

## THE PARTNERSHIP PROJECT: An Ontario Government Strategy to Create a Stronger Partnership with the Not-for-Profit Sector

### Introduction

*A historical and important step has been taken to recognize the economic and social contribution of the not-for-profit sector in Ontario. It is a sector comprised of 46,000 not-for-profit organizations that generates over one million jobs and that contributes close to \$50 billion to the economy of Ontario. In Halton alone, this sector of approximately 250 community agencies employs about 5,000 people and engages an estimated 20,000 volunteers. The Halton sector contributes about \$188 million to Halton's Gross Domestic Product and when the economic value of volunteer time is added, the sector's contribution to the regional economy raises to about \$240 million.*

*On March 11, 2011, the Government of Ontario and the Ontario Trillium Foundation released the findings and recommendations of the Partnership Project. It explores new strategies to strengthen the relationship between the government and the not-for-profit sector to build sector recognition and capacity. This Community Dispatch presents the recommendations of this report that have been accepted by the Government of Ontario. It is important to be aware of this initiative, celebrate it but, at the same time, assess its implementation such that it does become the backbone of a strategy to drive changes in attitude, awareness and understanding of the sector. It is important to be vigilant and monitor how the recommendations will be carried out to ensure that this does not become a framework for downloading to the not-for-profit sector and local communities.*

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### Partnership Project Recommendations:<sup>1</sup>

1. Promote a culture of respect/recognition across government and the province.
  - Appoint a Minister responsible for the not-for-profit sector.
  - Issue an annual report on the state of the not-for-profit sector and progress made in strengthening the sector and its relationship with the government.
2. Provide the sector with a central, identifiable point of contact in government.
  - Create a coordinating body in government.
  - Create advisory group.
3. Address funding, operational and capacity challenges by adopting an approach across all ministries that provides similar supports, consideration and recognition received by the not-for-profit sector in Ontario.
  - Enhance communication with the sector.
  - Develop avenues for greater collaboration in policy development, legislative and regulatory oversight.
  - Work with the sector to develop new approaches to funding as well as appropriate performance and accountability measures.
4. Support new ways to reinvigorate Ontario's tradition of volunteerism.
  - Convene a forum on the future of volunteerism in Ontario to mark the ten-year anniversary of the International Year of the Volunteer and further strengthen, support and acknowledge volunteerism.
  - Encourage volunteerism among all Ontarians, including youth, newcomers and

seniors, through media and recognition awards.

5. Leverage technology to break down silos, increase transparency, and share information
  - Establish an online portal as a one-stop-shop for information on new laws, new programs, funding opportunities, consultation opportunities and sector-related resources and information.
  - Create a province-wide database to streamline funding applications, share information on not-for-profit organizations, and better coordinate ministries and agencies.
6. Invest in social innovation.
  - Work with the Government of Canada and Canadian financial institutions to address regulatory and legal barriers to social innovation, and make available a range of social financing tools to the not-for-profit sector.
  - Identify new resources and vehicles for encouraging innovation and collaboration within the not-for-profit sector.

### **Partnership Project Overview**

The Partnership Project consisted of several roundtable conversations and online engagement that included not-for-profit organizations, sector leaders and the public.

Discussions throughout the Partnership Project focused on:

- Ways to improve collaboration between government and the not-for-profit sector
- Enhancing the effectiveness of the not-for-profit sector through policy and legislation
- Funding
- The coordination between policy, practice, communication and research

The Partnership Project represented an important step in creating a dialogue between the government and the sector.

### **The Voice of the Sector**

In the Partnership Project report, the key themes for action that emerged include: increase respect and recognition; foster coordination and collaboration; build sector capacity; modernize, standardize and streamline sector practices; and invest in social innovation.

#### ***Respect and Recognition***

The two key words that surfaced in conversations across the province were respect and recognition. The sector believes that there is an imbalance of power between the sector and the government. The sector would like to improve the relationship with the government through partnership which will require fluid communications and an understanding of the sector's contribution and capacity.

#### ***Foster Coordination and Collaboration***

Communication between the government and the not-for-profit sector needs to be enhanced. Throughout the Partnership Project, organizations expressed their difficulties and confusion when navigating the Government of Ontario's respective Ministries.

The sector requested that a coordinating body be established to act as a central point of contact in order to ease access to information and to break down silos between the government and the not-for-profit sector.

#### ***Build Sector Capacity***

"Capacity building is a key challenge facing the not-for-profit sector."<sup>2</sup> The not-for-profit sector is crucial to our daily lives yet is overlooked and undervalued.

The sector requested sufficient funding for training, operating and improving infrastructure.

Additionally, there is an increased need for recognition of the value of volunteerism.

### ***Modernize, Standardize and Streamline***

The Partnership Project report states that participants voiced concerns regarding unstable funding. Particularly, “funding policies and practices need to be standardized and streamlined.”<sup>3</sup>

The need to secure funding over reasonable time periods continues to be a challenge for the sector. Reasonable timelines, consistency among funding application forms as well as ease in the administrative and accountability processes are some of the areas that need improvement.

### ***Invest in Social Innovation***

Social financing and social enterprise represent new frontiers for innovation in the not-for-profit sector. Throughout time, this sector has demonstrated its ability to stretch the dollars they receive to ensure that human needs are met.

The Partnership Project report makes explicit that “the Government of Ontario has an opportunity to initiate dialogue on behalf of the not-for-profit

sector to effect changes in federal legislation and programs that would minimize the regulatory burden... and enable them to generate additional, diverse sources of funding.”<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, participants believed that the government can foster innovation through means such as existing and emerging social innovation initiatives, engaging the financial sector, establishing an innovation fund, as well as other mechanisms.

## **Conclusion**

The Partnership Project reflects the Government of Ontario’s commitment to the not-for-profit sector. Our sector has long expressed the need for this partnership and for our voices to be heard. The time has come for this partnership to move forward to ensure that the public continues to receive quality services.

<sup>1</sup> Full report and recommendations are available on the Partnership Project website at: <http://partnershipproject.ca>

<sup>2</sup> ibid

<sup>3</sup> ibid

<sup>4</sup> ibid



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