

**Office of the Voluntary Sector
Public Health Agency of Canada**

***Round-table Report: In for the Long Haul:
Working with the Accord and Codes
post-Voluntary Sector Initiative
March 31, 2005***

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INTRODUCTION

On March 31, 2005, representatives from the Canadian Federation of Voluntary Sector Networks (6), the Voluntary Sector Forum (1) and the Office of the Voluntary Sector (OVS), Public Health Agency of Canada (4), convened in Ottawa for a half-day dialogue titled “In for the Long Haul- Working with the Accord and Codes post Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI)”. Members of the Federation came from several communities/ regions/ provinces and represented a cross-section of voluntary sector organizations.

Reflecting on one of the key purposes of *An Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector* – which was to set out the values, principles and commitments to guide the two sectors’ relationship into the future - the objective of the meeting was two-fold. Firstly, the discussion points shed light on ways to maintain and move forward with the relationship between these two players, but also identified issues and challenges the two sectors will face in taking an integrated approach to working together. Secondly, building on the OVS commitment to promote training across all Regions of Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada, this planning session examined options for delivery of *Forging Stronger Links*¹ training workshops in the North as well as in isolated rural communities.

This report consolidates and highlights the main themes and recommendations that emerged from the round-table discussion, specifically looking at the issue areas that participant organizations are currently undertaking in their work, the use of the *Accord* and *Codes of Good Practice*, how the *Accord* and *Codes* might be used in the future, and ideas for training approaches in northern Canada and rural communities.

KEY ORGANIZATIONAL THEMES

To begin the dialogue, each participant reported on the mandate and the geographical span of the organization he/she represented, as well as two key themes or issue areas drawn from current work. A snapshot of themes presented are noted below, some of them shared by several participants, highlighting the common sets of issues faced by the sectors:

- Capacity-building, both regionally and nationally
- Raising the profile of the voluntary sector
- Connecting the voluntary, public and private sector
- Raising awareness about the sector- internally and externally
- Leadership development
- Network-building
- Moving the *Accord* and *Codes of Good Practice* out to a broader government and voluntary sector audience

USE OF THE ACCORD AND CODES OF GOOD PRACTICE

¹ In 2004, The Office of the Voluntary Sector developed a joint government/voluntary sector training workshop on the Accord and Codes of Good Practice. This training workshop has been set in a health context, but can be adapted across regions and issue areas.

This segment of the Round-table discussion reviewed the OVS regional training example of implementing the *Accord* and *Codes of Good Practice*; looked to identify successes, gaps and challenges in implementation; and discussed the use of the *Accord* and *Codes*, and related training material across a range of issue areas, then in a health context.

Many participants acknowledged the *Accord* and *Codes of Good Practice* as valuable resources and a foundation for guiding the relationship between the two sectors. In particular, the “Forging Stronger Links” training manual, designed by the Office of the Voluntary sector for health sector use, was identified as a good resource that has value beyond health. In fact, it was noted that many small organizations often work across different issues and environments and thus training of this kind would have to be used in a cross-sectoral context.

It was also noted that implementation of the *Accord* would need to be relevant in a community and provincial context, in order to reflect current realities across the country. As one participant noted: *64% of Canadian organizations have local mandates which means that they work at a grassroots level and are often unaffiliated with the national level of government.*

Three questions were subsequently raised out of this discussion:

- Why do we need a Federal Accord?
- How does it fit with provincial work?
- How can we make the link?

These are important questions to be addressed and were set in the backdrop of a later discussion about ways to move forward and how future initiatives between the government and the voluntary sector should be designed.

Challenges were also identified during this discussion. In terms of the relationship between the voluntary sector and the government, some participants indicated that there are existing behaviours and practices that are set at one level, that are not always consistent with behaviors that take place “on the ground”, meaning that there is a long way to go in moving the *Accord* forward (Funding Code principles in relation to actual experience with project funding).

While it was acknowledged that the *Accord* and *Codes* are significant documents, there was concern that: where organizations are in crisis, where relationships are strained; or where organizations are compelled to focus on actively meeting their objectives, it is at times difficult to promote the *Accord* as being, practical, useful and having value added. The point was made here that there is a need to therefore better market the *Accord* and *Codes*, setting it in the light of a tool for fostering better relationships. A positive note was also made that “Champions” at the Federal level do exist to deal with these issues and have in some regions made an impact. However, the

3 reasons were identified for why organizations are struggling with implementing the Accord and Codes:

- 1) Perceived relevance- not all organizations have a relationship with the federal government
- 2) Perceived sincerity or credibility- Is there the necessary political will and bureaucratic mechanisms in place to make it happen?
- 3) Transferability- is this a model/catalyst for local action, can the language, values, principles something organizations believe in?

current reality of high staff turnover was cited as an impediment to consolidating relationships. This reflects the much needed attention to ongoing transfer of knowledge on these resources and the importance of government and voluntary sector training both in an orientation and management context..

The above example of the OVS “Forging Stronger Links” regional training initiative, designed for joint delivery and participation by voluntary sector and government representatives, was recognized as a resource that addresses many of the same issues being discussed at the meeting. It was also identified as one way to address both the issue of adapting the *Accord* and *Codes* into regional and local contexts, as well as a tool to open up dialogue, air differences and address challenges between the sectors.

THE ACCORD AND CODES IN THE FUTURE, BEYOND VSI

This part of the discussion considered the *Accord* and *Codes* in the future after the Voluntary Sector Initiative is completed (March 2006), and where best to focus energies. There was a general consensus that the *Accord* and *Codes of Good Practice* and “Forging Stronger Links” material were good resources which could perhaps be a primer for how the voluntary sector and government can work together more effectively. However, in light of some of the above challenges in using the *Accord* in a real world context, it was suggested that focus on the mechanisms themselves (e.g., courses on applying the *Accord* and *Codes*) should be downplayed and instead used as illustrations in future initiatives on strengthening government and voluntary sector relationships. What followed in this part of the discussion were a series of ideas and recommendations for how to proceed and tackle challenges.

Recommendations for the future and proposed follow up

- Continued need to work on bringing voluntary sector and government together in concrete ways, due to the complex set of behaviours that need to be changed
- Create a hotline for the voluntary sector to link with the government to get questions answered and access to information
- Build in access to existing information and referral lines e.g. the National Network of Distress Centres have a 211 information line
- Renewal of the 2001 *Accord* and *Code* documents and a commitment that both sectors sign on to; also an opportunity for development of a third code of good practice on collaboration
- Establish a peer coaching system - across sectors and regions, as well as within organizations
- Invite participants to attend training in clusters (across sectors) that come together through another way of learning and building relationships

- Invite two members from the same organization to participate in training - e.g. a director and financial officer; a new volunteer and an experienced volunteer
- Use *Forging Stronger Links* material as a part of ongoing voluntary sector and government training (e.g. Voluntary Sector Leadership School, University programs, government orientation and management training)
- Examine a range of existing training material; evaluate and disseminate for comment to see what can be useful in guiding the relationship in the future
- Find or develop a pilot/model that has adapted the Federal *Accord* and *Codes* to a local level (noting that several examples of Provincial Accords exist)
- Identify regional champions in departments that have an interest in strong government/voluntary sector relationships- local points of contact are needed

THE ACCORD AND CODES: TRAINING APPROACHES FOR NORTHERN CANADA AND ISOLATED RURAL COMMUNITIES

The final part of the Round-table was dedicated to brainstorming ideas for implementing the *Accord* and *Codes* in northern and rural communities in Canada. While some of the participants did not have direct experience working with northern Canadian communities, many of their organizations had broad geographical spans, some covering rural communities and had very helpful insights on how to move forward in planning for training in the North.

The experience of some participants saw the importance of critically examining the relevance of material for the intended audience and their realities. In the North for instance, there might only be several organizations that are eligible for federal funding who could be identified for training at this level in the *Accord* and *Codes*.

Several of the participants also had creative suggestions for how to coordinate individuals and organizations in the sector from rural settings. For example, yearly rural fairs were cited as a main hub of contact for rural communities and an excellent opportunity to present material, conduct workshops, and present to planning committees for the fairs. Points of contact for such events were given in Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario. In terms of Northern Canada, participants suggested that finding interlocutors (such as the Voluntary Sector Forum, the Canadian Voluntary Initiatives, the Population Health Network, and the VOICE in Health Policy Project) who already have connections with Northern communities and organizations, some of them in a training context, would be helpful in assisting in planning and implementation of the *Accord and Codes* in these regions of the country.

CONCLUSION

Overall, and further to meeting evaluations, participants found the informal and open dialogue interesting and helpful. Collaboration on ideas for positive change was a good indication of the ability of the two sectors to come together and apply the principles of open dialogue and relationship building. Furthermore, the Federation representatives expressed a strong interest in maintaining a working relationship and continuing to search out new tools, new language, and new approaches to create motivation for moving the relationship forward, as the VSI comes to an end. This gave meaning to a comment made in the opening remarks of the Roundtable:

Although the VSI is ending, the relationship between the government and the voluntary sector is not.

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANTS

THE CANADIAN FEDERATION OF VOLUNTARY SECTOR NETWORKS:

Paula Speevak-Sladowski,
Centre for Voluntary Sector Research and Development,
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

Brenda Herchmer
Niagara College Centre for Community Leadership
Niagara Region, Ontario

Beth De Long
Pillar Voluntary Sector Network
London, Ontario

Martin Itzkow
Voluntary and Non-Profit Sector Organization of Manitoba.
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Katherine van Kooy
Calgary Chamber of Charities
Calgary, Alberta

Tim Beachy
Voluntary Organizations Consortium of B.C.
Vancouver, B.C.

THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR FORUM

Nadine Theriault
Ottawa, Ontario

OFFICE OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR, PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY OF CANADA

Sylvie Dufresne
Joan Simpson
Gylda Fry
Annette Hollas

APPENDIX B

Annotated Agenda: In for the Long Haul Working with the Accord and Codes post-VSI

March 31, 2005 – 8:30 AM to 12:30 PM

Holiday Inn – Plaza la Chaudière,

Chairperson: Joan Simpson, Office of the Voluntary Sector (OVS)

Facilitator/Recorder: Annette Hollas, OVS

8:00-8:30 Continental breakfast in meeting room
(Available at 7:30AM for early risers)

8:30-9:00 **Welcoming remarks:** Sylvie Dufresne, Director,
Office of the Voluntary Sector

Remarks from the Chair: Joan Simpson
Office of the Voluntary Sector (OVS)

- Who we are
- Why we've convened this meeting
- Recognizing OVS mandate re voluntary sector and health policy
- Morning objectives re Accord and Code integration

Introductions

- Name, organization, geographic span, mandate
- 2 key themes/aspects of your current work

9:00-9:30 **Use of the Accord and Codes of Good Practice**
a) OVS example: Regional Training Initiative

- Using "Forging Stronger Links" workshop resource; identifying successes, gaps, challenges; contributing to strategic direction

b) General discussion

- Across issues areas (not limited to health)
- In a health context
- Differences across different issues and environments
- Implementation and integration aspects (omissions too)

9:30-10:00 **Best Practices: Highlighting what works, what doesn't, and why**
a) Small group work (using "Forging Stronger Links" exercise)
b) Plenary feedback from small group discussion

10:00-10:30 **Key impacts of the Accord and Codes of Good Practice**

- a) Consider movement, progression, changes within time context:
 - 2000 – 2005 – 2010

- b) Consider the Accord and Codes in the future, beyond VSI
 - Where to focus energies
 - Areas to safeguard
 - Areas to move forward
 - Concerns re future outside VSI
 - Sustainability issues

10:30-10:45 Break

10:45-11:30 Part Two: Accord and Codes: Preliminary discussion of training approaches for northern Canada and isolated rural communities

- Challenges and opportunities
- Suggesting possible approaches and implications
- Identifying broader planning network

11:30 Working Lunch (20 minute break)

11:50-12:30 Overview of key meeting themes and learning

- a) Accord and Codes in longer term “evergreen documents”
- b) Training approaches to northern and isolated rural communities
- c) Next steps re: broader group distribution and feedback

12:30 Adjournment