

**Recommendation to the NS Government
Volunteerism Interdepartmental Coordinating Committee**

*For the Establishment of the
NS Volunteer Community Advisory Committee*

Prepared by the Steering Committee
Volunteer Community Stakeholder Meeting – May 14, 2006

Based on the Meeting Report prepared by
Horizons Community Development Assoc. Inc.

June 21, 2007

BACKGROUND

Volunteers and the voluntary sector are both essential contributors to Nova Scotia communities and to the high quality of life enjoyed by Nova Scotia citizens.

The Voluntary Sector represents a diversity of services, programs, and interests, and touches virtually all aspects of society including social services, human rights, education, international, environment, health, faith, arts, culture, sports and recreation. Non-profit organizations also provide people of all ages and backgrounds with the opportunity to activate their citizenship.

Volunteering, either through individual or group action, is a way in which human values of community, caring, and servicing can be sustained and strengthened: individuals can exercise their rights and responsibilities as members of communities, while learning and growing throughout their lives, realizing their full human potential; and, connections can be made across differences that push us apart so that we can live together in healthy, sustainable communities, working together to provide innovative solutions to our shared challenges and to shape our collective destinies

Beyond the significant contribution of the voluntary sector to our social fabric, the sector is also a powerful economic force. The 5,829 nonprofit and voluntary organizations in Nova Scotia benefit from 73,515,000 million hours of volunteer time, the equivalent of 40,842 full time jobs. In Atlantic Canada, 62% of all organizations work within their own neighborhood, city, town or rural municipality. This is almost identical to the country as a whole where 64% focus at a local level and 19% on a region or a province level.

According to the 2004 National Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participation, 377,000 Nova Scotians volunteered their time to charities and other nonprofit organizations, at a rate of 45%, contributing on average 195 hours. In recent years a number of issues have emerged that will have an impact not only on volunteers and the health of voluntary sector organizations, but also on the attractiveness and sustainability of Nova Scotia communities. Attending to these issues is essential to ensuring the ongoing contributions of volunteers and the voluntary sector to the quality of life of Nova Scotia citizens, and vitality of Nova Scotia communities.

Since 2001, much has been accomplished to enhance volunteer opportunities and support the voluntary sector in Nova Scotia, including:

- the Rural Volunteer Partnership;
- the International Year of Volunteers (2001);
- the establishment of regional groups and volunteer coalitions such as the Federation of Community Organizations, and Cape Breton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations;

- the work of the Nova Scotia Canada Volunteerism Initiative (CVI) Network
- the CVI *Talking with Volunteers* Report;
- the Nova Scotia Community Development Policy;
- the passing of the Volunteer Protection Act;
- the appointment of a Minister responsible for Volunteerism;
- and the formation of the Volunteerism Interdepartmental Coordinating Committee (VICC)

Efforts such as these have underscored the benefits of the volunteer community working in cooperation, and the value of a mechanism for engagement with government.

Government Support for Volunteerism:

In the spring of 2006, the Nova Scotia Government made the commitment to support volunteerism in Nova Scotia. As outlined in the Spring 2006 Speech from the Throne, the government publicly recognized the valuable contributions made by volunteers in all communities across Nova Scotia. At this time the Government appointed the Honourable Barry Barnet as the first Minister of Volunteerism.

The Department of Health Promotion and Protection was asked to take the lead for this cross-government, corporate portfolio. At the same time, the roll out plans for the NS Community Development Policy incorporated the need to support volunteers and recognize the importance of volunteers for developing healthy and sustainable communities. As a result an interdepartmental committee was established through the Community Development Advisory Group (CDAG). The committee, through collaboration with the Nova Scotia Network of the Canada Volunteerism Initiative (NSCVI) identified a list of priorities and developed an action plan for Government.

Currently, several of these priorities have been initiated, such as developmental work around insurance, the retention and recruitment of volunteers, development of community volunteer resource centers, database collection, promotion of volunteerism, understanding government reliance on volunteers, etc. Above all, will be the need to foster a collaborative working relationship and partnership with volunteers and volunteer organizations across Nova Scotia.

As a result of a May 14th meeting with volunteer community stakeholders from across Nova Scotia, this proposal has been prepared and submitted to VICC for recommendation to the Minister of Volunteerism.

The Department of Health Promotion and Protection has identified the need to provide more resources to this portfolio and will be hiring a full time program officer to work more closely with stakeholders to develop and implement a long term strategy. A new staff person should be in place by fall 2007.

Process:

On May 14, 2007, the Volunteer Community Stakeholder Meeting Steering Committee, comprised of four members of the former Canada Volunteerism Initiative Coordinating Committee and three members of the Volunteerism Interdepartmental Coordinating Committee, brought together over 40 community volunteers, voluntary sector and government representatives.

Meeting participants were drawn from the diverse community non-profit sector in Nova Scotia. Consideration was given to geography, non-profit sub sectors (sport, heritage, health, etc.), demographics, culture, government, and paid and unpaid volunteer perspectives.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the need for, and identify a preferred model for a provincial structure/mechanism to build capacity within the Nova Scotia volunteer community that provides a means to communicate and collaborate with the provincial government, complement existing volunteer initiatives, and support continued growth of volunteers in Nova Scotia.

Recommendation:***Structure:***

- Ensure that the principles of inclusion, accountability, and cultural awareness are integrated into the approved committee structure.
- Form a provincial advisory committee - the Nova Scotia Volunteer Community Advisory Committee (NS-VCAC).
- The advisory committee would meet four times per year with two meetings in Halifax and two in other regions of the province. Each meeting would include a forum with the Minister Responsible for Volunteerism. The meetings would be one day, 10:00am – 3:00pm.
- The advisory committee would consist of 20-25 members.

Membership Recommendations for Province-Wide Structure/Mechanism:

- Committee members would represent specifically targeted sectors, traditionally marginalized or population - based communities, and be based on the nine geographic regions of the District Health Authorities. The eight voluntary sub sectors would include: Health, Religion, Environment, Arts and Culture, Social Development and Services, Sport and Recreation, Philanthropic/Volunteer Promotion, and International Development. The population-based communities would include: Acadian, African Nova Scotian, Aboriginal, Immigrants, Persons with Disabilities, Seniors, and Youth.

- The advisory committee would be supported by staff and financial resources provided by the Department of Health Promotion and Protection. Financial supports would include: meeting costs, meals, translation, transportation, administration, and professional services.
 - Membership would be open for voluntary sector organizations (provincial/national affiliates), regional and grassroots organizations and volunteers.
 - The Minister of Volunteerism would sit on the advisory committee as an ex-officio member.
- Upon approval of these recommendations for a province-wide structure, VICC will need to determine a process for identification and recruitment of members for the NS-VCAC.

Functions/Purpose Recommendations:

- Develop action plans to address key issues affecting volunteers and the voluntary sector in Nova Scotia.
- Build and support volunteer capacity.
- Act as a communication link between the volunteer community and government.
- Develop and maintain a relationship with government, championing the issues of volunteers and the voluntary sector, and providing input on public policy.
- Develop an accountability mechanism for reporting back to volunteers and communities through provincial networks, local and regional groups, and through government departments. For example using report cards and websites to ensure the reach is inclusive.

Guiding Principles:

***Inclusion** – Ensure opportunities for all Nova Scotians regardless of gender, age, abilities, race, culture, language, or social or economic status to participate and have their contributions valued.

***Cultural Awareness** – Foster the understanding that all Nova Scotians must be treated fairly, acknowledging cultural differences.

Accountability – All collective action between government, volunteers and/or the voluntary sector must have incorporated and assigned specific responsibilities.

* Definitions based on The Nova Scotia Community Development Policy and the Public Service Commission Affirmative Action Policy

Next Steps Recommendations:

- Communicate clearly and openly with volunteer community representatives about the structure, role, functions, priorities, committed resources, and composition of the provincial advisory committee.
- Establish guiding principles and values for the advisory committee.
- Incorporate the feedback provided by meeting participants in the pre-meeting survey in future planning.

Budget – Year One:

- HPP will provide secretariat duties for the NS-VCAC, i.e. meeting logistics, minute taking, communications, follow-up, expenses and information processing.
- Travel for NS-VCAC members - \$3000 per two meetings
- Meeting expenses - \$500 per two meetings
- General administration - \$1000
- Professional services - \$2000
- Translation – 10% of total budget for year one \$10,000 = \$1000 (shared 50% with Offices of Acadian Affairs)
- Total budget for first year, 2007-08 is **\$11,000.00**

Reporting Relationships:

- NS-VCAC would be co-chaired by HPP staff along with someone chosen from the advisory committee membership.
- Recommendations from the NS-VCAC would be presented to VICC for discussion and presentation to the Minister.
- The Chair(s) of VICC would prepare briefing documentation for presentation to the Minister and Deputy Minister for approval and for Cabinet if necessary.

Communications:

- A thank you letter will be prepared and issued by the Steering Committee Co-Chairs of the May 14 Volunteer Stakeholder meeting. The letter will be sent to meeting participants, informing them of the timelines we are proposing for next steps.
- A communications plan will be prepared immediately by HPP communications staff to support the development of this advisory committee:
 - Upon approval of these recommendations from VICC, Ministerial correspondence will be prepared for May 14 participants and a copy of the approved report;
 - An announcement of the formation of the provincial advisory committee will be made and copies of the report will be distributed to key stakeholders.
- Prepare an announcement for when the committee is established and the principles and objectives of the work of the NS-VCAC are finalized.

- A communications strategy would be prepared by HPP communications staff to outline the need and the how to communicate consistently and regularly with the volunteer community across Nova Scotia. The strategy would outline the medium of communications available and appropriate, (i.e. websites, newsletters, presentations, government announcements, e bulletins, local meetings), define target audiences – both internal to government and external to the volunteer community.

Draft Timeline:

June 21/07	Presentation of report and recommendations to VICC
June/07	Thank you letter sent to May 14 participants from Steering Committee Co-Chairs
July /07	VICC comments/approval of recommendations
July/07	VICC presentation to Minister, seek approval with establishment of the Nova Scotia – Volunteer Community Advisory Committee
August/07	Establish process for membership selection
September/07	Report back to May 14 participants by Minister
October/07	Finalize membership of NS-VCAC
January/08	First meeting of the NS-VCAC

Voluntary Sector - Sub Sectors

The International Classification of Nonprofit Organizations (ICNPO) is being used to determine the classification of voluntary sector organizations by primary area of activity. It is the classification system recommended in the UN *Handbook on Non-Profit Institutions in the System of National Accounts*, and used by Statistics Canada, Imagine Canada and others.

Recreation and Sport

Volunteers and nonprofit groups are the back-bone of the recreation and sport delivery system in Nova Scotia. They make it happen through the efforts of thousands of volunteers, by guiding local community clubs and centers to provide safe and affordable places for children to play, hosting tournaments, serving on boards, building trails, driving teams to events, fund raising, and coaching and refereeing.

For some organizations, it's about quality of community life and the health of the province. For others, it's the challenge to perform at your best when the pressure is on. And for others still, it's about the chance for our citizens (young and old) to have fun, make new friends and to learn new skills.

Arts and Culture

The arts and cultural sub sector includes hundreds of not-for-profit organizations, and thousands of volunteers involved in a variety of disciplines: theatre, music, dance, visual arts, broadcasting, cinema, crafts, museums and literature.

Volunteers are at the frontlines of many arts organizations: they sit on boards, work on committees, advocate with public and private funders, organize fundraising events, sell tickets and manage booths, etc. They organize visits for school children in museums and art galleries, accompany them to plays and readings, and sometimes host artists from out of town when the company cannot afford to put them up in hotels!

They create events and support institutions that service and attract tourists. They help by making our communities vibrant and exciting places to live in and attract investment.

By giving time, effort and money, the arts and culture volunteer force works towards improving the quality of life in our communities and contributing to the moral and economic well-being of their fellow citizens.

Health

The sub sector is made up of largely diverse types of organizations, programs and services. Hospitals and other large health care institutions, such as nursing homes and out patient treatment centers are juxtaposed with small disease-specific health charities working on shoe-string budgets. Some health organizations get financial support from government(s) but almost all rely on donated dollars for some or all of their programming.

All groups working in health strive to be caring, hopeful, compassionate and collaborative. Health charities bring together a wealth of knowledge, expertise, experience and resources, all of which improve the health of Nova Scotians and strengthen Nova Scotia's health care system.

Individually and collectively, health charities make significant contributions in key areas of health including:

- Health care delivery
- Health Promotion, Public Health and Wellness Education
- Health research
- Health information, surveillance and awareness
- Patient, family and community support

Social Development and Services

Social development and service organizations are key contributors to strong communities, providing services and supports to help Nova Scotians enhance their participation in the community and ultimately improve their quality of life. In broad terms, social development/services organizations have been defined as those that "improve the institutional infrastructure and capacity to alleviate social problems and to improve well-being."

These voluntary sector organizations form an important part of the social safety net that helps build healthy, caring communities, providing a range of human services for individuals and families. Social development organizations provide economic security programs, youth outreach services, programs that address violence against women, prevention and early intervention services. They strengthen community through education and research, supports and services for people with special needs, Aboriginal peoples, affordable housing and homelessness initiatives. They advocate for those with disabilities and support new Canadians.

These organizations work on their own, through networks, collaborative partnerships and action coalitions. Social development organizations in Nova Scotia serve diverse communities – local, regional and provincial – and various communities of interest. They are your local social planning council, food bank, neighbourhood organization, literacy program and seniors centre. They are anti-poverty organizations, youth help lines, and groups providing leading research.

Environment

The environment sub sector in Canada encompasses over 2,000 non-profit and philanthropic organizations. They deal with a multitude of specific concerns over a wide range of issues: agriculture, health, biodiversity, hazardous waste, recycling, water management, ecotourism, urban management, international relations, community development, environment rights, ethics, economics, and climate change, to name but a few.

In general, each group is governed by a board of directors and brings together thousands of citizens, volunteers and paid workers of every background and with all types of expertise. Members promote sustainable development and try to create a better, safer and more just world. What unites them is the desire to protect the earth and, above all, to promote and institute healthy lifestyles. While some of these groups raise public awareness about recycling or go to communities to teach children about the importance of sustainable development, others conduct environment research and analysis, and promote the natural environment through tourism.

The efforts of this sub sector has inspired policies to protect endangered species, develop and implement the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, increase the number of parks and protected areas, expand urban transportation, and extend recycling depots. Their initiatives have led to the restoration of thousands of kilometres of riverbanks and the protection of wetlands, and raised questions about the way we extract natural resources and use our energy resources.

Philanthropic intermediaries and voluntarism promotion

This sub-sector is defined as “philanthropic organizations and organizations promoting charity and charitable activities, including grant-making organizations, organizations promoting and supporting volunteerism, and fundraising organizations”.

The ultimate objective of these organizations is to strengthen and build capacity among non-profits and voluntary organizations. They enrich the existing potential and enable organizations to deliver their respective missions by providing various forms of support (financial, technical, volunteer-matching, etc.).

Many organizations extend the more traditional forms of support by also providing leadership through strategic advice, policy advice and direction, consultation and other services.

International

The international development sub-sector in Nova Scotia includes registered charities and nonprofit organizations working both in the province and overseas. Among them are faith-based and secular development groups, professional associations, co-operatives, labour unions, and groups devoted to such issues as health, literacy, education, youth, and disaster relief. With shared values and a common goal of ending global poverty, they work on the front lines of social justice, humanitarian aid, and economic and democratic development.

These organizations work on their own and through a vast network of coalitions and collaborative partnerships. Many of these organizations work with domestic and international governing bodies and institutions, citizens' groups and non-governmental organizations in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and elsewhere to:

- build peace;
- uphold and promote respect for human rights;
- improve the lives of children;
- achieve gender equity;
- improve local access to safe water, sanitation, food, shelter, education and primary health care

Religion

Places of worship in Nova Scotia and many other religious bodies are arguably one of the cornerstones of community life in this province. In countless church basements, mosque meeting halls, temple and synagogue offices, and thousands of local religious settings, people gather for community purposes: scouting and guiding meetings, to access social service programs, educational events, fundraisers, emergency response, and polling stations.

Rural Nova Scotia life often revolves around the church. The volunteer action generated from faith groups is remarkable and the contributions of religious organizations, and those who work and volunteer in them, make a huge difference to the cumulative impact of charities and nonprofits in Nova Scotia.