outlining the symposium's findings to leaders in all levels of government, the corporate sector and the voluntary sector itself, the co-sponsors hoped that the symposium would contribute to and help shape the policy debate by raising the profile of the critical issues facing Canada's voluntary sector.

Co-Sponsors

George Brown College of Applied Arts & Technology¹ is one of Canada's largest and most diverse community colleges with close to 10,000 full-time and 40,000 part-time students enrolled each year. In partnership with over 1,000 community service and health care agencies, George Brown College is a leader in providing career training in the community services and health sciences sectors. From its campuses in downtown Toronto, George Brown College serves one of the world's most ethnically diverse communities and has a keen interest in issues related to voluntary action, citizenship and adult learning. It works actively with local, national and international partners to promote applied research, pilot projects and progressive public policy.

The Carold Institute², officially known as **The Clare and Harold Clark Institute for the Study of Charitable Activities in Canada**, was founded in 1989 to study and promote voluntary action and organization in Canada in the context of citizenship and social change. The Carold Institute is committed to the belief that learning through voluntary participation is the foundation of democracy. Since its inception, The Carold Institute has contributed fellowships to university-based programs to improve management skills and understanding in non-governmental organizations, jointly sponsored symposia to promote greater understanding of the voluntary sector in Canada, and supported voluntary activities such as the **Social Watch** project.

¹ See Appendix 3: Co-Sponsors

² See Appendix 3: Co-Sponsors

Organizations in Attendance

Canada West Foundation

Calgary AB

Canadian Centre for Philanthropy

Toronto ON

Captain William Spry Community Centre

Halifax NS

Clague Consultants

Vancouver BC

The Carol Institute

Toronto ON

Coalition of National Voluntary Associations

Ottawa ON

d-Code

Toronto ON

Department of Canadian Heritage

Ottawa ON

Foodshare Metro Toronto

Toronto ON

George Brown College

Toronto ON

New Internationalist

Toronto ON

Ontario Trillium Foundation

Toronto ON

Simon Fraser University

Vancouver BC

The Council of Canadians

Ottawa ON

United We Can

Vancouver BC

Volunteer Canada

Ottawa ON

Participants

Because the voluntary sector is made up of a diverse set of sub-sectors, the symposium's co-sponsors acknowledged that the entire spectrum of voluntary organizations in Canada could not be accommodated within the round-table discussion format they envisioned. As a result, invitations were sent to selected leaders in the voluntary sector across Canada inviting them to come together to address issues of direct service, advocacy, funding, research and communication.

Twenty-five participants representing a wide variety of organizations attended the symposium³. Each participant brought a tremendous amount of individual experience, passion and judgment to the discussions and contributed valuable perspectives that opened the door on their world to others involved in the voluntary sector.

Format and Agenda

The three-day symposium was structured around five presentations addressing specific issues facing voluntary organizations: demographics, gaming as a source of funds, advocacy, administration and new voices⁴. Each presentation generated questions and much discussion, and initiated valuable exchanges of information and experience. A final round-table session encouraged participants to share their perspectives on the outlook for the voluntary sector in Canada and asked them to identify the critical issues that must be addressed to ensure that the voluntary sector remains viable, healthy and effective.

Report

This report summarizes the ideas from and the discussion among the participants at the symposium. As such, it presents a broad range of experiences and perspectives synthesized into the themes that emerged over three days of thoughtful and intense reflection. The symposium's co-sponsors and participants hope that the ideas contained in this report will enhance the current thinking on the voluntary sector in Canada and help determine the direction of future initiatives within the voluntary sector and of government policy as it relates to this fundamental contributor to Canadian society.

³ See Appendix 1: List of Participants

⁴ See Appendix 2: Agenda

Definition and Deliberation

Examining Important Issues in Canada's Voluntary Sector

The symposium's co-sponsors brought participants together to reflect on what the last 10 years have meant to the voluntary sector and to identify key issues that need to be addressed in the future. Five papers were commissioned and presented at the symposium to spark discussion and analysis.

The sections that follow summarize the discussion that surrounded the important issue of defining the voluntary sector and offer short summaries of the five papers:

Recognizing Diversity in Defining Canada's Voluntary Sector

Examining Five Facets of the Voluntary Sector

1. Voluntary Action and Voluntary Organizations in Canada: Progress and Prospects
Presentation by Michael Hall, Canadian Centre for Philanthropy
2. Gaming and the Non-Profit Sector: Is it a Gamble?
Presentation by Jason J. Azmier, Canada West Foundation
3. Reflections on Democracy, Communities and Advocacy
Presentation by Pramila Aggarwal, George Brown College
4. Administration Issues in the Third Sector: Building Vibrant Civil Society Organizations
Presentation by Debbie Field, Foodshare Metro Toronto
5. New Voices, New Perspectives: Voluntary Action in the Nexus Generation
Presentation by Robert Barnard, d-Code

Recognizing diversity in defining Canada's voluntary sector

Understanding what we mean when we refer to 'Canada's voluntary sector' is critical if we are to formulate public policy that is specific, appropriate and targeted toward the sector's needs. Understanding the role that the voluntary sector plays in building a strong civil society requires shared understanding of the language we use in describing it.


The voluntary sector represents an important aspect of associational life in Canada: people choosing to come together to meet a need in their community, whether that community is defined by geography or by a specific aspect of its membership. However, defining Canada's voluntary sector presents several challenges in adequately reflecting a wide range of organizations with very different objectives and great variability by sub-sector, region, locale, reason for being and type of funding.

Broadly speaking, the voluntary sector is made up of non-profit organizations, defined by Revenue Canada as those organized for any purpose other than profit. Some non-profit organizations are registered charities while others are not. A registered charitable organization is registered with Revenue Canada⁵ and is therefore able to issue tax receipts for donations. While charitable organizations are an important component of the voluntary sector in Canada, the sector also includes many organizations which do not have charitable tax status - such as local schools, amateur sports groups or literacy programs - but to whom Canadians donate time, money and goods.

The question of definition emerged early in the symposium discussions. Participants agreed that a voluntary sector organization is one in which volunteers are essential in carrying out some part of its mission. They also agreed that the type of volunteer involvement varies widely and includes, for example, providing direct services to the organization's clients, overseeing operations as a member of its board, participating in fundraising campaigns, helping with day-to-day administration or advancing its advocacy initiatives.

Participants also debated how to account for the fundamental differences among widely divergent voluntary organizations. Large, quasi-public organizations such as colleges, universities, hospitals or foundations have little in common with grassroots advocacy groups, yet their powerful voice is more likely to drive the public policy debate on the voluntary sector. To what extent should public policy for the voluntary sector be driven by the needs of such organizations? How can smaller, lower-profile voluntary organizations be meaningfully included? How can we strike an appropriate balance between the needs of health-related and community-related voluntary organizations, or between direct-service organizations and those focused on advocacy?

⁵ To obtain registered charitable status, an organization must pass a public benefit test demonstrating that its activities are charitable and are to the benefit of a significant portion of the public.



The energetic discussion around the issue of definition points to the need for meaningful work on understanding the similarities and differences among voluntary sector organizations in order to ensure that public policy respects their diversity and adequately addresses their needs.

Exploring five facets of the voluntary sector

1. **Voluntary Action and Voluntary Organizations in Canada: Progress and Prospects**

Presentation by Michael Hall, Canadian Centre for Philanthropy

Although voluntary action is a vibrant part of Canadian life, it may be in danger of withering unless it is nurtured. Several factors have affected voluntary action and voluntary organizations over the past 10 years:

- a) **Changes in the role of government** as governments reduced expenditures and increased revenues to balance budgets and reduce debt meant that communities were asked to do more through voluntary action. To encourage this, the federal government improved tax incentives for charitable donations and created Joint Tables to develop policy recommendations to strengthen the voluntary sector.
- b) **Changes in government policies** reduced the largest traditional source of funding for charitable organizations, added new competitive pressures, eliminated government programs and increased demand for their services.
- c) **Improvements in knowledge about charitable organizations** gained through research showed that they are a powerful economic force and major employer in Canada.
- d) **Greater recognition has been given to the economic and social contributions** of voluntary action and voluntary organizations to the development of social capital through enhancing a society's capacity for collaboration and co-operation. Voluntary organizations have strategic importance as a middle course between sole reliance on either the market or the state.

Voluntary Organizations

Most of our understanding of voluntary organizations is based on the public information filed by the 78,000 registered charities in Canada. Estimates suggest that there are an additional 870,000 grass-roots voluntary organizations that are not legally required to file information and about which little is known.

Most charities operate on modest revenues and little or no staff. About 60% of registered charities have either no full-time staff or one full-time staff person.

Most charities rely heavily on government funding, however places of worship appear to be somewhat independent of government funding since about 80% of their revenues source from private giving. Health and social services organizations are particularly vulnerable to changes in government policy.

More detailed information about the voluntary sector is urgently needed to meaningfully contribute to the policy debate about the appropriate regulatory framework for the voluntary sector and effective enabling strategies and mechanisms.

Individual Voluntary Action

The **1997 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating** showed that almost every Canadian has some involvement with voluntary organizations: 88% donate either money or goods, 31% volunteer their time, 50% are members of community organizations and 40% give money to people who live outside their home. However, the bulk of the support and involvement is provided by a small, active minority, raising concerns about the future. Religious organizations receive over half of all charitable giving, while health organizations receive 17% and social service organizations receive 11%.


Trends in donations tend to reflect economic conditions. Although charitable donations showed 30% real growth during the last half of the 1980s, this growth fell off in the first half of the 1990s due to the economic downturn. Subsequent dramatic growth in 1996 was due to changes in income tax policy. Average real donations dropped to their lowest in 1991, but have climbed steadily since. Less than 30% of tax filers claim charitable donations and the percentage has been declining since 1990, indicating that although support for voluntary organizations has been robust, observed growth in donations is occurring in the presence of a shrinking donor base.

Volunteering

Close to one-third of the Canadian population aged 15 and over volunteer, contributing a total of over 1-billion volunteer hours each year. Although the rate of volunteering is increasing, volunteers do so for shorter periods of time. Youth account for much of the increase, largely to enhance their job prospects. While volunteer hours increased for adults aged 45 and older, adults aged 25-44 are volunteering less which may point to a future decline in volunteering as this cohort ages.

Thin Base of Support

Although Canadians have been increasing their support for voluntary organizations during the 1990s, the donor base has been shrinking. Voluntary organizations are particularly vulnerable to a decline in support from the 20% of



Canadians who are major donors and the 8% of Canadians who are major volunteers. Core supporters, those who are both major donors and major volunteers, provide over 50% of donations and over 40% of all volunteer hours. These tend to be older, female, married, employed full-time, well-educated, and have higher incomes and school-aged children.

Major donors, major volunteers and core supporters all display a level of religious involvement, which appears to promote voluntary participation. As a result, voluntary organizations are vulnerable to any decline in religious participation.

The Public's Concerns

Underlying their broad, but shallow, involvement with voluntary organizations, Canadians are skeptical about the efficiency with which donations are used and the effectiveness of voluntary organizations. Although over 90% of Canadians agree that voluntary organizations enhance communities, over 80% of donors and 70% of non-donors express concerns about charitable fundraising and how the funds are spent.

Meeting the Challenges

Voluntary organizations are attempting to meet some of these challenges through initiatives such as the **Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector** established to develop recommendations for promoting effective governance and accountability, and the **Joint Tables** established in partnership with the federal government to develop strategies to improve the regulatory framework for voluntary organizations and strengthen their capacities. Improving the strategic knowledge about voluntary organizations will provide data to help them decide how to best meet the challenges they face: increasing competition for scarce resources, a shifting public policy environment, and changing demographics.

2. Gaming and the Non-Profit Sector: Is it a Gamble?

Presentation by Jason J. Azmier, Canada West Foundation

Thousands of not-for-profit groups in Canada have benefited from gambling activity and continue to rely on gambling revenues as these revenues have grown and other sources of funding have declined. However, reliance on gambling revenue raises ethical, political and economic concerns.

Over the past 30 years, gambling revenues have expanded as provincial lotteries were introduced, provinces began experimenting with new games to fund the charitable sector, charitable groups established casinos and mega-lotteries, and

provincial governments and First Nations groups entered the casino business. Since new forms of gambling partially cannibalize existing forms, provincial governments have tended to accompany expansion of gambling with increased opportunities for gambling activity in the non-profit sector. As a result, the non-profit sector and governments now compete for the same gambling revenue.

Gambling policy in Canada differs significantly among the provinces and is often modified in response to public reaction. Gambling-generated revenue flows to the non-profit sector through charitable gaming, which is restricted to charitable organizations, or through government grants to all types of non-profit organizations where the grant proceeds are derived from gambling activity. Some provinces have established granting agencies to distribute some of their gambling revenue to the charitable sector, and some designate a percentage of their revenues from casino gambling to be transferred to the non-profit sector through a variety of programs. Since all revenues from government-sponsored gambling flow to the provincial general revenues, any grant to the non-profit sector contains some gambling funds. Non-charitable non-profits are particularly dependent on grant revenue since they cannot engage directly in charitable gaming or issue charitable tax receipts.

Grants to the non-profit sector represent a small percentage of the total government gambling revenues since the remainder stays in the general revenue fund for government operating expenses. Although government gaming revenues have doubled in the past five years, grant revenue transferred to the non-profit sector has not kept pace. The common reason provincial governments cite for expanding gambling opportunities is to provide funding to the non-profit sector. In reality, provincial governments sometimes tie non-profit funding to government gambling to cleanse the potentially negative image of this form of revenue.

Despite recent growth, gambling is a potentially unstable source of funding since the gambling market is finite, new games threaten the overall availability of funds, increased competition for funds by more non-profits reduces the amount available to each, and provincial gambling policy and revenues are dependent on the political climate and are subject to public pressure.



A 1999 **Canada West Foundation** survey of executive directors of non-profits that receive gambling grants provides insight into the issues facing these non-profits:

- ↳ a belief that gambling grants and charitable gaming are essential to fund their programs,
- ↳ potential over-reliance on gambling as a source of funding,
- ↳ potential instability of gambling-related funds,
- ↳ public and social concerns about gambling in the community,
- ↳ the likelihood that problem gamblers would become clients of the non-profit sector,
- ↳ the acceptance of gambling-related funds despite board or client objections, and
- ↳ public perception that certain forms of gambling were more acceptable than others.

Public tolerance of gambling is a strong measure of the future of government gambling policy since governments are increasingly sensitive to public attitudes about gambling. In their 1999 national public opinion survey on attitudes toward gaming, Canada West Foundation determined that Canadians approve of charitable involvement in gaming, that they believe that using gaming revenue to fund charities is appropriate and that they believe a major portion of gaming proceeds should go to charities. There is growing distrust that the governments will set gambling policy taking into account the best interests of the public, with over 80% agreeing that governments should hold public consultations before introducing new forms of gambling. Interestingly, gambling-based non-profit funding comes disproportionately from the minority of Canadians that participate in charitable gaming and, in most cases, linking gaming to a charitable cause is not a significant factor in the decision to gamble. However, gambling revenues may substitute for some donations, since about 60% agreed that gambling at charitable events is not really gambling but is like making a charitable donation. Finally, gambling is not perceived as having improved communities: only 10% of Canadians believe gambling has had a positive effect on their communities, while nearly 70% indicated that gambling has not improved the quality of life in their communities.

Future government gambling policy is unlikely to reduce gambling opportunities because the revenue generated has become too critical to provincial governments and the non-profit sector. In fact, provincial governments use the needs of the non-profit sector to justify expanding gambling activities. However, these revenues are subject to a number of external threats. A growing number of non-profits are competing for gambling revenues, and this competition will

escalate as non-profits experience reductions in other sources of funding, including individual donations, due to increased gambling revenues and increased public awareness that governments are transferring gambling revenues to the non-profit sector. New entrants into the gaming market such as First Nations groups and professional sports leagues, and bigger and faster gaming activities such as Internet gambling, interactive slot machines, video lotteries, super raffles, mega-lotteries, linked bingo and satellite bingo, are increasing competition and putting pressure on charitable gaming to keep up.

Dependency on gambling revenues leaves non-profits vulnerable to external changes in government gambling policies, which often change in response to changes in public opinion. Public awareness is growing that communities are experiencing gambling-related problems and that there is a prospect of even more harm from newer and bigger forms of gambling. Ethical concerns have prompted some non-profits to stop using gambling-related funds, and there is a growing realization that a gambling-based economic model is unsustainable because it shifts non-profit fundraising from broad, community-based support to fundraising from gamblers.

Canada West Foundation believes that future research into gaming and the non-profit sector should address emerging issues including:

- ↳ the shift away from community-based fundraising expertise and toward gambling-based fundraising expertise,
- ↳ the sustainability of gambling as a revenue source, the impact on volunteer activity,
- ↳ the lack of available funds for non-profits that refuse gambling-based revenues,
- ↳ the impact of gambling revenue on donation revenue, and the threat of shifting public tolerance of gambling activity.

3. Reflections on Democracy, Communities and Advocacy

Presentation by Pramila Aggarwal, George Brown College

Different cultures appear to interpret democracy differently. In India, dynastic control, widespread corruption and political power concentrated in a small number of influential citizens contrast sharply with Canadian democracy where there is less corruption and more reliance on the rule of law and the role of government to maintain its integrity. Although Canadian democratic institutions and bureaucracies allow the elite to maintain control and influence, Canadians actively participate in the democratic process. As a result, the struggle for democracy in Canada is largely focused on local concerns by those in the community sector.



The community sector serves as the site for almost all voluntary activity in Canada, and is assuming new significance as opposing political interpretations emerge about the role of communities in society. On the one hand, communities are being asked to provide services that are being downloaded from governments, on the other, they are being asked to help create a more just and democratic society.

Increasingly influenced by free market values, aggressive global competition and massive migration, governments and corporations are abdicating their social responsibilities in the search for higher profits. Widespread cuts to many essential services are increasing the need for the voluntary sector to fill the gap. As a result, community-based agencies are being asked to provide services through the voluntary sector under the guise of individual, family and community responsibility.

The number of volunteer hours has increased substantially in the past 10 years, partly because there are fewer opportunities for good jobs and partly because there is more work for volunteers to do. This increase primarily affects women, who perform the majority of volunteer work and occupy most of the part-time, poorly paid, marginal service jobs that are most susceptible to employment cutbacks.

Canada cannot afford the version of volunteerism that does not address the question of how volunteers earn their living. We cannot promote a democracy where two-thirds of our citizens have a lower standard of living because they contribute their time and skills to the community, while the other one-third enjoys a higher standard of living because they are rewarded for distancing themselves from their social and community responsibilities.

While the growing gap in economic disparity between rich and poor means that Canadians are looking to the community sector to provide a more humane alternative to a market-based society, this requires a shared and workable definition of 'community'. We must examine our underlying assumptions that communities are based on democratic principles, that they are progressive and non-hierarchical, and that community members share a common interest and vision. None of these assumptions may be true.

The experience of immigrant communities in Canada illustrates this point. The Canadian government's multiculturalism policies help formalize channels of advocacy and control dissatisfaction while recognizing that immigrants gravitate into self-defined communities for protection and identification. As a result, processes both internal and external to the immigrant community reinforce a sense of 'otherness', while mainstream society assumes that all members of these communities are the same.

However, immigrant communities are no more cohesive than other groups in society. Members of these communities possess culturally distinct backgrounds that disappear into the labels attached by mainstream society. Individuals have difficulty identifying with the new set of stereotypes created, and suffer when the entire community is implicated by the actions of a few. Immigrants of colour continue to be seen as outsiders no matter how long they have been in Canada. As a result, they seek out and create communities where they feel accepted and valued rather than marginalized, isolated and internally indebted.

The government encourages immigrant groups to create opportunities to bond together through shared cultural activities and through providing direct services within their own communities. Many immigrant communities are grateful for these opportunities and the grants that accompany them, and so are quick to comply with the expectation that they provide leadership to their members in maintaining law and order and in fitting in with mainstream values. In this way, the government controls how new communities integrate into the larger social framework.

Advocacy is important in addressing immediate suffering within specific communities and in transforming Canada into a more just, representative and equitable society. **Legal advocacy** accrues legal rights and addresses legal wrongs, made operational through the Charter of Rights and Freedoms; while **popular advocacy** empowers individuals to participate in making democracy work.

Popular advocacy is collective: it uses the skills and dedication of many people over long periods of time. While popular advocacy can effectively empower groups by helping them take ownership of the issues affecting them, it can only be sustained by a group's continuing support. While an outside advocate can be a dynamic force in helping a group find its voice, it can only take the group as far and as fast as it wants to go. Outside advocates may have difficulty judging the group's progress and, as a result, such advocacy work can engender a sense of hopelessness.

Popular advocacy work is largely unrecognized within the voluntary sector, in part because the issues often affect people across many communities rather than being neatly confined to one group, and because it is often difficult to see visible results. As a result, community agencies may be reluctant to allocate resources toward advocacy. Raising the status of advocacy work may mean finding ways to make it visible and quantifiable.

4. Administration Issues in the Third Sector Building Vibrant Civil Society Organizations

Presentation by Debbie Field, Foodshare Metro Toronto

Organizations in the third sector - also called the voluntary sector - face ten administration challenges:

1. **Balancing the need for direct service with the need for research and advocacy.**

Most third sector organizations begin when volunteers create a structure to respond to a community problem through direct service or research and advocacy. While most Canadian third sector organizations adopt one of these two main responses, a few successfully engage in both. *Is it possible to administer a third sector organization that provides direct service while involved in advocacy, or does this pose too many administrative difficulties?*

2. **Determining whether advocacy work jeopardizes an organization's already limited resources.**

Active advocacy may jeopardize a third sector organization's charitable status if it is perceived to be replacing direct service. However, advocacy may relate directly to the organization's mission and reason for existence. *Do the current restrictions on the resources third sector organizations can devote to advocacy work make sense?*

3. **Ensuring that grassroots efforts respect the balance between advocacy and direct service.**

Grassroots movements in the developing world often combine working to improve people's immediate circumstances with building solidarity and potential political cohesion. Without social assistance programs, benevolent movements in these societies are often organized by people in low income communities rather than by middle class volunteers. These organizations not only provide direct services, they educate and politicize the communities. *How does grassroots organizing differ both from traditional social work direct service information referral on the one hand, and political advocacy on the other? Is there a difference between grassroots organizations created and led by local volunteers and those created and led by outside volunteers? Does Revenue Canada recognize grassroots organizing?*

4. **Accounting for universality and broad social focus.**

Social programs needed by the entire population are a departure from the third sector's traditional focus on charity or the eradication of poverty. While universal programs do not stigmatize low income individuals, they make it harder to define the target audience. *Should Revenue Canada explicitly redefine charities to include non-profits that promote universal common goals?*

5. Enlarging their mandate to include revenue-generating business ventures.

While Revenue Canada restricts the abilities of charities to operate commercial enterprises, funding cutbacks and severe competition for donations make revenue-generating opportunities attractive to third sector organizations. However, many third sector revenue-generation programs have failed. Three conditions must be met if third sector organizations are to be successful in these ventures:

- a) the revenue-generating activity must advance the organization's mission,
- b) the organization must be able to spare the capital to invest, and
- c) the organization must ensure that experienced business people are in place to manage the revenue-generating activity.

Does it make sense for third sector organizations to try and generate income to replace shrinking revenues by operating break-even businesses? Can these businesses be viewed as mission-driven, entrepreneurial programs that use the marketplace to offer consumers a choice? Can Revenue Canada accept these businesses as long as they are mission-driven?

6. Sustaining volunteer activity through staff support.

The third sector depends largely on volunteers' energy and commitment for governance and program delivery. Once third sector organizations reach a certain size, they must adopt a more formal structure if they are to continue to exist. This shifts the organization away from its former purely volunteer base to one that is supported by paid staff, thereby increasing the organization's need to raise money on a sustained basis. *Can volunteers sustain the organization without staff support? How will the costs of maintaining staff be covered in a context in which many believe that the sector doesn't need money because volunteers will do everything?*

7. Attracting and maintaining staff.

The third sector is undervalued and underpaid for a variety of reasons:

- a) Boards of Directors and staff hesitate to expect decent pay because this is the 'voluntary sector',
- b) many of those working in the sector do because they are deeply committed and feel privileged to work for 'the movement',
- c) women dominate the caring professions and, on average, are paid 60% of the average wage paid to male-dominated professions, and
- d) third sector organizations are continually cash-strapped and cannot afford decent labour relations and human resource policies.

The limited funds available exacerbate issues of stress and overwork in the third sector. Developing a highly productive third sector depends upon ensuring decent wages, benefits and working conditions. Funding needs to include adequate provisions for wages and benefits, while governments and



foundations need to help develop sector-wide standards and fair labour practices. *How can the third sector attract and keep high-level, creative staff if the third sector continues to assume that staff are of secondary importance to volunteers? How can policies and practices be modernized so that adequate wages, good benefits and enlightened personnel policies are the norm?*

8. Finding the funding.

Sustained funding is crucial for sustained operation in the third sector. Stable government funding is imperative because the third sector performs important functions that benefit the whole of Canadian society. However, while obtaining core government funding is important, developing a diversity of funding sources provides valuable autonomy for third sector organizations. *How can third sector organizations be effective when much of their time is spent searching for funds needed for survival? What mechanisms could be put in place to assure more stable core funding? How can the third sector diversify its sources of funding so that it is not dependent on one source?*

9. Attracting and maintaining qualified Board members.

Boards of Directors need training and support to fulfill their governance obligations and fiduciary duties. The **Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector** proposed much-needed measures in this area, and recognized the particular challenges faced by very small agencies by exempting them from certain governance tasks. In Canada, new agencies face start-up challenges, especially if they serve a "new" community, and may benefit from being mentored by long-established third sector organizations. *How can the third sector attract and keep qualified Board members? What training supports could be put in place for Board members to reduce burn-out and fears of liability?*

10. Supporting volunteers.

The third sector relies upon volunteers. Making the volunteer experience meaningful and ensuring that volunteers' needs are met are important factors in supporting the critical role that volunteers play. *How can overworked, under-funded third sector organizations spare the time and energy to really serve their volunteers? Would the third sector benefit from viewing volunteers as the membership to whom it is ultimately responsible?*

5. New Voices, New Perspectives: Voluntary Action in the Nexus Generation

Presentation by Robert Barnard, d-Code⁶

The Nexus Generation encompasses the 7-million Canadians ages 18 to 34 and represents nearly 25% of the total Canadian population. While older Nexus, those ages 25 to 34, is under-represented in voluntary activities with a participation rate of 28%, younger Nexus has seen a dramatic increase in voluntary activity over the past 10 years from 18% in 1987 to 33% in 1997. Visible minorities also play a key and increasingly important role: two-thirds of Canada's visible minority population is under age 34. Unlocking the potential of the Nexus Generation as a valuable resource for the voluntary sector means understanding this highly skilled, enthusiastic group and finding ways to attract them.

Characteristics of the Nexus Generation

- ↳ technologically savvy, possessing computer, communication, information and media skills
- ↳ highly educated
- ↳ highly mobile: hard to reach through traditional channels
- ↳ adaptable: has had a wide range of experiences and is comfortable with change and diversity
- ↳ ethnically diverse
- ↳ confident and optimistic about the future; forward-thinking
- ↳ focused on job/career rather than on the traditional idea of community
- ↳ individualistic: entrepreneurial, do-it-yourself outlook; seek their own sense of fulfillment
- ↳ pragmatic: results-driven; impatient with inefficiency and bureaucracy
- ↳ altruistic: willing to contribute in a meaningful way, concerned about the well-being of society and looking to make a difference
- ↳ inhabits extended freedom zone by postponing marriage and children
- ↳ politically and socially aware: prefers volunteerism, boycotts and local community activities to conventional political participation
- ↳ holds more personal debt than previous generations
- ↳ driven by opportunity for challenge and creative expression
- ↳ searching for new social communities that support diversity and respect their needs

⁶ d-Code is an innovation engine that focuses on the attitudes, values and icons that drive the Nexus Generation, those Canadians between 18 and 34 years of age.



Strategies for attracting and retaining Nexus as volunteers, employees and donors must respond to both the altruistic and pragmatic dimensions of Nexus:

- ▶ **Promote the benefits of voluntary activity.**
Nexus is motivated to participate in volunteer activities where they can express their values and develop and use their skills and abilities. Promote what Nexus can gain through voluntary activities.
- ▶ **Illustrate the big picture.**
Nexus wants to see idealism in a realistic context. Set big picture ideals within a practical framework that lays out an action plan.
- ▶ **Appeal to Nexus' entrepreneurial spirit.**
Results-oriented Nexus is engaged through experience: it wants to 'do' and responds to the 'ing' in 'doing'. Involve Nexus in the creative process, offer a wide variety of tasks, set goals, allow them to express their individuality and provide a meaningful chance for them to make a difference.
- ▶ **Market the networks.**
Nexus is the largest bulk consumer of media, and is attracted to variety, innovation and accessibility. Use technology and multi-media to market to Nexus, and find on-line ways to connect with them and to connect them to volunteer opportunities.
- ▶ **Make it relevant.**
Believing in an organization's mandate motivates Nexus to become involved. Connect Nexus with the issues and causes it cares about to bring 'me' into the 'we' of an organization.
- ▶ **Connect to community.**
Highly mobile and with increasingly fragmented social ties, Nexus seeks a sense of security and community. Create a collaborative of concerned and socially active Nexus, and bring people together on-line and face-to-face to share knowledge, ideas, experiences and resources.
- ▶ **Ask them to get involved.**
While the majority of Nexus are willing to volunteer in their community, only half actually participate in voluntary activities. Actively pursue potential Nexus volunteers and make it easy for them to become involved.
- ▶ **Be flexible.**
Although Nexus is short of time and sees long term commitments as problematic, Nexus is willing to spend time if it is time well spent. Involve them in results-oriented, short-term projects that and can fit into their schedules.
- ▶ **Recognize diversity.**
Visible minority Nexus is searching for their roots while maintaining a dual cultural identity. Recognize that this segment of Nexus gravitates to voluntary organizations that have hybrid cultural activities and interests, rather than those that are wholly based in their traditional communities or in the mainstream.

Vibrant but Vulnerable

Hesitating at a Crossroads

“ People want to be part of giving something to something they care about.”

In responding to the presentations and in working to determine the key issues that the voluntary sector must address in the future, participants enthusiastically shared their perspectives on how the events of the last 10 years have affected the voluntary sector and brought it to where it stands today. The voluntary sector has come to a crossroads: although its vibrancy offers hope for the future, its vulnerability puts it at risk.

The sections that follow summarize the highly engaged and thoughtful debate that explored the vibrancy and vulnerability facing the voluntary sector today:

Celebrating its Vibrancy

1. The voluntary sector continues to make vital contributions to Canadian life.
2. The voluntary sector displays creativity and adaptability in pursuing its objectives.
3. Changing demographics may offer new pools of talent from which to recruit volunteers and staff.
4. Recent widespread and dramatic changes in the environment present challenges, but also offer opportunities for renewal.

Understanding its Vulnerability

1. Image problems and poor communication obscure the positive outcomes.
2. Governments at all levels increasingly rely on the voluntary sector to provide services formerly provided through the public sector.
3. Competition for increasingly scarce funding is the biggest issue facing every voluntary sector organization in Canada.
4. Fragmentation and competition are barriers to collaboration within the voluntary sector.
5. Organizational problems combined with resource constraints threaten the viability of many voluntary organizations.
6. Lack of relevant data impairs the voluntary sector's ability to plan meaningfully for the future.
7. Demographic trends may have alarming implications for voluntary sector organizations.



Celebrating its Vibrancy

1. The voluntary sector continues to make vital contributions to Canadian life.

The voluntary sector in Canada has a proud history of significant accomplishments that have had a major impact on Canadian society. Many of our health care, education and social services are the result of voluntary action by concerned citizens. Our quality of life today owes much to the volunteers of yesterday.

Canadians continue to demonstrate a genuine desire to be involved in their community. Fueled by the energy, commitment and passion of their staff and volunteers, voluntary organizations in Canada are a dynamic force in our social and economic framework. In addition to the services it provides with the help of volunteers, the voluntary sector makes significant and positive contributions to the Canadian economy: the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy estimates that Canadian charities received \$90.5-billion in revenues in 1994 and employed an estimated 1.32-million people.

2. The voluntary sector displays creativity and adaptability in pursuing its objectives.

Voluntary organizations display enormous creativity in carrying out their mandate; Canada's voluntary sector can be characterized as imaginative and adaptive. These traits are necessary for survival when resources are constrained, as has become evident in examining the voluntary sector's response to changes in its funding.

When government funding was plentiful, many volunteer organizations gave priority to pursuing government funding opportunities. Concurrently, these organizations adopted bureaucratic processes of management and decision-making that mirrored those of their major source of funds. Although many organizations also pursued corporate and individual donations, few engaged in any revenue-producing activities and smaller organizations remained almost entirely dependent upon government funding.

However, severe cuts in government funding in recent years have forced many voluntary organizations to search for new ways to raise the funds they need. Voluntary organizations of all types have begun more aggressively seeking funding from the corporate sector, investigating revenue-producing opportunities such as the sale of goods or services, turning to gaming activities such as charity casinos and mega-lotteries, or accepting gaming-based funding from provincial granting agencies.

"If we stick in and are committed to finding it, we will find what we need!"

At the same time, voluntary sector organizations began adopting management practices more closely aligned with the corporate sector while positioning themselves as businesses with a mission to provide direct service and a focus on fund-raising. Many voluntary organizations realized that successfully pursuing new sources of funding meant changing how they operated. The message? Adapt or go under.

Although volunteer organizations in Canada have been severely challenged in recent years, many have responded with creativity in refining their mission and focusing their efforts on specific goals. Voluntary organizations who can remain adaptable in the face of significant change are building a solid foundation for meeting the challenges of the future.

3. Changing demographics may offer new pools of talent from which to recruit volunteers and staff.

The demographics of the Canadian population are changing, shaped by a technologically adept, market-savvy youth cohort, an increasingly diverse population of immigrants and a large, aging cohort of baby boomers. Each of these demographic influences may present opportunities for the future of Canada's voluntary sector.

The voluntary sector can benefit from the energy, action-orientation, and technological facility of Canada's youth.⁷ Today's youth realize that the voluntary sector is under attack. Committed to making a difference - and convinced that they can - young Canadians may be attracted to opportunities for meaningful employment in the voluntary sector. In addition, many young people view volunteer involvement where they can use their considerable skills as an important way to enhance their career prospects.

Canada's growing population of immigrants is the most diverse in the world and offers new opportunities for recruiting staff and volunteers for voluntary organizations who are sensitive to the needs, customs and values of different cultures.

According to the **1997 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating**, older adults⁸ donate more time and money to the charitable sector than any other segment of the population. While Canada's aging population appears to offer a growing pool of potential volunteers - and donations - for the years ahead, the current baby boomer cohort lags significantly behind earlier generations in voluntary participation. In addition, this cohort is less likely to demonstrate the religious affiliation that has been highly correlated with volunteer activity in past generations. As these boomers head toward the peak years for volunteering and donating, will they continue to remain largely aloof from voluntary activity?

⁷ Youth refers to Canadians between the ages of 18 and 34.

⁸ Older adults refers to Canadians ages 45 and older.



4. Recent widespread and dramatic changes in the environment present challenges, but also offer opportunities for renewal.

While struggling for resources and meeting the challenges of recent years have overwhelmed many voluntary organizations, they have energized others. Voluntary organizations have been forced to re-examine their mission and re-evaluate their operations in order to respond effectively to the many levels of change battering them. Widespread cuts in government funding have propelled many voluntary organizations to seek new relationships with the corporate sector and new ways of working together with government and, sometimes, with other voluntary sector organizations.

Despite the turmoil of the past decade - and also because of it - Canadians continue to want to do something about issues that concern them. Rapid advances in communications technology have made it easier for people and the voluntary organizations with which they are associated to come together. As the federally-initiated Joint Tables illustrate, voluntary organizations are beginning to take tentative steps toward working together to help define and address the issues they face.

Understanding its Vulnerability

1. Image problems and poor communication obscure the positive outcomes.

Although the voluntary sector continues to contribute to Canadian society in many ways, in recent years this positive message has been swept away by a tide of pessimism primarily focused on the problems the sector is experiencing. This negative portrayal detracts from the many accomplishments within the sector and impairs public perception. Instead of appearing professional, dedicated and achievement-focused, voluntary organizations are in danger of being viewed as whiners who are looking for hand-outs rather than actively working to solve their problems.

The descriptor 'voluntary', itself, detracts from the image of the sector. 'Voluntary' can connote 'amateur' - or perhaps, more tellingly, 'not professional' - and may thus undermine the ability of the voluntary sector to have its voice taken seriously within the larger society. Add to that the recent tendency of governments to characterize voluntary organizations as special interest groups, the fragmentation within the sector and the lack of collaboration among organizations focused on competing for scarce resources and it is apparent that the voluntary sector has a critical image problem and no clear agenda for solving it.

2. Governments at all levels increasingly rely on the voluntary sector to provide services formerly provided through the public sector.

Although early signs of partnerships between voluntary sector organizations and governments are emerging, they are driven by governments' conviction that the voluntary sector offers a means for getting things done with less cost to government. While this view has been especially prevalent in the social services and community services sectors, the health care and education sectors have also been affected as they are increasingly required to fundraise to cover expenditures that were formerly funded largely by government.

The relationship between the voluntary sector and governments at all levels is ambivalent at best. Distrust has escalated as cuts to government funding forced widespread downsizing within the voluntary sector. However, the need to preserve what level of government funding remains means that voluntary organizations must continue to maintain a positive working relationship with their primary source of funding.

At the same time, voluntary organizations are caught in the debate about public responsibility for services formerly provided by government. If services are cut, then people will suffer. If people are suffering, voluntary organizations feel an obligation to step in to relieve that suffering. But should voluntary organizations be shouldering this responsibility? And if governments won't provide the services, and won't provide the funds to voluntary organizations who are filling the gap, where will the funds come from?

This downsizing has another major impact: it reduces the resources available for the critical advocacy work that many voluntary organizations undertake. As fundraising and service delivery consume more of a voluntary organization's resources, less energy, time and commitment are available for engaging in advocacy activities. Funds raised from alternative sources such as gaming or the corporate sector to replace cuts in government funding may come with strings attached that make advocacy work difficult or impossible. As the advocacy role of Canada's voluntary organizations dwindles, so, too, does the foundation of our civil society. Can Canadians afford to live in a society with no place for advocacy?

3. Competition for increasingly scarce funding is the biggest issue facing every voluntary sector organization in Canada.

Voluntary organizations are competing intensely for funding from all sources. Reductions in government funding have not only increased competition for whatever remains, they have forced voluntary organizations to aggressively seek new sources of funding. Appeals to the corporate sector, foundations and individual donors have skyrocketed, further escalating competition and

" The frustration is real, and so is the passion!"



reinforcing 'individualism': when dollars are at stake, every organization must look to its own needs. The result? Voluntary organizations have little incentive to co-operate at any level, precluding opportunities to combine resources or achieve economies of scale or scope.

With no assurance of stable, long term funding, voluntary organizations are less able to undertake long-term change initiatives because the money may not be there to obtain the resources they need. The smallest agencies with the least resources are hit first and hardest, yet these organizations are often primarily devoted to providing direct services to meet unique needs in their communities. With an organization's survival at risk, precious resources must be diverted toward obtaining funding. In fact, it's survival of the fittest: those who are big enough, smart enough and know their fundraising markets best are most likely to survive - and are least likely to be troublesome to governments.

Intense competition for funding threatens the autonomy of voluntary organizations and impairs their ability to advocate because they fear losing hard-won funding. Maintaining independence from government or the corporate sector is critical if the voluntary sector is to continue successfully advocating on behalf of those who are disadvantaged or to ensure equity within our society. Intense competition for funding has forced the voluntary sector to rely increasingly on the proceeds from gaming, raising ethical questions for many voluntary organizations. Some voluntary organizations may participate directly in gaming through events such as charity bingos or lotteries, or they may receive funding from the government that sourced from government-run gaming activities such as casinos or provincial lotteries. In either case, voluntary organizations are caught between accepting gaming-related funds so that they can continue their mission, and thereby condoning gaming and its societal impacts, or turning down the funds and having to fight even harder to obtain the resources they need.

While gaming has been a growing source of funding for voluntary organizations and governments, the recent explosion of new ways to gamble and the popularity of government-run casinos, provincial lotteries, mega-lotteries and video lottery terminals raise the issue of satiation. How much more can gaming revenues grow? As revenues from this source reach their limit, competition for these revenues will increase. If gaming isn't the answer to funding the voluntary sector, then what is?

" People who feel they can't find solutions can't do the job!"

4. Fragmentation and competition are barriers to collaboration within the voluntary sector.

The voluntary sector in Canada is extremely fragmented with voluntary organizations of all sizes carrying out a wide range of activities in sectors as diverse as health care, social services, education, recreation, religion and community activism. This fragmentation is fueled by direct and intense competition for scarce resources, especially funding. As a result, there is little networking or collaboration among voluntary organizations: each organization carries out its mission in isolation without recognizing that it may share common interests, agendas or even purchasing power with others.

5. Organizational problems combined with resource constraints threaten the viability of many voluntary organizations.

Many volunteer organizations have been severely challenged by the rapid pace of change that continues to affect all sectors in Canadian society. With little or no resources for staff development - or, for many, little or no staff - these organizations have limited ability to act quickly or to enable decision-making in the face of rapid change. These are serious strikes against any voluntary organization struggling to carry out its mandate when resource constraints mean fewer people are required to do more with less.

Throughout the sector, both staff and volunteers are working harder to meet more needs and stretching to cover the gaps left as government services have been cut back. However, inadequate funding and ongoing funding pressures mean that there is little to spare for developing human resources policies and processes or for management development activities. As a result, many who work in the sector are exhausted, confused and overwhelmed by the enormity of the tasks they face, especially in small community agencies. Community groups that are continually struggling with bread and butter issues may not be able to tackle the bigger issues for which they were originally created.

Employment in the voluntary sector is often subject to a peculiar 'halo effect': with many tasks dependent upon volunteers, paid employment takes on an aura of volunteerism with low salary levels, long hours and a sense that dedication to the mission is what counts. The volunteer sector generally experiences difficulty attracting and retaining the highly trained managers and staff it needs. And should 'dirty little secrets' come to light - as they do in poorly-managed organizations whether private, public or non-profit - the voluntary sector's aura of virtue means that the repercussions are felt more keenly and broadly throughout the sector.



6. Lack of relevant data impairs the voluntary sector's ability to plan meaningfully for the future.

Until recently there was virtually no coherent, objective data on the voluntary sector. Although the **1997 National Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating** has taken an important step toward filling that gap, there is still relatively little concrete knowledge about the sector and its trends. The evidence that does exist is largely organization-specific and anecdotal and, thus, not easily extrapolated to present a bigger picture.

Lack of objective, long term data constrains the sector's ability to plan adequately for the future. Since little is known about its strengths and weaknesses, it is difficult to prepare to take advantage of opportunities or defend against threats. Moreover, lack of data may deter outsiders - those in the corporate sector, government or members of the public - from playing a helpful, supportive or necessary role since without objective analysis they may remain unconvinced of the magnitude of the problems the sector is facing

Lack of data also contributes to a lack of 'brand identity' making it difficult to accurately pinpoint the differences between the voluntary sector and the other sectors of our society, or to understand distinctions within the sector. This problem is particularly acute for voluntary organizations when attempting to attract corporate support or sponsorship, since the private sector may not respond to appeals that are not well grounded in objective data and analysis. Lack of data reinforces the view that voluntary sector consists of amateurs who are stuck in reactive mode rather than professionals who can proactively plan.

7. Demographic trends may have alarming implications for voluntary sector organizations.

As the baby boomers become senior citizens, Canada's aging population will continue to increase the already heavy burden on many health, social service and community agencies. With a growing client base, voluntary organizations will be competing for another scarce resource: volunteers.

Forecasts are uncertain as to whether there will be enough volunteers to go around. While older Canadians have traditionally volunteered more than younger ones, this trend toward volunteerism has been heavily influenced by religious attendance: data shows that those who attend some type of religious service are much more likely to donate time or money to charitable organizations. With fewer Canadians of all ages professing any religious affiliation, there is every likelihood that the proportion of older Canadians volunteering their time or money will drop.

This shortfall may not be made up from the ranks of youth volunteers. Young Canadians today do not volunteer at the same rate as previous generations.

Although recent initiatives such as Ontario's requirement that high school students complete a certain number of hours of community volunteer work before they graduate have increased the profile of volunteering among younger Canadians, we don't yet know what effect this will have on this cohort's long-term volunteer participation rate. Although it's encouraging that youth perceive volunteering as helpful in enhancing their career prospects in other sectors, we don't yet know whether they will maintain a long-term commitment to volunteer involvement once their career needs are met.

Immigration to Canada has changed dramatically over the past fifty years, drawing from many cultures that are vastly different from the largely British- and European-driven migration that followed World War II. Today, new immigrants to Canada do not tend to share the cultural or religious norms of traditional Canadian society and may feel alienated or disassociated. Hence, they may not actively participate in the mainstream voluntary sector, although they are likely to be active in their own cultural communities. In addition, it takes time for these new communities to find their place in Canadian society. As evidence of assimilation begins to emerge, it is not yet known to what extent these communities may participate in Canada's mainstream voluntary sector. Finally, all of these demographic factors have potential implications for staffing in voluntary organizations. As older employees move closer to retirement, there are few youth or new immigrants willing to undertake careers in the voluntary sector when salary levels are low relative to similar positions in the corporate or public sector. Canada's voluntary sector is in some danger of losing precious human resources and being unable to replace them.

Collaborative and Committed *Building The Foundation for a Meaningful Civil Society*

In order to successfully meet the challenges facing the voluntary sector, symposium participants agreed that voluntary organizations in Canada need to adopt a collaborative and committed approach to building a meaningful civil society. If the voluntary sector's voice is to be heard in the emerging policy debate, that voice needs to be strong and the message needs to be clear. This can only occur if voluntary sector organizations take deliberate, strategic action toward collaboration, communication and a cohesive vision of the role of the voluntary sector in Canadian society.

Through discussion and debate, participants identified important tasks that Canada's voluntary sector must undertake if it is to achieve these objectives:

Tell Canadians why the voluntary sector matters in a civil society.

1. Explain why citizenship, participation and associational life are essential.
2. Clarify the role played by the three pillars of civil society.
3. Address the political and legislative factors that are eroding the voluntary sector's ability to fulfill its role in a civil society.
4. Reinforce the importance of participating in all dimensions of citizenship to ensure a healthy voluntary sector.

Establish leadership that is visionary, flexible and enabling.

1. Adopt a collaborative and balanced management model.
2. Stay true to the vision, but be open to new ways of achieving it.
3. Build enabling structures to overcome the organizational crises affecting many voluntary sector organizations.

Seek opportunities to collaborate rather than compete.

1. Recognize that collaboration based on commonalities will be important in building a healthy civil society.
2. Provide a new kind of leadership that values collaboration among voluntary sector organizations and across sectors.
3. Consider building local consultation networks that can inform and support voluntary sector leaders.

Communicate positively and strategically.

1. Communicate a positive vision toward action.
2. Understand the importance of image and how to influence perceptions.
3. Facilitate collaboration by increasing communication to all stakeholders within the voluntary sector.

Develop a knowledge base that builds understanding.

1. Increase the knowledge base about the voluntary sector to provide essential information for developing a workable plan for the future.
2. Develop political self-understanding and engage in critical thinking to make the data meaningful.
3. Build the knowledge base carefully and with a view toward action.
4. Create an inclusive strategy by understanding the evolving multi-faith, multi-cultural context of Canadian society.

Make a place for advocacy.

1. Recognize the critical advocacy role played by the voluntary sector.
2. Focus on effective methods of advocacy.
3. Protect advocacy through lobbying for stable, long-term funding.
Tell Canadians why the voluntary sector matters in a civil society.



Tell Canadians why the voluntary sector matters in a civil society

1. Explain why citizenship, participation and associational life are essential.

Citizenship is the driving force within a civil society founded upon democracy. A civil society enables and encourages ordinary people to take ownership of the present and future of their society through structures that foster public participation such as elections or public broadcasting. Hand-in-hand with the right to participate, citizenship in a civil society also offers many freedoms: the freedom to question the government, for example, or to advocate for change, or even to choose not to participate.

Citizenship in Canada today is at risk as never before. Many factors are eroding both the public participation and public dialogue dimensions essential to a healthy civil society. As individualism and consumerism reinforce a what's-in-it-for-me attitude, and as individuals feel increasingly alienated and unable to effect change, voter turnout has plummeted. Although Canada's public radio network remains highly participatory from a public dialogue perspective, listenership continues to fall and its technological replacement - public television - is almost completely passive. And as the Internet makes inroads on broadcasting of all sorts, public dialogue in Canada is at risk of being all but eliminated.

Associational life is an important dimension of citizenship in a civil society. As people choose to come together to overcome barriers and meet a need in their community, they are also participating as citizens who care about each other and about the society they live in. Associational life is a firm foundation of Canada's voluntary sector: individuals are free to choose the issues or causes they want to address, and having chosen, they can then build associations with other like-minded individuals all believing in and working toward the same goal.

Associational life is the healthiest dimension of citizenship in Canada today. Many of the pillars of a strong civil society have arisen out of advocacy movements led by volunteers. Canadians today enjoy the gains won by earlier generations and now institutionalized in our health care, education and social services sectors. Encouragingly, Canadian society remains open to change as new groups of volunteers emerge to meet new needs.

As Canadian society has been and continues to be restructured by the events of the past decade, it is important to recognize how the voluntary sector has been affected and how changes to the voluntary sector have the potential to further change society as we know it. Who holds the social safety net together? What services will no longer be provided by governments? Who is going to do the work previously carried out by hospitals, schools and community agencies? How will that work be paid for?

2. Clarify the role played by the three pillars of civil society.

Community leaders around the world are increasingly recognizing the importance of civil society. Canadian society has evolved to its enviable position as a civil society because people worked to effect change in the relationships among the three pillars of society: the corporate sector, the government sector and the community sector, where the voluntary sector resides:

- ↳ **Corporate sector.** The corporate sector represents commercial interests, serves as Canada's market interface with the rest of the world and provides employment, goods and services. Commercial ventures succeed or fail through open competition that helps to regulate prices through the principle of supply and demand.
- ↳ **Government sector.** In a civil society, the role of the elected government is to set the overall economic, environmental and social priorities by which citizens relate to each other and by which resources are allocated. Through regulation and legislation, governments provide standards of protection and citizenship. Through their systems of taxation, governments redistribute individual wealth to provide amenities and services for the common good such as highways, parks, health care, education and social services.
- ↳ **Community sector.** A strong civil society depends on citizens who feel empowered both as individuals and as members of their community. A strong community sector is founded on a healthy voluntary sector that empowers individuals by offering vision, a sense of ownership, stability and an opportunity for participation.

3. Address the political and legislative factors that are eroding the voluntary sector's ability to fulfill its role in a civil society.

The voluntary sector helps define a civil society by the degree to which individuals shoulder responsibility for each other. Neither the corporate sector nor government can do that.

The voluntary sector is an essential component of the economic and social framework of civil society because of its distinct contribution to community life: people choosing to help people at the local level. Canada's voluntary sector provides direct services, advocates for changes that will benefit society and educates individuals, corporations and government about what people and their communities need.

The rapid and relentless pace of social, economic and technological change is battering the voluntary sector, catapulting many voluntary organizations and the individuals that rely on them into crisis. Governments must set public policy, provide a legislative framework and develop a funding strategy that addresses the political and legislative forces that are hammering the voluntary sector:



" As services shrink, the crises are getting worse."

- ↳ Governments are off-loading services to the corporate sector and the voluntary sector. Although government has put lot of stock in the ability of the corporate sector to improve service delivery, the anticipated gains have not been realized to date. Limitations in funding, structure and staffing prevent the voluntary sector from serving as an efficient or even workable option for the delivery of services formerly provided by government. Cutting government services to save money and expecting the voluntary sector to provide those same services without an increase in funding means that services will be irretrievably lost and individuals and communities will suffer.
- ↳ Governments are using the voluntary sector to justify a series of policies relating to gaming without tying the revenues earned directly to the communities involved. While gaming contributes an increasing portion of government general revenues, there have been no government initiatives to address gaming-related problems in the host communities. By earmarking a portion of the proceeds from government-run gaming to fund charitable organizations, the government is using the voluntary sector to enhance the public image of gaming. If gaming is to continue as a major source of government revenue, then governments must also take into account the social costs paid by communities.
- ↳ Public policy for the voluntary sector has typically been driven by large, quasi-public organizations such as the foundations established for hospitals, universities and colleges. However, the complexity of Canada's voluntary sector demands that governments do a better job targeting public policy to meet the needs of specific sub-sectors. In order to do this, governments will need to invest in research to better understand the breadth of the voluntary sector. They will then be better positioned to craft an appropriate public policy framework that aligns with specific needs.
- ↳ Tax legislation currently restricts the advocacy work of a charitable organization to a maximum of 10% of its resources. In fact, voluntary organizations face decreasing opportunity for advocacy due to mounting pressure to maintain sources of funding. The federal government must review its tax legislation and public policy directives to ensure that advocacy continues to fulfill its essential role in building a healthy civil society.

4. Reinforce the importance of participating in all dimensions of citizenship to ensure a healthy voluntary sector.

Citizenship possesses both a voluntary dimension and a public dimension:

- ↳ **Voluntary dimension.** This forms the basis of our voluntary sector: people reaching out to help others from a sense of citizenship or community service when there are no personal stakes and no specific connection between the individuals involved except that they are members of same community.
- ↳ **Public dimension.** This encompasses the ability to contribute to decision-making about levying taxes and allocating public resources for the public good, and includes the right and privilege of paying taxes. Through exercising their right to vote, Canadians actively participate in electing the public officials who then direct taxation and the allocation of the moneys received for the public good.

Although many Canadians do participate in the voluntary dimension of citizenship, active participation in the public dimension is decreasing as more Canadians choose not to vote and look for ways to avoid paying taxes. To the degree that the services it provides are directly or indirectly funded by government, the voluntary sector also benefits from the public dimension of citizenship.

However, questions remain about how the work of voluntary sector will be paid for: through tax benefits? gaming? entrepreneurial initiatives? revenue generation? If funding is to come from government revenues, then how will the optimum allocation of public resources be determined? If funding is to come from corporate sponsorships or donations, then how will voluntary organizations maintain independence and impartiality? If funding is to come, in part, from revenue-generating activities, then how will voluntary organizations continue to fulfill their service mission while engaging in manufacturing or marketing?

Establish leadership that is visionary, flexible and enabling.

1. Adopt a collaborative and balanced management model.

Leadership in the voluntary sector needs to value collaboration over competition. This means adopting management practices that are open and focused on helping staff, volunteers and clients develop and reach their potential. It also means recognizing the professionalism of those who work in the voluntary sector.



At the same time, leaders of voluntary organizations need to maintain a balanced perspective. Voluntary organizations must balance their need to react quickly with the need to take the time to consider the long-term implications of their actions. They must balance their role as direct service providers with their role as advocates for the public good. And they must look for balance in the messages they send to ensure that they accurately reflect their mission.

2. Stay true to the vision, but be open to new ways of achieving it.

Voluntary organizations must maintain their passion, vision and commitment to action if the voluntary sector is to continue to play an effective role in Canadian society.

Buffeted by major changes in recent years, the voluntary sector has been hard pressed to set an agenda beyond the critical need to secure funding. However, leaders of voluntary organizations must look beyond funding issues to create a strategy that reinforces their vision and allows flexibility in achieving it.

Remaining flexible means being open to new perspectives and new ways of working. As the nature of volunteering changes, management in the voluntary sector must change, too, to ensure that this critical resource is used effectively. The voluntary sector must find ways to harness the contributions that work-related, education-mandated or judicially-ordered volunteers can make. Voluntary organizations must continue to value the grassroots style of volunteering at the same time as much of the sector becomes 'professionalized'; both approaches are valid and both can play an important role. As participation in religious observances declines, leaders in the voluntary sector need to be prepared for a potential drop in volunteering by working together to create a new ethos that will attract volunteers and ensure that they play a meaningful role.

3. Build enabling structures to overcome the organizational crises affecting many voluntary sector organizations.

Current and looming organizational problems within many voluntary organizations pose a real threat to their effectiveness and, in some cases, their survival. New, enabling, proactive, action-oriented structures are needed to help voluntary organizations meet these challenges.

In order to fully tap the potential of their staff and volunteers, voluntary organizations need to specifically address the people part of their structures by creating a meaningful role for youth, addressing issues of diversity and building career opportunities that attract top-notch employees.

In this age of instant information, voluntary organizations are increasingly pressured by a chronic lag in adopting computer and communications technology. This lag must be addressed if the voluntary sector is to avoid a critical barrier caused by lack of information and inadequate communication capability.

Seek opportunities to collaborate rather than compete.

1. Recognize that collaboration based on commonalities will be important in building a healthy civil society.

While collaboration has been an emerging and increasingly important trend in health care, education and services for children and youth, social service agencies have been slow to adopt this approach. There is growing recognition that voluntary organizations working in isolation may not be able to achieve their objectives in our current economic climate. If no one organization can do the job, then coalitions based on commonalities are needed.

This means, however, that leaders in the voluntary sector will need to overcome the fragmentation and competition that stand in the way of finding commonalities. Voluntary organizations need to consider a pluralist approach that tolerates their differences and enables them to work together toward common goals.

2. Provide a new kind of leadership that values collaboration among voluntary sector organizations and across sectors.

Collaboration in the voluntary sector will only occur if the parties value it and are committed to achieving it. Leaders in the voluntary sector need to make networking an important priority. If voluntary organizations can come together into active networks with action as their objective and advocacy as a unifying principle, then the voluntary sector will have created an important political voice that can speak on its behalf.

In creating these networks, voluntary organizations need to look both horizontally at their peers and vertically at their stakeholders, and to build relationships that are intercultural and inter-sectoral. It is as important for voluntary agencies to network with each other as it is for them to network with potential sources of funding or volunteers. Each collaborative relationship enriches the organizations involved and extends economies of scale and scope, whether financial, operational or ideological.

Collaboration offers another immediate benefit: it can help overcome the isolation of small organizations struggling to survive. Partnership opportunities

" We need to overcome the narcissism of small differences!"



with similar organizations or mentoring relationships with larger or more diverse organizations can add tremendous value to managers in the voluntary sector who typically get little in the way of management support. By actively seeking collaboration, voluntary sector organizations can lead the way to a better model of co-operation for society at large.

3. Consider building local consultation networks that can inform and support voluntary sector leaders.

One suggestion that emerged from the discussion was that the voluntary sector could create local round tables where voluntary organizations could come together. Dubbed a 'National Consultation of Local Consultations', these consultation networks could include large charitable organizations such as the major health-related charities, one-location institutional organizations such as hospitals, colleges or universities, social service-based agencies and community agencies, as well as voluntary organizations that do not have charitable tax status.

The consultation networks could provide a forum for voluntary sector organizations to meet regularly, explore shared issues of concern and find ways to work together either within their local area or by approaching other consultation networks. They could be created and operated relatively easily by building on the networking and technology-savvy capabilities of youth, concurrently offering youth an opportunity to make an important and fundamental contribution.

Communicate positively and strategically.

1. Communicate a positive vision toward action.

Organizations in the voluntary sector must articulate a clear vision that is action-oriented. By carefully positioning itself according to its mission within a well-defined sub-sector, each voluntary organization will be consciously creating a 'brand identity' that will help Canadians better understand the unique role it fulfills in our social fabric.

A brand identity centred around a positive image and an action-orientation is increasingly important for successfully reaching out to youth. Largely absent from places of worship, today's youth are not receiving the same messages about the tradition and value of voluntary service that older, church-going volunteers received in their youth. This media-hip generation looks to brand-name identification for everything from clothing to beer to movies to provide a sense of belonging and to help make sense of the vast array of choices with which they are faced. It's time that mainstream voluntary organizations

discovered what marketers have known for a long time: if youth feel an affiliation with what you are selling, they will want to buy.

Voluntary organizations also need a thoughtful communications strategy to ensure that all sectors of Canadian society get the intended message, not the unintended one. As the sector becomes increasingly professionalized, voluntary organizations need to recognize that a proactive communications strategy is as important to achieving their mission as their fundraising strategy.

2. Understand the importance of image and how to influence perceptions.

Certain kinds of voluntary activity garner a lot of media attention. As the symposium was taking place in Toronto, participants followed the developments in Seattle as thousands of volunteers and advocates protested the World Trade Organization talks. The media images emanating from Seattle told a powerful story about collective effort and advocacy.

Voluntary organizations are often not attuned to the importance of managing their relationship with the media. In recent years, media reports about the voluntary sector have largely been focused on the negatives of funding issues and cutbacks. In addition, truly bad news of misappropriated funds or failures of trust such as the tainted blood scandal have had an overly sensational presentation in the media partly due to the 'halo effect' described earlier. The many accomplishments of the voluntary sector during this difficult time have not received nearly as much attention. Voluntary organizations need to learn how to cultivate positive relationships with the media so that the portrayal of their image is balanced rather than skewed toward the negative.

There is another compelling reason for voluntary organizations to learn how to work with the media: to avoid the adversarial positioning that arises from distrust. Symposium participants observed this first-hand when an invited participant representing one of the national media was questioned about their motives for participating and their intentions regarding information that might be revealed during the discussions. The symposium's co-sponsors had not anticipated this reaction. They had issued the invitation because of the participant's in-depth knowledge about voluntary sector issues, and they expected that the media perspective would add tremendous value to the discussions. The co-sponsors regretted that the participant chose to withdraw as a result. This incident illustrates the opportunities that are lost when the voluntary sector views the media as an adversary rather than as a potential ally in achieving their objectives.

Voluntary organizations that recognize the importance of a focused media strategy - and follow through by implementing one - have a much better chance



of attracting the support of concerned Canadians. Otherwise, they run the risk of being perceived as struggling, amateurish and beset by problems with no easy answers if that's how the media choose to portray them.

3. Facilitate collaboration by increasing communication to all stakeholders within the voluntary sector.

Active communication is a critical component of collaboration. Voluntary sector organizations need to seek out regular opportunities to share ideas. A website clearinghouse of information could serve as a convenient, low cost networking and discussion opportunity for the voluntary sector. The Canadian Centre for Philanthropy is currently developing such a website that is expected to be on-line by spring 2000. Still in the planning stage at the time of the symposium, the Canadian Centre of Philanthropy hopes that this website will be an important communication resource for voluntary sector organizations and for others who want data and information about the sector.

Develop a knowledge base that builds understanding.

1. Increase the knowledge base about the voluntary sector to provide essential information for developing a workable plan for the future.

Objective data about the voluntary sector are only now emerging. Although previous information about the voluntary sector was rich in anecdotes and case histories, there is a growing understanding that these need to be supplemented by objective data to ensure that governments, the corporate sector and the public hear what the voluntary sector has to say.

Knowledge gained through research will enhance the voluntary sector's power to advocate. Since governments and the corporate sector are both driven by economics, advocacy efforts are more likely to be successful if they are supported by relevant data.

This knowledge will also enhance the voluntary sector's power to translate ideas into action. In the past the voluntary sector largely relied on a belief that the public would support good ideas. However, there is now increasing realization that data and analysis are needed to provide objective support for those good ideas. An increasingly selective donor and volunteer base needs a well-supported rationale for donating precious dollars and time.

“ How does research help us think about what we know?”

2. Develop political self-understanding and engage in critical thinking to make the data meaningful.

Organizations such as the **Canadian Centre for Philanthropy** and **Canada West Foundation** play an important role in collecting and analyzing data on the voluntary sector, while organizations such as **The Council of Canadians** and **The Carold Institute** add to this by reflecting upon what that data means. This research is useful in helping the voluntary sector learn from its past and develop an accurate view of its present. Putting the data into a meaningful perspective requires critical thinking in order to determine how the voluntary sector might be mobilized differently as new trends emerge.

3. Build the knowledge base carefully and with a view toward action.

The fragmented nature of the voluntary sector makes collecting sector-wide data difficult. However, meaningful research is much more workable on a sub-sector or local level, recognizing that different sub-sectors will have different priorities, needs and uses for the data.

In determining the parameters of this research, it's important that those who will be gathering and analyzing the information engage voluntary sector leaders in discussions about the definitions, terms, questions and measures to be used in order to ensure that the data collected is relevant, meaningful and useful. Data that is comparative over time will help assess long-term trends and enable planning for effective action in the future.

4. Create an inclusive strategy by understanding the evolving multi-faith, multi-cultural context of Canadian society.

What we know about the voluntary sector in Canada is firmly rooted in our experience of the voluntary behaviour of a largely Christian-based culture. However, the growing variety of cultures active in Canadian society today requires a better understanding of multi-faith, multi-cultural responses to volunteering, donating and charity. Our increasingly diverse social composition presents exciting opportunities for the voluntary sector if we are able to recognize and respect cultural differences.



Make a place for advocacy.

1. Recognize the critical advocacy role played by the voluntary sector.

The voluntary sector's advocacy role is an essential foundation in building a strong civil society. It is also unique since it is a role that neither the corporate sector nor governments can play.

However, effective advocacy requires a strong voluntary sector to empower individuals. Through donating time or money to causes they support, Canadians recognize that reaching out to help others is an important part of how our society functions. Canadians rely on the voluntary sector to help mend the frayed parts of our social fabric by channeling collective effort into causes that matter.

2. Focus on effective methods of advocacy.

In our media-saturated society, the voluntary sector tends to believe that effective advocacy requires information, contact with the media and, often, an unexpected direction that garners attention. The protests in Seattle over the World Trade Organization talks demonstrated the incredible power of ordinary people coming together to advocate, and the enormous media attention that was focused on their advocacy efforts affected the talks themselves.

Although most advocacy efforts are orderly and respectful - as was much of the experience in Seattle - some, like Seattle, have verged on or actually given rise to the opportunity for violence. Violence always ensures media attention, but it often buries the real message of the advocacy effort under an avalanche of sensationalism. There are many different ways to advocate: quietly making the point can be as effective as being out in the street or featured in the press.

How the media interpret and report on advocacy initiatives greatly influence public perception. The voluntary sector needs to use media coverage - rather than being used by it - to reinforce its advocacy efforts rather than subvert them.

3. Protect advocacy through lobbying for stable, long-term funding.

Advocacy is difficult if volunteers and voluntary organizations are engaged in a daily struggle for survival. When voluntary organizations must compete for funding, they necessarily look to protect what they have by not antagonizing the sources of their funding. As a result, dependence on specific sources of funding may limit their ability to advocate effectively for fear that their revenues will be cut. Faced with those circumstances, voluntary organizations may have to choose between advocating and continuing to provide direct services. Stable, long term funding for voluntary organizations would help maintain a proper role for advocacy while still ensuring their survival and maintaining their ability to deliver direct services.

Policy Directives and Future Actions

The symposium was structured so as to encourage reflection and debate. It offered participants a forum where they could explore ideas and bring forward suggestions about what must be done if Canada's voluntary sector is to move forward.

Through engaging in debate and discussion, through sharing experiences, through asking questions and searching for answers, symposium participants suggested important policy directives and possible future actions that, if undertaken, would advance the voluntary sector's ability to fulfill its role in Canadian society:

↳ **Definitions**

The voluntary sector needs clear definitions of and delineations between its sub-sectors so that the policy debate addresses the specific needs of each sub-sector, rather than being driven by only the loudest or largest.

↳ **Research and Measurement**

More knowledge about the voluntary sector is critically important in drafting policy that will enhance the sector's ability to meet the needs of its constituents. Funding must be found for research, and critical thinking needs to accompany the data analysis to ensure that policy development is based on concrete information and, at the same time, is sensitive to the specific needs of the sector.

↳ **Funding**

A comprehensive, co-ordinated policy review must address the need for stable, long-term funding for the voluntary sector. Policies relating to corporate and individual taxation affect donations and sponsorships, while provincial gaming policies have broad impact on many aspects of the voluntary sector.

↳ **Advocacy**

Advocacy is a crucial component in the voluntary sector's contribution to a civil society. Policy development must not impair or restrict the voluntary sector's ability to advocate.



↳ **Collaboration**

Policies that put voluntary sector organizations into direct competition with each other - for funding, for example - prevent collaboration. Collaboration within the voluntary sector will both empower and mobilize it, lending weight to its voice in the policy debate. Local and national consultations will ensure that the voluntary sector has broad representation and that no voices go unheard. Governments also need to collaborate with the voluntary sector, rather than competing with the sector or dictating to it, in determining what roles each can play in our society.

The symposium's participants hope that the ideas captured in this report will help inform leaders in all sectors about the issues and challenges facing the voluntary sector in Canada, and will provide a thoughtful catalyst for examining the policies that affect it. The participants are optimistic that more research and discussion will contribute positively to the policy debate, and will help set the voluntary sector upon the path toward a vibrant, collaborative and committed future.

Appendix 1: List of Participants

Voluntary Action and organization in Canada

November 28 – 30, 1999

Pramila Aggarwal
Community Worker Program
George Brown College, Toronto

Jason Azmier
Research Analyst
Canada West Foundation, Calgary

Robert Barnard
d-Code, Toronto

Henry Chong
Area Manager
Ontario Trillium Foundation, Toronto

Michael Clague
Clague Consultants, Vancouver
Board Member, The Carol Institute

Michael Cooke
Dean
Faculty of Community Services
& Health Sciences
George Brown College, Toronto
Board Member, The Carol Institute

Debbie Field
Executive Director
Foodshare Metro Toronto, Toronto

Patrick Flanagan
Youth Advocate
Solicitor General, Fredericton

Terry Gilhen
Program Director
Volunteer Canada, Ottawa

Victoria Gibb-Carsley
National Organizer
The Council of Canadians, Ottawa

Michael Hall
Vice President, Research
Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, Toronto

Al Hatton
Executive Director
Coalition of National Voluntary
Organizations, Ottawa

Diane Hill
Hagersville, Ontario

Ken Lyotier
Manager
United We Can, Vancouver

Don McRae
Senior Policy Officer
Department of Canadian Heritage, Ottawa

Robert Roach
Program Development
Canada West Foundation, Calgary

Linda Roberts
Multi-Service Coordinator
Captain William Spry Community Centre,
Halifax

David Robertson
Treasurer and Board Member
Foodshare Metro Toronto, Toronto



Mark Selman

Learning Strategies Group,
Faculty of Business Administration
Simon Fraser University, Vancouver
Board Member, The Carold Institute

Carolyn Sharp

Université St. Paul, Ottawa

Shelley Smith

d-Code, Toronto

Richard Swift

Editor
New Internationalist, Toronto

Frank Sorochinsky

President
George Brown College, Toronto

Alan Thomas

President
The Carold Institute, Toronto

Symposium Staff

Pat Bourke

Report Writer

Ingrid Norrish

Symposium co-ordinator

Appendix 2: Agenda

Voluntary Action Symposium

Program Outline

Sunday, November 28

- 2:00 p.m. Registration & Refreshments
3:00 p.m. Welcoming Remarks
Michael Cooke, George Brown College
3:15 p.m. Symposium Opening Remarks
Frank Sorochinsky, President George Brown College
Alan Thomas, Carol Institute
4:00 p.m. Overview Paper & Discussion
Michael Hall, Canadian Centre of Philanthropy
5:30 p.m. Reception

Monday, November 29

- 8:30 a.m. Continental Breakfast
Morning Program Chair: Carolyn Sharp
9:00 a.m. Finance Paper & Discussion
Jason Azmier, Canada West Foundation
10:30 a.m. Refreshment Break
10:45 a.m. Advocacy Paper & Discussion
Pramila Aggarwal, George Brown College
12:15 p.m. Lunch & Free Time
Afternoon Chair: Michael Clague
1:30 p.m. Administration Paper & Discussion
Debbie Field, Executive Director, FoodShare Metro Toronto
3:00 p.m. Refreshment Break
3:15 p.m. New Expressions Paper & Discussion
Robert Barnard, d- Code
4:45 p.m. Comments & Reflection
5:15 p.m. Adjourn
7:00 p.m. Dinner

Tuesday, November 30

- 8:00 a.m. Continental Breakfast
8:30 a.m. Symposium Summary, Recommendations, Ideas, Future Directions and Final Report Distribution
Chairs: Alan Thomas & Michael Cooke
11:45 p.m. Lunch
1:30 p.m. Adjourn



The Carold Institute

The Carold Institute, formally known as **The Clare and Harold Clark Institute for the Study of Charitable Activities in Canada** was founded in 1989, principally by Mrs. Clare Clark, with the assistance of Alan Thomas, Gordon Selman, and Win Hewetson. Its purpose is the *"study and promotion of voluntary action and organization in Canada, in the context of citizenship and social change"*.

Mrs. Clark's career included service to the YWCA, The Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE), and the Indian-Eskimo Association, which she founded. Particularly in her work with the Joint Planning Commission, an agency of the CAAE, she developed an abiding commitment to voluntary action and its critical role in the development and maintenance of citizenship. At her death, in 1997, she gave the bulk of her estate to the endowment of the Carold Institute.

Since its inception, the Institute has contributed fellowships to university-based programs devoted to improving skills and understanding in the management of non-governmental organizations, participated in jointly-sponsored symposia devoted to the greater understanding of the voluntary sector in Canada, and abroad, and supported such seminal voluntary activities as the current "Social Watch" project. It is interested in entertaining appropriate proposals for support, for cooperative projects, and for self initiated activities.

The Institute is committed to the belief that learning, in the context of voluntary participation, individual and collective, is the foundation of democracy.

Faculty Of Community Services And Health Sciences George Brown College

George Brown College (GBC) is one of Canada's largest and most diverse community colleges. Close to 10,000 full-time and 40,000 part-time students enroll in the college's programs each year. GBC is committed to be a leader in the fields of community services and health sciences, hospitality and tourism, and in selected areas of business, technology and creative arts.



With three campuses located in the inner core of downtown Toronto, it serves one of the world's most ethnically pluralistic communities. The college's mission statement commits it to working with partners from all sectors of our society and to providing high quality education that meets the evolving social and economic needs of the communities it serves. Its programs are aimed at enabling students to achieve their individual and career goals.

GBC's **Faculty of Community Services and Health Sciences** has over 3000 full-time and 10,000 part-time students. It works in partnership with more than 1000 community service and health care agencies to provide career training in this rapidly evolving sector. The Faculty also maintains partnerships and delivers programs in the United States, the United Kingdom, Bosnia, Jamaica, Cuba and South Africa.

The Faculty offers programs in community advocacy and development, child and youth work, early childhood education, counselling, intervention for deaf-blind persons, sign language interpretation, mental health care, senior care, dental and hearing care, nursing, home care, orthotics/prosthetics, and fitness and lifestyle management.

The Faculty has a keen interest in issues related to voluntary action, citizenship and adult learning. It works actively with many local and national partners to promote applied research, pilot projects and progressive public policy related to these issues.

Additional copies of this report can be obtained by contacting:

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