Moving Policy Forward through Collaborative Practice

Ottawa Ontario

March 31, 2005

Workshop Report

The opinions expressed in this document are those of the participants at the "Moving Policy Forward through Collaborative Practice" workshop, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government of Canada.

BACKGROUND

The Non-Profit and Voluntary Sector Affairs Division, Social Development Canada (SDC) and the Voluntary Sector Forum (VSF) convened the "Moving Policy Forward through Collaborative Practice" workshop in Ottawa, Ontario on March 31, 2005 to examine the lessons learned from the Sectoral Involvement in Departmental Policy Development initiative.

The Sectoral Involvement in Departmental Policy Development (SIDPD) initiative is a 5-year $28.5 million program which had two major objectives:

   a) to enhance policy development in federal departments by strengthening opportunities for input by voluntary sector organizations; and
   b) to strengthen the policy capacity of the voluntary sector to contribute to departmental policy development.

Using the lessons learned from SIDPD as a starting point, workshop participants discussed strategies for strengthening collaboration between the federal government and the voluntary sector in the policy development process.

The workshop brought together over 50 representatives from the voluntary sector and federal departments to share lessons learned with respect to collaboration in the policy development process, and to identify concrete strategies for sharing these lessons and facilitating voluntary sector and government collaboration.

Copies of the workshop agenda, presentations and list of participants are available in Appendices I, II and III respectively.

TRENDS IN COLLABORATION: "LESSONS FROM SIDPD AND BEYOND"

The New Economy Development Group conducted an analysis of the lessons learned from the SIDPD projects, over the months of January to March 2005. The following is a summary of the key findings of this analysis presented by Dal Brodhead (CEO of the New Economy Development Group) to workshop participants.

In summary, at the policy development level, there appears to be an emerging understanding of the nature of collaboration and its relationship to partnering and the need for horizontal governance. The understanding of why we need to coordinate and collaborate is an evolving notion – but in essence it is about governance – the mobilization of both public policy levers and the knowledge of the voluntary sector and other stakeholders for society's well being.

Virtually all interviews conducted by New Economy in undertaking their analysis indicated that there has been increased voluntary sector policy capacity along

with real changes in the way in which voluntary sector partners are working together.

However the results are more mixed in terms of strengthening the voluntary sector's opportunities for input into departmental policy development. While there are several interesting examples of improved opportunity to input into departmental policy development processes, limited innovation has appeared to date across government. Significantly, several of the successful projects reviewed have received continued funding from several sources including the federal government to continue their work.

At the project level, successful projects exhibit similar characteristics including a clear understanding of purpose. Project managers talked about time spent identifying issues, mapping strategies, identifying stakeholders, determining a process, confirming and clarifying objectives, identifying indicators of success and preparing for evaluation. Successful projects also had clear governance structures that included in some cases signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) or partnership agreements signed by all parties.

Successful projects had well thought out engagement strategies that operated at multiple levels – which ensured that the strategy included key players across multiple sectors; including senior government management, other key officials from all relevant levels of government, community organizations, and citizens.

Successful projects took into account the importance of building relationships. Interviewees spoke about the time required to both define the parameters of the relationship and develop the relationships required to make the project work. Lastly, successful projects exhibited the ability to continuously learn throughout the life of the project, to build in review mechanisms and to be open to evaluation as a learning tool.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM SIDPD PROJECTS — "COLLABORATION IN PRACTICE"

Presentations were made on three SIDPD projects which exhibited many of the characteristics of success and which represented a range of subject matter and geographic areas of the country:

- The "Rural Voices for Early Childhood Development and Care" Project (Rural Voices and Manitoba Family Services and Housing);
- The "BC Network of Associations for Internationally Trained Professionals" (Immigrant Services Society of BC and MOSAIC); and
- The "Reducing Poverty through Multi-Sectoral Collaboration" Project (Caledon Institute)

The presentations were all informative and illustrative of the challenges and benefits of working horizontally and collaboratively — in some cases across jurisdictions, including multiple stakeholders and multiple communities.

GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The small group discussion focused on three areas: the key differences in working in collaboration and the ways of working when collaboration is not present, what would have to change within each sector to work toward increased collaboration and what actions need to be in place in order to support collaboration.

> **1. WHAT ARE THE KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WORKING IN COLLABORATION AND WORKING IN NON COLLABORATIVE WAYS?**

Working in Collaboration

- Working in collaboration means identifying and bringing solutions forward with a common purpose. It also means the silos within the voluntary sector and the government need to break down.
- There is a growing recognition of the need to sort out inter-departmental roles and responsibilities and to address interjurisdictional issues. Issues are increasingly seen as multi dimensional and interrelated with a desire to get to the root of the problem and not just throw money at it.
- Insufficient time to develop thorough policy options is a constraint.
- Developing and managing relationships add a new dimension and demand on resources.
- There is more of a focus on outcomes and accountability and acknowledgement of the roles and importance of civil society and the need for citizen engagement.
- Collaboration requires a focus on respect and trust and takes a "we" rather then a "they" perspective. Communication is two way and there is acknowledgement of the need to understand each other's language and develop a common language. True collaboration is difficult to do and requires commitment and resources.

Not Working in Collaboration

- Policy work in the past has been highly adversarial with the voluntary sector often taking up positions focused against government. The government, on the other hand, has always been largely the funder and was thus seen to have power and control.
- For the most part government does not view the voluntary sector as a legitimate policy player with expertise, but rather as an advocate.

Communication is largely one way – out from government – "we will tell you what you need to know".

- Lastly, government departments and the various jurisdictions in government do not necessarily work together but rather remain largely in their separate areas of responsibility.

2. WHAT WOULD HAVE TO CHANGE WITHIN EACH SECTOR TO WORK TOWARD INCREASED COLLABORATION?

Government Changes

- Government would have to shift to a real understanding of the value and expertise of the voluntary sector. There is a need for a systemic and structural shift in government that includes a permanent commitment to interdepartmental and intergovernmental collaboration.
- The Accord and Codes of Good Practice are visions that require mechanisms to bring them into action.
- There is a requirement for investment in skills and leadership training in both government and the voluntary sector. Government also needs to invest in its own policy capacity – there is currently a gap in policy expertise in government.
- Administrative/funding mechanisms and practices need to be developed that support innovation and collaboration. Present administrative practices act as a disincentive to collective action. Government needs to develop a culture that includes a willingness to innovate and risk tolerance. Reward incentives for government personnel need to take into account the resources, time and commitment required for successful collaboration.
- The take-up on SIDPD has been uneven.

Non-Government Sector Changes

- There needs to be a shift in the culture of the voluntary sector from entitlement to accountability.
- The voluntary sector also needs to move from organizations that are defined by representation to ones that are more focused on issues.
- Their needs to be more emphasis on building relationships among the key players.
- The voluntary sector needs also to become more collaborative with and amongst its members and to be less competitive.
- Lastly, the voluntary sector needs to understand and acknowledge the need to be more accountable. It needs to understand and take seriously the need for evaluation and review of objectives and projected outcomes.

Universal Changes

- There is a requirement for cultural shifts on the part of both the voluntary sector and government**.**
- There is a need for new mechanisms for reaching out and engaging citizens in issues that concern them. These mechanisms need to be able to identify issues and means of addressing them. There is the need for increased capacity for working in collaboration in both Government and the voluntary sector.
- There is also a need to be jointly accountable for outcomes (successes and failures). This includes shared leadership and the common development of objectives, projected outcomes, indicators of success and the management of evaluations.

3. WHAT ACTIONS NEED TO BE IN PLACE TO SUPPORT COLLABORATION?

- A leadership statement from senior levels of government and politicians that indicates support for collaboration
- Senior level accountability mechanisms for collaboration, including performance reviews
- Central agency guidelines on collaboration similar to Results-based Management Frameworks (RMAFs)
- Implementation of the Accord and Codes of Good Practice
- Report to Parliament on implementation of the Accord and Codes
- Capacity Training for government and voluntary sector staff linked to the Accords of Good Practice that puts the Codes into Action
- Distribute SIDPD and similar success stories wherever possible to government and voluntary sector
- Set aside resources in all similar funding programs for the development of collaboration
- New funding and reporting mechanisms that support collaboration and the long term nature of policy development including core funding and multi-year approaches to projects and funding
- Development of a practice guide on what makes for good collaboration
- Address continued problems with the Charities Act
- Political strategy for the voluntary sector with respect to their role
- More political commitment to and means for citizen engagement
- Use of the Voluntary Sector Portal to disseminate results and build a knowledge strategy on collaboration

Summary:

Several themes resulted from the group discussions and were summarized by Dal Brodhead:

Change

Change is possible but there is a need for major cultural shifts if collaboration is to become common practice. There is recognition that this is a two way street – both the voluntary sector and government need to change the way they do things.   There is a need for change in style and commitment from leadership in government and the voluntary sector all the way up to the highest levels.

Joint/Mutual Issues

The issues are owned by and are the responsibility of both government and the voluntary sector. There is a need for redefinition of accountability, for shared investment and commitment, and joint responsibility for dissemination of results and knowledge.

Commitment and Clarity of Purpose and Roles

Commitment to collaboration is essential in order to move the collaboration agenda forward and to enable consistency and continuity. This requires multi-year goal-setting and long-term commitment.

Capacity and Training

There is a need for training and commitment in order to develop the capacity required both within government and the voluntary sector.

It was noted that collaboration is not always necessary. There are times when just consultation and coordination are appropriate.

WRAP UP AND NEXT STEPS

The workshop succeeded in bringing together government officials and voluntary sector representatives to discuss their successes in collaboration in the policy development process, and identify strategies for promoting future voluntary sector and government collaboration.

Next steps to be undertaken by SDC and the VSF following this workshop will include the dissemination of lessons learned from SIDPD, and other materials resulting from the workshop, and the development of further mechanisms to facilitate collaborative policy development between the federal government and the voluntary sector.

In addition to the lessons learned from SIDPD, there are several incremental initiatives that have been identified by SDC that will assist with furthering the

sector's capacity to collaborate and innovate, and to engage in local, regional and national public policy dialogue, including:

- establishing the Task Force on Community Investments;
- implementing the regulatory reform initiative which will focus on service improvements for charities;
- establishing a Voluntary Sector Human Resource Council;
- ensuring the successful launch of the Voluntary Sector Portal; and
- working closely with the non-profit and voluntary sector on a transition strategy to move beyond the Voluntary Sector Initiative.

Appendix I

Workshop Agenda

Appendix II

Presentations

Appendix III

List of Participants