Voluntary Sector – Federal Government Accord: Approaches to Ratification or Endorsement

by

Karen Jackson

SUMMER
2001

Table of Contents

Appendices
1: Sectoral and Multi-sectoral Umbrella Organizations in Quebec
2: Summary of Best Practices

Background

As part of the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) begun in June 2000, the sector and the federal government are drafting a Joint Accord. The purpose of the Accord is to articulate a shared vision, a set of principles, and mutual undertakings to shape and guide the relationship. There are no plans for the Accord to have legal status.

A Joint Table of voluntary sector and government representatives is leading this endeavour. Over the coming months, their work will include extensive consultations throughout Canada; organizations as well as individual citizens will have opportunities to participate and comment upon a preliminary document. As one aspect of the consultation process, regional and local events are being co-hosted by the Joint Table and local voluntary sector organizations.

This process will hopefully culminate in an Accord supported by the Joint Table. Presuming this consensus is reached, government Table members can access established decision-making processes within the federal government to obtain the government's endorsement (or rejection) of the Accord. What is uncertain – and represents charting a new course – is whether the voluntary sector should, and if it should, how it could go about securing the sector's parallel endorsement of the draft Accord.

The sector adopted an objective and independent approach to choosing the members of the sector participating at the Joint Table on the Accord. For the VSI as a whole across six Joint Tables, the sector attempted to involve a cross-section of individuals: from national organizations and organizations in all parts of Canada, rural and urban; from the many fields of activity found in the sector; and with experience in the differing roles of the sector. Although the reputation and credibility of the participants are expected to contribute to the Accord's legitimacy, the participants are not deemed to have been delegated authority or to be "representatives" of the sector or any sub-components.

Further complicating the future task of ratification or endorsement is the great diversity found within the sector. Indeed, there are no hard and fast definitions of who and what is part of the sector and who and what is not. The sector is not organized in the way that the public and private sectors are. Despite the existence of some umbrella organizations and coalitions at the national level, there is no single voice or pinnacle organization with the resources and the reputation which could be turned to, that could automatically ratify the Accord on behalf of the sector. Nor is there any precedent of a previously applied process in the Canadian context.

The purpose of this paper is to explore some potential models or approaches that could be used in the voluntary sector to obtain the ratification or endorsement of a draft Accord. Naturally, the primary objective of such a process would be to grant legitimacy and momentum to the Accord. But at the same time, a secondary set of objectives could conceivably entail creating positive precedents for other sector-wide initiatives, enhancing the sector's capacity and its cohesion.

An initial literature and website review showed us that there are very few examples of policies or initiatives where voluntary sector organizations have been so formally and fully involved that they have had a role in ratifying or endorsing the product. The only examples we found of such efforts are the policy development in Quebec and the compacts in the United Kingdom which are similar in intent and content to that planned in Canada. In New Zealand, there is a process in the early stages which might ultimately result in an accord. For this reason, we cast our net more broadly to consider other possible examples or approaches to how the "voice" of the sector has been organized or how representation has been exercised.

We looked at initiatives and developments in South Africa, France, Belgium, the Republic of Ireland, the European Union, the United Nations and the World Trade Organization. We also considered Canadian NGO activity vis-à-vis certain national issues and sub-sectoral and regional initiatives within the voluntary sector. We have reported here on only those initiatives or developments which would appear to have greatest relevance to the Canadian context and circumstances.

There may be value in exploring even further how the sector in Canada is organizing "its voice" and exercising representation but because very little has been written on the topic, this will necessitate an interview-based approach to the research.

Experiences in Different Contexts and Circumstances

The Compacts of the United Kingdom

A lesson from the United Kingdom (UK) is to avoid according undue importance to the act of endorsement or ratification. In the UK experience:
- In all instances, endorsement was provided by a working group or a national organization that had played the key role in the prior process of consultation within the sector and/or in the negotiations with the government.
- No concerted efforts at outreach or consultation within the sector were made at the time of endorsement.
- Endorsement was understood to be simply a milestone along the way in a process where next steps would entail negotiating codes of practice or implementation procedures.

England[1]

The voluntary/community sector, at a September 1997 conference of its key national umbrella organizations, agreed to the creation of a Working Group on Government

---

[1] An important source on England was Stuart Etherington, "Civil society and government relationships: developing collaborative relationships between civil society and government: the compact between the UK government and the voluntary sector in England," *Asian Review of Public Administration,* January-June 2000, vol. XII:1.

Relations to spearhead the Compact process for the sector. This Group would negotiate the compact with a ministerial working group acting on the government's behalf.

The sector's working group comprised representatives from a number of leading voluntary and community sector umbrella bodies, including community organizations, volunteering organizations, the black and ethnic minority voluntary sector, as well as the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO). The Group had an independent chair, Sir Kenneth Stowe; and NCVO acted as the secretariat.

The Working Group realized that reaching an agreement with the government would require fulsome consultation with voluntary organizations, and would draw its authority from the breadth and depth of those consultations. To assist it in its work, the Working Group established a Reference Group with a membership of 67 voluntary organizations.

The Working Group embarked upon a thorough consultation process throughout the voluntary and community sector. A consultative document was written by the Working Group and vetted by the Reference Group prior to the distribution of 25,000 copies. It became clear through meetings, seminars and other events across the country that there was widespread support, in principle, for a compact.

However, the consultations also produced many suggestions and comments on the orientation and content of the Compact. For example, one issue that emerged during the consultations was the need to take into account the special considerations of black and ethnic minority groups. To this end, special consultations were undertaken with these organizations and, subsequently, a separate code of practice (or, implementation protocol) was developed to respond to their needs.

The Working Group endorsed the final draft of the Compact – the result of detailed discussions between the sector Working Group on Government Relations and the Ministerial Working Group. No claims were ever made that this endorsement had come from the voluntary sector as a *sector* per se. Reinforcing this interpretation of the endorsement, Sir Kenneth Stowe wrote in an introductory note to the Compact:

> I'm chairing this group. I have no authority whatsoever to do so. And this Working Group has no authority whatsoever to sign the Compact with the government. We can only get that authority by consulting with [voluntary and community organizations] and that is what we shall do. And that is what we did.[2]

There was no attempt to get sign-off by the whole sector and there was no consultation on the final draft. But with the endorsement of the working group, the document was widely publicized and distributed throughout the sector.

---

[2]   K. Stowe, Presentation to the Annual Conference of the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, Toronto; transcript provided by Bowden's Media Monitoring Ltd, 1999, p. 9 cited in S. Phillips, *op. cit*., note 3.

It was well understood that the Compact was meant to be a broad policy statement and that endorsement would lead to further discussions on implementation mechanisms and other follow-up actions. As such, the endorsement was an agreement to move forward with next steps.

The provisions in the Compact, which call for an annual process of reviewing the relationship between the government and the sector, reinforce this notion of a milestone. Input to this review is gathered through a survey of voluntary and community organizations carried out by the sector's Working Group and by a questionnaire circulated to relevant government departments and agencies. The main themes and issues that surface are discussed at an annual meeting of the Working Group with key Ministers, and a yearly action plan is adopted. The review process also includes an Annual Report to Parliament.

Scotland

Unlike in England, the Scottish Compact was the product of a process that was a joint one from the beginning. A single working group included representatives of the Scottish Office and representatives of the Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), plus other national umbrella groups. However, it was recognized in Scotland as in England that consultations throughout the voluntary sector would be important to garnering support for the Compact. Those consultations were conducted primarily through the networks of the SCVO.

The SCVO is the lead organization representing the voluntary sector in Scotland and is recognized as such by the Scottish Office. Most of the principal organizations are represented, as are many locally based charities and voluntary groups. The SCVO had 630 member organizations at the time of the consultation. As noted by Susan Phillips,

> SCVO really could be considered a "peak association" and its counterpart in the volunteering subsector, Volunteer Development Scotland, was supportive of its role in the compact process. Therefore, the SCVO's lead role in the compact was not contested and the breadth of the sector could be reached through its well developed, somewhat hierarchical network of local councils and organisations.[3]

SCVO endorsed the final draft of the Compact. Again, the Compact was meant to be a broad framework and thus endorsement was expected to lead to further negotiations on operating mechanisms. Once a final draft was presented, there was no consultation focused on whether to endorse the document. As in England, support was "assumed" as the result of the consultations and engagement of the sector in earlier phases. SCVO

---

[3]   Susan Phillips, "Voluntary Sector-Government Relationships in Transition: Learning from International Experience for the Canadian Context," in Kathy Brock and Keith G. Banting (eds.), *The non-profit sector in Canada*, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, forthcoming.

made available an electronic copy of the compact, and voluntary organizations were invited to send their comments via e-mail to SCVO; opportunities are provided for the input to be used by sector representatives in ongoing monitoring and implementation processes.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, a compact process was launched with the publishing of the Green Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity in May 1997. In order to develop the compact, the Voluntary Activity Unit within government set up a joint forum with representatives from all departments and the sector. In conjunction with the Northern Ireland Council on Voluntary Action (NICVA), the Unit organized a working group to consult with the sector. A draft compact was circulated to the 5,000 organizations on the NICVA database. The consultations culminated in a National Consultative Seminar in March 2000 to which all interested voluntary organizations were invited. As with the SCVO, NICVA is the lead organization representing the voluntary sector in Northern Ireland and the consultations flowed through its networks.

NICVA signed off on the final draft of the Compact. The endorsement was a simple statement of approval. Endorsement was interpreted as a stepping-stone to proceeding with further discussions and negotiations around implementation at the local level between organizations and government departments. A set of codes of practice are to be issued by the government and not jointly with the sector, although there have been consultations. There are no provisions for acceptance of these codes by the sector.

Accord-like or Other Policy Initiatives

New Zealand[4]

Although a process has begun in New Zealand to improve the relationship between the government and the voluntary sector, a compact does not exist and issues of ratification or endorsement have not been confronted to date.

The New Zealand government appointed the Community and Voluntary Sector Working Party in August 2000 to advise it on a framework for an agreement between the government and the community/voluntary sector. The overarching objective was to strengthen the relationship between the government and the sector. The Working Party includes government officials and sector leaders.

The Working Party's first task was to gather information and sample views. The process of engaging the community and voluntary sector was a multi-faceted one ranging from the convening of community meetings to the receipt of written briefs. When it reported

---

[4]   This section draws from New Zealand government websites and "The Third Sector and State Partnerships," by Pat Hanley, a paper delivered to the Third Sector and State Partnerships Conference, at the Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights, Deakin University, Victoria, New Zealand, December 13-14, 2000.

in April 2001, the Working Party told the government that the timing was not right and that there was insufficient support for a formal agreement across the community sector.

In presenting the government with a number of alternative recommendations, the Working Party advised the government to:
- establish a treaty commission to deal with outstanding treaty issues with the Iwi/Maori peoples;
- issue a statement of intent spelling out the principles and values that would govern the government's future attitudes and behaviour vis-à-vis the sector; and
- review funding of the sector as well as contracting and accountability procedures, and initiate some concrete steps to strengthen the sector.

The government committed to respond to the report of the Working Party by summer 2001.

The community and voluntary sector in New Zealand is extensive, diverse and unorganized at the national level. Indeed, the Working Party reported that the lack of investment in umbrella national and strategic groups had weakened the development of the sector. A further complication would appear to be the government's practice of engaging the Iwi/Maori peoples as community groups, while they insist upon their treaty relationship being recognized.

At the same time, however, the strained relationship between the government and the sector and efforts to improve that relationship would appear to be serving as an impetus toward intra-sectoral cooperation and collaboration.

A group of leaders of national organizations, that had been meeting since 1996 on an *ad hoc* basis to focus on the relationship with government, decided recently to establish a more formal process. They established the Community Sector Roundtable (CSR) as an open forum for people who were interested in the relationship between non-governmental organizations/voluntary sector and the government. The original group has now expanded to more than 60 organizations that are linked electronically and hold regular meetings.

European Union[5]

In recent years, the European Commission (EC) has increased its efforts to engage voluntary organizations in policy dialogue. We found no examples, however, of instances where the sector has been asked to ratify a policy or an agreement.

At present, Brussels-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are organized sectorally or according to policy areas, and little collaboration or exchange occurs among

---

[5]   This section draws from Jeremy Kendall and Helmut K. Anheier, "The third sector and the European Union policy process: An initial evaluation," *Journal of European Public Policy,* June 1999, vol. 6:2.

them. They express their support, or lack of, for any policy or initiative on an individual basis. There is no lead organization that can position itself as such in any debate or endeavour. At this stage, if the organizations were to become engaged in a process, which called upon them to endorse or ratify an accord or agreement, it is unlikely that they would have the capacity or legitimacy to do so in the name of their sectors. To do so, would require stronger networks across national borders than exist today. Building these stronger networks is a current priority of the umbrella organizations.

The Commission has played a role in encouraging NGOs to regroup into umbrella organizations and to develop common networks across borders within the European Union (EU). The Commission is interested in streamlining processes of consultation and in being assured of the representativeness of the positions put forward by the NGOs. However, representation is not the only criteria that determines NGO participation in EU discussion. Past experience in consultation processes, and being capable of providing research-based evidence, are also important criteria for participation. According to A. Warleigh, "the key to NGO influence is the ability to provide credible policy advice, which in turn has three foundations: successful past collaboration, recognized expertise and a large membership."[6]

We cite one example which illustrates the current patterns in the state of NGO/EC relationships. In March 1996, about 1,000 people representing NGOs and the Commission gathered in Brussels for the first European Social Policy Forum organized by the European Commission.

The Forum aimed to broaden the scope of the interaction between the Commission (together with other EU institutions) and those involved at the grassroots level in the fields of economic and social action, social cohesion and dialogue. Organizations had set up a "European Platform of NGOs in the social sector" to present shared positions on the various topics under discussion. At the end of the Forum, it was determined that the Platform should continue.

The Platform comprises 18 members, all involved in solidarity actions. Most are federations, coalitions or networks and thus the Platform encompasses a large number of organizations. The Platform convened a Conference in Lisbon in fall 1999 at which representatives of EU governments, European Institutions, the European Trade Union Confederation and NGOs met to discuss civil dialogue, social cohesion and the European Union. Among other actions, through consensus, the Platform called upon the European Commission to draw up a list of NGOs which would be consulted on the development, implementation and evaluation of the EU's actions and policies, with the proviso that this list should be open and non-exclusive. The Declaration does not prevent the Commission from continuing to decide which groups or organizations will participate in processes, how they will participate, and to pass judgement on whether they are appropriately representative.

---

[6] A. Warleigh, "The hustle: citizenship practice, NGOs and 'policy coalitions' in the European Union," *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 7:2, 2000, p. 234.

To prepare for the Conference, umbrella NGOs based in Brussels had called on their members to provide input via questionnaires, which had been sent to all member NGOs in the member states. Considerable difficulty was encountered in soliciting responses even though the conference was a conscious move by the Platform organizations to break out of the Brussels enclave, forge links with members, and learn about the different national situations.[7]

European Social and Economic Councils[8]

Social and economic councils or similar organizations exist in many European countries. Many seem to include only representatives of the traditional "social partners" (namely, employers, employees and government) characteristic of tripartite arrangements of Western Europe. Ireland is one of the exceptions; the community and voluntary sector was added through statutory change in 1998 to the National Economic and Social Council. The sector joined representatives from trade unions, employers' organizations, and agricultural and farming organizations as "social partners" on the Council. There are five individual nominees to the Council from the sector.

Although sectoral organizations are well developed in Ireland and there are many coordinating bodies, the sector is currently debating the suitability of one umbrella organization (or several organizations) being established as a formal national body to represent the community and voluntary sector as a whole. Government openly acknowledges that it would prefer to deal with one or more, but fewer than at present, representative organizations. The diversity within the sector makes it difficult to recognize who represents whom; and as a result, as elsewhere in the world, the government typically initiates appointments of individuals to working groups (etc.) who are recognized as having expertise. It would appear, therefore, that even though the voluntary and community sector has been formerly included in the "social partnership," Ireland continues to struggle with the issue of representation of the sector on the national stage.

United Nations

At this point, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is a leading institution of the United Nations (UN) in attempting to enhance participation of NGOs in its deliberations. The model adopted by ECOSOC makes provisions for different categories of consultative status. The Council has developed a list of "consultees," i.e., accredited organizations that have demonstrated their representativeness by stating who they represent and what their interests are in UN processes. These "consultees" are invited to send observers to

---

[7]   For additional information on NGOs in the European Union and relationships between NGOs and the European Commission, see the Commission Discussion Paper, "The Commission and non-governmental organizations: building a stronger partnership," at www.europa.eu.int/comm/secretariat_general.

[8]   See these websites: http://www.nesc.ie; http:///www.irlgov.ie/taoiseach/search/default.htm; and http://www.dscfa.ie/dept/reports/volact.pdf.

conferences and have been allowed to propose items for the conference agendas. When the issues have been deemed relevant, they have been added to the agendas.

Although ECOSOC has taken these modest steps to provide for direct involvement of NGOs, there is no practice of facilitating supranational processes, which would require processes of endorsement or formal ratification. For the most part, the "operating principle" of UN institutions remains one of expecting the voluntary sector to concentrate at the national level on influencing the views, positions and inputs that their governments bring to the UN.

This is not to deny that the involvement of NGOs in official and parallel processes has been an important feature of each of the UN summits during the 1990s: Rio de Janeiro on the environment and development; Copenhagen on social development; and the fourth world conference on women in Beijing.

Canadian Experiences

NGO Cooperation at the National Level

There have been instances of cooperation among Canadian non-governmental organizations in providing input to the Government of Canada vis-à-vis international conventions and declarations. However, we could find no examples of collective input duly endorsed by a broad range of organizations or their members. These activities are most often led by a few representatives based upon their knowledge, expertise, research or accumulated understanding of members' views and not upon "point in time" endorsement or consultation with the membership.

Similarly, NGOs have come together to advocate on a particular policy issue such as NAFTA, constitutional reform or the Social Security Review. Typically, this collaboration has focused on advocacy strategies rather than the adoption of a single detailed policy position. A coalition will come together around a position "for" or "against" an initiative and then, agree to work together in order to advance that position. Here too, constraints of time and resources often do not allow for endorsement or ratification of positions by their members.

Sectoral and Regional Initiatives

A quick canvass of recent sub-sectoral and regional initiatives in Canada indicated that there may be more lessons to be learned from some of these than from looking at cooperation across the entire sector. The lessons are likely to be more relevant to organizing the voice of the sector than specifically to endorsement of the Accord *per se*. Recent developments regarding the Health Charities Council of Canada and the Voluntary Sector Initiative in Manitoba are reported on here.

Health Charities Council of Canada

Representing national health charities, and established formally in June 2000, the Council has taken shape over a number of years. Support for its establishment has been built among the national health charities through a series, to date, of four annual roundtables. The first roundtable was held in 1998 at the initiative of the Canadian Cancer Society and the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada. By spring 2001, as the result of a membership recruitment campaign, 36 national charities had joined the Council. In the intervening three years, a governance structure and a set of policies were developed and adopted through an iterative process. With secretariat services provided by NVO and funded partially by Health Canada, a number of discussion papers and workbooks were prepared, sent to national health charities in advance of roundtable meetings, and then discussed and decided upon at the meetings. In this manner, the Council has adopted the following governance arrangements:

- a nine-person executive board;
- equal standing accorded to each member organization of the Council with all having one vote (however, all efforts are made to work through consensus);
- minority reports prepared when warranted;
- a membership fee schedule, with fees based on operating revenues of the member organizations; and
- an annual priority-setting exercise, which occurs through roundtables.

There are at least some tentative lessons to be learned from the early experience of the Health Charities Council of Canada:

- The charities which came together in the early roundtables focused on identifying clearly – and building upon – their common purposes.
- From the very beginning, there was an appreciation of the differences based upon size of group and there was respect for the past efforts of size clusters to collaborate among themselves. As a result, for example, there are three representatives for each of the small, the medium-sized and the large groups on the Council's governing body.
- Senior volunteers as well as staff were always involved in the initiative.
- The iterative process of formulating governance policies provided for the referral of draft materials to the boards of the individual charities.

Manitoba Voluntary Sector Initiative

Perhaps even more so than the previous example, it is too soon to distil definitive lessons or "do's and don'ts" from the happenings in Manitoba. An ambitious process of organizing to bring a more coordinated voice to the sector in Manitoba began when the Volunteer Centre of Winnipeg undertook its own planning process in 1999. As a result of that exercise, the Volunteer Centre concluded that it was time to attempt a broader initiative which would bring greater coherence to the sector in the province. The Volunteer Centre brought together a number of key umbrella organizations – including the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, the United Way, the Arts Stabilisation Council and the Winnipeg Foundation – which agreed to collectively spearhead an initiative.

In summer 2001, an extensive process of consultation, fact-finding, collective visioning and the identifying of common purposes, challenges and barriers is occurring throughout the sector across the province. The process also includes reaching out through a series of working groups to all orders of government, the business sector and organized labour. Reference groups are beginning to form within Winnipeg around a mix of flexible organizing principles; for example, the disabled community, aboriginal, francophones, and health and social services. Elsewhere in the province, a geographic approach is being taken to convening consultations and gathering input. Current efforts are to culminate in a policy conference planned for fall 2002.

There are some striking similarities with the Health Charities Council of Canada:
- Once again, important precipitating steps and animating roles are being assumed by a few key umbrella organizations within the sector.
- Leadership is being brought to the Initiative by a combination of senior volunteer leaders and senior staff.
- The first step was to have a Steering Committee of these leaders focus on spelling out their common purposes, vision, principles, and a plan of action. And, while governments are being supportive, this is a sector-driven initiative.
- As seen in Quebec, networks are beginning to form along lines of geography, sub-sectors and sub-groups of populations.

Quebec

In Quebec, the autonomous community action groups have been pressing for a formal policy recognizing the sector's role and autonomy for well over a decade.

In 1995, the Secrétariat à l'action communautaire autonome du Quebec (SACA) was created to help community organizations access government resources and to advise the government on its relationship with the sector. An advisory committee to the Secretariat was set up by mutual agreement and was composed of representatives selected solely by the community sector on the basis of sectoral representation. In fact, the composition of the committee and the selection process were sanctioned by the sector at a province-wide assembly meeting in November 1996 with more than 125 individuals representing the member organizations of 20 sectoral and multi-sectoral umbrella groups.[9] During this meeting, a declaration was adopted including a set of principles, which were to serve as a guidepost for the advisory committee in negotiations with the government.

Numerous attempts were made to draft a policy in the years that followed. An initial version was written and released by the government in 1999 after a working group composed of ministerial and voluntary sector representatives had attempted without success to work jointly on the policy for six months. This first version was severely criticized by the sector. When a subsequent version of the policy was released in spring 2000, once again it was a government document without members of the advisory

---

[9]   For a list of the sectoral and multi-sectoral umbrella organizations plus additional details, see Appendix 1.

committee to SACA having seen it. It formed the basis of the consultations lead by Mr. Gerald Larose in fall 2000.

Once Larose's report to government was made public, members of the advisory committee to SACA went back to their sectoral networks to gather feedback. Based upon this input, the advisory committee articulated a series of concerns and recommendations for change in the policy.

The government in spring 2001 released a revised version of the policy. The advisory committee then met and formulated a resolution to accept the policy, conditional upon the inclusion of a series of additional commitments by the government. The resolution was distributed widely throughout the sector and was featured in a provincial assembly meeting in late May. Delegates to the assembly were required to come with voting credentials that had been granted by their organizations. Through a formal vote on May 29-30, the provincial assembly adopted the conditional approval of the policy. As of late June, the provincial government had not responded.

The advisory committee to SACA has constantly engaged in an ongoing dialogue and drawn upon its sectoral networks. As a result, the legitimacy and representativeness of the advisory committee has been assured. Organizational networks in Quebec are strong; they overlap sectorally and geographically, making it comparatively easy to circulate information and get feedback from the sector.

Best Practices

Based on this research and analysis, it is impossible to recommend a single process or model for Accord ratification or endorsement by the voluntary sector. It is possible, however, to suggest some best practices based upon experience elsewhere which could have some relevance in two respects: acceptance of the Accord, and achieving greater cohesion and coherence across the sector. See Appendix 2 for a summary of these best practices.

1.   *A notion of "endorsement" is more appropriate than ratification.*

No relevant examples were found of formal ratification processes being implemented. Given the context of the Accord in Canada, it is preferable to think in terms of some signal or process of endorsement, and not of formal ratification. The Accord is not to have legal status. It is to be a document of vision and of principles, and the sector members of the Joint Table have no official mandate or authority.

2.   *The perceived legitimacy, adequacy and responsiveness of prior processes of consultation within the sector will be important to the acceptance of the Accord.*

As the consultation sessions are held across the country, it will be important to meet two objectives. First the input, the perspectives and suggestions for change and

improvement must be recorded and analyzed. More fundamentally, it will be critical to weigh the reactions in a general sense and gauge whether a level of overall support exists for the Accord. Presuming there is a sufficient degree of general support for the Accord, members of the Joint Table can then attempt to respond to suggestions and criticisms and report widely on the results of their further reflections and deliberations.

3. *At the point of concluding the Accord, there should be well-articulated and clear commitments to follow-up activities in support of its implementation.*

The examples of the compacts in the United Kingdom speak to the value of positioning endorsement of the Accord as a milestone in a process which brings closure to certain activities and phases of work but also serves as the starting-point of others. Under the right circumstances, the Accord could be distributed widely (e.g., by posting it electronically); as well, ongoing comment and perspective could be invited from sector organizations. To be worthwhile and sustainable, there would need to be an ongoing entity designed to be the receiver of the input as well as the purveyor and translator of such comments into ongoing processes of monitoring, implementation and relationship-building. As of summer 2001, the draft Accord makes provisions for ongoing process and appropriate organizational structures to give effect to the Accord.

4. *The leadership capacity of the Joint Table members in signing off on the Accord should not be underestimated.*

With the appropriate consultations having occurred, the overall level of support read correctly, the suggestions responded to in some fashion, and plans for next steps in place including communicating broadly, the sector members of the Joint Table should not dismiss their own credibility to sign off on the Accord. The initial efforts made to ensure the sector table members were drawn from a cross-section of interests, regions and experiences should contribute to their capacity to do so.

As in England, although such a sign-off could never be deemed to be an endorsement on behalf of the entire voluntary sector in Canada, it may be considered sufficient and legitimate if the Accord has been positioned as a milestone in an ongoing process. The Joint Table members could endorse the Accord, reporting more broadly to the sector on how the input has been responded to and how the next stages of implementation will unfold.

5. *The networks of organizations that exist nationally should be used to gather reaction and gauge the level of support in order to augment the regional processes of consultation.*

It is difficult to provide conclusive advice on the degree to which an Accord process could and should tap into existing networks as well as the regional consultations. There may be pros and cons both for the Accord process and the networks.

Although Canada has no pinnacle organization of the voluntary sector, there are some federated and affiliated and individual umbrella organizations. The Quebec experience would attest to the advantages of using such networks where they exist. But at the same

time, the happenings in the European Union point to the difficulties of working through such networks as they struggle to become truly representative. On the whole, however, good progress seems to have been made in Canada in recent years in starting to give leadership voice to the sector or sub-sectors such that the European Union experience is likely less relevant at this stage.

The experience of the Health Charities Council of Canada has taught the following pertinent lesson: a clearly enunciated statement of common purposes and the discipline to focus narrowly on those purposes in the first instance may well be important to the future success of a fledgling umbrella organization. To ask alliances and networks to involve themselves in the Accord may extend far beyond their common purposes and could conceivably impact negatively on their efforts to build strong organizations.

On balance, our analysis would suggest that the regional consultations should be supplemented by conferring with the national umbrella organizations or networks on the draft Accord. And, if significant differences in views and reactions when compared with those heard during the regional consultations were to surface, particular attention needs to be paid to these differences during the post-consultations follow-up.

6. *National networks and umbrella organizations cannot be looked to serve as the endorsing agents of the Accord.*

What is likely to be inappropriate in Canada under any circumstances is to approach the national umbrella organizations and their networks late in the process to spearhead a separate act of "endorsement" when the prior consultations have been animated through a regional approach.

7. *Particular attention needs to be paid to the particularities of the Canadian voluntary sector in process design (e.g., region and size).*

Regional diversities have been accommodated through the design of the Accord's consultation process. The diversity in the size of organizations should also be recognized somehow in processes of consultation and implementation as was the experience of the Health Charities Council of Canada. Based upon our analysis, it would also be important to include both senior volunteers and staff of the voluntary sector in current and ongoing processes. And, indeed, other elements of Canadian diversity do need to be reflected in all processes.

Appendix 1:
Sectoral and Multi-sectoral Umbrella Organizations in Quebec

The autonomous community movement in Quebec is well organized through both sectoral and multi-sectoral networks, or umbrella organizations. When the government announced the creation of SACA in 1995, this provided the impetus for the 20 umbrella organizations and networks to join forces, agree to form an advisory committee, and convene an assembly to adopt a concerted approach.

Representatives of the 20 umbrella organizations/networks sit on the advisory committee to SACA. By and large, they are the executive directors of the umbrella organizations or networks.

It is through the umbrella organizations and networks that invitations were sent out in 1996, 1998 and 2001 to the individual (125 or more) organizations, inviting them to send representatives to the provincial assemblies.

The advisory committee comprises representatives of the following umbrella sectoral and multi-sectoral organizations.

Regroupements multisectoriels

- Coalition des tables régionales des organismes communautaires du secteur de la santé et des services sociaux

- Mouvement d'éducation populaire et d'action communautaire du Québec (MEPACQ)

- Table des fédérations et organismes nationaux en éducation populaire autonome

- Table des regroupements d'organismes communautaires et bénévoles, santé et services sociaux

- Table nationale des Corporations de développement communautaire (TNCDC)

Regroupements sectoriels

- Secteur action bénévole
  Fédération des centres d'action bénévole du Québec (FCABQ)

- Secteur alphabétisation populaire
  Regroupement des groupes populaires en alphabétisation du Québec (RGPAQ)

- Secteur Autochtones
  Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec

- Secteur communications
  Fédération des TVC autonomes du Québec

- Secteur consommation
  Fédération des ACEF

- Secteur défense des droits
  Assemblée des travailleurs et travailleuses accidentés du Québec (ATTAQ)

- Secteur éducation à la solidarité internationale
  Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale (AQOCI)

- Secteur environnement
  Réseau québécois des groupes écologistes (RQGE)

- Secteur famille
  Fédération des associations de familles monoparentales et recomposées du Québec (FAFMRQ)

- Secteur femmes
  Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale de la région de Québec

- Secteur jeunes
  Regroupement des organismes communautaires autonomes jeunesse du Québec (ROCAJQ)

- Secteur logement
  Regroupement des comités de logements et associations des locataires du Québec

- Secteur loisirs
  Conseil québécois du loisir (CQL)

- Secteur personnes handicapées
  Confédération des organismes de personnes handicapées du Québec (COPHAN)

- Secteur réfugiés, personnes immigrantes et communautés ethnoculturelles
  Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes (TCMR)

Appendix 2:
Summary of Best Practices

1.   *A notion of "endorsement" is more appropriate than ratification.*

2.   *The perceived legitimacy, adequacy and responsiveness of prior processes of consultation within the sector will be important to the acceptance of the Accord.*

3.   *At the point of concluding the Accord, there should be well-articulated and clear commitments to follow-up activities in support of its implementation.*

4.   *The leadership capacity of the Joint Table members in signing off on the Accord should not be underestimated.*

5.   *The networks of organizations that exist nationally should be used to gather reaction and gauge the level of support in order to augment the regional processes of consultation.*

6.   *National networks and umbrella organizations cannot be looked to serve as the endorsing agents of the Accord.*

7.   *Particular attention needs to be paid to the particularities of the Canadian voluntary sector in process design (e.g., region and size).*