Information Management and Information Technology Joint Table

Final Report

March 2003

Voluntary Sector

Canada

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Context

In June 2000, the federal government announced the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI), a joint endeavour designed to better serve the needs of Canadians by strengthening the capacity of the voluntary sector and enhancing its relationship with the Government of Canada.

The Information Management and Information Technology Joint Table (IM/IT-JT) was one of the joint tables established in the summer of 2000 as part of the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI).

Membership and Staff

The IM/IT-JT was made up of 14 representatives, half from the government and half from the voluntary sector. One representative from each sector was named co-chair. The membership of the joint table changed somewhat over two years with the final membership as follows:

Voluntary Sector Representatives	Government Representatives
Don McCreesh, Co-chair Volunteer YMCA Canada	**Lisanne Lacroix, Co-chair** Corporate Secretary Industry Canada
Dr. Gary Birch (ex-officio) Chair, Advisory Committee on Assistive Devices	**Donna Achimov** Director General Public Access Programs Communication Canada
Marilyn Box (ex-officio) Secretariat Officer Voluntary Sector Initiative Secretariat	**Bob Cumming** Manager, Departmental Coordination Rural Secretariat, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
Paul Dell'Aniello Director, Seagram Chair of Management of Non-Profit Organizations Université du Québec à Montréal	**Réjean Gravel** Director General, Systems and Informatics Directorate Corporate Services, Environment Canada
Margaret Fietz President and Chief Executive Officer Family Service Canada	**Rodney Hagglund** Director, Voluntary Sector Initiative Charities Directorate Canada Customs and Revenue Agency
Ian Kershaw Independent Consultant	**Susan Margles** Executive Director Canadian Health

Focus IT Solutions Inc.   Network
                                            Health Canada

Philip King
Vice President e-Business
United Way of Greater Toronto

Kathy Marshall
National Coordinator
Disabled Women's Network Canada

Karen McGrath
Executive Director
Health and Community Services
St. John's Region,
Newfoundland and Labrador

Josephine Sutton (ex-officio)
VolNet National Advisory Committee

The IM/IT-JT also had a secretariat composed of Industry Canada personnel, specifically located in the Information Highway Applications Branch. It reported to the government co-chair who was, at the time, part of this branch. The composition of this secretariat changed three times over the life of the table. At the onset, the secretariat was composed of only one officer and a support staff. Due to unforeseen circumstances in the fall of 2001, the secretariat had to be restaffed. Again in April 2002, the configuration of the secretariat changed and is now made up of:

IM/IT Secretariat

Bernard Chabot   **Michèle Leury**
Manager IM/IT   Project Officer IM/IT
Industry Canada   Industry Canada

Gisèle Proulx   Brigitte Bisson
Senior Project Officer IM/IT   Administrative Assistant IM/IT
Industry Canada   Industry Canada

Mandate and Operating Principles

The mandate of the IM/IT-JT was to investigate and respond to the technology needs of the voluntary sector.

To deliver on this mandate, the IM/IT-JT developed and recommended initiatives to help strengthen voluntary organizations with the knowledge and technological capacity they need to achieve their specific missions and mandates, and to bring their capacity in line with that of the public and private sectors.

Upon convening, the IM/IT-JT worked to develop a set of principles to guide its decision-making. These guiding principles were as follows:

- ➢ Work in partnership with other sectors (e.g., the private sector); share the responsibility.
- ➢ Do not create any solution that will put agencies at risk. All solutions should balance risk and benefit to organizations.
- ➢ Put organization and management ahead of technology.
- ➢ Program should not be about hardware.
- ➢ Begin with the mandate and mission of voluntary sector organizations.
- ➢ The solutions or recommendations must create the greatest impact upon the voluntary sector, keeping in mind the specific needs of a variety of communities of interest.
- ➢ All IM/IT products must meet the common look and feel and accessibility guidelines.
- ➢ The program must address the recommendations and guidelines established in the *Working Together* document.

Terms of Reference

Vision

The voluntary sector can:

- ➢ Demonstrate leadership in using information and communications technology strategically and operationally, and
- ➢ Manage information as efficiently and effectively as other sectors of the Canadian economy.

Mandate

To achieve the vision, as part of the VSI, the IM/IT-JT's mandate was to develop and implement initiatives to help strengthen voluntary organizations with the knowledge and technological capacity they need to achieve their specific missions and mandates.

Specifically, it was tasked with overseeing the design, development, implementation and evaluation of a program to fund voluntary sector initiatives that meet these criteria, within the limits of the budget by:

> ➢ Defining and validating the current and forecast needs of the voluntary sector for information and communications technology management expertise, in consultation with the sector;
> ➢ Defining the obstacles to meeting these needs;
> ➢ Ensuring that the needs and obstacles identified account for the perspectives of the voluntary sector as a whole, including considerations such as accessibility, language, location, size and culture;
> ➢ Defining criteria for access to the contribution funds budgeted for the IM/IT initiative;
> ➢ Ensuring that the $10 million/five-year budget for the IM/IT initiative is managed effectively and in accordance with federal government's accountability requirements; and
> ➢ Reporting progress regularly and advising the government and the voluntary sector through the Joint Coordinating Committee and other mechanisms, as appropriate.

Relationship between the IM/IT-JT and the Joint Coordinating Committee

The IM/IT-JT reported progress regularly to the Joint Coordinating Committee (JCC) for coordination purposes. To avoid duplication, and to ensure consistency with and appropriate links to the work of other joint tables, the IM/IT-JT sought advice from the JCC on horizontal issues such as the timing, process and scope of other initiatives.

The IM/IT-JT also sought advice from the JCC on issues such as the relationship among initiatives, gaps and overlaps, resolution of implementation issues, coordination of consultations and communications, timing and progress of implementation, and preparation of progress reports.

Membership and governance

Following the model established for all joint tables, the IM/IT-JT was composed of an equal number of government officials and voluntary sector leaders, and was co-chaired by a representative of each.

Workplan

At its first meeting in October of 2000, the IM/IT-JT set out a work plan for analyzing existing IM/IT information in the voluntary sector, as well as a short-term (six months) needs assessment. This work was to be followed by validation of the needs assessment through regional consultations in the voluntary sector. Longer term goals of benchmarking and creating a vision, as well as surveying donors and supporters, were also set.

It is important to note that all members of the IM/IT-JT who were contacted about this report, believed that the IM/IT-JT would remain intact to oversee the implementation of the IM/IT initiative. In effect, they believed that they had five years in which to complete their duties. The lifespan of the joint tables was clarified only after a year had passed (at the tenth IM/IT-JT meeting); this knowledge greatly affected the speed, direction and quality of the IM/IT-JT's work.

A formal workplan was created and submitted to the JCC for review and comment.

Work Completed and Process Used

At the onset, the IM/IT-JT members established the terms of reference and the guiding principles that would oversee their work and interaction and that would build a trusting relationship between them.

The IM/IT-JT met on the following dates at these locations:

October 27, 2000	Toronto, ON
November 24, 2000	Ottawa, ON
December 15, 2000	Ottawa, ON
January 29, 2001	Ottawa, ON
March 13, 2001	Ottawa, ON
May 2, 2001	Ottawa, ON
May 31, 2001	Ottawa, ON
August 24, 2001	Ottawa, ON
October 16 and 17, 2001	Aylmer, QC
November 21, 2001	Teleconference
December 17 and 18, 2001	Merrickville, ON

January 31 and February 1, 2002   Ottawa, ON

March 20 and 21, 2002   Ottawa, ON

May 29 and 30, 2002   Gatineau, QC

The IM/IT-JT used the Industry Canada Audit and Evaluation Branch's standing offer to award a contract to Prairie Research Associates for the environmental scan and evaluation framework. The scan was intended to help specify the research hypotheses for the needs analysis and to provide an overview of the key issues framing the work of the IM/IT-JT.

The environmental scan was delivered at the end of March 2001. It contained general trends, opportunities and gaps that existed in information and communication technology in the voluntary sector.

A Request for Proposals was issued for the needs analysis and evaluation framework. The winning proposal was submitted by RealWorld Systems (formerly Good Enough Information Systems, Inc.). A list of 17 technology options was created through a literature review and interviews with key sources in the voluntary sector. These options were incorporated into a survey that was then mailed to 2,500 voluntary sector organizations. Based on a return rate of almost 20%, the top five technology choices of the voluntary sector were identified in December of 2001. These choices became the basis for the recommendations in the final report of the IM/IT-JT. In order of preference they are:

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

After the needs were identified, the IM/IT-JT split into four subcommittees, divided tasks and continued to work between official joint table meetings. A list-serve, e-mail and conference calls were also used to keep in touch and keep projects moving forward. The committees addressed the requirements listed in the needs assessment as follows:

- ➤ Portal/Website Team (a portal to access both voluntary sector and government information);
- ➤ Funding Exchange Database Team (a software application for funding organizations and organizations seeking funding that decreases the level of effort on both sides to provide and acquire funding);
- ➤ Tools and Infrastructure Team (a combination of hardware, software, training, and technical support); and
- ➤ Changing Funding Practices/Lobby team (changing policies and rules to facilitate IM/IT infrastructure funding for voluntary sector organizations).

While membership on the subcommittees was determined by interest, the co-chairs ensured that there was at least one representative from government and one from the voluntary sector on each subcommittee. In addition, a contractor was assigned to each subcommittee to supervise and/or carry out any work identified. After the teams were set, each team was tasked with defining the scope; setting objectives; identifying beneficiaries/end-users; identifying stakeholders; and defining deliverables/end results.

A "gate" decision-making process was adopted to guide the work of the subcommittees and to coordinate their activities so that each subcommittee was at the same stage of their projects' cycles at the same time. The gate process had these steps:

- ➤ Gate 1: Agreement to initiate the project;
- ➤ Gate 2: Agreement on the required infrastructure and resources;
- ➤ Gate 2a: Review prior to pilot or focus group testing (optional depending on issue);
- ➤ Gate 3: Agreement to proceed with roll-out; and
- ➤ Gate 4: Post-implementation evaluation.

Over the course of the remaining months, the subcommittees used the gate process to move their work forward to produce recommendations for projects to be undertaken and the budgets required to be included in the IM/IT Table's final report. These recommendations were presented and approved at the 14th meeting and incorporated into the final report.

Projects

Success Stories/Case Studies were commissioned to show how the voluntary sector uses technology, its impact and lessons learned.

A speakers' kit was developed through an ad hoc committee made up of three members and a contractor.

Connectus Consulting was awarded a contract to undertake research analysis drafting and facilitation work in May 2001. The company maintained an "evergreen" document that became the basis for the final report.

Links with other joint tables

Based on interviews with members, links with other VSI joint tables were made on an *ad hoc* basis. The IM/IT-JT made contact with and worked with the Capacity Joint Table on issues of cooperation and overlap. The IM/IT-JT initially expected that the JCC through the Voluntary Sector Task Force would manage areas of cooperation and overlap, but in practice this was not the case.

This situation is somewhat reflective of the IM/IT-JT's communications within the VSI community. All members who were interviewed commented that the structure of the oversight and the coordination roles made communication between joint tables challenging.

Consultations

The IM/IT-JT consulted with the voluntary sector by conducting the environmental scan and needs assessment. During the environmental scan, Prairie Research Associates interviewed 24 key informants, 21 of whom represented the voluntary sector. In most cases, executive directors or senior staff working with information technology issues were interviewed. The contractor also interviewed one of the co-chairs of the IM/IT-JT and two representatives of the private sector. Key informants in the voluntary sector represented several areas of the sector. The organizations varied in size, budgets, and staff. In most cases, the organizations interacted through various networks in the sub-sector and worked with member organizations.

For their survey, RealWorld Systems interviewed over 50 informants who were drawn from members of the joint tables and from the voluntary sector. The survey was initially tested in a pilot mailing to 200 organizations selected randomly from the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency database of registered charities. After the pilot, this survey was sent to 2,200 randomly selected voluntary organizations drawn from the VolNet database. The survey was also offered online in newsgroups and on websites and was distributed at regional consultation sessions held by other joint tables.

In April 2002, the Funding Exchange Database team consulted with foundations, and provincial and federal government representatives on the concept of building key web applications to facilitate obtaining and disseminating funds. These consultations helped to shape the team's final recommendations.

Communications

A speaker's kit was commissioned and used as the basis for presentations to the JCC, within Industry Canada and externally to interested parties.

The projects, reports and minutes of meetings are all posted on the VSI website. Updates were also made available through the VSI *Update* newsletter.

Communicating the results of the IM/IT-JT's work began in the fall of 2002 and will continue over the next two years as its recommendations are implemented by Industry Canada. Voluntary organizations will be kept informed via the VSI website, newsletters, articles and through mass mailings.

Lessons Learned

Based on interviews with the IM/IT-JT co-chairs, one member and a member of the secretariat, a few themes emerged regarding lessons learned. These themes were reflected in the majority opinion of those interviewed.

The first theme was the importance of building a strong base for the work of the IM/IT-JT. This was done first by recognizing that the IM/IT-JT was composed of a wide range of people from a variety of backgrounds. With that in mind, creating a strong, trusting relationship between all members before setting any goals or starting any projects was paramount. Creating a collegial, team atmosphere at the beginning of the process ensured that all interactions occurred with understanding and respect for other viewpoints and helped to smooth out any bumps in the process when they did occur.

The second component to building a strong base was to establish the manner in which members interacted, made decisions and delegated work. When the roles, responsibilities and guidelines for interaction were clearly stated, it avoided confusion and misunderstandings between members and made it much simpler to arrive at a consensus. Once a trusting and communicative relationship was established, setting goals and directions was much easier and, in fact, required very little modification once the work was started.

The second theme was the importance of having a strong secretariat. It was the secretariat's responsibility to carry out the will of the members once decisions had been made; when the secretariat was ineffective, so was the IM/IT-JT. The secretariat went through several personnel changes over two years, hindering the growth of institutional memory. It also meant that members felt that they couldn't delegate work to the secretariat, which slowed the progress considerably.

Having people in the secretariat who were interested in and knowledgeable about the voluntary sector was also key. There were instances in the beginning in which unilateral decisions were made (e.g., the scheduling of meetings, hiring of contractors) that showed a lack of understanding of the voluntary sector and created roadblocks to cooperation. By the end of the process, however, the secretariat had evolved and became proactive, responsive and facilitative in helping to move projects forward.

At the start of the VSI, members agreed that every last possible dollar should go towards the VSI. For this reason, a senior person with sufficient understanding of both government procedures and the voluntary sector was not recruited because of the costs

involved. It is felt that this decision hindered the IM/IT-JT's progress in the long run through slowed progress and lapsed funding.

One of the factors that hindered the work of the secretariat forms the basis for another lesson learned. The secretariat was initially set up to report directly to the government co-chair. When the co-chair changed positions within Industry Canada, the secretariat reported to another manager who was not involved with the VSI. This made it far more difficult for the secretariat to receive the day-to-day guidance and support it required to fulfill its mandate.

The lesson learned, therefore, is the lack of interest in, and consequently, awareness of the VSI–IM/IT-JT in government departments — beyond the people immediately involved — hampered its work. Without strong support from all levels in government departments, the work of the IM/IT-JT on the government side was dependent on the good will and personal commitment of members, which varied according to the workload of their respective full-time positions.

And finally, because this was a first-time initiative, the role structure within the VSI as a whole meant that there wasn't complete clarity about the joint tables' mandates and responsibilities. All members of the IM/IT-JT believed that they had more than two years to fulfill their mandate and that they would oversee not only the policy creation, but also the implementation of those recommendations. This affected the speed with which the IM/IT-JT initially worked towards its goals and forced it to rush its efforts once it realized that it had less than one year remaining to produce a final report.

It also meant that a number of contractors and consultants had to be hired to complete its work in the short amount of time remaining. This led briefly to a situation in which the consultants had more information about the process and work of the IM/IT-JT than the members had and, therefore, were seemingly running the IM/IT-JT.

In addition, as reported earlier, members felt that stronger coordination earlier in the process might have provided a better understanding of the VSI as a whole and of the specific policies each joint table was developing to accomplish its mandate. This could have prevented duplication of efforts among the joint tables, filled in some of the gaps in coverage and produced stronger results for the initiative overall.

Next Steps

The IM/IT-JT officially dissolved in October 2002. Funding from the VSI has been secured for the projects recommended in the final report and will be undertaken by staff at Industry Canada. Members who were interviewed for this report expressed an interest in continuing to be involved as the VSI moves from recommendations to implementation. All members will be kept informed of the progress made on their recommendations.

To ensure the joint government–voluntary sector involvement continues, an advisory group will be established to assist Industry Canada in the implementation and delivery of the recommendations. This advisory group will be composed of some former IM/IT-JT

members and some new voluntary sector and government representatives. The new government representatives will be from the other joint tables or their successor bodies. This will ensure consultation and coordination as implementation progresses.

In addition, the IM/IT Secretariat will ensure that voluntary sector organizations are kept informed of the implementation of the various deliverables through the VSI website, the VSI Secretariat, and via other communications means.

Outstanding Issues

All members who were contacted pointed to the strong relationships formed between voluntary sector and government members as one of the great successes of the VSI. These relationships, however, have been restricted to members of the joint tables both on the government and voluntary sector sides. The importance of the VSI has not penetrated into the consciousness or agenda of government departments on a larger scale, and the voluntary sector has yet to see much progress or value from the VSI at the "front lines" level. As the work of the IM/IT-JT and the other joint tables moves from words into action, it will be important to ensure that government departments and voluntary sector organizations hear about what is being done and how it could benefit them.

Relevant Documents List

Reports

All of the following documents are available on the Voluntary Sector Initiative website at: www.vsi-isbc.ca

Strengthening Voluntary Sector Capacity Through Technology: Report of the Joint Table on Information Management/Information Technology of the Voluntary Sector Initiative
http://www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/imit/reports_technology.cfm

Information Management/Information Technology and the Voluntary Sector – Environmental Scan
http://www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/imit/pdf/environmental_scan.pdf

Technology Needs of the Canadian Voluntary Sector - Final Report
    Highlights: http://www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/imit/technology_needs_highlights.cfm
    PDF: http://www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/imit/pdf/technology_needs.pdf

- Supporting Document 1 - Detailed Methodology Literature Scan and Examples of Websites
  PDF (461 KB) | DOC (Microsoft Word - 270 KB)

- Supporting Document 2 - Technology Needs Analysis Survey
  PDF (400 KB) | DOC (Microsoft Word - 158 KB)

- Supporting Document 3 - All Comments from Interviews and Survey
  PDF (375 KB) | DOC (Microsoft Word - 209 KB)

Meeting notes

Minutes
http://www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/imit/advisory.cfm