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Building the Technological Capacity of the Voluntary Sector



VOLNET

*The Voluntary Sector Network Support Program
National Advisory Committee Report*

Canada

Building the Technological Capacity of the Voluntary Sector



*The Voluntary Sector Network Support Program (VolNet)
National Advisory Committee Report*

January 1999

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Cat. No. C2-408/1999
ISBN 0-662-64047-0
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The Honourable John Manley
Minister of Industry

Dear Minister:

The purpose of my writing is two-fold: first, to thank you and your government for your leadership in creating the Voluntary Sector Network Support Program (VolNet) in order to expand the technological capacity of the voluntary sector; and second, to submit to you, on behalf of the VolNet National Advisory Committee (VNAC), our report, *Building the Technological Capacity of the Voluntary Sector*.

Making communication and information technology more accessible to the voluntary sector will greatly enhance its already formidable ability to contribute to Canada's social, cultural and economic fabric. I am proud that these past five months of intense deliberations have resulted in a significant contribution to a vital program.

I must add that the relationship that has developed between VNAC and your department is an example of the good things that can happen when committed volunteers and government officials work together toward an important goal. I am confident that the foundation of a valuable endeavour has been laid: as a committee of volunteers, VNAC brings expertise from a number of key areas, as well as a strong level of credibility that will attract resources and build broad, lasting public support.

I welcome your continued support of this program, and encourage your ongoing efforts to use the considerable strengths of VNAC to ensure that VolNet continues to meet the growing needs of the Canadian voluntary sector.

Yours sincerely,



Lil Krstic
Chair
VolNet National Advisory Committee

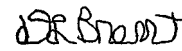
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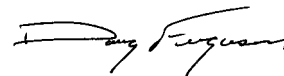
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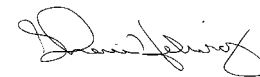
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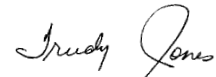
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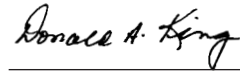
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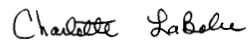
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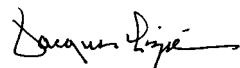
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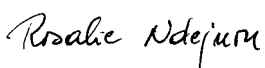
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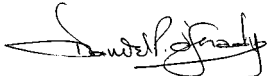
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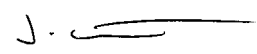
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the February 1998 Budget, the federal government announced the creation of the Voluntary Sector Network Support Program (VolNet) in order to “expand the technological capacity of the voluntary sector.” Fifteen million dollars over three years were allocated for the program, and a target of offering connectivity to 10 000 voluntary organizations by March 31, 2001, was established. Wanting to engage the participation of the voluntary sector in the development of the program, the federal government created the VolNet National Advisory Committee (VNAC) in June 1998. This report is the result of the committee’s efforts to date.

Voluntary organizations and volunteerism touch the lives of all Canadians, and as the rebalancing of services between the voluntary sector and the government continues, they become all the more critical to Canada’s economic and social well-being. Despite this, while some voluntary organizations have taken advantage of the benefits of the Internet, the majority have not, and still need to get connected. But this is not all. In order to make connectivity meaningful and sustainable, they also need to develop the necessary skills and knowledge about how best to integrate the Internet into their work.

This “holistic” understanding of what needs to be done to enhance the voluntary sector’s use of the Internet leads to the first recommendation of this report (for the summary of recommendations, see Appendix A). It is recommended that a range of services be provided through VolNet, including a VolNet Service Package (connectivity, equipment and basic Internet skills), applied Internet skills development and support, and on-line tools that are relevant and meaningful to the voluntary sector, giving organizations a reason to be on-line.

Taking into consideration the size, nature and complexity of the voluntary sector, the second recommendation addresses who should be eligible to receive the VolNet Service Package. It is recognized that the value and legitimacy of a voluntary organization comes from its ability to serve its community rather than from whether or not it has acquired charitable status. It is also recognized that VolNet needs to have “priority groups.” Therefore, the third recommendation specifies that priority should be given to organizations not connected to the Internet and to organizations that may be isolated, either geographically or as a result of the focus of their mission.

The challenge of how best to deliver VolNet is discussed in recommendations four through seven. VolNet delivery agencies throughout Canada could help identify eligible voluntary organizations, distribute the VolNet Service Package, and provide the skills development and support needed to make sure the Internet is fully adopted into a participating organization’s daily use. A maximum of 30 delivery agencies would be VolNet “champions” in the field, simultaneously moving the voluntary sector to an enhanced level of connectivity.

Delivery agencies should have knowledge of the voluntary sector and demonstrated expertise in the uses of the Internet in the voluntary sector. Several organizations are already performing some of the work expected of a delivery agency. By building on existing initiatives rather than developing something completely new, this model will leave behind knowledge, expertise and capacity that will serve the voluntary sector long into the future.

Recommendations eight and nine suggest how VolNet can maximize its impact through a resource development strategy. In conjunction with VNAC, VolNet delivery agencies and others in the voluntary sector, Industry Canada should seek collaborative agreements with the private sector, other federal government departments, provincial governments and foundations. VolNet can also benefit from the opportunity to build on the existing infrastructure and capacity of the voluntary sector. Alliances with the sector can promote self-reliance and sustainability of VolNet's work.

Increasing awareness of VolNet is critical to meeting its goals of connectivity and Internet adoption in the voluntary sector, and to its resource development strategy. Recommendation ten suggests that VolNet use several means to communicate the program, first to eligible voluntary organizations, and then to other potential stakeholders, including the private sector, all levels of government, the media and the general public.

VolNet's evaluation strategy is the subject of recommendation eleven. This strategy should measure both concrete indicators, which will demonstrate whether VolNet has met its targets, and the impact the program has had in terms of its broader objective of increasing the voluntary sector's use of the Internet. The evaluation should facilitate continual learning about how to enhance Internet adoption by the sector. VNAC and the delivery agencies should be involved in this evaluation so that the knowledge remains in the sector.

The final recommendation outlines VNAC's preliminary deliberations on the resource allocation for VolNet. It is suggested that over 60 percent of the funding be initially allocated for goods that VolNet will deliver to voluntary organizations (including the VolNet Service Package), that over 20 percent go towards setting up the VolNet delivery agency support network, and that the remainder be reserved for communications and program management. This strategy recognizes that the items necessary to meet the program's major targets must be secured. However, it is anticipated that as VolNet's resource development strategy takes effect, there will be opportunities to shift the focus of these allocations.

These recommendations provide what VNAC believes to be realistic and feasible goals for VolNet. More importantly, they provide the complete array of elements required to ensure that this program is successful in its efforts to enhance the voluntary sector's use of the Internet in ways that are sustainable and meaningful to the organizations and to the Canadians they serve.

BACKGROUND

In the February 1998 Budget, the federal government announced the creation of the Voluntary Sector Network Support Program (VolNet) in order to “expand the technological capacity of the voluntary sector.” To support this initiative, the government allocated \$15 million over three years for the program. It also established the program’s target of offering connectivity to 10 000 voluntary organizations by March 31, 2001. The 1998 Budget referred to providing these organizations with access to computer equipment, the Internet, new information technologies, network supports and training.

Recognizing that the success of VolNet is dependent on understanding the nature and scope of the voluntary sector in Canada, the federal government decided to consult representatives from the sector and other key stakeholders as to how best to design and implement the program. Hence, in June 1998, the VolNet National Advisory Committee (VNAC) was created.

VNAC consists of 28 representatives from various fields in the voluntary sector (including health, international development, social services, justice, environment, faith, arts and culture, recreation and sports, and equality seeking groups), the private sector, as well as two representatives from both Industry Canada and other federal departments that support the voluntary sector. A list of VNAC members can be found in Appendix B.

Engaging the participation of the voluntary sector and other interested parties in the development of VolNet has helped to ensure that the program is developed in a way that is relevant and appropriate to the sector. Since it was created, VNAC has met three times and held numerous conference calls. Between meetings, VNAC conducted its work in five standing committees that focussed on program delivery, resource development, communications, membership, and budget and evaluation issues. This report represents the results of VNAC’s efforts to date.

VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS AND THE INTERNET

Voluntary organizations — whether non-profit organizations, charities, service clubs or local community associations — affect almost every aspect of Canadians' daily lives. They provide opportunities for people to work together on common issues, and they do so in ways that not only strengthen our communities but also improve our overall sense of belonging and well-being.

In Canada, the voluntary sector is comprised of more than 175 000 non-profit organizations, 75 000 of which are registered charities.^{1,2} It is a diverse group working in a variety of fields including health, environment, social services, justice, faith, arts and culture, recreation and sports, and international development. Registered charities other than hospitals and teaching institutions generate over 570 000 paid jobs (4 percent of the Canadian labour force)³ and the sector mobilizes over 7.5 million volunteers who contribute more than one billion hours of labour.⁴ The recent National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating confirmed that Canadians are widely involved in the voluntary sector, whether in terms of participating or donating. As the respective roles of government, the private sector and the voluntary sector continue to evolve, the relative size of the voluntary sector and its contribution to the social and economic well-being of the country is expected to increase.

Voluntary organizations, however, do much more than fill the gaps left by government and the private sector. They also provide opportunities for citizens to participate in meaningful ways in the growth and development of their communities. In general, voluntary organizations promote equality, respect diversity and value collaboration over competition. As a result, they have much to gain from connecting to the Information Highway. Voluntary organizations already using the Internet have demonstrated that adopting Internet-based technologies can help further their missions by developing new partnerships with like-minded organizations in other parts of Canada and the world. They can reach more Canadians, who directly support or benefit from their work. Over time, organizations can also support their work in more sustainable ways by reducing their operating costs and generating additional revenues. The difficulty is that there is still a large disparity in the sector between organizations that currently are and are not using the Internet effectively.

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1. Jack Quarter, *Canada's Social Economy: Cooperatives, Non-profits and Other Community Enterprises* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1992). These figures are based on information provided by the appropriate department in each of the provinces, territories and federal government.
 2. Many individuals working in or supporting the sector argue that this number should be much higher in order to recognize the large number of volunteer-based organizations that are not registered but that support community interests.
 3. Patrick Johnston, "Filling the Gap: What Can Canada's 'Third Sector' Deliver as Governments Cut Back?", presentation to The Canadians Leader's Forum, co-sponsored by Queen's University Programme for Public Executives and The Public Policy Forum, Banff, April 24-25, 1997.
 4. Statistics Canada, *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians: Highlights from the 1997 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating*, Catalogue No. 71-542-XIE, August 1998. Available at: <http://www.ccp.ca>

In October 1997, VolNet undertook an informal survey⁵ of charitable organizations to determine the extent to which these organizations were using Internet-based technologies. Among the organizations surveyed, 65 percent were not currently connected to the Internet, primarily because of financial limitations or a lack of knowledge. Of the 35 percent of organizations that were connected, more than 75 percent expressed a need for Internet training, ranging from learning the basics, such as using E-mail and navigating the Internet (71 percent), to using more advanced applications, such as search engines and Internet-based fundraising tools (85 percent).

Based on the results of this survey and others,⁶ VNAC believes that a clear sense of purpose and a holistic approach to supporting the sector is critical. Therefore, in addition to setting up physical connections to the Internet, attention should be given to helping voluntary organizations develop the necessary skills, acquire knowledge, access ongoing support, and learn about relevant on-line tools so that their connectivity is sustained. With this approach, VolNet's emphasis will be on ensuring that the Internet is used in a way that is meaningful to voluntary organizations. VolNet's mission, therefore, should be to enable voluntary organizations to access and use Internet technologies to further their own missions.

Given the size, complexity and current technological capacity of the voluntary sector, VNAC also wanted to ensure that the following objectives were considered when developing a model for the program:

- increase the number of voluntary organizations connected to the Internet by 10 000;
- increase voluntary organizations' awareness of the benefits and strategic importance of the Internet;
- enhance the voluntary sector's ability to share information with other voluntary organizations, governments and stakeholders via the Internet;
- address the barriers to using the Internet that are the result of social inequalities of race, poverty, gender, disability, age or language by assisting voluntary organizations working in these areas to access and use the Internet;
- where appropriate, assist voluntary organizations to empower their constituents through the use of the Internet; and
- ensure that organizations become aware of the need for a strategy to sustain the use of the Internet within the organization.

5. In October 1997, VolNet conducted an "Internet Readiness Survey" (available at <http://www.volnet.org>) of 1500 English and 500 French charitable organizations using Revenue Canada's database of charitable organizations (648, or 32.4 percent, responded to the survey). As the study only included charities, the results are not necessarily representative of the voluntary sector as a whole.

6. Other surveys support these findings. For example, in 1996, in its "Volunteer Linkages of Technology Survey," the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation found that the greatest barriers to using information technologies were budget limitations, lack of staff training and lack of technical support. In 1997, the National Council of Non-profit Associations found that less than half of 7000 American non-profit organizations surveyed used the Internet, due to either a lack of knowledge or adequate equipment.

THE CHALLENGE OF CONNECTIVITY: DEVELOPING RELEVANT SERVICES

What Will VolNet Do?

Voluntary organizations are at different stages of readiness to adopt and use Internet-based technologies. In addition, many voluntary organizations do not perceive a need to integrate these technologies into their ongoing activities because of cost, time and a lack of understanding of the full potential of the Internet and its strategic importance to their activities. Given the complexity of the problem, the voluntary sector would greatly benefit from having access to a range of services, some of which address their need for basic access and skills development, and others which encourage organizations to make full use of the technologies, and ensure that they stay on-line.

THE VOLNET SERVICE PACKAGE

VNAC recognizes that limited financial resources and/or a lack of in-house expertise prevent many voluntary organizations from connecting to the Internet. In response to this problem, VNAC proposes that VolNet help 10 000 voluntary organizations obtain basic connectivity by supplying the necessary Internet access, equipment and skills to get started. A standard VolNet Service Package would include:

- an Internet account
- computer equipment (including selected assistive devices⁷)
- technology (e.g. software, hardware and access) discounts
- basic Internet skills development.

APPLIED INTERNET SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

In order to realize the full potential of the Internet, voluntary organizations will also need advanced training and support. For example, applied learning modules can help individuals understand a range of Internet-based applications and incorporate them into the ongoing activities of their organizations. Through on-line discussion groups, special events and workshops, voluntary organizations can develop the capacity to use the Internet to raise funds, promote the organization and recruit volunteers.

Since learning often occurs by doing, VolNet should also facilitate a program of ongoing support to voluntary organizations. The type of support provided will depend on the needs of the voluntary organizations. For example, it may include technical support or informal dialogues to encourage voluntary organizations throughout the learning process. This support can be delivered in a variety of ways, such as setting up a support telephone number, making on-site visits, or holding informal question and answer sessions in a community. Because organizations at all stages of Internet use face these kinds of problems, applied learning opportunities and ongoing support should be widely available to voluntary organizations in need.

7. Assistive devices refers to devices that facilitate the use of computers and other technology by persons with disabilities. Such equipment includes: screen magnification hardware and software, speech access hardware and software, sticky key programs or adaptive keyboards, and TTY/modems.

VOLNET ON-LINE TOOLS

VNAC recognizes that voluntary organizations have access to few Internet-based applications that exist specifically to support the strategic communication and technology interests of the sector. Without relevant content, connectivity will not be meaningful.

In order to provide voluntary organizations with a reason to stay on-line once connected, VolNet should help ensure that they are able to access relevant content. To do this, VolNet should identify on-line tools that it could either enhance to make relevant to a larger number of organizations, or simply promote and market to the sector. In doing so, VolNet should avoid duplication with existing efforts to bring relevant content to the voluntary sector.

In particular, VolNet should focus on making both “national” and “community” on-line tools accessible. National on-line tools are tools of significant importance to the voluntary sector as a whole (e.g. electronic commerce tools, Intranet tools and training materials specific to the sector). Community on-line tools are tools that are developed for a particular segment of the sector (e.g. health, social services, or environmental groups), and can be applied and transferred to other segments or regions. For example, a health information database that could be used by voluntary organizations in several provinces would be considered a community tool.

The VolNet Service Package, applied Internet skills development and support, and on-line tools are the three inter-related components that VNAC considers to be critical to helping voluntary organizations use the Internet in ways that are meaningful and sustainable, and key to VolNet’s success.

RECOMMENDATION 1

VolNet should offer a range of services to the voluntary sector, including a VolNet Service Package (connectivity, equipment and basic Internet skills), applied Internet skills development and support, and on-line tools.

Who Is Eligible to Receive VolNet Services?

VNAC recognizes that voluntary organizations engage in a wide variety of activities in a wide range of fields. They vary in size and in modes of operation (for example, some operate exclusively on volunteer labour while others employ staff). Voluntary organizations must also contend with the complexities of accountability, which are likely to be more a function of their administrative structure than their legal status. For example, a properly functioning board of directors and a constitution that ensures democratic operating practices are some of the ways in which an organization gains legitimacy in a community.

In recognition of the nature and diversity of the sector, VNAC wants to ensure that VolNet is based on a principle of inclusiveness and flexibility. For the purposes of VolNet, VNAC has openly defined a voluntary organization as any organization that is incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation under the appropriate provincial or federal legislation, or is registered as a charity or an amateur athletic association with Revenue Canada. Within this framework, VolNet should plan to offer the VolNet Service Package to 10 000 voluntary organizations⁸ that meet the eligibility criteria listed below.

RECOMMENDATION 2

To be eligible to receive the VolNet Service Package, a voluntary organization should:

- be incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation under the appropriate provincial or federal legislation, or be registered with Revenue Canada as a charity or an amateur athletic association;
- have a voluntary board of directors;
- offer services or programs that serve the public interest;
- demonstrate that it operates democratically, or in other participatory ways, and represents its membership or constituency;
- have annual revenues of less than \$500 000.

Under normal circumstances, the following organizations should not be eligible to receive the VolNet Service Package:

- individuals;
- profit-oriented organizations;
- industry and trade associations (including professional associations);
- political parties and organizations involved exclusively in partisan political activity;
- municipalities, universities, hospitals and schools;
- organizations already served by similar government programs;
- places of worship (as opposed to religious charities);
- labour unions.

8. This differs from applied Internet skills development and support, and on-line tools, which can be made widely available to voluntary organizations in a region or sector.

VNAC also recognizes that there are a number of voluntary organizations that serve important public needs but are isolated in terms of either their geography or the economic or social position of the people that they seek to serve, as indicated in the organization's mission. To ensure that these voluntary organizations are also supported by VolNet, VNAC believes that special consideration must be given to them.

RECOMMENDATION 3

VolNet should give priority to voluntary organizations that:

- have not been connected to the Internet in the last six months;
- are isolated, either geographically or as a result of the mission of the organization (for example, organizations serving groups seeking equality by addressing issues that affect minority language groups, people with disabilities, the elderly, youth, the economically disadvantaged, aboriginals and women).

In selecting eligible voluntary organizations, consideration should also be given to ensuring that organizations in every province and territory are served, that organizations in both urban and rural areas are served, and that every sector within the voluntary sector is served.

How Will VolNet Deliver Its Services?

THE VOLNET SERVICE PACKAGE, APPLIED INTERNET SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

Embodied in VNAC's recommendation to develop a VolNet Service Package is a solution to the challenge of connecting 10 000 organizations to the Internet. However, several challenges still exist to deliver VolNet:

- selecting 10 000 beneficiaries from a total of over 175 000 voluntary organizations, and administering all of the requests for assistance;
- overseeing and implementing the distribution of the VolNet Service Package;
- providing voluntary organizations with applied Internet skills development and support;
- ensuring that the impacts of VolNet will endure past the life of the program.

VNAC's solution to these challenges is for Industry Canada to work with existing organizations that already have experience in using Internet-based technologies and in providing services to the voluntary sector. These organizations — referred to as VolNet delivery agencies — would become VolNet "champions" in the field. They would not only ensure connectivity, but they would also become central points of support for voluntary organizations in a region or sector, motivating these organizations to use a range of Internet-based applications including VolNet's on-line tools. As a national network, delivery agencies would strengthen national and international voluntary sector networks, helping to move the voluntary sector to an enhanced level of connectivity.

Delivery agencies could be a single organization, or a consortium of organizations (see page 11 for eligibility). VolNet should aim to establish at least one delivery agency per province and territory. While there should be a maximum of 30 delivery agencies in order to maintain low administrative costs, a lead delivery agency may have satellites in different regions or in a particular sector. It should be ensured that delivery agencies are able to service organizations in both urban and rural areas, and representing every sector of the voluntary sector. Voluntary organizations should also be able to receive service in the official language of their choice.

The specific roles and functions of a VolNet delivery agency would be to:

- identify an average of 175 voluntary organizations per year that are eligible for and would like to benefit from VolNet, and conduct a needs assessment of these organizations;
- assist these voluntary organizations in acquiring all or part of the VolNet Service Package;
- serve as a central point of Internet support and applied Internet skills development for voluntary organizations in a particular region or sector, and develop strategies for encouraging voluntary organizations to take ownership of their use of the Internet and continue to use it in their daily business;
- in most cases, help enhance the program through the development of collaborative agreements or other leveraging strategies;
- work as part of a national network of VolNet delivery agencies.

VNAC envisions the development of the delivery agency network as no less than a movement to help Canada's voluntary organizations become equal players on the Internet playing field. VNAC believes that by investing in organizations that already exist, the model proposed will leave behind knowledge, expertise and capacity that will serve the voluntary sector long into the future.

RECOMMENDATION 4

VolNet should establish up to 30 delivery agencies to help identify eligible voluntary organizations, distribute the VolNet Service Package, support the adoption and use of Internet-based technologies in the voluntary sector, and help leverage resources for the program.

IDENTIFYING AND SELECTING VOLNET DELIVERY AGENCIES

A number of organizations in Canada are already fulfilling some part of the work required by VNAC to qualify as a delivery agency. However, in order to have the strongest delivery agencies possible, it is likely that partnerships between organizations will need to be developed. Further, while several organizations will have a sense of the needs of voluntary organizations in their region or sector, it is unlikely that they will have already conducted a precise needs assessment for these organizations.

Industry Canada should develop an open competitive process to select VolNet delivery agencies. The process would give VolNet a snapshot of the landscape in terms of who is already doing work relevant to VolNet, and it would ensure that the strongest partners possible are chosen for VolNet. VNAC would review the proposals, and make recommendations to the Minister of Industry on which delivery agency proposals to support.

There should be three phases to the work of a delivery agency: an assessment phase, during which voluntary organizations to receive the VolNet Service Package are identified, an implementation phase, during which the delivery agency fulfils its main mandate, and an evaluation phase.

RECOMMENDATION 5

VolNet should have a fair and transparent process to select VolNet delivery agencies.

DELIVERY AGENCY ELIGIBILITY AND EVALUATION CRITERIA

To ensure that VolNet is building on existing capacity and not developing something completely new, delivery agencies should have knowledge of the voluntary sector, demonstrated expertise in the uses of the Internet in the voluntary sector and the capacity to take on the work of a delivery agency. It is likely that a delivery agency candidate would already be performing some part of the work expected of VolNet delivery agencies.

RECOMMENDATION 6

An eligible VolNet delivery agency is one organization or a consortium of organizations (with one as the lead) that possesses the following characteristics:

- **it must be a legal entity (essential for the lead applicant) that has been in operation for at least 12 months;**
- **it must have experience with and knowledge of the voluntary sector;**
- **it must have demonstrated knowledge of uses of the Internet in the voluntary sector (or be able to explain how the organization will gain this expertise, for example, through collaboration with other organizations);**
- **it must be able to demonstrate that it can receive, manage and account for public funds in a responsible manner, and has the capacity to deliver the project.**

In selecting delivery agencies, preference will be given to voluntary sector organizations with the capacity to meet the requirements of the program.

Under normal circumstances, the following groups would not be eligible to become VolNet delivery agencies:

- individuals;
- profit-oriented organizations;
- industry and trade associations (including professional associations) and other representatives of business interests;
- municipalities, universities, hospitals and schools.

However, these groups may be eligible if (1) they can demonstrate that their proposal is clearly to benefit voluntary sector organizations, and (2) their proposal is accompanied by documentation that demonstrates support for the proposal by voluntary organizations.

In evaluating delivery agency proposals, while preference should be given to organizations that can demonstrate a capacity to connect a large number of organizations (175 or more), consideration should also be given to service delivery to isolated organizations. The proposal should be evaluated according to the following criteria: the delivery agency's understanding of and ability to achieve its proposed outcomes; its plan to include VolNet's priority groups; the extent of leveraging in the proposal from the voluntary, private and public sectors; and the overall impact the plan will have on the voluntary sector targeted.

VOLNET ON-LINE TOOLS

VNAC suggests two different approaches to making the national and community on-line tools available to the voluntary sector. National on-line tools should be identified and prioritized by VNAC in consultation with Industry Canada. Initiatives to enhance or promote these tools should be supported both by VolNet and through the development of partnerships with the private sector, other government agencies and the voluntary sector. Industry Canada should oversee the initiatives, and ensure that these tools are made available to VolNet delivery agencies and other interested voluntary organizations.

Similar to the Virtual Products initiative managed by Industry Canada's SchoolNet program, community on-line tools should be identified through a call for proposal process. This will ensure that VolNet receives proposals that capture the creativity and real needs of the sector. In identifying projects to be supported, priority should be given to those tools that meet an explicit need or demand within the sector and can be easily and quickly applied and transferred to other segments or regions within the voluntary sector. This part of the VolNet program should be established after the other program components, and full eligibility criteria should be developed at that time.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Initiatives to make national on-line tools accessible to the voluntary sector should be identified by VNAC and implemented in part through the development of partnerships. Community on-line tools should be developed through a call for proposals process.

VOLNET'S RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: PROMOTING COLLABORATION

The opportunities for VolNet to assist as many voluntary organizations as possible through collaboration are great, and the potential benefits are numerous. VolNet should seek to maximize its impact and reduce its costs by partnering with other key stakeholders and, where possible, by leveraging the existing capacity of the voluntary sector.

Industry Canada should seek collaborative agreements with the private sector, other federal government departments, provincial governments and foundations. VolNet can also benefit from the opportunity to build on the existing infrastructure and capacity of the voluntary sector. For example, Community Nets, which offer connectivity and technical support to the voluntary sector, are a valuable resource because they understand the conditions under which voluntary organizations operate. VNAC greatly favours alliances — those built on local capacities — as a means to promote self-reliance and the long-term sustainability of VolNet.

Collaboration can take several forms, including cash or in-kind donations, co-financing, or mutual promotion activities. VolNet's priority should be to minimize the cost of providing the VolNet Service Package (i.e. connectivity and equipment). This would allow for a reallocation of VolNet funds to the other critical components of the program.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Collaborative agreements should be sought with the private sector, other federal government departments, provincial governments, foundations and voluntary organizations in order to leverage the existing VolNet resources. Priority should be given to securing free or discounted connectivity and equipment so that resources slated for these purposes could be reallocated to other VolNet priorities.

The development of collaborative agreements for VolNet should be a joint effort of Industry Canada, VNAC and VolNet delivery agencies. Not only will this give legitimacy to VolNet's approach but it will help ensure that the federal government works with and does not compete with the voluntary sector in identifying resources for VolNet. It will also help create strong relationships between the voluntary sector and other parts of Canadian society, which could serve the sector well into the future.

RECOMMENDATION 9

To ensure that it is working for, and not competing with, the voluntary sector, Industry Canada should work closely with delivery agencies, VNAC and the voluntary sector in developing collaborative agreements for VolNet.

VOLNET'S COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY: CREATING AWARENESS IN THE SECTOR

To meet VolNet's goals of connectivity and of heightening Internet adoption in the voluntary sector, a communications strategy is needed that will increase the sector's awareness and enthusiasm about the potential of the Internet. VolNet is currently part of the Connecting Canadians communications campaign. In addition to this, there should be a program launch, media events, a publicity campaign, and a Web site to increase awareness and understanding of VolNet.

Providing concrete information about the services VolNet has to offer the voluntary sector should be a key objective of this strategy. Effectively communicating the program's target of offering connectivity to 10 000 organizations will be important so that the parameters of the program are known to the voluntary sector and its various publics. Another goal of the communications strategy is to raise the general consciousness of Canadians about ways in which the Internet can be used to help voluntary organizations further their missions. Industry Canada should also use this opportunity to disseminate information on the Year 2000 challenge to the voluntary sector.

The priority audience for this communications strategy should be voluntary organizations that are eligible to participate in VolNet, with particular attention given to organizations that may become delivery agencies. Communicating the program through existing voluntary sector networks will enable VolNet to reach as wide a range of voluntary organizations as possible. In addition — given the range of stakeholders involved in the successful implementation of VolNet — the private sector, all levels of government, the media and the general public should also be informed about this program.

Finally, VNAC understands that a meaningful partnership between the voluntary sector, Industry Canada and other federal government departments is critical to VolNet's success. Promoting regular communication among these parties will help ensure that the program is as innovative as possible and develops in a way that truly meets the needs of the voluntary sector.

RECOMMENDATION 10

VolNet should develop a communications strategy that provides information about the program, builds awareness about the potential of the Internet in the voluntary sector and targets eligible voluntary organizations as its priority audience.

CONTINUAL LEARNING AND EVALUATION

In this program, VolNet delivery agencies will have knowledge of individual organizations' progress in terms of getting connected and integrating the Internet into their work. Conversely, Industry Canada and VNAC are well positioned to monitor what is happening in the program as a whole, including program delivery, resource development and communications strategies. Industry Canada, VNAC and delivery agencies should therefore work together over the life of the program to evaluate and reflect upon the progress of VolNet. This will facilitate continual learning about how to integrate Internet use into the voluntary sector, enable ongoing improvements to the program and provide knowledge that will serve the sector in the future.

RECOMMENDATION 11

Working with VNAC and VolNet delivery agencies, Industry Canada should develop an evaluation strategy that facilitates continual learning about how to increase the voluntary sector's use of the Internet, and ensures that VolNet achieves its objectives and fulfils its mandate by March 31, 2001.

In evaluating VolNet, both quantitative and qualitative indicators should be considered. Quantifiable measures of success include the number of organizations that get connected and receive computers through VolNet. Qualitative measures include an examination of how voluntary organizations, once connected, use the Internet in strategic ways to further their missions. Having both types of information will help ensure that VolNet meets its targets and will simultaneously provide a strong indication of the difference that being connected has made to voluntary organizations' ability to serve Canadians.

ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES AND TIMETABLE

VNAC believes that, although VolNet could be enhanced through the identification of further resources, the objectives described in this report can be met within the current budget (\$15 million over three years) and timeframe (by March 31, 2001). VNAC recommends that enough funding be initially allocated to the VolNet Service Package (in particular, connectivity and equipment) to ensure that VolNet has the resources to reach its goal of connecting 10 000 voluntary organizations. However, if the cost of this service could be decreased through VolNet's resource development strategy, such funding should be reallocated to other VolNet priorities (for example, support or on-line tools).

RECOMMENDATION 12

Industry Canada should consider the following as an initial approximate allocation of VolNet funding: 64 percent for items that VolNet will deliver to voluntary organizations (44 percent for the Service Package including connectivity, equipment and basic Internet skills development; 17 percent for applied Internet skills development and support; and 3 percent for VolNet on-line tools); 23 percent for setting up a sustaining delivery and support network in the form of VolNet delivery agencies; 3 percent for communicating VolNet to its target audiences; and 10 percent for overall VolNet program management.

VNAC recommends that the VolNet program be announced once a means of connectivity for voluntary organizations has been secured. Further, the process to identify delivery agencies should start at the earliest date possible, with a goal of establishing at least five delivery agencies by February 1999. A target of an additional five delivery agencies every three months is recommended until VolNet reaches its maximum number of 30. VolNet should be in a position to start connecting voluntary organizations to the Internet by early April 1999.

CONCLUSION

The VolNet National Advisory Committee's recommendations answer the questions: what will VolNet deliver, to whom, and how. They then suggest ways in which Industry Canada can expand the impact and ensure the success of the program through its resource development and communications strategies. Finally, the evaluation of the program and the learning that comes from it will be key to understanding its impact. These recommendations provide what VNAC believes to be realistic and feasible goals for VolNet. More importantly, they provide the complete array of elements required to ensure that this program is successful in its efforts to enhance the voluntary sector's use of the Internet in ways that are sustainable and meaningful to the organizations and to the Canadians they serve.

APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1

VolNet should offer a range of services to the voluntary sector, including a VolNet Service Package (connectivity, equipment and basic Internet skills), applied Internet skills development and support, and on-line tools.

RECOMMENDATION 2

To be eligible to receive the VolNet Service Package, a voluntary organization should:

- be incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation under the appropriate provincial or federal legislation, or be registered with Revenue Canada as a charity or an amateur athletic association;
- have a voluntary board of directors;
- offer services or programs that serve the public interest;
- demonstrate that it operates democratically, or in other participatory ways, and represents its membership or constituency;
- have annual revenues of less than \$500 000.

Under normal circumstances, the following organizations should not be eligible to receive the VolNet Service Package:

- individuals;
- profit-oriented organizations;
- industry and trade associations (including professional associations);
- political parties and organizations involved exclusively in partisan political activity;
- municipalities, universities, hospitals and schools;
- organizations already served by similar government programs;
- places of worship (as opposed to religious charities);
- labour unions.

RECOMMENDATION 3

VolNet should give priority to voluntary organizations that:

- have not been connected to the Internet in the last six months;
- are isolated, either geographically or as a result of the mission of the organization (for example, organizations serving groups seeking equality by addressing issues that affect minority language groups, people with disabilities, the elderly, youth, the economically disadvantaged, aboriginals and women).

RECOMMENDATION 4

VolNet should establish up to 30 delivery agencies to help identify eligible voluntary organizations, distribute the VolNet Service Package, support the adoption and use of Internet-based technologies in the voluntary sector, and help leverage resources for the program.

RECOMMENDATION 5

VolNet should have a fair and transparent process to select VolNet delivery agencies.

RECOMMENDATION 6

An eligible VolNet delivery agency is one organization or a consortium of organizations (with one as the lead) that possesses the following characteristics:

- it must be a legal entity (essential for the lead applicant) that has been in operation for at least 12 months;
- it must have experience with and knowledge of the voluntary sector;
- it must have demonstrated knowledge of uses of the Internet in the voluntary sector (or be able to explain how the organization will gain this expertise, for example, through collaboration with other organizations);
- it must be able to demonstrate that it can receive, manage and account for public funds in a responsible manner, and has the capacity to deliver the project.

In selecting delivery agencies, preference will be given to voluntary sector organizations with the capacity to meet the requirements of the program.

Under normal circumstances, the following groups would not be eligible to become VolNet delivery agencies:

- individuals;
- profit-oriented organizations;
- industry and trade associations (including professional associations) and other representatives of business interests;
- municipalities, universities, hospitals and schools.

However, these groups may be eligible if (1) they can demonstrate that their proposal is clearly to benefit voluntary sector organizations, and (2) their proposal is accompanied by documentation that demonstrates support for the proposal by voluntary organizations.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Initiatives to make national on-line tools accessible to the voluntary sector should be identified by VNAC and implemented in part through the development of partnerships. Community on-line tools should be developed through a call for proposals process.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Collaborative agreements should be sought with the private sector, other federal government departments, provincial governments, foundations and voluntary organizations in order to leverage the existing VolNet resources. Priority should be given to securing free or discounted connectivity and equipment so that resources slated for these purposes could be reallocated to other VolNet priorities.

RECOMMENDATION 9

To ensure that it is working for, and not competing with, the voluntary sector, Industry Canada should work closely with delivery agencies, VNAC and the voluntary sector in developing collaborative agreements for VolNet.

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Working with VNAC and VolNet delivery agencies, Industry Canada should develop an evaluation strategy that facilitates continual learning about how to increase the voluntary sector's use of the Internet, and ensures that VolNet achieves its objectives and fulfils its mandate by March 31, 2001.

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Industry Canada should consider the following as an initial approximate allocation of VolNet funding: 64 percent for items that VolNet will deliver to voluntary organizations (44 percent for the Service Package including connectivity, equipment and basic Internet skills development; 17 percent for applied Internet skills development and support; and 3 percent for VolNet on-line tools); 23 percent for setting up a sustaining delivery and support network in the form of VolNet delivery agencies; 3 percent for communicating VolNet to its target audiences; and 10 percent for overall VolNet program management.

APPENDIX B: VOLNET NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chair

KRSTIC, Lil

Place of employment:

Telephone Pioneers

Voluntary organizations:

Junior Achievement; Kindergartener's Count

Members

BEKKEMA, Denise

Place of employment:

Storefront for Voluntary Agencies

Voluntary organizations:

City of Yellowknife Heritage Committee; Northwest Territories Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (NWT SPCA); Festival of the Midnight Sun Society

BERTRAND, Denis

Place of employment:

Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne (FCFA) du Canada

Voluntary organizations:

Théâtre La Catapulte; Conseil d'administration du Centre de théâtre francophone d'Ottawa

BRENT, Diana

Place of employment:

Calgary Catholic School District

Voluntary organizations:

Council of Canadians with Disabilities; Integrated Network of Disability Information and Education; Adapted Technology Committee, University of Calgary, Resource Person; Independent Living Resource Centre of Calgary; The Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities

CARROLL, Jim

Place of employment:

J.A. Carroll Consulting

Voluntary organizations:

YMCA Canada; Media Awareness Network

CHALLINOR II, John

Place of employment:

Compaq Canada Inc.

Voluntary organizations:

Communications sub-committee – Imagine; Communications sub-committee – Information Technology Association of Canada (ITAC)

CHAN, Steven

Place of employment:

Independent Design Engineer

Voluntary organizations:

Society for the Promotion of Environmental Conservation (SPEC); International Development Education Resource Association (IDERA); Vancouver CommunityNet; EcoCity Network of Vancouver

DIRKS, Gerald

Place of employment:

Brock University

Voluntary organizations:

Canadian National Institute for the Blind; Human Rights Committee, World Blind Union; Task Force on Braille Literacy, Canadian Braille Authority; Departmental Long Range Planning Committee, University of Brock

FERGUSON, Doug

Place of employment:

Lifesaving Society

Voluntary organizations:

Canadian Parks & Recreation Association (CP/RA), Parks & Recreation Ontario (PRO)

FIETZ, Margaret

Place of employment:

Family Service Canada

Voluntary organizations:

Psychogeriatric Community Services Clinic; University of Ottawa Psychological Services

HARE, Marvin

Place of employment:

National Association of Friendship Centres

HELLQUIST, Wayne

Place of employment:

United Way of Regina

Voluntary organizations:

Saskatchewan Youth Olympic Academy; North Central Community Safety Centre; North East Community Centre; Canadian Olympic Association; Pan American Games Society, Manitoba Multi Sport Training Centre

HELWIG, Sherri

Place of employment:

CultureNet; S.L. Helwig & Associates; Periodical Writers Association of Canada

Voluntary organizations:

CultureNet; Ontario Association of Art Galleries; The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery; Museum Computer Network; Canadian Conference of the Arts; Interactive Multimedia Arts & Technologies Association; Cultural Human Resources Council; ArtsWire

HOOPER, June

Place of employment:

New Brunswick Easter Seal March of Dimes

Voluntary organizations:

New Brunswick Ministers of Health's Advisory Committee on Rehabilitation Services

JOHNSTON, Donald

Place of employment:

Community Foundations of Canada

JONES, Trudy

Place of employment:

Gander Women's Center

Voluntary organizations:

Gander Women's Center, Board for Epilepsy in Newfoundland and Labrador; Self Help Support Group, National Anti-Poverty Organization (NAPO); Literacy Council

KING, Donald

Place of employment:

Seniors' Education Centre, University Extension, University of Regina

Voluntary organizations:

Canadian Council for the Advancement of Education; Council for Saskatchewan Fundraising Executives

LABOBE, Charlotte

Place of employment:

University of P.E.I.

Voluntary organizations:

Mi'kmaq Family Resource Center

LIZÉE, Jacques

Place of employment:

Fédération des unions des familles

Voluntary organizations:

Institut Vanier de la famille; Fédération des unions de familles en politique familiale (niveau national); Carrefour Action Municipale et les familles; Maisons de la famille au Québec; Table du monde municipal sur le 3^e Plan d'action de la politique familiale au Québec; Projet 1,2,3 Go à Centraide

MORGAN, Dudley

Place of employment:

Yukon College

Voluntary organizations:

Canadian Mental Health Association; National Aboriginal Broadcasters Television Northern Canada (TVNC); Challenge Vocational Alternatives

MORTIMER, Peter

Place of employment:

Metro Halifax United Way

Voluntary organizations:

Chebucto Community Net; Information Providers Committee

NDEJURU, Rosalie

Place of employment:

Centre de documentation sur l'Éducation des adultes et la condition féminine (CDEACF)

Voluntary organizations:

Frontier College; Institut canadien d'éducation des adultes; Communauté rwandaise de Montréal

O'GRADY, Daniel

Place of employment:

Canadian Airlines International

Voluntary organizations:

National Conference Board of Canada; Corporate Community Investment Council; Economic Development Council; Canadian Council for Business in the Community; Calgary Corporate Workplace Volunteer Council; Association of Volunteer Administrators (AVA)

PENNER, Janice

Place of employment:

Penner & Associates Advisory Services

Voluntary organizations:

YWCA of Canada; Prairie Theatre Exchange; City of Winnipeg Centreplan Committee; Forks North Portage Partnership; University of Manitoba Pension Plans Boards; Tourism Winnipeg; 1998 Grey Cup Committee

ROBERTS, Kirk

Place of employment:

Open Text Corporation

Voluntary organizations:

Change Canada Charitable Foundation; Internet Society

SUTTON, Josephine

Place of employment:

Women'Space

Voluntary organizations:

VIOLET; Women's Justice Network

SY, San San

Place of employment:

ACJNet University of Alberta

Voluntary organizations:

Edmonton Community Adult Learning Council; Edmonton FreeNet

TREMBLAY, Hélène

Place of employment:

Commission scolaire Jacques-Cartier

Voluntary organizations:

Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français

