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CANADIAN GOVERNMENTS AND THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR:

TOWARD RATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Prepared by Lorie McMullen, member of the Junior League of Edmonton,
and a volunteer with the Edmonton Social Planning Council.

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This paper is designed to provide an Overview of the relationships which exist between the Voluntary Sector and the Governments of Canada, primarily Federal and Provincial. It is hoped that, in seeing these relationships in broad perspective, the reader will identify areas which need improvement, change or emphasis and will apply his/her own knowledge or skills towards those ends.

Following a general description of Government/Voluntary Sector realities and attitudes, a definition of "Voluntary Organization" and the "Voluntary Sector" is given to help clarify the paper's points of reference.

Relationships in the following areas are then discussed:

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The Conclusion reiterates some of the frustrations involved but points out the challenge to be met by the Voluntary Sector in shifting focus from service-delivery to advocacy and policy/planning roles.

Footnotes and an annotated bibliography follow.

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Various public programs may be initiated and controlled individually by one of the three levels of government - Federal, Provincial, Municipal - or may reflect involvement of two or three levels through complex cost-sharing arrangements. "Thus, in public-private relationships there seems to be confusion, overlapping and lack of coordination resulting from a tripartite federal-provincial-municipal government system."¹.

It is also a reality of the system that: "Since Federal and Provincial Cabinet members are selected from among the elected members of the party in power, the holder of a ministerial portfolio need not bring to the job any prior knowledge or experience in the areas of his particular responsibility. Therefore, enormous responsibility is placed upon the civil servants, the deputy ministers and the assistants, the people who head the bureaucracy. They stay at the top of the departmental pinnacle while ministers come and go. Over the years, it is the civil servants who have provided the solid base and the expertise for the politicians to draw upon."².

Each government level subscribes in general terms to the philosophy of citizen participation and the partnership between itself and the voluntary sector. For example, the Federal Government, in its Speech from the Throne delivered on October 12, 1976, states:

"Obviously, the development of the new strategies required by the times in which we live will demand the closest possible co-operation among governments, workers, businessmen, cooperative and voluntary organizations and all other sectors of society. To that end, the Government will launch a major series of consultations throughout Canada to secure a greater sharing of economic and social responsibility among all Canadians.

"Consultation in this context does not mean simply informing the public about Government decisions. Nor does it mean an aimless search for the opinions of others. It means that the Government will place before interested Canadians its assessment of the major problems we must solve together, and its definition of the available options."³.

THE PROBLEM IS: The Governments and the voluntary sector itself do not fully understand the techniques necessary and appropriate for this "consultation" to be effective. "Citizen involvement often takes the form of an effort to block something that has already been planned...yet the most constructive results will be achieved when citizens, planners, elected officials, and members of relevant area agencies share their experience, knowledge, and goals and jointly create a plan acceptable to all."⁴ In educating ourselves, as a part of the voluntary sector, to the principles and techniques necessary for our move from a reactive position to a policy and decision-making one, we must also realize that governments would benefit from a similar educative process. It has been suggested that they need the help of the voluntary sector in understanding how the most effective partnership can be formed and that training programs in citizen participation techniques and pitfalls could be initiated BY the voluntary sector FOR governments, with ultimate benefits for all.

VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS are neither succinctly defined nor tightly regulated by legislation. They are generally considered to be "non-governmental, non-profit organizations whose primary purpose is social and community development and service."⁵ As such, they are registered under the Societies Act (or its counterpart) in their own Province and are subject to the Charitable or Non-Profit sections of the Income Tax Act of the Government of Canada.

THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR is considered to have three main components - "1. The voluntary associations (private or nongovernment groups which people join to work together for the correction of a situation they believe is not receiving adequate attention from government or other citizens or both. They also promote certain goals or activities they consider worthy or desirable, and dedicate time and effort to their pursuit.) 2. The voluntary agencies that provide direct services. Two important characteristics of these agencies have always been their administrative boards of citizen directors and their financial support from private philanthropic sources (although financial support patterns are now in a state of change). 3. Cutting across and included in the activities of both groups are the volunteers themselves, the third main 'component' of the private sector. There is a marked difference in the way voluntary organizations and voluntary agencies work with volunteers."⁶

FUNDING

Many Government/Voluntary Sector relationships are made by money!!! Because of complex Federal-Provincial-Municipal cost-sharing arrangements, it is often difficult to know what monies are available for what purposes and how application can be made for them. This problem is being addressed by the National Advisory Council on Voluntary Action who have spoken about encouraging the establishment of a clearing house for information regarding available funding for voluntary programs. Two excellent publications document many sources of funds, both government and private. They are "A Canadian Directory to Foundations" and "A Directory of Federal Funding Sources" and are detailed in the bibliography.

Funding a program with government monies has some implications of which we should be aware. There is the saying that governments often feel "because they bought the button, they have the right to design the coat"! "The idea of government purchasing service from the voluntary agency...has much to commend it: costs, community involvement, checks and balances between the community and government, and a well defined businesslike relationship between the public and private sectors. On the other hand, the agency that becomes deeply involved in a purchase-of-service arrangement with government may very well have compromised itself for effective social action."⁷

Also, "Many social action groups are being financed by federal government through the Department of the Secretary of State and the Department of National Health and Welfare. Indeed, some provincial governments are financing welfare rights groups and social action agencies in whole or in part. It speaks for the maturity of Canadians and their system of government that the government feels secure enough to place considerable money in the hands of its critics, who show no reluctance to speak out regarding the failure of its programs."⁸

LOBBYING

"Individuals or groups are free to lobby their elected officials; in fact, they often lobby the civil servants as well. This format of participation serves a purpose and undoubtedly will always be with us in one form or another. It is insufficient as a participation device however because the strongest and the biggest necessarily have better access to information, presentation formats, time and money (when necessary) than the little guys."⁹.

Lobbying in Canada is neither legislated nor controlled. Registered lobbyists do not exist and lobbying may theoretically be done by any individual or group - it does not affect the tax status of a voluntary organization. Basic steps in lobbying are generally effective in Canada and Coalitions are often formed around a specific interest or issue for lobbying purposes.

Two major such Coalitions exist to speak out on behalf of the volunteer and the voluntary organizations. One is the Committee of National Voluntary Organizations which was formed out of representatives of 75 Organizations who have met twice nationally. The NVO's have a mandate to work together to achieve reform in postal rates affecting them in provisions of the income tax act respecting charitable giving, and in unnecessary provisions in the anti-inflation program. They will also promote liaison with the Federal Government and communications among the various organizations on matters of common interest. They have, to date, achieved a change in the regulations of the Anti-Inflation Board, which had placed corporate contributions to charitable organizations in the category of restricted expenses. This iniquitous provision was subsequently removed by the Finance Minister. They have also pressed for full consultation before a National Youth program is formulated by the Federal Government which would affect a number of national youth-service agencies.

The second is the Canadian Committee on Volunteerism which is representative of the more than 60 Volunteer Bureaux and Centres in Canada. Their concerns relate to continuing standards of quality in the functions of such Bureaux, but they are also being heard pressing for change on behalf of the volunteer they serve. Tax credits, out-of-pocket expenses, insurance, education, publicity and communication, the needs for a National Clearing-House for literature in volunteerism and the accumulation and documentation of new information are issues they have raised.

VOTING

It is important to note that the major voice in a participatory democracy, the Individual Vote, is cast at the Federal and Provincial level only once every 3-5 years. Canada does not have referenda, initiatives or propositions on specific issues (except occasionally at the Municipal level) in which individuals may have a vote. The elected governments, therefore, have an infrequent accountability and, in election seasons, specific issues often give way to emotional, personal or general ones such as "it's time for a change", or "I've always been a Liberal".

APPOINTMENTS

Advisory Boards, Councils, Commissions, etc.

These exist at all Government levels and are filled generally by "Order-in-Council" or by invitation of the official directly responsible. It is difficult to discover how many such positions exist and how individuals or organizations gain access. The National Advisory Council on the Status of Women published a Draft Paper "A Review of appointments within the power of the Federal Government to Boards, Commissions, Councils, Committees and Corporations" which reflects their concern that "since such organizations are recommending and enforcing government policy on a wide variety of issues which affect Canadians in almost all areas of life, women should be adequately represented in appointments being made".¹⁰ The document defines and lists some 121 'departmental', 'agency' and 'proprietary' corporations; Boards, Commissions, Councils and other Agencies to which appointments are made. It also suggests that "Names and curriculum vitae of possible candidates for appointments to federal bodies should be sent to the Prime Minister, to the Federal Cabinet Minister responsible for a particular agency, as well as to any Cabinet Minister(s) from your province and from the suggested appointee's province".¹¹ The "Corpus Directory and Almanac of Canada" also outlines and describes many of those corporations, Councils, etc.

The Canadian Federation of University Womens' Clubs and various Status of Women Action Committees on a Provincial level are also concerned with government appointments and are additional sources of information in this area.

There is one Federal Advisory group which is taking responsibility for areas of direct concern to voluntary organizations. The National Advisory Council on Voluntary Action was established in late 1974 by the Secretary of State and is to make a report through him to the Government of Canada in December, 1976. The main function of the report will be to clarify:

- "a) The role and importance of voluntary action/voluntary organizations in a rapidly changing Canadian society;
- b) the role and responsibility of the Government of Canada in the provision of support to voluntary action/voluntary organizations;
- c) the status, condition and needs of voluntary organizations including their relations with the Government of Canada; and
- d) the actions which need to be taken by the Government of Canada in order to substantially improve the condition of voluntary organizations and their relations with the Government of Canada"¹².

MANDATED CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT

Citizen involvement, as a built-in function of a program is, at best, a scattered thing. In some cases, citizens are given an advisory role and their advice may be accepted or rejected by other powers; in others, citizens may directly affect policy but there are no specific guidelines about involving or educating the general public about these policies; or policy involvement may be mandated in areas where the citizens are unable to effectively participate due to lack of education or experience.

Some examples: Alberta's Preventive Social Services legislation mandates the involvement of Citizen Advisory Boards in each of 54 districts throughout the Province. Their responsibility is to set priorities for the spending of PSS funds within the framework of their district's allocation and their recommendations are approved by their municipality and the Provincial government. There is no regulation re advertising these priorities for input from other citizens and the Boards tend to be filled by appointment rather than from public application.

Federal New Horizons programs require certain percentages of program Board members and/or those served by programs to be senior citizens, LIP (local initiative programs) which provides funding for job-creating programs requires involvement of advisory committees.

Alberta's Early Childhood Services requires parental and community involvement in its kindergarten programs...each kindergarten must have a volunteer board which operates it within the broad policy guidelines laid out by the Province. Unique to Alberta, it encourages parental planning of programs, liaison with teachers, and even extends to volunteer classroom work by parents in a province where school volunteers are not widely accepted. This program has interesting implications because, as a child progresses into the elementary school system from kindergarten, the parent who has appreciated his direct involvement wishes to continue it and pressure is being put upon teachers and principals to accept a different relationship with the community.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

"Public hearings are a traditional involvement mode used by virtually all agencies at all levels of government...Despite increased usage, however, public hearings are not generally thought to constitute a hopeful direction for involvement. Anyone who has spent time at public hearings knows what generally happens: some time is spent on trivial formalities, announcements, and occasional testimonials...The officials proceed to 'set the stage'. Some are seeking to enhance their recognition as benefactors, others to put the claimant on the defensive...The procedure often produces hostility and enmity where none is necessary."¹³ A public hearing does not necessarily guarantee the situation will be changed for the better.

These public forms of dialogue and citizen input have been used recently to cover many spheres of interest..transit service, housing policies, recreational plans and even the topic of citizen participation on a municipal level; labour legislation, Universities funding, and the Ombudsman Act on a Provincial level; and National Parks, Canada Council and pipeline construction policies on a Federal level. Such public hearings are usually advertised in the media and it is important to discover what form a presentation to the hearing should take since some require written and others accept verbal.

AWARENESS - ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Informed public opinion is essential in a democracy and citizen participation must be based upon understanding and information. "The Government and all Parliamentarians are concerned about the extent to which the average citizen is informed about Parliament...At a time of growing complexity in public affairs it is especially important to enhance the citizen's right of access to the information necessary to make well-informed judgements and to take responsible action".¹⁴ Some newspaper headlines - "Are MPs really prepared to let some sunshine in?", "Move started to open up city hall", and "Baldwin raps gov't secrecy". "Watchdogging" is important!

Some newspapers publish excerpts from legislative proceedings daily, some TV and radio stations cover City Councils or Provincial Legislatures in action, Public Libraries have Government Information divisions (since the demise of Information Canada) and a number of government departments have individual libraries of specific interest. Some bookstores also act as agents for publications of the Government of Canada and elected representatives usually maintain offices which can always be contacted for information. Questions can be asked of your member of Parliament by calling him in Ottawa through the Government Operator, collect, and Provincial Governments sometimes have toll-free numbers you can call from all areas of the province. Neighbourhood or municipal resource centres responsible for information-dissemination are most helpful and contact with any other organization or agency known to have similar concerns can result in beneficial information-sharing.

CONCLUSION

"The problem in Canada is not a diminution of voluntary effort. The problem is that voluntary effort is running off in all directions without plan or philosophy in respect to purpose and goals. When you add to these confusions the growing power and responsibility of government for decisions that affect the personal lives of all, and when you further understand the inability of government to involve citizens meaningfully in the decision-making process, you gain some appreciation of the growing sense of frustration."¹⁵

Although we will continue to rely on the voluntary sector to demonstrate, in certain areas, how human needs can best be met and, at the same time unceasingly to press government to develop the skills, structures and resources required to meet those needs, the merits of the voluntary sector are shifting in focus and are now considered to be:

- "1. Its freedom to criticize government and government programs, and its usefulness in providing a channel to the political level through a citizen board of directors.
2. Its advocacy role on behalf of citizens generally and of particular groups as needs evolve.
3. Its capacity to gain citizen commitment and involvement, and to tap voluntary resources.
4. Its flexibility.
5. Its capacity for innovation and experimentation.
6. Its ability to individualize need in the face of massive universal programs and structures."¹⁶

HOW CAN WE HELP THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR TO LIVE UP TO THE HIGH PROMISE OF SUCH CLAIMS?

FOOTNOTES

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2. Richard Rohmer "Exodus U.K."
(McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1975) pg. 181
3. Govt. of Canada "Speech from the Throne"
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4. Desmond M. Connor "Citizens Participate: An Action Guide for Public Issues"
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9. Elwood Springman "The Need for Participatory Democracy"
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14. Govt. of Canada "Speech from the Throne"
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foundations, Canadian Government Departments and Granting
Agencies, American Granting Agencies and British Charitable
Trusts. Also sections on approaching Foundations in Canada
and the U.S. (some do grant funds for Canadian projects)
- Carter, Novia Trends in Voluntary Support for Non-government Social
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- Connor, Desmond M. Constructive Citizen Participation, a quarterly magazine
Development Press, Box 1016, Oakville, Ontario (\$4 per year)
Includes regular reviews of books and materials related to
citizen participation, articles on watchdogging, use of media,
participative planning, planners' responsibilities, etc. Style
is quite "easy", questions are raised and reader dialogue is
invited.
- Draper, James A. Citizen Participation Canada - A Book of Readings, 1971
New Press, 553 Richmond St. W., Toronto 133, Ontario
The readings, by various authors, outline theories related to
ideology of participation, change and intervention, community
development and learning, relating to communities, etc.
- Government of Canada 1976 Corpus Almanac of Canada
Government Information Division, Public Libraries
Contains listing of Associations & Societies, overviews of
Government departments and responsibilities, along with names
and addresses of those in charge. Also includes agencies,
Boards and Commissions of Federal Govt.
- Government of Canada A Directory of Federal Funding Sources
Department of Secretary of State
Outlines purpose, total fund amounts, a contact address,
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Case studies are indexed by themes: citizen action as a result of-indigenous organization, agency outreach, government invitation to participate, advocacy, community development and community organizing.

Unknown editor

City Magazine, published 6 times per year
Charlottetown Group Publishers, Inc. 35 Britain St.,
Toronto, Ontario M5A 1R7

This is oriented to architects and planners and is a rather technical publication. Articles on land banks, conglomerate developers, urban renewal, pollution, neighbourhood improvement, etc.