

# Taking the Accord Forward:

The First Report to Canadians on  
Implementing An Accord Between the  
Government of Canada and the  
Voluntary Sector

Background Paper:  
Voluntary Sector Implementation

Prepared by the Voluntary Sector Forum  
December 2003

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# Preface

The Accord and the Codes of Good Practice have the potential to profoundly change relations between the voluntary sector – made up of citizens organized for the public good – and Canada’s federal government. Used wisely and with the whole-hearted support of both sectors, these tools can significantly enhance the sectors’ ability to work together successfully for the benefit of Canadians. Moreover, they have the potential to establish the voluntary sector as the “third pillar” of Canadian society – an equal partner with the federal government and the private sector.

There’s no question that we’ve done some good groundwork over the past year, building awareness and tools, and putting in place key governance structures. That being said, the challenge we face over the next 18 months is to translate the values, principles and practices of the Accord and Codes into the day-to-day interactions between the Government of Canada and the many and diverse organizations that make up the voluntary sector. A lot is riding on what we do. Without adequate resources and the strongest possible commitment from both sectors, there is a very real risk that – in the end – this will be a great idea that never really amounted to much. Let’s not let that happen – let’s turn “potential” into reality.

The Voluntary Sector Forum

December 2003

# About this Paper

## *Some context*

When *An Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector* was signed in December 2001, it committed the two sectors to reporting annually on their progress in implementing the Accord. *Taking the Accord Forward: The First Report to Canadians on Implementing An Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector* fulfills that promise, providing a joint assessment of government and voluntary sector accomplishments from October 2002 to September 2003. The report serves another purpose as well, identifying the sectors' joint priorities as they move forward to build a revitalized relationship by implementing the principles and practices set out in the Accord. (*Taking the Accord Forward* is available on VSI web site – [www.vsi-isbc.ca](http://www.vsi-isbc.ca))

## *Purpose, scope and organization*

This background paper is one of two appendices to *Taking the Accord Forward*. A resource for those wishing more in-depth information about voluntary sector activities in this area, it provides a detailed accounting of the sector's progress and plans for putting the Accord to work in voluntary sector organizations. Like the overview report, Section A of the background paper describes key accomplishments in the five activity areas set out in the Accord:

- *A solid foundation*: putting in place organizational structures in the federal government and the voluntary sector to put the Accord into action
- *Awareness is key*: raising awareness of the Accord within the voluntary sector and the federal government, as well as among Canadians

- *Putting the Codes into action*: developing codes of good practice to help guide interactions between the two sectors
- *Tracking our progress*: establishing processes for monitoring the Accord, reporting to Canadians about progress and moving forward on priorities
- *A shared journey*: holding regular meetings between Ministers and sector representatives

Section B of the paper looks ahead, setting out the priorities that will guide the voluntary sector's work over the coming years.

## *For more information...*

A companion document outlining the federal government's recent progress and priorities for the future is also available. To find out more about these reports, the Accord and Codes of Good Practice, or the VSI, see The Voluntary Sector Forum web site at [www.voluntary-sector.ca](http://www.voluntary-sector.ca) or the VSI web site at [www.vsi-isbc.ca](http://www.vsi-isbc.ca) or call (613) 238-7555 or 1-800-821-8814 (toll free).

# A. Our Achievements So Far

Looking back over the past year, much has been done to set the stage for implementing the Accord. Some excellent materials have been developed and a good “multiplier” methodology is in place to help us reach and build awareness among voluntary sector organizations across the country. There is even anecdotal evidence that we are making progress “down on the ground” in the relationships between voluntary sector organizations and government departments. And both sectors are gathering data in order to measure the impact of their efforts.

Yet, a great deal of work remains to realize the Accord’s vision for an enhanced relationship between the sectors. A strong

and sustained effort will be required to reach the tens of thousands of organizations who were not directly involved in the VSI to make them aware of the purpose, application and importance of the Accord and Codes of Good Practice.

Following is a description of the voluntary sector’s achievements in five key areas. As well, a series of “What we heard” sidebars highlight some of the comments made by voluntary sector organizations in a survey conducted in the summer of 2003 (see also, *Tracking our progress*).

## FORUM MEMBERS

- Monica Patten (chair), *Community Foundations of Canada*
- Yvonne Atwell, *Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women’s Health*
- Darlene Bessey, *YWCA of Canada*
- Lani Cooke, *Yellowknife Association for Community Living*
- Marlene Deboisbriand, *Volunteer Canada*
- Michel Desjardins, *Groupe de développement Consortia*
- Gordon Floyd, *Canadian Centre for Philanthropy*
- Colleen Ford, *Canadian Parks and Recreation Association*
- Bonnie Greene, *United Church of Canada*
- Al Hatton, *United Way Canada*
- Damon Johnston, *Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development Inc.*
- Marcel Lauzière, *Canadian Council on Social Development*
- Esperanza Moreno, *Canadian Council for International Cooperation*
- Marjorie Northrup, *Volunteer Bureau of Montreal*
- Liz O’Neill, *Big Sisters and Big Brothers Society*
- Sandy Onyalo, *National Dialogue Committee of African Canadians*
- Pierre Riley, *Fédération des Centres d’action bénévole du Québec*
- Penelope Rowe, *Community Services Council Newfoundland and Labrador*
- Shauna Sylvester, *IMPACS*
- Charlotte Thibault, *Fondation canadienne des Femmes, Montréal*
- Michael Weil, *YMCA Canada*
- Megan Davis Williams, *Canadian Council of the Arts*

## A SOLID FOUNDATION

As the leadership structure guiding the voluntary sector's activities in this phase of the VSI, the Voluntary Sector Forum (the Forum) has a challenging mandate.

### *Oversee the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI)*

One of the Forum's priorities is to oversee the remaining work of the VSI as it moves towards completion in 2005. During the VSI's first phase, Joint Tables recommended a range of programs and projects aimed at strengthening the government-voluntary sector relationship and building capacity within the sector. The Forum is directing the implementation phase of outstanding projects, working to ensure the delivery of concrete tools and results for the sector. A major focus of this phase is implementing the Accord and Codes of Good Practice. As part of its work in this area, the Forum has collaborated with Canadian Heritage to develop a video, workbook and training sessions aimed at raising awareness and providing practical skills to implement the Accord and the Codes of Good Practice (see *Awareness is key*).

### *Advance the sector's interests on national issues*

The Forum is taking a lead role in promoting the voluntary sector's interests on three issues of national importance, two of which relate directly to the Accord and Codes of Good Practice on Funding and Policy Dialogue. One priority area is voluntary sector financing, including changes to the funding regime

and the funding climate in which sector organizations operate. The Forum is working to improve sources and mechanisms of financing, with the goal of ensuring long-term sustainability for sector organizations.

## A TRANSITIONAL BODY

Launched at the Voluntary Sector Assembly in October 2002, the Voluntary Sector Forum will oversee the VSI until its completion in 2005. One of the Forum's tasks is to propose a structure for its successor – a permanent organization that will represent the sector as it moves forward following the VSI.

Advocacy is also high on the Forum's agenda. Efforts in this area center on achieving recognition of advocacy as a fundamental role of the voluntary sector and ensuring that charitable organizations can participate fully in developing national policies.

The Forum is also exploring the problems faced by voluntary sector organizations related to liability and risk management.

### *Build and engage the voluntary sector*

Strengthening and engaging the voluntary sector is a complex undertaking, requiring sensitivity and responsiveness to diverse organizations, regions and sub-sectors. The Forum is building on the accomplishments of the VSI's first phase to:

- work with emerging coalitions, and local and regional groups
- maintain and develop information networks
- establish links within and between sub-sectors and geographic areas
- build new processes and structures for the sector

As part of its outreach activities, the Forum is expanding its database of contacts and developing its website as an interactive communications tool. It also produces an electronic newsletter that provides information on the Forum's activities, as well as new developments, resources and upcoming events of interest to voluntary sector organizations.

### *A membership reflective of the voluntary sector*

The Forum's 22 members reflect the knowledge, diversity, experience and interests of the voluntary sector. To provide continuity and build on experience gained during the VSI's first phase, half of the Forum's members were drawn from the Voluntary Sector Steering Group, which oversaw the first phase of the VSI. One of the main factors guiding the membership selection process – both for returning and new members – was the desire to reflect the broadest possible range of voluntary sector organizations, both in terms of geography and sub-sector (see *Forum members*).

#### **WHAT WE HEARD...**

“It's important to encourage solidarity among sector organizations, but many of them don't have the resources to participate.”

“If you want buy-in from local organizations, you're going to have to show them how the Accord and Codes are relevant to them.”

“We need to increase our efforts to reach the arts sector, as well as smaller and rural communities in Quebec, and small organizations across the country.”

Voluntary sector survey (summer 2003)

## AWARENESS IS KEY

Over the past year, the Voluntary Sector Forum has focused much of its energy on preparing materials and a methodology to get information about the Accord and Codes of Good Practice out to sector organizations. As part of its awareness-building strategy, the Forum collaborated with Canadian Heritage to develop a series of “hands-on” tools and resources to help organizations make the Codes a reality in their own workplace. These resources include:

- a *10-minute video* providing context and background about the Accord and Codes, case study examples of how they can be applied in the workplace, and testimonials endorsing them as strong building blocks for a revitalized relationship between the two sectors.
- a *plain-language workbook* featuring easy-to-use checklists and a variety of exercises to help both sectors apply the Codes in their daily work. *The Rubber and the Road: A Workbook for Implementing the Codes of Good Practice* provides concrete tools for assessing current relationships, moving forward on policy dialogue and funding issues, and setting out an action plan for the future.
- a *series of workshops and “train the trainer” sessions* that give participants essential background information on the Accord and Codes, and provide a detailed introduction to using *The Rubber and The Road*. More than 100 people from both sectors participated in pilot sessions of the workshop, which took place in Fredericton early in the fall of 2003. Additional sessions will be planned as funds are available.

As well, the Forum is canvassing voluntary sector organizations to share their experiences in using the Codes of Good Practice. The “best and worst” of these practices will be posted on the sector web site sometime in 2004.

## GETTING THE WORD OUT

Since October 2002, the Forum has distributed:

- 750 kits containing copies of the Accord and the Codes of Good Practice
- 3,402 copies of the Funding Code
- 3,209 copies of the Policy Code
- 1,165 copies of the Accord.

### *Going electronic*

Due to limited resources, the Voluntary Sector Forum relied heavily on electronic media to get its messages out to sector organizations. From December 2001 to September 2003, there were almost 8,500 “hits” on the joint web site to view or download the Accord, more than 2,500 hits for the Funding Code and approximately 1,800 for the Policy Code.



*Voluntary Sector Forum Info*, which has a national readership of more than 4,000, has been published three times since its creation in the spring of 2003. In addition to providing background information on the Accord and Codes, the Forum's electronic newsletter has helped to inform readers about new implementation tools and solicit broad-based input on good practices. It was also used to distribute the sector's monitoring and reporting survey on awareness and use of the Accord and Codes of Good Practice, and to solicit organizations' participation and input on progress and plans (see *Tracking our progress*).

### *The spoken word*

Speaking engagements are an important vehicle for information sharing about the Accord and Codes. While the Forum's efforts in this regard have been hampered by a shortage of funds, over the past year members and staff took part in 20 workshops and conferences (reaching almost 1,000 people) at the national, provincial, local and international levels. These include, for example, a national conference on criminal justice, a meeting of Canadian peace organizations and a philanthropy conference in Australia.

### WHAT WE HEARD...

"More work needs to be done to raise awareness within the sector."

"We need training, and implementation tips and examples to tell us how to use the Accord and Codes in our organizations."

"Communications tools need to be user friendly, simple."

"The Accord and Codes are too lofty and idealized – especially for organizations doing direct service delivery."

Voluntary sector survey (summer, 2003)

### PUTTING THE CODES TO WORK

Over the past year, the sector set the stage for significant advances in this area, developing and testing a range of awareness, education and training materials to voluntary sector organizations. These materials are described in the preceding section, *Awareness is key*.

## TRACKING OUR PROGRESS

To fulfill its commitment to monitor sector progress and report to Canadians, the Voluntary Sector Forum undertook a survey of sector organizations in June 2003. The survey was distributed via the Forum's electronic newsletter, *Voluntary Sector Forum Info* and was also posted on the Forum web site. To ensure representation from the broadest possible range of sector organizations, staff also sent targeted follow-up messages to groups in its database that did not initially respond to the survey (e.g., Aboriginal groups, visible minorities, Francophone groups, organizations from Manitoba).

### *About the respondents*

By the end of the summer, the Forum had received a total of 110 completed questionnaires, a response rate of approximately five percent. Although small in size, the sample proved to be fairly representative of the Forum's database of organizations. Following is a snapshot of the organizations that responded to the survey:

- almost half operate at the local level; slightly less than a quarter each at the national and provincial levels; a small number have an international focus
- the majority have a mandate to provide programs or services, public information and education, or advocacy; a small number of organizations focus on policy or research
- all provinces and territories were represented – with the exception of Nunavut and Yukon Territory
- annual budgets range from \$1,500 to more than \$25 million (including one organization with an annual budget of \$130 million); more than half of respondents have an annual budget of under \$1 million, the majority of these are under \$300,000

*The majority of respondents enjoy a “good” relationship with the federal government; a small number characterized their relationship as “difficult,” while a quarter said they have no relationship at all.*

Although the survey results do not present a complete picture of the sector's experience with the Accord and the Codes over the past year, they provide a reasonable assessment by a representative cross-section of sector organizations. As such, the results can be used to identify areas of progress and continuing concern, and to provide a baseline for reviewing and assessing change over the coming years. It should be noted, however, that the results are somewhat skewed by the fact that organizations accessed the survey via the VSI web site, indicating that they had some prior awareness of/ experience in the VSI.

*Among sector organizations, awareness is highest about the Accord, lower for the Funding Code and lowest for the Policy Code.*

In addition to general information about the organizations themselves, the questionnaire focused on five major areas: relationship with the federal government; level of awareness about the Accord and the Codes; use of the Accord and Codes; perceived change in the organization's relationship with the federal government; and priorities for implementation over the coming year. Highlights of the survey findings in four of these areas are presented below; sector input on priorities for the future are addressed in section B.

#### *Relationship with the federal government*

- The main contacts for most responding sector organizations are Human Resources Development Canada, Health Canada or Canadian Heritage (note: many organizations deal with more than one department).
- Most organizations that responded to the survey receive funding from the federal government; a smaller number participate in the policy process; and slightly fewer are involved in service/program delivery (note: most organizations have more than one role vis à vis the federal government).

#### *Awareness of the Accord and Codes\**

- Most respondents indicated they have “high” or “some” awareness about the Accord; a quarter have “very little” or “no” awareness of it.
- About half have “high” or “some” awareness of the Funding Code; a third have “very little” or “no” awareness of it.
- About half have “high” or “some” awareness of the Policy Code, and half have “very little” or none.

\* As noted above, these findings may give a falsely high impression of the extent of awareness, as respondents received the survey via a VSI web site.

#### **WHAT WE HEARD...**

“We didn’t have the resources we needed to use the Accord and Codes effectively.”

“It’s still early on, but our experience So Far is that the Accord and Codes are proving to be useful resources.”

“The Funding Codes seems to have been entirely ignored by government departments. Payments for projects seem to take even longer than they did before.”

Voluntary sector survey (summer, 2003)

- Major sources of information about the Accord and Codes are the voluntary sector web sites and newsletters, the VSI consultation process and the Voluntary Sector Assembly that was held in October 2002; other sources include various networks and member organizations, annual meetings and conferences, resource centers and membership on VSI committees and Joint Tables.

#### *Use of the Accord and Codes*

- While a significant proportion of respondents refer to or use the Accord and Codes to some degree, they did not feel this was the case for their government counterparts.
- More than half of those responding said that neither they nor their government counterparts ever referred to or used the Accord or Codes.

*Perceived change in behaviour/attitude in federal government contacts*

- Among the improvements cited were: the government's greater willingness to seek input from the sector; more opportunity for interaction and participation in policy development; and greater appreciation of the sector's value.

*Slightly more than half of respondents said there had been no change in the relationship over the past year, a smaller number indicated there had been a change for the better, with slightly fewer indicating a change for the worse. In many cases, this indicated continued frustration with on-going problems.*

- Those who felt the relationship had deteriorated spoke about: increasing micro-management by government; more bureaucracy; and an increased aversion to risk-taking.
- Those who felt the relationship had worsened due to funding-related issues commented on: greater accountability and financial reporting requirements; and the overall decrease in available funding.
- Those who indicated there was "no change" observed that the Accord and Codes had had no impact on the way federal departments carried out their business.

## **A SHARED JOURNEY**

The voluntary sector is committed to working with the federal government at the highest level to ensure that both sectors live up to the principles and objectives set out in the Accord. With this in mind, members of the Voluntary Sector Forum look forward to meeting with the Ministerial Consultative Committee in 2004 to review progress to date and discuss priorities for the coming year.

### **WHAT WE HEARD...**

"We need to increase buy-in from both the government and the voluntary sector if we're going to achieve any real change."

"It's important to promote the collaborative spirit of the government and the voluntary sector as their strength."

"The initiative doesn't have any teeth unless funding and advocacy issues are addressed."

"The onus should be on the government to implement the Accord and Codes."

Voluntary sector survey (summer, 2003)

## B. Priorities for the Future

The Voluntary Sector Forum is well aware that its efforts to implement the Accord and Codes of Good Practice are only just beginning. Time, ingenuity and resources will be needed to ensure that the thousands of voluntary sector organizations across Canada become aware of the Accord and Codes, and learn how to use them creatively in their relations with federal government departments. Over the next 18 months, the challenge will be to translate the ideas, frameworks and good will generated thus far into tangible, sustainable results.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Working on behalf of the voluntary sector, the Voluntary Sector Forum has identified clear priorities for moving forward. These priorities for action are based on feedback from the survey of voluntary sector organizations, as well as the anecdotal experiences of Forum members and others in the voluntary sector. They will guide the Forum's work in this area over the coming months.

### **1) Continue a commitment to a joint partnership between the voluntary sector and the Government of Canada.**

*An Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector* (December 2001) outlined the commitments that each partner, either jointly or separately, would undertake to strengthen their relationship and fulfill the principles and values of the Accord.

With respect to shared commitments, the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector agreed to: act in a manner consistent with the values and principles in the Accord; develop mechanisms and processes required to put the Accord into action; work together as appropriate to achieve shared goals and objectives; and promote awareness and understanding of the contributions that each makes to Canadian society.

In this regard, the Voluntary Sector Forum will continue its commitment to the partnership outlined in the Accord, which is based on the principles of independence, interdependence, dialogue, co-operation and collaboration, and accountability to Canadians. This includes a continued commitment to periodic meetings with the Ministerial Consultative Committee. In addition, the Voluntary Sector Forum will continue to work with others in the voluntary sector and with the Government of Canada to identify ways to strengthen and sustain the relationship, including securing the necessary investment of resources from both partners.

To achieve this commitment over the coming year, it is recommended that the following steps be taken:

- Carry out a series of training sessions across the country and in federal departments using the training material and implementation guides developed by the VSF and Heritage Canada. Wherever possible, these sessions should be done jointly for sector and government representatives, using a train-the-trainer approach to promote local ownership and facilitate access to small organizations.
- Identify “best practice” examples of voluntary sector-government partnerships and use them as demonstration cases to encourage similar action. A number of recent projects from the Sectoral Involvement in Departmental Policy Development (SIDPD) projects could be used for this purpose; this would also enable the sector and the government to examine lessons learned as a result of the SIDPD process. Additional good practices and success stories should be collected and shared with the voluntary sector and government departments.
- Work with the Government of Canada to develop a mechanism for resolving disputes related to the Accord and the Codes, as outlined in the Accord.

## **2) Encourage government action on advocacy.**

The Accord recognizes the importance of advocacy in civil society and the key role of the voluntary sector: “*Advocacy is inherent to debate and change in a democratic society and, should not affect any funding relationship that might exist*”. (Principles: Independence)

With this in mind, the Voluntary Sector Forum and other voluntary sector organizations seek a commitment from the Government of Canada to participate in collaborative discussions and deliberations at the ministerial level on legislative options to provide greater latitude for voluntary sector organizations, including registered charities, to participate in public policy debate and policy development.

## **3) Continue efforts to encourage government action on financing.**

The Accord also commits the Government of Canada to: “Recognize and consider the implications of its legislation, regulations, policies and programs on voluntary sector organizations including the importance of funding policies and practices for the further development of the relationship and the strengthening of the voluntary sector’s capacity” (Government of Canada Commitments).

The Voluntary Sector Forum and other sector organizations seek commitment from the Government of Canada that the Accord and the Code of Good Practice on Funding will be implemented in a meaningful and sustained way. This includes ensuring that there are sufficient financial and organizational resources in the federal government and in the sector to follow through on implementation initiatives. In addition, the Voluntary Sector Forum will continue to encourage government action – both inside and outside of the joint relationship – to enhance the financial capacity of the sector. This includes finding ways to provide non-restrictive, multi-year funding for voluntary sector organizations, thus allowing them the flexibility to allocate those funds in the manner that best meets their missions.

#### **4) Establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for voluntary sector awareness and use of the Accord and Codes.**

The Accord identifies a number of measures that are needed to implement the Accord and Codes of Good Practice, including the development of “*Processes for monitoring the Accord, reporting to Canadians on the status of the relationship and the results that have been achieved...*” (Taking the Accord Forward). The Accord also includes a commitment from the voluntary sector to “*Serve as a means for the voices and views of all parts of the voluntary sector to be represented to and heard by the Government of Canada, and ensuring that the full depth and diversity of the sector is reached and engaged*” (Voluntary Sector Commitments).

To address these related commitments, the Voluntary Sector Forum will take steps to ensure that it has the resources and capacity to develop the necessary survey instruments and data gathering approaches for future reports. This will include working with the Government of Canada to identify resource requirements and sources, and soliciting guidance from voluntary sector organizations on how best to reach and represent the diversity of the sector.

#### **WHAT WE HEARD...**

- “There needs to be more awareness about the Accord and Codes within the voluntary sector.”
- “We need training if we’re going to make the Codes come alive to people working in the sector.”
- “Do what has to be done to get both the sector and the government to buy-in.”
- “Don’t forget about getting input from small organizations – they need to feel these initiatives are relevant to themselves, not just big national organizations.”