

Community Dispatch

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AN ACCORD BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Canada, along with other nations across our Globe, is witnessing social and economic change. This change has not brought social and economic prosperity for all. How we provide opportunity and quality of life for all Canadians and how we care for members of our communities needs to be strengthened. An Accord between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector was launched in 2001. I believe that this Accord can be the underpinnings of a strong and vibrant relationship between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector. The Accord, along with its Codes, represents an open, fair, and cooperative form of collaboration with the Government of Canada in order to foster the social development of our people as they live and work in our local communities. For this reason, I bring the Accord to your attention.

Joey Edwardh

CONTEXT OF THE ACCORD

In thousands of voluntary sector organizations throughout Canada, volunteers and staff are working together to improve the quality of life of people in local communities. The Voluntary Sector touches virtually all aspects of our society from social justice, human rights, environment, health and faith to arts and culture, sports and recreation. It delivers services critical to Canadians; it advocates for common causes; it supports economic and community development in Canada and worldwide; and, it raises funds. The Voluntary Sector has also been instrumental in the development of most of the public services Canadians rely on today, essential aspects of a welfare society, that is schools, hospitals, social assistance and care for children in need. These

services began as voluntary initiatives. Today, both the public and voluntary sectors are involved in the delivery of these services.

Voluntary Sector organizations bring their community based knowledge, expertise and compassion to the identification of social priorities and to public policy debates. The Voluntary Sector encourages people to participate and work together for common causes; it strengthens citizen engagement; it gives voice to the voiceless; it allows for multiple perspectives to be heard on a variety of issues; and it provides opportunities for people to practice the skills of democratic life.

The *Accord* is a framework document that sets out values, principles and commitments to guide the working relationship of the two sectors. The *Accord* represents a public commitment to more open, transparent, consistent and collaborative ways for the Voluntary Sector and the Government of Canada to work together in the 21st Century.

The *Accord* establishes:

- Values and Principles to guide the relationship between the Government of Canada and Voluntary Sector.
- Commitments to action for the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector.
- Measures for implementing its provisions, including practical tools like the *Codes of Good Practice on Funding and Policy Dialogue*.
- Obligations by the Government of Canada and the sector to monitor, report on, and improve their relationship

VALUES

The *Accord* is based on six values that are most relevant to the relationship between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector. These values are:

1. **Democracy** – upholding the right to associate freely, to express views freely and to engage in advocacy.
2. **Active Citizenship** – welcoming the active involvement of individuals and communities in shaping society whether through political or voluntary activity or both.
3. **Equality** – respecting the rights of Canadians under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Human Rights Act, and the rights of individuals worldwide as defined by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
4. **Diversity** – respecting the rich variety of cultures, languages, identities, interests, views, abilities, and communities in Canada.
5. **Inclusion** – welcoming the expression and representation of diversity and upholding the right of each to speak and be heard.
6. **Social Justice** – ensuring the full participation in the social, economic and political life of communities.

PRINCIPLES

The *Accord* is also based on five guiding principles:

1. **Independence** – The Government of Canada and the Voluntary sector are autonomous, have unique strengths and separate accountabilities, and agree that:
The Government of Canada is accountable to all Canadians and has a responsibility to identify issues of national concern and mobilize resources to address them, establish policies and make decisions in the best interest of all Canadians. The Voluntary Sector is accountable to their supporters and to those they serve in providing services, organizing activities and contributing a collective voice at the local, national and international level. The independence of Voluntary Sector organizations includes their right within the law to challenge public policies, programs and legislation and to advocate for change. Advocacy is inherent to

debate and change in a democratic society and, subject to the above principles; it should not affect any funding relationship that might exist.

2. **Interdependence** – the Voluntary Sector and the Government of Canada recognise that: The actions of one can directly or indirectly affect the other, since both often share the same objective of common good, operate in the same areas of Canadian life, and service the same clients; and each has complex and important relationships with others (business, labour, provincial, territorial and local governments, etc.) and the Accord is not meant to affect these other relationships.
3. **Dialogue** – The Voluntary Sector and the Government of Canada, recognizing that sharing of ideas, perspectives and experiences contributes to better understanding, improved identification of priorities, and sound public policy, agree that: dialogue should be open, respectful, informed, sustained, and welcome a range of viewpoints; dialogue should be carried out in a way which respects each party's confidential information and builds and maintains trust; and appropriately designed processes and governance structures are necessary to achieve sustained dialogue.
4. **Co-operation and Collaboration** – The Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector agree that the social fabric of communities is strengthened and civic engagement is increased when they work together to address issues of mutual concern and that; working together to identify common priorities or complementary objectives will help facilitate cooperation and collaboration; and working relationships should be flexible and respect what others contribute and the challenges and constraints under which they operate.
5. **Accounting to Canadians** – In addition to their separate accountabilities, the Voluntary Sector and the Government of Canada are accountable for maintaining the trust and confidence of Canadians by: ensuring transparency, high standards of conduct and sound management in their work together; and monitoring and reporting on the results.

COMMITMENTS TO ACTION

The Principles of the *Accord* represent the basis on which to develop a relationship. Success in building the relationship will depend on the actions and practices of both the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector for the benefit of all Canadians. The following commitments will be essential in the future:

The Voluntary Sector and the Government of Canada commit to:

- Act in a manner consistent with the values and principles in this *Accord*;
- Develop the mechanisms and processes required to put the *Accord* into action;
- Work together as appropriate to achieve shared goals and objectives; and
- Promote awareness and understanding of the contributions that each makes to Canadian society.

The Government of Canada commits to:

- Recognize and consider the implications of its legislation, regulations, policies and programs on voluntary sector organizations including the importance of funding policies and practices for the further development of the relationship and the strengthening of the voluntary sector's capacity;
- Recognize its need to engage the voluntary sector in open, informed and sustained dialogue in order that the sector may contribute its experience, expertise, knowledge, and ideas in developing better public policies and in the design and delivery of programs; and
- Address the issue of ministerial responsibility for the continued development of the relationship with the voluntary sector.

The Voluntary Sector commits to:

- Continue to identify important or emerging issues and trends in communities, and act on them or bring them to the attention of the Government of Canada;

- Serve as a means for the voices and views of all parts of the voluntary sector to be represented to and heard by the Government of Canada, ensuring that the full depth and diversity of the sector is reached and engaged; and
- Address the issue of responsibility for the continued development of the relationship with the Government of Canada.

TAKING THE ACCORD FORWARD

The *Accord* is the beginning of a journey. Measures, processes and structures are needed to implement its provisions. The Voluntary Sector and the Government of Canada agree to develop in a timely fashion:

- Appropriate organizational structures in the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector to give effect to the provisions of the *Accord*;
- Processes for monitoring the *Accord*, reporting to Canadians on the status of the relationship and the results that have been achieved, resolving disputes, agreeing on next steps, and discussing the strategic opportunities for future collaboration;
- Codes or standards of good practice to help guide interactions between government departments and voluntary sector organizations on aspects of the relationship such as policy dialogue, funding, and other issues as identified;
- A regular meeting between Ministers and sector representatives to discuss the results that have been achieved; and
- Ongoing actions to increase awareness about the *Accord* within the sector and the Government of Canada, and among Canadians.

The goal of the *Accord* along with its implementation plan is to provide an enabling framework that will help the Voluntary Sector and the Government of Canada better serve Canadians.

The Codes of Good Practice

The Codes of Good Practice, an essential part of the *Accord*, are a resource of tangible, concrete ideas about how to take the spirit and guidelines of the *Accord* and put them into action in both government and voluntary sector organizations. There are two codes of Good Practice:

i) *The Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue*

ii) *The Code of Good Practice on Funding*

The *Codes* are about building relationships, looking for common ground and accepting one another's differences. They are also about making Canada a better place to live by improving policies and programs for Canadians.

i) *The Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue* is intended to encourage voluntary sector participation in the public policy process. The Voluntary Sector can bring the diverse voices of many societal groups to the policy table. Engaging more people, collecting more ideas, and integrating a broader range of views into the policy process will contribute to policies that are more reflective of Canada's diversity, and more responsive to the needs of Canadians.

In the *Code* both parties commit to:

- Engage in an open, inclusive and ongoing dialogue throughout public policy processes
- Allocate resources and time to policy activities
- Ensure appropriate and significant representation from across the Voluntary Sector
- Develop and strengthen knowledge and policy capacity
- Inform each other of the policy implications of their experiences and activities
- Take into account the differing regional impacts of policies

ii) *The Code of Good Practice on Funding* guides the funding aspect of the relationship between the

Voluntary Sector and the Government of Canada and reinforces their respective accountabilities.

Among its many provisions, the *Code* calls for funding arrangements to reflect the nature and scale of the issue at stake. For example, many social issues may require long-term funding commitments to make real progress. Conversely, shorter, less complex funding agreements may be more appropriate for lower cost, lower risk projects. The *Code* also commits the Voluntary Sector to develop its funding sources and diversify them to the greatest extent.

The *Code* encourages multi-year funding arrangements, clear and consistent communication around funding, and streamlined administrative requirements. In addition, the *Code* outlines measures to simplify and harmonize application and reporting procedures. It also calls for improved access to funding information for all voluntary sector organizations.

These and other provisions in the *Code* intend to achieve the following:

- Enhanced ability for each sector to carry out its mandate
- Greater transparency, consistency, and understanding between both sectors in regard to funding requirements
- Clear and balanced accountability
- Good funding policies and practices
- Improved capacity and long-term sustainability of voluntary sector organizations

What is the Voluntary Sector doing to implement the Accord and its Codes?

The Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) is responsible for increasing the awareness and use of the *Accord* and Codes in the Voluntary Sector. Working with Government colleagues, and local organizations, workshops and training sessions will be held across the country, in Ontario and in Halton. Local trainers will offer workshops to organizations close to home.

What is the Government of Canada doing to implement the Accord and Codes?

In October 2002, the Clerk of the Privy Council tasked all Deputy Ministers and agency heads with responsibility for the implementation of the *Accord* and *Codes* within their departments/agencies.

Each department and agency has identified a Champion who, with the Deputy Minister promotes and leads the use of the *Accord* and *Codes* within their organization.

Progress by departments and agencies on the use of the *Codes* is being monitored and reported on in

an annual report to Canadians. This report will provide an overview of government and voluntary sector accomplishments to date and plans for the future.

Workshops on the *Accord* and its *Codes* have been scheduled in Halton for, November 10, 2004, November 24, 2004 and December 1, 2004. Please call 905-632-1975 for registration information.

For more information on the Accord and registration forms check:

www.volunteerhalton.ca

www.cdhalton.ca



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