

**BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS:
USING GOOD PRACTICES
AS A CATALYST**

**JOINT ACCORD TABLE FOCUS GROUPS
ON THE DRAFT CODES OF GOOD PRACTICE**

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HIGHLIGHTS

Greater understanding and appreciation: Participants from both sectors expressed the need and desire to learn more about each other's realities, structures and constraints. Recognition of the full extent of the voluntary sector's economic and social contributions to communities and civil society is an important component of relationship building. Commonalities in the challenges faced by frontline government staff and sector staff were greater than expected by the participants, a rewarding addition to the dialogue and an important learning in the focus group process.

Respect and equality: Underpinning the discussion in each community was the importance of a truly equal relationship between the federal government and the voluntary sector. However, the federal government is and will likely remain the most powerful player, given that it holds the purse strings and has the final word on policy decisions. Nonetheless, greater mutual respect is likely to flow from application of the Codes of Good Practice.

Hard-to-reach groups: There must be conscious efforts and specific mechanisms to engage "hard-to-reach" groups, which include small, rural, marginal or isolated voluntary sector organizations. Local organizations working at the community level wish to participate in policy development and have a lot to contribute. In addition, for survival and growth, they must build capacity, in part, through successful funding relationships.

Ongoing dialogue: Establishing an open, inclusive and ongoing dialogue between the voluntary sector and the government, either formally or informally, is key to the implementation of both Codes. For many in both the voluntary sector and the government, this will mean changing practices and attitudes.

Sustainable capacity: Sections of the Funding Code addressing sustainability should be strengthened and clarified to provide for: more multi-year or core funding; more program funding; and mechanisms to address systemic issues by allowing more carry-overs, lessening holdbacks, providing bridge financing, and allowing voluntary sector organizations to carry reserves without getting penalized. Many specific proposals were brought forward about what should be considered as infrastructure needed for capacity building. Building sustainable capacity in the voluntary sector is essential to the success of the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) and future joint processes.

Resources for policy work: Many voluntary sector organizations need additional human and financial resources in order to be able to engage seriously in policy development, including leading their own research efforts. The voluntary sector and the federal government should share the responsibility of allocating these resources.

Streamlined timing: Timing was identified as an important challenge that, when addressed, will greatly improve the relationship between the voluntary sector and the government. For the Funding Code, the financial and human resource problems created by waiting for approvals – and especially for initial and final payments on approved



programs/projects – was a source of concern everywhere. Participants were generally satisfied with the issue of time as stated in the Policy Development Code.

Simpler application processes: Application forms for government funding should be written in plain and clear language, consistent budget formats should be developed, and information requested should include only information required for assessment and decision-making. Efforts should be made to standardize the application forms from program to program within departments and also between departments. Consistent financial and other reporting requirements should be developed across programs and departments.

Refocusing accountability: Every Funding Code focus group commented on the onerous requirements for accountability, while acknowledging that accountability at a level suitable to the size of the project or program was appropriate. Both frontline government staff and voluntary sector staff talked about the increased emphasis on detailed financial accountability, and how the actual accomplishments, contributions and successes of projects and programs were being buried in the audit trail. They also mentioned that this emphasis on accountability left little time for government staff to work with community people to develop the programs and projects that would truly meet community needs. An important component that needs to be reflected in the Codes of Good Practice is to broaden accountability to include government’s accountability to the voluntary sector, and both sectors’ accountability to the community, in addition to the voluntary sector’s accountability to government.

Participatory evaluation: Evaluation is an issue that touches both funding program design and accountability. Participants felt that components for successful evaluation should be spelled out in the Code and should include: time and financial support for evaluation design; a commitment to joint community-based evaluation design; recognition that building community capacity does not necessarily produce “well-defined measurable results” in the short term; acceptance of anecdotal information for evaluation purposes, especially from small organizations; results that are useful to government, voluntary sector and the community; and a commitment to report back to community on evaluation results.

Accessible language: The language of the Codes of Good Practice should be simpler, making the content more accessible to the whole range of voluntary sector organizations. Shorter, plain language versions of both Codes could be produced as part of the communications plan for the Codes. The French versions of the Codes are somewhat problematic because of the complexities of translation and the occasional use of inappropriate terms; these language issues need to be resolved when the Codes are finalized.

Communication: The Codes must be widely disseminated and discussed across the voluntary sector and the government. Promotion of the Codes cannot and should not be the responsibility of large national sector organizations or the federal government alone; it is very important to expand the number of voluntary sector organizations involved. It is crucial to understand how federal policies and funding issues affect communities and



recipients of programs at the local level. It is also very important to share the experience and relationship building potential of this process with provincial, territorial, municipal and Aboriginal governments, as well as the corporate sector.

Commitments and structures: The voluntary sector must pull together locally and regionally, and establish better internal structures. There must be ways for sector organizations at the local, regional, territorial/provincial and national levels to participate and give input into the national voluntary sector structure. Clear political support for relationship building and for implementation of the Codes of Good Practice – demonstrated by top-down direction and bottom-up action – is needed within the federal government. New structures and processes, such as a dedicated Minister and ADM for the voluntary sector, will assist in implementing the Codes and continue the exploration of better ways of working together across the sectors.

Moving forward: A lot of hope for building stronger relationships was raised through the process of developing and signing *An Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector* and developing these Codes of Good Practice on policy development and funding. Although uncertainty about the results of this work was reflected in these focus group discussions, participants from both the federal government and the voluntary sector expressed a strong desire to improve their relationships.



PLAN FOR THE FOCUS GROUPS

The Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) Secretariat contacted participants and organizations involved in the *Accord* consultations in 2001 to set up focus groups on the draft Codes of Good Practice on policy development and on funding. Communities were chosen to represent a wide range of realities in Canada: east and west, north and south, English and French, rural and urban, small and large. Six communities were selected: Belleville, Edmonton, Moncton, Montréal, Vancouver and Yellowknife.

Participants were invited to attend a half-day workshop and a networking lunch. Following a presentation on the work of the Joint Accord Table, participants divided into two groups. One group worked on the Policy Development Code and the other on the Funding Code. The facilitator briefly presented the Code and then the following four questions were discussed:

1. Based on your experience, will the Code address the key problems and challenges in the policy development relationship between the voluntary sector and the federal government? Is anything missing from the Code? Should anything in the Code be changed?
2. What key points in the Code will really make a difference?
3. In your day-to-day work, what actions could you take to apply the Code?
4. What is needed to make the Code a reality across the country?

Approximately thirty participants were invited to each session; an average of six to nine people attended each of the fourteen focus groups. Efforts were made to include government officials; however the majority of participants represented the voluntary sector. In some focus groups, only voluntary sector representatives participated. Voluntary sector organizations ranged from large provincial organizations to small, volunteer-run organizations. There was representation from a wide range of groups including: health, family support, seniors, volunteer centres, ethnocultural, First Nations, literacy, and prisoners rights. Representatives from government included the following federal departments: Agriculture Canada, Canadian Heritage, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Corrections Canada, Environment Canada, Human Resource Development Canada, and Status of Women Canada. A small number of provincial or territorial government people attended, from Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Northwest Territories. One or two foundations, one municipal government official and one RCMP member attended.

Participants were asked to complete an evaluation form at the end of the session. The evaluations and comments of participants gathered from the evaluation sheets were generally very positive. A few would have preferred to have more time to discuss the four questions, and some expressed a certain level of scepticism regarding the benefits of the Codes to voluntary sector organizations, and for the implementation of the Codes. It is useful to note that the voluntary sector has a longer and deeper relationship with the federal government on funding issues than on policy development work. This was reflected in the discussions, and participants made more suggestions on the changes and improvements to the Funding Code.



ASSESSING AND IMPROVING THE CODES

The first and most important activity of the focus groups was to assess the Codes. Participants identified key problems and challenges experienced in the working relationship between the federal government and the voluntary sector in the areas of policy development (for one group) or funding (for the other group). They discussed whether the specific Code addressed these problems and challenges, and suggested changes to improve the Code.

In each community, participants had many comments about the Codes and made many suggestions, most of them additions. All the proposed changes are listed under Question 1 of Appendix B for the Policy Development Code, and Appendix C for the Funding Code. (Note that, in the Appendices, the bullets in sections 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 of the Policy Development Code were numbered for easy reference.) In this section of the report, we present changes that reflect consensus or convergence across the six communities for each of the Codes. We also include other significant comments from participants.

THE POLICY DEVELOPMENT CODE

Adequate resources to increase capacity for policy work

Policy development work requires time, expertise, commitment and people. Participants in all six communities mentioned the need for the voluntary sector to access more resources in order to develop its capacity for policy development work. Participants mentioned the need for increased human and financial resources for capacity building within the voluntary sector, as outlined in sections 4.3, first and second bullets. The majority wanted this issue to be added under section 4.1 so that the allocation of resources is the responsibility of both the voluntary sector and the federal government. The other communities raised this as an overall concern without proposing a change to the Code. Participants insisted that without adequate resources, the Code would remain a “lame duck” since a large number of voluntary sector organizations, especially smaller groups and groups with few or no staff members, would not have the capacity to participate in policy development. Yellowknife participants said that government officials also need more resources, especially those working at the territorial and regional levels. Better internal mechanisms and more vertical flow of information between the local, regional and national levels of government are also needed.

Learning more about the other party

Participants in five communities mentioned the need for both parties to learn about and understand each other more. They insisted that “learning about the other” should not only be the responsibility of the voluntary sector, as stated in section 4.3, second bullet. Government officials must also learn and know more about the voluntary sector and



become more aware of its contribution and value to society. Some participants explained that the voluntary sector is perceived in a negative way by the government and that this must change through mechanisms specified in the Code. One participant mentioned the key role of the Federal Regional Councils. Yellowknife participants said that both the voluntary sector and the government must find ways to understand better the different culture and ways of working of the other party.

Hard-to-reach groups

Participants in Belleville, Yellowknife, Moncton and Montréal want a clearer and more detailed explanation of “hard-to-reach” groups. Some want the Code to list who these groups are and/or they want the following voluntary sector groups or communities to be named in the Code: rural groups, groups isolated by geography, tiny communities, northern communities and emerging groups such as the homeless or street youth. Moncton participants wish to include *groupes populaires* and to add literacy under the principle of Accessibility.

Resources for voluntary-sector-led research

In three communities (Moncton, Montréal and Vancouver), participants want the Code to mention the availability of government funding for voluntary-sector-led research. The leadership role of the voluntary sector is very important. This does not mean research undertaken by the voluntary sector as a result of a government Request for Proposal. The voluntary sector must be able to do its own research in order to develop the best programs and gather the hard evidence and data to have a legitimate and respected voice when participating in policy development. This research can include needs assessment, cost/benefit analysis and program evaluations. The results of this research must be shared across the voluntary sector and with the government.

French language issue

Montréal and Moncton (both groups) participants talked about the issue of French at different levels. The VSI as a whole is characterised by meetings in English, documents conceived in English and the French coming “after” the English. This is problematic and limits the participation of francophone voluntary sector groups. Because VSI documents are developed and drafted in English, the French used in documents, including in the Code, is somewhat problematic. Participants noted some translation problems (for example, section 4.2, sixth bullet, is different in the two versions of the Code) and the need to use more appropriate terms (for example, in section 4.2, fourth bullet, “l’aider à” was perceived as paternalistic). There is the desire for stronger language in some instances. (This point was also made in English.) Participants want the Code to include a section on the official language issue and to be clear about the rights of minority communities.



Other important elements

Appendix B includes the list of changes requested regarding stronger language. One key change is to replace the term “should” with “will endeavour to” in each of the three sentences before sections 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3.

The issue of time was mentioned in many communities. There needs to be adequate time for the different stages of policy development and the government must give the rationale for its decisions in a timely manner. Most participants felt that the text of the Code – time is included under the principle of responsibility – was adequate.

Finally, the final version of the Code should achieve a middle ground between the language of the voluntary sector and the language of the government. The language of the current version of the Code is still too much on the side of the government, although it is much better than the language of the draft *Accord* used during consultations in 2001.

Choosing the key points of the Policy Development Code

Following the assessment, participants picked key points in the Code. These are presented under Appendix B, Question 2. There is no consensus and limited convergence across the six communities as to what the key points of the Code are. Participants in Edmonton, Montréal and Vancouver underlined the importance of an open, inclusive and ongoing dialogue between the voluntary sector and the government. This was reinforced by Moncton participants (English), in a broader way, to engage the three levels of government and other stakeholders. Belleville and Yellowknife participants identified key points for the voluntary sector: early involvement in policy development, appropriate representation, and genuine participation in policy development. Montréal participants insisted on better practices on the government side, including better understanding of the voluntary sector. Edmonton participants also identified this point, as well as available funding for voluntary-sector-led research. Participants in Moncton (French) support the spirit of the Code, i.e. the desire for a new and better way of working together.

THE FUNDING CODE

Learning through trade-offs

Greater recognition of the significant and extensive range of contributions of the voluntary sector to communities and civil society must be clearly reflected in the Code. The economic and social contributions need more emphasis, especially voluntary sector contributions to healthy communities. Suggestions were made about how better to reflect that strength and capacity in the part of the Code that describes the voluntary sector (section 2 of the Code), throughout the Code, and in the Appendices. On the other hand, every community articulated ways that the Code must be changed to broaden, clarify and extend the financial supports provided by government to them for capacity building.



One of the issues that was raised directly or indirectly in most of the focus groups was the need to simplify and shorten the Code to make it more accessible. At the same time, participants suggested many additions to the Code to make it stronger or more clear. This push/pull is a thread that runs throughout the work on these Codes. As a solution, one participant in Edmonton suggested that it might be best to develop a shorter version of the Codes for broad distribution. The shorter version should be written in plain language, and could be used for marketing of the concepts in the Codes. Full versions of the Codes could be made available in print or on the web.

Two differing positions were articulated in the area of support for small organizations, those without charitable status, those from ethnocultural communities, those with a very local mandate, etc. Almost every time the need for support for these smaller organizations was articulated by one voice, another voice added that the larger organizations required the same kinds of support.

In the same way that there was a push/pull reality for a number of issues considered during the focus groups, so too were common tensions in the relationship. The most frequently mentioned areas were:

- Timing
- Pressure to enter into partnerships
- Government needs/mandate versus community needs/mandate
- Accountability to whom and for what
- The balancing act of the voluntary sector: between community and government, and between different levels of government

The discovery of common ground between government and voluntary sector staff, when together in some of the focus groups, was an enriching opportunity for both. Frontline staff in both sectors faced similar concerns about:

- Lack of resources to do their work well
- Too much emphasis on accountability
- Too little flexibility
- Lack of knowledge and understanding of each other's realities

Hearing a shared perspective brought a new dimension to the dialogue and bodes well for stronger partnerships in the future.

Set the relationship on an equal footing

Underpinning the discussion in each community was the importance of a truly equal relationship between the federal government and the voluntary sector. In Belleville, they likened the current relationship to “the prince and the pauper”; in Yellowknife, the “parent and child.” In every community except Vancouver, specific suggestions for addressing this imbalance were made. Yellowknife, in fact, recommended that the section of the Code on voluntary sector responsibilities (5.1) should include much more if the Code is to describe a truly equal relationship between the two sectors.



Strengthen the sustainable capacity of the voluntary sector

Capacity building struck a chord in all communities. Whether in Moncton or Vancouver or any community in between, every focus group made specific suggestions to strengthen and clarify the parts of the Code addressing sustainability (mostly section 5.2.2 of the Funding Code). The range of suggestions for improving sustainable capacity was wide:

- More multi-year or core funding (Belleville, Moncton, Montréal and Vancouver).
- More program funding (Vancouver).
- Mechanisms to address chronic issues including:
 - Allowing more carry-overs (Moncton & Yellowknife).
 - Lessening holdbacks (Moncton).
 - Providing bridge financing when voluntary sector organizations are caught in approval or payment delays (Moncton).
 - Allowing voluntary sector organizations to carry reserves – a prudent financial management practice – without getting penalized (Belleville).

What should be considered infrastructure and, therefore, be eligible for financial support was discussed in each focus group. All six communities made specific suggestions for activities that should be included; Edmonton specifically suggested developing a detailed list of eligible infrastructure costs and including it as an appendix to the report.

A question of timing

All groups identified timing as an important challenge that, when addressed, will greatly improve the relationship. The financial and human resource problems created by waiting for approvals – and especially initial and final payments on approved programs/projects – was a source of concern everywhere. Clarifications of the Funding Code were proposed on everything from informing communities about results (soon) after being consulted on design (Edmonton & Moncton), to developing effective and accessible mechanisms for timely information sharing on new programs, criteria changes, etc. (Belleville, Vancouver and Yellowknife), to decision-making processes (Belleville, Edmonton, Moncton, Montréal and Yellowknife), to payment schedules (Edmonton, Moncton and Montréal).

A simpler application process

Linked to the issue of timing is the issue of the application process. Improvements to funding application forms were suggested in all communities, from recommending that all application forms be written in plain and clear language, to developing consistent budget formats, to requesting only information required for assessment and decision-making. Efforts should be made to standardize the application forms from program to program within departments and also between departments. Consistent financial and written reporting requirements should be developed across programs and departments. Every effort in this process should, as they said in Vancouver, “simplify, simplify.” Participants in Yellowknife expressed concern that the Codes could encourage the federal government to build more bureaucracy, instead of contributing to a relationship and funding system that work more easily and transparently.



Refocusing accountability

No discussion of reporting requirements would be complete without mention of accountability. Every community talked about the onerous requirements for accountability, while acknowledging that accountability at a level suitable to the size of the project or program was appropriate. Both frontline government staff and voluntary sector staff raised concerns about the increased emphasis on detailed financial accountability, and how the actual accomplishments, contributions and successes of projects and programs were being buried in the audit trail. They noted that this emphasis on accountability required government staff to spend time pushing paper at the expense of having time to work with community people to develop the programs and projects that would really meet community needs. To illustrate the connection with the Code, Vancouver felt strongly that the description that each government department and agency would “determine the type(s) of funding best suited to fulfil its mandate” (section 4.1 of the Code) did not use meeting community needs as the test, but rather departmental ones. As well, it was powerfully articulated in several communities (Edmonton, Vancouver and Yellowknife) that the focus of voluntary sector accountability to government must change to include government’s accountability to the voluntary sector, and both sectors’ accountability to community.

Participatory evaluation

Evaluation is an issue that touches both program design and accountability. Participants in Belleville, Vancouver and Yellowknife felt that components for successful evaluation should be spelled out in the Code and had to include:

- Time and financial support for evaluation design
- Commitment to joint community-based evaluation design
- Recognition that building community capacity does not necessarily produce “well-defined measurable results” in the short term
- Acceptance of anecdotal information, especially from small organizations
- Results useful to government, voluntary sector and the community
- Commitment to report back to community on evaluation results

On the issue of measurable results, there was a divergence of views. Montréal participants felt that rewarding success through measurable results was important for capacity building. People in Vancouver & Yellowknife talked about the difficulties in measuring individual and community capacity building, especially within a single funding period. Belleville participants were also concerned about who will determine what a chronic long-term need is when designing evaluations.

Learning from previous successes and building on existing models were regularly raised as significant components of capacity building. They were also seen as solutions to concerns about everything from timing, to partnership building, to alternate third-party delivery mechanisms. For example, participants in Moncton and Yellowknife proposed using inclusive models and mechanisms to address problems of changing criteria and lack of clarity when program funding devolves from the federal government to the provincial



or territorial government. The Envision Process developed in Newfoundland & Labrador was suggested as a model for working with smaller, more isolated communities. An offer was made by the Atlantic Centre for Excellence in Women's Health to share its tool kit for government, business and community that addresses inclusion issues. The model used for establishing the Homelessness Initiative in NWT was a very successful joint process that should be shared with other regions.

Back to our principles

The principles included in the Code were derived from *An Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector* (December 2001). Half of the communities made suggestions for additions to the principles: recognize the current strength and capacity in the voluntary sector; use “value” instead of “added-value” when describing the voluntary sector; reward successful projects; avoid competition by government with foundations financing the voluntary sector; include rural and distant communities; have both sectors reflect the populations they serve; and respect the independent mandates of the full range of voluntary sector organizations.

Other important elements

A unique suggestion was to add, at the beginning of the Funding Code, a vision of what Canada would look like if the voluntary sector and the federal government had a strong and collaborative working relationship. Several participants hoped that the effort on the VSI, *Accord* and Codes would result in a clear and simple relationship between the two sectors. Others wanted the Code to include a description of a strong civil society, with more emphasis on the depth and breadth of the contributions made by the voluntary sector in our communities.

Choosing the key points of the Funding Code

There was a clear consensus in every community that strengthened sustainable capacity in the Funding Code would really make a difference. Each community had its own specific parts of the Code – or additions to the Code – that would build capacity (see the details in Appendix C under Question 1, section 5.2.2). Other key points ran the gamut:

- Joint decision-making, and transparency and consistency (Belleville).
- Cooperation and innovation (Edmonton).
- Good governance as the other side of the coin of sustainable capacity (Moncton English).
- Ensuring that the voluntary sector has the necessary resources to fulfil its responsibilities under the Code (Moncton French).
- Recognition of the added value of the voluntary sector (Montréal).
- Addressing the loss of the concept of public and service in the federal government (Vancouver).
- Need for an informed and involved voluntary sector (Yellowknife).



OTHER ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The majority of participants involved in the discussions on both Codes commented on the issue of adequate resources for capacity building. A large number of voluntary sector organizations will not be able to engage seriously in policy development without the allocation of adequate resources for capacity building. As mentioned earlier, the clear consensus in all Funding Code discussions was the importance of sustainable capacity building in the voluntary sector.

A fundamental concern was expressed in Edmonton and Yellowknife about the challenges facing voluntary sector organizations and government officials located outside of Ottawa/Ontario. For both, due to isolation and distance, participating in national processes and accessing key government players are more difficult. Furthermore, according to participants, decision-makers in Ottawa do not have a clear understanding of the issues facing rural and remote communities. Distance and geography were also barriers faced in the Atlantic region, as noted in the Moncton discussions.

Other concerns expressed by participants encompass a wide range of issues. Many were sceptical about moving the relationships forward and implementing the Codes. There was particular concern about applying the Codes at the community level and how to involve small and marginal organizations. Many participants also discussed the potential impact of the Codes on provincial/territorial, municipal and Aboriginal levels of government and the key role of communication with these levels at this point.

APPLYING THE CODES

The last part of the focus groups looked at the implementation of the Codes of Good Practice. Participants identified concrete actions to apply the Codes in their workplaces as well as strategies for the whole country, across the voluntary sector and the federal government. These actions and strategies are presented in Questions 3 and 4 of Appendices B & C. The results have been combined in this section because of the tremendous convergence in comments about how to apply the Codes, both locally and across the country.

In order for the Codes to become a reality, actions and attitudes need to change within the voluntary sector, within the federal government, between both parties, and with other levels of government. It will take political will and concerted efforts on the part of both the federal government and the voluntary sector to build relationships that live up to the vision and specifics of the Codes of Good Practice. Effective mechanisms and models that build these relationships and implement the good practices must be shared from place to place across the country.

Regarding the Policy Development Code, there is a need for more reflection, discussion and education within the voluntary sector, both in individual organizations and across the



sector. Voluntary sector organizations must educate themselves on policy development, gain a better understanding of the federal policy process and reflect on the Code. For the Funding Code, voluntary sector organizations have to remain committed to using a portion of their admittedly limited resources – both people and funds – on governance, financial management and accountability. They must also dedicate resources to working with other sector organizations and governments on relationships, and joint activities.

The Codes can be used within voluntary sector organizations to inform their Boards, staff and other volunteers about the Codes and the joint processes already underway. The Codes can also be used to acknowledge and celebrate the efforts of volunteers and staff. Board members, in particular, must learn about the Codes. There is a need for local groups to mobilise and appropriate the Codes for themselves. Moving these joint processes forward and building stronger relationships cannot and should not be the responsibility of large national voluntary sector organizations alone. This grassroots mobilisation will translate into stronger voluntary sector support for the next steps. It is very important to expand the number of voluntary sector organizations involved in this process and to make the Codes relevant to them, especially to smaller or isolated organizations. It is crucial to show how federal policies affect communities and recipients of programs. Organizations must understand the potential benefits of a successful application of the Codes. Demonstration models, case studies and pilot projects are helpful tools. The voluntary sector must pull together locally and regionally, become more cohesive, and establish better internal structures. At the national level, the Voluntary Sector Steering Group must pursue its work of establishing a decentralised well-funded leadership structure with appropriate representation from across the country. Ways must be found for voluntary sector organizations at the local, territorial, provincial, regional and national levels to participate and give input into the national voluntary sector structure.

Clear political support for the joint processes and for implementation of the Codes of Good Practice – demonstrated by top-down direction and bottom-up action – is needed within the federal government. More awareness raising and education is required about the depth and breadth of voluntary sector contributions to Canadian communities and our civil society within departments and across the government. Government staff must understand and respect the principles and values of the voluntary sector. The Codes must be imbedded in individual departmental procedures, especially in the guidelines followed by public servants working directly with communities and voluntary sector organizations. The implementation of the Codes should not only be done through the written word but also through presentations and training given by “real” people. Learning about the Codes should become part of the basic training of new public servants. New structures and processes, such as a dedicated Minister and ADM for the voluntary sector, are needed within the federal government for the Codes to be implemented and for the sectors to pursue their joint work.

Ongoing dialogue and joint processes must become integral to the relationship between the voluntary sector and the federal government. Frontline government staff must be encouraged to work more in partnership with community-based organizations to develop, conduct and evaluate programs and projects that truly meet more community needs.



Relationships must be initiated and strengthened between voluntary sector representatives and government officials, and with Members of Parliament. The Codes must be shared and discussed by the greatest number across both sectors. Voluntary sector organizations can support the education process within the government by reporting on its added value. For the Funding side of the relationship, in particular, a highly accessible help desk for information on government funding programs, including contact information, would be of great use in capacity building for all sizes of voluntary sector organizations.

The role of the Regional Federal Councils in implementing the Codes is potentially strategic. Support for the Councils and for frontline government staff in small, rural and remote communities must be enhanced. Regular formal reviews of the implementation of the Codes of Good Practice will help keep the relationship-building on track. In addition, regular high-level meetings between members of the federal government and representatives of the voluntary sector should be held each year. These recommendations and others which address future structures and mechanisms to ensure progress on relationship building, will be essential to the success of the Codes.

Outreach to other stakeholders by the voluntary sector and the federal government is necessary. The Canadian public must become aware of the contribution of the voluntary sector, the *Accord* and the Codes through a national communication strategy. It is also crucial to share the VSI experience, the *Accord* and the Codes with provincial, territorial, municipal and Aboriginal governments, and opposition parties at the federal and provincial/territorial level. It is also important to encourage similar dialogue between these other levels of government and the voluntary sector. Lessons learned must be shared so that the relationship between the voluntary sector and other levels of government, too, could improve.

All of these strategies require wide distribution and promotion of the Codes of Good Practice on policy development and on funding, and of the *Accord* itself. Participants suggested that a short and simple, easy-to-use version of the Codes, written in plain language, should be produced. Participants cautioned that the existing one-page version of the *Accord* has too small type. When preparing and sharing the plain-language version of the Codes, ways must be found to make them relevant and accessible to different locations and communities.



A FINAL WORD

Everywhere we went – urban or rural, south or north – the importance of developing programs and mechanisms that reach into rural and distant communities was mentioned. Not only do national programs and initiatives of the federal government have to be relevant in all parts of the country and in all sizes of communities, but information about them must reach these communities in a timely manner, and opportunities to participate in their development must be offered to the diversity of the voluntary sector. Involving large and small, local and national voluntary sector organizations is necessary to ensure that programs are practical, relevant and will truly meet community needs. Developing policies, programs, mechanisms and models jointly, and then using the effective processes in other locations, was seen as the best way to build success. A key component of this approach is the emphasis on local participation and decision-making, which leaves room for differences between regions, provinces/territories, and even local communities.

Many participants in all communities were concerned about how the Codes would be implemented. How will people learn of them at the local level? Is there a commitment at senior levels of the federal government to implement these Codes? How will commitment to this new way of working together reach frontline staff in both sectors? Will the necessary financial resources be put in place to support the commitments in the Codes, both in terms of using the Codes themselves to further relationships, and in terms of providing the needed resources to the voluntary sector for long-term sustainable capacity building? What mechanisms will ensure that the commitments continue as government changes priorities and people leave their positions? How will other levels of government, the corporate sector and the general public get involved in this essential relationship building? How do these Codes fit with other Canadian and international Codes? And finally, how will the behaviour of the two sectors be monitored and improved, as needed?

A lot of hope for building stronger relationships was raised through the process of developing the Codes of Good Practice on policy development and funding. Although uncertainty about the results of this work was reflected in the focus group discussions, participants from both the federal government and the voluntary sector expressed a strong desire to improve their relationships. Judging by these focus groups, individuals at the working level in both sectors are ready to participate in the implementation phase. The Codes will also serve as a wake-up call to voluntary sector organizations to pull together, develop effective mechanisms to incorporate the diversity of their sector into decision-making, become more cohesive, and act in concert when appropriate. To be successful, the initiatives will need to involve many more voluntary sector organizations in implementation. As well, a concerted effort from the top-down and the bottom-up in the federal government will be needed in order to make the Codes a reality.

