



Survey of Voluntary Sector Organizations

FINAL REPORT

Submitted to:

Caroline DeWitt
Human Resources and Social Development Canada
Place Vanier, Tower A
355 River Road
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0L1

EKOS RESEARCH ASSOCIATES INC.

May 2008

EKOS RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

Ottawa Office

359 Kent Street, Suite 300

Ottawa, Ontario

K2P 0R6

Tel: (613) 235 7215

Fax: (613) 235 8498

E-mail: pobox@ekos.com

Toronto Office

480 University Avenue, Suite 1006

Toronto, Ontario

M5G 1V2

Tel: (416) 598 8002

Fax: (416) 598 2543

E-mail: toronto@ekos.com

Edmonton Office

9925 109th St. NW, Suite 606

Edmonton, Alberta

T5K 2J8

Tel: (780) 408 5225

Fax: (780) 408 5233

E-mail: edmonton@ekos.com

www.ekos.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	iii
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Purpose of the Survey	3
1.3 Methodology	3
1.4 Profile of Responding Organizations	7
1.5 Qualitative Phase	9
1.6 Caveats	10
1.7 Organization of the Report	10
2. Awareness and Participation in VSI	13
2.1 Overall Awareness of VSI	13
2.2 Awareness of Accord and Codes	16
2.3 Awareness of Specific VSI Activities	18
2.4 Perceived Purpose of the VSI	20
3. Sector-Government Relationship	21
3.1 Perceived Change in Sector-Government Relationship	21
3.2 Reasons for Improvement/ Attribution to VSI	23
3.3 Leveraging of Relationships with Other Levels of Government	26
3.4 Perceived Impact of VSI on Federal Officials	27
4. Intrasectoral Relationships-Networks	29
4.1 Perceived Change in Intersectoral Relationships	29
4.2 Participation in Intrasectoral Networks/Collaborations	31
4.3 Perceived Changes in Sector Strength and Cohesiveness	33
4.4 Reasons for Improvement/ Attribution to VSI	35
4.5 Strategies to Promote Effectiveness of the Sector	38
5. Changes in Capacity	43
5.1 Human Resources Capacity	43
5.2 Use of VSI Sponsored tools for HR	45
5.3 IT Capacity	45
5.4 Use of other VSI-Sponsored Tools	47
5.5 Funding Environment	47
5.6 Attribution of Capacity Improvements to VSI	51

6.	Changes in Involvement and Capacity for Public Policy	53
6.1	Involvement in Public Policy	53
6.2	Changes in Sector-Government Policy Dialogue	55
6.3	Reasons for Improvement/ Attribution to VSI.....	56
6.4	Barriers to Participation in Public Policy.....	58
7.	Regulatory Reform.....	59
7.1	Registered Charities.....	59
7.2	Awareness of Regulatory Reforms	60
7.3	Impact of Regulatory Reform.....	63
8.	Ongoing Relevance of VSI Rationale/ Overall Assessment.....	67
8.1	Sector Understanding of Evolving Role in Government Program Design and Delivery.....	67
8.2	Sector perceptions of VSI Assumptions	73
8.3	Overall Assessment of VSI and Strategies to Advance VSI Agenda	74
9.	Conclusions	81
9.1	Summary of Findings	81
9.2	Concluding Observations.....	84

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

In June 2000, the Government of Canada announced its commitment to spend \$94.6 million over the next five years to develop its relationship with the voluntary sector in a joint initiative called *Partnering for the Benefit of Canadians: Government of Canada-Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI)*. The VSI was jointly managed by members of the voluntary sector and the federal government. It was an unprecedented exercise in working together, both for the Government of Canada and for the voluntary sector. The objectives of the VSI were: (1) To improve the relationship between the Sector and the federal government; (2) To build the Sector capacity in areas of finance, human resources, policy and knowledge, and information management; and (3) To improve the regulatory and legal framework under which the Sector operates.

Phase I of the VSI included work by six Joint Tables, in addition to a Joint Coordinating Committee: Joint Accord Table; Awareness Joint Table; Capacity Joint Table; National Volunteerism Initiative Joint Table; IM-IT Joint Table; and Joint Regulatory Table. Phase II of the VSI would see the completion of the programs and projects initiated by the Joint Tables by government departments or voluntary organizations.

Purpose

The survey of voluntary sector organizations is one of several methodological components that will support the impact evaluation of the VSI. Like the VSI itself, the evaluation of the Initiative has been conducted jointly, under the guidance of a Joint Evaluation Steering Committee (JEC). The impact evaluation builds on the formative evaluation conducted in 2004, but focuses more directly on the impacts of the VSI. This Survey of Voluntary Sector Organizations forms a critical piece of evidence in addressing the "Results Indicators Checklist" by tapping the perspective of voluntary organizations themselves. Later, these data will be triangulated with other sources (survey of federal government officials, case studies and secondary data) to produce a full and detailed picture of the impacts of the VSI and their sustainability.

Methodology

The sampling frame for the survey of voluntary organizations was created using a purposive strategy, aimed at two objectives: to understand the overall awareness and reach of VSI and the various activities sponsored by the VSI; and to explore the impacts of the VSI from a smaller sample of organizations most likely to have been affected by the Initiative. Two primary sources for listings for voluntary organizations were used, both provided by the Canada Revenue Agency: the file for registered charities; and the T1044 Non-Profit file. Additional selection criteria were implemented to maximize the organizations in the sample that had a relationship with government and were therefore in a better position

to comment on the VSI. The CRA files were supplemented by a highly targeted listing of voluntary organizations that had been directly involved with the VSI.

The survey instrument, following the Results Indicators Checklist, was composed of six main sections: awareness of and participation in the VSI/VSI-sponsored initiatives, tools and resources; sector-government relationships; capacity (including human resources, information technology and funding environment); policy dialogue; regulatory reform; and intrasectoral collaborations/networking. As well, the survey included several questions on respondents' overall assessment of the VSI and background information on their organization.

The survey instrument was pretested in March 2008 and data collection occurred between April and September 2008. In total, 2,110 interviews were completed with voluntary organizations. The response rate for the survey was 52 per cent. To maximize the flexibility of the survey of voluntary organizations, the survey instrument was programmed in a form amenable to both telephone and Internet-based administration. Over the course of the survey, 10 per cent of organizations completed the survey on the Internet and 90 completed the interview over the phone.

Following the completion of the survey, a qualitative phase of research was conducted with stakeholders to reflect on the impacts of the VSI and elaborate upon the quantitative results based on the views of selected members of the voluntary sector who were integrally involved in the VSI. Two focus groups were held in Toronto and Calgary during the week of January 21st, 2008. In addition to the focus groups, a small number of key informant interviews (3) were conducted with respondents who were unable to attend the groups or were in locations outside of Calgary and Toronto.

Findings

Following is a summary of findings from the survey of voluntary organizations and qualitative research with key representatives of the sector:

- This survey suggests that, even among a sample of voluntary sector organizations that is more heavily focussed toward those with a relationship with the federal government, the key VSI products do not appear to have gained significant traction within this community or within the federal government. Awareness of the VSI, and its key products, the Accord and the Codes of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue and Funding is modest – 35 per cent for the VSI and between 13 and 21 per cent for the Accord and Codes. Those who claim to have heard of the Initiative or the Accord and Codes admit that they do not have a detailed familiarity (and this is further confirmed in the relatively high proportion of don't know responses to other items in the survey and shallow knowledge of specific VSI initiatives). For their part, voluntary organizations do not perceive the knowledge and commitment to the Accord or the Codes to be strong among federal officials.
- The consensus view among key representatives of the sector, however, was that there was insufficient attention, resources and organizational infrastructure at the time of the VSI devoted

to raising awareness and knowledge of the Initiative among sector organizations. In fact, these qualitative research participants considered this to have hindered the effectiveness of the VSI in retrospect. The survey took this into consideration by asking responding organizations about their awareness of some of the key initiatives, tools and resources of the VSI such as regulatory reform, research on the sector, human resources and policy capacity projects. Awareness of regulatory reform is highest of all the VSI initiatives – about one in three organizations are aware of this activity (and one in four among registered charities). For the other initiatives, between about one in ten and one in five organizations indicated awareness. While these results are modest at best, some key informants maintain that the awareness of the VSI would have been higher at the time of the Initiative, but has decayed over time.

- When asked about the state of government-sector relations, the survey responses tend to be slightly more positive than negative, though the most common perception is of a continuation of the status quo. Where there is an improvement, those who are aware of the VSI attribute the change to the Initiative to some or a great extent. Improved communication and effort at the individual level are deemed to be important in improved relationships. Focus group and interview participants noted some improvements in the sector-government relationship as a result of the VSI but these were often short-lived due to countervailing forces such as expectations around accountability, changing personnel and a shift in priorities at the federal level over time.
- According to the survey results, there are few perceived benefits to voluntary organizations of a federal relationship in terms of leveraging alliances with other levels of government or in terms of financial leveraging. Focus group participants provided some examples, however, of leveraging (e.g., of CVI funds) and impacts on subsequent provincial/territorial voluntary initiatives.
- It is the level of collaboration and networking within the sector that is the “good news story” of the study in terms of improvements over time. For example, over one-half of surveyed organizations have observed an improvement in the level of collaboration, respect, sharing of information and transparency in relationships among organizations in the voluntary sector. This is confirmed by extensive and beneficial participation in formal or informal networks and joint activities, which are said to have had positive impacts for clients (for example, increased outreach) and the organizations involved (sharing of information and resources). On the other hand, the VSI is not reported to be a key driver of these collaborations, according to survey results. One in three organizations have also observed improvements in sector strength and cohesiveness and this is an area where the VSI is rated to have had some impact (according to those familiar with the Initiative) by raising awareness of the sector, and of common agendas and cross-cutting issues. The VSI research products were commonly cited by key representatives of the sector as being very important in developing the sector’s identity.
- Some capacity improvements are occurring in the voluntary sector, particularly in the area of information technology, though these impacts are generally attributed to technology evolution rather than the VSI. In the area of HR, surveyed organizations are seeing improvements in the

skill levels of staff and volunteers, but there are persistent difficulties for some in recruiting and retaining staff and volunteers. While qualitative respondents pointed to the establishment of the HR Council for the Voluntary/Non-Profit Sector as an important development, according to the survey, a small proportion of voluntary organizations at this time are actively using the Council's resources. The funding environment has not seen the same kind of progress as information technology and human resources, and some organizations reported in the survey that they are now in a financially weaker position.

- Sector participation in policy at the federal level is limited, according to survey results: one-quarter of organizations engage in this activity (even in a sample that is more heavily focused on organizations with a relationship with the federal government). Still, among these organizations, policy capacity is seen by many (four in ten) to have improved during the VSI period and some have detected enhanced influence and participation of the voluntary sector in this area (three in ten). Impacts on policy dialogue are weakly linked to the VSI, however (though, again, a substantial portion of organizations simply don't know if the VSI had an impact or not and since few are aware of the details of the VSI, few would likely attribute any change to the Initiative). Focus group and interview participants expressed disappointment with the VSI in this area – the results of SIDPD projects were perceived to be uneven at best. Some were of the opinion that SIDPD was a government-directed exercise that, while having some benefit for the individual organizations involved, yielded few lasting capacity impacts for the sector as a whole or in terms of the receptiveness of government departments that were involved.
- The regulatory reform initiative of the VSI has the highest profile of all the VSI initiatives among surveyed organizations; not surprising given that contact with CRA and the regulatory environment has an impact on all registered charities and that the revision to the annual reporting return was a tangible outcome of regulatory reform. The reforms are also said to have had some positive impacts on such things as accountability and public trust, although the reform package is seen to have met its objectives to only a moderate degree, with few saying that it met its objectives to a high degree. Note, however, that regulatory reform at CRA is still in progress (to 2009). Focus group participants and interview participants were more enthusiastic about regulatory reform, seeing a variety of reforms enshrined in law and a positive improvement in the sector's relationship with the charities regulator.
- There was no clear consensus among voluntary organizations as to whether their role and contribution with respect to government program design and delivery was increasing or decreasing. Responding organizations did, however, provide a number of examples of the unique role and contribution of the sector vis-à-vis government programming. In addition to service delivery in many core areas such as addressing community health and social needs, sector organizations were also noted to provide valuable expertise to government (a grassroots perspective) on the needs of their constituents, as well as providing a conduit for information/promotion to effectively reach Canadian citizens.

Concluding Observations

In terms of overall observations, the results of the national survey of voluntary organizations and the qualitative research with key representatives of the sector that followed together bring a number of conclusions about the VSI into focus:

- Key sector representatives that participated in the qualitative research and survey respondents with familiarity with the VSI generally believe the Initiative to have been a worthwhile effort. Despite (surveyed) voluntary organizations' general lack of awareness of the Initiative and difficulty in clearly attributing outcomes to the VSI, their overall assessment of the Initiative is positive. The VSI was seen to have signalled a commitment on the part of the federal government to recognize the contribution of voluntary organizations and initiate a more fulsome relationship and dialogue with the sector. The approach was perceived to be innovative and, for a time, generated a great deal of excitement and interest, according to key sector representatives. Many organizations that are aware of the Initiative believe that the state of affairs would be worse now if there had not been a VSI.
- There were a number of achievements of the VSI noted in the study. With respect to the regulatory framework, reforms that have been entrenched in law and in policy were commonly noted by study participants as an example of sustainable outcomes of the VSI. CRA and the Charities Directorate were also held up as an example of an area where there has been a significant and sustained improvement in the sector-government relationship (though this is an impact that key sector representatives commonly pointed out, but which might be largely invisible to grassroots organizations).
- Key sector representatives were also of the opinion that the VSI contributed to the development of an awareness of the sector as a sector, both among government officials and voluntary organizations themselves. The latter is borne out in the survey data where organizations are seemingly more apt to identify themselves with the broader sector. There is also significant participation in collaborations and umbrella organizations (though whether this is a result of the VSI is unclear). The research that was sponsored by the VSI on the size and contribution of the sector and ensuing impacts on sector identity were widely praised by key sector representatives. Those who were direct participants in the VSI also noted the opportunities for learning and personal development afforded by their experience with the Initiative.
- Finally, there was also the development of a host of tangible products, tools and resources that continue to be available to organizations via websites or organizations such as the HR Council for the Voluntary/Non-Profit Sector (itself perceived to be an important long-term outcome of the VSI by key sector representatives). The development of the Accord and Codes were heralded as important, albeit underutilized documents by key sector representatives. The survey results, however, indicate only modest recognition and limited use of these products and tools in the broader community of voluntary organizations. Voluntary organizations do not

perceive the federal civil service as currently supporting or promoting the Accord and Codes in any vigorous or uniform way across the federal government.

- As mentioned, survey respondents and key sector representatives did not note any marked improvement in the relationship between the voluntary sector and federal government as a result of the VSI. According to key informants and focus group participants, this objective of the VSI was in some ways hindered by broader events at the time such as the enhanced accountability measures that were being implemented during the VSI period, a development that strained the capacity of many organizations and burdened the relationship with the government. In terms of the current state of the relationship, some of the survey commentary and the remarks of key sector representatives suggested the relationship has deteriorated in some respects since the VSI, with the manifest influence of the sector waning in some areas. Capacity issues also continue to be a concern for the sector. Human resources – particularly recruiting and retaining staff - are challenging, as well as funding. While the HR Council has been created to help deal with the former issues, the VSI was not given a mandate to grapple with the issue of funding in a substantial way.
- With respect to promotion of policy capacity, the capacity to do policy and even interest in policy is confined to a small number of organizations within the sector, and the efforts under the VSI were generally viewed by key sector representatives as limited in enhancing or extending this capacity more broadly in the sector.
- As a vehicle for change, the VSI had many advantages: for example, the preparatory work conducted by the Voluntary Sector Roundtable, senior level interest and champions within the civil service and at the political level, and a collaborative working model in the Joint Tables. While the focus of the impact evaluation of the VSI is not on process (these issues were well-documented in the Process Evaluation of the VSI), the survey and qualitative research did confirm many of the challenges in the design and delivery of the VSI that were identified in the Process Evaluation. Challenges such as an overly ambitious agenda, exclusion of funding and advocacy from the VSI agenda, overly bureaucratic and complex processes, challenges in working horizontally and jointly, lack of continuity of Table representatives on the government side and a decline in the seniority of federal representatives over time were described as having hindered the work of the VSI. Key sector representatives also noted the absence of sustained civil service and government support for the VSI and structures to sustain and institutionalize change as ultimately affecting the sustainability of its impacts.
- According to qualitative respondents, an unintended consequence of the VSI is that the Initiative involved a substantial commitment of many of those in leadership positions in the voluntary sector, thus drawing attention and effort away from other endeavours. For example, the Voluntary Sector Roundtable (the sector organization that provided a national policy voice for the sector prior to the VSI) was disbanded by the sector during the VSI due to redundancy. However, the organization (or similar) has not been resurrected since the end of the VSI.

- A second unintended, but positive, consequence of the VSI according to some key sector representatives is that the VSI tools and resources such as the Accord and Codes are available as models for initiatives that some provinces are now undertaking in building frameworks for their relationship with the voluntary sector.
- Many of the issues that were the initial drivers of the VSI remain relevant today, though arguably CRA reforms have gone some way toward addressing the issues related to the regulatory environment and continue to do so. As well, awareness and development of the identity of the sector as a sector, networking improvements and the distinct role and contribution of the voluntary sector to government program design and delivery were also noted.
- The weight of opinion among study participants was that, in other areas, such as improving the sector-government relationship, there were few sustainable outcomes. The practices and guidelines in the Accord and Codes to guide the sector-government relationship have not been institutionalized in a way that many would have liked. That said, there was a subsequent better appreciation from the sector of government constraints. HR capacity in the sector continues to be a challenge and some capacity initiatives spawned by the VSI have become vulnerable to funding cuts (e.g., the CVI). There was perceived to be limited impact on the enhancement of policy capacity and involvement. As mentioned above, the SIDPD projects were not viewed as having broad and lasting impacts on the level of policy dialogue between the sector and federal government. Lack of sustained and vigorous support for the initiative within the civil service and within the federal leadership were named by key sector representatives as inhibiting factors, along with an absence of institutionalized, structured support for initiatives to sustain and advance the VSI agenda.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

a) The Voluntary Sector

The voluntary sector is one of the three pillars of Canadian society, along with the public sector and the private sector, and is essential to the continued development of a vibrant, democratic society. It provides opportunities for civic participation and encourages Canadians to become engaged in their society and communities in a meaningful way. The contributions of volunteers in the sector are vital to the quality of life of millions of people; many of the services Canadians take for granted would not be available without the voluntary sector.

According to the National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Organizations (Statistics Canada, 2003) there are 161,000 organizations in the sector, of which 78,000 are registered charities. These groups range from arts and cultural groups to sports clubs, religious organizations and health and welfare/service groups. The sector employs over one million people and one in four Canadians reported that they volunteered through a charitable or non-profit organization in 2002.

b) The Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI)

The history of the VSI can be most readily traced to the establishment of the Voluntary Sector Roundtable in 1995. This group of 13 national, umbrella voluntary sector groups commissioned the Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector in 1997. The Panel's report, which included 41 recommendations, helped provide the impetus for the establishment, in March 1999, of a joint initiative between the voluntary sector and the Government of Canada to form a new relationship to better serve the needs of Canadians. Three joint government and voluntary sector tables worked through the summer of 1999 and released the document *Working Together: A Government of Canada/Voluntary Sector Joint Initiative* in August 1999. The Government of Canada took into consideration the proposals of the Joint Tables and worked with voluntary sector leaders to develop measures to build a new relationship, strengthen capacity of the sector and improve the regulatory framework. In June 2000, the Government of Canada announced its commitment to spend \$94.6 million over the next five years to develop its relationship with the voluntary sector in a joint initiative *Partnering for the Benefit of Canadians: Government of Canada-Voluntary Sector Initiative*.

The VSI was jointly managed by members of the voluntary sector and the federal government. It was an unprecedented exercise in working together, both for the Government of Canada and for the voluntary sector. The objectives of the VSI were:

- To improve the relationship between the Sector and the federal government;
- To build the Sector capacity in areas of finance, human resources, policy and knowledge, and information management; and
- To improve the regulatory and legal framework under which the Sector operates.

Phase I of the VSI included work by six Joint Tables, in addition to a Joint Coordinating Committee:

- Joint Accord Table
- Awareness Joint Table
- Capacity Joint Table
- National Volunteerism Initiative Joint Table
- IM-IT Joint Table
- Joint Regulatory Table.

The joint tables were co-chaired by a government and a voluntary sector representative and composed of an equal number of representatives from each sector. The Joint Coordinating Committee was mandated to coordinate the different elements of the VSI. The government established a Voluntary Sector Task Force and the voluntary sector a Voluntary Sector Initiative Secretariat to provide staff resources to the initiative.

One of the early achievements of the VSI was the establishment of the *Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector* that provided a framework for improved relationships based on more open, transparent, consistent and collaborative ways for the two sectors to work together. This was followed by two Codes of Good Practice – A Code of Good Practice on Funding and a Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue which were developed to help facilitate the ready implementation of the Accord. There have also been a multitude of projects, for example, to enhance the policy capacity of the voluntary sector, address human resources issues in the sector, build alliances, and raise awareness of the contributions of the voluntary sector among the public, government and within the voluntary sector itself. One of the more extensive of these was SIDPD – the Sectoral Involvement in Departmental Policy Development. This allowed for joint policy projects between voluntary sector organizations and government departments. SIDPD stimulated and/or reinforced the active involvement of a number of sector organizations and departments in the VSI process. The capacity building achievements in the information technology area are also worthy of note.

While the VSI process is now essentially complete (with the exception of the evaluation process), it has created possible longer-term effects and lessons learned on relationship-building and collaboration. On the voluntary sector side, the Voluntary Sector Forum was established in 2002 to provide pan-Canadian leadership and coordination in the voluntary sector, on horizontal, sector-wide issues. Its objectives include continuing to improve the relationship with government and building on the VSI and its achievements. Other outcomes of the VSI include the establishment of the Human Resources Council for the Voluntary/Non-Profit Sector, the research on the sector (National Survey of Non-Profit and Voluntary Organizations, Statistics Canada Satellite Account) and the ongoing offices for voluntary sector involvement that some government departments such as Health Canada (with the Public Health Agency of Canada), Canadian Heritage and Human Resources and Social Development Canada have established. Certainly these continue to play an important role in both building the capacity of the sector and in continuing to strive to improve the relationship between the federal government and the sector.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY

The survey of voluntary sector organizations is one of several methodological components that will support the impact evaluation of the VSI. Like the VSI itself, the evaluation of the Initiative has been conducted jointly, under the guidance of a Joint Evaluation Steering Committee (JEC). The impact evaluation will build on the formative evaluation conducted in 2004, but focus more directly on the impacts of the VSI. This Survey of Voluntary Sector Organizations forms a critical piece of evidence in addressing the “Results Indicators Checklist” by tapping the perspective of voluntary organizations themselves. Later, these data will then be triangulated with other sources (survey of federal government officials, case studies and secondary data) to produce a full and detailed picture of the impacts of the VSI and their sustainability.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

a) Survey Sampling

The creation of a sampling frame for the population of voluntary organizations in Canada was the most significant challenge for the survey. While the original conceptualization of the project was for a nationally representative survey of voluntary organizations, what emerged during the research design phase was considerable uncertainty about the feasibility of such a survey (given the enormous challenges in constructing a nationally representative sampling frame as none is readily available), as well as the value of a randomly-drawn survey of the sector (given the anticipated low levels of awareness of the VSI or even interaction with the federal level of government among a randomly selected group of voluntary organizations). Thus, the creation of the survey sampling frame followed a more purposive strategy, aimed at two objectives: to understand the overall awareness and reach of VSI and the various activities sponsored by the VSI; and to explore the impacts of the VSI from a focused sample of organizations most likely to have been affected by the Initiative.

Ultimately, two primary sources for listings for voluntary organizations were used, both provided by the Canada Revenue Agency; the file for registered charities; and the T1044 Non-Profit file. The charities file contained roughly 45,000 names of organizations that are currently registered as a charitable organization. The non-profit file contained roughly 15,000 organizations. These two sources were selected as the most exhaustive and comprehensive sources of voluntary organizations. It was recognized that the bias would be toward larger organizations, however, it was also understood that this would likely be a better representation of organizations with a relationship with the federal government.

Each file included contact information for the organization as well as information about the money received from government. This was specific to the federal government in the case of the charities file, however, it included all government in the non-profit file. In each case an initial sample was randomly drawn in order to complete a number of interviews with charitable and non-profit organizations. Once this initial sampling was completed, additional samples were drawn from among those organizations receiving \$1,000 or more from the government, in order to maximize the organizations in the sample that had a relationship with government and were therefore in a better position to comment on the VSI.

The first and smallest portion of the sample was derived, in part, from a highly targeted listing of individuals and organizations that have been directly involved with the VSI. These were drawn from the Joint Tables participants, those participating in other VSI activities or consultations, or receiving VSI funding (e.g., SIDPD projects). This was a listing of organizations in the best position to comment on the VSI. This sample was added to the overall sample of charities and non-profit organizations and initial screening questions in the survey questionnaire then determined who would receive the most detailed set of questions about the VSI and its impact.

In order to test the overall penetration of the VSI and its initiatives, tools and resources, registered charities and non-registered non-profit organizations in the sector beyond the criteria mentioned above were included.

b) Survey Design

The design of the survey instrument was based on the Evaluation Framework and Methodology Report for the impact evaluation of the VSI and the Results Indicators Checklist. This was an ambitious listing of issues, involving some challenges in operationalizing key concepts. As part of the design phase, 12 in-depth, key informant interviews were conducted with representatives of the JEC or key representatives of departments, including Statistics Canada and Canada Revenue Agency, that have been involved in the VSI or the design and planning of the VSI evaluation. Interviews explored the scope of the survey, priority issues, indicators and recommendations on aspects of the survey administration. The survey instrument, following the Results Indicators Checklist, was composed of six main sections: awareness of and participation in the VSI/VSI-sponsored initiatives, tools and resources; sector-government relationships; capacity (including human resources, information technology and funding environment); policy dialogue; regulatory reform; intrasectoral collaborations/networking). As well, the survey included several questions on respondents' overall assessment of the VSI and background information on their organization. A mix of

closed- and open-ended questions allowed respondents to provide an assessment of changes in their organization or their relationship with government, accompanied by the opportunity to expand on their answers, for example, the reasons for change or the expected sustainability of change over time.

As mentioned above, a threefold grouping of survey respondents was developed based on the extent of their interaction with the federal government and their awareness of the VSI:

- *Individuals and organizations directly involved with the VSI.* This group includes the most informed individuals and organizations who participated actively in the VSI, for example in consultations leading up to the development of the Accord, the Joint Tables, in workshops and training and so on. This group responded to an extended version of the survey instrument which explored impacts of the VSI and sustainability.
- *Organizations with a relationship with the federal government.* This second group is the portion of the sector that, although involved with the federal government, was not directly impacted by the VSI. Nevertheless, this group responded to general questions about changes in their relationship with the federal government, as well as capacity and intrasectoral networking. Registered charities in this group also responded to items about regulatory reform.
- *The rest of the sector.* This segment of the sample, having no ongoing dealings with the federal government or awareness of VSI, responded to a limited number of survey items.

Prior to the data collection, the survey instrument was pretested extensively with voluntary organizations and revisions were made to ensure the instrument was of a reasonable duration, that the complex skip logic functioned properly (i.e., that respondents were properly routed through the questionnaire based on their answers to previous questions) and that wording of the questions was clear.

c) Survey Administration

To maximize the flexibility of the survey of voluntary organizations, the survey instrument was programmed in a form amenable to both telephone and Internet-based administration. All potential respondents were sent an introductory letter introducing the survey, its purpose and role in the context of the larger evaluation of the VSI. Organizations were also provided the opportunity (through a url) to view the survey and, if they wish, complete it electronically. Alternatively, a representative from EKOS called the organization shortly afterwards to complete the interview over the phone. Over the course of the survey, 10 per cent of organizations completed the survey on the Internet and 90 completed the interview over the phone.

The survey instrument was pretested in March 2008 and data collection occurred between April and September 2008. In total, 2,110 interviews were completed with voluntary organizations. The response rate for the survey was 52 per cent.

As indicated above, a grouping of organizations was created based on responses to initial questions in the survey regarding the degree of their relationship with the federal government and awareness of the VSI. As discussed in the sampling approach section earlier, the sample frame was not built to be a comprehensive and representative listing of all organizations in the sector, but to be reasonably reflective of three key segments of the sector: those directly involved in the VSI; those with some awareness of the VSI and ongoing relationship with government; and organizations that are less likely to have any ongoing dealings with the federal government and likely very limited awareness of the VSI.

d) Data Base Management and Weighting

The final database was weighted along a number of parameters. The file was weighted to reflect the regional distribution of the charities and non-profit files, as the survey underrepresents Quebec organizations (see Table 1.1 on page 8). The file was also weighted to restore the distribution reflected in the CRA frame for charities for size (organizations with revenue of under and over \$5,000), as well as for substantive type of organization (arts, health, etc) - also for charities (as no such tag was available on the T1044 for non-profits). Since the proportions of charities to non-profit organizations in the survey was very close to the proportions measured in the National Survey of Non-profit and Voluntary Organizations (55 per cent charities, 45 per cent non-profit split) no targets were set in the weight calculation for this. It should be noted that there are some questions in the survey which were targeted to a very small segment of the sample that is most involved with the government and/particularly involved with the VSI. In this case, it seemed counterproductive to weight their responses to fit a broader profile of the sector (e.g., by region, size and sector), since these parameters do not necessarily apply to this small very involved segment. Results for these questions have been noted in each case in the chart as well as in the text.

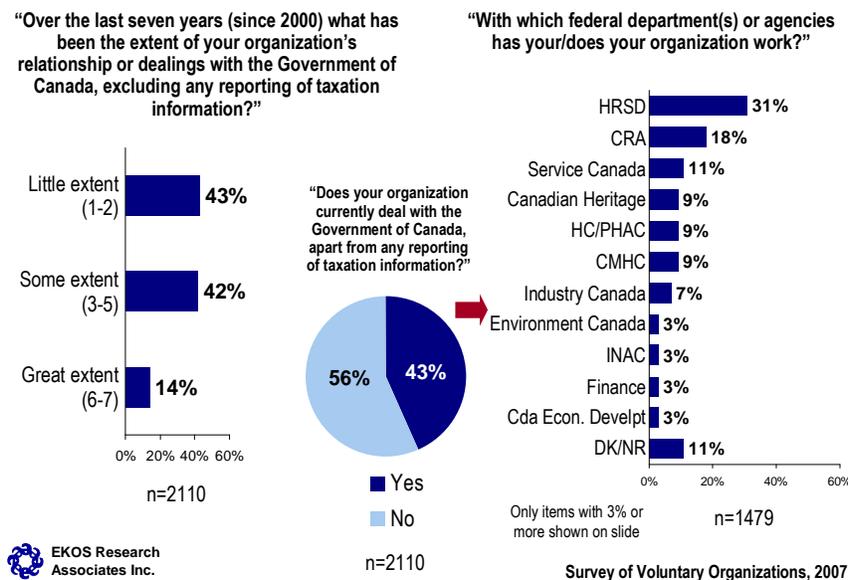
There was considerable discussion about whether or not to weight the cases to restore the normal distribution of voluntary organizations that do and do not work with the federal government, as the survey includes a considerable over sample of organizations that work with the Government of Canada and have some level of funding from the federal government. While this is certainly appropriate for some areas of the questionnaire (overall awareness of the VSI, assumptions of the VSI), it did not seem appropriate for some sections of the questionnaire (e.g., relationship with government, capacity changes and impact from the VSI). Nor did it seem appropriate for questions that were only answered by small segments of the most involved in the sector.

In the end, to avoid an overly complex weighting scheme, the decision was made to not weight for relationship with the federal government. Some verification was conducted to compare the results for data weighted and unweighted using the relationship with federal government variable. While some results were marginally more positive with the relationship variable left out of the weight (as it is currently reported), the difference was rarely more than two to three percentage points, and did not have an impact on the overall story.

1.4 PROFILE OF RESPONDING ORGANIZATIONS

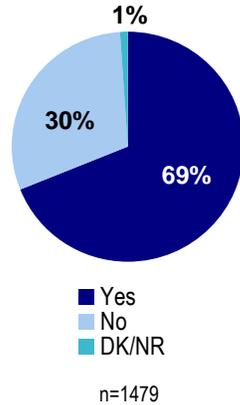
As indicated, the survey included an overrepresentation of organizations with a relationship with the government of Canada. Forty-three per cent of the cases in the weighted sample say that they have little to do with the government, however, the actual sample (unweighted) includes 37 per cent of cases with no federal government relationship. The largest proportion of organizations are working with HRSD, followed by Canada Revenue Agency. A total of 69 per cent of the (unweighted) sample say that they are funded from the federal government, largely for service delivery.

Relationship with Government



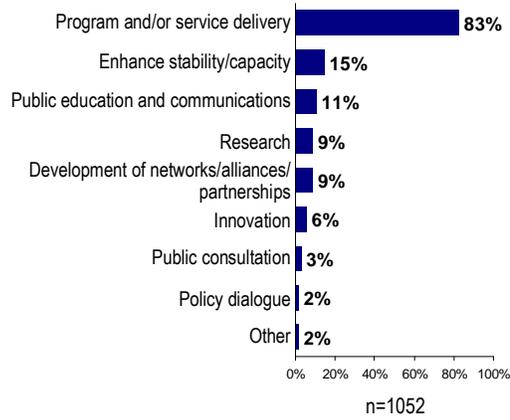
Government Funding

“In the last seven years, has your organization received program/project funding from the federal government?”



EKOS Research Associates Inc.

“For what purpose(s) has your organization received program/project funding from the federal government?”



Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

The following table provides some of the key sample characteristics of the survey file of 2,104 responding voluntary organizations.

Table 1.1: Characteristics of Responding Organizations

	OVERALL (%)
Size (n=2104) (unweighted)	
Less than \$100,000	25%
\$100,000 to \$249,999	17%
\$250,000 to \$499,999	15%
\$500,000 to \$999,999	14%
\$1,000,000 to \$4,999,999	16%
\$5,000,000 to \$9,999,999	3%
\$10,000,000 to \$19,999,999	1%
More than \$20 million	1%
DK/NR	7%
Region (unweighted)	
Atlantic	11%
Quebec	13%
Ontario	40%
Saskatchewan and Manitoba	11%
Alberta	10%
British Columbia	16%

	OVERALL (%)
Area (n=1831) (unweighted)	
Arts and Culture	13%
Education	12%
Health Services	8%
Social Services	24%
Community Benefits (e.g., sports)	25%
Religious organizations, spiritual services	7%
Other	10%
DK/NR	1%
Role (n=2104) (weighted)	
Service delivery	62%
Public information/education	38%
Policy dialogue	10%
Advocacy	21%
Research	11%
Other	27%
DK/NR	1%
Status (Registered Charity) (n=2045) (weighted)	
Yes	58%
No	42%
DK/NR	1%

1.5 QUALITATIVE PHASE

Following the completion of the survey of voluntary organizations, a qualitative phase of research was conducted to reflect on the impacts of the VSI and elaborate upon the quantitative results based on the views of selected members of the voluntary sector who were integrally involved in the VSI. These “key informants” were invited to participate in the research by their membership on one of the Joint Tables, as academic researchers on the sector or assumed a leadership role during the second phase of the VSI. Two focus groups were held in Toronto and Calgary during the week of January 21st, 2008. Across the two groups, 12 participants attended the two and half hour discussions (four in Toronto and eight in Calgary). A focus group guide was designed to encourage discussion about awareness of the VSI, impacts on areas such as government-sector relationship, capacity, intrasectoral networking and regulatory reform.

In addition to the focus groups, three key informant interviews were conducted with respondents who were unable to attend the groups or were in locations outside of Calgary and Toronto. These interviews were conducted using a modified version of the focus group guide. Findings from the focus groups and the key informant interviews are reported together and for reporting purposes these study participants are referred to as “key sector representatives”.

1.6 CAVEATS

The most significant caveat associated with the survey is that this is not a nationally representative survey of voluntary organizations. Rather, the survey was designed to overrepresent organizations with a relationship with the federal government and participation in the VSI in order to better explore the impacts of the Initiative on the sector. The vastness of the sector and the relatively limited penetration of VSI-sponsored initiatives, tools and resources required this more purposive approach to survey sampling. As a result, the survey is more representative of the population that the VSI was most likely to have reached, not the voluntary sector as a whole. A second caveat relates to responses on the impacts of the VSI. Despite the purposive sampling approach and the large total sample size, many of the items related to the impacts of the VSI were, in fact, answered by a small sub-set of respondents (i.e., those who observed a change in one of the areas targeted by the VSI - government-sector relationships, capacity or policy dialogue – and who were aware of the VSI). Thus, the margin of error for these responses is much higher than the overall size of the overall sample might suggest.

One major caveat to be considered in interpreting the results of the survey is that the VSI period defined for the purposes of the survey is 2001 to 2005, which is a much wider range of time and is also asking respondents to provide a very long historical perspective. Added to this, is the fairly dramatic shift in the leadership and policy development in the federal government that has occurred between 2005 and 2007. This makes accurate recollection of impacts and relationships with the federal government difficult. A third factor is that many other similarly named initiatives and programs aimed at the voluntary sector have also existed over the period of 2001 to 2007, which also adds to the confusion in recalling the impact of the VSI in particular on voluntary organizations. Each of these (the long period, the several years in between 2005 and 2007 and considerable change that occurred during that time, as well as the number of different initiatives aimed at the voluntary sector) make it difficult for organizations representatives to provide a clear assessment of the impact of the VSI on a number of dimensions of their organizations.

With respect to the qualitative research, the primary benefit of focus group discussions is that they allow for in-depth probing with participants on perceptions and attitudes related to the subject matter. The focus group technique is used as a means of developing insight, however, the findings should be treated as suggestive rather than definitive and representative of all key sector representatives involved with the VSI. At the same time, these knowledgeable representatives provide an important perspective to contextualize the survey results and impacts of the VSI, and make connections between the Initiative and longer-term impacts that might not be evident in a broad survey of the voluntary sector.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

There are eight additional chapters in this report. Chapter Two addresses the issue of the general penetration of the VSI – awareness of the Initiative itself and its key initiatives, tools and resources. Chapters three through seven explore the impacts of the VSI in relation to objectives in the area of government-sector relationships (Chapter Three); intrasectoral relationships (Chapter Four); capacity

(Chapter Five); policy capacity (Chapter Six); and regulatory reform (Chapter Seven). Chapter Eight discusses findings related to the continued relevance of the VSI rationale and sector organizations' overall assessment of the VSI (strengths, weaknesses and future strategies). Overall conclusions are presented in Chapter Nine.

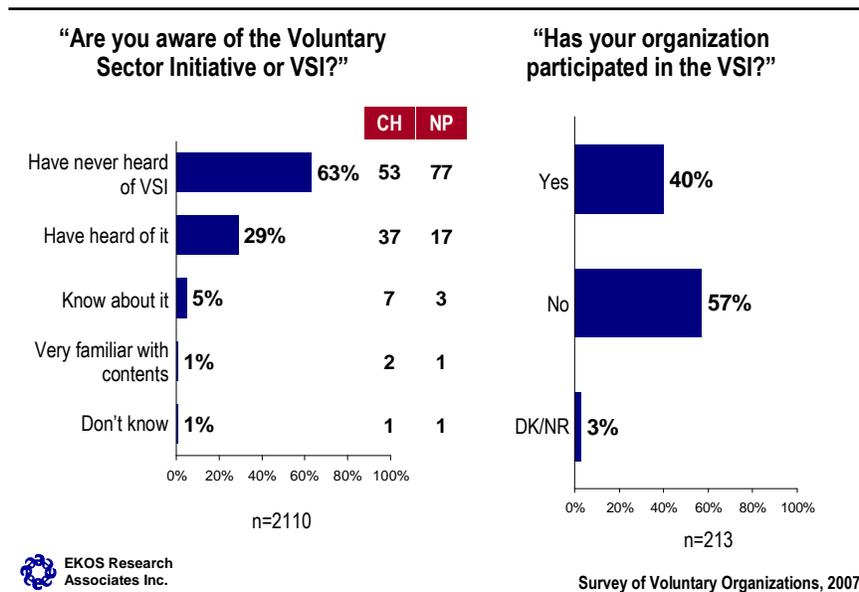
2. AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION IN VSI

2.1 OVERALL AWARENESS OF VSI

There is limited (unprompted) awareness of the VSI among the voluntary sector, even among this sample that is heavily stratified toward organizations that report an ongoing relationship with the federal government. Four in ten voluntary organizations indicate being aware of the VSI (with most of these saying they have heard of the initiative, but don't know much about it). Six in ten organizations have never heard of the VSI. Note, however, that the VSI was never "branded" as an Initiative or widely and systematically communicated to the sector (save the joint website – vsi.gc.ca) and so the many projects and activities carried out under the VSI (regulatory reform, research on the sector and so on) were not explicitly linked with the VSI.

In the survey responses, charitable (CH) are marginally more aware of the VSI compared to non-profit (NP) organizations indicated among those organizations that are aware of the VSI, about four in ten have participated in the Initiative, typically as participants in a consultative process (e.g., VSI-sponsored meetings, forums, group discussions) or by having received/used/read/distributed VSI information and materials.

Awareness of and Participation in VSI



Organizations that are registered charities are more likely to be aware of the VSI compared to non-profits. Awareness of the VSI is higher among voluntary organizations with dealings with the federal government and, within this group, those who received funding from the federal government (Table 2.1). Awareness is lower among Quebec organizations and higher in the Prairies. Larger organizations (measured by revenue) indicate greater awareness of the VSI.

Table 2.1: Awareness of VSI

	HEARD OF VSI (%)
Relationship with Federal Government	
Yes	43
No	29
Region	
BC	32
Alberta	40
Prairies	49
Ontario	39
Quebec	19
Atlantic	43
Size	
Less than \$100,000	37
\$100,000 to \$249,999	34
\$250,000 to \$499,999	36
\$500,000 to \$999,999	33
\$1,000,000 to \$4,999,999	36
\$5,000,000 to \$9,999,999	48

Among organizations that are aware of the VSI, those with a funding or other type of relationship with the federal government and organizations that reported using one or more VSI-sponsored tools or resources are more likely to have actively participated in the VSI. Smaller organizations are less apt to have actively participated in the VSI.

Key sector representatives were not surprised and some, in fact, were heartened by the level of awareness indicated in the survey given that few efforts were directed at marketing the VSI as an Initiative to the sector and the time that has elapsed since the end of the VSI. Participants noted that during the years the VSI was implemented, there was a “real buzz” and excitement about these efforts, however, this enthusiasm has waned since the VSI ended. In hindsight, there was some feeling in the focus groups that a higher profile for the Initiative would have been beneficial as a way to demonstrate the overall value of the VSI to sector and government communities and to enable sector organizations to understand the various VSI-sponsored initiatives as part of an overarching strategy to achieve broad objectives. As well, it

was noted that the VSI did not have funds for communications for sector organizations to promote awareness among voluntary organizations.

- *“I would say in Alberta there was a good awareness among all sector leaders at least in the major cities that there was a VSI, though maybe not the details. If you asked most people now, their eyes would glaze over. There wouldn’t be good recollection and there’s been a lot of changeover”. “The VSI, once it ceased as an Initiative, really faded from the radar screen ... the energy dissipated ... but the products that were developed are still there and are still state-of-the art. The national survey, other research projects, these are still legacy pieces, used by sector leaders and training programs. We need to distinguish between the products and the VSI as an entity.”*
- *“Further complicating this (awareness), the Awareness Table spent the first year trying to understand what we were trying to build awareness for... was it for the VSI or the sector? There was no clarity, it was really challenging.”*
- *“They’re (awareness levels) pitiful, but for this sector they’re good, it makes sense. We need to take into account what most people involved in this sector are doing, they are delivering the services. It is only a few leaders in the sector that take those issues of sustainability, capacity and regulations seriously. ”*
- *“I think they should have funded communications. It’s not so much about branding. There was no real money to support the Forum going forward. There wasn’t any follow-up communications or funding of an infrastructure organization within the sector to really take the time and drive this knowledge through the sector.”*
- *“Although they (voluntary organizations) are aware of some products and use these on a fairly regular basis, they don’t associate it with the VSI or make that connection...It is an important point to make. Even though their overall knowledge or understanding of the VSI as a whole is fairly limited, they would be familiar with pieces or some of the outcomes of the VSI.”*

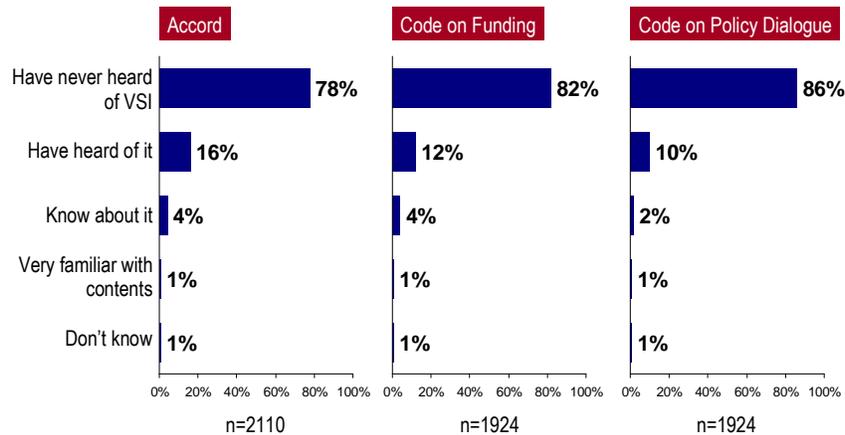
Source: VSI Focus groups and Key Informant Interviews, 2008

2.2 AWARENESS OF ACCORD AND CODES

About one in five voluntary organizations have heard of the Accord that the federal government and voluntary sector signed in December 2000. Again, those who are aware most often indicated having heard of the document, but not knowing much about its contents. There is a slightly lower level of awareness of the Code of Good Practice on Funding among voluntary organizations and the Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue (17 per cent and 13 per cent respectively indicate awareness of the Codes).

Awareness of Accord and Codes

“In December 2000, the federal government and the voluntary sector signed ... that sets out values and principles of working together. To what extent are you aware of the ... and its contents?”



EKOS Research Associates Inc.

Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

Registered charities are more likely than non-profits to be aware of all the VSI-sponsored documents – the Accord and the Codes of Good Practice (Table 2.2). Awareness of all documents is also somewhat higher among organizations that have had dealings with the federal government and those that have used other VSI-sponsored tools or resources. In terms of substantive area of concern, health-related and social service organizations indicate greater levels of awareness of the Accords and the Codes compared to other types of organizations. Awareness of the Accord (but not the Codes) is higher among voluntary organizations located in the Prairies.

Table 2.2: Awareness of Accord and Codes*

	Accord and Contents (%)	Codes of Good Practice on Funding (%)	Codes of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue (%)
Status			
Registered charity	27	24	18
Non-profit	14	11	7
Relationship with Federal Government			
Yes	28	22	17
No	14	12	8
Area			
Arts and Culture	18	16	12
Education	20	16	13
Health Services	29	25	22
Social Services	29	21	18
Community Benefits (e.g., sports)	20	13	9
Religious organizations, spiritual services	17	20	11
Region			
BC	20	16	11
Alberta	19	17	16
Prairies	28	21	14
Ontario	23	20	15
Quebec	14	12	9
Atlantic	19	16	12

* Percentage reflects those organizations who have heard of VSI.

As another layer of analysis, the survey responses for the roughly 175 most involved with the federal government and/or familiar with the VSI were isolated. Naturally (and by definition) this segment is quite a bit more apt to say they are familiar with the VSI (26 per cent know about or are very familiar with the Accord, 23 per cent have the same level of familiarity with the Code on Funding and 16 per cent said the same about their level of familiarity with the Code on Policy Dialogue). That said, considering that this group represents the 12 per cent of the sector that work with the federal government and are aware of the VSI, the level of familiarity with these core VSI documents is not high.

Again, key sector representatives were not surprised by the modest levels of awareness of the Accord and Codes. While acknowledging that the Accord and Codes were initially produced and distributed with enthusiasm and promise, evidence based on feedback from the focus groups points to the conclusion that there is little current momentum around these documents. The profile and utilization of the documents within the sector and their integration within the federal government are perceived to have been diluted with the end of the VSI, and with changes in federal leadership. Still, there were some instances where the Accord and Codes were noted to have informed other processes and initiatives, for example, at the provincial level (for example, *Framework For Collaboration Between the Government of Alberta and the*

Alberta Nonprofit/Voluntary Sector (2007); *Blueprint for action: Building a foundation for self-sufficiency* (2007), Report of the Premier's Task Force on the Community Non-Profit Sector in New Brunswick).

- *"The Codes were big and had the potential to be huge. We could have done more work politically to get it rooted. Although I still see TB actions being built on the foundations of the Codes...When you look at the Blue Ribbon Panel, some recommendations you can tell they had been influenced and were aware of the Accord and Codes."*
- *"Certainly there were a lot of learnings and a lot of the language in the Accord and Codes is appearing in the documents coming out of the provinces and territories. In fact, phrase by phrase talking about recognizing the value of the voluntary sector, acknowledging the important relationship between the sector and government and their respective roles in building community and civil society."*
- *"There is a more fundamental problem. I don't think there was really ever any bureaucratic support from the get go. It had a lot of political support from some key individuals within the bureaucracy but overall it simply didn't have support from the civil service to ensure the ongoing sustainability of certain products such as the accord." "Lack of continuity and over time the level of responsibility was bumped downward. Thus, lack of continuity of federal representation was a great challenge."*
- *"It's an open question in my mind whether government officials with a connection to policy use the Code on Policy. There was more awareness when they were published.... I don't have a sense that it's infused the organizational culture (of government), or that it's used by the sector... This is quite disappointing. It's a tool, you use it or you lose it. The risk (of not using the Accord and Codes) is that it just becomes another document."*

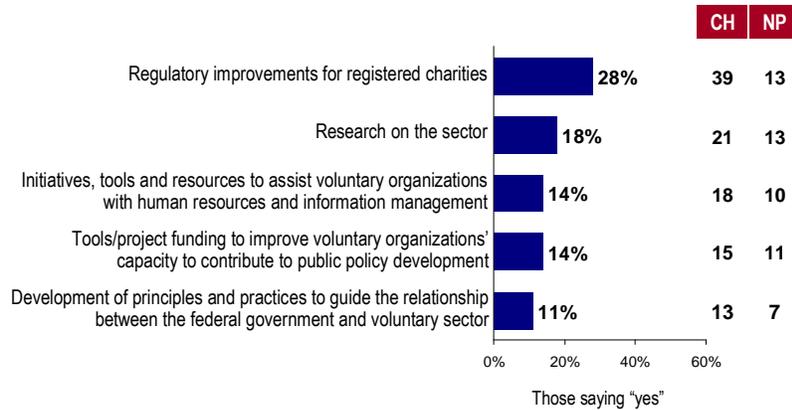
Source: VSI Focus groups and Key Informant Interviews, 2008

2.3 AWARENESS OF SPECIFIC VSI ACTIVITIES

As indicated above, because the VSI was never branded as an Initiative which encompassed a variety of activities and projects, the survey examined awareness of the VSI through organizations' familiarity with some of its key initiatives. In a question prompting recall of some of the specific initiatives of the VSI, voluntary organizations are most likely to have heard about regulatory improvements for registered charities (about one in three). This is followed by research on the sector (one in five). Initiatives to assist voluntary organizations with human resources and information technology management capacity, public policy development and the development of principles/practices to guide the relationship between the federal government and voluntary sector have lower levels of awareness (between 11 and 14 per cent).

Aware of Specific Initiatives of VSI

“Do you recall hearing anything about any of the following types of VSI initiatives?”



n=2110

Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

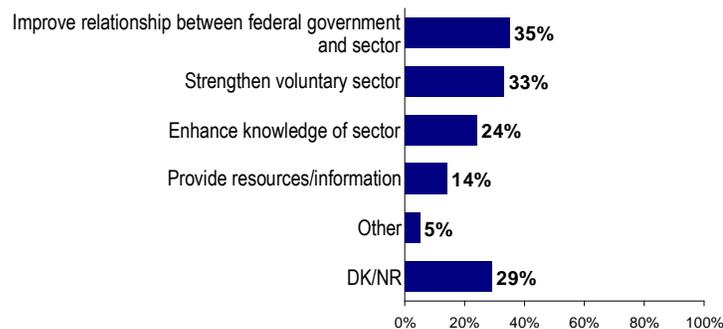
Across the various VSI-sponsored initiatives, registered charities are more apt to indicate awareness than non-profits, as noted in the chart above (and the gap is widest for reported awareness of regulatory reform). Awareness of the various VSI-sponsored initiatives is also higher among organizations with a relationship with the federal government, including funded organizations and organizations that have used a VSI-sponsored tool or resource. Among that narrow 12 per cent segment of the sector that is the most involved with government awareness on each of these ranges between 54 and 63 per cent. Awareness increases with the size of the organization for all VSI-sponsored initiatives (with the exception of human resources/information management tools and resources). Religious organizations consistently indicate less awareness of VSI-sponsored initiatives, whereas organizations in the arts, health and social services sub-sectors tend to be more aware (again the exception being for human resources/information management tools and resources). Awareness of regulatory reform is higher in the Prairies, while organizations in Quebec indicate lower awareness of human resources and information management tools and resources.

2.4 PERCEIVED PURPOSE OF THE VSI

Organizations that indicated being aware of the VSI were asked about their understanding of the purpose of the VSI (what it was designed to achieve, including intended benefits of the VSI for the voluntary sector and for the federal government). The most frequently mentioned purpose was to initiate or improve the relationship between the voluntary sector and the federal government (mentioned by 35 per cent of respondents); that is, to enhance awareness by both sides of the other's issues and challenges, bridge gaps in understanding and strengthen relationships. A second purpose of the VSI, according to organizations, was to strengthen the voluntary sector itself, by building capacity to work with government and with other organizations in the sector, fostering a sense of identity/cohesiveness within the sector and supporting the volunteer base (mentioned by 33 per cent). One in four respondents (24 per cent) viewed the purpose of the VSI as acknowledging and promoting the value and contribution of the sector through activities such as research on the sector and raising the profile/credibility of the sector. Fourteen per cent of organizations mentioned developing and providing resources and information for and about the voluntary sector (e.g., volunteers and volunteer management, best practices). Almost one in three respondents could not provide a response (higher among organizations that indicated low levels of familiarity with the Initiative or did not report using any of the VSI-sponsored tools or resources tested).

Purpose of the VSI

**“Based on your understanding, what was the primary purpose of the VSI/
what was it designed to achieve, including intended benefits of the VSI for the
voluntary sector and for the federal government?”**



3. SECTOR-GOVERNMENT RELATIONSHIP

3.1 PERCEIVED CHANGE IN SECTOR-GOVERNMENT RELATIONSHIP

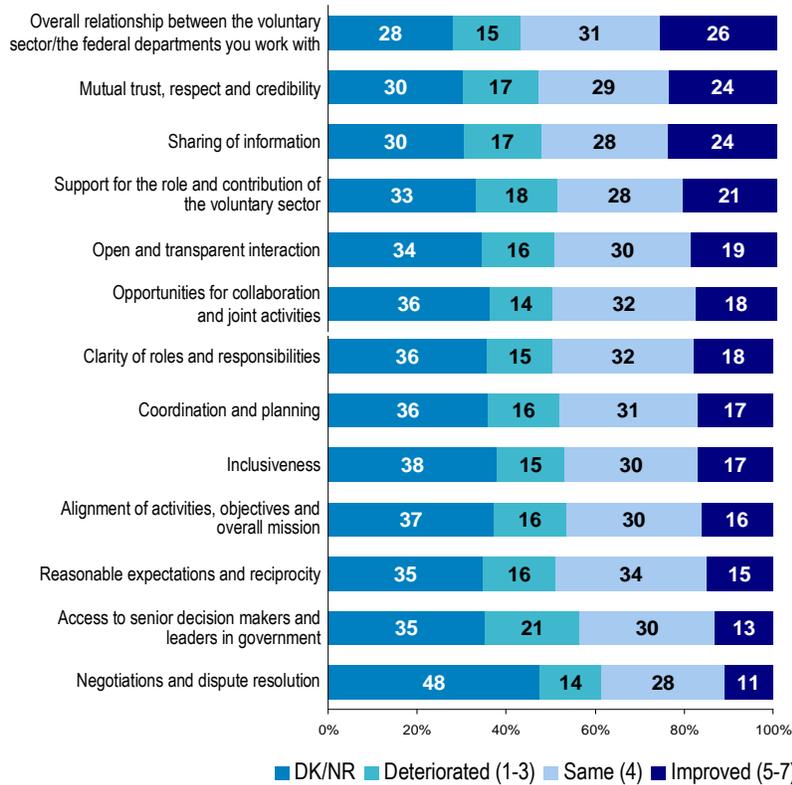
Voluntary organizations (with dealings with the federal government) provide generally tepid responses about the extent and direction of change in the relationship between the voluntary sector and the federal government, with one in four or fewer saying that there have been positive changes in the relationship between 2000 and 2005 on any one of the aspects tested.

One in four respondents (26 per cent) say that their overall relationship with the federal departments that they work with improved between 2000 and 2005. Areas where voluntary organizations were somewhat more likely to indicate an improvement were in sharing of information, government's support for the role and contribution of the voluntary sector and mutual trust, respect and credibility (between 21 and 24 per cent saying these aspects improved). Voluntary organizations were less likely to indicate that the relationship between the sector and the federal government had improved in terms of access to senior decision makers and leaders in government and in the area of negotiations and dispute resolution (13 and 11 per cent respectively indicated an improvement).

Note that the responses to the sector-government relationship battery include a substantial proportion of 'don't know/no response'. This could be due to a variety of reasons, including a sporadic or tenuous relationship with the federal government or respondents' lack of experience during the period under question (2000 to 2005). In any case, when only valid responses to the questions are considered, the proportions shift considerably. For example, one in three voluntary organizations (26 per cent) said that the overall relationship between the voluntary sector and the federal departments they work with improved between 2000 and 2005. A similar proportion (31 per cent) indicate the relationship stayed about the same and under one in five (15 per cent) say the relationship deteriorated.

Change in Government-Sector Relationship

“As far as you know, what is the extent and direction of change in the relationship between the voluntary sector and the federal government between 2000 and 2005 in the following areas:”



EKOS Research Associates Inc.

n=1360

Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

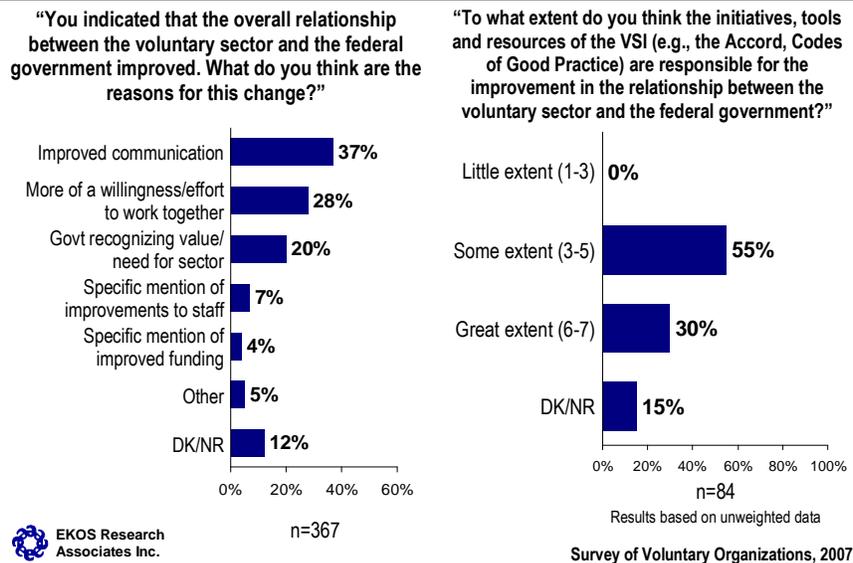
Considering sub-group differences, those who indicated awareness of the VSI or used one or more VSI-sponsored tools or resources provide a consistently more positive assessment (by 10 to 20 percentage points in most cases; so for most elements the impact is rated as positive by 30 to 45 per cent of this segment) of the change in the relationship between the sector and the federal government. Registered charities are more likely than non-profits to indicate that their relationship with the federal government had improved in areas related to sharing of information and negotiations and dispute resolution. The smallest voluntary organizations (<\$100 thousand in revenue) are less apt than other organizations to see an improvement in the overall relationship, opportunities for collaboration and joint activities, and inclusiveness.

3.2 REASONS FOR IMPROVEMENT/ ATTRIBUTION TO VSI

Voluntary organizations that reported an improvement in the overall relationship between the voluntary sector and federal government were asked about the reasons for the change. The most commonly reported reason was improved communication (which is itself attributed to use of technology – e.g., Internet), as well as increased opportunities for contact, better information sharing, greater clarity in definitions and guidelines) (37 per cent). Three in ten organizations cited a greater willingness/effort on the part of government and the sector to work together (28 per cent) (higher among those that indicated greater involvement with the VSI at 47 per cent (not shown)). These efforts are supported when there is individual leadership/understanding and continuity in the relationship.

Finally, one in five organizations believe there is greater government recognition of the value and contribution of the voluntary sector (at least partly in response to the more effective efforts of the sector in this area) and government’s reliance on the sector to achieve objectives. When asked about the role of the VSI specifically (those that were aware of the Initiative), on the unweighted sample, three in ten say that the initiatives, tools and resources of the VSI (e.g., the Accord, Codes of Good Practice) are responsible for the improvement in the relationship between the voluntary sector and the federal government to a great extent. Another 55 per cent indicated that the VSI had at least some influence on this improvement.

Reasons for Improvement in Relationship/ Attribution to VSI



In the focus groups and key informant interviews, participants were of the view that the VSI had a positive impact on sector-government relationships, at least initially. The work of the Joint Tables and the projects and activities that followed signalled a commitment to a spirit of collaboration leading to increased trust. In some areas of sector-government relationships that had been characterized by wariness (e.g., between the sector and the charities regulator), the opportunities for collaboration leading up to and during the VSI were very effective in dispelling myths and misconceptions, and moving this relationship in a more positive direction. For other departments, the relationships built during the VSI increased the degree of comfort and familiarity between the sectors, paving the way for fruitful exchanges. Still, these participants were mindful of the fact that some of the survey respondents and they themselves had also observed a weakening in some aspects of the sector-government relationship for a variety of other reasons (e.g., due to the government's accountability agenda, turnover in key personnel, lack of senior level participation of federal officials in the latter years of the VSI, challenges within the bureaucracy to obtain and integrate the input of the sector into policy development).

- *"I think a number of the public servants are still now operating with a greater knowledge base than they had before the VSI started and that is all we can hope for. They know enough to ask the questions. They have the data. And some still remain in contact"... "There are good things going on. They'll talk to you. They'll phone and ask. They understand that service delivery is being done by autonomous organizations."*
- *"Some of the knowledge gained was not formal...we shattered myths. People suddenly began to understand the issues that government had to live with, the accountability issues. "*
- *"Now, I would say that awareness (in the sector) is fairly low. But at the time when we were meeting I think that there was a fair excitement at the potential, and the audaciousness of pulling together the federal government and the sector to work together jointly. I think that there was a fair awareness in the sector. But, now, I think that the time has passed where most people won't demonstrate much awareness. They will know that some things have happened but they won't connect the dots (to the VSI)." "I don't think that people credit anything once its in place....you forget why things happened once it's happened. We lose our sense of history and connection".*
- *"There weren't really that many things that come out of it that are still sustaining and out there. And there are few I'd say the Accord and funding) where.... because of the cynicism around the fact that the federal government departments never even signed up to it or never behaved (accordingly)...the sector (considered it)...a waste of time It never had legs.*
- *"The Charities Directorate folks are unbelievable in terms of continued sustained effort to have a relationship ... the change has been phenomenal. Finance is doing this more often too. They're making phones calls. HRSDC, Heritage are good at making phone calls. But the people we deal with don't have the influence they used to have"... "They have smaller pots of funding to satisfy innumerable requests"... " There are more people feeling more comfortable in making the phone call, but I'm seeing it being kept informal and keeping it under the radar screen."*

- *“Senior level discussions may be going on in sub-sectors but not across sectors...senior discussions aren’t going on. What is going on, further down in the departments where officials have a need, there is more tactical stuff going on, such as funding that has been going on and is still going on... So, more tactical such things, getting infrastructure in place, but not high level dialogue and partnership. That overall sense of relationship is not there.”*
- *“For the groups who knew about the VSI, it probably had a slightly positive effect, however, the accountability agenda and the VSI never grappled with this, had a much greater negative effect than the VSI had a positive effect. I think the relationship has gotten worse for a variety of reasons that have to do with accountability, not really addressing the big regulatory issues, the funding cuts. I would say the sector is slightly worse now than it was in the late 1990s.”*
- *“There aren’t any opportunities for meetings anymore and those were the cornerstones of the movement (the VSI).”*
- *“The big gap is the VSI didn’t engage enough, high enough across enough departments. It was too focused and too narrow. So that afterwards it didn’t have enough legs. We weren’t engaging with enough of the federal government that this all made sense and came together. We also came down about three levels. We started with Deputies, and then we ended up way down at training levels. So, when we reached agreement, we thought we were reaching agreement with the federal government, but actually we were reaching agreement with some individual with some individuals at the Director level. That didn’t institutionalize what we were doing within the federal government.”*

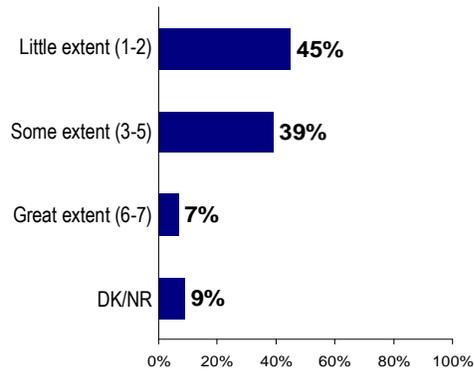
Source: *VSI Focus groups and Key Informant Interviews, 2008*

3.3 LEVERAGING OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

A relationship with the federal government has a minimal impact on organizations' ability to leverage relationships with other levels of government. A small proportion (seven per cent) indicated that their relationship with the federal government promoted or facilitated a relationship with municipal, regional or provincial governments. Some impact was noted by about four in ten organizations, while another four in ten indicated little impact.

Leveraging of Relationships

“To what extent has your relationship with the federal government promoted or facilitated a relationship with other levels of government (i.e., municipal/regional/provincial)?”

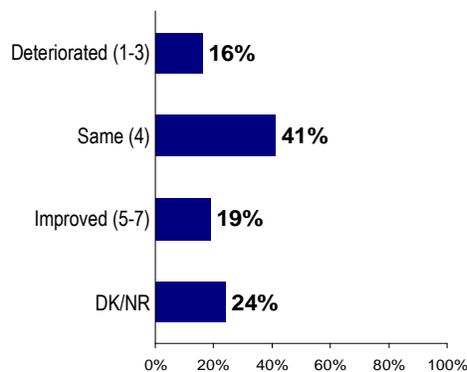


3.4 PERCEIVED IMPACT OF VSI ON FEDERAL OFFICIALS

One of the objectives of the VSI was to improve federal capacity to deal with the voluntary sector. From the perspective of organizations in the voluntary sector (who have a relationship with the federal government), this has occurred to only a limited degree. While almost one in five say the ability of senior federal officials to cultivate and manage networking between the government and the voluntary sector improved between 2000 and 2005, a similar proportion believe this ability deteriorated during this timeframe. Four in ten organizations saw no change during the period.

Change in Federal Officials' Ability to Manage Networks

"Thinking about the period between 2000 and 2005, do you think that the ability of senior officials in the federal government to cultivate and manage networking between the government and voluntary sector deteriorated, improved or stayed the same?"



n=892

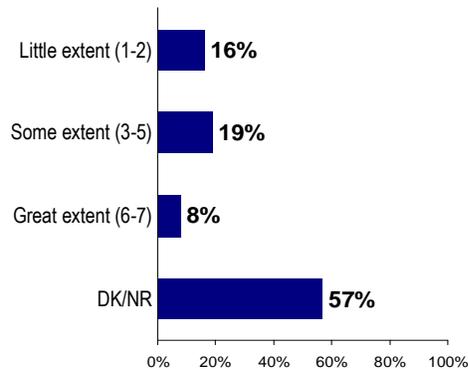
Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

Among organizations that were involved with the VSI, one in three say that there was an improvement in senior government officials' ability to cultivate and manage networking (not shown).

Among those organizations with a relationship with the federal government and familiar with the Accord and the Codes of Good Practice, these documents are generally perceived to be little-used among federal officials. A small proportion – six per cent – say the values, principles and practices of the Accord and Codes are incorporated to a great extent in federal dealings with their organization. One in five said to some extent. Note that, even among these organizations with a relationship with the federal government and awareness of the VSI, six in ten didn't know/didn't respond to this item.

Use of Accord and Codes by Federal Officials

“To what extent have the federal officials with whom you have worked incorporated the values, principles and practices of the Accord and Codes of Good Practice in the way they deal with your organization/the voluntary sector?”



n=1027

Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

As mentioned above, the lack of visibility of the Accord and Codes within the federal government was confirmed by the perceptions of participants in the focus groups who observe little current profile or utilization of these documents. Some Key sector representatives were also of the opinion that while federal officials continue to consult with and seek the input of the voluntary sector for program and policy, at present this is not an energetic or robust undertaking.

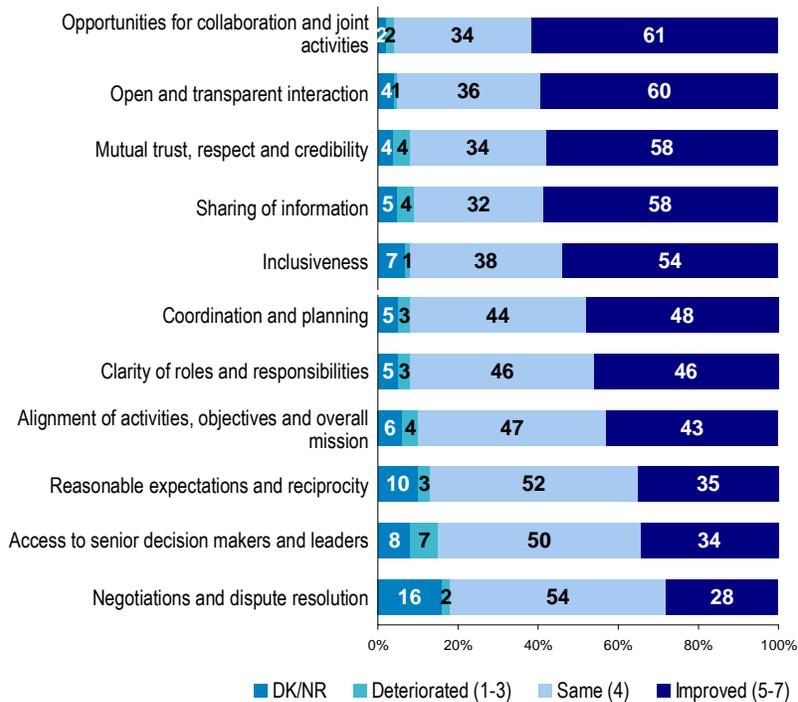
4. INTRASECTORAL RELATIONSHIPS-NETWORKS

4.1 PERCEIVED CHANGE IN INTERSECTORAL RELATIONSHIPS

Several items on the survey examined organizations' relationships and networks with other organizations in the voluntary sector. On a set of attributes describing their relationship with other voluntary organizations, just over one half of the most involved voluntary organizations who have a relationship with the federal government and who are aware of the VSI indicated improvements in opportunities for collaboration and joint activities, mutual trust, respect and credibility, sharing of information, and open and transparent interaction between 2000 and 2005. (Note that results are based on the unweighted sample.) Similar to the results regarding relationships with government, access to senior decision-makers and leaders is less apt to be seen as an area where there has been improvement. Reasonable expectations and reciprocity and negotiation and dispute resolution are the least affected of the areas (although the proportion of 'don't know/no response' is higher for these aspects).

Change in Intersectoral Relationships

“Please rate the extent and direction of change in your organization’s relationship with other organizations in the voluntary sector between 2000 and 2005 in following areas:”



Results based on unweighted data



n=134

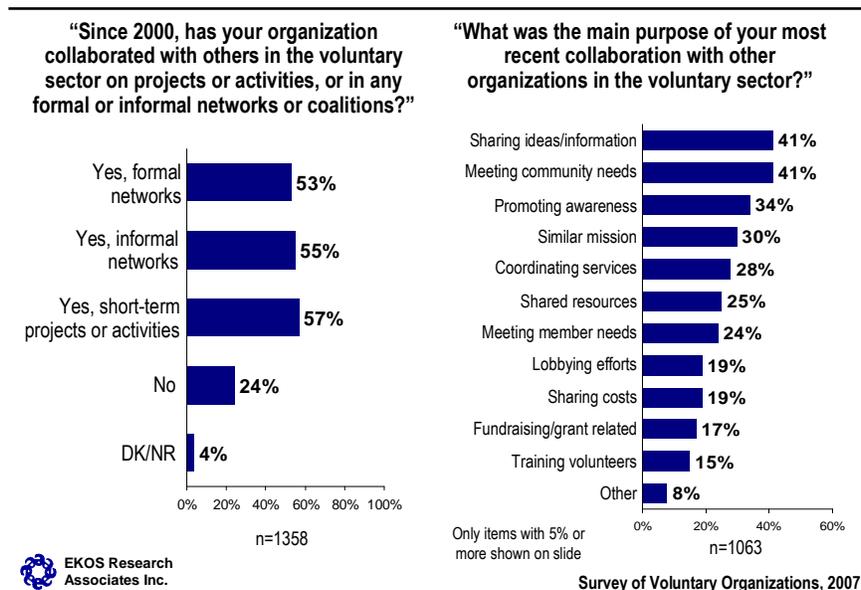
Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

In general, voluntary organizations that indicated greater engagement with the federal government through a funding or other relationship, and those that indicated awareness of the VSI or use of VSI-sponsored products provided more positive ratings of the change in their relationship with other voluntary organizations. In particular, among the fairly narrow segment of the sector (12 per cent) that is the most involved with government, improvements are noted across the board by 45 to 75 per cent of organizations; typically showing a 15 to 20 percentage point increase over the results shown by the overall sample.

4.2 PARTICIPATION IN INTRASECTORAL NETWORKS/COLLABORATIONS

Of the voluntary organizations in the sample that have some involvement with government, three-quarters of voluntary organizations have collaborated with other voluntary organizations, whether in informal networks or short-term projects or activities (six in ten organizations) or formal networks (just over one in two organizations). Collaborations are most often undertaken to share ideas/information or to better/more effectively meet community needs (both at 41 per cent).

Participation in Networks



Organizations with a funding or other type of relationship with the federal government are more likely to have participated in collaboration with another voluntary organization since 2000. Likelihood of participating in collaboration also increases with organization size. Organizations that indicated awareness of the VSI or VSI-sponsored documents and those who have used at least one of the VSI tools or resources are also more apt to have participated in collaboration with another voluntary organization. The 12 per cent of the sector that is most involved with government and the VSI are considerably more apt to cite networks, with 76 per cent citing formal networks, 82 per cent citing informal networks and 79 per cent citing short-term projects.

Registered charities are more likely than non-profits to indicate partnering for a number of purposes, including coordinated service delivery and fundraising, whereas non-profits are more apt to partner for lobbying reasons. Organizations that are users of at least one of the mentioned VSI tools or resources indicate a greater variety of types of collaborations than non-users, for example in coordination of

service delivery, shared resources/facilities. Organizations in Quebec also indicate a great variety of types of collaborations than other regions.

When asked what types of groups they collaborated with, respondents provided a wide variety of responses, the most common being social services related (15 per cent); other voluntary/non-profit (generic) (13 per cent); arts and culture (12 per cent); community service (13 per cent); education groups and churches or church umbrella organizations (both at nine per cent). Registered charities, organizations with significant awareness of the VSI and those that have used at least one of the mentioned tools or resources of the VSI are more likely than organizations not aware of the VSI and non-users to have collaborated with a variety of voluntary organizations. Considering substantive areas of the organization, the response patterns indicate that organizations are more apt to partner with other voluntary organizations within a similar substantive area: arts organizations are more apt to partner with other arts, recreation or cultural groups, education groups with other education organizations and health organizations with other health-related groups.

The most important impacts or benefits of collaborations for voluntary organizations (according to the most involved with government in the sector, using the unweighted sample, include sharing of information (29 per cent) and resources/skills (22 per cent); and increasing the reach of services (21 per cent).

Impact of Networking

“What has the impact or benefit of collaborations with other voluntary organizations been for your organization?”



Results based on unweighted data



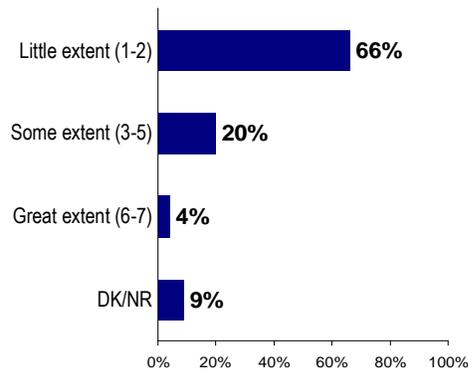
n=98

Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

The VSI is perceived to have had little impact on the formation of organizations' networks/ collaborations (seven in ten indicated little or no contribution in this area), according to the most involved organizations in the sector (based on unweighted results). A minority – four per cent – indicated a significant impact and 20 per cent reported some impact. There are few sub-group differences for this item; however, organizations that are users of VSI-sponsored tools or resources are more likely to indicate the VSI had some impact on building of the collaborations or networks in which their organization has been involved. Even that segment of the sector that is most involved with government and the VSI are only marginally more likely to attribute the collaborative changes to the VSI, with nine per cent saying that the VSI had a great deal of responsibility and 26 per cent saying that it had some.

Attribution of Collaboration to VSI

“To what extent has the VSI been responsible for building of the collaborations or the network(s) in which you are involved (for example, through the Sectoral Involvement in Departmental Policy Development program)?”



Results based on unweighted data



n=196

Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

4.3 PERCEIVED CHANGES IN SECTOR STRENGTH AND COHESIVENESS

In terms of overall strength and cohesiveness of the sector, one-third of voluntary organizations indicate they have seen a positive change over the period 2000 to 2005. Another one-third of organizations believe the strength of the voluntary sector stayed the same during this time, while just over one in ten believe it deteriorated. One in five is not sure.

In terms of individual elements of sector strength and cohesiveness, organizations were most apt to believe that recognition by Canadians of the existence and value of the voluntary sector improved between 2000 and 2005 (38 per cent say to a great extent) and that information about the voluntary sector improved during this time (33 per cent). Respondents were less apt to report a positive trend in their sense

of belonging to the larger voluntary sector and fewer than one in five believe that there has been an improvement in the effectiveness with which the voluntary sector is able to collectively engage the government on an issue (although one in three say that they cannot comment on this).

Changes in Sector Strength and Cohesiveness

“Please rate the extent and direction of change in the following between 2000 and 2005?”



EKOS Research Associates Inc.

n=2110

Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

Non-profits are slightly less likely than registered charities to indicate an improvement across the various indicators of voluntary sector strength and cohesiveness. Organizations that have a funding or other type of relationship with the federal government provide a more positive rating of the evolution in sector strength and cohesiveness. Voluntary organizations that are aware of the VSI and/or have used at least one VSI-sponsored tool or resource are also more apt to rate the indicators of sector strength and cohesiveness as improved. Size of organization has an uneven effect: larger organizations are more likely to say that the ability of the sector to collectively engage the government on issues has improved, while the smallest organizations (<\$100 thousand) are less likely to have seen a positive impact on their sense of belonging to the sector as a whole. Organizations in Quebec are more likely than those in other regions to have seen an improvement in their sense of belonging to the sector between 2000 and 2005.

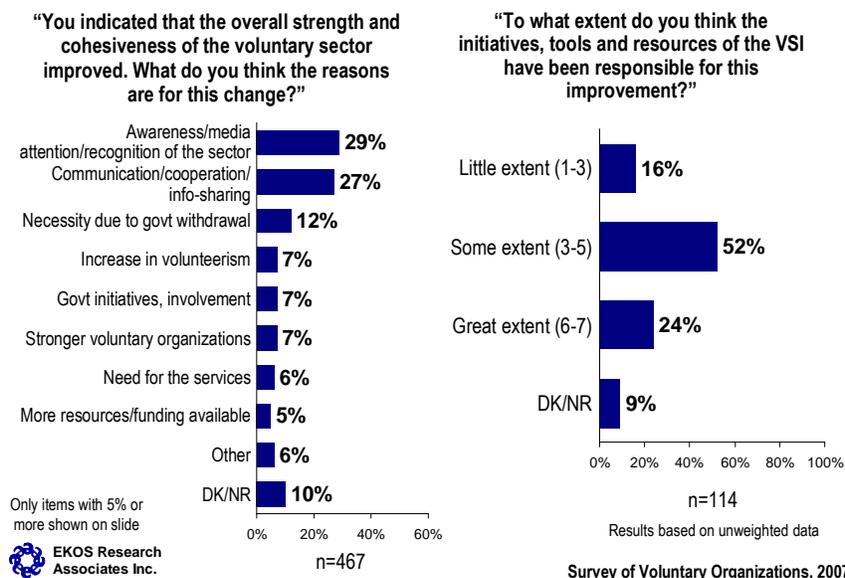
Isolating only that 12 per cent segment of the sector that is most involved with the government and VSI, results are considerably more positive with 57 to 61 per cent citing an improvement in overall strength, recognition of the sector by Canadians and information about the sector. Another 45 per cent cite improvements in the sense of belonging and 35 per cent are also positive about the effectiveness of engaging the government.

4.4 REASONS FOR IMPROVEMENT/ ATTRIBUTION TO VSI

Among those that observed an improvement in the overall strength and cohesiveness of the sector, the primary reasons for this change were most commonly cited to be greater awareness/recognition of the value and contribution of the sector in the media (29 per cent) and increased communication/cooperation among voluntary sector organizations themselves owing in good part to the increased availability of technology and Internet access, and a more collaborative spirit among organizations to achieve mutual objectives (27 per cent). According to 12 per cent of organizations, the voluntary sector has become stronger by necessity, due to government withdrawal and restricted funding in some areas that have pushed organizations to fill gaps and to share resources. About one in ten indicate improvements in the voluntary sector to be the results of increasing availability and quality of volunteers (itself attributed to an appreciation of the need for/benefits of volunteering and the aging population which has brought many retirees to the voluntary sector) and the same proportion cite government initiatives such as the VSI which have brought organizations together. A stronger, more active and vocal sector, with stronger leadership was also cited by seven per cent as a reason for increased strength and cohesiveness of the sector.

Among those who are involved with government and aware of the VSI, as well as having observed an improvement in the strength and cohesiveness of the sector, one in four feel the Initiative has contributed to this improvement to a great extent, and another one-half to a moderate extent (based on unweighted results). Even among the most involved in the sector the result is fairly similar with 30 per cent ascribing a large role to the VSI.

Reasons for Cohesiveness in Sector and Attribution to VSI



Among focus group participants and key informants, the impacts on the VSI on intrasectoral collaborations and cohesion were viewed as uneven – with some content areas (e.g., health) and regions (e.g., Alberta) having been quite effective in building collaborative networks and strengthened the sector's identity as a sector. Still, there is reportedly more work to be done in this area. According to participants, a key challenge for the sector is the heterogeneity of organizations and that most sector organizations are preoccupied with “doing”, rather than grappling with the broader issues affecting the voluntary sector. Smaller, more tightly resourced voluntary organizations often simply don't have the capacity, time or resources to participate in broader umbrella groupings or sector-wide initiatives.

- *“What some hoped the VSI would do was to change the nature of the relationship between the voluntary sector and the federal government in a way that could be sustained over time. There would be a deeper relationship and more institutionalized processes and mechanisms, and that they would survive beyond the VSI. My sense is now there are fewer opportunities for relationships, connections than during the peak of the VSI. We are probably no further ahead and might even be worse off than in 1995 than when the exercise began. ...I think things would have been much worse without the VSI. I do believe if we hadn't had these candid forums things may have been much worse and these mitigated some of the worst excesses of the clamping down.”*
- *“There's a lot more trust in capacity building organizations of the sector and sector-serving organizations, because of the evolution and work of organizations that evolved since the VSI...being able to deal at the contextual level and cross-cutting sector level versus the sub-sector level”... “There is more than there was at the beginning of the VSI, but... there's still a lot of work to be done... “The reality is it doesn't matter because we are perceived by everyone else as a sector and so we have to act like one. We are talking more, we aren't talking enough.”...” The VSI contributed by helping to create an environment of collaboration amongst organizations in the sector.”*
- *“In the voluntary health sector there seems to be a much greater willingness to work together and I think part of that could be attributed, in part, to the work of VSI and the Voluntary Sector Round Table, but only part.”*
- *“One of the off-shoots of the voluntary sector round table initiative, which to me would be one of the most critical ones outside of what it created, but the most critical thing it did create, was the need to create provincial and regional groups like us. It has bottomed off, but some of us are stronger than we ever were. To me what is going on in Alberta and other provinces is an indirect spin-off of the model we were trying to create...All of these came out as people trying to say this is very good, but most of the action is actually provincial and local for the voluntary sector, so let's try to figure out how we can create within our infrastructure at the provincial and regional level. They bottled what we did or spun off some of their own models. It created an initiative that tried to organize the sector at the different levels, not just the national/federal level. That might be as important a spin off as the HR council or the two surveys.”*
- *“One thing, a really important thing that came out of the VSI, we didn't know we had a collective agenda. The VSI gave us an opportunity to talk about our collective agenda in terms of what are the things that most impact charities with CRA, that most impact charities on funding, in terms of human resources. “*
- *“The research products were extremely useful because they gave the sector the opportunity to tell its story better. There were countervailing pressures though, the*

accountability agenda, so it probably raised awareness to some extent, but not much among the general public, and at the political level, it probably had a very slight impact if any. Among voluntary organizations....I think there is still questioning about is it a sector. The VSI has both positive and negative effects...it had some positive effect through the research tools, the negative effects were that it took what had started to be an effective organization through the VSR....morphed into the Forum and then when funding was cut to the Forum it inadvertently destabilized some of the leadership in the sector.”

- “The VSI contribution was really in framing some of the common aspects that cut across the sector...There is an ever present reality: people operate on a day-to-day basis within silos. Government programs and funding envelopes are organized vertically. To do horizontal work is a huge challenge. Many of the champions were exhausted, burned out and not replaced.”
- “It does become a voluntary sector driven responsibility. I don’t see it is something that is a responsibility of the government to be involved in that. I think it is the voluntary sector that has to figure out and sort out the issue of who and how do you represent a sector that is as diverse and disparate as the voluntary sector is... This really needs to take place at a provincial level. At the end of the day, relatively few engage directly with the federal government. The largest proportion deal with municipal or primarily with provincial government.”
- The Accord to guide the relationship was created but some government departments would even acknowledge that such a thing existed. So right from Day One some departments didn’t acknowledge that there were guidelines or practices to be followed. Even from the day it was written some weren’t on board”. “How can we get the provinces to sign up for this when your co-department down the road won’t acknowledge that the Code exists?”
- “Awareness of the sector as a sector is hard to measure. I suspect there was some modest increase in the number of people who came to understand that their organization was part of something bigger. There probably a greater increase in understanding on the part of federal government officials. There were revelations...people were not aware of the number of departments that engaged the voluntary sector.”
- The environment played a role as well, with the whole accountability thing. It changed how people were treated and it wasn’t just the amount of money, but the amount of reporting requirements, and how and people were being treated like children. We had people in the field telling “look things are getting worse, not better. While you guys are out there having meetings with your government contacts in Ottawa, we’re getting clobbered - demands are getting worse, not better”.
- “The VSI helped to create the habit of collaborating in the sector”. The VSI and Roundtable created an atmosphere of collaboration and if you didn’t collaborate your peers in the sector would apply pressure to collaborate. You got used to doing it that way”.

Source: VSI Focus groups and Key Informant Interviews, 2008

A reported unintended (and negative) impact of the VSI has been the withering of a sector-wide organization that was in place prior to the Initiative. The Voluntary Sector Roundtable, whose members included senior sector leaders, was dissolved by the sector during the VSI as being redundant. The organization (or similar) was never resurrected following the end of the VSI.

4.5 STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SECTOR

Strategies to ensure sustainability of gains made in networking within the sector were explored with survey respondents. Access to increased or continued support is identified most often by respondents as a necessary strategy to ensure longer term sustainability of improvements (by 26 per cent). By this, organizations indicated, for example, the availability of core/committed funding to organizations to ensure the stability of organizations and provide the necessary staff and time to seek out and participate in collaborations. Organizations also mentioned the need for ongoing funding to an Initiative such as the VSI to foster relationships within the sector and between the sector and the government. According to respondents, overarching initiatives such as the VSI are also useful to produce and update tools and resources that can be utilized by the sector as a whole. Finally, funding was recommended to support locally-based sector-serving organizations whose objective is to promote networks and alliances.

Just over one in ten organizations recommended ongoing communication within the sector (14 per cent), including continued sharing of information and resources to raise awareness about the mandate and activities of organizations and to identify opportunities for collaboration. A similar proportion (10 percent) mentioned increased communication between the federal government and voluntary organizations as a strategy to promote the effectiveness of the sector, including continued outreach to the multitude of organizations that comprise the sector, promoting access to government-sponsored tools and resources and demonstrated willingness and commitment to work with the sector.

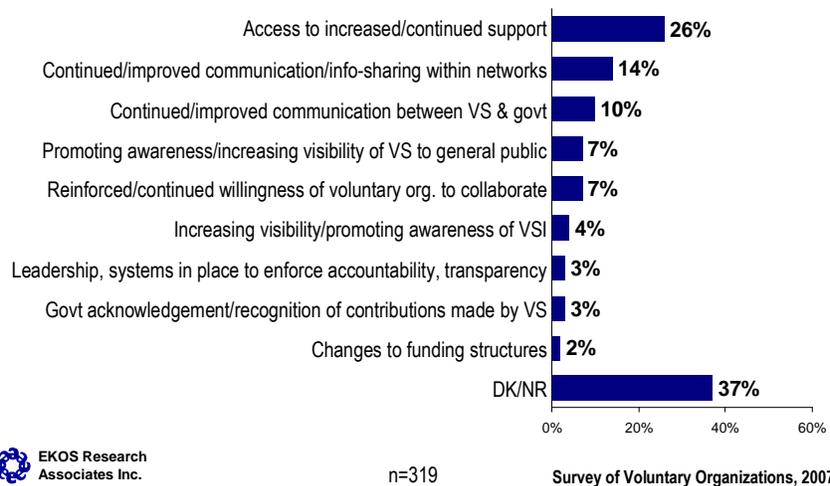
According to voluntary organizations, networking within the sector would also benefit from greater promotion and awareness of the contribution of the voluntary sector among the general public (seven per cent), more specifically as a way to enhance the volunteer base. There were some related suggestions to support the work of organizations at the national and local levels that promote volunteerism (e.g., benefits of volunteering for individuals and corporate sector and, for voluntary organizations, how to recruit, retain and reward volunteers, one-stop source for information on volunteer resources).

Finally, a handful of organizations recommended that participation in alliances and collaborations be encouraged by the federal government through policies that provide incentives/recognition of successful collaborations, raising awareness about the benefits of collaboration or as a requirement of funding (seven per cent). The remaining responses were mentioned less than five per cent of the time. Almost four in ten organizations were uncertain how networking within the sector could be sustained in the longer term.

Voluntary organizations more familiar with the VSI, or who used some element of the VSI, are much more likely to identify increased or continual support as the change required to protect gains in the longer term. The same is true of organizations who deal with government more regularly, or who have received funding. In fact, among the 12 per cent of the sector with the greatest involvement with government 53 per cent said that access to increased or continual support is required. Organizations engaged in policy or research are also more apt to identify increased or continual support as a necessity to sustain improvements.

Sustainability of Sector Networks

“What is needed to ensure that changes to networking within the sector that have been accomplished are sustainable in the longer term?”



Organizations were asked whether there were strategies that would maximize the extent to which the voluntary sector can effectively engage the federal government in a unified manner on issues of concern. While there were a variety of responses, with no clear consensus, many organizations explicitly recognized the value of a cohesive voice in the sector to drive change. Eight per cent of responses suggested providing support to the voluntary sector to undertake networking, specifically, supporting umbrella or sector-serving organizations (or establishing them where they don't exist) or creating a national coalition or national body to lobby government on common issues. A related recommendation included providing additional funding support to voluntary organizations who are now fully committed (even overwhelmed) in fulfilling their organizations' mandate to allow them resources and capacity to participate in efforts to benefit the sector (seven per cent).

Other recommendations centred on government action; that is, for government to make a sincere effort to reach out to voluntary organizations, provide more opportunities for the voluntary sector to provide input, and, generally, to be more receptive to the input of the sector. Examples of specific suggestions included: creation of a new body/central agency for the voluntary sector (e.g., Ministry of

Voluntary Sector/ombudsman/standing committee/respected champion/federal secretariat); ongoing consultations/workshops/panels/forums with organizations in the voluntary sector to disseminate information/obtain views; and facilitating sector networking through information sharing within the sector through a dedicated website/directories of organizations/information resources.

Perhaps prompted by their lack of awareness of the VSI, many respondents recommended that any further efforts by the government to connect with the voluntary sector be accompanied by a broad and intensive promotional campaign to ensure that voluntary organizations are aware of these efforts. Some related responses proposed that communication within the sector be improved. For example, communication within existing or emerging networks such as in the form of annual meetings/conventions/forums (though, again, some raised the issue of funding, warning that the voluntary organizations are themselves unlikely to be able to afford staff to organize or even attend these events on their own). Finally, there were a group of comments focused on efforts to sustain the voluntary sector overall, such as access to government information (including information about the VSI), promoting volunteerism, providing incentives (tax or otherwise) to volunteer, low cost training for staff/volunteers, addressing liability issues and generally raising the awareness of the value and importance of the sector.

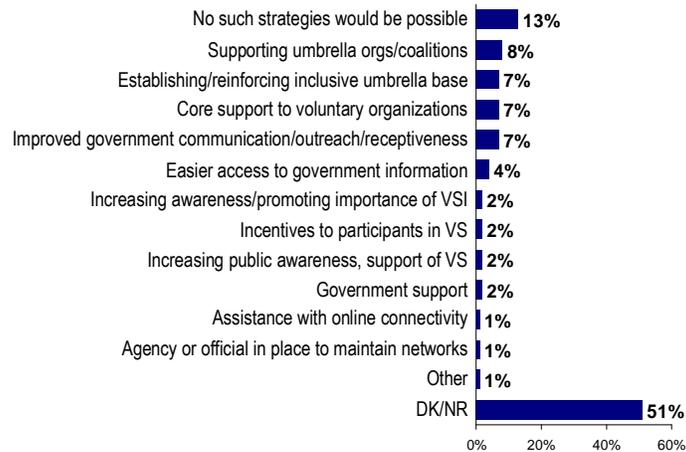
- Q: Are there other strategies for the sector...to operate as a single, unified entity and engage the federal government on shared interests and issues of concern?
- *An annual symposium of volunteer leaders to discuss issues and answers... A national body that would have a provincial presence...An increased capacity of organizations to have panel discussions/open talks among themselves... A single umbrella organization...Broad-based coalitions between agencies/ organizations that would lobby the federal government.*
 - *A very big increase in administrative funding... A very small amount of core funding is needed to maintain good staff and prioritize networks... Federal government needs to assist in supporting the development of umbrellas for the sector.*
 - *Communicating more information to organizations such as ours. ...Dialogue between organizations and government, so government can get acquainted with them and for organizations to have their voice heard.*
 - *A government-sponsored central agency... Respected champions or ombudsman...A Ministry...A Task force or standing committee of Parliament.*
 - *I'm not convinced that there is enough in the way of shared interests to require a national voice... Charities are so vast and varied in wants and needs there is not much in common among them and their relationship with federal government so it is doubtful they can all work together as a unit to engage the government.*

Source: *Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007*

Just over one in ten organizations did not believe a unifying strategy was possible or desirable given the difference of opinion in the voluntary sector and the diversity of needs and values represented in the array of voluntary organizations. However, several of these respondents who expressed reservations also acknowledged that it may be useful to have the sector unite over certain issues strategically rather than generically, or to collaborate within more narrow segments of the sector. One half of organizations did not provide a response to the question.

Strategies for Maximizing Sector Effectiveness

“Are there other strategies that could be explored for the sector, so that it could operate as a network, and maximize the extent to which it is able to represent itself as a single, unified entity, and engage the federal government on?”



EKOS Research
Associates Inc.

n=1159

Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

5. CHANGES IN CAPACITY

5.1 HUMAN RESOURCES CAPACITY

A significant proportion of voluntary organizations say the overall human resources capacity of their organization improved between 2000 and 2005 (41 per cent), just over one-third say capacity has stayed the same and about one in six indicate that their human resources capacity has deteriorated.

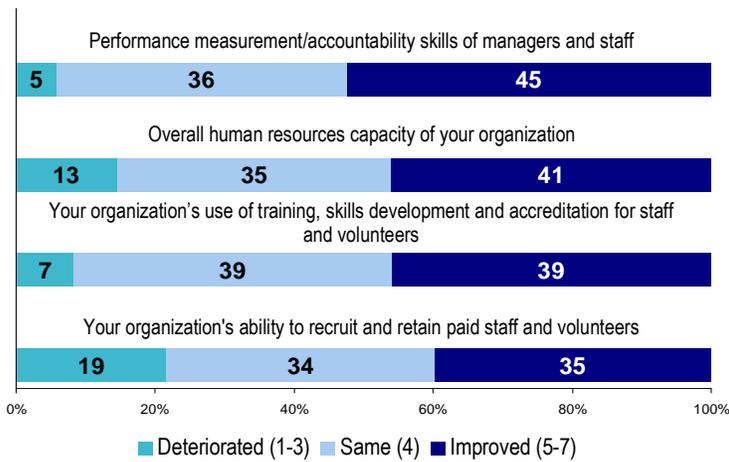
In terms of various aspects of capacity, voluntary organizations are most apt to have seen an improvement in the performance measurement/accountability skills of managers and staff, followed by their organization's use of training, skills development and accreditation for staff and volunteers. Voluntary organizations are less apt to report improvements in their organization's ability to recruit and retain paid staff and volunteers (one-third). Nineteen per cent say that their ability to recruit and retain paid staff has deteriorated over time, which is perhaps not surprising given the ever increasing labour shortage, particularly in the western provinces.

It is important to note that the portion of the sector that is more familiar with the VSI and has used some element of the VSI, is more apt to rate the trend in their HR capacity as positive over the five years between 2000 and 2005. For example, among the 12 per cent of organizations most involved with government and the VSI 41 to 57 per cent cite improvements in different areas of HR. Similarly, larger organizations are more apt to report a positive change (particularly the organizations reporting between one and five million in revenue, as opposed to the largest organizations in the sector). Organizations that have received federal funding and organizations located in Alberta are more apt to say that they are doing better in their use of training. Those reporting better recruitment and retention are more apt to be working in the policy area. In both cases (training and recruitment), it is organizations in the Prairies that are seeing a decline during that time. Organizations dealing with the public and advocacy are more apt than others to site an improvement in the capacity of their managers to address performance measurement and accountability. Registered charities are somewhat more likely than non-profit organizations to say that their HR capacity is just generally better overall.

Although changes are fairly positive in this regard, the VSI is not perceived to have had much of an influence on these improvements (see section 5.6). One half of the organizations that indicated an increase in HR capacity said that the VSI had very little influence and a very small percentage of the sector seeing a positive change believe that the VSI has played a large role. One-third believe that the VSI played some role, giving it a three, four or five on the seven point scale of influence or impact. It is important to note that organizations that are aware of and have used some element of the VSI (e.g., the website, the HR Council, etc) are more positive in their assessment of its impact on their HR capacity.

Change in Human Resources Capacity

“Please indicate the extent and direction of change in your organization’s human resources capacity between 2000 and 2005.”



 EKOS Research Associates Inc.

n=1249

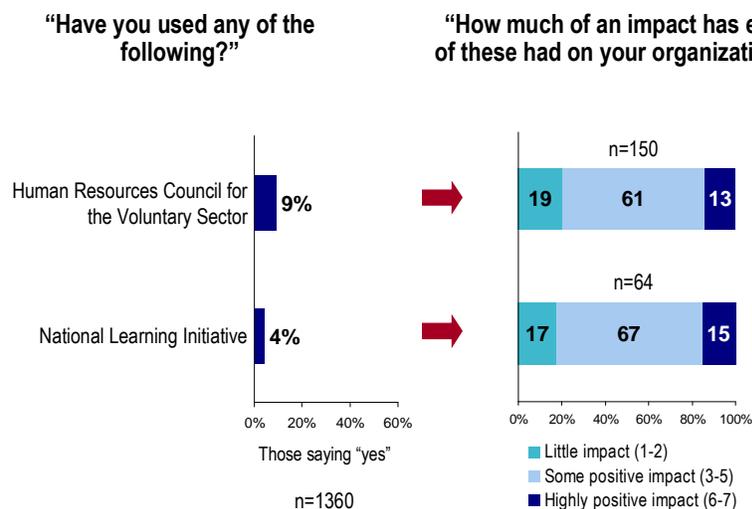
Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

5.2 USE OF VSI SPONSORED TOOLS FOR HR

Roughly one in ten organizations say that they have used the Human Resources Council for the Voluntary/Non-Profit Sector (nine per cent). Fewer have used the tools or resources of the National Learning Initiative (four per cent). As these questions did not include any detailed description of either one, this may be an issue of awareness and recognition of these two entities. Organizations most aware of the VSI are more apt to have used either or both of these. Among that portion of the sector that is most involved with government 30 per cent have used the HR council and 10 per cent have used the Learning Initiative, although degree of impact is similar to the overall results as reported by this narrower segment.

Among the few organizations reporting use of these two VSI-sponsored resources, a handful believe that it had more than a moderate impact on their organization. That said, the large majority do believe that there has been some impact on their organization.

Use of VSI-Sponsored HR Tools and Resources



EKOS Research
Associates Inc.

Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

5.3 IT CAPACITY

Voluntary organizations report the strongest and most positive changes in their IT capacity between 2000 and 2005. Almost two-thirds indicated an improvement in their organization’s overall IT capacity. Seven in ten organizations experienced improvements in the computer skills of their staff and volunteers, their information technology infrastructure, and the strategic use of technology in their organization (68 per cent on the latter). Voluntary organizations are much less likely to indicate an improvement in the availability of IT training and skills development for staff and volunteers. One in three

report an improvement, 43 per cent report no change and one in ten report a deterioration in availability of IT training and skills development.

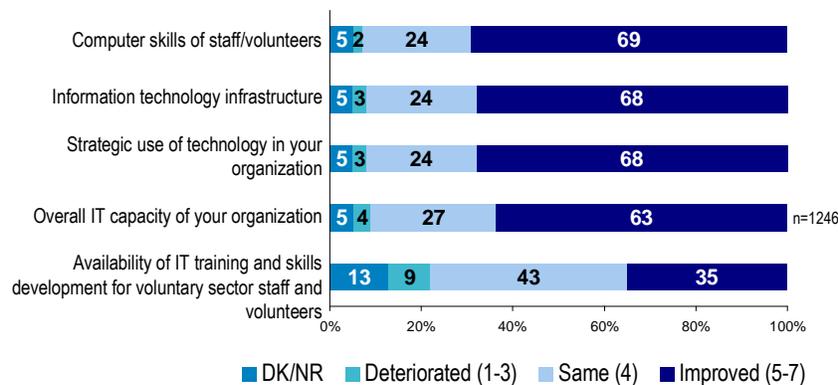
As with other areas of capacity, organizations reporting greater awareness of the VSI and use of at least some elements of it are more apt to report an improvement in IT capacity across the board. This is also the case with larger organizations in the sector, reporting at least one million in revenue, as well as those involved in public policy and advocacy. Health organizations are particularly likely (relative to those working in other fields) to report a significant improvement in information technology infrastructure. Organizations in Quebec are noticeably less likely to report an improvement than others across the country in the computer skills of staff and volunteers.

Among the one in nine most involved organizations in the sector, there is at least a ten percentage point spread in those citing improvements over the results for the sector overall. That is, 71 to 81 per cent cited improvements in all areas of IT, with the exception of availability of training and skills development for the sector (where 42 per cent cited an improvement).

Although changes are very positive in this regard, the VSI is perceived to have had very little to do with these improvements (see section 5.6). This is the area where any capacity improvement is least likely to be attributed to the VSI, likely because this area has seen such improvement between 2000 and 2005.

Change in IT Capacity

“Please rate the extent and direction of change in your organization’s information technology capacity between 2000 and 2005?”



EKOS Research Associates Inc.

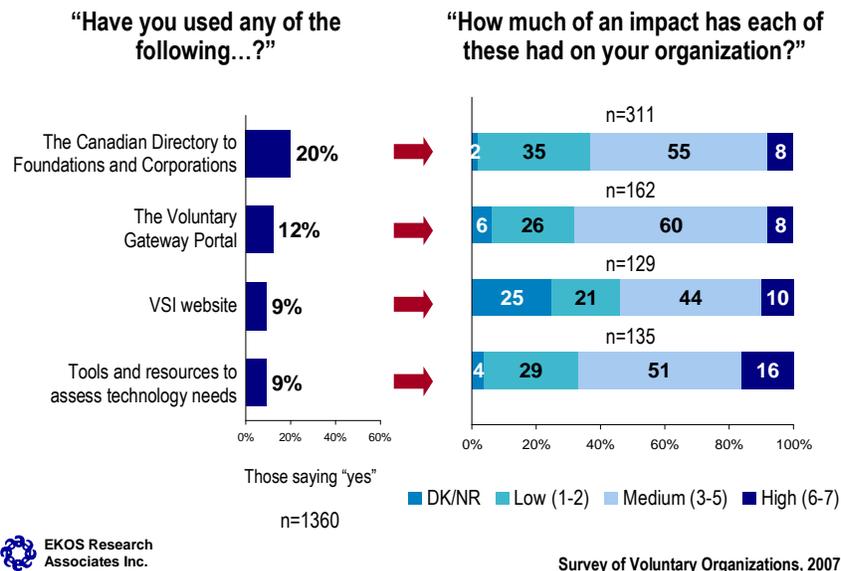
n=1360

Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

5.4 USE OF OTHER VSI-SPONSORED TOOLS

Of the VSI-sponsored tools for IT, the Canadian Directory to Foundations and Corporations is most commonly used (by 20 per cent). Other tools such as the Voluntary Gateway Portal, VSI website and tools and resources to assess technology needs were used by about one in ten. Rated impact of the tools is moderate with between 60 and 70 per cent indicating at least some impact.

Use of VSI-Sponsored IT Tools and Resources



The results are more positive among the most involved organizations in the sector, where 43 per cent have used the Directory, 38 per cent have used the website, 29 per cent have used the portal and 13 per cent have used tools and resources to assess technology. Reported impacts are largely the same, however, with the exception of the tools and resources to assess technology, where the impact is reported to be stronger (with 35 per cent of users saying that it was high).

5.5 FUNDING ENVIRONMENT

Funding is an area where relatively little positive change is perceived to have taken place. Three in ten organizations experienced a positive change in their funding relationship with the federal government between 2000 and 2005. Just under four in ten (39 per cent) indicated no change in their overall funding relationship while one in four said the relationship had deteriorated. While three in ten indicate that their overall funding situation has improved, their ratings of the individual elements such as clarity of roles and responsibilities, stability of their organization's funding, timeliness of funding decisions

and transparency of funding decisions are rated much lower (less than one in five rate any of these elements as having improved).

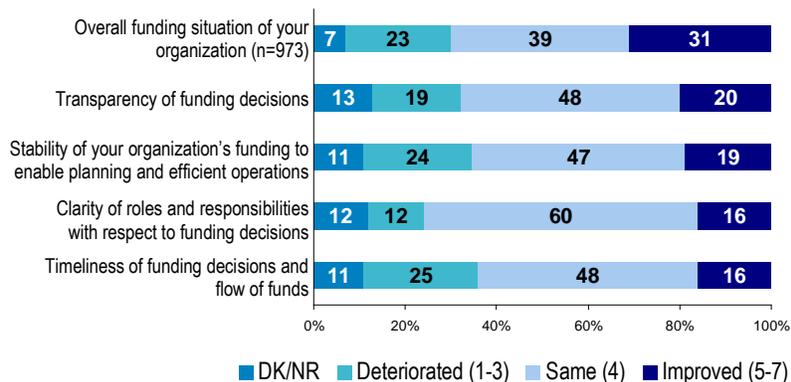
Overall, it is the mid-sized organizations (with budgets of \$500,000 to \$1,000,000, as well as those that were aware of elements of the VSI, that more often reported an improvement in funding situation. Arts organizations were more likely than others in the survey to report deterioration in their funding situation. Organizations involved in policy more often reported an improvement in specific elements of funding (including stability and timeliness, as well as transparency and clarity of roles and responsibilities). Those organizations involved in community work also cited an improvement in transparency and clarity of roles, as did those involved in research when rating transparency). Clarity of roles and responsibilities also saw an improvement for organizations working with government and those more aware of the VSI (and also is somewhat higher for non-profit organizations, relative to charities).

Among the one in nine organizations that are most involved with the federal government and the VSI results are more positive regarding overall funding situation on which 40 per cent cite an improvement. It is also worthy noting that 29 per cent cited improvements in the clarity of roles and responsibilities, although a full 44 per cent also cited deterioration in the timeliness of funding.

Even more than the tepid results regarding changes in capacity in the funding area, the VSI is perceived to have had very little to do with any improvements in this regard, although more than one in four are not sure and cannot comment (see section 5.6). A full 53 per cent of organizations with a funding relationship with the federal government indicated that the VSI has had little or no impact on their funding situation.

Changes in Funding Environment

“To what extent did the following aspects of your funding relationship with the federal government change between 2000 and 2005?”



The change over time in funding received by voluntary organizations has been negative for some and positive for others, with more describing a positive situation (compared with a negative one). When asked to describe the changes in their sources or amounts of funding that they receive for programming and activities, more than a third describe a growth in the activities that they have undertaken or in the amounts that they receive in funding (e.g., through government sources, fundraising, private industry). Another one in four described a loss in revenue and a need to reduce programming/cover the costs through other means. Four in ten (41 per cent) reported a status quo in terms of funding.

There is little substantive difference in responses from different segments of the sector, although, those organizations in the survey reporting that they are involved in policy are more apt to also report that they have received new funding. They are also more likely, however, to have lost funding (as are those involved in research).

Changes in Sources of Funding

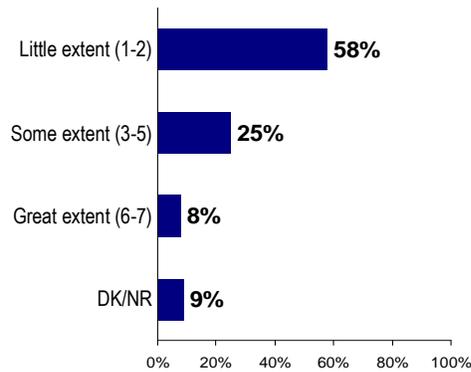
“In what ways, if any, did your organization undergo any changes between 2000 and 2005 with respect to sources or amount of funding or programming objectives/activities?”



Sector organizations with federal funding were asked about the extent to which this funding allowed them to leverage additional funds from other governments, with most saying that it made little difference. Fewer than one in ten believe that it made a significant difference and one in four believe that it made some (but not a significant) difference. Organizations involved in policy were somewhat more apt to say that it made a significant difference. Among the narrow segment of the sector that is most involved with government leveraging funds is more prevalent with 19 per cent saying that it happened to a large extent and 38 per cent said that it occurred to some extent (and one in three said that it did not happen to a very large extent at all).

Leveraging of Funding

“To what extent did funding from the federal government allow your organization to leverage additional funds from other sources of government (i.e., municipal/regional, provincial) between 2000 and 2005?”

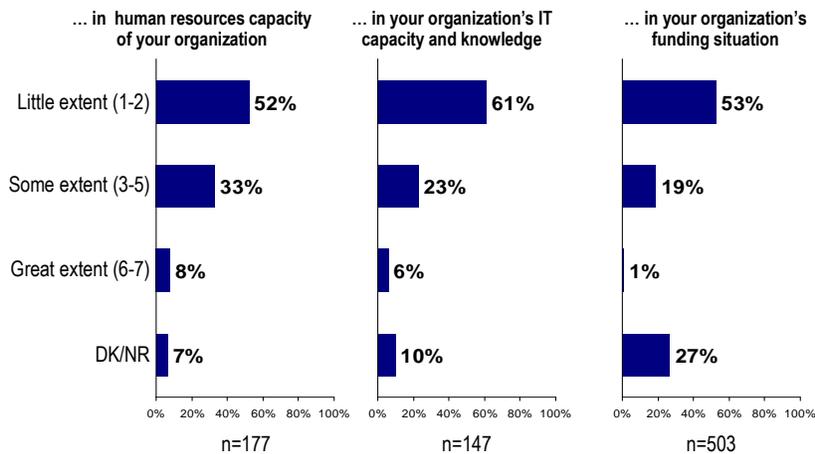


5.6 ATTRIBUTION OF CAPACITY IMPROVEMENTS TO VSI

As previously indicated, among organizations that experienced an improvement in capacity (human resources, IT or funding), a small minority of organizations perceive that the initiatives, tools and resources of the VSI were important in contributing to this impact to a great extent (6 or 7 on a 7-point scale). This figure is somewhat higher for improvements in human resources, where improvements were moderate, compared to IT and funding. Note, however, that one in four provided a “don’t know/no response” with regard to the impact of the VSI on funding, which would be less transparent to organizations than their own IT and HR. Between one in five and one in three rated the impact of the VSI to be moderate. Eight per cent believe that there have been improvements in HR that are attributable to the VSI and virtually no one believes that there are positive changes in IT or funding that are related to the VSI.

Attribution of Changes in Capacity to the VSI

“To what extent do you think the initiatives, tools and resources of the VSI have been responsible for the improvement ...?”



EKOS Research Associates Inc.

Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

Even among that narrow segment of the sector that is most involved with the government and VSI, few indicate that the VSI had a large impact on sector capacity in these areas. That said, more of them believe that the VSI has been somewhat responsible (with 48 per cent saying some extent for HR, 30 per cent saying some extent for IT and 40 per cent saying some extent for funding capacity changes) (not shown).

Key sector representatives had relatively few comments on the impact of the VSI with respect to capacity. A notable impact of the Capacity Joint Table in the area of human resources was noted to be the establishment of the Human Resource Council for the Non-Profit/Voluntary Sector. This was viewed as

a critical achievement for the sector, putting it on the same footing as other industry groupings the Canadian economy (e.g., automotive, construction). Still, several participants in the group forecast that recruitment and retention of personnel would become an increasing challenge for the sector over time. Finally, the research that was conducted on or about the sector – the NSNVO, the Statistics Canada Satellite Account (which identifies the economic contribution of the voluntary sector), the Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating and Canada’s participation in the Johns Hopkins Comparative Non-profit Sector Project - was noted in the focus groups as a significant accomplishment of the VSI. This suite of resources was reported to be an important and new contribution to knowledge and understanding of the size, nature and contribution of the sector and, according to sector representatives has been used extensively as a policy development tool, has contributed to sector pride and identity and has informed other initiatives (e.g., provincial/territorial).

- *“On the IT side, we were not successful in getting the industry to apply the same rules to the sector that it applies to small business in terms of assistance that exists. IT upgrades would have been evolutionary in terms of technology”... “The HR situation in the sector is appalling and is only going to get worse. This is a huge issue. Government is going to end up wearing a number of programs that the sector is now delivering because we won’t have the people to deliver them.”*
- *“The Satellite Account, the Surveys and the Johns Hopkins project – that created a lot of database on the sector and where it is at. For capacity building that was critical. That was huge. That was critical. Some of these things come out every three years. To me that is the minimum. If the government decides to cut this out, they would be declaring a war on the sector as far as I’m concerned. This is just basic information that is required...we need this stuff in order to do our jobs.”*
- *“I think in terms of enhanced and improved data and knowledge about the sector as a whole, we are light years ahead of where we were. I think the HR Council has done some important work, and I see that as having been spawned in many ways by the VSI. IT, hard to know whether the increase in the sector’s understanding and use of IT is related to the VSI or a function of everyone having more resources available for this kind of thing and costs of everything came down. The fact that we couldn’t talk about funding, that is the number one capacity issues ... hurt the Initiative.”*
- *“We could also have used another half year of the Tables meeting in most cases, with a drive to get the final plans in place. We were told that we couldn’t meet again”. “You might have done more implementation”. “More time for follow-up to make sure things got done. Everything just shut down” “Follow-up or whatever it takes to imbed something, we didn’t do”.*

Source: VSI Focus groups and Key Informant Interviews, 2008

6. CHANGES IN INVOLVEMENT AND CAPACITY FOR PUBLIC POLICY

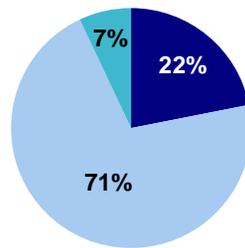
6.1 INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC POLICY

One-quarter of voluntary organizations (22 per cent) actively contribute to public policy at the federal level. Of those that are involved in public policy, 14 per cent (or three per cent of organizations overall) said they became more involved in contributing to federal public policy as a result of the VSI.

Those within the sector that are more familiar with the VSI and have used some element of the VSI are more apt to report that their organization contributes to federal policy, and that this involvement increased as a direct result of the VSI. Furthermore, involvement in federal policy increases with the size of organization (from 16 per cent of those with revenues of less than \$100,000 to 42 per cent of those with revenues exceeding \$5 million). Non-profit organizations are more apt than charities to report that their organization contributes to federal policy (26 per cent of non-profits in the sample, compared with 18 per cent of charities, although it should be noted that the source for obtaining non-profit organizations in the sample is heavily focused on larger organizations). Finally, organizations located in Quebec are least apt to contribute to federal policy, while those in the Prairies and Ontario are more inclined to engage in this type of involvement.

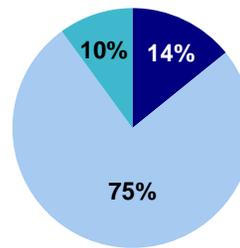
Involvement in Federal Public Policy

“Does your organization’s mission and operations include contributing to public policy at the federal level (i.e., with the federal government)?”



n=1360

“Between 2000 and 2005, did your organization become more involved in contributing to federal public policy at the federal level (i.e., with the federal government) as a result of the VSI?”



n=342

■ Yes
 ■ No
 ■ DK/NR

Among the most involved one in nine sector organizations, 37 per cent said that they became more involved in public policy as a result of the VSI.

A small number of organizations surveyed had participated in a SIDPD project, limiting the use of survey results to explore the impact of these projects on the sector's ability to contribute to government policy. Of the small number of survey respondents (15 in total) who indicate that their organization participated in a SIDPD project, half indicate that the project they were engaged in involved facilitating the sector's contribution to policy. Most of these respondents (seven in total) suggest that the SIDPD project they participated in improved the opportunities for engagement of the sector in public policy; the extent of influence of the sector on key policy decisions or directions; the transparency of decisions made by the federal government; and the capacity of their own organization to contribute to policy.

Some focus group participants, particularly in Calgary, expressed disappointment with the SIDPD program. The program was perceived to have absorbed a significant portion of the VSI funding with limited sustainable results. Participants attributed this limited impact to the two-year time frame available for projects – not long enough to achieve the kind of enduring increase in policy capacity that was envisioned by the program. Further, according to participants, the projects were approved and implemented without the benefit of an overarching strategy and there was too little interaction among the SIDPD projects to foster learning. As well, it was suggested that the SIDPD overestimated the interest of voluntary sector organizations in policy. As mentioned elsewhere, the attention and resources of many voluntary organizations are tight and channelled to address the needs of their direct clients or communities. Broader policy efforts become the area of expertise of a small number of larger or sector-serving organizations with the dedicated resources and interest to do so.

- *“SIDPD was a nice idea, (but) a lot of money spent and that we didn't really learn anything from. Too short, too little, too late, no follow-up. No real strategy”... “There was no front-end, integrated evaluation of the process that would move knowledge horizontally across government. I don't think those folks ever even interacted with one another.”*
- *“I don't think it (SIDPD) achieved its goal which was to have sustainable involvement in the sector in departmental policy, horizontal consistencies. That just didn't happen. While the funding went to groups to do some things and I'm not saying it didn't have some benefits for them, there was not a parallel investment in the department itself to be receiving and certainly nothing sustained afterwards and that was one of the biggest disappointments”... “Individual organizations benefited for that time.”*
- *“The idea was that SIDPD would provide an opportunity for the sector to develop advanced policy proposals. But SIDPD departments drove the agenda. They were using projects to extend the departments' policy capacity. The balance was wrong. Leadership was with the department not with the voluntary organization.”*
- *“Most people in our sector don't want to do policy, they want to deliver service. It also comes down to capacity. “*

- *“There really wasn’t that much of a focus on public policy, that wasn’t one of the three broad areas of objectives (of Working Together). It was one of the sub-objectives of capacity. Policy is more important to the federal government and never involved the sector. This never surfaced a significant goal jointly.”*

Source: VSI Focus groups and Key Informant Interviews, 2008

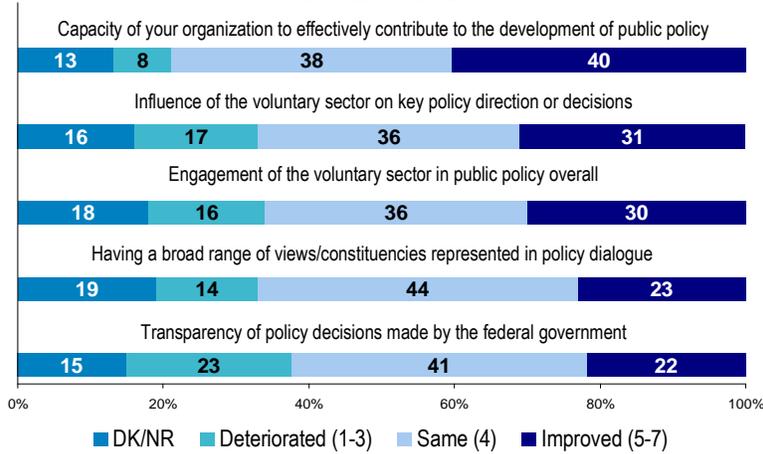
6.2 CHANGES IN SECTOR-GOVERNMENT POLICY DIALOGUE

Voluntary organizations who contribute to public policy were asked to rate changes in the policy dialogue between the federal government and the voluntary sector during the VSI period (2000 to 2005). Voluntary organizations are most likely to perceive an improvement in the capacity of their own organization to contribute to public policy, with 40 per cent identifying an improvement. Roughly three in ten organizations perceive an improvement in the influence of the voluntary sector on key policy direction or decisions, and in the engagement of the sector in public policy overall in this time frame (although one in six believe that there has been a deterioration in these areas). Close to one-quarter believe that there has been an improvement in the range of views or constituencies represented, although over four in ten feel that representation has remained largely unchanged. Voluntary organizations are less apt to perceive any improvement to the transparency of federal policy decisions over this time frame (with equal proportions perceiving improvement and decline in transparency over the VSI period).

Again, those aware of the VSI are much more likely to believe that the policy dialogue between the sector and government improved over the VSI period in terms of the representation of views or constituencies; the capacity of their own organization to contribute; the influence of the sector on policy; and overall engagement of the sector in public policy. Those who used some element of the VSI are also more apt to believe that there has been improvement in the influence of the sector on key policy directions or decisions, and in the engagement of the sector in public policy over the period of the VSI. In fact, among the most involved 12 per cent of the segment, there is a roughly ten percentage point spread in the proportion indicating an improvement (compared with the overall results). That is, 59 per cent cited an improvement in capacity to contribute and 48 per cent said the same about the level of influence. Another 39 per cent indicated an improvement in the overall engagement level and 37 per cent cited improvements in the range of represented views.

Changes in Sector-Government Policy Dialogue

“Please rate the extent and direction of change in the policy dialogue between the federal government and the voluntary sector in your organization’s area of concern between 2000 and 2005?”



EKOS Research
Associates Inc.

n=283

Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

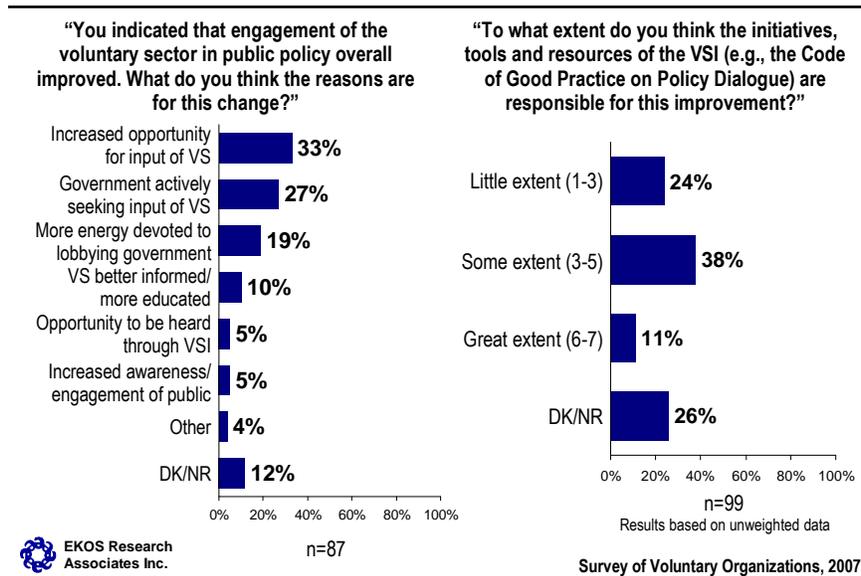
6.3 REASONS FOR IMPROVEMENT/ ATTRIBUTION TO VSI

Survey respondents that are aware of the VSI and who indicated that the engagement of the voluntary sector in public policy overall improved over the VSI period were asked to identify what they feel are the reasons for this change. Three in ten organizations mentioned increased opportunities for the voluntary sector to provide input on policy, including, for example, additional consultations and communication, and enhanced planning within government to consider input. One in four organizations indicated a greater willingness/openness/receptiveness on the part of government to actively seek and value input from the sector (27 per cent). This includes a generally more collaborative climate within government and greater transparency in the policy process during the VSI time period. A similar proportion (19 per cent) suggested that engagement of the sector has improved due to the increased efforts and capacity of the sector to lobby government and, related to this, that the sector is better informed and educated regarding government processes (10 per cent). Few directly link the VSI with the improvements that have occurred.

Furthermore, about one in ten of these organizations (aware of the VSI and who perceived an improvement in the engagement of the sector in policy development over the VSI period) believe that the initiatives, tools and resources of the VSI (e.g., the Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue) are responsible for this improvement to a great extent. Over one-third believed the VSI had a moderate impact in this area, and one in four indicated little impact.

Again, those more familiar with the VSI and who have used some element of the VSI are more apt to believe that the initiatives, tools and resources of the VSI are responsible for this improvement. In fact, among the most involved who also cited an improvement in overall engagement level, 45 per cent attributed this to increased opportunity for input and another 35 per cent said this was due to the government actively seeking input from the sector (based on unweighted data). One in four also said that there was greater opportunity to be heard through the VSI.

Reasons for Improvement in Policy Dialogue/ Attribution to VSI

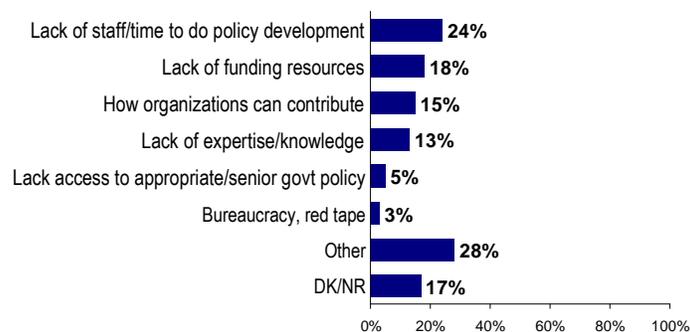


6.4 BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC POLICY

Barriers to participation in the public policy process by voluntary organizations often have to do with operational constraints: one in four organizations say they lack time/staff to engage in policy development, followed closely by lack of funding or resources to commit to public policy development (18 per cent) and, to a lesser extent, lack of expertise within the organization to contribute effectively (13 per cent). About one in five organizations (20 per cent) identify lack of access to the policy process as a barrier, due either to limited access to senior decision-makers within government or lack of opportunities to provide input.

Barriers to Contributing to Federal Public Policy

“What are the main barriers for the voluntary sector to be able to contribute fully to the public policy process?”



EKOS Research
Associates Inc.

n=287

Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

These types of barriers were also mentioned by participants in the focus group discussions. According to these sector representatives, policy is the focus of a relatively small number of organizations within the sector, requiring a significant commitment of time and resources that many organizations cannot afford. As well, some key sector representatives noted that efforts in the area of policy dialogue vary from department to department, with some areas of government being more keen to seek out and include the input of the sector than others. As with the sector-government relationships, initial inroads in enhancing policy capacity and mechanisms for departments to include sector participation in policy development were not institutionalized and thus were perceived by key sector representatives to have generally waned since the end of the VSI.

7. REGULATORY REFORM

7.1 REGISTERED CHARITIES

Roughly half of the voluntary organizations included in the sample are registered charities (56 per cent). These organizations are more likely than the non-profits to say that they have received funding from the federal government (65 per cent of those reporting funding say they have charitable status, while only 47 per cent of those reporting no funding say they are a charity) and are more apt to be aware of some element of the VSI. They are more prevalent in the Prairies and the Atlantic provinces than elsewhere across the country. (Of responding sector organizations in the Atlantic and Prairies, 74 to 75 per cent say they have charitable status, while only 56 to 57 per cent of those responding from BC, Alberta and Ontario say they are a charity. The lowest incidence is in Quebec, where only 39 per cent of responding organizations say they have charitable status.) Charitable status is also somewhat more prevalent among the smallest organizations in the survey sample. (A total of 65 per cent of responding organizations in the survey who report budgets of less than \$250,000 annually say they have charitable status. This drops to 59 per cent of those with budgets of \$250,000 to \$500,000, and to 30 to 39 per cent of those with budget of \$500,000 to \$5,000,000.) Those with a focus on arts, religion and health are also more apt to be registered as a charity, as are those involved in public education. It should be noted, that this is the composition of the survey sample and may not be a close reflection of the actual universe of charitable organizations in the sector, particularly given that the source of non-profits in the survey sample has come from the CRA T1044 file, which is skewed toward larger organizations. This ultimately influences the relative proportions of charities cases in the sample.

Among those not currently registered as a charity, one in four say that they have considered applying to become a registered charity (24 per cent). These organizations share a similar profile with those that are already registered (smaller, more concentrated in the Prairies and in arts organizations, as well as those involved in public education). They are also more apt to be aware of the VSI and say that they have used at least some element of it (although they are also more prevalent among organizations that are not funded by the federal government, which is contrary to the pattern for charities).

Among these organizations that have considered applying for registered status, almost half (42 per cent) have in fact, already applied to become a registered charity, but presumably either did not qualify or lost their charitable status at some point in the past. This is more often the case among non-funded organizations, the smallest organizations (with budgets of under \$100,000) and those involved in public education.

7.2 AWARENESS OF REGULATORY REFORMS

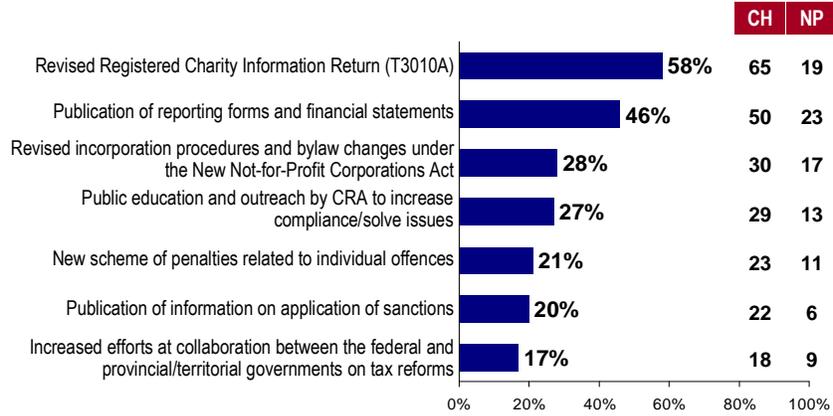
Awareness of some regulatory reforms¹ is fairly high, but it is relatively low for others. Over half (58 per cent) of voluntary organizations that either are a charity or have considered applying for charitable status are aware of changes to the Registered Charity Information Return, designed to ease the complexity and reporting burden of taxes on charities. Slightly fewer of the same types of organizations say they are aware of the publication of reporting forms and financial statements designed to increase the access to information and transparency of information (46 per cent). Just under three in ten are aware of changes under Industry Canada's Not-for-Profit Corporations Act and/or any public education or outreach efforts by CRA. There is less awareness of other aspects such as the penalties for individual offences, information on application of sanctions and increased efforts at collaboration between different levels of government of tax reforms, with roughly one in five to one in six being aware of each.

In each case it is the larger organizations that are more often aware of the VSI, and users of at least some element of it, that are more aware of each element of the CRA reforms. In most cases it is the organizations that are already registered charities (as opposed to those that have considered applying for charitable status) that are more aware, even of the changes in the Not-For-Profit Corporations Act (as noted in the chart). In many cases it is the organizations involved in public policy that are more aware (the reforms to the return, the changes to the Not-For-Profit Corporations Act and the information on sanctions). In other cases it is those involved in research that are more aware (changes to the Not-For-Profit Corporations Act, CRA outreach efforts, penalties and increased collaboration across levels of government). Religious organizations are also more apt to be aware of the tax form reforms than other organizations and those involved in advocacy are more in tune with CRA outreach. Voluntary organizations that indicated having a relationship with the federal government are more likely to be aware of the changes in the Not-For-Profit Corporations Act and CRA outreach efforts compared to organizations with no relationship with the federal government (other than reporting).

¹ Understanding of Director's Liability issues was identified as an evaluation question in the initial Evaluation Framework document but was not covered in the survey of voluntary organizations.

Awareness of Regulatory Reforms

“In the 2003/04 Budget a package of regulatory reforms for registered charities was introduced based on the work of the VSI Joint Government-Sector Table on Regulatory Reform. Are you aware of each of the following reforms?”



 EKOS Research Associates Inc.

n=1298

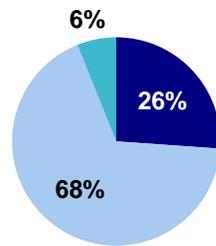
Those saying "yes"
Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

One in four organizations (26 per cent) that are either registered charities or have considered applying say that they feel well enough informed about the changes. The remaining 68 per cent who do not feel well informed are most apt to say that they would like more information generally on a range of topics, not specifically related to regulatory reform (e.g., voluntary initiatives, tools and resources for voluntary organizations, “in all areas”, “general information on the sector” and so on) (30 per cent of those who do not feel informed). Another one in nine would like more information on funding programs, again not directly related to regulatory reform. Of the remaining organizations there are a wider variety of areas that are of interest, although nothing stands out above the rest of the topics. Three in ten are unsure of what additional information they would need.

Registered charities/those that considered applying that are informed about the VSI are more apt to say that they are aware of the CRA regulatory reforms. Awareness is also more prevalent in the Prairies (and to a lesser extent in Ontario) and least likely to be the case in Quebec. Those working in policy and research are also marginally more likely to say they feel well-informed of the regulatory reforms. Organizations that are involved in public policy development are marginally more likely to ask for updates on anything new, but generally there are no other distinctive patterns of specific information needs.

Feel Well Informed?

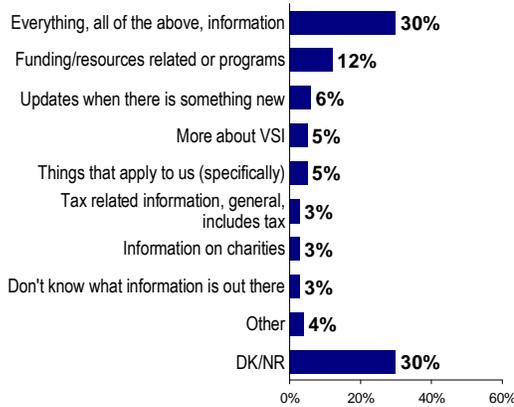
“Do you feel well enough informed about the changes in the regulatory environment for voluntary organizations?”



■ Yes
 ■ No
 ■ DK/NR
 n=1298



“In what areas do you think that you need more information?”



Only items with 3% or more shown on slide
 n=891

Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

7.3 IMPACT OF REGULATORY REFORM

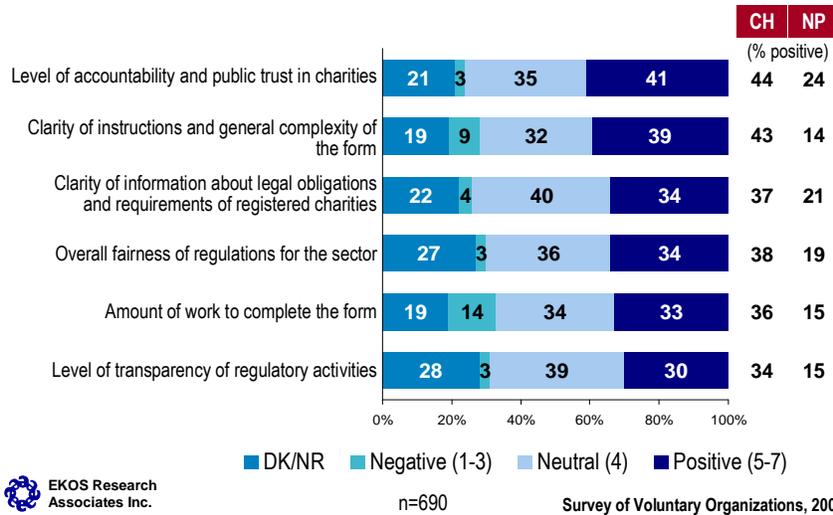
In a list of six potential impacts of regulatory reform, voluntary organizations were most apt to say that the reforms had a positive impact on the level of accountability and public trust in charities and the clarity of instruction and general complexity of the Registered Charity Information Return (T3010A) – roughly four in ten indicated a positive impact. The remaining elements had similar impact ratings, with between 30 and 34 per cent providing a positive rating of the impact. Across the board there is less than 10 per cent that indicate a negative impact, although amount of work to complete the form tops the list with 14 per cent stating a negative impact.

Across all six impacts, it is organizations that are more aware of the VSI and charities (as opposed to non-profits that have considered applying for charitable status but do not have it), who are more positive about the impact of the regulatory reforms. In fact, among the one in nine organizations in the sector who are most involved with government between 41 and 55 per cent are positive in their assessment of the impact in the reported areas.

Apart from these general patterns, organizations with a service delivery focus are more positive about the overall fairness of the regulations for the sector and large organizations are most positive about the impact on the level of accountability and public trust in charities. Those with a government relationship are more positive about the impact on clarity of instructions and complexity of the Registered Charity Information Return (T3010A) and mid-sized organizations are more positive about the impact on clarity of instructions and complexity of the T3010A. It is mid-sized organizations as well as those involved in social issues that are also more positive about the impact on clarity of information about obligations and requirements. Lastly, BC organizations stand out across the country in their positive rating of the impact of the reforms on the amount of work to complete the form.

Impact of Change in Regulatory Reform

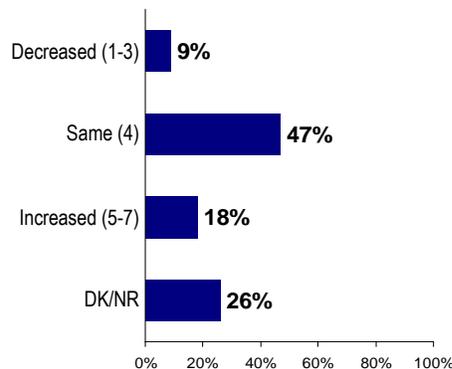
“Considering the regulatory reforms that were just listed as being introduced in 2003/04, what kind of impact have they had in each of the following areas?”



Increased collaboration between the federal and provincial/territorial governments in tax reform has not been apparent to even the most involved in the sector. A small number of organizations in the sample (93) that are most familiar with the VSI were asked about whether the collaboration between the federal and provincial/territorial governments had increased or decreased on tax reforms. Although one in four said that they do not know, most believed there had been no change in this area (based on unweighted data). While 18 per cent have reported an increase in collaboration, nine per cent have noticed a decrease.

Change in Federal-Provincial Collaboration

“As far as you are aware, to what extent has the collaboration between the federal and provincial/territorial governments increased or decreased on tax reforms?”



Results based on unweighted data



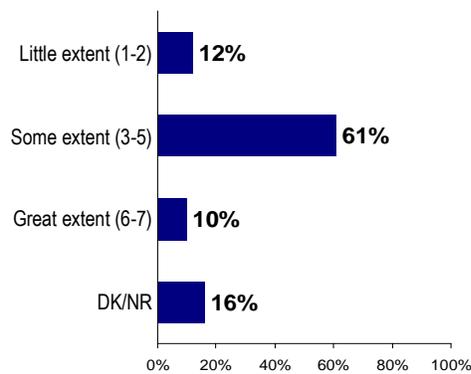
n=93

Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

More importantly, similarly tepid results were reported in terms of impact on the primary goals of the reforms. Six in ten organizations believe that the objectives of the 2003-05 reforms (to simplify the reporting process, increase transparency and fairness and generally provide greater support to the sector) have been achieved to a moderate extent and another one in ten say to a great extent. On the other hand, just over one in ten said the objectives have not been achieved.

Achievement of Reform Goals

“Overall, the reforms implemented by the CRA between 2003 and 2005 were designed to simplify the reporting process, increase transparency and fairness, and offer more support to the sector with regard to registered charity status. To what extent do you think that these objectives were accomplished?”



 EKOS Research Associates Inc.

n=416

Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

Even among those organizations that believed objectives were achieved to a great extent, relatively few (14 per cent) said that it was largely attributable to the VSI. On the other hand, 75 per cent said that it was partially attributable to the VSI (to some extent) and 11 per cent did not know. This may suggest that organizations are only partially aware of the various different elements of the VSI and are reticent to attribute any sizable impact to the Initiative.

As is the case in many areas under study, in the area of regulatory reform, the view of key sector representatives also tended to be more positive and enthusiastic than those of survey respondents. These participants, having a more direct and significant involvement in the VSI, were better able to make the link between the VSI and regulatory reform. That the vast majority of the Joint Regulatory Table recommendations were fully or partially supported in the 2004 Federal Budget was a notable achievement of the Initiative. Tangible products of regulatory reform that were mentioned by key sector representatives included: the revised Registered Charity Information Return (T3010A), the Charities File outreach and training initiative, publication of the names and contact information of registered charities (which is a useful resource for the sector), and CRA service standards. Some key sector representatives, being more knowledgeable about the relationship between the voluntary sector and the charities regulator in the past, indicated there was a substantial improvement in the trust and openness of the relationship. While there

were some disappointments (e.g., inability to use the Tax Court for appeals), there was also a recognition of the limits of reform (e.g., for the establishment of an independent Commission which would require constitutional change).

- *“The fact that you can now go on a government website and get the name and mailing address of every registered charity in the country is a big deal. You can go on and find out all of the policies that CRA uses in regulating charities. This is big deal.”... “With respect to information referral, we thought we had a comprehensive list of organizations in the area ...in the 85 to 90 range, but there are actually 221. That national register would not have happened without the VSI, but the connection isn’t made.”*
- *“The fact is that the CRA and the Charities directorate capacity now to articulate and develop its policy is far superior, there’s a more nuanced and sophisticated approach to dealing with charities. This is something that might not necessarily touch the average front-line worker in a way that they can identify or care about. From my point of view, the regulatory reform changes continue and there is a whole lot of changes that can be linked in part to the VSI.”*

Source: VSI Focus groups and Key Informant Interviews, 2008

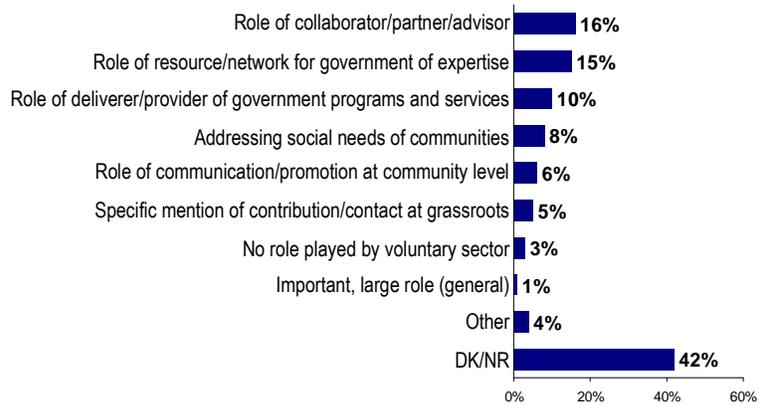
8. ONGOING RELEVANCE OF VSI RATIONALE/ OVERALL ASSESSMENT

8.1 SECTOR UNDERSTANDING OF EVOLVING ROLE IN GOVERNMENT PROGRAM DESIGN AND DELIVERY

While not an objective of the VSI, the survey examined the perceived evolution in the role and contribution of the voluntary sector with respect to the development and delivery of federal government programs and services. Voluntary organizations that have a relationship with the federal government were asked about the distinctive nature of their role in the design and delivery of federal government programs. The role of collaborator/partner/advisor on new and emerging issues/needs, and on the effects of government policies and programs was mentioned by 16 per cent and another 15 per cent noted the voluntary sector's close connection to the community as bringing a unique and valuable perspective and knowledge to the work of government. This is followed by service delivery agents (according to 10 per cent), and related to this, addressing the social needs of communities (eight per cent) or addressing a particular area of concern (six per cent). In terms of service delivery, many organizations further noted that the voluntary sector provides a way to deliver programs and services that are more cost-efficient and comprehensive compared to government delivery, owing to the use of volunteers and the presence of voluntary organizations in small and remote communities/dedicated to particular segments of society. Finally, six per cent of responses referred to the role of the voluntary sector as a conduit for communication or promotion at the community or grassroots level/ensuring information is made available to/understood by constituents. Four in ten organizations did not provide a response.

Role of Sector in Government Service Delivery

“What do you see as the distinctive role(s) and contribution of the voluntary sector in assisting the federal government with the development and delivery of their programs and services?”



EKOS Research
Associates Inc.

n=1183

Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

Q: What do you see as the distinctive role(s) and contribution of the voluntary sector?

- *In partnership with the public sector, voluntary sector provides grassroots connections and effective services to people at the local level, models a different way of service delivery.*
- *The government has access to valuable resources/ideas/practicalities at the “ground level” through the voluntary sector thereby obtaining critical information and knowledge to help to effectively implement programs and services.*
- *As government’s budget becomes more limited, society relies more and more on volunteers to fill the gap and ensure services are there that the community needs... Maximize the benefits of federal government program implementation... Better positioned to deliver programs and services closer to the community and people than the government is and the dollar goes further in the voluntary sector... The sector better understands the local situation and involves local people more effectively. The sector is more efficient at delivery and has a better understanding of what can work in a community... Small non-profit organizations are agile and able to address specific issues which the government has difficulties paying attention to because of financial limitations.*
- *Meeting humanitarian needs, examples: the homeless, the hungry or for education purposes.*
- *Provide the government with statistical information to identify priorities... Organizations within the volunteer sector conduct needs assessments and environmental scans; these documents would be beneficial to the government in developing programs.*
- *Can provide grassroots feedback and opinion on many important issues... Provide a firsthand perspective that is more practical than those made by the policy makers*

who don't have this firsthand experience... Can help set priorities that shape programs, more in touch with the general community.

- *Delivering messages to the public, making recommendations to government... Getting the information out there, making it user friendly... Help communicate and promote and raise awareness of the different programs... Our distinctive role here is to disseminate information provided by the federal government to put it in a form that is locally understandable.*

Source: Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

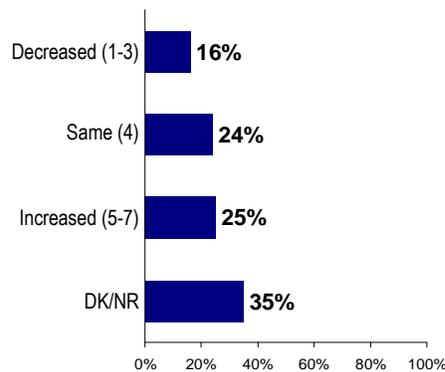
Those more familiar with the VSI and who participated in some element of the VSI are more apt to identify the potential for the voluntary sector to play most of these roles. Those who did receive funding are more apt to identify the potential for the sector to play the role of collaborator/partner/advisor, or of service delivery agents. Similarly, those who deal with government regularly are more apt to identify the potential role the sector can play in terms of resource or network, and as service delivery agents. Registered charities are more apt to perceive the role of collaborator, partner or advisor as one the sector can play while non-profit organizations more often identify the sector as contributing in the role of resource or network.

Comments from key sector representatives largely viewed the role and contribution of the sector as having increased or at least stayed the same particularly in the social area (e.g., homelessness, poverty) due to client demand. Participants also felt it important to emphasize the overall size and importance of the sector – as an employer of over two million people or eight per cent of the Canadian labour market (equal the size of the manufacturing sector). The sector's contribution includes delivery of core government services (for example, in the areas of education and health), as well as other contributions such as encouraging citizenship and building social capital – both perceived to be essential elements in ensuring strong, safe communities in Canada.

One-quarter of voluntary organizations that have a relationship with the federal government (who were also able to comment on the role of the sector in assisting the federal government) believe that the role of the sector in assisting the federal government with the development and delivery of their programs and services increased over the VSI period, while an equal number believe that the role remained unchanged and 16 per cent believe that it actually decreased.

Extent of Change in Sector Role in Government Services

“To what extent has the role of the voluntary sector increased or decreased in assisting the federal government with the development and delivery of their programs and services between 2000 and 2005?”



n=731

Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

Among the most involved in the sector 36 per cent said that the role of the sector increased over the VSI period.

Organizations who deal with government regularly, who are more familiar with the VSI, and who used some element of the VSI are all more apt to believe that the role of the sector increased with respect to the development and delivery of federal government programs.

Among those most involved with the government and/or familiar with the VSI and who believe that the role of the voluntary sector has increased in terms of federal program development and delivery, four in ten attribute the expanded role of the voluntary sector to a declining federal presence in some areas (based on unweighted data). Federal government “downloading/cutbacks/outourcing” has created a gap in services which the voluntary sector now fills. A similar proportion of organizations (35 per cent) attributed the voluntary sector’s increased role to a more positive development. These organizations believe the government’s understanding and recognition of the value of the voluntary sector in delivering innovative and successful programming has improved. The government is perceived to be more welcoming of sector input and responsive to collaborations with the sector. A handful of organizations credited an increased role to the

maturing of the sector itself (more robust, active, higher profile, greater sophistication and professionalism of organizations).

Q: How and why has the role and contribution of the voluntary sector increased?

- *Because the government has been cutting costs and downloading delivery of programs onto the voluntary sector, or the near-voluntary sector... The government's role in certain areas had dwindled and the voluntary sector had to fill the void.*
- *Recognition of the efficiency and importance of the voluntary sector... The increase in the volunteer sector and the number of Canadians it serves. An increase in the sophistication of this sector. The federal government's openness to this sector's input... More consultative mechanisms are in place to consult regarding programs and policies.*
- *The needs have been better identified and there's been more responsibility and challenges thrown at the voluntary sector to meet such needs.*
- *Showing government just how much of an impact the voluntary sector has across the country in everyday life. There is more funding and there has been more demand for the services.*

Source: *Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007*

Conversely, those who believe that the role of the sector declined over the VSI period most often attribute this decline to a lack of effective communication between the federal government and the sector, and limited opportunities for consultations/input from the sector (44 per cent). Three in ten say they have observed or experienced a decline in funding available to voluntary organizations making it difficult for organizations to operate and fulfill their mandate (29 per cent). Finally, one in five cited a decline in the number of volunteers (22 per cent) as the primary reason for the decreasing role of the voluntary sector.

Q: How and why has the role and contribution of the voluntary sector decreased?

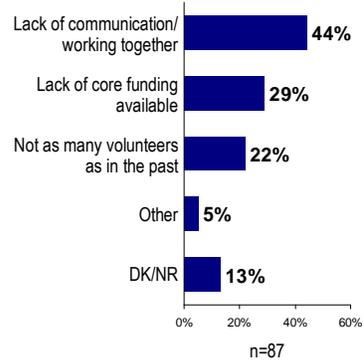
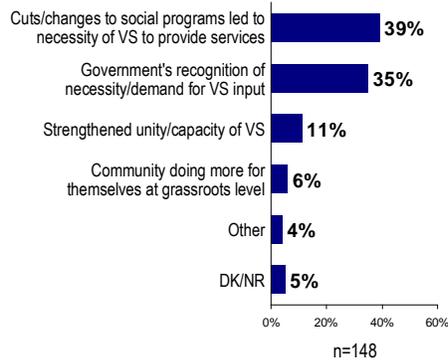
- *Because it has become harder and harder to get volunteers, because people are too busy.*
- *Because there is no open consultation between the federal government and the sector... The government appears less and less interested in collaborating with the sector, and more and more concerned about 'risk management'.*
- *If the voluntary sector is to be seen as important, it must be supported not only by lip service but financially – I see evidence of a decrease in support from the federal government... Since 2000, in general the financial support from the government to the voluntary sector has been decreasing.*
- *Increased bureaucracy and controls...Inflexibility and lack of matching programs with community needs has led to volunteer groups unable to access programs, the red tape and bureaucracy leads to frustration by community volunteer organizations.*

Source: *Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007*

Reasons for Increase/Decrease in Sector Role and Contribution

“How and why has the role and contribution of the voluntary sector increased in assisting the federal government with its programs and services evolved over the last five years?”

“How and why has the role and contribution of the voluntary sector decreased in assisting the federal government with its programs and services evolved over the last five years?”



EKOS Research
Associates Inc.

Results based on unweighted data

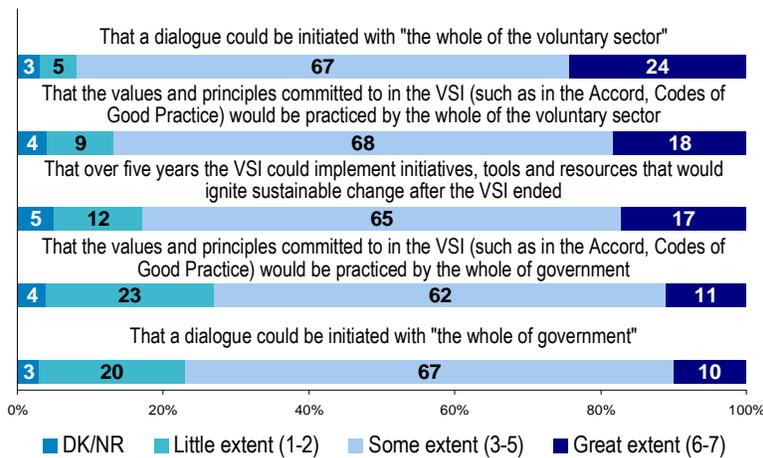
Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

8.2 SECTOR PERCEPTIONS OF VSI ASSUMPTIONS

Organizations in the sample that indicated awareness of or involvement in the VSI were asked to rate some of the originating assumptions of the VSI in terms of the extent to which they were realistic or achievable. One in five organizations felt that the assumption that a dialogue could be initiated with the whole of the sector was realistic/achievable to a great extent and a somewhat smaller proportion, one in five, felt that the values and principles of the VSI could be practiced by the whole of the sector to a great extent. Seventeen per cent believed that the VSI could implement initiatives, tools and resources that would ignite sustainable change. Voluntary organizations expressed comparatively more scepticism about the assumptions that a dialogue could be initiated with “the whole of government” and that the values and principles committed to in the VSI would be practiced by the whole of government (one in ten thought these assumptions were realistic to a great extent).

Assumptions of VSI

“The design and activities of the VSI leading to outcomes was based on a number of assumptions. To what extent do you think each of the following were realistic or achievable?”



EKOS Research
Associates Inc.

Results based on unweighted data
n=92

Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

8.3 OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF VSI AND STRATEGIES TO ADVANCE VSI AGENDA

Those familiar with the VSI were asked to identify its key strengths and challenges. The key strengths of the VSI most often identified by respondents (using unweighted data) include its contribution to initiating a dialogue between the federal government and the government which served to demonstrate a commitment to the voluntary sector and to improve the relationship between the government and the voluntary sector (22 per cent). A similar proportion of organizations mentioned the development of a practical set of tools and resources for use by the sector to enhance capacity as a strength of the Initiative (21 per cent). These are followed closely by other strengths that included mobilizing the sector/building a common/collective/stronger voice for the sector; contribution toward creation of joint efforts and partnerships, and enhanced networking within the sector (17 per cent); and an improved focus on the voluntary sector (16 per cent).

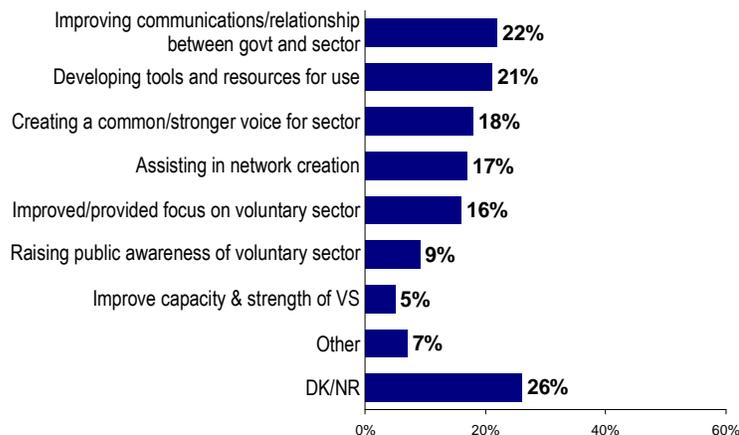
Q: What do you see as the key strengths of the VSI?

- *An attempt to forge a link between the sector and government where a dialogue could take place and real support to the field could develop.*
- *Putting the issues of the voluntary sector on the federal agenda.*
- *Development of practical tools and raising the profile of voluntary sector contributions with the public and government.*
- *It energized the sector and aligned our thinking – at least for a time.*

Source: Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

Key Strengths of VSI

“What do you see as the key strengths of the VSI?”



Results based on unweighted data



n=92

Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

The key challenges of the VSI that were identified by voluntary organizations involve difficulties associated with implementing change within government and the nature of the voluntary sector itself. One-quarter of respondents (25 per cent) indicated that a challenge for the Initiative was in bringing about systemic change in the federal bureaucracy – a challenge that organizations linked to difficulties in communicating with government, entrenched systems, processes and attitudes, and a lack of senior and stable commitment to the Initiative. A similar portion of responses (23 per cent) identified challenges for the voluntary sector – a key barrier being simply “getting the word out” (awareness, understanding and buy-in) among organizations, a particular challenge being connecting with local, remote and smaller organizations in the sector. Related to this, the sheer diversity and size of voluntary organizations was also noted as a barrier, which made it difficult for the Initiative to provide tools and resources to fit the needs of vastly different organizations (mentioned by 21 per cent). Finally, there were reported challenges associated with the design of the Initiative itself – an ambitious agenda, but with a limited timeframe (18 per cent) and the absence of ongoing funding (17 per cent) to ensure awareness and take-up of the Initiative among the many segments of the sector, sufficient resources for voluntary organizations to participate and for the ideas and products of the Initiative to gain momentum within government and sector.

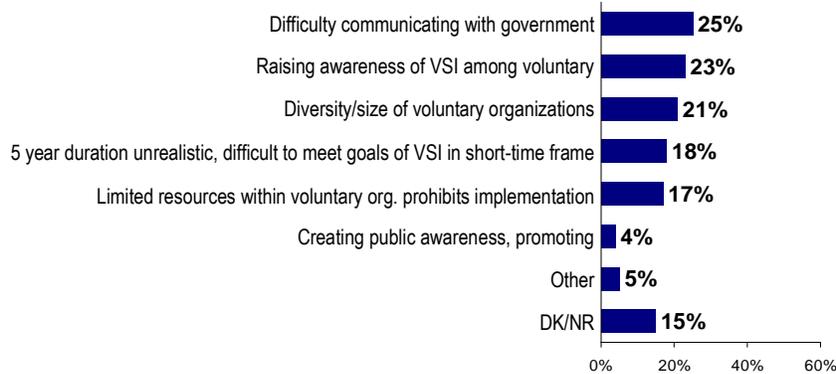
Q: What do you think that the key challenges of the VSI were?

- *A 5-year goal to accomplish so much was much too short.*
- *A lack of commitment to it by governments... Dealing with government and entrenched systems and processes, changing/moving targets for government agendas.*
- *Dealing with underresourced organizations that had no time or money for participating in the initiative.*
- *The sheer numbers and sheer mass of the voluntary sector... Trying to respond to the diverse needs of all the voluntary organizations.*
- *To sustain and build on any improvements which have been made.*

Source: *Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007*

Key Challenges of VSI

“What do you think that the key challenges of the VSI were?”



Results based on unweighted data



n=92

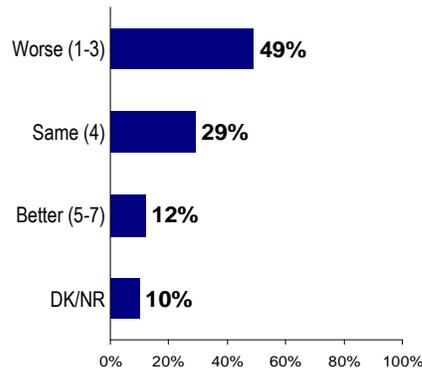
Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

Organizations were asked to consider shifts in the broader, external environment that may have enhanced or undermined the efforts of the VSI. By far the most frequently mentioned factor was the change in federal government that occurred following the VSI, a change that was perceived to have had a largely negative effect on the voluntary sector in terms of funding and the general federal commitment to engagement of the voluntary sector. Enhancement of reporting and accountability requirements in the wake of the Grants and Contributions and Gomery Inquiries were also deemed to, again, have had a negative effect in creating a culture within government that is risk-averse, and creating a system of rules and reporting that has led to poor timeliness in responding to applications for funding and an administrative reporting burden that is difficult for many voluntary organizations to bear. Other influencing factors in the broader environment that were mentioned by a small number of respondents included: shifting of responsibility for programming from the federal to the provincial jurisdiction; increasing difficulties in recruiting volunteers; lack of recognition/appreciation of the voluntary sector; and a tight labour market making it difficult for the voluntary sector to compete with government and the private sector for qualified staff.

Despite the challenges experienced with the VSI, organizations more often believe that the state of affairs between the government and the voluntary sector would be worse today had the VSI not existed. In other words, a net gain is perceived to have been made by close to half (49 per cent based on unweighted results). One in three feel that there has been little sustained impact (29 per cent indicate that affairs would be no different in the absence of the VSI), and 12 per cent believe that the state of affairs between the sector and the government would actually be better today had the VSI not taken place.

Overall Assessment of VSI

“Overall, do you think that the state of affairs between the government and the sector would be better, worse or the same today if the VSI had not existed?”



Results based on unweighted data



n=114

Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

Still, this same group of respondents was asked in what areas the intention of the VSI to put in place structures and mechanisms over the five years to build momentum for sustainable change has been fulfilled. Almost one-half of organizations were unsure or could not clearly identify any sustainable change and another one in five indicated that no positive, sustainable changes had occurred. Among the remainder, the most frequently cited shifts that have been sustained since the VSI ended included: the continuation of collaborations/networks among voluntary organizations that were established during the VSI (particularly when the relationship is mutually beneficial); tools and resources for use by the voluntary sector (e.g., the sector council, online resources) (though some respondents also cautioned that these resources will quickly become outdated without ongoing funding and attention); and an enhancement of the information and knowledge base about the sector and, in general, the sector's awareness of the issues that affect them. A small number of organizations also mentioned improvements in awareness of and attitudes toward the voluntary sector and changes to the regulatory environment.

Q: In what areas has sustainable change occurred (also drawn from other questions on concrete examples)?

- *Attitude towards the voluntary sector has changed.*
- *Development of the Codes of Good Practice.*
- *Regulations regarding the reporting requirements... CRA began a discourse with the sector and was much more receptive to requests... The regulatory changes are entrenched.*
- *It caused some provinces to set up their own VSI.*
- *Some of the tools and the HR council... Availability of online resources in areas such as management training... The resources for information have been sustained.*

- *The VSI brought together people who had not previously collaborated, they are still collaborating because it is in their interest to do so.*
- *VSI stabilized what the sector thinks of itself (the sector's recognition as a cohesive body influencing work with the federal government).*

Source: Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

Where the VSI goal of sustained change has not been realized, this was attributed primarily to the absence of ongoing funding for the VSI and its various initiatives, and the lack of political will to continue this agenda. Note, again, however, that one-half of organizations were unsure and did not provide a response to the question.

Q: In what areas has change not been sustained?

- *Anything that had to do with ongoing support, especially financially, was not sustained. The VSI created expectations within the sector (got hopes up) but the VSI could not deliver.*
- *Networking – voluntary sector organizations do not have resources to engage in activities to sustain them... VSI could be a good catalyst to keep the dialogue happening in regular intervals – we don't have the time to bring everyone together on our own – the help would be welcome.*
- *The Accord and Codes have not been sustained.*
- *The ongoing training that was going on during the VSI has not been sustained.*
- *Too little time to create sustainable change in any area that VSI was involved in. Change takes time.*
- *There were no structures put in place to link the government with the voluntary sector – when the Tables ended there were no mechanisms to encourage and foster the partnerships.*

Source: Survey of Voluntary Organizations, 2007

The majority opinion in the focus groups paralleled the survey responses: that the VSI was a worthwhile Initiative overall and that the sector is certainly better positioned as a result of the VSI (things would be worse now had there been no VSI). The VSI was praised as highly innovative and unique in its approach, yielding valuable experience and lessons learned on joint voluntary sector-government collaboration. Where disappointments were noted, these had to do with some of the initial parameters of the VSI (e.g., no joint tables established to consider advocacy and financing, weaknesses in the process). The lack of continuity and sustainability of the VSI initiatives and learnings was also troubling for many, spurring suggestions to find ways to formally embed and celebrate the impacts of the VSI.

Examples of longer-term outcomes of the VSI were notes in areas such as regulatory reform, human resources in the sector, research on the sector and intrasectoral impacts. Where there were disappointments, these were attributed to some weaknesses in the VSI process itself (covered in detail in the process evaluation of the VSI), as well as the challenge for government and the sector to capitalize on the VSI window of opportunity which provided a foundation for relationship-building, capacity enhancements and research.

- *“The single most important thing that came out of the VSI in my mind is the research base. That the sector employs 2 million Canadians!”... “It (NSNVO) gave us the ammunition we need to make the case for the kinds of resources and awareness that our provincial government folk have about the sector.”*
- *“The largest legacy piece is the changes that were effected on the regulatory side, 69 out of 75 recommendations accepted. The education piece out of CRA came as a direct result of this process... getting the sector aware of the rules and regulations based on the fact that many of them are pretty grass roots. The introduction of service standards. We’ve also calmed down the relationship.”*
- *“One of the other legacy pieces that might be dissociated with the VSI but is terribly important... is the International Year of Volunteers, that was the first project that was done to create awareness... Going on to the CVI, people don’t think of the CVI as part of the VSI.. No one ever evaluated what both the attitudes and resources did to build our (sector-serving organizations’) credibility and how much dollars it leveraged for smart Volunteer Centres and people who were in the capacity area. When we finished... we had \$250,000 of legacy projects. “*
- *“Some of the spin-offs are some of the legacies. Some of the disappointments are that it simply is not ongoing. It was worth trying. It was worth doing and a lot of lessons were learned. So, what is the opportunity to apply those lessons as opposed to just letting them die in the history books? Perhaps go and try these things on a lower scale than at a higher level. With the time and energy, it was still worth doing. Absolutely worth trying.”*
- *“In terms of the people who participated, we were challenged, we were given an opportunity to stretch ourselves and to learn, and able to influence some of the outcomes. I think that was incredibly important. In terms of leadership of the sector across the country, there is an alumnus that has gone on to do all sorts of other things...they are going to influence outcomes when they go back to their ordinary jobs or volunteer or work in government.”*
- *“When you talk about capacity, the capacity of capacity-building organizations has also ballooned. We’ve got some great material coming out through CVI and we were able to host workshops and forums, do training. It’s unbelievable, the amount of capacity that’s been built. Volunteer Alberta went from a \$45k a year organization to, in its prime, \$700k with the money it was able to leverage and only \$125k of that was CVI dollars. If you want an example of leverage that is a probably a good one.”*
- *“It’s really important when you talk about leveraging that you don’t just talk about leveraging dollars. Leveraging networks across the country is critical. Leveraging the knowledge across the country has been critical. There are a number of organizations across the country that got money because of work that started with VSI, but I can point to more that are better organizations because of work that started with VSI.”*
- *“I think that what we may be seeing is an increasing sense that where this (engagement of government) needs to take place at a provincial level. At the end of the day, voluntary organizations engage primarily with provincial governments. There have been in fact a number of provincial mechanisms in Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario that would bring the sector together to engage in a more strategic way. A lot of references go to the VSI as a model or example”.*

Source: VSI Focus Groups and Key Informant Interviews, 2008

Key sector representatives identified the following lessons learned from their VSI experience:

- Collaborative/horizontal initiatives take enormous time and effort. The work of the Joint Tables and the execution of the ensuing workplans were conducted under what turned out to be tight timeframes and, in retrospect, unclear and unrealistic objectives. Many of the key sector representatives who were joint table participants felt burned out by the exercise once it was completed. As mentioned, there were unintended negative impacts on other bodies such as the Voluntary Sector Roundtable that suffered a loss of participation due to the VSI.
- Importance of attention to process aspects to support objectives. The process evaluation of the VSI documented the strengths and weaknesses of the VSI at the conclusion of the first phase. Key sector representatives echoed some of these conclusions. Many indicated the importance of individual leaders and champions. There were several suggestions for ways the VSI process could have been improved to increase effectiveness (e.g., participation by senior level decision-makers, selection of sector and government representatives with an adequate emphasis on skill sets, effective secretariat to support cross-table communication, focus on policy as opposed to operational agendas).
- Sustaining structures and focused attention. Key sector representatives expressed concern that the experience of the VSI (relationship building, capacity enhancements) had not been institutionalized within the bureaucracy or within the sector. While some observed that the VSI had contributed to a habit of consulting with the sector, this cannot be sustained without supporting structures to withstand changes in personnel or policy direction. The work of the Joint Tables and the VSI itself ended in 2005 without sufficient attention and planning for the continuity of the research, policy development and implementation and capacity building that occurred through the VSI.

9. CONCLUSIONS

Assessing the impact of the VSI through a national survey of voluntary organizations presented a number of challenges. Methodologically, there were significant challenges in compiling a suitable sampling frame of this large and very diverse sector. The final sampling frame reflects an attempt to balance reasonable representativeness of the sector, while focusing on the portion of the sector for which VSI impacts could be expected to occur. From a substantive perspective, the VSI initiative has sponsored many tools, resources and initiatives which have surely had significant impacts for some organizations, but these impacts are not easily detectable in a broad based survey. The qualitative research with key representatives within the sector has provided an additional perspective in understanding the impacts of this Initiative.

9.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Following is a summary of findings from the survey of voluntary organizations and qualitative research with key representatives of the sector:

- This survey suggests that, even among a sample of voluntary sector organizations that is more heavily focussed toward those with a relationship with the federal government, the key VSI products do not appear to have gained significant traction within the voluntary sector writ large or within the federal government writ large, for that matter. Awareness of the VSI, and its key products, the Accord and the Codes of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue and Funding is modest – 35 per cent for the VSI and between 13 and 21 per cent for the Accord and Codes. Those who claim to have heard of the Initiative or the Accord and Codes admit that they do not have a detailed familiarity (and this is further confirmed in the relatively high proportion of don't know responses to other items in the survey and shallow knowledge of specific VSI initiatives). For their part, voluntary organizations do not perceive the knowledge and commitment to the Accord or the Codes to be strong among federal officials.
- The consensus view among key representatives of the sector, however, was that there was insufficient attention, resources and organizational infrastructure at the time of the VSI devoted to raising awareness and knowledge of the Initiative among sector organizations. In fact, these qualitative research participants considered this to have hindered the effectiveness of the VSI in retrospect. The survey took this into consideration by asking responding organizations about their awareness of some of the key initiatives, tools and resources of the VSI such as regulatory reform, research on the sector, human resources and policy capacity projects. Awareness of regulatory reform is highest of all the VSI initiatives – about one in three organizations are aware of this activity (and one in four among registered charities). For the other initiatives, between about one in ten and one in five organizations indicated awareness.

While these results are modest at best, some key informants maintain that the awareness of the VSI would have been higher at the time of the Initiative, but has decayed over time.

- When asked about the state of government-sector relations, the survey responses tend to be slightly more positive than negative, though the most common perception is of a continuation of the status quo. Where there is an improvement, those who are aware of the VSI attribute the change to the Initiative to some or a great extent. Improved communication and effort at the individual level are deemed to be important in improved relationships. Focus group and interview participants noted some improvements in the sector-government relationship as a result of the VSI but these were often short-lived due to countervailing forces such as expectations around accountability, changing personnel and a shift in priorities at the federal level over time.
- According to the survey results, there are few perceived benefits to voluntary organizations of a federal relationship in terms of leveraging alliances with other levels of government or in terms of financial leveraging. Focus group participants provided some examples, however, of leveraging (e.g., of CVI funds) and impacts on subsequent provincial/territorial voluntary initiatives.
- It is the level of collaboration and networking within the sector that is the “good news story” of the study in terms of networking improvements over time. For example, over one-half of surveyed organizations have observed an improvement in the level of collaboration, respect, sharing of information and transparency in relationships among organizations in the voluntary sector. This is confirmed by extensive and beneficial participation in formal or informal networks and joint activities, which are said to have had positive impacts for clients (for example, increased outreach) and the organizations involved (sharing of information and resources). On the other hand, the VSI is not reported to be a key driver of these collaborations, according to survey results. One in three organizations have also observed improvements in sector strength and cohesiveness and this is an area where the VSI is rated to have had some impact (according to those familiar with the Initiative) by raising awareness of the sector, and of common agendas and cross-cutting issues. The VSI research products were commonly cited by key representatives of the sector as being very important in developing the sector’s identity.
- Some capacity improvements are reportedly occurring in the voluntary sector, particularly in the area of information technology, though survey respondents and key sector representatives generally attribute these impacts to technology evolution rather than the VSI. In the area of HR, surveyed organizations are seeing improvements in the skill levels of staff and volunteers (though, again, most do not attribute these to the VSI), but there are persistent difficulties for some in recruiting and retaining staff and volunteers. While qualitative respondents pointed to the establishment of the HR Council for the Voluntary/Non-Profit Sector as an important development, according to the survey, a small proportion of voluntary organizations at this time are actively using the Council’s resources. The funding environment has not seen the same kind of progress as information technology and human resources, and some

organizations reported in the survey that they are now in a financially weaker position. An area where capacity is perceived to have made a substantial leap as a result of the VSI was in the area of research on the sector itself – understanding the nature and contribution of the sector. The NSNVO, Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating and the Statistics Canada Satellite Account research continue to valued products that inform other work in the sector.

- Sector participation in policy at the federal level is limited, according to survey results: one-quarter of organizations engage in this activity (even in a sample that is more heavily focused on organizations with a relationship with the federal government). Still, among these organizations, policy capacity is seen by many (four in ten) to have improved during the VSI period and some have detected enhanced influence and participation of the voluntary sector in this area (three in ten). Impacts on policy dialogue are weakly linked to the VSI, however (though, again, a substantial portion of organizations simply don't know if the VSI had an impact or not and since few are aware of the details of the VSI, few would likely attribute any change to the Initiative). Focus group and interview participants expressed disappointment with the VSI in the policy area – few were aware of any significant and sustainable impacts and thus the results of SIDPD projects were perceived to be uneven at best. Some key sector representatives were of the opinion that SIDPD was a government-directed exercise that, while having some benefit for the individual organizations involved, yielded few lasting capacity impacts for the sector as a whole or in terms of the receptiveness of government departments that were involved. It is unclear the extent to which the enhancement of policy capacity was ever a sector priority. Further, some key sector representatives questioned the allocation of VSI resources such that one sub-objective (policy) in one area of the VSI (capacity building) received a disproportionate share of the overall resources.
- The regulatory reform initiative of the VSI has the highest profile of all the VSI initiatives among surveyed organizations; not surprising given that contact with CRA and the regulatory environment has an impact on all registered charities and that the revision to the annual reporting return was a tangible outcome of regulatory reform. The reforms are also said to have had some positive impacts on such things as accountability and public trust, although the reform package is seen to have met its objectives to only a moderate degree, with few saying that it met its objectives to a high degree. Note, however, that regulatory reform at CRA is still in progress (to 2009). Focus group participants and interview participants were more enthusiastic about regulatory reform, seeing a variety of reforms enshrined in law and a positive improvement in the sector's relationship with the charities regulator.
- There was no clear consensus among voluntary organizations as to whether their role and contribution with respect to government program design and delivery was increasing or decreasing. Responding organizations did, however, provide a number of examples of the unique role and contribution of the sector vis-à-vis government programming. In addition to service delivery in many core areas such as addressing community health and social needs, sector organizations were also noted to provide valuable knowledge and expertise to

government (through a grassroots perspective and research) on the needs of their constituents and the potential impacts of policy. Voluntary organizations also reportedly provided an effective conduit for information/promotion to reach Canadian citizens. Many responses stressed the capacity of the voluntary sector to delivery programs and services on the government's behalf in a way this is both cost-effective and innovative, with the capacity to reach marginalized or remote populations.

9.2 CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

In terms of overall observations, the results of the national survey of voluntary organizations and the qualitative research with key representatives of the sector that followed together bring a number of conclusions about the VSI into focus:

- Key sector representatives that participated in the qualitative research and survey respondents with familiarity with the VSI generally believe the Initiative to have been a worthwhile effort. Despite (surveyed) voluntary organizations' general lack of awareness of the Initiative and difficulty in clearly attributing outcomes to the VSI, their overall assessment of the Initiative is positive. The VSI was seen to have signalled a commitment on the part of the federal government to recognize the contribution of voluntary organizations and initiate a more fulsome relationship and dialogue with the sector. The approach was perceived to be innovative and, for a time, generated a great deal of excitement and interest, according to key sector representatives. Many organizations that are aware of the Initiative believe that the state of affairs would be worse now if there had not been a VSI.
- There were a number of achievements of the VSI noted in the study. With respect to the regulatory framework, reforms that have been entrenched in law and in policy were commonly noted by study participants as an example of sustainable outcomes of the VSI. CRA and the Charities Directorate were also held up as an example of an area where there has been a significant and sustained improvement in the sector-government relationship (though this is an impact that key sector representatives commonly pointed out, but which might be largely invisible to grassroots organizations).
- Key sector representatives were also of the opinion that the VSI contributed to the development of an awareness of the sector as a sector, both among government officials and voluntary organizations themselves. The latter is borne out in the survey data where organizations are seemingly more apt to identify themselves with the broader sector. There is also significant participation in collaborations and umbrella organizations (though whether this is a result of the VSI is unclear). The research that was sponsored by the VSI on the size and contribution of the sector and ensuing impacts on sector identity were widely praised by key sector representatives. Those who were direct participants in the VSI also noted the opportunities for learning and personal development afforded by their experience with the Initiative.

- Finally, there was also the development of a host of tangible products, tools and resources that continue to be available to organizations via websites or organizations such as the HR Council for the Voluntary/Non-Profit Sector (itself perceived to be an important long-term outcome of the VSI by key sector representatives). The development of the Accord and Codes were heralded as important, albeit underutilized documents by key sector representatives. The survey results, however, indicate only modest recognition and limited use of these products and tools in the broader community of voluntary organizations. Voluntary organizations do not perceive the federal civil service as currently supporting or promoting the Accord and Codes in any vigorous or uniform way across the federal government.
- As mentioned, survey respondents and key sector representatives did not note any marked improvement in the relationship between the voluntary sector and federal government as a result of the VSI. According to key informants and focus group participants, this objective of the VSI was in some ways hindered by broader events at the time such as the enhanced accountability measures that were being implemented during the VSI period, a development that strained the capacity of many organizations and burdened the relationship with the government. In terms of the current state of the relationship, some of the survey commentary and the remarks of key sector representatives suggested the relationship has deteriorated in some respects since the VSI, with the manifest influence of the sector waning in some areas.
- Capacity issues also continue to be a concern for the sector. Human resources – particularly recruiting and retaining staff - are challenging, as well as funding. While the HR Council has been created to help deal with the former issues, the VSI was not able to grapple with the issue of funding in a substantial way.
- With respect to promotion of policy capacity, the capacity to do policy and even interest in policy is confined to a small number of organizations within the sector, and the efforts under the VSI were generally viewed by key sector representatives as limited in enhancing or extending this capacity more broadly in the sector.
- As a vehicle for change, the VSI had many advantages: for example, the preparatory work conducted by the Voluntary Sector Roundtable, senior level interest and champions within the civil service and at the political level, and a collaborative working model in the Joint Tables. While the focus of the impact evaluation of the VSI is not on process (these issues were well-documented in the Process Evaluation of the VSI), the survey and qualitative research did confirm many of the challenges in the design and delivery of the VSI that were identified in the Process Evaluation. Challenges such as an overly ambitious agenda, exclusion of funding and advocacy from the VSI agenda, overly bureaucratic and complex processes, challenges in working horizontally and jointly, lack of continuity of Table representatives on the government side and a decline in the seniority of federal representatives over time were described as having hindered the work of the VSI. Key sector representatives also noted the absence of sustained civil service and government support for the VSI and structures to sustain and institutionalize change as ultimately affecting the sustainability of its impacts.

- According to qualitative respondents, an unintended consequence of the VSI is that the Initiative involved a substantial commitment of many of those in leadership positions in the voluntary sector, thus drawing attention and effort away from other endeavours (most notably according to sector representatives, the Voluntary Sector Roundtable which withered and has not been resurrected since the end of the VSI).
- A second unintended, but positive, consequence of the VSI according to some key sector representatives is that the VSI tools and resources such as the Accord and Codes are available as models for initiatives that some provinces are now undertaking in building frameworks for their relationship with the voluntary sector. Related to this is the formation of stronger regional sector networks in at least one province. Key sector representatives in Alberta were strongly of the view that these relationships were expanded and fortified by the VSI. The VSI was perceived to have supported relationship building among organizations across sub-sectors, enhanced the strength of sector-serving organizations and enabled leveraging of funds from other sources.
- Many of the issues that were the initial drivers of the VSI remain relevant today, though arguably CRA reforms have gone some way toward addressing the issues related to the regulatory environment and continue to do so. As well, awareness and development of the identity of the sector as a sector, networking improvements and the distinct role and contribution of the voluntary sector to government program design and delivery were also noted.
- The weight of opinion among study participants was that, in other areas, such as improving the sector-government relationship, there were few sustainable outcomes. The practices and guidelines in the Accord and Codes to guide the sector-government relationship have not been institutionalized in a way that many would have liked. HR capacity in the sector continues to be a challenge and some capacity initiatives spawned by the VSI have become vulnerable to funding cuts (e.g., the CVI).
- There was perceived to be limited impact on the enhancement of policy capacity and involvement. As mentioned above, the SIDPD projects were not viewed as having broad and lasting impacts on the level of policy dialogue between the sector and federal government. Lack of sustained and vigorous support for the initiative within the civil service and within the federal leadership were named by key sector representatives as inhibiting factors, along with an absence of institutionalized, structured support for initiatives to sustain and advance the VSI agenda.