

National Learning Initiative



A national skills and learning framework for the voluntary sector



*A collaborative project of the
Association of Canadian Community
Colleges and the Coalition of National
Voluntary Organizations*

Canada

Funded by the Government of Canada through the Voluntary Sector Initiative.

National Learning Initiative

The National Learning Initiative (NLI) for the voluntary sector represents a unique partnership between the Coalition of National Voluntary Organizations and the Association of Canadian Community Colleges. NLI aims to further social development in Canada through a national skills and learning framework, building strong leadership skills in the voluntary sector while increasing organizations' commitment to lifelong learning.

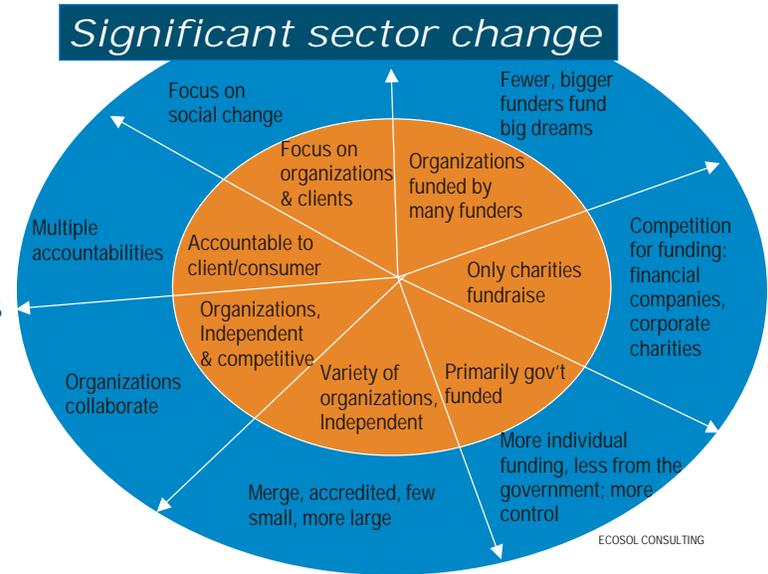
The Need

Recent decades have brought with them significant change in the voluntary sector. Organizations and leaders are no longer primarily focused on managing their own organizations but instead have an expanded mandate to lead effective social change, with accountability to many more groups (see "Significant sector change" chart). Today's voluntary sector leaders must collaborate more, develop and nurture increasingly complex relationships and deal with multiple funding sources and diverse program partners.

New Realities ~New Competencies

The trend toward increasing complexity and collaboration in the sector has not only meant change for organizations, it has had a huge impact on leaders and managers.

New competencies, skills and abilities are now required to work effectively in voluntary sector leadership positions. Educational and training opportunities tailored to these new skills are essential for building a stronger voluntary sector in Canada—and a stronger society.



Definitions

CORE COMPETENCIES: “Competencies are the knowledge, skills, abilities, mindsets and behaviours that lead to improving life in the community and the world through principled actions and professional behaviour in the voluntary sector. Competencies that are common across the voluntary sector, irrespective of regional or sub-sectoral differences, are understood as core competencies.”

-NLI Report

NATIONAL SKILLS AND LEARNING

FRAMEWORK: This initiative will assist in the delivery of well-articulated, relevant and accessible leadership and management training for the voluntary sector workforce. It will allow training to take alternative forms, allowing individuals to complete their education via diverse classes and modules from various institutions and organizations. The framework will help create a culture of learning within the sector and organizations, with a focus on increased professional development opportunities that are responsive to today's changing realities.

“Leadership is about interpreting and making sense, or meaning, of the experiences of organizational life . . . Voluntary sector leadership is a career not for the faint of heart or mind.”

-DR. BRENDA ZIMMERMAN, YORK UNIVERSITY

Identifying Core Competencies: The Process

The main competencies required of a senior leader or manager in the sector were identified at a series of five regional workshops held across Canada in the fall of 2002. Workshop participants, nominated by their peers, included leaders and managers in the voluntary sector.

Throughout the workshops, participants generated a profile of voluntary sector competencies, grouped into four key areas:

- Aspirations & Alignment;
- Strategies & Resource Management;
- Relationships; and
- Complexity.

These competencies are outlined in this brochure as a way of disseminating the findings and testing their accuracy through feedback from diverse individuals and organizations in the voluntary sector.

This brochure contains the results of recent research into core competencies for voluntary sector leaders and managers. Please fill out the form on the last page of this brochure and share your insights.

Your response is needed as soon as possible!

Leadership in the Voluntary Sector

Before beginning to identify core competencies, workshop participants reflected on the qualities of a good voluntary sector leader and determined that he or she . . .

- helps effect social change;
- collaborates well with others;
- stays informed about relevant issues;
- remains focused on the organization's mission;
- uses the skills of creativity, innovation and strategic thinking;
- works toward change with care and ethical consideration;
- manages effectively with tenacity and determination;
- cares for self, is aware of limits, remains flexible and open-minded;
- mentors, cares for, trusts, and delegates to staff.

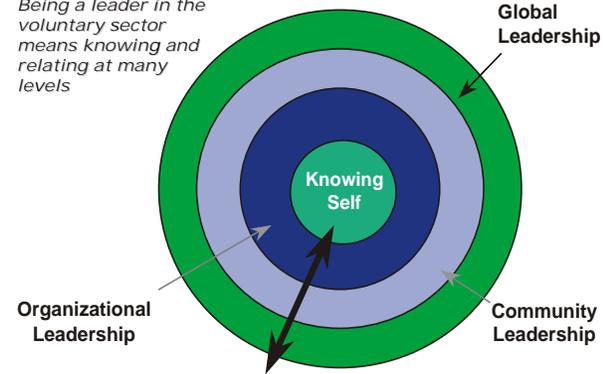
Critical Abilities

Participants agreed that any competencies a voluntary sector leader has are based on certain foundational qualities, which include:

- a high level of self-understanding;
- a commitment to lifelong learning and ethical, principled actions;
- an awareness and ability to articulate personal values;
- wisdom, acumen and the ability to intuit future needs and directions.

LEADERSHIP in the Voluntary Sector

Being a leader in the voluntary sector means knowing and relating at many levels



Interdependent, interactive, generative
ECOSOL CONSULTING

“Global leadership is the ability to look beyond one’s own community to the broader society and its needs.”

Learning in the Voluntary Sector

“There is an urgent need for lifelong learning in the voluntary sector” - NLI Report

Due to the unique nature of the voluntary sector—and its limited funds and resources—participants in the workshops agreed that new and alternative approaches to learning must be developed. Participants identified the following needs:

- to encourage a culture of lifelong learning in the voluntary sector;
- to increase awareness of the need and funding for learning opportunities in the voluntary sector, especially among boards, organizations and funders;
- to develop a comprehensive and well-thought-out system that will result in ongoing learning opportunities for those in the sector;
- to maintain a broad perspective on learning in the sector and remain flexible and responsive to emerging issues;
- to study how issues related to recognition, rewards, merit and compensation apply to learning in the sector.

National Learning Initiative Partners:



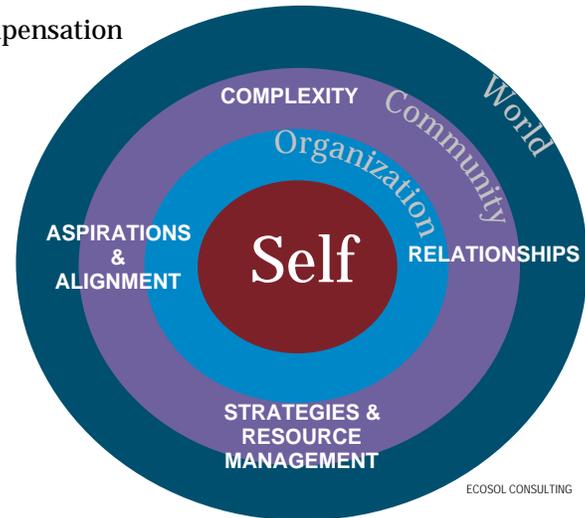
The Coalition of National Voluntary Organizations

The Coalition of National Voluntary Organizations (NVO) works at the national level to support the activities and actions of national voluntary organizations. Representing 135 member organizations, NVO fosters the development of a strong civil society by promoting the voluntary sector through building coalitions, by working with members and others, by acting as political advocates and by promoting the voluntary sector as a key contributor to the quality of life in Canada.



The Association of Canadian Community Colleges

The Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) is the national, voluntary membership organization created in 1972 to represent colleges and institutes to government, business and industry, both in Canada and internationally. With an Ottawa-based Secretariat, ACCC interacts with federal departments and agencies on the members' behalf and links college capabilities to national industries.



Aspirations & Alignment COMPETENCIES

“Organizations no longer work independently—they are required to collaborate with other organizations. These collaborations are highly complex, requiring negotiating skills, management of emotional and trust issues, managing different timelines required by working with multiple organizations and putting aside competition with other organizations.”

-NLI Report

The competencies in this category enable a voluntary sector leader to work toward improving life in the community and the world. They propel the leader in his or her quest to achieve peace, freedom, human rights, opportunity, safety, justice and the removal of poverty and discrimination. A leader with these competencies ensures that his or her leadership is community-based, includes representation from many sectors of society, and is founded on a clear and well-articulated vision.

The **Aspirations & Alignment** competencies include:

- taking effective and innovative action in the interest of society and working toward policies that positively impact the public;
- developing and winning widespread commitment to the organization's vision;
- providing leadership to the organization in dealing with ethical issues;
- dealing effectively with issues larger than the organization itself;
- working well with external partners;
- nurturing a work and organizational environment where learning, in its diverse forms, is ongoing and constant.

Strategies & Resource Management COMPETENCIES

The competencies in this category relate to effectively managing the day-to-day operations of an organization through management practices that are effective, ethical and in the best interests of the organization.

The Strategies & Resource Management competencies include:

- maximizing the use of various fundraising approaches and public relations/marketing programs;
- ensuring the wise use of funds and resources;
- creating an organizational environment where individuals use creativity and innovation to carry out their responsibilities and respond to challenges;
- effectively using the tools of information technology and research to achieve goals and mission;
- providing leadership in developing plans and evaluating the effectiveness of programs, ensuring widespread involvement from the organization and beyond.

“...practices that are effective, ethical and in the best interests of the organization.”



Relationships COMPETENCIES

“Managers used to direct their staff, now leaders inspire and empower individuals to work in teams and with the community.” - NLI Report

The competencies in this category allow voluntary sector leaders to work effectively with people at many different levels to achieve a common vision. They enable the leader to develop and maintain effective relationships with people inside and outside of the organization, nurturing collaboration, gaining trust and winning commitment to shared goals.

The Relationships competencies include:

- developing effective interpersonal relationships;
- maximizing the potential of all human resources (staff, volunteers and board members);
- nurturing an environment where teamwork thrives;
- demonstrating wisdom and care in relationships with a keen awareness of political implications;
- representing the organization effectively as a public persona;
- building and maintaining effective links between individuals, the organization, and the community;
- excelling in both written and oral communication;
- optimizing the use of communications technologies;
- building a stronger organization and community by utilizing diverse talents, cultures and assets;
- developing creative approaches to local issues while maintaining a global perspective.

Complexity COMPETENCIES

“Voluntary sector leaders are faced with unprecedented global change . . . funders and corporations are competing with the voluntary sector for leadership and organizations are merging or collaborating in new and innovative ways. The response to this change is often complex, may require complicated decision-making and ethical considerations, may involve multiple parties and may require more time than is available.” -NLI REPORT

The competencies in this category enable voluntary sector leaders to deal with increasing complexity in an interdependent world, where change is constant. A leader with these competencies demonstrates flexibility and creativity in the face of contradiction and difficulty. He or she easily adapts to change.

The **Complexity** competencies include:

- responding and being accountable to multiple individuals, organizations and partners;
- understanding the increasing interdependence of organizations and individuals in the community, the nation and the world;
- assessing how economic and political systems relate to the organization and its mission;
- translating theories and knowledge into effective action that helps lead the organization;
- nurturing a healthy organizational and work environment where innovation, creativity and adaptability are valued;
- demonstrating the ability to cooperate and compete, according to what is appropriate at the time.

Next Steps for the NLI

As next steps, the NLI is proposing to draw on the findings of the core competencies process to develop and make available helpful **human resources tools** for the voluntary sector, including:

- a sample position description for a voluntary sector executive director;
- a performance evaluation tool for boards of voluntary sector organizations to use when evaluating the work of senior staff;
- a self-assessment tool for individuals wishing to become executive directors or equivalent.

Strengthening Existing Curricula

To enhance the quality of leadership education for the voluntary sector, NLI also intends to develop a list of learning outcomes for use by educators in evaluating existing curricula. It is our hope that existing programs will be strengthened and new alternatives and partnerships explored to better meet the evolving learning needs of the voluntary sector.

Feedback

Please complete the evaluation form on the final page of this brochure and return it to us at the address or fax number shown. You could also reply electronically on our web site at www.nvo-onb.ca.

Your comments will help us further refine our research findings and apply them in a way that will benefit the voluntary sector and its leaders—today and long into the future.

Thank you!



Your response is needed!

1. Name (optional): _____
2. Organization (optional): _____
3. Position with the organization: __ Staff __ Volunteer __ Executive __ Management __ Other: _____
4. How would you rate the competencies presented in this brochure (see pgs. 5-8), when compared to your actual experience in the voluntary sector? *(Please circle one):*

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all accurate		Somewhat accurate		Very accurate

Comments:

5. Is there anything you would add to the competencies found on pgs. 5-8? Remove?

6. What kind of tools would be useful to you, based on the findings discussed in this brochure?

- Performance evaluation forms (sample)
- Job descriptions for executives (sample)
- Self-assessment tools
- Learning outcomes for college courses
- Short courses/workshops for voluntary sector leaders
- Other (please specify): _____

7. Are there any other areas of voluntary sector work, in addition to that of leaders and managers, that could benefit from the identification of core competencies and enhanced opportunities for learning?

Please send me a complete copy of the National Learning Initiative Core Competencies Report.

Please mail your completed form to:

National Learning Initiative
c/o The Coalition of National
Voluntary Organizations
301-75 Albert St. Ottawa, ON K1P 5E7

Fax to:
(613) 238-5257

E-mail your responses to:
bsuderman@nvo-onb.ca

Respond online at:
www.nvo-onb.ca

Thank you! Your feedback is crucial to this process.

“Strong leaders build strong organizations, which meet the needs of Canadians, making the lives of Canadians better.”

- NATIONAL LEARNING INITIATIVE REPORT



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

THE CONTENT OF THIS BROCHURE IS BASED ON THE REPORT “TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK OF COMPETENCIES FOR LEADERSHIP IN THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR” (THE NLI REPORT), PREPARED BY ECOSOL CONSULTING FOR THE NATIONAL LEARNING INITIATIVE.

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