

Moving Forward
Points for Consideration
Priorities for a vital, sustainable community sector
in
Newfoundland and Labrador

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July 2011

The priorities presented in this document are based on work of the Community Sector Council Newfoundland and Labrador (CSC) in discussion with the Community Sector Working Committee (CSWC). The CSWC, formed by CSC in follow up to its Provincial Forum *New Thinking for the Next Decade* held in October 2010 is a vehicle to support collective thinking about the community (voluntary, non profit) sector and to offer advice to the Board of the Community Sector Council. The Working Committee has 19 members - leaders (both volunteers and paid employees) from community sector organizations across the province, many of whom were selected through a public call for participation. Part of the Committee's mandate is to enhance the understanding of key issues for the sector and to offer guidance on sector priorities. At a recent meeting the Committee identified key areas through which the Provincial Government could strengthen its relationship with the community sector and play a continuing role in further strengthening community sector organizations throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

The community sector, alongside the public and private sectors, is one of three pillars of Newfoundland and Labrador society. Without the work of many community sector groups, life in our communities would be vastly different. Attention and public discourse typically focuses on the volunteer aspect of the sector. This is understandable given the importance of volunteer contributions; the expressed concerns about the declining pool of volunteers; and the difficulty for many groups to recruit and retain new leaders and volunteers. Government's recent campaign "Who Cares" is a significant effort to give profile to the importance of volunteering. The community sector though is about more than volunteers and volunteerism. Much of the work of the sector is led by non profit and charitable organizations which exist to address specific community needs; to provide an array of services and benefits to individuals and communities; and, to enhance our artistic, cultural and environmental milieu.

These organizations generate significant economic activity which in turn triggers additional business activity. Many groups secure revenues from sources outside the province thus generating new jobs and programming. They buy goods and services, support local businesses, pay rent, contribute to provincial coffers through taxes, and often step up to respond to government's needs and to create short-term employment for those seeking work in communities throughout the province. In fact, non profits may be the only location for such employment opportunities in many communities.

People in the sector are entrepreneurs and innovators generating considerable employment, economic development, cultural dynamism, social development and support to individuals, tourism attractions and learning opportunities. Leadership in the sector is frequently provided by paid employees. Thousands of people are employed on a long-term, full-time basis in community groups throughout the province. We are partners to both the public and private sectors in building a stronger province and a better quality of life. Continued, targeted public recognition will help solidify these relationships in the minds of both citizens and policymakers.

Community sector organizations work within a policy landscape that does not always recognize the unique features, governance structures, opportunities and constraints they face. This is especially so for the growing number of organizations sometimes referred to as social enterprises. Social enterprises are organizations which operate in a “business-like model” producing and selling goods or services to support their missions with the proceeds being used to support the work of the organizations rather than for private profit. Few organizations in Newfoundland and Labrador are fully self-sufficient in earning 100% of their revenue through sales. Many are hybrids relying on multiple funding sources; nonetheless, many are seeking ways to become more entrepreneurial, both as a principle and as a means of diversifying revenue. More explicit policies and programs to support social enterprise development would be helpful.

The community sector is full of innovative ideas and experienced leaders, who understand intimately the needs of their communities, their clients and their organizations. A long-term and “structured” partnership between sector leaders and government officials around critical issues would assist in advancing the role of the sector and ensuring that issues are addressed effectively, proactively and in a timely manner.

One of the greatest challenges for community sector organizations is planning for the future; with a heavy reliance on short-term and project-based funding, it can be extremely difficult to set meaningful long-term priorities. The preponderance of short-term funding creates an administrative load as staff members and volunteers work each year to secure the funds for the next. In many cases, these short-term funds are provided to established organizations which have an extensive track record of effective operation - ideal candidates for multi-year support. Wherever possible, multi-year funding and programs should be negotiated.

The story of the community sector needs to be better understood and more forcefully told. Increased research about the community sector in our province is required to build a comprehensive profile and to elucidate the contributions and value of the community sector.

CSC offers the following suggestions for Provincial Government consideration.

- 1. Re-enforce Government’s commitment to the value, role and importance of the community (voluntary, non-profit) sector in the social, economic, and cultural fabric of our communities.**

Place a particular emphasis on promoting and demonstrating the value and role of community-based voluntary, non profit organizations.

2. Work jointly with the sector to develop a strategic plan for the Provincial Government's approach and priorities for the sector.

Work jointly with the sector to develop a long-term strategic plan that lays out a clear vision, goals and directions for the community sector and government in their mutual relationships. A strategic plan would identify future opportunities and challenges and set directions for policy, programs and opportunities to deal with them. This process should be an inclusive one that gathers input from communities and groups across the province. The full support and engagement of government with the sector is essential to undertake province-wide dialogue as part of the generation of the plan.

3. Review policy frameworks to ensure they are enabling to the community, non profit sector and support the effectiveness of community organizations.

This should entail identifying key strategic opportunities for sustainability, growth and development. The community sector should be viewed as an essential and important partner. As a matter of course, government should include the sector as a visible and distinct representative on government bodies, commissions and agencies especially such groups as the Strategic Partnership Council, the Research and Development Corporation, Workplace Health and Safety Commission and so forth.

4. Create an investment fund to support innovation, research and development, best practices and explore new ways of doing business.

Research and development is considered an essential element of growth and innovation in other sectors. The same concepts should be applied to non profit and social innovations. The sector is often in the vanguard as early warning signal, catalyst and incubator, yet it has few resources to draw upon to play this role to best advantage.

The intent of the Fund is not to diminish the role of existing organizations nor to focus only on "growth" of new approaches, but also to be a resource to aid in optimal performance, to support stellar initiatives and to enable activities not covered through normal funding sources. The fund could draw upon public and private funds and might be "governed" by an independent body.

5. Encourage approaches to support and strengthen social /community enterprise activity and encourage a greater understanding of the social enterprise model as a legitimate means of economic, social, environmental and cultural development.

Work with community sector organizations, private sector, corporations, credit unions, foundations and other potential funders to develop a pool of expertise to build social entrepreneurship skill sets and provide access to capital (grants, patient capital etc).

6. Develop and launch a research plan for the community sector.

To plan well, knowledge about the role of the community sector and volunteerism is essential. A comprehensive snapshot of the sector in Newfoundland and Labrador is fundamental to ensuring that the appropriate directions are taken. Key priorities for research should include:

- a census (or snapshot) of the sector
- labour market and human resource issues including employment rates
- gathering information about volunteer engagement including at local levels
- the shifting needs of communities and organizations
- demonstrating the real value of non profits (and those engaged in social enterprise) to their communities and regions, and
- the significant role of community organizations in generating economic activity and employment and their success in attracting new monies to the province.

7. Establish a mechanism for the Voluntary Non Profit Secretariat to work jointly and in partnership with the community sector (sector and government as a whole) to augment accountability and mutual engagement.

Create a Joint Committee with equal numbers of representatives from government and the sector to inform the work of government especially the VNPS and to enhance mutual accountability. Through this Joint Committee establish other “joint” committees to lead strategic undertakings across different themes and departments.

8. Underwrite more multi-year contractual and funding arrangements for community-sector organizations.

This is a continuing issue which needs to be resolved. Efforts to reduce the administrative burden where reasonable should be encouraged. We hear frequently about groups who are growing more frustrated with excessive and repeated paper work especially for small amounts of funding and projects which are not approved. Any effort to streamline would of merit, especially for groups with a proven track record.

9. Finance Voluntary Resource Hubs strategically located throughout the province to support community sector (voluntary, non profit) activities, organizations and volunteer engagement.

Building on the successful work of the Voluntary Clusters Pilot Projects and the Community Sector Council NL and other groups, prepare a plan to provide resources through regional and local hubs and nodes for area-based support for collaboration, skills

building, community/area wide planning for sector groups and services. These Hubs should serve as a locus for volunteer recruitment, discussion, training, governance issues, logical interactions, more joint proposals, and connections with government officials and services. They would be a visible “go to” place for matters related to volunteerism, research and community-based development and representation.

10. Review the Labour Market Development Agreement and Labour Market Partnerships to better integrate the employment needs of individuals while providing important and timely support to community groups in meeting their missions.

With the transfer of these funds to the Provincial Government an opportunity exists to create a good fit between local employment needs and community needs. Program planning, applications and funding could be streamlined and approved in a manner to ensure more effective and productive use of the funds.

11. Work directly with the sector to produce a training plan for boards, volunteers, organizations and employees – delivered by the sector for the sector to build new leadership skills and support organizational standards and best practices.

The community sector wishes to be well-run and governed. There are increasing demands for accountability and other requirements to meet. For many people willing to contribute to their communities serving on board is becoming more daunting. The magnitude of the legal responsibility assumed by board members is often not fully appreciated. Insurance does not negate the importance of good practices. Assisting people to run organizations efficiently and providing tools for sound internal controls and practices is a priority. While some training can be at an institutional level it is our experience that hands-on events at a local level, provided by sector colleagues may be more effective.

Thank you for the opportunity to forward these suggestions on behalf of CSC and the Community Sector Working Committee.

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