



Final Report

Technology Needs of the Canadian Voluntary Sector

IM/IT Joint Table of the Voluntary Sector Initiative

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January 29, 2002





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Technology Needs of the Canadian Voluntary Sector

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Voluntary Sector Initiative established an Information Management/Information Technology (IM/IT) Joint Table to investigate and respond to the technology needs of the Canadian voluntary sector. The Joint Table plans to invest \$6.1 million in technology programs for the sector over the next three years.

RealWorld Systems (RWS) was retained to study the needs and priorities of the sector in relation to technology, and to suggest options for potential funding. Between September and December 2001, RWS interviewed over 50 key informants in the Canadian voluntary sector, searched the literature for information on the use of technology, surveyed over 2,500 voluntary sector agencies across the country, and searched for best practices among businesses and nonprofits in Canada and elsewhere.

On the basis of interviews and a scan of the literature RWS developed a list of 17 technology options (Appendix A) that we tested in a structured survey. All of these options would be helpful to the sector, and even the lowest ranked one was rated as high or medium priority by half of the respondents. The IM/IT Joint Table could serve real needs identified by the sector by supporting any of the options.

However, there were clear preferences among the survey respondents. The top five choices, in order, were:

- **Top choice:** An inexpensive and easy to use online database of funders with detailed information about who they fund and how to apply. The service should make it easier to apply for funding by allowing organizations of all sizes to search for funding for which they are eligible.
- Direct funding or discounted prices for computers, software, Internet connections and system upgrades.
- More flexibility from funders to allow organizations to buy computers and software or upgrade their systems as an ongoing operating expense.
- Reduced administration and paperwork for filling out funding proposals and reports. A possible service could eliminate duplication of paperwork by providing a common online database of information that funders frequently request.
- A national Web site that would provide 'one-stop shopping' of information for and about the voluntary sector. The Web site would include news updates, best practices, links to important Web resources, advocacy tools including email campaigns and research about the sector.



These choices reflect core organizational needs of the sector as a whole – for sufficient and flexible funding. They also reflect the need for a reduction in administrative expenses that do not directly meet organizational missions, and the value of sharing information about the sector.

Other highly rated choices involved fundraising tools, online and distance training for staff and volunteers, an inexpensive way to create agency Web sites, and a way to find detailed contact information about other voluntary sector organizations.

We recommend that the IM/IT Joint Table investigate the possibility of supporting all of the five top-ranked options described above. The IM/IT Joint Table may be able to ensure, with targeted funding, that the needs of the voluntary sector are included in key federal initiatives, or to assist regional projects to collaborate in developing a network that would benefit the entire country rather than one or two regions.

At the very least, the Joint Table should address two of the top three choices – the development of an online funding database and reduced administration in funding processes – as they relate to federal funding programs.

2. INTRODUCTION

The Information Management/Information Technology (IM/IT) Joint Table of the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) commissioned a study of the technology needs of the Canadian voluntary sector in order to guide the investment of \$6.1 million in technology programs over the next three years. RealWorld Systems (RWS), an information technology consulting firm specializing in nonprofits and evaluation, was retained.

This study aimed to identify a set of options that are highly valued by the sector, are implementable, and have high potential for impact across the entire sector.

Technology should be a tool, not an end in itself. Investments in information and communication technologies should be tied to organizational goals rather than assessed in isolation. Accordingly, the methodology of the study focused on the needs of the sector as a whole, and how technology could meet those needs.

Between September and December 2001, RWS interviewed over 50 key informants in the voluntary sector, searched the literature for information on the use of technology, surveyed over 2,500 voluntary sector agencies across the country, and searched for best practices among businesses and nonprofits in Canada and elsewhere.

Consistent with VSI definitions, the voluntary sector was defined as incorporated not-for-profit organizations, of which there are approximately 150,000. About 77,000 of these are registered charities. RWS did not include hospitals, schools and universities in the study, since these organizations have massive technology needs that may not be characteristic of the rest of the voluntary sector.



One of the biggest challenges in assessing technology needs is that technology itself is rapidly changing, so that many organizations are not familiar with the ways that technology can help them. Most people do not know enough about the costs or benefits of technology to be able to rank options meaningfully. In addition, ‘best practices’ in this area are often misleading. A technology program that looks like a best practice now may turn out to be an expensive disaster two years later. Interviews and survey tools had to probe for options that were understandable and meaningful to the sector. They also had to focus on options that could be flexible enough to respond to new information and tools over the next three years.

On the basis of interviews and a scan of the literature, RWS developed a list of 17 technology options (Appendix A) that we tested in a structured survey in English and French sent to over 2,500 organizations. The results, comprising responses from 495 organizations, are summarized in this paper.

3. METHODOLOGY

There were three major phases of the study: option generation, option ranking, and analysis.

3.1. Option Generation

Based on open-ended interviews with over 50 key informants from the voluntary sector (see Appendix B), a literature review and an open online discussion, we developed a list of key needs, issues and options. The interviews, for example, resulted in about 700 separate comments that were analyzed and synthesized to come up with 25 technology options. These options were assessed against the organizational needs and technology studies from the literature to ensure that all major perceived needs would be addressed by at least one option in the final list.

The Joint Table was anxious to hear the perspectives of voluntary sector organizations that have typically been left out in other consultations. Accordingly, we spoke to many organizations that were small, new, regionally dispersed and/or rural in preference to the ‘usual suspects’ of national umbrella groups located in Toronto or Ottawa. In addition, several opinion leaders from national groups were interviewed because of their connections and knowledge of the sector; many of these are members of VSI joint tables. RWS interviewed Canadian voluntary sector agencies with expertise on the overall nature and needs of the sector, and/or lead users who are using technology in effective or highly promising ways to meet organizational and community needs.

Our aim was to develop a list of technology options that would provide a comprehensive list of what the voluntary sector perceives as valuable. RWS wanted to capture the sector’s perspectives using, as much as possible, their own words. Therefore, the final list contains options that, in some cases, overlap or are subsets of others. The 25 options were tested in focus groups and further narrowed to 17. The final list is in Appendix A.



3.2. Option Ranking

The list of options was incorporated into a structured survey and tested in a pilot mailing to 200 organizations selected randomly from the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA) database of registered charities. The survey was also posted on the Web, and promoted in listservs, email mailing lists, and articles posted in Charity Village, Canada's largest portal for nonprofits. It was handed out at several VSI consultations as well. On the basis of the pilot results changes were made to the survey instructions and demographic questions. However, none of the 17 options were changed. Responses from the pilot group confirmed that the list was comprehensive and accurate.

The survey was then sent to 2,249 randomly selected voluntary sector organizations drawn from the Volnet database¹. This database comprises the CCRA dataset of registered charities as well as the incorporated nonprofits from every province except Nova Scotia. The following adjustments were made to achieve the final sampling frame.

- Hospitals, universities, schools and churches/places of worship were removed prior to randomization. (Places of worship represent a third of registered charities in Canada).
- Organizations that had been sent the pilot surveys were not removed prior to randomization.
- RWS randomly selected 2,000 organizations from the remaining dataset
- Organizations that were under-represented were then added to the sample
- RWS randomly selected 100 places of worship to ensure that faith communities were included.
- 100 organizations from each of the following regions and groups were added to the sample: the Territories, Prairies, Quebec, Atlantic provinces, Ontario and B.C.; French language agencies; organizations serving Aboriginal Canadians; organizations that were registered before 1980 and those registered after 1995; those with total annual revenues of under \$100,000 and over \$2 million.
- Size, age and language of organizations were identified through the CCRA database.
- Agencies serving Aboriginal Canadians were identified by means of a text search on agency names. The search was based on the following words: Native, Aboriginal, Indian, Inuit, First Nation, Cree, Mohawk, Iroquois, Ojibwa, Six Nations, Metis, Métis. We also checked visually to ensure that the selections were appropriate, e.g., not relating to 'East Indian' or 'West Indian' organizations.
- If there were less than 100 organizations in a cell, we randomly selected from that category from CCRA to bring it up to 100.

¹ The database was developed by Volnet for its own research and offered to the IM/IT Joint Table for this study.



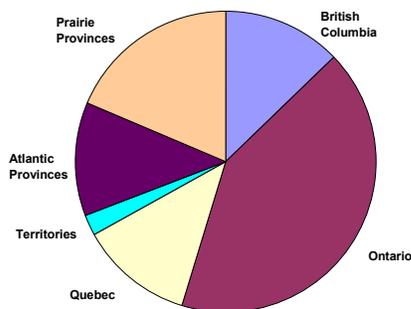
In the demographic section of the survey we asked whether the community served by the organization was at least 25% rural, aboriginal, francophone, or people with disabilities. And we asked what type of organization they were, based on the categories used by the Volunteer Opportunities Exchange: Art & Culture, Education, Environment, Faith Group, Health, International Aid, Social Services and Sport & Recreation. These two questions were the most problematic to agencies; three agencies stated that their community groups, if not appearing on the list, seemed to be less valued by the survey, and several objected to the inaccuracy of the category system. In total, we ended up with 26 separate groups for analysis (six regions, five types of communities served including ‘none of the above’, three sizes, three ages, eight types, and the total group).

3.3. Analysis

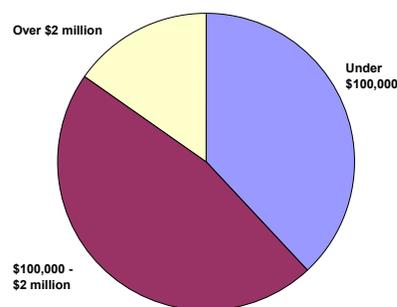
The survey contained 17 technology options, one open-ended question for additional comments, plus several demographic questions. Each option could be rated as ‘High Priority’, ‘Medium Priority’, ‘Low Priority’, or ‘Don’t Know’. As noted above, every option was good; all of them could be supported from interviews and research, and even the lowest-rated was scored as Medium or High Priority by half of the respondents. In order to rank the options, we subtracted the ‘Low Priority’ scores from the ‘High Priority’ scores for each question, and ignored the ‘Medium Priority’ and ‘Don’t Know’ responses. As a result, some options have a negative score (if there were more ‘Low’ than ‘High’ priority ratings) even if most respondents rated them as Medium or High priority.

RWS received a total of 184 responses from the mailing of 2,294 randomly selected organizations, making a response rate of 8%. This is a fairly low response, but not unexpected given that the final survey was six pages long and quite complex. In total, including the Web surveys and responses from consultations, we received 495 completed surveys. It was impossible to estimate the response rate for the Web survey, since public invitations were sent out broadly through many online communication vehicles.

All Respondents by Region



All Respondents by Annual Income





The responses we received represented a cross-section of voluntary organizations both in total and from the random sample. RWS heard from organizations of all sizes across the country, most of which had small or medium sized annual incomes.

The low response rate means that the survey respondents were, to a large degree, self-selected – even the ones that were sent random mailings. Respondents had the interest and the incentive to fill out a long and complicated survey. Therefore, there is a possibility that the results of the survey do not represent the real preferences of the sector. Fortunately, there was a high degree of consistency among the responses. The results from the random mail/fax surveys were not markedly different from the results of the web-based surveys, and the subgroups were almost identical to each other in terms of their top five, middle four and bottom eight choices. That suggests that organizations from a wide range of the Canadian voluntary sector who are inclined to state a public opinion about technology are likely to agree with the results of this survey.

For the total group of respondents, the top five options that are described in the Executive Summary were among the top seven choices for all 26 subgroups except for the Territories (where the third choice was rated as eighth), and for Faith Groups and International Aid, which had significantly different profiles from the rest of the group. The random sample responses, with a total number of respondents of 184, had smaller numbers in each subgroup and therefore showed a bit more deviation although not much. The same top five options were all in the top 8 ranks of the 26 subgroups except for the three groups noted above Faith, International Aid and Territories) and Quebec, which, like the Territories, rated the third choice lower (9th rank).

The consistency between and among groups suggests a high degree of consensus as to the importance of the top five choices. The minor exceptions (the Territories and Quebec) and the major exceptions (Faith Groups and International Aid) will be described in detail in section 5, below.

For more information on our methodology and the sources we included in our review, contact VSI for a set of supplementary documents (described in Appendix C).

4. NEEDS OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR – OPTION GENERATION

In order to generate the technology options for the survey, RWS interviewed key informants and reviewed the literature on the voluntary sector to identify the most important issues facing the sector, as well as the most important uses of technology.

We did not focus on how nonprofits were using technology, but rather on how technology could be effective in helping organizations meet important needs, such as fulfilling their missions, attracting funding, using resources efficiently, and working more effectively with staff and volunteers. For a



review on how nonprofits are currently using technology, see the recent paper by Mark Surman of the Commons Group (2001).²

This section summarizes the major issues and needs coming out of the literature and interviews, and that led to the list of 17 options in Appendix A. RWS consulted key studies covering a diversity of voluntary organizations, including:

- A study by Paul Reed and Valerie Howe, Statistics Canada, of 40 community-based organizations in eight diverse communities across Ontario. The purpose of the investigation was to understand how different kinds of voluntary organizations are functioning and to ascertain the state of the voluntary sector in general in Ontario in the 1990s.³
- A report from the Clare and Harold Clark Institute for the Study of Charitable Activities in Canada (Carold Institute) which, with George Brown College of Applied Arts and Technology, co-sponsored a symposium on the voluntary sector in 1999. They invited selected leaders in the voluntary sector from across Canada to explore and deepen their understanding of the key issues facing the sector.⁴
- An environmental scan of information management/information technology in the voluntary sector prepared by PRA Inc. for the IM/IT Joint Table. The report included the results of interviews with 24 key informants, most of whom represented large umbrella groups in the voluntary sector.⁵
- An update to Statistics Canada's 1997 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating.⁶

Almost all of these studies based their findings on interviews with, surveys of or presentations from members of the voluntary sector rather than independent measures. Some used structured surveys while others, like Reed and Howe's, used lengthy open-ended interviews. In a sense, they provided a context, filled the gaps from the interviews conducted from this study, and enabled us to focus on technology issues in our interviews rather than general voluntary sector needs.

Four overarching needs of the voluntary sector emerged from the literature review, supported by the interviews. These needs were for:

² Commons Group, *From Access to Applications: How the Voluntary Sector is Using the Internet*, (2001), Ontario Ministry of Citizenship.

³ Paul Reed and Valerie Howe, "Voluntary Organizations in Ontario in the 1990s," in *Information and Insights for the Nonprofit Sector*, Cat. No. 75F0033MIE, Issue No.1 (Statistics Canada, 2000).

⁴ Carold Institute, *Voluntary Action and Organization in Canada: The Last Decade and Beyond* (1999).

⁵ PRA Inc., *Information Management/Information Technology and the Voluntary Sector – Environmental Scan*, Prepared for the IM/IT Joint Table (2001).

⁶ Statistics Canada, *2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating*, Cat. No. 71-542-XIE.



- Funding
- Efficient funding processes
- Training
- Information technology resources

A fifth theme resonated through the interviews — voluntary organizations should collaborate in order to share information, resources and expertise. This idea was particularly espoused by voluntary organizations that were small, struggling or in a remote, rural location. In some respects, networking and collaboration could be considered in the context of each of these core needs, such as collaborating in joint funding applications, or sharing training or best practice information.

4.1. Funding

Funding emerged as by far the most important key issue in the literature and interviews. The overall level of funding is widely believed to be insufficient, particularly in the context of increasing demand for the services of the voluntary sector organizations in the face of a reduction and/or change in the type of funding available. Voluntary sector organizations must compete amongst themselves for funds. This competition has an impact not only on survival but also on the time and resources available to deliver the organization's core services.

The short term nature of many funding arrangements and the changing environment means that the income level for many organizations varies from year to year. This instability hinders long term planning and can lead to solutions that, while workable in the short term, are inefficient over a longer time span.

Increased flexibility of funding was seen by some to be an important need, especially in relation to technology. Rigid constraints on the use of funds—not allowing funds to be used for general operations, for example—can prevent an organization from managing its affairs in the most effective and efficient manner.

4.1.1. Level of Funding

Reed and Howe's study of diverse voluntary organizations in Ontario came to several conclusions, one of which was that there was "a chronic difficulty of insufficient funding relative to needs". Some agencies report their caseloads have doubled or tripled in a five-year span while their funding has not kept pace. Agencies of all types are searching for new sources of funds.



A key finding of the study was that, though this underfunding had existed for a long time, the challenges facing voluntary organizations today were not the result of government cuts alone but a combination of shifts in the sources of government funding (from grants to contracts) and the rapidly changing social environment.

The participants at the Carold Institute's symposium characterized the voluntary sector as "vibrant but vulnerable." Contributing to its vulnerability was competition for scarce funding, which was seen as the biggest issue facing organizations within the sector, often draining resources that were formerly directed toward direct service or advocacy.

A voluntary organization may receive funds from donors as well as government or institutional funders. Statistics Canada's *2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating* found that, although the total amount donated increased by 11% between 1997 and 2000, the number of donors declined. The sector is thus relying on a smaller base of donors, which puts it in a vulnerable position. Aggravating this concern is the finding that more Canadians are questioning charitable fundraising. A large percentage reported "not liking the way in which requests are made," and "thinking that the money will not be used efficiently," as reasons for not giving more money to charitable and nonprofit organizations.⁷ Reed and Howe also point out that, with an additional 30,000 charities registered between 1986 and 1999, the competition for donors has intensified.

Our key informants expressed similar concerns about the level of funding. Among their comments were the following:

- The major trend affecting voluntary sector organizations (VSOs) today is survival.
- A major trend affecting VSOs is the need to compete for funds.
- Government should assist VSOs through core funding programs so they can concentrate on service delivery instead of on survival.

4.1.1.2. Income Stability

Reed and Howe found that income instability was widespread among the agencies surveyed. This affected the agencies' effectiveness, especially among the smaller organizations that had fewer options for expanding their income base. Ninety percent of the participating agencies said their ability to serve clients had been weakened by income instability or cuts.

Our key informants commented on the futility of short term funding programs:

- Funding [for technology programs] needs to be spread over ten years.

⁷ Statistics Canada, *2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating*, p. 74.



- Ensure that any funding program is sustainable, that it won't be dropped at the end of the funding cycle or in a few years.
- Government funding for two years is setting up VSOs to fail. They need long term funding, at least ten years.
- Funders give short-term money for technology and then pull out. VSOs can't afford to continue paying for maintenance. Technology in the voluntary sector requires long-term funding.

4.1.3. Funding Flexibility

Some voluntary organizations face gaps in their financial resources due to restrictions imposed by the funder on their use of funds. Funders are often willing to fund specific projects but reluctant to invest in general operating expenses. This is particularly true for information technology where ongoing funds to maintain the equipment are frequently lacking.

During interviews conducted by PRA Inc., informants indicated that restrictions in funding mechanisms that limit the purchase of capital equipment were a common barrier facing many voluntary organizations.⁸ The authors concluded that nonprofits needed funding that was both reliable and flexible. Government funding tends to be highly targeted, which often restricts organizational activities.

Our key informants reiterated the need for flexible funding. They indicated that:

- Government funding is too rigid for the reality of VSOs. Funding could be more personalized to their communities and needs.
- It is extremely difficult to find funding for operational needs to deliver products.
- Computers are inexpensive enough that they don't have to be treated as a capital expense. In any case, funders are going to have to be willing to fund information technology as a program cost.
- Our agency could never have bought computers - we can't buy capital expenses under most funding programs. They were supplied to us.

⁸ PRA, p. 10.



4.2. Efficient Funding Processes

Voluntary organizations reported a need for a more efficient funding process, one that leaves them with more time and energy to devote to service delivery.

When they are applying for and reporting on funds, voluntary organizations are subject to the requirements of the funders, requirements over which they have no control. As the voluntary sector becomes more 'business-like', and as competition for funds becomes more intense, these requirements add to the overall administrative burden of these organizations. Not only are there varying application forms and more frequent reporting, but organizations also have to pay more attention to contractual, liability and other issues.

The increased administrative burden takes time. It also requires additional skills, and it takes resources away from the voluntary organization's core purpose, which is to deliver a specific service, at a time when there is increasing demand for those services. Reed and Howe comment that "diverting staff to deal with these matters [additional attention to fundraising, partnering, reporting, computerizing], especially when client issues are becoming more complex, results in great stress to everyone in these organizations."⁹

One of our key informants commented that fundraising was the biggest waste of time in terms of interfering with service delivery. Another suggested that VSOs should be relieved of many administrative activities by having access to more centralized administrative services, so they can concentrate on serving their communities.

There are at least three ways in which the funding process could be made more efficient from the voluntary organizations' point of view, and therefore more effective in service delivery:

- Simplified reporting requirements;
- Standardized application process; and
- A central source of information about available funds.

4.2.1. Reporting Requirements

Reporting on performance is an important way for voluntary organizations to demonstrate to funders and the public how effective their support has been in enabling the organization to achieve its goals. Funders and the public are requiring an increased level of reporting which in turn requires additional time and resources to complete.

⁹ Reed and Howe, p. 3.



While it is hard to argue against accountability, the level of reporting required is often onerous for an organization with limited resources. The time taken on reporting leaves less time available to deliver service.

Reed and Howe report that more than two-thirds of agencies say they spent significantly more time reporting to their funders.¹⁰ At the same time, many believe that the information requested by funders is not appropriate for judging their organizations' effectiveness.

The Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector (Broadbent report) supports the principle of outcome-based assessments but cautions that "requiring outcome-based performance measurement in an overly simplistic manner or without investment in adequate capacity to support it will almost certainly lead to more harm than good."¹¹ The report also points out that, in terms of reporting on governance, there should be differential requirements for small charities and larger ones.

Several of our key informants agreed that making applications, monitoring and reporting were extremely arduous and time-consuming. Others pointed out that information technology was helpful for these reporting activities.

Voluntary organizations with scarce resources need to have a balance between accountability and service delivery.

4.2.2. Standardized Funding Applications

A number of our informants talked of the frustrations involved in applying to different funders for grants. In some cases the frustrations stemmed from having to duplicate information on each application; in others it was because each funder required a different approach to the information. What was needed was some standardization to simplify the application process. This would save resources and enable the voluntary organizations to focus on their core goals.

Informants' comments and suggestions included:

- There should be an online data dictionary to reduce funder duplication collecting data from agencies.
- It would be great if funders had access to the same financial documents, bylaws and annual reports, so we don't have to fill out so many forms.

¹⁰ Reed and Howe, p. 3.

¹¹ Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector (1999), *Final Report: Executive Summary and Principal Recommendations* (1999) p. 3.



- There should be a database with aggregate information on your agency with whatever you need to submit to funders so it was available to them so they don't keep asking for duplicate information on, for example, Board members. This is a major timewaster.
- Funders are becoming too demanding. There are too many steps and it takes too long to apply for funding. VSOs do not always have enough staff to take care of them.
- Find ways to help VSOs spend less time finding money for the current year.
- Reduce the costs of data collection and analysis for agencies by streamlining the information that funders request. Reducing duplication through common schemes would be very helpful.
- The grant process should be streamlined. The process is too cumbersome, and it is misdirected. It is set up only for those who have grant writing skills and grant administration skills.

4.2.3. Centralized Funding Information

One effect of increased competition for funding is that voluntary organizations are looking for a wider range of funding sources. Reed and Howe report that agencies of all types are looking for ways to reduce their dependency on a single or unstable source of income.

The key informants said that, as well as a database of agency information as described above, they need an easy way to look for available funds, such as a centralized database of funds.

- The government should create an Internet site, such as Strategis, for VSOs to find out about all funds available ahead of time. They are always told at the last minute.
- Helping small and struggling voluntary organizations means helping them spend less energy and time on trying to find the dollars to do things.
- VSOs need to have sources of information in order to find out about funding programs and deadlines. This information must not only be for people in the loop.

4.3. Training

The need for training to develop competence in a range of organizational functions was a common theme raised by the key informants and mentioned in the literature. Reed and Howe found that, as a condition of funding, organizations are being required to demonstrate capacities outside their service delivery, including budgeting, evaluation, program administration and fund development skills.



The need for training, especially in information technology, was frequently raised by our key informants. The following are a selection of their comments:

- More funds for training are needed. Funding just to buy computers is not enough. People need to be trained on how to create Web sites, how to develop protocols, how to maintain the network, etc.
- Set up a system of grants where VSOs could get training in technology so they can solve their own technical problems.
- As technology gets easier to use, the need for training and technical support will keep going 'up the chain' to more strategic uses of technology.
- One suggestion is to set up a training program for trainers, creating a series of experts through large national organizations and other effective regional ones.
- Computers are great but not utilized to their full potential. Training is vital.
- There should be funding for continuing education related to technology.
- One of the trends in the sector is the lack of technical skills, training support, and lack of funds to access technology.
- One of the major trends that will affect the way various communities use technology is the required skill. Despite the fact that technology is becoming more user friendly, there is an increasing need to be more knowledgeable in order to maintain the equipment. It is important for VSOs to have funding to train their staff or hire new staff with the required skills.
- VSOs require continuous training. Training should be widely available.
- Training is the most important thing, the number one issue.

4.4. Information Technology Resources

While the second organizational need (for a more efficient funding process) is related to factors external to the organization, the fourth addresses information needs that are internal. In many respects, the internal information needs vary with diversity in the voluntary sector. The needs of small and/or rural organizations are different from the larger, well-established ones. Both, however, have a need to adopt information technology and to remain current if they wish to be credible to funders and the public.

In general, information technology resources include:

- Information management and information technology tools



- Communications and the Internet
- Access to shared and central resources

Before looking at these different components of IT resources in more detail, general comments about information technology from our key informants included:

- VSOs must increase their individual capacity by using technology.
- VSOs should use technology as a tool to achieve their mission and enhance service delivery.
- One of the trends is to find a less expensive way to have personalized software program development.
- Technology is crucial for voluntary organizations ... it is a key element of any infrastructure. Organizations cannot be efficient without technology.
- There is a huge problem of how to integrate technology into the VSO's day-to-day operations. If VSOs saw the benefit of technology they might be more willing to implement technology.
- The voluntary sector should be using technology to facilitate and cut the costs of reorganizing its processes, to facilitate operational processes especially internal and external communications.
- Technology should be used as communication and business tools to enhance service delivery ... as long as organizations can keep their equipment current and have access to technology training.

4.4.1. Information Management and Information Technology Tools

For most voluntary organizations, information is one of the primary resources they work with. They need to manage information about donors, fundraising and volunteers. Advocacy organizations need to make information readily available to the public. They need to manage funds received, accounting, scheduling. They need information technology tools such as databases and other software.

Some specific tools and issues mentioned by our key informants included:

- It's important for VSOs to have good management policies of how information should be managed.
- VSOs would be more effective with scheduling, accounting, word processing packages.
- Technology should be used as a tool for online fundraising/pledges.



- Online volunteer management systems would make the sector more effective and efficient.
- Technology should be used for supporting in-house administrative tasks, desktop publishing, email and Internet sites.
- Technology is a great tool to reach people with disabilities.
- Hardware and software programs are important, and mostly contact management programs (databases). Commercial ones are not suited to VSOs and are too expensive.
- Power Point technology is needed in the sector but it is too expensive to buy or rent. It should be more accessible to VSOs.
- VSOs need to use technology for accountability, using databases to track how services are delivered.
- VSOs need to increase the pool of recruiting. Teleworking could be an interesting way to attract valuable people.
- VSOs will require good database technologies to help track their service delivery.
- The voluntary sector should use technology for database management purposes. Small and medium organizations do not have funds to buy research software programs.

4.4.2. Communications and the Internet

The ability to communicate with members, government and the public is critical for voluntary organizations. One of the revolutions that the Internet has brought is in communications, with email and informative Web sites available 24 hours a day, regardless of geography. In PRA's study, organizations indicated that email was the most frequently used new technology.¹²

Most of the organizations in the PRA study were umbrella organizations that are in constant communication with their members, public and governments. These organizations felt they had no choice but to keep up with and harness information technology.¹³

Our key informants had a wide range of comments about communication and Internet needs:

¹² PRA, p. 8.

¹³ PRA, p. 9.



- The voluntary sector as a whole needs to get on to electronic use of email, Web, e-commerce, donations, looking for funds, programming, registering online, list of volunteers needed. It would be used for public but also internally amongst the sector.
- VSOs should use the Internet to search for information, communicate by email, work with virtual VSOs' staff, get online training, and circulate information about themselves.
- Email is the essential way to communicate in the North, across long distances.
- Email is a very important way to communicate, and becoming essential.
- Many volunteers are using email and the Web. We need to use it with them to make it easier for them to volunteer, reduce turnover.
- Web sites are important for communicating with colleagues.
- Email is better than cold calls as an outreach tool for marketing purposes.
- Listservs, email, discussion groups are invaluable tools to help people communicate around issues and interests instead of around geography. Isolated people can also join regardless of where they live.
- Use and experiment with videoconferencing.
- Videoconferencing could be an alternative to the expensive cost of traveling for training/meetings.
- Technology is a good way to replace the need to travel thanks to videoconferencing, online training, email.
- Rural areas have slow Internet connections. Web sites must be lean, able to work with slow and unreliable Internet.
- Increase Internet access.
- The cost of Internet connectivity is a major trend.
- Connectivity is the key (email and the Web) for VSOs in the near future.
- Internet high-speed access is a major trend. A lot of offices do not have it. Increasing their speed will help them be more efficient
- VSOs require broadband access.



- The core technology trend affecting VSOs is the speed of Internet access, and Internet access itself.
- Computers and Internet access are crucial tools for VSOs to be more effective and efficient.
- Internet access is a must for small and struggling voluntary organizations.
- Funds to help VSOs have Web page design would be good. It is too expensive to have done commercially.
- All VSOs should have a Web site.

4.4.3. Shared and Central Resources

Many of our key informants agreed that access to shared resources and information was an important way to build strength in the sector. One of our key informants commented, however, that collaboration between voluntary sector organizations had declined due to competition for resources and money.

A common problem, according to PRA, is the difficulty voluntary organizations have in keeping up with technological changes. One of the conclusions from its study was that sharing costs and resources might be a way to help voluntary organizations adopt new technologies affordably.¹⁴ Reed and Howe also talked of partnering as a way to do more with less.

Comments about networking and sharing resources from our informants included:

- Suggest content management systems for the sector, helping agencies share knowledge and resources.
- Suggest consumer reviews of software, evaluation, see what's available and works.
- Suggest standards and data exchange; ways systems can usefully talk to each other.
- A standard category index across the whole sector would greatly improve the ability to search for services available.
- VSOs regardless of size must coordinate by using technology.
- The full potential of technology includes information sharing and sophisticated databases.

¹⁴ PRA, p. 3.



- It is very important that the small VSOs network in order to accomplish things that only a large organization used to do. This can be accomplished through the use of technology and an online presence.
- Sharing best practices is the first step to integrating technology in the voluntary sector.
- Technology should be used to work collaboratively with similar agencies to reduce duplication of work.
- The ability to work collaboratively within their community – with government, other not-for-profits and businesses – will build the capacity of small, struggling voluntary sector organizations.
- VSOs should use technology to link organizations together with same needs, concerns and issues.
- Simple networking, sharing of peripherals is still not done in small to medium organizations.
- VSOs really need technology (Internet, computers, etc.) so they can share information. Technology reduces administrative overhead.
- Technology will be used by voluntary organizations to exchange information and get organized in a more effective way. It is important to develop networks in the sector.

Other key informants advocated the value in having one place to look for information, a ‘one-stop shopping’ portal for the voluntary sector.

- VSOs would be more effective with access to best practices information.
- VSOs need to have access to information resources in order to know what other VSOs and governments do.
- A great example is any one-stop shopping site. These sites are for promoting their organizations but also act as umbrellas of sources for other VSOs.
- Portals would be good tools for VSOs to go to one source. Internet search engines are not easy to use.
- Government Web sites should be a place to share resources and information on technology for voluntary organizations.
- For rural agencies, the issue is finding and sharing information. When small organizations want to do an initiative, they’ve no idea if it’s been done before. They should be able to go to a Web site and look for similar projects. Otherwise it takes ages.



- There should be a central database for all VSOs in the country.
- An online database describing VSOs so they can contact each other for collaboration.
- Community information centres should be consolidating their databases across the province.
- An effective way to reduce technical support needs is to provide important applications and tools centrally.
- In order to build capacity of smaller VSOs, you could centralize technical resources ... where VSOs could go to get upgrades, technical support and maintenance support.
- VSOs need to have access to what is going on in the sector. A lot of information could be shared. For example, it would be good to have a Web site, like a job site, but for volunteers to register.

5. SURVEY RESULTS — OPTION RANKING AND ANALYSIS

On the basis of the organizational needs identified in the previous section, a list of technology options (Appendix A) was developed and tested with voluntary sector organizations. It covered the areas of engagement in public policy; sharing and finding knowledge; fundraising and resource development; collaboration; recruitment and training of volunteers and staff; technical support; and funding for hardware, software and connectivity.

The options were incorporated into a survey that was mailed out to a random sample of voluntary sector organizations and also publicly posted on the Web (see Section 3 on Methodology for more detail).

According to the 495 survey respondents, the following five options were the highest priorities:

1. **Top choice:** An inexpensive and easy to use online database of funders with detailed information about who they fund and how to apply. The service should make it easier to apply for funding by allowing organizations of all sizes to search for funding for which they are eligible. [Option 6]
2. Direct funding or discounted prices for computers, software, Internet connections and system upgrades. [Option 16]
3. More flexibility from funders to allow organizations to buy computers and software or upgrade their systems as an ongoing operating expense. [Option 17]

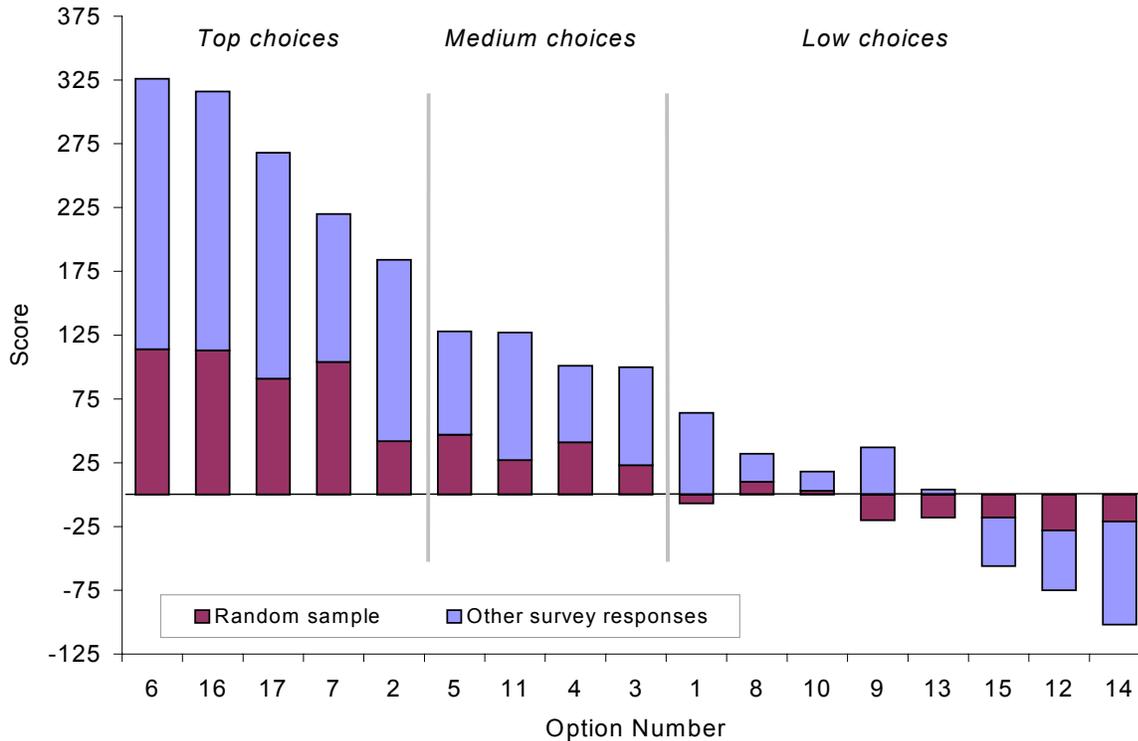


4. Reduced administration and paperwork for filling out funding proposals and reports. A possible service could eliminate duplication of paperwork by providing a common online database of information that funders frequently request. [Option 7]
5. A national Web site that would provide 'one-stop shopping' of information for and about the voluntary sector. The Web site would include news updates, best practices, links to important Web resources, advocacy tools including email campaigns and research about the sector. [Option 2]

These choices reflect core organizational needs of the sector as a whole – for sufficient and flexible funding. They also reflect the need for a reduction in administrative expenses that do not directly meet organizational missions, and the value of sharing information about the sector.



Options by Rank, All Respondents



The scores represent the number of ‘High Priority’ ratings subtracted by the number of ‘Low Priority’ ratings for each option. For example, top-rated option 6 was rated as High Priority by 360 respondents, and as Low by only 34, for a score of 326. The lowest rated option, number 14, was rated as High Priority by 112 respondents, but as Low by 187, for a score of -102.

The second group of options was as follows (in order of priority):

6. Fundraising tools, including fund processing, e-commerce, direct email campaigns and donor management software. [Option 5]
7. Online and distance training for staff and volunteers. This could include technical training in using computers, general professional development or management education for staff and volunteer development. [Option 11]
8. A stable, reliable and inexpensive service to allow voluntary sector organizations to create Web sites with their own domain names. The Web sites should be easy to update and allow staff or volunteers to publish community information on the Web including information about their services, educational material, advocacy and other public communication material. It would



also let organizations publish private documents for staff and volunteers such as policies and internal documents. [Option 4]

9. A way to find information about other voluntary sector organizations on the Web including an updated online database of voluntary sector agencies and possibly contact information for experts in various fields. Some of this information may be public and some private for agencies only. [Option 3]

The remaining options were ranked as low priority:

10. Easier ways to participate in consultations, so that all agencies have access to public policy and engagement processes. This may include lists of fax numbers and email addresses for agencies that are willing to be consulted on specific issues. [Option 1]
11. A way to collect and manage client and service information in a form that is secure but can be summarized for funders. This would reduce the administrative expense of satisfying accountability requirements. [Option 8]
12. Email for all voluntary sector organizations. There should be a way to set up secure, reliable email addresses for every organization and provide a way for them to pick up email either using a computer or other simpler devices. [Option 10]
13. Inexpensive teleconferencing, videoconferencing and Web based meeting tools to encourage collaboration and reduce travel costs. It could include shared workspace on the Web, shared event calendars and discussion groups and could support telecommuting for staff and volunteers. This would also encourage accessibility to remote agencies and community members. [Option 9]
14. A toll-free technical support line and other off-site centralized help. This could include contracts with central organizations to help agencies in their region or assist with the development of a national "I.T. Youth Corps" that would provide technical support. [Option 13]
15. Consumer reviews of hardware, software and best practices to enable sharing between voluntary sector organizations and better decisions about how to use and buy technology. [Option 15]
16. Volunteer, staff and Board recruitment including matching through online databases. [Option 12]
17. Simpler technology devices to replace computers for basic tasks and reduce the need for training and technical support. Technology must be easier to use so it doesn't take so much time from organizations. [Option 14]



Some of the low priority items could be included under one of the high priority ones; for example, inexpensive Web based meeting tools could fall under ‘discounted prices’.

Some specific demographic groups had a different set of priorities.

Faith groups were represented by the smallest number of responses for any subgroup (8 respondents), so their results should be interpreted with caution. Their top ranked options were email for all organizations, and online /distance training for staff and volunteers. Not surprisingly, they showed little interest in an online database of funding opportunities or in reduced paperwork for filling out proposals. On the basis of this very small sample, it seems possible that their needs are quite different from the rest of the voluntary sector. They were similar to the overall group in their high rankings for the top-rated options related to direct funding or discounts for technology, and for more funding flexibility.

International Aid groups (13 respondents) also preferred online/distance training to reduced paperwork, although they strongly supported funding flexibility and access to an online database of funding opportunities.

Respondents from Quebec (61 respondents) and the **Territories** (11 respondents) were very similar to most of the other groups in their top ranking of online funding database, direct funding or discounts for technology, reduced administration. They were less interested in more funding flexibility. Instead, the Territories requested online/distance training, and Quebec preferred email for all organizations and a Web site creation service.

These differences between subgroups were minor, and most could be explained by the low numbers of respondents (n=13 or less). Quebec, with 61 responses, was the exception. However, the top five preferred options for Quebec respondents were almost identical to the full groups’. If ‘direct funding or discounts on technology’ included email and Web site creation services, Quebec respondents’ priorities would also be met. Interestingly, agencies which reported that at least 25% of their communities were francophone had the same results as the overall group.

6. EXAMPLES OF HIGH PRIORITY SERVICES

There are many examples of programs related to the top-rated options chosen by voluntary sector organizations. We hesitate to call them ‘best practices’ because of the lack of research establishing whether these practices in fact lead to enhanced effectiveness or efficiency among organizations. In fact, many costly technology investments cited as ‘best practices’ one year can be shown to be disasters in following years, as demonstrated by the recent dot.com crash.

There are, however, many exciting and promising examples that can be used to guide the IM/IT in developing valuable services. They are listed in the same order of priority as the options they demonstrate, though some are combined, and we have not listed an example of ‘more flexibility from funders’.



For other examples and possible best practices, see the excellent review of technology programs used by Canadian voluntary sector agencies by the Commons Group for the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship.¹⁵

6.1. An inexpensive and easy to use online database of funders

This point combines the first and third choices. Sustainability, and more precisely funding, is a key organizational need and gap in IT use that has been identified repeatedly by nonprofit organizations. Online databases allow nonprofits to conduct highly targeted or very broad searches for multiple funders at the same time, saving significant staff time and resources in identifying potential funders. Good databases also provide sufficient information about funders to allow organizations to determine which organizations they are most likely to have success in approaching. This saves both funders and organizations significant time and resources. There exist already a number of such databases that allow nonprofit organizations to search for funders according to the type of funder and the type of initiatives funded. All of these databases are subscription-based and subscription costs can be prohibitive for some organizations with more limited resources. Existing databases also vary in the sophistication and user-friendliness of their search tools and the most sophisticated database is targeted to the scientific community not the voluntary sector.

For example:

- The Canadian Centre for Philanthropy (www.ccp.ca) provides an online subscription database of non-government grant-makers in Canada. Subscribers can search the database for specific funders by name, or by each of the following fields: the type of activity they are seeking funding for; geographic location; amount requested; and type of funding being sought – or by all fields at once.
- Vancouver-based, Metasoft's Big Online (www.bigdatabase.com/bigonline.nsf/publish/welcome) is an online subscription-based database of grant-makers in Canada and the United States. The directory includes more than 67,000 funding sources from private foundations, corporate sources and government programs. The database is updated regularly and includes information on funders' organization profile and contact information, financial statements, funding preferences and recent grants made. Metasoft updates the entries regularly through a team of four researchers and also offers consultation services on proposal writing.
- As a multi-purpose site for philanthropy serving grantees and grant-makers, the Foundation Center (www.foundationcenter.org) provides a detailed, searchable Web-based database of U.S.-based grant-making foundations. Users can search for foundations or for grants awarded.

¹⁵ Commons Group, *From Access to Applications: How the Voluntary Sector is Using the Internet* at www.volunteersonline.ca/news/environmentalscan.htm, December 2001.



A highly sophisticated search engine allows searching by multiple fields including funding type, geography and subject area. The database also includes a thesaurus to help users develop more effective searches. The service is subscription-based and provides four levels of access depending on need. The Center also provides training assistance to users in seminars across the U.S.

- Among its other online features, Community of Science (www.cos.com) includes a subscription-based online database of grant-makers in the R&D field around the world. The database includes a sophisticated search tool that allows grantees to do simple searches by geography or keyword, but also highly refined searches by multiple fields including funder type, funding amount, submission deadline and funding requirements. It includes an email update feature to alert users to new additions, the ability to publicize users' major research findings, and a personalization feature to tailor the site into a personal "Workbench".

6.2. Direct funding or discounted prices for hardware, software, connectivity

There are some examples of direct funding and reduced costs:

- Announced in the 1998 federal budget, the Voluntary Sector Network Support Program (VolNet; online at www.volnet.org) offers Internet connectivity, including computer equipment, new information technologies, network support and Internet skills development, to voluntary organizations. For eligible voluntary sector organizations, VolNet offers: a basic Internet account for one year; funding of up to 50 percent of the cost of the equipment needed to connect to the Internet; and basic Internet skills development to get online and start using the Internet. The program is currently scheduled to end March 31, 2002.
- Computers for Schools (CFS; online at www.schoolnet.ca/cfs-ope/) is a national, federal government-led program that operates in cooperation with all provinces and territories, the private and volunteer sectors. The program collects, repairs and refurbishes donated surplus computers from government and private sector sources and distributes them free to schools and libraries throughout Canada. Since 1993, CFS has provided more than 250,000 computers to schools and libraries in all provinces and territories. CFS now delivers more than 60,000 additional computers each year. The program also oversees repair and refurbishing centres throughout Canada where surplus computers are cleaned, refurbished and prepared for delivery. Workshops are staffed by volunteers, including current and retired telecommunications professionals, and students.
- Several technology companies offer a gifts-in-kind program to reduce costs of their products to nonprofit organizations or offer limited numbers of products free of charge. For example, Microsoft Canada offers the latest versions of many software products to nonprofits who successfully apply through third-party Web sites (www.compumentor.org, www.inkindcanada.ca and other distributors). To qualify, organizations must be registered charities.



6.3. Reduced administration and paperwork in filling out funding proposals and reports

A secure funding database like those described above could allow nonprofits and funders to save time and resources in meeting reporting and administrative requirements. By providing access to commonly requested information in a secure, online format, nonprofits can spend less time producing multiple reports to multiple funders and funders can receive ready access to information in a consistent and useful format. Many of the same organizations that are leading in the areas of online funding database are developing approaches to improved efficiencies. For example:

- Foundation Center (www.foundationcenter.org) (United States) provides access to a set of common online grant applications and online reports now used by several associations of funders in the U.S. such as the Donors' Forum of Chicago and the National Network of Grantmakers. These applications allow nonprofit organizations to seek funding from multiple funders through one type of application form. Some applications can be downloaded in Word and completed electronically while others must be printed from Adobe Acrobat. These common forms can save nonprofits significant time and effort by allowing them to duplicate much of or even all of the same information on an application form submitted to another funder.
- Community of Science (www.cos.com) (United States and Great Britain) provides science research funders with subscription-based access to online tools. Through its COS Expertise, funders can search a database to verify profile information about research organizations applying for funding, including biographies of individuals applying for funding, and to identify peer reviewers for funding allocation panels. Research-driven companies, government agencies, and private foundations can use COS Expertise to identify prospective collaborators, license new technologies, leverage R&D efforts and perform due diligence. All of these can significantly reduce the administrative burden on applicants, funded researchers and funders while enhancing opportunities to leverage project funding and collaborations.

6.4. National Web site providing 'one stop shopping' of information for and about the voluntary sector

Voluntary sector organizations have noted that they often do not know where to look on the Internet for information and that the number of different sites available makes it difficult to know which to use. A one-stop-shopping Internet site would provide nonprofits primarily, as well as funders and others interested in the voluntary sector in Canada, with a single point of entry (a portal) on the Internet to access multiple sources and types of information and services. The site can be constructed to be sector-wide or multiple sites might be tailored to the needs of sub-sectors (such as social service providers or arts organizations). There exist already several examples of online portals for the voluntary sector:

- GuideStar (www.guidestar.org) (United States) is a searchable online database of registered nonprofit organizations in the U.S. Guidestar provides a single point of access for funders to



locate information about the operations and finances of nonprofit organizations and allows donors to seek out and compare charities, monitor their performance and ensure greater confidence in their grantmaking activities.

- Network for Good (www.networkforgood.com) (United States) is a newly-launched online portal aimed at assisting charities in strengthening their connections with people seeking to donate, volunteer or speak out on issues. Users will be able to investigate and donate to nearly 850,000 charities in the Guidestar database, and peruse tens of thousands of volunteer opportunities.
- The Scottish Council of Volunteer Organizations (www.sevo.org.uk) is developing WorkWithUs.org (www.workwithus.org) a new, single online gateway for the Scottish voluntary sector. Once it is launched, the portal aims to deliver “a single port of call on the Internet for accessing all information, services and opportunities in the voluntary sector; a huge and totally interactive warehouse of Web sites; the biggest electronic library exclusively containing Voluntary Sector information, and a shopping mall.” To meet the IT needs of Scotland’s nonprofit organizations, WorkWithUs.org will also act as a consolidator of the latest software technology and will provide an interactive communication office on the Internet designed for, and used by, thousands of charities and Voluntary action groups.
- The Government of the Republic of Ireland, through Comhairle, the national social service agency, provides online access to a resource database for voluntary and community sectors in Ireland (www.comhairle.ie). On-screen access to the system is designed through a number of alternative routes: full text word search, index, keyword and alphabetical contents listings. The database contains at least six different categories of information including: funding for voluntary bodies for the Republic of Ireland and for Northern Ireland; practical information on managing volunteers; a directory of more than 500 nonprofit organizations in the sector including a description of their activities and contact information; a guide to setting up an information service in a nonprofit organization; information on establishing any nonprofit body; and a guide to other supports and resources available to the sector.
- Settlement.org (www.settlement.org) is a one-stop source for information and tools relevant to government-funded settlement service providers in Ontario. Service providers can access information on topics from employment and education to social services to legal and human rights that they need daily to provide services to their clients. Service providers can also download and print forms instantly that might normally take weeks to arrive by mail. There is a reference section for staff that provides access to recent reports, community publications and other relevant Web tools. This is another type of ‘one stop shopping’, that focuses on information relevant to client services rather than listing the organizations themselves.



7. RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the IM/IT Joint Table investigate the possibility of supporting all of the top five priorities identified by the voluntary sector. Given the relatively small amount of funding available - \$6.1 million over three years – the Joint Table could work with partners to extend the reach of its programs, and use its funding to stimulate sustainable interventions.

All of the top-ranked options are being designed or implemented in projects across Canada already. The IM/IT Joint Table may be able to ensure, with targeted funding, that the needs of the voluntary sector are included in key federal initiatives, or to assist regional projects to collaborate in developing a network that would benefit the entire country rather than one or two regions.

At the very least, the Joint Table should address two of the top three choices – the development of an online funding database and reduced administration in funding processes – as they relate to federal funding programs.

It is possible that multiple program options can be provided by one Web site, or that there are others ways to integrate several options. Some suggestions for further analysis follow.

7.1. Online funding databases and reduced administration

The development of a comprehensive, easily searchable database of funding opportunities for the voluntary sector is a massive task. Two Canadian services already exist, as described in the examples in section 6, above, but they are expensive and focus on foundation funding rather than government sources.

We recommend that the IM/IT Joint Table assess the potential of working with one or more federal government departments to develop a searchable database of funding programs that would meet the needs of the voluntary sector. This database should be designed to roll out across the entire federal government and other major funders, and should support processes to simplify reporting and proposal writing requirements.

Components of a mature online funding system may include the following:

1. An online, up-to-date and accurate directory of current Government of Canada funding programs in a common searchable format.
2. An online, up-to-date and accurate directory of voluntary sector organizations, with a core set of common data elements relevant to Government of Canada funding criteria. (This directory would include all registered charities as well as other voluntary sector organizations that wish to apply for federal funding. It would be optional for other voluntary sector organizations.)



3. A common application process that takes advantage of the data contained in the online voluntary sector database, in order to reduce duplication of paperwork for frequently requested information (addresses, financial summaries, etc.).
4. Tracking mechanisms to enable researchers in the federal government and voluntary sector to analyze and respond to funding trends.
5. Connections to other funding programs in provincial and municipal governments. This may take the form of offering the common application process to other funders, or through developing an integrated search and matching engine with other directories, or merely linking to other Web sites. Provincial and municipal funders could be invited to take advantage of the system on a cost-sharing basis, similar to the Merx procurement service.
6. Links to useful resources provided by the federal government or voluntary sector partners, including proposal writing tools and training for voluntary sector organizations, and relevant regulations, Treasury Board guidelines, evaluation frameworks and so on. Other information resources may be added to this service over time, including:
 - a. Personalized searching and matching for funding opportunities, including email notifications of new funding programs that match eligibility criteria or interests.
 - b. Consultation tools based on the online agency directory. Agencies could state whether they were willing to participate in consultations, and on what topic. Email notifications could be sent to agencies that matched interest profiles.
 - c. Template-based Web sites could be built onto the online organizational directory to enable agencies to add information to their funding profile if they wished. (Agencies that already have Web sites could be linked from the directory profile.)

7.2. Direct funding or discounted prices for technology

A grants and contribution program for technology purchase directed at the voluntary sector would not be an efficient way of using the IM/IT funding. Once the costs of administrating such a program was taken into account, including the costs to agencies of preparing funding proposals, the amount available to the sector would probably be less than the cost of providing the funding program. We recommend that the IM/IT Joint Table consider a service that identifies and reviews high priority technology products and services for the sector, and negotiates discounts or gifts-in-kind with providers.

A good evaluation should be built in to ensure that the program monitors the success of the services from the perspective of the sector, and makes changes to the portfolio accordingly. The service could be posted on the Web and include links to corporate charity discounts, negotiated discounts through government programs, research and reviews of basic tools such as email services, teleconferencing, Internet appliances and so on.



7.3. Funding flexibility around technology purchases

This option—greater flexibility from funders in relation to purchases of computers and software—requires advocacy and possibly education within the federal government and other funders. Within the federal government, rules around the purchase of capital equipment (for example) is a matter of contracting policy and practice established by the Treasury Board Secretariat for individual funding departments. Outside the federal government this is a matter of the individual policy and practice of particular funders.

The VSI Working Group on Financing is currently examining issues that affect the stability and sustainability of voluntary sector organizations. Some issues are being examined with the Capacity Joint Table, while others—such as the current federal funding situation—are being examined by the Interdepartmental Working Group. The Working Group’s recent Progress Report confirmed that “funding that doesn’t always consider the real costs of implementing a project or delivering services, such as directly-related infrastructure costs.”¹⁶ This IT investment option may involve coordination and collaboration between the IM/IT Joint Table, the Working Group on Financing and the Interdepartmental Working Group.

We recommend that the IM/IT Joint Table consider supporting advocacy efforts with relevant federal government departments and other funders regarding funding flexibility, possibly in conjunction with other Joint Tables.

7.4. A national Web site providing ‘one stop shopping’ of information for and about the voluntary sector

We recommend that the IM/IT Joint Table consider investing in a national Web site for the voluntary sector. The Web site could include news updates, best practices, links to important Web resources, advocacy tools including email campaigns and research about the sector. It would function as one of several voluntary sector portals in Canada. (Some portals already exist, as pointed out by several key informants, including Charity Village.)

Portals are characterized by many functions. They can grow and combine, and continue to gain in complexity. Functions provided by a national Web site could include links to the online database of funding opportunities described in section 7.1 above, detailed contact information about agencies in the voluntary sector, e-commerce services and so on.

This type of Web site presents massive challenges in content creation and management, as well as technical management. Modules should be added as funding is available, or as the sector demonstrates a strong interest and ability for using it. Unless the costs of ongoing content development and updating

¹⁶ Voluntary Sector Initiative (2001), “Impediments identified in current federal funding practices,” Progress Report of the Working Group on Funding.



are addressed convincingly in the business plan, the Joint Table should be cautious about funding this service, or restrict itself to assisting existing services to grow to the next level.

7.5. Incorporating other options

Several other options listed in the survey were ranked low in comparison with the five top choices, but still have high support among voluntary sector organizations. These options should be considered as possible components of the funded programs. For example, one possible function of a national Web site is a process for participation in government consultations. This option was fairly low ranked in the survey, but it is an essential issue for the sector as a whole, and could be included as a module.

As stated throughout this paper, all of the technology options listed in Appendix A are rated highly by many organizations. They are all good choices. Agencies and funders can use these options to assess their own interests and direct investments toward areas that meet their own priorities.



APPENDIX A - TECHNOLOGY OPTIONS

These options are in the same order that they were presented in the survey. Their ranking from the total group are in brackets. For example, the first choice was ranked as tenth out of 17. For more detail on ratings and scores, you can order detailed spreadsheets as part of the supporting documents described in Appendix C.

A Voice for the Voluntary Sector: Engagement in Public Policy

1. Easier ways to participate in consultations, so that all agencies have access to public policy and engagement processes. This may include lists of fax numbers and email addresses for agencies that are willing to be consulted on specific issues. [10]

Information Management: Sharing and Finding Knowledge

2. A national Web site that would provide 'one-stop shopping' of information for and about the voluntary sector. The Web site would include news updates, best practices, links to important Web resources, advocacy tools including email campaigns and research about the sector. [5]
3. A way to find information about other voluntary sector organizations on the Web including an updated online database of voluntary sector agencies and possibly contact information for experts in various fields. Some of this information may be public and some private for agencies only. [9]
4. A stable, reliable and inexpensive service to allow voluntary sector organizations to create Web sites with their own domain names. The Web sites should be easy to update and allow staff or volunteers to publish community information on the Web including information about their services, educational material, advocacy and other public communication material. It would also let organizations publish private documents for staff and volunteers such as policies and internal documents. [8]

Fundraising and Resource Development: Mobilizing the Community and Responding to Funders

5. Fundraising tools, including fund processing, e-commerce, direct email campaigns and donor management software. [6]
6. An inexpensive and easy to use online database of funders with detailed information about who they fund and how to apply. The service should make it easier to apply for funding by allowing organizations of all sizes to search for funding for which they are eligible. [1]
7. Reduced administration and paperwork for filling out funding proposals and reports. A possible service could eliminate duplication of paperwork by providing a common online database of information that funders frequently request. [4]



8. A way to collect and manage client and service information in a form that is secure but can be summarized for funders. This would reduce the administrative expense of satisfying accountability requirements. [11]

Collaboration: Connecting with Colleagues and Community Members

9. Inexpensive teleconferencing, videoconferencing and Web based meeting tools to encourage collaboration and reduce travel costs. It could include shared workspace on the Web, shared event calendars and discussion groups and could support telecommuting for staff and volunteers. This would also encourage accessibility to remote agencies and community members. [13]
10. Email for all voluntary sector organizations. There should be a way to set up secure, reliable email addresses for every organization and provide a way for them to pick up email either using a computer or other simpler devices. [12]

Volunteers and Staff: Recruitment, Training and Development

11. Online and distance training for staff and volunteers. This could include technical training in using computers, general professional development or management education for staff and volunteer development. [7]
12. Volunteer, staff and Board recruitment including matching through online databases. [16]

Technical Support: Reducing the Load on Organizations

13. A toll-free technical support line and other off-site centralized help. This could include contracts with central organizations to help agencies in their region or assist with the development of a national "I.T. Youth Corps" that would provide technical support. [14]
14. Simpler technology devices to replace computers for basic tasks and reduce the need for training and technical support. Technology must be easier to use so it doesn't take so much time from organizations. [17]
15. Consumer reviews of hardware, software and best practices to enable sharing between voluntary sector organizations and better decisions about how to use and buy technology. [15]

Hardware, Software and Connectivity: Paying for the Infrastructure

16. Direct funding or discounted prices for computers, software, Internet connections and system upgrades. [2]
17. More flexibility from funders to allow organizations to buy computers and software or upgrade their systems as an ongoing operating expense. [3]



APPENDIX B – LIST OF KEY INFORMANTS

<u>NAME</u>	<u>ORGANIZATION</u>	<u>CITY & PROVINCE</u>
Donna Achimov* ¹⁷	Public Access Programs, Communication Canada	Ottawa, ON
Laurie Beachell	Council of Canadians with Disabilities	Winnipeg, MB
Dr. Gary Birch*	Advisory Committee on Assistive Devices	Burnaby, BC
Paddy Bowen	Volunteer Canada	Ottawa, ON
Marilyn Box*	Voluntary Sector Initiative Secretariat	Ottawa, ON
Michelle Brown	Random North Development Association	Clareville, NF
Mary Ann Chambers	United Way of Canada – Centraide Canada	Westhill, ON
Bob Cumming*	Rural Secretariat, Agriculture and Agrifood Canada	Ottawa, ON
Michael Cushing	Ontario Social Development Council	Toronto, ON
Paul Dell’Aniello*	Seagram Chair of Management of Non-Profit Organizations, Université du Québec à Montréal	Montréal, QC
Janice Dunbar	Rural Women and Economic Development	Stratford, ON
Margaret Fietz*	Family Service Canada	Ottawa, ON
Richard Firth	Metropolitan Community Church	Toronto, ON
Réjean Gravel*	Systems and Informatics Directorate, Corporate Services Environment Canada	Hull, QC
Bonnie Greene	United Church of Canada	Toronto, ON
Ron Hagglund *	Charities Directorate, Canada Customs and Revenue Agency	Ottawa, ON
Al Hatton	Coalition of National Organizations	Ottawa, ON
Wayne Hellquist	Saskatchewan Science Centre; VolNet Community Representative	Regina, SK
Brenda Herchmer	Niagara Centre for Community Leadership	Welland, ON
Martin Itzkow	Intersectoral Secretariat on Voluntary Sector Sustainability	Winnipeg, MB
Donald Johnston	The Columbia Basin Trust; VolNet Community Representative	Castlegar, BC
Sol Kasimer	YMCA Canada	Toronto, ON
Ian Kershaw*	Focus IT Solutions	Calgary, AB
Philip King*	United Way of Greater Toronto	Toronto, ON
Nayanika Kumar	Millwoods Welcome Centre for Immigrants	Edmonton, AB
Lisanne Lacroix*	Industry Canada	Ottawa, ON
Scott Lamberton	Horizons of Friendship	Cobourg, ON
Marcel Lauzière	Canadian Council on Social Development	Ottawa, ON

¹⁷ An asterix (*) means that the interviewee is also a member of the IM/IT Joint Table



<u>NAME</u>	<u>ORGANIZATION</u>	<u>CITY & PROVINCE</u>
Maggie Leithead	Charity Village	Vancouver, BC
Forbes, Leslie	Central Okanagan Interagency Network	Kelowna, BC
Walter, Lewis	Halton Hills Public Library	Halton, ON
Rosalind Lockyer	North-Western Ontario's Women's Loan Fund	Thunder Bay, ON
Susan Margles*	Canadian Health Network, Health Canada	Ottawa, ON
Kathy Marshall*	Disabled Women's Network Canada	Brandon, MB
Duncan Matheson	Laurentian University	Sudbury, ON
Don McCreesh*	Celestica Inc.	Toronto, ON
Karen McGrath*	Health & Community Services – St. Johns Region, Newfoundland and Labrador	St. Johns, NF
Peter Mortimer	United Way Halifax, Community Resources; VolNet Community Representative	Halifax, NS
Rosalie Ndejuru	Centre de documentation sur l'éducation des adultes et la condition féminine (CDEACF); VolNet Community Representative	Montréal, QC
Martha Parker	Volunteer Calgary	Calgary, AB
Monica Patten	Community Foundations of Canada	Ottawa, ON
Francine Pelletier	Communautique; VolNet Community Representative	Montréal, QC
Carol Rock	Rural Women and Economic Development	Stratford, ON
Larry Rooney	Phoenix Community Works Foundation; VolNet Community Representative	Toronto, ON
Penelope Rowe	Community Services Council, Newfoundland and Labrador	St. Johns, NF
Peter Royce	Vancouver Community Net; VolNet Community Representative	Vancouver, BC
Grant Schellenberg	Canadian Policy Research Network	Ottawa, ON
Reza Shahbazi	Windsor New Canadian Centre	Windsor, ON
Martin Sime	Scottish Council for Voluntary Organizations (SCVO)	UK
Graham Stewart	John Howard Society of Canada	Kingston, ON
Maria Stewart*	Voluntary Sector Task Force, Privy Council Office, Government of Canada	Ottawa, ON
Mark Surman	Commons Group	Toronto, ON
Jo Sutton*	VolNet National Advisory Committee, Program Delivery	Almonte, ON
Shauna Sylvester	Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society	Vancouver, BC
Elaine Teofilovici	YMCA Canada	Toronto, ON
Andrea Uzans	Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society	Vancouver, BC
Rosa Walker	National Aboriginal Economic Development Board	Winnipeg, MB
Kathy Woodbake	Thunder Bay Multicultural Association	Thunder Bay, ON



APPENDIX C – SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

The following documents are available from the Voluntary Sector Initiative's IM/IT Joint Table. Unless otherwise stated, they are available in either PDF or Microsoft Word format.

- Detailed methodology, literature scan and examples of Web sites.
- Variants of survey, French & English, including cover letter.
- All comments from interviews and survey, with identifying information removed.
- Spreadsheets with results (Excel spreadsheet format only).



APPENDIX D – REFERENCES

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