

Provincial Gathering of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Organizations
Nov. 4, 2010
Holiday Inn Harbourview, Dartmouth, NS
Full Conference Report

Introductions and Welcome

Welcome by emcee Sandra Murphy, Executive Director of Community Links, a provincial partner and a principal organizer of the event.

The Provincial Gathering event stemmed from community conversations held across Canada by Imagine Canada and from local gatherings held across Nova Scotia under the auspices of Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion and Protection –Volunteerism. It was hoped the discussions to follow would help chart the direction for moving the voluntary sector forward nationally and provincially.

Seventy-one (71) participants were registered and attending from non-profit and voluntary sector organizations in Nova Scotia. Fifteen resource people supported the event and ten government people participated in the morning session only.

National Engagement Strategy:
www.imaginecanada.ca/node/239

Brenda Cameron-Couch, Director, Community Outreach for Imagine Canada:
The geographic distribution of participants was a positive sign. She thanked Community Links for its effort in organizing the event, saying that local partners play a strong role in the quality of information received at the community level.

Ms. Murphy introduced the Honourable Marilyn More, Nova Scotia Minister of Labour and Workforce Development, Minister of Education, and the Minister responsible for the Voluntary Sector. Minister More has served in the Nova Scotia government since 2003, and brings to cabinet a strong background in community social development and volunteer development.

Minister More opened her remarks with a thank you to the nonprofit and volunteer representatives in attendance, and asked them to share her gratitude and support with their boards and colleagues. She provided an update on her meetings with the Nova Scotia Community Volunteer Advisory Council, regarding strategic directions for the sector and the Nova Scotia Government. Six members of the Council were in attendance; however, a show of hands at her request showed that less than a fifth of participants were aware of this council or its activities. She said there is a need to raise awareness of the work of this council, which was formed in March 2008 to provide understanding into the voluntary sector. She highlighted the work of the Federation of Community Organizations and Phoenix Youth Program in undertaking work that lead to the recent release of information from the NS Not-for-Profit and Voluntary Sector Research Project

that has shown that paid staff in the voluntary sector are very committed and has revealed several findings that the province wants to explore, including training, leadership development, and succession planning.

Minister More announced the Community Development Trust Voluntary Sector Professional Improvement Initiative, (www.gov.ns.ca/news/details.asp?id=20101104001) which is making available \$800,000 in federal funding to provide training, skill enhancement, and capacity development to assist the voluntary sector in improving productivity and innovation. Funding for the voluntary sector will continue to be more competitive, requiring organizations to “think outside the box” for operations and asset management.

In response to the growing demand for a unified voice for the voluntary sector, and an enhanced need for training and skills support, the Nova Scotia Government has launched a Voluntary Sector Division under its Department of Labour and Workforce Development. “This will provide a direct link to labour standards, occupational health and safety support, and skills enhancement.”

Framework for Action for the Non-Profit Sector: Drivers of Change and Actions to Consider

www.imaginecanada.ca/files/www/en/publicpolicy/framework_for_action.pdf

Michelle Gauthier, Vice President, Public Policy and Outreach, Imagine Canada, provided context for recent community conversations and highlights of forum results to date.

Canada’s voluntary sector includes 12.5 million volunteers and 2 million paid employees, representing \$100.7 billion or 7% of the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). One consistent message received in community forums across the country is that the voluntary sector has a leadership role to play, and it needs to leverage this power more effectively. Voluntary sector members are typically quick to celebrate diversity and hold a strong sense of what divides rather than unites, which can be an admirable strength but hinders a collective voice. Another strong message: the sector must ensure it is seen not with a perpetual hand out for money but a consistent creator and provider of its own solutions. This is a sign of maturity in the sector, Gauthier said. She encouraged participants to each have a “30 second elevator speech” prepared at all times to share the works and needs of their organizations, including how they are adapting to changing demands and resources. “If we don’t do it for ourselves it will be done for us or to us,”

The overarching driver is the changing demographic of Canadian society: an aging population, increased urbanization, increasing cultural diversity, and a growing aboriginal youth population.

The seven drivers of change were then summarized:

Driver 1: *the increasing importance of social innovation, including new products, services and behaviors*

Driver 2: *structural shifts in the revenue base supporting charities and nonprofits, including an increase in the public's demand for clarification of what charities and or not do for revenue generation or funding programs*

Driver 3: *shortage of talent to strengthen and lead charitable and nonprofit organizations.*

Gauthier shared the story of a colleague who admits to telling bright young talent to gain their experience in the voluntary sector and then progress to a full-time job in the public or private sector, because she can't "in good conscience" recommend they invest their careers in a sector with low wages and no pension.

Driver 4: *lack of growth in the number of volunteers to govern, support and promote civic and community organizations.*

Gauthier shared the experience of a food bank manager in need of volunteers who, as a mother of young children, recognized the need for her peers to share their time with a place in which their children are also engaged. The result was a new volunteer program for children ages 7-14. Gauthier also emphasized the need to promote the importance of good governance, sharing the experience of an animal rescue centre which has more than enough volunteers to go rescue animals but has no new talent for the board of directors that ensures the service is sustained.

Driver 5. *heightened demand for transparency, accountability, communication of impact and public policy engagement.*

Gauthier said the voluntary sector has to learn to say no when the cost of fundraising or service provision is not sustainable or in keeping with their organization's goals. Recent national media reports on the high expenses of some non-profit organizations has called into question the reputation every member of the voluntary sector, including those that have exercised fiscal responsibility. As a result of these unbalanced reports, organizations are faced with a loss of donations and volunteer support and an increased demand for accountability, leaving fewer hours and dollars for their actual service delivery.

Driver 6: *growing need for transformative partnerships among charities and nonprofits and with other sectors.*

Gauthier said there is much discussion of cooperation, but in reality the limited amount of resources in communities creates competition rather than collaboration. Organizations must seriously consider how cooperation can work, be it in shared space and staff or joint programs. "Evolve from retribution to contribution, transactional to transformational," Gauthier said.

Driver 7: *Increased use of social media and new technologies for community engagement, outreach to youth and networking*

In her invitation to tables to discuss potential actions within these drivers, Gauthier offered a quote: The best way to predict the future is to invent it yourself. “I look forward to that,” she said.

The Provincial Context: Challenges and Opportunities

Andrea Caven, Program Coordinator with the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development, Voluntary Sector division, provided a summary of discussions from the Local Gatherings held in 11 communities across Nova Scotia: Barrington, Bridgewater, Stellarton, Truro, Antigonish, Halifax, Windsor, Amherst, Port Hawkesbury, Kentville, and a teleconference linking members of seven Acadian francophone communities.

The summary report and notes from each Local Gathering:
www.gov.ns.ca/hpp/volunteerism/Local-Gatherings.asp

Local Gathering discussions focused on success stories and their contributing factors, challenges and opportunities and priorities for action.

Mutual challenges included:

- Access to funding, specifically a lack of core or multiple-year funding, requiring a yearly scramble for dollars and hindering long-term programs and planning
- Volunteerism: aging volunteers, fewer volunteers, youth engagement, recruitment and training costs, and a lack of paid staff.
- Organizational leadership and capacity building: the need for good governance, leadership, vision, and skills; increased demand for legal and financial accountability and protection; need for greater appreciation of the voluntary sector among government and communities not only as a service provider but a major employer: 24,500 in Nova Scotia.
- Legal/liability requirements: organizations are experiencing the challenge of having to meet more legal and financial requirements, attain certain standards, complete funding reports and submit lengthy proposals, and make sure volunteers have a police record check.
- Public and government appreciation for the Voluntary Non-profit sector: concern about level of understanding of the work and role of the Sector, and whether value is placed on the role and contribution of volunteers.

Priorities identified by the discussions included:

- Funding
- Collaboration
- Investing in HR
- Capacity building
- Creating Volunteerism infrastructure and supports
- Volunteer incentives
- Volunteerism Strategies

Linkages between challenges and opportunities, and the Imagine Canada drivers were made throughout the presentation. In this way, participants were able to see the connection between the two presentations, and were supported to move forward with discussions about the Challenges, Opportunities and Drivers.

Table Discussions: Challenges, Opportunities, and Drivers

With the national and provincial contexts provided, participants were then asked for their own perspectives via table discussions.

Participants were asked to discuss:

- Surprises, if any, in the national and provincial perspectives
- Examples of innovation and challenges in connection to the drivers

Each table group was asked to list the three drivers they felt were the most important.

Surprises:

- Drivers do not articulate that the value of the sector is widely misunderstood.
- Pleased that National strategy reinforced the Provincial context
- The new Voluntary Sector division under the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development is a business model; the Province of Nova Scotia is “miles ahead” of the federal government and general public in recognizing that the voluntary and nonprofit sector functions as business, with financial forecasting and accountability
- Youth mentioned only in Driver 7 in connection with social media; youth should be a priority in each driver
- The overarching driver did not include poverty, and the environment and climate change.
- Charitable organizations rarely or not at all included in the local gatherings
- Information gathering did not include electronic surveys
- Little mention of immigrant inclusion and support
- Growth in aboriginal youth population not seen in Nova Scotia

Examples of Innovation and Challenges within the Drivers:

Driver 1: *The increasing importance and influence of social innovation in Canada*

General comments:

- Small actions when multiplied can have a ripple effect
- ‘Buy Local’ was a voluntary sector initiative later taken over by the provincial government
- Organizational mindset: think “what can I contribute?” rather than “what can I get/receive?”

Driver 2: *Structural shifts in the revenue base which supports the work of charitable and nonprofit organization*

Examples of innovation:

- International micro-credit
- Presenting a business face to the community; not asking for donations but earning business and generating revenue
- Presenting a business case for services provided: ie \$90 per day to keep a senior healthy in his/her own home compared to \$140/day for a long-term care facility
- Rather than diversifying funding, talk of merging funding
- Have uniform record-keeping for agency accountability
- Not new funding needed, but new framing for existing funding
- Hold fundraising workshops: proposal writing, fee setting, memberships etc.

Point of debate: some say times of economic fiscal restraint make it tough to compete for dollars; others say the time is ideal to promote value for service

Driver 3: *Shortage of talent to strengthen and lead charitable and nonprofit organizations*

Examples of innovation:

- A National Compensation Review to ensure competitiveness
- Saint Leonard's Society of Nova Scotia in the past two years has focused on staff development, introducing a matching RSP (Retirement Savings Plan) program, comprehensive benefits package and education allowances, and will soon introduce an EAP (Employee Assistance Program).
 - o Challenges identified here: An organization with good governance and a strong board can provide these benefits. However, when a board changes, its agenda can change and the programs may not be maintained
 - o Unions or associations advocating for nonprofit employees may demand things that an individual nonprofit organization cannot afford
- Volunteer mentorship program, in which an experienced volunteer mentors a new recruit
- Introduce volunteerism in high school as a curriculum unit
- Seek local champions, such as community pharmacies, to get the word out of resources and services available
- Volunteer trading, provides rotating resource for agencies and avoids volunteer burnout.
- Provide flex time for professional development
- Skill "hubs" for key talent and skills, such as legal, financial, facilitation, etc.
 - o Challenge identified: volunteers with a passion for a cause may not fit in or continue if tasked with something else
- Summer and other seasonal dwellers are an untapped volunteer resource

General comment: "There is a discount on passion, yet there should be a premium."

Driver 4: *Lack of growth in the number of volunteers to govern, support and promote civic and community organizations*

Examples of innovation:

- Issue specific invitations to sectors of the community

- Senior-youth partnerships and mentorships
- Include volunteerism as a school credit

Suggestion: To engage youth, avoid listing mission statements and targets; choose instead to list specific tasks, hours required, and potential rewards, all in plain language

Challenge: Rural transportation lacking in many areas, keeping potential volunteers away from opportunities

Driver 5: *Heightened demand for transparency, accountability, communication of impact and public policy engagement*

Examples of innovation:

- Include Genuine Progress Index (GPI): use its data to illustrate and support voluntary sector contributions
- Government could provide resources to assist with necessary documentation

Challenges:

- Volunteer sectors need to be able to advocate without fear of reprisal or penalty
- It is our responsibility to create an organization to deal with government
- Government ties the hands of the voluntary sector, framing it as ‘special interest’ and controlling funding
- Government needs to recognize there is a cost to volunteering, and the sector needs recognition and support to offset these costs

Driver 6: *Growing need for transformative partnerships among charities and nonprofits and with other sectors*

Examples of innovation:

- A partnership between VPN, Atlantic School of Theology and Cancer Care Nova Scotia has resulted in three annual workshops with 350-plus participants each for health professionals, volunteers, and chaplains on topics of shared concern such as loneliness, grief, and surviving the loss of a loved one
- Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS), a data collection tool for shelters and outreach programs, is a partnership between the federal government, Computers for Schools, and community organizations
- Making Change, through the Social Action Committee of Second Story Women’s Centre, partners transition houses with the RCMP, Nova Scotia Community College, banks, real estate companies, and other organizations and businesses to address the issue of violence against women and girls, resulting in greater awareness of the issue and a more positive, inclusive means of moving forward
- Women’s Institute members created 12,000 finger puppets for patients receiving blood tests at the IWK children’s hospital

Challenges:

- There is a belief that collaboration can or must be forced, but it is a process. Nonprofits understand this, but government tends not to.
- There is the need for partnership, but there is the need to be ready for it first.

Driver 7: *Increased use of social media and new technologies for community engagement, outreach to youth and networking*

Examples of innovation:

- An on-line game such as Gameful or SF Zero that promotes real-world collaboration. The site functions similar to a social networking site: users create and account and profile and link to friends and organizations that create “challenges” for the users to complete, offering rewards to encourage participation in positive pursuits such as volunteerism and healthy living.
- SKYPE conferences used for board members, to bridge geography and avoid costly travel
- National infrastructure organization, information at volunteer.ca
- Creating new web site to help sectors and volunteers find perfect match
- Facebook meets Craigslist meets LavaLife

Challenges:

- Social media is a powerful resource, but there are costs (technology, training, time)
- Social media helps people and agencies stay connected, but does not build relationships
- Many rural communities have limited access to high-speed internet

Some volunteers and employees are not allowed to have a workplace Facebook site, as they can be hard to manage and control, and require justifiable work time

Top Drivers:

Driver 6: *Growing need for transformative partnerships among charities and nonprofits and with other sectors*

Driver 7: *Increased use of social media and new technologies for community engagement, outreach to youth and networking*

Driver 2: *Structural shifts in the revenue base which supports the work of charitable and nonprofit organization*

Driver 3: *Shortage of talent to strengthen and lead charitable and nonprofit organizations*

Some tables commented that all seven drivers seemed too interconnected to enable choice of just three; the list seemed unbalanced with a blend of true drivers and facilitating drivers

Several tables listed combined drivers as one choice. Two tables felt Drivers 3 and 6 were connected. Other examples include Drivers 1+7, Drivers 3+4, Drivers 6+7, and Drivers 2+3+7.

Lunch Break and Speaker

Veronica McNeil, of the Federation of Community Organizations (FOCO), presented the findings of Study of Nova Scotia's Not-for-Profit Voluntary Sector Labour Force. This research was undertaken as a partnership of FOCO and Phoenix House Youth Program with funding from HRSDC.

Details are available at www.foco.ca

Table Discussions/Possible Actions

One table was designated for each of the seven possible actions circulated from the national and provincial perspectives. Participants were asked to sit at the table for the action they wished to discuss. The assembled groups were given 15 minutes to select one or two priorities to support each of these actions. Groups were then asked to circulate to different tables to round out discussions. Selected priorities were recorded on flip charts for viewing and Dotmocracy.

Discussion summaries and selected priorities:

Possible Action 1: Solidify our funding base

Priorities:

1. Multiyear funding with annual evaluation: this eliminates the need for annual applications, as funding would be based on performance
 - critical for project success
 - -avoid burnout/drain on community and volunteer resources
2. A volunteer navigation position, to act as a central and collective voice for the funding application process in the region
 - explain financial data and service provision in business terms
 - gain reputation as major employer and significant sector
 - unify voice to lobby government for funding on behalf of sector
3. Policy review:
 - Align tax incentives for nonprofit donations with those allowed for political donations
 - Clearly define 'charity': what groups/activities qualify, and why
 - Change reporting and funding application procedures that consume human resources and hinder long-term planning
 - Need mechanism to support sector in times of fiscal restraint

Possible Action 2: Invest in our Human Resources and Build Capacity

Priorities:

1. Sustained funding for compensation, pension, and benefits
 - Employees leave because they cannot afford to stay or because there are few opportunities for advancement
 - People stay till they fall down or do they leave only when they can work no longer.
 - What can I do to get over my exhaustion from my compassion?

2. Develop an innovative HR campaign/ strategy on the unique benefits of working the Non-profit sector.
 - The oldest and the youngest are giving the most hours into volunteering
 - 16-24 are the ages of the majority of people who are volunteering. The biggest group of volunteers has the least number of hours. Seniors are at 30% doing the most amounts of hours
 - Focus on the benefits, such as flexible schedules, building of transferable skills,

3. Increase organizational capacity through training, and good practices
 - Govt wants numbers -the report that came out last week will be helpful. They have the numbers, to say we have 24,000 working in the voluntary sector. This is more than the military. We need to continue to quantify the information
 - We need more mentorships, working in isolation is hard, I'd like to be able to have someone to call up and say "hey, I have this (whatever), what do you think?" They don't have to be in your exact sector, just have someone talk to. We need to get more orgs. working together so we don't feel like we are working all alone
 - Webinars is a good tool to use.
 - Encourage workplace boundary-setting; limit hours worked, after-hours work, computer/Blackberry use

Possible Action 3: Introduce more Sustainable Operating Models

Priorities:

1. Sector Council, which would be a representative of all of the subsectors, including health, recreation, justice, and other agencies.
 - Educate our employees and volunteers, and a central body (possibly a co-op) would help provide this.
 - FOCO - Federation of Community Organizations, Water Co-op Association of Nova Scotia, HANS - Health Association of Nova Scotia are examples
 - There needs to be a volunteer navigator by region, so they can act as a resource to help smaller groups of people.

2. A regulatory shift to enable **social enterprise** for nonprofits: government gives a lot of money to colleges and universities. Why can't other nonprofits get this same type of funding?

Possible Action 4: Foster knowledge mobilization and social innovation

Priorities:

1. Invest in clarification of knowledge mobilization process and platforms to get new ideas into the hands of sector organizations, funders, and the public
2. Monitor sector policies in other jurisdictions to inform our efforts in policy, regulatory innovative efforts
 - Need mechanism to identify and share
 - Need definition of social 'innovation': clear language
 - Sector has knowledge but needs to understand what is meant by mobilization
3. Examine ways to provide information within subsectors on effective program and service delivery models

Possible Action 5: Strengthen governance, transparency, accountability and public policy engagement

Priorities:

1. Boards need support and training to:
 - Be aware of and have tools to respond to existing standards: e.g. Canada Revenue Agency, Registry of Joint Stocks
 - To engage in advocacy for public policy development on behalf of the organization, client, and sector
 - Commit to government transparency and accountability to service users and community members
2. Promote recognition of the volunteer sector as a sector which contributes to the public good, leverages resources, and contributes to the economy
3. A requirement to revisit the definition of 'charity' and the language used to describe ourselves, then using the definition to strengthen us as a sector of industry

Possible Action 6: Develop a greater awareness of the sector's contributions and impacts

Priorities:

1. Establish a provincial voice to build and sustain capacity across the sector and promote the mobilization of knowledge and research about the Sector.

- Outcome is a reliable and robust network with a diverse membership.
2. Survey the sector on a regular basis to document the contribution of the sector and the challenges organizations are facing.
- impact statements
 - create benchmarks
 - share common tools as the standard
 - need to access all voluntary organizations to understand
 - survey, document to create outcome of impact statements and benchmarks, sharing common tools on the standard.
 - Outcome is an up-to-date information, database
- language needs to be accessible (simplified).

Outcome is we become a voice of influence for the Voluntary Sector (own champions)

Possible Action 7: Build strong infrastructure to support volunteerism

Priorities:

1. Develop regional volunteer centres, including a physical space
 - Considered a key, through which everything else evolves
 - Strategy needs to accommodate both urban and rural needs
 - To support work of volunteers and organizations that work with volunteers
 - Provide structure, entry point, and literal gathering spot for training, funding support, and information
 - Requires signage and advertising so people can locate and be aware of existence
 - Can support development of volunteer pools
2. Provincial database, accessible by everyone, to provide information on important topics such as liability insurance, volunteer resource centres, navigators for immigration and volunteerism, criminal records checks
 - Onus on organizations to become culturally competent
 - Onus on organizations to be informed
3. Volunteer navigators throughout the province
 - Educate own citizens first, whom can then educate newcomers and peers in the community
 - Start at the municipal level
 - Can keep media informed and volunteers engaged
4. Raise awareness of volunteerism via a social marketing campaign

Walkabout and Dotmocracy

Each participant was given four stickers and time to circulate among the charts of each of the seven Potential Actions, with representatives from each table presenting their priority actions for vote. Participants were asked to choose up to four priority actions, marking each with a sticker.

The voting results were as follows:

1. Establish a sector council (**Priority Action 6: *Develop a greater awareness of the sector's contributions and impact***)
2. Establish a provincial voice (**Priority Action 3: *Introduce more sustainable operating models***)
3. Develop regional volunteer service centres, with a physical space (**Priority Action 7: *Build strong infrastructure to support volunteerism***)
Note: One vote was attached with a qualifier: “If [the centre] includes an engaging game that is collaborative and fun, then I’m supportive ... centres are usually boring, though.”
4. Provide sustained funding for compensation benefits: pension and medical (**Priority Action 2: *Invest in our human resources and build capacity***)

Closing Remarks

Andrea Caven, Program Coordinator with the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development, said the day’s discussions provided valuable information to her department on the importance of volunteerism and what government can do to support the voluntary sector as a labour force. She said she was struck by discussion of language, and how important the proper word choice and clarity of language is to fostering discussion, identifying commonalities and moving forward. She said many of the connections discussed in this event mirror the information shared in previous events, providing a solid base for getting down to action. She encouraged participants to take the ideas shared at this event back to their groups and communities to begin conversations about what can be done and what is possible. She encouraged use of the participant list for networking and action.

Michelle Gauthier, Vice-President, Public Policy and Outreach, Imagine Canada, acknowledged that discussions can often create momentum that is challenging to maintain in reality. The process of “working local” to move the agenda forward is encouraging, she said, thanking Community Links and the Province of Nova Scotia for being such supportive partners in this provincial gathering. She encouraged participants to view the gathering as a journey rather than a destination, and asked them to share and

promote dialogue with their boards, staff and communities. She also encouraged use of the Imagine Canada blog to share feedback and future conversations:

<http://blog.imaginecanada.ca/>

Participants were advised of the 2011 National Summit, Nov. 28 and 29 in Ottawa. Further details on the National Engagement Strategy, Framework for Action and the Summit are available at www.imaginecanada.ca/node/239

Sandra Murphy, Executive Director of Community Links and the Nova Scotia partner for this provincial gathering, said it was a great experience for her organization to work with the provincial and national partners. She thanked Veronica McNeil and Brenda Wallace-Allen for serving on the local planning committee, as well as the volunteer facilitators and recorders and the students from NSCC Kingstech Campus who served as traditional note takers and social media networkers during the event.

Reception:

Participants at the event retired to a following reception. Three presentations were made on various aspects innovation. These were:

Chris Fyles from Lakes City Employment Services Association spoke on social entrepreneurship and the multiple opportunities which opened up to Lake City when the decision was made to purchase their own space.

Mary Lu Redden of Humanities 101 spoke on innovative fundraising and the exciting event that happened when they organized a 24 hour reading of the Odyssey and the use of social media which lead to raising \$24,000 in 24 hours.

Carol Pickings-Anthony, of the Lunenburg/Queens Volunteer Partnership shared an innovative video for youth recruitment which has just been produced and is being utilized in local schools.

November 5th

Participants attended one of three workshops: 1) Risk Management offered by Dr. Norman O'Reilly on behalf of Imagine Canada; 2) Social Financing offered by Nora Sobolov, manager and CEO of Community Forward Fund; and 3) Volunteer Recruitment and Retention offered by Max Chauvin at the request of the local planning committee.