

Awareness Joint Table

Final Report

March 2003

Awareness Joint Table

Final Report
March 2003

Table of Contents

Foreword	3
Introduction	5
The voluntary sector: a vital pillar of society	5
The Voluntary Sector Initiative	5
The Awareness Joint Table	5
Joint Table Membership	6
Mandate and Objectives	7
Workplan	7
Research and development of awareness initiative (Fall 2000-Fall 2002) .	7
Work Completed and Process Used.....	8
Linkages with other joint tables and coordinating bodies	8
Research and analysis	8
Consultations	10
Results	12
Aboriginal voluntary sector video <i>It's Our Way</i>	12
Regional communications officers.....	12
Voluntary Sector Awareness Initiative	12
Recommended audiences.....	13
Intended results.....	13
Next Steps	13
Implementation and evaluation of awareness initiative (Winter 2003 – Spring 2005).....	14
Lessons Learned	14
About raising awareness of the voluntary sector	14
About the joint table process	14
About the Voluntary Sector Initiative	15
About government–voluntary sector relations	15
Relevant Documents List.....	16

Foreword

Canada is a caring society recognized for its compassion, mutual responsibility and fundamental values of freedom and community. Our quality of life is fuelled by a dynamic and diverse voluntary sector that includes 180,000 organizations of all sizes and that mobilizes over 6.5 million dedicated volunteers, in addition to over a million paid staff. The voluntary sector is critical to civil society and to Canada's way of life, yet many do not recognize it.

This report is the result of the work of the Awareness Joint Table (AJT), one of the working groups established in the fall of 2000 through the Voluntary Sector Initiative. Consisting of representatives from both the federal public service and the voluntary sector, the AJT's mandate was to find ways to promote the voluntary sector's importance and contribution to Canada's way of life. Its challenge was to develop a national initiative that would influence the attitudes, opinions and perceptions of Canadians within a limited budget—a daunting task to say the least.

As the AJT discovered through consultations and research, expectations were high, and funding was limited. In addition, the many parts of the voluntary sector did not see themselves as a cohesive, integrated sector with a unified set of needs.

To achieve a meaningful result, the AJT determined that we had to refine the objective. The public awareness initiative would have to be targeted and specific. It would have to reach the audiences most likely to carry the message forward and it would have to position the voluntary sector as critical to Canada's quality of life.

The *Voluntary Sector Awareness Initiative* recommended by the AJT will help to position the voluntary sector in Canadian society so that its contribution is valued and supported by individuals, communities, and public and private sectors. It will help Canadians recognize that the voluntary sector is one of three pillars of our society—as important as both the public and private sectors. It will help to give the voluntary sector a voice and influence in decision-making in Canada. It will help voluntary sector organizations see themselves as part of an integrated and cohesive sector that is credited with helping to shape Canada's way of life.

The approach recommended by the AJT and endorsed by the Joint Coordinating Committee includes both a national component and the necessary tools for community organizations to take part in repositioning the voluntary sector as a vital force in Canada. It is targeted to opinion leaders and will help local organizations deliver the key messages in their own communities.

It is important to note that any public awareness initiative requires a sustained effort over several years to influence public attitudes and effect social change. It is our hope that over the next few years, the public awareness initiative will begin to generate positive

results and useful tools that can serve as a legacy for strengthening understanding and awareness of the importance of the voluntary sector to Canadian society.

As co-chairs of the Awareness Joint Table, we would also like to say a few words on behalf of the AJT members about how much we have all learned in this process. The spirit of cooperation and creativity was outstanding. Both voluntary sector and government members found the joint table process unique, enriching and a very positive approach to working together. We all look forward to seeing the fruits of our labour in action over the next two years.

Suzanne Lawson
Co-chair

Johanne Bélisle
Co-chair

Introduction

The voluntary sector: a vital pillar of society

Much of Canada's reputation as a humane, caring and prosperous nation is due to the contribution of the voluntary sector. Comprised of a diverse network of approximately 180,000 charities and non-profit organizations, the voluntary sector is a socially and economically critical pillar of society, equal in importance to the private and public sectors.

Not only does it generate \$90 billion in annual revenues and employ 1.3 million people, the voluntary sector also mobilizes over 6.5 million dedicated volunteers who devote their time and energy to making Canada a better place to live. From community soup kitchens to national health care associations, the voluntary sector exemplifies the most fundamental Canadian values of mutual responsibility and active citizenship.

The Voluntary Sector Initiative

Recognizing that the voluntary sector plays a crucial role in developing strong communities and forms the basis for citizens' participation in a democratic society, the federal government has a vested interest in working with the voluntary sector to address issues of mutual concern. In recent years, changing government roles, increasingly diverse populations and new social and economic realities have only reinforced the need for the government and the voluntary sector to work in partnership to serve the needs and interests of Canadians.

For this reason, the federal government and the voluntary sector jointly launched the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) in June 2000 with the dual goals of strengthening the capacity of the voluntary sector and enhancing its relationship with the federal government. To carry out the work associated with these goals, the VSI established six joint tables, of which the Awareness Joint Table was one.

The Awareness Joint Table

According to the report [*Working Together*](#), which formed the basis for the VSI, "*Several key groups of Canadians...lack a thorough understanding of the sector's nature, needs and challenges, and the opportunities the sector affords. This lack of understanding is a barrier to enhanced support of and involvement in the voluntary sector.*"

In keeping with the recommendations of *Working Together*, the AJT was created to examine how to generate awareness of, ongoing support for, and involvement in a sector that is critical to civil society. Beginning in the fall of 2000, the AJT conducted research, developed and considered various awareness strategies, and consulted extensively with volunteers and voluntary organizations across the country. This report is the culmination of the AJT's two years of work.

Joint Table Membership

The AJT consisted of seven senior representatives each from the voluntary sector and the federal government. The Department of Canadian Heritage provided secretariat support to the AJT and will be responsible for implementing the awareness initiative. A joint voluntary sector–government advisory body will oversee the implementation of the initiative after the AJT has disbanded.

Voluntary Sector members

Suzanne Lawson (Co-chair)
National Executive Director
Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis Society of
Canada

Louise Gagné
Bénévole
Le bureau international des droits des
enfants

Martyn (Major) Goodger
Director of Development
Salvation Army

Murry Krause
Executive Director
Central Interior Native Health Society

Trudy Schroeder
General Manager
Winnipeg Folk Festival

Rieky Stuart
Executive Director
OXFAM Canada

Sue Tomney
Director - Communications

Government members

**Johanne Bélisle (Co-chair: March 2002 –
September 2002)**
Director General, Strategic Policy and
Research
Strategic Policy Sector
Canadian Heritage

**Jérôme Moisan (Co-chair: November
2000 -- February 2002)**
Director, Official Languages
Strategic Policy and Research
Privy Council Office

Jamey Burr
Director, Partnership Development
National Secretariat on Homelessness
Human Resources Development Canada

Marcel Custeau
Ombudsman
Canadian International Development
Agency

Ann Dostaler
Senior Policy Analyst
Sector Relations Branch, Policy and
Communications
Environment Canada

Helen Friel *
Director Citizen Engagement
Citizen Engagement and Community
Initiatives Branch
Community Engagement Sector
Correctional Service Canada

Leslie MacLean
Director General

TransAlta Corporation

Strategic Planning, Policy and Evaluation
Communication Canada

Jim Mintz

Director of Marketing and Creative
Services
Communications, Marketing and
Consultations Directorate
Health Canada

* Note: As of September 16th, 2002, Helen has been assigned as Policy Intern, Canadian Criminal Justice Association, as part of the Centre for Voluntary Sector Research and Development's Policy Internships and Fellowships pilot project.)

Mandate and Objectives

In 2000, the Joint Coordinating Committee of the VSI mandated the AJT to develop an awareness initiative that would foster recognition of the vital role of the voluntary sector in Canadian society. The initiative was designed to influence the attitudes, opinions and perceptions of Canadians by:

- Informing a variety of audiences (community leaders, the private sector, media, governments, Canadians, youth and the voluntary sector itself) of the important work of voluntary sector organizations;
- Positioning the voluntary sector as a contributor to Canada's social, economic and cultural well-being; and
- Encouraging Canadians to participate and become engaged in the work of the voluntary sector.

Workplan

The AJT took a flexible, learning-centred and iterative approach to its decision-making. As a roadmap to guide the work of the AJT, the following workplan evolved, as objectives became further refined.

Research and development of awareness initiative (Fall 2000-Fall 2002)

- Research and analysis;
- Development of options and priorities for the awareness initiative;
- Consultations on elements of the awareness initiative;
- Refinement of awareness initiative with input from the Assistant Deputy Minister Executive Committee and the Voluntary Sector Steering Group; and
- Presentation to Joint Coordinating Committee for approval.

Work Completed and Process Used

Linkages with other joint tables and coordinating bodies

The AJT recognized that other joint tables would make contributions to building awareness and recognition of the voluntary sector, and that collaborative approaches with other joint tables would be critical to coherent and consistent messaging.

Through meetings with the VSI joint table secretariats and various coordinating groups, the AJT was able to share information, keep apprised of progress, and coordinate activities with other joint tables where appropriate. By pooling resources, all joint tables benefited from joint consultations or public opinion polls, for example.

In addition, relationships were formed with the National Volunteerism Initiative Joint Table to share ideas and expertise related to the awareness initiative and to distinguish between awareness of the voluntary sector and awareness of volunteerism; with the Capacity Joint Table to position the sector as an employer of choice for youth; and with the Aboriginal Reference Group to help build awareness of the Aboriginal voluntary sector.

Throughout the workplan process, the AJT maintained a close reporting and consultative relationship with the Joint Coordinating Committee, the Voluntary Sector Task Force, the VSI Secretariat, the Assistant Deputy Minister Executive Committee and the Voluntary Sector Steering Group.

Research and analysis

Scan of research on public attitudes towards the voluntary sector

As an important first step toward considering how to increase awareness of the voluntary sector, the AJT commissioned a scan of existing public opinion research on the perceptions and attitudes towards the voluntary sector.

Conducted by the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy (CCP), the [*Scan of Research on Public Attitudes Towards the Voluntary Sector*](#) (February 2001) included a literature review and interviews to identify existing or upcoming public opinion research on the voluntary sector in Canada.

The scan determined that there is a limited amount of research on public attitudes toward the voluntary sector in Canada. Overall, the research showed that Canadians view favourably the work, importance and the contribution of the voluntary sector to Canadian society. However, Canadians do not want the delivery of services and programs by the voluntary sector to be a substitute for programs and services that governments ought to deliver. Canadians invest a considerable amount of trust in voluntary and charitable organizations while expressing concerns about how organizations solicit, use and manage donations.

Telling our story: communicating the value of philanthropy and the voluntary sector

Under the theme *Telling Our Story*, the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy's 7th Annual Symposium took place in spring 2001. At the AJT's suggestion, and with its financial support, CCP added Montreal as a third venue for the conference, which was already scheduled to be held simultaneously in Toronto and Edmonton.

In keeping with the symposium's theme, the AJT commissioned a discussion paper entitled [*Telling Our Story: Communicating the Value of Philanthropy and the Voluntary Sector*](#). Based on interviews with over 60 Canadians (including media, voluntary sector, private sector, academic representatives, and others), the paper identified current ideas and questions related to raising public awareness of the voluntary sector in Canada.

Its key themes included: telling the practical story of the changing relationship with government and the resulting effects on the voluntary sector and society at large; telling the results-based story that highlights the voluntary sector's capacity for innovation, research and development; and telling the inspirational story of the opportunities the voluntary sector provides for partnerships and meaningful community engagement. One of the key questions raised was whether it is possible to articulate a unified, tangible story that will have impact, given the voluntary sector's diversity. Distributed throughout the voluntary sector, this discussion paper is helping organizations with their communications activities.

The discussion paper also provided the context for discussion groups hosted and facilitated by AJT members during the symposium. Delegates in Montreal, Toronto and Edmonton responded to the considerations and questions raised in the paper, and outlined further ideas and recommendations for the awareness initiative.

Benchmark research: opinion leaders survey

To guide the development of messages and corresponding tools for the awareness initiative, the AJT contracted EKOS Research Associates Inc. to conduct a national survey of opinion leaders in the summer of 2002. The survey was designed to gauge opinion leaders' knowledge of the voluntary sector; to measure their perceptions, opinions and attitudes about the voluntary sector's role, its capacity and effectiveness; and to measure their receptivity to working with the voluntary sector. To complement this benchmark research, a shorter survey entitled [*Positioning the Voluntary Sector in Canada: What the Elite and General Public Say*](#), was conducted with a representative sample from the general public.

In addition, the AJT commissioned a synthesis of past public opinion research related to the voluntary sector. - [*What Public Opinion Surveys Say About the Voluntary Sector*](#) .

Consultations

Voluntary sector questionnaire

The AJT participated with voluntary sector organizations in Canada-wide consultations led by the Joint Accord Table during summer 2001. The AJT produced a questionnaire to elicit the views of consultation participants on the need for and content of an awareness initiative. The questionnaire was also posted on the VSI website.

Respondents identified key themes and innovative ideas for the awareness initiative. Overall, respondents indicated that voluntary sector organizations require resources and training to build their capacity to participate in communications, public relations and marketing initiatives. They highlighted the importance of media relations, networking and the Internet towards raising awareness of the voluntary sector.

Think tank session “Creating a Communications Action Plan”

In October 2001, the AJT convened a panel of experts to provide advice and direction on developing communications plans targeting four audiences: government, the private sector, the voluntary sector and youth. These experts were Karen Jackson (Canadian Policy Research Networks), Mark Sarner (Manifest Communications), Eric Young (E.Y.E.), Paddy Bowen (Volunteer Canada) and Shauna Sylvester (IMPACS). Discussions focused on refining the approach and scope of the awareness initiative as it relates to repositioning the voluntary sector with these four audience segments.

Based on the suggestions resulting from the think tank session, the AJT examined proposals for four initiatives targeted to the selected audiences. The proposed initiatives included a voluntary sector awards program; a youth initiative; a government initiative; and corporate and voluntary sector partnerships. Recognizing that the remaining AJT funds would best be directed towards the Canada-wide public awareness initiative described later on in this report, the AJT decided that the four proposed initiatives would be incorporated into the broader initiative or could be covered under existing programs as described below.

National Voluntary Sector Awards Program

The Report on the Design and Implementation of a National Awards and Recognition Program to Promote the Voluntary Sector presented the benefits and challenges of a national awards program; outlined a strategy to secure buy-in for an awards program within the voluntary sector; provided the components and scope of work for an annual awards program; and identified a number of other recognition options for the AJT's consideration. Subsequent consultations with the voluntary sector revealed a lack of support for an awards program and a preference for non-competitive recognition programs.

Youth initiative

The AJT commissioned the research for and development of a framework for a career-oriented initiative targeting youth that would promote and brand the voluntary sector as a

source of rewarding employment. The report, Voluntary Sector Youth Initiative Report identified opportunities for partnerships to raise youth awareness of volunteer and career opportunities in the voluntary sector.

However, the AJT determined that these partnerships can only be pursued once it has been confirmed (through the National Survey of Voluntary Organizations or other ongoing sectoral studies) that the voluntary sector has the need and the capacity to recruit and retain new employees and/or youth volunteers. Once the necessary research has confirmed that this capacity exists, Canadian Heritage will assess the feasibility of pursuing this initiative in collaboration with Human Resources Development Canada and appropriate voluntary sector partners.

Federal government initiative

The Voluntary Sector Task Force has developed a distribution plan (phase 2) for further dissemination of [*An Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector*](#) across the federal government. In addition to the Accord, a number of other VSI-related materials will be made available to federal departments, including information on the role and importance of the voluntary sector. The AJT felt that promoting awareness of the Accord in the federal government would also raise awareness of the importance of the voluntary sector. Target audiences include: senior program, policy, and financial officers, Directors General of Communications, government policy research institutes, learning institutions, and federal regional councils.

Corporate and voluntary sector partnerships

Partnerships with the private sector were identified as a way to increase private sector awareness of the important work of voluntary sector organizations, and to position the voluntary sector as a contributor to Canada's social and economic well-being.

Although voluntary sector organizations have skills and creative ideas that can benefit businesses, they require tools to assist them in seeking partnerships with small and medium-sized enterprises. Investigations by the AJT revealed that since initiatives to support corporate-voluntary sector partnerships are already underway, further investment by the AJT is not necessary. For example, one of the VSI's Sector Involvement in Departmental Policy Development projects provided funding for an initiative that will accomplish this goal. In addition, a number of similar initiatives are underway through the Imagine Program sponsored by the CCP.

Consultation workshops with voluntary sector organizations

In February and March 2002, the AJT held nine three-hour consultation workshops with voluntary sector representatives in cities across the country. The workshops were designed to gauge participants' receptivity to the awareness initiative and to seek their input into the messages, target audiences, tools and support needed to participate in such an initiative.

Consultations revealed that it was essential to develop tools that would enable local organizations to participate in a campaign at the community level. Community-based

campaigns must also be coordinated with the national campaign and products must be easily tailored to specific audiences.

Results

After extensive research, consultations and deliberations, the AJT developed a framework for a major voluntary sector public awareness initiative. The strategic approach for the initiative was approved by the Joint Coordinating Committee on May 30, 2002 and is described below. This awareness initiative is the AJT's main deliverable, and the majority of remaining AJT funds have been reserved for its implementation and evaluation.

In addition to the awareness initiative, the AJT also sponsored the following two collateral initiatives.

Aboriginal voluntary sector video *It's Our Way*

The AJT provided funding and support for the production of *It's Our Way*, a video about the Aboriginal voluntary sector, and an initiative of the Aboriginal Reference Group. This video enhances awareness of the Aboriginal voluntary sector and its contribution to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, and provides examples of traditional and cultural views towards volunteerism.

Regional communications officers

At the Joint Coordinating Committee's request, the AJT provided funding to the VSI Secretariat to hire communications professionals to promote awareness and understanding of the VSI within each region of the country for a six-month period. These Regional Communications Officers were able to raise awareness of the contribution of the voluntary sector in their regions, thus supporting AJT's ultimate objective.

The Regional Communications Officers provided the AJT with valuable feedback to assist in the development and implementation of the awareness initiative. The report of the VSI Secretariat includes a description of the activities of the Regional Communications Officers.

Voluntary Sector Awareness Initiative

The AJT produced and endorsed a strategic approach for a Voluntary Sector Awareness Initiative. The initiative's objective is to help position the voluntary sector in Canadian society so that its contribution to Canada's way of life is valued and supported by individuals, communities, public and private sectors.

The approach includes a national component targeted to opinion leaders from all sectors, and a community-based component driven by voluntary sector organizations to develop complementary and targeted awareness activities at the local level. It will be important

for the messages and tools developed for the awareness initiative to take into account the needs and the capacity of community-based organizations.

Limited resources require that the initiative be focused to ensure maximum exposure. Since the primary goal is to position the sector within the broader community as one of the three pillars of Canadian society, it is important to talk to those people who are most likely to be able to make that happen, that is, opinion leaders.

One of the main challenges in designing the awareness initiative is that not all voluntary organizations see themselves as part of a cohesive sector. Just as the various levels of government and various sizes of businesses are grouped into the public and private sectors, those in the voluntary sector will need to relate to it as a whole if they want to partner with the public and private sectors. The awareness initiative aims to achieve this goal while still respecting the voluntary sector's diversity.

Recommended audiences

Included in the term "opinion leaders" are:

- Members of boards of directors of voluntary sector organizations;
- Politicians at all levels;
- Community leaders including municipal councils, school boards, and communities of interest;
- Business and labour leaders; and
- Media representatives.

Intended results

- That Canadians recognize the voluntary sector as one of three pillars of society.
- That the voluntary sector has a voice and will influence opinion leaders.
- That voluntary organizations view themselves as part of a cohesive sector.
- That voluntary organizations have the capacity to undertake communications at a local level.

Further details are outlined in the [Strategic Communications Framework for the Awareness Initiative](#).

Next Steps

In the fall of 2002, work on the awareness initiative moved to an operational phase that requires ongoing decisions on a myriad of technical details (e.g., draft texts, distribution lists, approval of materials, etc.). Therefore, the AJT proposed the creation of a small advisory body to provide ongoing oversight during the initiative's implementation, taking into account the spirit of collaboration and partnership achieved to date between the government and the voluntary sector.

The advisory body is composed of communications experts from government and the voluntary sector and may be expanded to include other sectors as appropriate. Canadian Heritage provides secretariat support to this advisory body and will be responsible for program management and financial accountability related to the awareness initiative. A draft workplan follows:

Implementation and evaluation of awareness initiative (Winter 2003 – Spring 2005)

<i>Deliverable</i>	<i>Date</i>
Select delivery agency to implement initiative	Winter 2003
Develop tools/materials	Spring/Summer 2003
Launch initiative	Fall 2003
Project and financial management, including evaluation	Ongoing

Lessons Learned

About raising awareness of the voluntary sector

Given the diversity of the voluntary sector, the AJT faced a significant challenge in defining the exact nature and extent of its task, and in bringing its own and others' expectations in line with this task and the associated budget. This issue was further complicated by the fact that voluntary sector organizations do not necessarily perceive themselves as part of a cohesive entity.

Faced with these challenges, the AJT learned that devoting time and funds to research is an essential first step to defining a complex issue. It also learned that an awareness campaign about a diverse sector, targeted to a diverse Canada, requires significant financial resources. Finally, the AJT learned that raising awareness is not sufficient in and of itself; it has to lead to an action or change to be effective. Over the course of identifying what that change would be, the AJT learned to reconcile the diversity of views and opinions, within the parameters of its budget.

About the joint table process

Although the spirit of the individual AJT members, and the VSI overall, was one of cooperation, the overlap between the joint tables' mandates was difficult to manage within the multiple joint table structure. It was also difficult for separate joint tables to negotiate collective or complementary strategies to deal with related issues.

AJT members unanimously agreed that the joint table process led to more creative thinking and a better product than had strategies developed solely by sector or government, and subsequently they consulted one another. However, the AJT agreed that

adequate staff support for research and policy work was essential, as its focus was best directed towards identifying and resolving issues at a strategic level rather than dealing with details related to process and implementation.

About the Voluntary Sector Initiative

Members of the AJT were in favour of streamlining the overall VSI governance structure. Reporting to a variety of oversight mechanisms was time-consuming and it was not clear to whom the AJT was ultimately accountable.

Private sector representation on the AJT added a unique perspective and was appropriate to its mandate; its members agreed that as awareness of the voluntary sector increases, so should private sector involvement in the VSI.

Recognizing the importance of reconnecting with the grassroots by consulting with voluntary sector organizations in communities across Canada, the AJT agreed that it would have been beneficial to allow more lead-time for participation in VSI-related consultations.

About government–voluntary sector relations

Both voluntary and government AJT members agreed that the joint table experience helped each of them to overcome misperceptions and gain an appreciation for each other.

Government representatives gained a broader perspective on the extent of the voluntary sector's size, diversity and role. In turn, voluntary sector representatives gained an understanding of how government works, including the constraints of the various rules and processes that guide bureaucracies. Although it gave voluntary sector representatives a better appreciation for their ability to respond quickly to society's needs, they also developed a respect for the government's level of public accountability, and its ability to achieve positive results within this complex structure.

Overall, voluntary and government representatives found the joint table experience unique, enriching, and a very positive approach to working together.

Relevant Documents List

Working Together

<http://www.vsr-trsb.net/publications/pco-e.pdf>

Scan of Research on Public Attitudes Towards the Voluntary Sector

http://www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/joint_tables/awareness/pdf/report.pdf

Telling Our Story: Communicating the Value of Philanthropy and the Voluntary Sector

<http://www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/awareness/pdf/drainie.pdf>

Positioning the Voluntary Sector in Canada: What the Elite and General Public Say

http://www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/awareness/pdf/awareness_opinion_report.pdf

What Public Opinion Surveys Say About the Voluntary Sector

http://www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/pdf/awareness_opinion_synthesis.pdf

An Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector

http://www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/relationship/pdf/the_accord_doc.pdf

Strategic Communications Framework for the Awareness Initiative

http://www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/awareness/cfp_appendixb.cfm#s1