



**Women's Groups
in the Non-profit and Voluntary Sector**

**Brief presented by the
New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of
Women**

to the

Premier's Community Non-Profit Task Force

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The New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women is a body created by provincial legislation to study and advise on issues of concern to women and to bring these before the public and the government. The Council is composed of 13 women appointed by government who meet at least four times per year to determine priorities for action on women's issues.

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Executive Summary

This brief was prepared by the New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women, and is based on interviews with representatives of a few key equality-seeking groups in the province. We also used the Advisory Council's brief to the N.B. Commission on Legislative Democracy and the 2003 report, *Non-profit and Voluntary Sector in Atlantic Canada: Regional Highlights of the National Survey of Non-profit and Voluntary Organizations*, as well as a number of other research documents. =

The provincial government needs the non-profit sector. They are the ones who work at the grassroots, who have the knowledge and expertise and, perhaps most importantly, the trust of those who are the most disadvantaged in our society. Non-profit groups should be the natural partners of the government because they provide government with a "window" on what is happening on the streets and in the communities of this province. There is interdependency between government and non-profits; the two sectors need to work together. The Advisory Council on the Status of Women hopes that this consultation process is only the beginning on an on-going dialogue between the provincial government and the non-profit sector.

As you know, there are great challenges within the non-profit sector. Many voluntary groups are scrambling to raise money, to pay the bills, to continue to do the work that they do. Staff do not earn much – certainly not what they could make if they went to work for government. Many non-profit staff are women and given the size of the non-profit sector in this province - this sector is likely a major contributor to the wage gap in this province.

This Executive Summary is prepared in the format recommended by the Premier's Community Non-profit Task Force.

CHALLENGE: Over the past decade, governments, for the most part, have moved from providing core or operational funding to project funding. This has meant that non-profits scramble from one project to the next, “re-inventing” themselves each time to appear to be doing “something new” in order to get funding. There is fierce competition between non-profit organizations for scarce government and private sector dollars. The impacts of this uncertain funding environment include: groups have a hard time directing their services and programs to where they are needed most; it is difficult to plan long-term; it is difficult to attract competent staff when all you can offer is a short-term contract; there is a tendency to “mission drift”; groups involved in advocacy work are increasingly reluctant to “speak out” for fear of losing funding, and they have been increasingly marginalized over the past decade. The most recent example is the change to the budget and mandate of Status of Women Canada, which will no longer fund advocacy as of April 1st.

However, there are very real issues and real situations in this province – poverty being high on the list but also violence against women, pay inequity, lack of female participation in public life – that will never change unless and until the system changes. Advocacy groups have a important role to play.

SOLUTION: It is imperative that the provincial government develop *Funding guidelines for non-profit and voluntary organizations* that recognize the need for systemic changes, that provide assistance for groups involved in advocating for change and that are fair and equitable.

CHALLENGE: Many non-profits report frustration with what they perceive to be a lack of understanding or awareness on the part of government bureaucrats regarding how government decisions affect non-profits. Specifically, those groups that do receive some kind of regular funding cite delays in having their budgets approved and receiving funds; difficulty in getting funding advances; inconsistent reporting and compliance requirements; and lack of coordination between government programs and funding priorities that complicate the planning process for organizations. This makes it difficult for non-profits to plan in terms of hiring staff, offering programs, making needed purchases etc.

SOLUTIONS:

- The provincial government should review the process to ensure that budgets for non-profit groups that receive provincial funding are approved before a new fiscal year begins;
- The provincial government should move to a regime of three or four-year budgets for such groups in order to allow them to plan for the longer term;
- The provincial government should examine suggestions to ease financial costs

for non-profit and voluntary organizations that are detailed in this brief. In particular, we recommend that the provincial government carry out a review of the Workers' Compensation program to see that it is equitable for the non-profit sector.

- A specific area of concern for non-profits is the need for training money. The sector has little money available to train staff and volunteers yet the needs are great. This issue will get worse before it gets better, especially now that the federal Voluntary Sector Initiative has ended (the impacts of which have not yet been felt in the province). In the area of mental health; Transition Houses, for example, are dealing with clients facing much more complex issues today, compared to 20 years ago, yet having the funds to train staff to deal with such issues is a challenge. The provincial government should include the non-profit sector in its own training programs, whenever appropriate, to ease this situation.

CHALLENGE: Attracting and retaining volunteers is a major challenge for non-profit organizations these days. Some of the reasons cited include: young people today are less interested in volunteering; difficult economic conditions and increased demands from employers have had a negative impact on the supply of volunteers; more women are in the workforce and therefore less available to volunteer; volunteers today prefer short-term assignments, rather than long-term commitments, and are reluctant to take on leadership or administrative roles. This brief notes that in Atlantic Canada in 2003, volunteers contributed about 127 million hours of volunteer work, the equivalent of approximately 66,000 full-time jobs. Yet many non-profits are unable to fulfill their mandate because of the lack of qualified volunteers; this shortage re-bounds on those who continue to volunteer, with existing volunteers facing overwork and often burnout.

SOLUTION:

- The provincial government should establish a program that will provide incentives for civil servants to do volunteer work in the community as part of their regular work schedule;
- The provincial government should establish an exchange program between government and the non-profit sector that would facilitate short-term work placements between the two sectors; this could provide an enriching experience where civil servants have an opportunity to view first-hand the challenges faced in the non-profit sector and vice versa.

CHALLENGE: Despite the number of consultations that have been done with the non-profit sector over the past few years (as outlined in this brief), the reality remains that there is no regular mechanism by which non-profits can have real input into government. Perhaps the greatest challenge that the non-profit sector faces vis-à-vis government is the lack - or at least the *perceived* lack - of recognition and respect for the work they do. They sense that they are not listened to.

SOLUTION:

- The provincial government should create a central public dialogue office with consultation expertise within government to assist departments and agencies in undertaking and supporting meaningful consultation and deliberative dialogue with citizens and civil society organizations;
- The provincial government should develop, share and adopt specific guidelines for open consultation, as an ongoing framework for meaningful consultation with citizens and civil society organizations, and as an important accountability tool; and
- The provincial government should create a new civic engagement fund, to be administered by the public dialogue office, to support civil society groups engaged in various consultation activities with citizens and communities, including conducting research, preparing resource materials, and cost-sharing events.

CHALLENGE: After the first round of “community” consultations, the Premier’s Community Non-Profit Task Force will be holding a number of “sector” consultations. It is important for the Task Force to recognize that there are two broad categories of non-profit and voluntary organizations: those that provide direct services and those that advocate for systemic change.

SOLUTION: The Task Force’s sector meetings should include one or more meetings with advocacy groups in order to understand their particular challenges and to work with them to find solutions.

This summary only touches on some of the issues raised in our brief. We direct the Task Force, in particular, to a number of concrete suggestions in the brief that could potentially ease the financial situation of many non-profits.

An issue that has been raised on many occasions by the non-profit sector is the “silo” effect in government, that is, the lack of co-ordination among government departments

and the impact of this fragmentation on the efficiency and, more importantly, the effectiveness of government in meeting people's needs. Solving issues, such as poverty, will require the involvement and work of several departments. We recognize that the Premier's Community Non-profit Task Force would prefer participants to attach each "solution" to a department. We submit that this is not possible. Many of the solutions proposed above touch several departments and require the involvement of each if changes are to be effected.

The Advisory Council – and the many non-profit women's organizations across the province that we are in touch with– takes this initiative seriously. We believe that the government is serious when it seeks the views of the non-profit sector; and that the government will make the necessary changes to assist non-profits to continue doing their work.

1. Introduction

The Advisory Council on the Status of Women welcomes the opportunity to present its views on the important issues being examined by the Premier's Community Non-Profit Task Force.

We recognize the important role that the non-profit sector plays in our province. These are the people who work at the grassroots, who have the knowledge and expertise and, perhaps most importantly, the trust of those who are the most disadvantaged in our society. Non-profit groups should and could be the natural partners of the government because they provide government with a "window" on what is happening on the streets and in the communities of this province. There is and should be an interdependency between government and non-profits; the two sectors need to work together.

As you know, there are great challenges within the non-profit sector. Many voluntary groups are scrambling to raise money, to pay the bills, to continue to do the work that they do. Staff do not earn a lot of money – certainly not what they could make if they went to work for government. Many non-profit staff are women. Given the size of the non-profit sector in this province it is likely that the non-profit sector – with its relatively low wages – is a major contributor to the wage gap in this province.

We applaud the new provincial government for undertaking this consultation. The Advisory Council on the Status of Women sees this consultation process as very positive; we hope that it is only the beginning on an on-going dialogue between the provincial government and the non-profit sector, one that will provide a model for the rest of the country.

1.1. *Mandate of Task Force*

The mandate of the Task Force¹ includes the following:

To gather information regarding:

- a. The current profile and activities of the non-profit sector in New Brunswick;
- b. The financial, organizational, human resource, and other challenges facing the non-profit sector;
- c. The potential contributions of the non-profit sector to the communities of New Brunswick; and
- d. How government policies, programs and service delivery could be more effectively linked with the endeavours of the non-profit sector.

The Task Force is expected to make recommendations to the Premier that are specific, realistic and relevant to government in terms of strengthening the non-profit sector; and to report on strategies to effectively integrate service operations and enhance relations between the non-profit sector and government.

Certain classes of non-profit organizations (i.e. hospitals, schools, cemeteries) are not included within the scope of this Task Force.

¹ Premier's Community Non-Profit Task Force. Terms of Reference. Available on the Task Force's website at www.premier-taskforce-groupeetude-nb.ca/anglais/main.htm

2. Background and Literature Review

Non-profit and voluntary organizations make an enormous contribution to communities in New Brunswick. Yet, like in many other parts of Canada, surprisingly little was known until recently about the size and scope of these organizations, the contributions they make to Canadian society, or the challenges they face in attempting to fulfil their organizational missions.

The National Survey of Non-profit and Voluntary Organizations (NSNVO) was the first-ever, large-scale survey of non-profit and voluntary organizations in Canada.² Begun in 2002, and carried out by a consortium of groups with the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy (now called Imagine Canada) serving as the lead organization, the NSNVO had two distinct phases:

- Phase I was qualitative in nature, consisting of a literature review; a nation-wide series of 36 focus groups that were held with representatives of non-profit and voluntary organizations in April and May of 2002; and a smaller number of key informant interviews. The result of Phase I was the report *The Capacity to Serve: A qualitative study of the challenges facing Canada's non-profit and voluntary organizations*, 2003.
- Phase II involved a national survey with 13,000 organizations, carried out by Statistics Canada in 2003 to determine the size and scope of the non-profit and voluntary sector, the various types of organizations that make up the sector, the areas in which they are active, and the impact that they have on Canada's economy. The result of Phase II was the report *Cornerstones of Community: Highlights of the National Survey of Non-profit and Voluntary Organizations*, 2004.

A number of spin-off reports were also prepared including one that will be of particular interest to the Task Force, *The Non-profit and Voluntary Sector in Atlantic Canada: Regional Highlights of the National Survey of Non-profit and Voluntary Organizations*, 2006.

In this section, we look briefly at some of the key information provided in these reports.

2.1. Size and economic impact of non-profit sector

2.1.1. Canada

Information from the NSNVO shows that an estimated 161,000 incorporated non-profit and voluntary organizations operated in Canada in 2003. These included a wide variety of organizations that were categorized as follows: arts and culture organizations; sports and recreation; education and research; universities and colleges; health; hospitals; social services; environment; development and housing; law, advocacy and politics;

² For purposes of this survey, non-profit and voluntary organizations were defined as organizations that have a structure, are non-governmental, do not distribute profits, are self-governing, and benefit from some degree of voluntary contribution of time or money. More than half of the groups interviewed during Phase II of the project were registered charities. (Note that these studies use the term "nonprofit" without the hyphen; we have changed this to be consistent throughout this brief.)

grant-making, fundraising and volunteerism promotion; international; religion; business and professional associations and unions; and organizations not classified elsewhere.

With annual revenues totalling \$112 billion (\$75 billion, excluding *Hospitals* and *Universities and colleges*), these organizations play a substantial role in Canadian society. They are also significant employers, with paid staff totalling over two million people.³

Nationally, 56% of these organizations were registered charities, which means they are able to provide receipts for donations that donors can use to claim tax credits.

2.1.2. Atlantic Canada

Approximately 8% (12,882) of the estimated 161,000 non-profit and voluntary organizations were based in Atlantic Canada. They represent a powerful social and economic force, with combined annual revenues of \$5.7 billion and staff of almost 106,000 people (\$4 billion annual revenues and 83,000 staff, when *Hospitals*, *Universities and colleges* are excluded). Atlantic-based non-profits report having over one million volunteers who collectively contribute about 127 million hours of volunteer time per year, the equivalent of approximately 66,000 full-time jobs. Organizations in this region also report a total membership of five million people, which means that the average Atlantic Canadian belongs to two non-profit organizations.⁴

Some 3,890 of these organizations (roughly 2.4% of the total nationally) were based in New Brunswick. A greater percentage of NB non-profits are registered charities (68% compared to 64% regionally and 56% nationally).

The Atlantic region, which has 7.4% of the country's population, accounts for 8% of non-profit organizations, 5% of employees and 5% of volunteer positions associated with the non-profit sector across the country.

The major areas of activity in Atlantic Canada are relatively similar to the national profile, with some exceptions. In Atlantic Canada, the largest percentage of organizations (27%) falls into the Religion category (versus 19% nationally); 18% in Atlantic Canada versus 21% nationally are Sports and Recreation groups. The Atlantic region has the lowest percentage of organizations in the Grantmaking, Fundraising and Promoting Volunteerism activity area (8% versus 12% in Ontario).

Some other key indicators of non-profits in Atlantic Canada are noted here:

- 46% report annual revenues of less than \$30,000 and only 4% of all organizations have annual revenues in excess of \$1 million;
- 52% have paid staff (of these, 22% are in the *Hospital, Universities and colleges* sub-sectors; 78% are spread across other activity areas);
- 48% operate exclusively with volunteers, with half of all volunteers associated with three main activity areas: Religion (23%, compared to 11% nationally);

³ NSNVO, Phase II report, 2004.

⁴ *The Non-profit and Voluntary Sector in Atlantic Canada: Regional Highlights of the National Survey of Non-profit and Voluntary Organizations*, 2006. Data on Atlantic Canada used in this section is from this report, which comes from the 2003 NSNVO survey.

Sports and Recreation (15%, compared to 28% nationally) and Environment organizations (12%, compared to 4% nationally);

- Almost half of volunteers are concentrated in the 15% of organizations with revenues in excess of \$250,000;
- The non-profit sector in Atlantic Canada receives a smaller share of revenue from governments (45% compared to 49% nationally). When *Hospitals, Universities and colleges* are excluded from the analysis, only 32% of revenues for other sub-sector activity areas come from government (compared to 36% nationally);
- In contrast, (with *Hospitals, Universities and colleges* excluded) non-profits in Atlantic Canada source 53% of their revenues from earned income (compared to 43% nationally);
- Less than one fifth of all non-profit organizations in Atlantic Canada receive more than half of their revenue from government sources; a greater percentage is primarily dependent on earned income (37%) and grants and donations (34%);
- Atlantic organizations generate a significant portion of income from investments, outstripping the national average (11% compared to 4%); excluding *Hospitals, Universities and colleges*, the share coming from investments in Atlantic Canada jumps to 15%;
- In Atlantic Canada, 78% of government funding comes from provincial sources, and only 19% comes from federal sources;
- Only 1% of all revenue flowing to the sector in Atlantic Canada (with *Hospitals, Universities and colleges* excluded) comes from corporate donations; the percentage of revenues coming from corporations is three times greater in Canada than it is in the Atlantic region.

In summary, the survey suggests that the non-profit sector in Atlantic Canada is not nearly as dependent on government funding as generally perceived. Overall, Atlantic region organizations receive a smaller portion of their revenues from governments than the Canadian norm (45% compared to 49%), and a much lower proportion of their revenues from grants from federal and provincial governments compared to the Canadian average (17% versus 29%). Less than one fifth of non-profits in this region (19%) rely on government for more than half of their revenues.

In addition, the report notes that Atlantic Canada non-profits seem to be more entrepreneurial than elsewhere in Canada. Excluding hospitals, universities and colleges, all other organizations generated over half (53%) of their revenues from earned income in 2003, compared to the Canadian average of 43%.

The Atlantic Canada report notes that the NSNVO gathered more information than has ever been previously available about registered charities and incorporated non-profit organizations in Canada. It also provided a regional portrait of the sector, and an ability to compare activities and trends in Atlantic Canada with the rest of the country.

The results of the NSNVO revealed that organizations are operating in a dynamic environment where they may not always have the financial and human resources or capacity to control and adapt to changes occurring around them. In particular, it notes:

“The survey has highlighted problems in many organizations and sub-sectors regarding changing approaches to funding, reductions in government funding, an unwillingness to fund core activities and the move toward short term project-based funding allocations. The NSNVO serves as a serious warning that changes in policies and practices are necessary if, as a society, we wish to stabilize and re-invigorate the non-profit and voluntary sector.”⁵

2.2. Challenges identified by non-profits

The reports by the National Survey of Non-profit and Voluntary Organizations note that there were relatively few regional variations in the capacity, needs and challenges among organizations in the non-profit sector, although there were some variations in political and economic environments in which these groups operate. In Atlantic Canada, participants expressed many of the same challenges in the areas of finance, human resources and structural capacity that were noted in other regions. Despite similar constraints, however, participants believed that the rate of volunteerism was higher in Atlantic Canada than elsewhere. Challenges identified in this report are discussed briefly here.⁶

2.2.1. Financial challenges

Financial capacity issues pose the greatest challenges for the organizations consulted for this study. Although the need for more money was often identified, organizations spoke more frequently about the need for “better money.” This meant stable, longer-term funding that helps organizations pay for core operating expenses, gives them the autonomy to direct their services and programs to where they are needed most, and allows them to plan for the future.

Participants identified a number of external factors that present challenges, including:

- Government downloading and funding cutbacks;
- Priorities of funders that change frequently;
- A growing tendency for funders to support short-term projects rather than long-term activities and operational or core costs;
- Increasing competition amongst non-profit and voluntary organizations for scarce resources;
- Funding that is often accompanied by onerous demands for financial accountability; and
- Mandated collaboration with other organizations (i.e. in order to access funding).

Many non-profits reported serious difficulty in dealing with the changing funding environment and frustration with what they perceive to be a lack of understanding or awareness on the part of government regarding how government decisions affect non-profits. Specifically, they cited delays in receiving funds; difficulty in getting funding advances; inconsistent reporting and compliance requirements; audit costs; government

⁵ Ibid., pg ix.

⁶ Information presented in Sections 2.2 and 2.3 is summarized from *The Capacity to Serve: A qualitative study of the challenges facing Canada’s non-profit and voluntary organizations*, 2003

regulatory framework (e.g. constantly changing Canada Customs and Revenue Agency rules and regulations); and lack of coordination between government programs and funding priorities that complicate the planning process for organizations.

This report noted that the financial challenges “percolated throughout the non-profit and voluntary organizations,” exerting a major influence on other key capacity areas. The lack of long-term funding, for example, impacts directly on the ability to recruit and retain staff, and leads indirectly to difficulties with volunteer and board management (because of the role that staff plays in supporting volunteers and board members). It also makes long-term strategic planning extremely difficult, if not impossible.

2.2.2. Human resource challenges

A number of human resource challenges were also identified, the greatest being the decline in the number of volunteers and changes in the expectations of volunteers. Participants attributed this to a number of factors: young people today are less interested in volunteering; difficult economic conditions and increased demands from employers have had a negative impact on the supply of volunteers; more women are in the workforce and therefore less available to volunteer; volunteers today prefer short-term assignments, rather than long-term commitments, and are reluctant to take on leadership or administrative roles.

The report also notes that while some corporations promote volunteerism as a philosophy, they do not provide the structure to allow their employees to volunteer.

The second greatest human resources capacity issue raised was the need for more paid staff and, in particular, for more staff with specialized skills (e.g. managers, fundraisers, accountants). Participants reported that the uncertain and unpredictable nature of funding exacerbates this problem, leading to staff burnout and/or high turnover of staff who often pursue more stable employment with better pay and working conditions.

2.2.3. Structural challenges

Most participants identified planning and development capacity (or the lack thereof) as the most significant among these challenges, although all these issues are inter-related.

- The lack of core funding and stable, long-term funding means many groups lack the organizational resources necessary for planning and development;
- Planning and development is much easier for organizations that have access to staff, volunteers and boards with the right skills for these tasks;
- Finding the time and human resources to undertake strategic planning is difficult for many organizations, especially those facing a high level of demand for their service. Often the only way to carry out planning is to shut down the services, something that is not always possible; and
- The ability to plan for long-term is exacerbated by the lack of appropriate staff skills, motivation and continuity; and also by insufficient relationship and network capacity.

Infrastructure and process capacity results from the effective use of infrastructure, processes and organizational culture. The biggest gap identified related to information technology or the lack thereof. Purchasing, maintenance, upgrading, training and

retraining costs associated with information technology were cited as major challenges that are, again, exacerbated by an uncertain funding environment.

Capacity to contribute to policy development is limited by the lack of financial and human. Many do not have the means to research and prepare briefs, for example, for consultations such as this one.

At the same time, those groups that had been involved in policy development were sceptical about the value of their input. They believed that their views had not been listened to or that the consultation process had been structured to minimize their input. Many participants expressed a perceived lack of government responsiveness to the views of non-profit and voluntary organizations.

2.3. Strategies for change

The NSNVO Phase I report identified a number of ways to strengthen efforts to build capacity among non-profit and voluntary organizations. These included the development and implementation of:

- New funding models that provide non-profit and voluntary organizations with the stability and support they need to develop human capital and organizational infrastructure, and to engage in long-term planning;
- New models of financial accountability that reduce the burden on organizations while providing funders with assurances that funds are being used appropriately;
- Approaches to volunteer recruitment and management that meet the changing needs and interests of potential volunteers;
- Strategies to reduce competition among organizations and increase opportunities to share resources and infrastructure;
- Strategies to help organizations provide training for paid staff, volunteers and board members; and
- Strategies to improve public and media awareness of the value of non-profit and voluntary organizations, their contributions to society, and their need for support.

2.4. *Why funding matters*

The changing funding environment has been a preoccupation of the non-profit sector for the past decade. A recent report by the Canadian Council on Social Development⁷ noted that, for non-profits, much organizational time is now devoted to chasing short-term sources of funding, often at the expense of the organizations' mission and core activities. This report identifies a number of impacts of this situation, which are worth summarizing here, to set the context for what follows in this brief. The impacts include:

- **Volatility** – As organizations struggle to diversify their funding sources, they can experience huge swings in revenue. Such volatility undermines an organization's stability and its capacity to provide consistent, quality programs or services, to plan ahead and to retain experienced staff;
- **A tendency to "mission drift"** – As organizations scramble to qualify for narrowly prescribed program funding or to win government contracts, some are being pulled away from their primary mission which is their long-term purpose and the source of their credibility in the community;
- **Loss of infrastructure** – With the move to project funding and the tightening of restrictions on administrative costs that are covered by funders, some organizations are losing their basic infrastructure. They are becoming a series of projects connected to a hollow foundation;
- **Reporting overload** – Many smaller organizations are discouraged as they face yet another round of short-term contracts, short-term hiring and letting-go of program staff, all the while pursued for multiple reports from multiple funders with multiple forms and requirements;
- **House of cards** – Because funders now often require financial or in-kind contributions from other sources, the loss of one contract or the end of one partnership agreement can bring down the whole interlocking structure. A service that is thriving one year can collapse the next;
- **Advocacy chill** – When organizations must cobble together projects and partners to survive, being seen as an outspoken advocate on behalf of one's client group can be regarded as too risky, despite the justice of the cause. Groups do not want to have their name in the newspaper when the next funding submission comes up. Advocacy organizations have been effectively marginalized over the past 10 years; and
- **Human resource fatigue** – People, both paid staff and volunteers, are stretching themselves to the limit to meet the new challenges. How long can this go on?

⁷ Katherine Scott (2003), *Funding matters: The impact of Canada's new funding regime on nonprofit and voluntary organizations*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Council on Social Development. Available online at www.ccsd.ca/pubs/2003/fm/index.htm

3. ACSW response to the Premier's Non-profit Task Force

It is hard to imagine life in New Brunswick without the enormous contribution made by non-profit and voluntary groups. These non-governmental organizations (NGOs) touch every aspect of community life, from organizations that provide food, clothing and other services to the disadvantaged, to those offering various health and educational programs, those that enrich the arts and cultural life, groups working to protect the environment and those involved in capacity building and advocacy for systemic change.

As a group whose mandate involves promoting equality of opportunity, freedom from discrimination, equal treatment, equal benefit, equal status, equality of results - as well as respect of differences - between women and men in all sectors of New Brunswick society, the Advisory Council sees first-hand the important role that non-profits play in New Brunswick.

We are also aware of the many challenges that they face. We know that many non-profit groups in New Brunswick are struggling, and that in many instances, what that keeps them going is the passion that they have for the work.

There is not enough recognition for those involved in non-profit organizations – for the thousands of volunteers who make a contribution day in and day out, with relatively little thanks; for the staff who, in many instances, would make a better living and have a more secure future by going to work for the private sector or government.

We applaud the government's initiative in launching the Premier's Community Non-Profit Task Force.

We see this initiative as the beginning of a dialogue between government and the non-profit sector, a dialogue that we hope will continue beyond when the report is completed and presented to government.

The Advisory Council – and the many non-profit women's organizations across the province that we are in touch with on a regular basis – takes this initiative seriously. We believe that the government is serious when it seeks the views of the non-profit sector; we believe the government will listen, will respond, and will make the necessary changes to assist non-profits to continue doing their important work.

There are some laudable examples of effective government – non-profit consultations over the past year, most notably the initial Minister's Working Group on Violence Against Women and the Social Policy Renewal Process, where groups felt involved and listened to.

3.1. Review of past consultations

The NB Advisory Council on the Status of Women has participated in many consultations with government in the past. In 2004, we presented a brief to the NB Commission on Legislative Democracy.⁸ While the brief focused on the need for electoral reform in New Brunswick, it also touched on some of the challenges faced by non-profit groups in the province.

⁸ NB Advisory Council on the Status of Women. *Women and Electoral Reform in New Brunswick*. Brief presented by the New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women to the NB Commission on Legislative Democracy, July 2004.

The brief noted that public participation in governance is not limited to voting or running for office. Democracy is also about “what happens” between elections when politicians and bureaucrats are developing legislation, policies and programs. Members of non-profit and community organizations have told the Advisory Council on numerous occasions that they feel largely excluded from the decision-making process. They said:

- Non-profits are asked for their input but then not listened to;
- Non-profits have valuable expertise, based on working at the grassroots level, but such expertise is not being adequately tapped by politicians and bureaucrats;
- Consultation, when it is carried out, is sometimes short-lived and narrowly conducted.

A New Brunswick woman working with an anti-poverty group reflected the views of many when she told the Advisory Council:

“Consultation does not work; sometimes it is only done every few years. Groups want to be part of policy development. Through such avenues as the Advisory Council and community participation, those people who are most impacted need to be part of solving the problem. The quality of policy-making suffers and many individuals feel alienated because they have little or no say in the decisions that affect their daily lives.”⁹

This brief also noted that the “silo effect” is a reality, and the problem is not new. New Brunswickers who participated in the province’s Social Policy Renewal Process of the late 1990s expressed great concern about the lack of co-ordination among government departments and the impact of this fragmentation on the efficiency and, more importantly, the effectiveness of government in meeting people’s needs.

The report stressed that social and economic problems must be addressed in a comprehensive manner, requiring interdepartmental cooperation. Poverty is an example; it raises issues of income support, economic development, training and literacy, but each is the responsibility of a different department. Gender equality issues also tend to get lost between budget allocations and departmental initiatives.¹⁰

The alienation felt by many non-profits in terms of their involvement in the political process has been expressed on many occasions. In this brief, the ACSW recommended that the provincial government actively promote and expand mechanisms for bridging the gap between citizens and government, so that groups and women from diverse realities may become true players in the decision-making process. It suggested that government should consider more frequent recourse to models such as the Ministers’ Group on Violence Against Women or the Social Policy Renewal process as a method of engaging the community and benefiting from its input.

It also recommended that the provincial government commit to using a gender equality perspective at all stages of legislative change and policy and program development, with the objective of ensuring that the results are of equal benefit to women and men in all their diversity.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

The Commission on Legislative Democracy, in its final report¹¹, agreed with a number of the ACSW recommendations, and recommended the following:

- That a central Public Dialogue Office with consultation expertise be created within government to assist departments and agencies in undertaking and supporting meaningful consultation and deliberative dialogue with citizens and civil society organizations;
- That a new Civic Engagement Fund, to be administered by the Public Dialogue Office, be created to support civil society groups engaged in various consultation activities with citizens and communities, including conducting research, preparing resource materials, and cost-sharing events;
- That specific guidelines for Open Consultation be developed, shared, published, and utilized across government as an ongoing framework for meaningful consultation with citizens and civil society organizations, and as an important accountability tool;
- That the working group model established by the Minister's Working Group on Violence Against Women be utilized as a model for "best practices" engagement on public policy development for other issues;
- That government explore the value of utilizing "citizens assemblies" and "citizen panels" to engage citizens in deliberative dialogue and/or decision-making on a diverse range of issues; and
- That an annual pre-budget consultation process be undertaken by the Minister of Finance that includes a public information document for citizens, province-wide public hearings and a public appearance before a Standing Committees of the legislature.

Policy Link NB held workshops in 2004 and again in 2006. The objective of the 2006 workshop was "to create a functioning and working relationship with all levels of government to develop better public policy."¹² Its intent was "to rethink the governance model between communities and government – to articulate a vision and define priorities for communities and their influence on social policy, their quality of life, and the character of a compassionate society."¹³

A discussion primer prepared for this forum noted that there have been a number of examples of consultations between government and non-profits in the past few years, including the NB Commission on Legislative Democracy 2004 (noted above), Next NB/Avenir NB, Making the Link between Health and Poverty, Policy Link Forum 2004 and Campaign 2000. It noted that a number of barriers have been identified in all these consultations, including:

¹¹ Commission on Legislative Democracy (December 2004). *Final Report and Recommendations*. Fredericton, NB: Province of New Brunswick. Available online at www.gnb.ca/0100/pub-e.asp

¹² Policy Link NB (March 2006). *A New Brunswick Public Policy Summit Addressing Inequities with a Focus on Action: Discussion primer*. Prepared by Rick Hutchins for Policy Link NB. Available online at www.policylink.nb.ca

¹³ Ibid.

- Insecurity of continual funding;
- Too many layers of bureaucrats to consult with when seeking assistance is a source of frustration;
- The lack of priority placed on consulting with not-for-profit organizations regarding public policy is a challenge; and
- The federal and provincial governments seem to be working at cross-purposes sometimes. They don't always have the same agenda and are seen by the voluntary sector as "playing off" against one another.¹⁴

The keynote speaker at the 2006 workshop, an influential federal politician, focused on the importance of partnerships and core funding for non-profit organizations. In summarizing her presentation, the report stated: *"She enforced the idea that non-profits should not engage in any work that does not contribute to securing core funding. Research itself will not lead to funding; only action will lead to funding."*¹⁵

3.2. What women's groups told us

In preparing this brief, the Advisory Council spoke to many non-profit women's groups in New Brunswick. This is what they told us.

3.2.1. The financial environment for non-profits

Similar to the NSNVO survey cited in Section 2, financial challenges underscore the life of many non-profits in this province. As government funding has shifted from operational or core funding to project funding, many NGOs now spend an inordinate amount of time preparing proposals. The amount of work that this requires should not be underestimated. Project application requirements (not to mention the follow-up reporting) are often extensive, demanding days if not weeks of work.

There is increased competition among non-profits for funding from the government (with the determining factor for success often being having the best writer, rather than the most valuable or most needed service). There is also increased competition for funding from the private sector, which more and more is also willing to fund an activity or project but not operational expenses. One need only open a newspaper to realize that most non-profit organizations are scrambling to raise money, and are surviving from one fundraiser to the next. Continually bombarded with requests for contributions, many donors are reaching the point of donor exhaustion.

Many non-profits speak of having to continually "re-invent themselves", that is, come up with one new project after another, putting a different "spin" on their work each time (as if they are doing something "new") in order to continue to receive funding. There are some very real inherent dangers in this, some of which were discussed earlier.

As an organization whose mission is to promote equality of opportunity, the Advisory Council works hand-in-hand with many women's organizations in the province whose missions also involve advocating for systemic change.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid. Moncton-Riverview-Dieppe MP Claudette Bradshaw.

We all know that there are very real situations in this province – poverty being high on the list but also violence against women, pay inequity, lack of female participation in public life – that will never change unless the system changes.

Groups that advocate for systemic change have an important role to play. Groups that focus on building capacity – within people, families and communities – also have an important role to play. In both instances, however, change does not happen overnight. In a funding environment that increasingly wants results – that increasingly relies on measurable performance outcomes, preferably within the life of a year-long project – groups that are involved in advocacy work or building capacity have been increasingly marginalized.

No one should underestimate the “advocacy chill” that has set in. A recent example is the change to the mandate and budget of Status of Women Canada. As of April 1, 2007, this agency will no longer fund organizations that do advocacy work. (Status of Women Canada did not provide “core” funding, although for some groups, it was the only revenue that they had.)

In New Brunswick, this means that groups such as the Pay Equity Coalition, the NB Child Care Coalition and the NB Coalition of Transition Houses – all of which advocate for systemic changes that could make a real difference to the lives of women in the province – will no longer be funded. *These groups will be effectively silenced.*

In many instances, those being silenced are or represent the most marginalized members of society.

We believe provincial politicians need to question whether this situation is desirable; whether the government can build the kind of society that it wants to in New Brunswick when those who are most disadvantaged have increasingly no real voice.

The Advisory Council recognizes that there are some non-profit groups in the province that do receive funding for their core operations,¹⁶ although in many instances, this does not relieve them from the responsibility of also doing their own fundraising. Some have not seen an increase in their allotment from the provincial government for many years. Given the trends of the past decade, we do not expect that governments on either level will return to a model of core funding versus project funding.

At the same time, we believe that there are some instances when this is required, and we strongly recommend that the provincial government develop *Funding guidelines for non-profit and voluntary organizations*, that will recognize the need for structural and systemic changes if we are to develop a caring society where even the most disadvantaged have a voice; that will provide assistance for groups involved in advocating for change; and that will be fair and equitable.

Given the current political climate in Ottawa, we believe that it is imperative that the provincial government show leadership on this issue.

Another issue is that many non-profit groups in New Brunswick that receive provincial funding (such as Transition Houses) are required to submit their proposed budgets by

¹⁶ The 2004 Policy Link document noted, for example, that there is a core-funding program in place for all provincial sports organizations in NB, though it is not multi-year.

November but often do not hear whether their budget has been approved until much past the March 31st end of the fiscal year, sometimes as late as July. Such groups may operate for three or four months into their new fiscal year before knowing, for example, whether they will be required to lay off staff or make other budget cuts.

We strongly recommend that the provincial government review this situation, and find a means to ensure that budgets for such groups are approved before a new fiscal year begins. We also recommend that the provincial government move to a regime of three or four-year budgets for such groups in order to allow them to plan for the longer term.

There are many ways in which the province could ease the financial burden now faced by the non-profit and voluntary sector. These ideas have been compiled from our interviews with women's organizations.

- PNB Telephone service – One non-profit director received an estimate from the telephone company for the cost of a conference call. When she inadvertently used a telephone line that had been installed in her office a year earlier for a government project, she found the cost was about one-tenth of what she had been quoted. Why can't non-profit groups have access to the PNB phone line?
- Worker's Compensation – One non-profit director reports having to pay \$2.28 per \$100 in Worker's Compensation. That results in having a WCB bill of \$3,700 per year. The equivalent figure in PEI is 29 cents per \$100. This director has talked to three different governments about this, with no results. The provincial government needs to review the WCB policies and regulations to see that non-profit organizations are treated fairly.
- Used computers and other equipment – The government often replaces/upgrades its technology. Could non-profits have access to this used equipment at a minimal cost?
- Sharing services/Buying in bulk – There are often comments – coming from government representatives and elsewhere – that non-profits should “get together” to buy goods and/or services in bulk or to share services such as administrative support. (The latter belies the fact that many non-profits don't have administrative support to share.) Overall, this is a good idea although the reality is that it would need someone to organize and coordinate. Most non-profits are doing their best to keep their head above water and wouldn't have time to take this on. As well, some non-profits do not have the means to “buy into” sharing costs with other non-profits under the same roof. The United Way in Greater Moncton implemented a laudable example of “sharing” several years ago when it purchased equipment (e.g. laptops, LCD projectors) that was then made available to non-profits in the area. Not all non-profits are on United Way's list, however. The provincial government needs to find ways to help non-profits share services and/or buy in bulk.
- Honoraria for participation in meetings – The Ministers' Group on Violence Against Women is cited frequently as a “best practices” model for government – non-profit consultation. No one doubts that it has been. The reality, however, is that participation in this exercise has represented a cost to the organizations that have been involved. Every day that an Executive Director spends in a meeting in Fredericton represents “time lost” for activities (e.g. fundraising activities) that need to be carried out back at the office. While non-profits appreciate the

opportunity to have input into real and productive consultations and processes, government needs to recognize that there is a cost involved to the non-profits. In formalized and on-going processes, such as the Ministers' Group on Violence Against Women, the provincial government should consider paying daily honoraria for participation by members of non-profit groups.

- Language training – Many non-profits are expected to have bilingual capacity but they do not have access to language training, other than what they are afford to pay for themselves. The impact is that, in many parts of the province, groups are now unable to offer services in both official languages. On the other hand, governments frequently provide such language training for government employees. Why could this not be extended to those working in the non-profit sector?
- Other kinds of training – A specific area of concern for non-profits is the need for training money. The sector has little money available to train staff and volunteers yet the needs are great. One example is in the area of mental health; Transition Houses, for example, are dealing with clients facing much more complex issues today, compared to 20 years ago, yet having the funds to train staff to deal with such issues is a challenge. The provincial government should include the non-profit sector in its own training programs, whenever appropriate, to ease this situation. There is also a need for training that would ensure good governance, for example, training for people to become effective Board members, training for strategic planning skills. This issue will get worse before it gets better, especially now that the federal Voluntary Sector Initiative has ended (the impacts of which have not yet been felt in the province).
- Provincial health (drug) plans, pension plans – One of the challenges that non-profits face in attracting and retaining staff is that there are few, if any, employment benefits. Civil servants, on the other hand, are able to buy into the provincial drug plan and pension plan. Can non-profits have access to these plans?
- HST/provincial taxes – One non-profit director reported that, when she was part of the parents' group at her child's school, the parents were able to purchase playground equipment through the school board, rather than the parents' group, and as a result didn't have to pay taxes. We recognize that some non-profits are able to re-claim some of the HST that they pay; none (to our knowledge) are exempt from provincial taxes.

These are some concrete examples that would alleviate the financial pressure on many non-profits, if they could be implemented. Government needs to help non-profits work "smarter" because in a lot of instances, non-profits are able to do the work more effectively and more inexpensively than government.

3.2.2. The human resource environment for non-profits

Many of the human resource challenges identified in the NSNVO survey are also felt in New Brunswick. In terms of staff, non-profits may be able to find people to hire; the challenge is in retaining them. Many non-profits report feeling like a "training ground" for the provincial government. A young person comes on staff, energetic and impassioned

by the cause that the non-profit represents, but, with a little experience under her/his belt, is quickly attracted away by a better salary and better working conditions offered by the provincial government.

As an example, a woman with a Bachelor of Social Work, working at one of New Brunswick's Transition Houses, which are funded by the province and which may pay a starting salary of around \$14 per hour, can easily move to the provincial Department of Family and Community Services where her starting salary will be \$18 per hour. This is not an infrequent occurrence. Why would she continue to work at the Transition House, which provides few, if any, long-term benefits?

In terms of volunteers, non-profit women's groups face many of the same challenges in attracting and retaining volunteers, especially those willing to take on leadership roles such as chairing a Board of Directors. There are some large, private sector corporations that encourage their employees to volunteer in the community and indeed, allow them to do so on company time. There are many companies that could follow suit, if the will were there.

We believe that the provincial government should set an example for the private sector. We strongly recommend that the provincial government establish a program that will provide incentives for civil servants to do volunteer work in the community. Provincial employees should be allowed to volunteer as part of their regular work schedule (within defined guidelines, of course). The province should also develop a volunteer recognition program as a way of making sure that adequate promotion of this program is done.

We also recommend that the provincial government establish an exchange program between government and the non-profit sector that would facilitate short-term work placements between the two sectors. This could provide an enriching experience where civil servants have an opportunity to view first-hand the challenges faced in the non-profit sector and vice versa.

3.2.3. The "dialogue" environment for non-profits

Despite the number of consultations that have been done with the non-profit sector over the past few years (as outlined above), the reality remains that there is no regular mechanism by which non-profits can have input into government.

On the other hand, a few recent consultations been touted as models for consultation, and a government that was serious about, for example, poverty reduction could establish a Ministers' Working Group on that issue similar to the Minister's Working Group on Violence Against Women.

Some of the women's groups interviewed stated that they had "good working relationships" with the provincial government, although only because their group had been around for a long time, and/or they had been able to identify one or more key politicians or civil servants who were sincere in their efforts to respond to their needs.

The Commission on Legislative Democracy had recommended that a central Public Dialogue Office with consultation expertise be created within government to assist departments and agencies in undertaking and supporting meaningful consultation and deliberative dialogue with citizens and civil society organizations.

It also recommended that specific guidelines for Open Consultation be developed, shared, published, and utilized across government as an ongoing framework for meaningful consultation with citizens and civil society organizations, and as an important accountability tool.

The provincial civil service represents a confusing maze for many non-profits, and such an office could also serve as a clearinghouse for information about programs and funding. It could connect non-profits with the appropriate individual to answer questions and/or clarify information in funding proposals. Not surprisingly, given the amount of work needed to fill out one proposal after another, mistakes are made. But such mistakes can be devastating for a non-profit organization. As an example, one non-profit director interviewed had applied to a government program for a summer student and, being new at the job, didn't realize that the person hired had to be under 30. The mistake was not caught until the end of the project, at which time the non-profit was expected to repay the money.

To be able to participate meaningfully in consultations such as this one requires an ability on the part of a non-profit organization to research, to document, to prepare a brief. The groups that have been the most adept at effecting change are those with the resources to "do their homework."

Even the Premier's Community Non-profit Task Force, which is attempting to be informal, is dependent on the extent to which non-profits are able to provide specific information.

A fund to subsidize civic engagement, to be administered by the Public Dialogue Office, should be created to support civil society groups engaged in various consultation activities with citizens and communities, including conducting research, preparing resource materials, and cost-sharing events.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

Non-profits often deliver programs and services more efficiently and more cost-effectively than can government. Because non-profits work at the grass roots level, they are also more in touch with the realities of many situations and often are more able to come up with appropriate solutions.

It is hard to imagine what our society would look like if, all of a sudden, the non-profit sector disappeared and its work had to be carried out by government.

Perhaps the greatest "bone of contention" that the non-profit sector faces vis-à-vis government is the lack of recognition and respect – or at least the *perceived* lack of recognition and respect – for the work that they do and the sense that they are not listened to. As noted earlier, there have been a number of consultations involving the non-profit sector over the past decade, with little concrete evidence that much has changed.

It is crucial that the provincial government show leadership on this issue, by:

- Recognizing the important role that non-profit advocacy groups play in advocating for systemic changes. While the provision of direct services such as food banks and health and educational programs is obviously important, it is

critical to address the root causes of such problems as poverty and hunger. It is important that groups are able to devote a portion of their resources to advocacy work, and crucial that those whose work involves advocacy have a voice;

- Finding ways to address financial challenges faced by many non-profits;
- Setting an example of the importance of volunteer work by allowing civil servants to volunteer in a non-profit organization as part of their regular work schedule; and
- Putting in place a permanent and on-going mechanism for consultation with non-profit and voluntary organizations that will give the non-profit sector a “seat at the table” and will make sure that their views are heard.

4.1. Recommendations

We make the following recommendations:

- That the provincial government develop *Funding guidelines for non-profit and voluntary organizations* that will recognize the need for structural and systemic changes if we are to develop a caring society where even the most disadvantaged have a voice; that will provide assistance for groups involved in advocating for change and that will be fair and equitable.
- That the provincial government review the process and procedures with non-profit groups that do receive provincial funding (such as Transition Houses) to ensure that budgets for such groups are approved before a new fiscal year begins. We also recommend that the provincial government move to a regime of three or four-year budgets for such groups in order to allow them to plan for the longer term;
- That the provincial government seriously examine the suggestions for financial assistance that are made in this brief, with a view to finding a way to ease financial costs for non-profit and voluntary organizations.
 - In particular, we recommend that the provincial government carry out a review of the Workers' Compensation program to see that it is equitable for the non-profit sector;
 - A specific area of concern is the need for training money. The sector has little money available to train staff and volunteers, yet the need is great. An example is in the area of mental health: Transition Houses, for example, are dealing with clients facing much more complex issues today yet having funds available to train staff to deal with such issues is a challenge. Non-profits also need to train for good governance. We recommend that the provincial government include the non-profit sector in its own training programs, whenever appropriate, to ease this situation.
- That the provincial government establish a program that will provide incentives for civil servants to do volunteer work in the community. Provincial employees should be allowed to volunteer as part of their regular work schedule (within defined guidelines). The province should also develop a volunteer recognition program as a way of making sure that adequate promotion of this program is done.

- That the provincial government establish an exchange program between government and the non-profit sector that would facilitate short-term work placements between the two sectors; this could provide an enriching experience where civil servants have an opportunity to view first-hand the challenges faced in the non-profit sector and vice versa.
- That the provincial government create a central Public Dialogue Office with consultation expertise to assist departments and agencies in undertaking and supporting meaningful consultation and deliberative dialogue with citizens and civil society organizations;
- That the provincial government develop, share, publish, and utilize across government specific guidelines for open consultation, as an ongoing framework for meaningful consultation with citizens and civil society organizations, and as an important accountability tool; and
- That the provincial government create a Civic Engagement Fund, to be administered by the Public Dialogue Office, to support civil society groups engaged in various consultation activities with citizens and communities, including conducting research, preparing resource materials, and cost-sharing events.

Our understanding is that after the first round of “community” consultations, the Premier’s Community Non-Profit Task Force will also be holding a number of “sector” consultations. In this context, it is important for the Task Force to recognize that there are two broad categories of non-profit and voluntary organizations: those that provide direct services and those that advocate for systemic change. Given the climate of “advocacy chill” that currently exists, we recommend:

- That the Task Force’s sector meetings include one or more meetings with advocacy groups in order to understand their particular challenges and to work with them to find solutions.

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The **Voluntary Sector Initiative** was a five-year (2000-05) initiative between the government of Canada and the voluntary sector. The VSI was based on the recognition that the voluntary sector is one of the three pillars of Canadian society, equal in importance to the public and private sectors. Although the VSI has ended, its website continues to be a rich source of information on the voluntary sector. www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/index.cfm

The **Office of the Voluntary Sector** was formally established under Health Canada's Centre for Healthy Human Development (CHHD) in April 2002, signalling the department's commitment to the Voluntary Health Sector and to the VSI and its related activities. Two years later, in September 2004, the Centre, including the Office of the Voluntary Sector, became part of the newly-created Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). From its new setting, the Office serves as a centre of expertise, leadership and coordination across PHAC and HC for voluntary sector/health policy and program issues. www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/vs-sb/index.htm