Policy Internships and Fellowships Program
Final Report

The Potential for Policy Dialogue between the Voluntary, Community-based Sector and Federal Departments in Newfoundland and Labrador

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Foreword

The Community Services Council of Newfoundland and Labrador was delighted to enter into a joint undertaking with Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), Newfoundland Region, to take advantage of the Policy Internships and Fellowships Program (PIAF). The program was designed to enable a federal employee to spend several months with a voluntary, community-based organization. One of the outcomes of the federal Voluntary Sector Initiative, PIAF presented a wonderful opportunity for a government agency and a non-profit organization to work cooperatively on a policy project of mutual interest and import.

Our theme focused on a longstanding perception that the further one gets from the centre of Canada the more difficult it is to influence major policy directions. While this perception was much talked about, it was the Community Services Council's objective to determine if the perception was founded and if so, to what extent. This was an ambitious undertaking which set out to address the level of influence and involvement in the policy- making process of "regions on the periphery". Traditionally, the regions (both government and the voluntary, community-based sector) have been "consumers and recipients" of policy. As well, we wanted to explore mechanisms to enable regions on the periphery to be more directly involved in shaping public policy. The Community Services Council was also interested in addressing the related issue of understanding how policy that is developed "centrally" translates to the regions and local communities and to the voluntary, community-based sector.

We knew when we launched this work that we were entering somewhat sensitive territory - sensitive from many perspectives. First, the project would be looking to some extent at the relationships within federal departments, i.e. between central offices and regional or local offices. Second, the project would be looking at the relationships between government departments and community-based organizations in general. And finally, we wanted to contemplate - if our original perceptions were verified - where the logical starting point to effect change might be. Embarking on this project required a high level of trust and good will on the part of everyone who participated.

On behalf of the Community Services Council I wish to express appreciation to Cathy Drummond, former Regional Head of HRDC (now Human Resources and Skills Development in Newfoundland and Labrador, who kindly enabled this exchange to occur, and to Paul Green, Manager of Strategic Services, who was the Department's project liaison and champion. We are also indebted to the Chair of the Federal Regional Council, Paul Mills (Vice-President of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency), who encouraged the participation of his colleagues in the interview process being undertaken as part of this project, and to those who responded to our calls. We also extend our thanks to the representatives of community organizations, who contributed their knowledge and experience which helped form the conclusions drawn in this report.

Finally, I would like to convey my personal thanks and gratitude to Larry Peckford, a long-time employee of HRDC, who wove his way with genuine commitment and perseverance through some tough terrain. In this report, Larry quite skillfully sets out the issues and makes concrete suggestions regarding how government departments and the voluntary, community-based sector at a regional level might join forces in the development of policy at a federal level. The challenge remains to find ways to better position Newfoundland and Labrador to have a stronger voice in shaping public policies, to ensure that they are better tailored to meet the needs of the people of this province. This report is one small step in that process.

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Introduction

After a successful first-year pilot, the Policy Internships and Fellowships (PIAF) Program was renewed in 2003. The program is managed by the Centre for Voluntary Sector Research and Development (CVSRD), a joint initiative of the University of Ottawa and Carleton University, in conjunction with the Centre for Public Sector Studies of the University of Victoria.

PIAF emerged as a program of the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI)[1], in response to a need for more formal collaboration between representatives of both the federal government and the voluntary community-based sector. An Accord between the two groups was signed in October 2001. *The Accord between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector*[2] sought to strengthen the relationship by setting common values, principles and commitments in the shared goal of working together for the benefit of all citizens. Through an exchange of employees working as interns and fellows, PIAF pursues its goal of improving the understanding, by both sectors, of their respective environments.

The overall objective of the PIAF program is to develop policy knowledge by harnessing both the experience and skills of the voluntary sector and the federal government while, at the same time, allowing the voluntary sector to become a greater contributor to, and partner in, the development of public policy.

Home Department: Human Resources and Skills Development (formerly HRDC)

In 2004 Human Resources Development Canada, along with other federal government departments, underwent significant structural change. Several functions of the department were transferred to a new Department of Social Development. Of interest to the voluntary sector was the transfer of the Social Development Partnership Program (formerly delivered by HRDC), as well as the Voluntary Sector Directorate (from the Department of Canadian Heritage). Remaining HRDC programs were reorganized under a new department, namely Human Resources and Skills Development (HRSD); among them were: Employment programs; Insurance programs; the Homelessness Secretariat; Learning programs including the Canada Student Loans Program; Workplace programs including Sector Councils; and a service delivery network to support (delivery of) these programs. Most of the HRDC programs that were often used by organizations in the voluntary sector remained in the reorganized department (HRSD).

Host Organization: Community Services Council of Newfoundland and Labrador

As an independent, registered charitable organization dedicated to promoting the social and economic well-being of the province, the CSC was well placed to host an employee from a federal department. For more than 25 years, the CSC has been a leading social planning and research organization working with people and communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. The mission of the Council is to encourage citizen

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[1] Website reference: www.vsi-isbc.ca

2 Voluntary Sector Initiative *An Accord Between the Government of Canada and the* ,

Voluntary Sector (December 2001). Website reference: www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/relationship/accord.cfm

engagement, to promote the integration of social and economic development, and to provide leadership in shaping public policies. The CSC achieves its mission by: promoting volunteerism; conducting leading-edge research; advocating policy positions; pioneering innovative programs and services; building bridges and cultivating collaboration; harnessing the power of technology; and advancing the voluntary, community-based sector.

The CSC acts as a social entrepreneur, bringing a dynamic, creative approach to the issues of the day. The CSC founded the province's first Volunteer Centre and published the first comprehensive directory of community services across the province. Through www.enVision.ca, it currently provides a virtual resource centre for voluntary, community-based organizations across the province. At any given time the CSC is working on any number of projects that contribute to, or provide leadership in shaping, public policy.

As a leader among voluntary organizations across Newfoundland and Labrador, the CSC has been an active participant in the Voluntary Sector Initiative and a member of the Voluntary Sector Forum, and it has a deep interest in promoting the sector and its relationship to federal departments in the province.

The particular social and economic circumstances within Newfoundland and Labrador - characterized by a struggling rural economy, declines in provincial population, and uneven economic performance - made an examination of policy development timely. Moreover, that it would take place in relation to departments of government whose activity affects significantly the lives of so many citizens of our province, promised to makes such an exercise worthwhile.

For these reasons, there seemed to be a real connection between the goals of the CSC and the work that could be accomplished by a federal employee through a PIAF assignment. The CSC responded to a public call for PIAF applications during the summer of 2003. Penelope Rowe, Chief Executive Officer of the CSC described policy development in the CSC's application as follows: "Policy development is not a straight line nor is it a simple concept. It is based on many elements. Organizations may assume that those who deliver programs are the people who make the policies and the rules. But most policy is designed and developed in Ottawa. The voluntary sector needs to be aware of local versus national influence and to understand the appropriate place for influencing particular decisions."

At another point in the CSC application Ms Rowe noted that in this province "labour market development/employment creation programs are often the primary lifeline of voluntary organizations, which work creatively with HRDC (particularly through the Labour Market Development Agreement) to develop programs to meet the needs of E.I. clients while also meeting the needs of communities and the missions of organizations." It is within this context that the CSC and organizations in the voluntary sector are often significantly challenged when policy and program changes occur on short notice or policies that influence program design fail to meet client needs. As a consequence the CSC, with its mandate and proven record in influencing public policy, saw a real opportunity in PIAF.

My Placement

With the support of the Regional Executive Head of (then) HRDC, employees in Newfoundland were solicited for their interest in the PIAF Program.

I was chosen to be a PIAF Policy Fellow in September 2003. An Interchange Agreement was signed between HRDC and the CSC, with the assignment starting on October 22, 2003 and ending in May 2004. I was able to bring 32 years of public service experience to this assignment, having worked for more than 20 years as a service delivery manager in Human Resource Centres of Canada located in various parts of Newfoundland and Labrador. While my career at HRDC was oriented primarily to program delivery and certainly much less to policy development, this was an excellent opportunity to change focus after years of frontline program delivery. Also, I had extensive experience working as a volunteer in communities, so I had learned through first-hand experience how public policy can often be disconnected from the needs of the community.

Flowing from CSC's interests as cited in their above-noted PIAF application, the purpose of the fellowship was to determine the extent to which policies of federal departments in Newfoundland and Labrador are sensitive to the particular needs of the voluntary sector, and to identify opportunities where community organizations might influence policy as it relates to social and community development.

In particular, the following goals for the fellowship were identified:

- Examine how federal departments in this province contribute to departmental policy development
- Consider appropriate linkages with federal departments in order to enhance awareness of the *Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue*
- Strengthen capacity within the region (both departments and the voluntary sector) to engage in policy dialogue and development

Environmental Context

Following the signing of the *Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector* in 2001, the Joint Accord Table of the Voluntary Sector Initiative released two publications in 2002 that were meant to fulfill the commitments in the Accord for a strengthened relationship between the two sectors. These publications focused on two major areas of interaction between government and the voluntary sector: funding and policy dialogue. Known as *A Code of Good Practice on Funding*[3] and *A Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue*[4], these publications were meant to guide the interactions and relationship between government departments and the voluntary sector in these important areas. For the purposes of this discussion the *Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue* is of particular interest since it advocates a strengthened dialogue between the sectors in order to achieve better public policies for citizens.

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[3] Voluntary Sector Initiative, *A Code of Good Practice on Funding* (October 2002). Website reference: www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/relationship/accord.cfm

[4] Voluntary Sector Initiative, *A Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue* (October 2002). Website reference: www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/relationship/accord.cfm

The Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue proposes increased cooperation and engagement with the voluntary sector and, in particular, calls for an ongoing and systematic review, by federal departments, of the potential impact, on the voluntary sector, of any major government policy and program proposals. It articulates that processes and mechanisms must be found, in order to allow the voluntary sector to engage in dialogue with the diversity of groups represented in the sector, particularly those that are hard-to-reach or on the margins of society. The Code notes that there is a need for more accessible and available information from government. Finally, it indicates that there should be better understanding between the two parties with regard to their respective policy objectives and the respective role to be played in reaching these objectives.

As a starting point, these goals may seem a bit lofty; however, the functioning of government on behalf of citizens can be complex and bureaucratic. Similarly, the voluntary sector is large and made up of a great number of diverse organizations and groups. From this quite complex environment there must be an accommodation of viewpoints, given that the sector comprises some 180,000 incorporated organizations across Canada, with 900,000 full-time employees, over $90 billion in revenues and support from 27% of Canadians who volunteer over a billion hours each year. In Newfoundland and Labrador, approximately 140,000 people volunteer; this represents 31% of our population aged 15 years and older. By any standard in civil society, this group represents a major component of our society alongside the public and private sectors.

The structure of Canadian government follows the British parliamentary tradition, with an elected legislature (Parliament), the office of Prime Minister, Cabinet and Ministries or departments. Policy ideas are usually conceived out of some issue or political principle. These issues are largely developed by the bureaucracy through a process of research and design, taking into account a myriad of factors that exist either inside or outside government.

Policies, in final form, give life to the actions of government as they respond to public needs and government vision and set a course of action. Defining and developing public policy can be a long or short process depending on the urgency of a situation and the circumstances of the day. Once developed, through a selection of goals and the identification of means to achieve them, implementation occurs usually through responsible departments, which identify the kind of intervention required - often through new or existing programs and services. The creation of new laws or regulations can also be an outcome of policy development.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the federal government's direct program/service delivery is substantial when one considers its range of activities across a broad spectrum. The program value of federal departments such as Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), Industry Canada, Health Canada and Department of Canadian Heritage, just to name a few, creates a fairly large footprint for the federal government in the social and economic life of this province.

The underlying theme of this fellowship was that it might be advantageous to find ways to influence policy from the local level so that policies and the actions they create are well grounded in the needs of the community. The federal government, as a general

principle of governing, is increasingly emphasizing the importance of engaging Canadians in public policy decisions. Government departments, through their Ministers and officials, are seeking to involve citizens through more effective and focused consultation and communication. There seemed to be no better time to examine this matter in this province, especially in light of the dual perception that regions on the periphery have a weak role in influencing policy and that frequently policies do not fit local circumstances.

Research

I began my fellowship by attending the Fourth Annual National Forum of the Public Policy and Third Sector Initiative at Queen's University, held on October 24-25, 2003. The Forum's theme was *The New Financial Environment of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations –Policy and Practice in Transition.* The Forum served as a quick primer for the many facets of the voluntary community-based sector. I quickly became aware that the sector, sometimes referred to as the as the third or non-profit sector, was well studied by academe and was on the radar screen of the federal government. The signing of *An Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector* in 2001 could certainly be regarded as a pivotal moment in gaining formal recognition from this level of government. Although a federal public service manager for some years, I was not aware of the Accord. Equally, I was only marginally aware of the federal infrastructure (Voluntary Sector Initiative) that now existed to support the sector.

Following the conference in Kingston, I continued to reflect on the place of the voluntary sector in Canada. I was especially perplexed that the events that led to the signing of the Accord were not well known to me either as a public servant or as a volunteer in my community. While admittedly the companion documents - *A Code of Good Practice on Funding* and *A Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue* - were more recent developments, I began to consider how these initiatives might be accepted within a large institution such as the federal public service. The presentation by Professor Vic Murray, at the Forum in Kingston, on the future of government/voluntary sector relations had resonated with me. Professor Murray is associated with the School of Public Administration at the University of Victoria. In addition, shortly after returning from Ottawa, I read an article written by Dr. David Good, also with of the University of Victoria, and who was formerly an Assistant Deputy Minister with HRDC in Ottawa. Although written in advance of the signing of the Accord, Dr. Good's article said much about how this initiative might be positioned within the federal bureaucracy.[5]

In his presentation to the Forum (entitled *Honouring The Code By Reaching Out*), Professor Murray acknowledged that his close association with Dr. Good had resulted in some borrowed ideas. Nevertheless, borrowed or not, I suspect he is too good an academic to agree with his colleague just because he says so. What both these academics say about the state of the federal government's relations with the voluntary sector is that the visibility and viability of this sector depend on a number of factors. First, the voluntary sector, notwithstanding the signing of the Accord or some feel-good affinity for the work of its participants, will get no special attention from the public service on moral or highly principled grounds. Public servants are driven by a rapidly changing agenda and they are highly responsive to the political institutions they serve. The

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[5] David A. Good, "A Government – Voluntary Sector Accord," *Canadian Journal of Policy Research – ISUMA*. 2 (2) (Summer 2001). Website reference: www.isuma.net/index_e.shtml

changing of the political administration in Ottawa in December 2003 created new department structures and mandates. Public servants will be preoccupied with these changes for some time to come. The place of the Voluntary Sector Initiative in all of this is not completely clear. Dr. Murray's comments in Kingston emphasized that the initiative does not have a government-wide institutional home. This should be worrisome to the sector, as it needs to keep its profile and issues high across the whole of government.

I find Dr. Good's conclusion in 2001, which is consistent with my own experience as a public service manager, to be persuasive. Quite simply, if the Accord and Codes are to have any impact, public servants will need to be considerably more informed about these agreements and will need an incentive to behave according to them. Dr. Good goes on to say that both government officials and voluntary sector personnel will need training in how to use the Codes when dealing with issues such as funding, policy development and partnering. Furthermore, he says that institutional and systemic measures will need to be taken, so that the relationship is managed strategically and the various aspects of the Accord and Codes are implemented. Even with these measures, it will take considerable time to create a sufficient level of ownership for this initiative.

It would be equally valid to ask how well the Accord is known across the voluntary sector. I believe that, for such an important matter, there needs to be a push and pull in all directions in order to gain awareness about, and create responsiveness to, the sector's needs. While collaboration with voluntary groups may have been extensive in the development of the Accord and Codes, the results of these initiatives, I believe, are still known and appreciated only by voluntary organizations at the national and provincial levels. My experience in Newfoundland suggests that the Accord is not well known at the local level. Local organizations know all too well the issue of funding, the need for policy input and the need to improve their relationship with governments. At this point in time, however, based on my limited survey of organizations in the sector, there does not appear to exist locally an appreciable awareness and understanding of the implications of the Accord and Codes of Good Practice.

The above observations provide a picture of my general orientation to the fellowship in the months immediately following the conference in Kingston. Policy development by its nature can be a fuzzy concept for many individuals in the public service and the voluntary sector alike. While I was beginning to develop an understanding of what is (and is not) policy development, it continued to be a challenge to set out precisely how the work I might undertake could assist both my host organization and the federal government community in the province. HRSD was my home organization, but it was clear that my examination of policy capacity would not be exclusive to that department.

Living in Stephenville on the west coast of the province and working part-time from this location, I felt I should take some time to consider opportunities in my home community, so as to enhance my experience in the program. After discussing my fellowship with the Executive Director of the Community Education Network (CEN), I chose to work with this community-based organization. CEN has an excellent reputation of working with various federal departments to advance its goal of improving social and economic conditions in the region of southwestern Newfoundland.

Community Education Network

I have a long professional association with this organization and I determined that examination of some aspects of its work from a policy perspective might be valuable to both the organization and myself. In so doing, I hoped to put a human face on the impact of government policy and to show how policies in their transformation to funding and programs benefit particular sectors of the population.

Formed more than 10 years ago, the Community Education Network fosters a community-wide interest in learning and creates learning opportunities that are relevant to the area's social and economic conditions. With an emphasis on lifelong learning, the network searches for solutions to the social and economic challenges faced by residents in this area of southwestern Newfoundland.

I decided it would be useful to have a look at two activities that are aligned with the Network's actions in the strategic area it identifies as Prevention and Early Intervention. The first area of interest was a significant initiative which supports the health, social and developmental needs of young children in the region. With major funding from Health Canada, the Network operates 14 Family Resource Centres that are located at strategic sites throughout southwestern Newfoundland.

The second area of interest was the Network's involvement in an applied research initiative of the Applied Research Branch of (then) HRDC. This initiative, known as Understanding the Early Years (UEY), is being implemented in select communities across Canada. The research is being conducted in the belief that the nurturing and attention that children receive in early childhood have a major impact on the remainder of their lives. UEY was designed to gather information about the factors that affect child development and well-being.

I approached my review of these initiatives by identifying how they developed from policy interests and evolved into program or community-based activities. In the case of the establishment of Family Resource Centres, I found that CEN's interest in early childhood development dates back (more than 10 years) to its earliest days as a community organization. The evidence was clear there was a convergence between CEN's interest and the government's recognition that young children living in areas of high risk required special support. The resulting program of Health Canada, known as the Community Action Program for Children (CAPC), was influenced by policy discussions at a number of levels - international, national and local. The Program had a sustained consultation phase that culminated in its broad acceptance across the country and today, the Community Education Network is the umbrella under which Family Resource Centres successfully operate in many rural and remote communities in southwestern Newfoundland. These Centres make a significant contribution to child and community health in many communities across this region.

Understanding the Early Years is different since UEY is, by design, research-based. Its approach has definite policy implications for government if it chooses to act on what appears to be fairly solid conclusions. From interim evaluation data there is significant evidence that the work has been valuable to a number of communities in southwestern Newfoundland, with quite positive outcomes reflected in various measures of child health and social well-being. This was by all accounts a surprising conclusion that ran counter to expectations in an area at risk because of social and economic circumstances. UEY targeted the same geographic area and age group as did the Family Resource Centres. This overlap proved quite beneficial for two separate government departments which

may not have otherwise collaborated on these initiatives. This collaboration powerfully demonstrates that departments that work together under the same organizational umbrella can benefit from a sharing of expertise and resources.

In conclusion, this example confirms that new and emerging government initiatives can be implemented and tested in the community with benefits that far exceed initial expectations. There is evidence to suggest that such initiatives have potential implications for policy development and successful program delivery.

<u>Policy Interviews: Federal Departments and Voluntary Organizations</u>

The next phase of the fellowship focused on federal departments and involved an assessment of their policy capacity in this province. My host organization set this as a goal, as there is a shared view, in the voluntary and private sectors, that federal departments should have more capacity to make policy decisions based on information gathered and analyzed in the province. The province of Newfoundland and Labrador covers a very large area and is quite diverse with considerable economic challenges. The province's voluntary sector depends heavily on federal departments, which develop policies and programs that lend extensive support to communities and individuals. The province of Newfoundland and Labrador is different in fundamental ways from the other Atlantic provinces. Because of this uniqueness, there is a view that federal departments in Newfoundland and Labrador should have the capacity and latitude to arrive at solutions by making many of their own policy and program decisions.

The decision to assess this capacity was formally supported by the Federal Council Chair in the province. The Federal Council of Newfoundland and Labrador, made up of senior departmental representatives, had struck a policy sub-committee, which was about to examine this area. After discussions with committee members, they chose to wait for the completion of this (fellowship) work before proceeding with their own review. Using information provided by the Federal Council, I determined that there were 29 federal departments or agencies with a physical presence in the province. While the focus of this fellowship was on departments that may have a relationship with the voluntary sector, the number and choice of departments to be interviewed was partly random and dependent on the response of the department to our request for participation. Eleven representatives of federal organizations were interviewed; respondents were either the Regional Head of the organization or a designate (see Annex 1).

In addition to the interviews with departmental representatives, a decision was taken to interview a sample of voluntary organizations. Our objective was to seek the view of voluntary organizations as to their relationship with federal departments and as to ways in which departmental policy can be influenced. Ten voluntary organizations were interviewed (see Annex 2). To give a fairly representative view of the sector as a whole, these organizations had varied backgrounds and interests and were located in both rural and urban areas.

Federal Departments

Most federal departments with decentralized or regional operations have similar patterns in their organization either within a province or region. The department can be an autonomous region with its functions confined to one province or, depending on the

department's activity, it may be a centralized regional organization made up of smaller provincial operations reporting to a single location within the region. As a region, whether it is strictly within provincial jurisdiction or comprises other provincial organizations, it is usually led by a Regional Director who often reports to a Deputy Minister in Ottawa.

Having regional status usually accords the department more resources to carry out corporate functions including some policy work and other broad activities. The Regional Director generally has more authority and capacity to make decisions on larger-scale issues. Through that office, the department's scope is enhanced and is generally greater than that of a departmental head in a province that is part of the region. By having autonomy as a Regional Director reporting directly to Ottawa, the former has considerable leeway to determine how the department functions in the region and the depth of its influence, and has the authority to act.

Of the 11 federal organizations that took part in the interview process, three (according to my assessment) have regional status in that the Regional Director/Head in the province operates in autonomous organizations reporting directly to a senior official in Ottawa. The Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) is an exception, as it is a regional organization with a special mandate for Atlantic Canada and has headquarters in Moncton, New Brunswick. ACOA is headed by a Vice-President, who enjoys a level of autonomy similar to that of a Regional Director in, e.g. DFO or HRSD. The Departments of Human Resources and Skill Development Canada and Fisheries and Oceans have Regional Directors who report directly to Ottawa.

The point in highlighting this issue is that the reporting relationship of a head of a department within a province can potentially have a lot to do with how the department brings provincial issues forward and influences policy that affect this region. For example, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans - with its focus on this important natural resource - has a Policy and Economics Branch headed by a Regional Director. This gives the department regional capacity for an examination of the many facets of the industry through active policy analysis and policy development. Similarly, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency has a significant organizational presence in this province which, although centralized in program delivery, has a Director General of Policy and Coordination with a core group of senior policy analysts who do provincial economic and social analysis. With these resources, ACOA has the capacity to take steps to develop policy options and shape its programs to meet provincial needs. Different from other federal organizations in the province, the above-noted departments are well served by this capacity and can readily respond to circumstances that are particular to this province.

Human Resources and Skill Development Canada has an extensive delivery network, with 15 Human Resource Centres in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Regional Executive Head reports to the Deputy Minister in Ottawa. As an employee of HRSD, and knowing the operations of this department, I would suggest that the Newfoundland region lacks the authority for any substantial policy development in this province. The region has capable staff who interpret and give operational program advice to field offices and community organizations. This often includes extensive feedback to program developers at the national level, which can sometimes be influential in changing program operational models and delivery processes. The department also has staff who complete labour market analyses and a Director-level position with a policy function.

The regional organization does not, however, have designated positions that are tasked with a policy function; consequently, programs follow the national template with its policy origins in Ottawa.

Excluding the three departments noted above, all but one of the departmental representatives interviewed had a reporting relationship elsewhere in Atlantic Canada (the exception being the Director of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, who reports to Ottawa). In all, there was essentially no policy capacity, although for many there were varying degrees of positional influence on policy decisions and some activities of departments had policy implications. For most representatives I interviewed, the policy role was largely that of a conduit for information conveyed from the provincial organization to the regional office. In some instances, it was quite clear that the department's role in the province was to provide information giving but not policy advice.

While there is much to be said about the various mandates of federal organizations and the purposes served by their reporting relationships, the concerns of the voluntary community-based sector would lie primarily with departments that have a mandate for social and/or economic development. Clearly, from my research, HRSD and ACOA in this province are the federal organizations with which voluntary organizations have the most extensive dealings, in terms of support. It is these departments, in addition to others such as the Department of Canadian Heritage, Corrections Service Canada, Health Canada and Industry Canada, that are the major program contacts for the voluntary sector. The overriding concern of the sector is the federal organization's ability to be sensitive to local needs and to be influenced (and be influential) in its policy direction by meaningful and sustained dialogue.

Voluntary Organizations

My placement with the Community Services Council was a great experience. I spent several weeks working at its office in St. John's and working amongst its staff, who carry out various activities and programs in support of the voluntary sector. They are an incredibly dedicated group of people who like many in the sector work hard without the benefits generally available to workers in the public and private sector. The organization's advocacy function on behalf of the voluntary sector is remarkable. The CSC is quite involved in many initiatives with organizations and groups throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. This exposure added immensely to my fellowship, e.g. through the contacts made with other community organizations and with representatives of federal departments.

The voluntary organizations I interviewed were chosen in collaboration with the CEO of the Community Services Council. A rural-urban mix was desired and I believe achieved. Organizations from the major centres of Corner Brook and St. John's were interviewed, as were organizations in Port aux Basques, Stephenville and Rocky Harbour. There was good diversity in the interests of the organizations, ranging from corrections to health care, persons with disabilities, community and social development, recreation, professional theatre and filmmaking. The average operational life of these 10 organizations was 28 years with the oldest dating back 53 years. All have a volunteer Board of Directors and a number are registered charities. All organizations asked to participate did so willingly and no organization declined.

As noted earlier, the presence of federal or provincial funding essential for the operation of these voluntary organizations was evident from the interviews. A direct contribution to core administrative costs from a federal or provincial government source was identified by 5 of the 10 voluntary organizations. It was noted, however, that this funding covered the majority of core administrative costs of only three of these organizations. As a result, most organizations depend heavily on membership fees, project activities, client/customer fees, donations and administrative fees to fund their work.

Not surprisingly, all organizations interviewed relied considerably on federal departments or federal-provincial agreements for programming. HRSD had significant program involvement in 9 of the 10 organizations and ACOA in 6 of the organizations. The Department of Canadian Heritage, Canada Council for the Arts, Health Canada and Corrections Service Canada were also prominent in the support of other organizations surveyed. These organizations in their diversity are mature in the extent and depth of their relationship with federal departments.

What Did They Say

The questions posed during the interviews attempted to determine depth and kind of relationship with a federal department. In particular, I sought to find out in each interview what programs were used and what it meant to the organization to achieve program objectives. Generally, all respondents characterized their relationships with departments as both good and respectful. Access to federal representatives was not cited as an issue. All organizations were extremely busy and the challenge of sustaining their organization was never far from their minds. Because these organizations have incredible resiliency they have maintained a significant presence in their community, region or province. Taken in combination, the various social, cultural, health and

economic activities which they support contribute substantially to the well-being of the citizens and communities in this province. Voluntary sector organizations and federal departments would be the poorer without one another.

The following broad themes emerged from the interviews:

- In all cases, the goals of voluntary organizations were intertwined with the mandates of government departments and achieved through (mutual) interdependence. All organizations interviewed operated without any immediate risk to viability but their dependence on federal support was unmistakable.

- As reflected in the summary of interviews with federal departments, those programs accessed by voluntary organizations were primarily nationally designed and not influenced by regional circumstances. It was evident that departments do their best to be flexible and cooperative arrangements between two or more federal departments in supporting program initiatives were not uncommon. HRSD and ACOA were often known to partner on the same project, supporting different aspects of the work. This was always seen to be innovative and productive.

- Most organizations were not aware of the *Accord between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector* or the *Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue*. For most, this was the first time they had heard of these agreements. As a result, it was a revelation that there could be a dialogue, which would allow views to be heard at a level where policies are developed and programs designed.

- Many organizations were very busy with day-to-day activities and felt they would be limited in the degree to which they could contribute to policy discussions. In some instances, representatives of voluntary organization sit on Program Advisory Committees of departments. In other cases, the organization was satisfied that the work of an umbrella organization which represented its interest would wield the necessary influence to advance particular issues. The frantic pace of getting the job done was often cited as a circumstance that precluded reflection on these larger issues.

- The John Howard Society of Newfoundland and the Community Services Council of Newfoundland and Labrador were examples of organizations with the capacity to enter into policy dialogue - both provincial and national - on particular subject areas. The CSC has as its mandate a research and policy function and through its CEO this activity is carried out very well. The John Howard Society has developed considerable local expertise to influence corrections policy and contributes to its national organization, which carries out a number of policy initiatives. The Executive Director of the Bay St. George Community Employment Corporation has worked in various capacities on national efforts that achieved success in influencing government policy that directly affected the client group.

- Regarding the question of responsiveness with unique or innovative arrangements, ACOA, in a number of cases, received honourable mention for its flexibility and ability to respond more specifically to the needs of organizations in

the sector. HRSD, despite its significant presence and range of program options, was noted in a number of instances as becoming more rigid in its program criteria and increasingly preoccupied with program controls and audit functions.

What Does All This Mean?

I believe that this account of my experience and my general conclusions fairly describe the state of relations between the voluntary sector and the federal government in this province. The intentions of the federal government in formalizing its relationship with the sector and making concrete commitments are admirable. As in all things, "the proof of the pudding is in the eating". At present, all the ingredients and mixtures have not yet been determined, so we are not yet at a point where a predictable recipe for cooperation and dialogue is possible. The voluntary sector is not fully aware of the implications of the Accord and Codes of Good Practice. Federal departments are in a similar position as they are continually challenged by institutional change internally and, at the same time, are trying to grasp a concept that will allow external parties to be more formally involved in influencing the government's policy agenda.

As a consequence, voluntary sector organizations and federal government departments are at a very early stage in their understanding of a new relationship. With some exceptions noted earlier in this report, my analysis is that, given their particular organizational arrangement, most federal departments located in the province have little influence over policy matters. For that matter, the general environment within regional organizations in the Atlantic region may be little better. It is clear, however, that the institutional framework that directs the functioning of departments outside Ottawa, which is the major centre of political and bureaucratic influence, limits the opportunity for policy development, especially in the smaller regions of the country. This situation has developed over many years and in the best of circumstances it will take considerable time for change to occur.

To keep its commitment to the voluntary sector, the current Voluntary Sector Initiative should continue to be supported well past its present timeframe. Both parties, in my view, need more time to build a framework in which the dialogue continues and the VSI will keep a focus on reaching this objective. The concerns expressed earlier in this report, that the government's relationship needs to be grounded more firmly in the institutional framework of government, should not be dismissed. The voluntary sector should push for this fundamental change, which would I believe greatly improve the ability of the sector to influence the machinery of government more broadly across all departments.

The potential for policy dialogue with the voluntary sector, particularly in smaller regions, needs to be recognized and addressed. Newfoundland and Labrador, like other smaller regions across the country, needs to be better able to have its voice heard at various points in the system, not just through regional offices or by some circuitous route to Ottawa. The current policy capacity of most departments in this province is generally weak and the sector will be quickly frustrated should it attempt to engage in a dialogue with departments within the context of current organizational arrangements.

The Community Services Council and other groups should consider other means of developing local leadership, to promote the Accord and Codes of Good Practice. The Federal Council of Newfoundland and Labrador is aware that it needs to pay more

attention to the role of federal departments in developing and influencing policy. The progress of the Voluntary Sector Initiative and the publication of the Codes of Good Practice give the VSI and departments an excellent opportunity to seize the agenda; this opportunity can be maximized by realizing the best that is available from the resources of both sectors. This may require some negotiation by departments with their regional and national counterparts since, as has already been pointed out, policy dialogue has not regularly or systematically occurred at local levels. The *Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue* creates expectations in terms of the involvement of the voluntary sector in the various stages of policy development, including issue identification, agenda setting, policy design, monitoring and impact assessment. These steps in the policy development process have, up to now, been primarily within the purview of departments and have excluded meaningful local input. Implementation of the Code will require considerable change on the part of departments.

There are many issues to occupy the minds of political and departmental leaders in the federal government. The voluntary sector is only one of many constituencies that demand the attention of government and want in on the action. The value of the sector is enormous to the well-being and health of our province and nation; with leadership and coordination, a great deal can be accomplished.

Reflections and Next Steps

The undertaking of this fellowship was timely at this point in my career, since as a frontline manager I spent much of my time implementing policy by active program delivery. Now I have had a chance to really make sense of this concept and to talk about the process of policy development. Policy can be a misunderstood concept for many public servants as well as for the many groups and organizations that interact with government departments. Organizations in the voluntary community-based sector have spent years responding and reacting to policy decisions and are not always well prepared to play an active role in policy development. After all, it is a common myth that this is the work of government and within its exclusive jurisdiction. So as not to underestimate anyone in the sector, let me hasten to add that this view may not be universally shared but I submit it is still a perception that exists to a far greater degree than we may want to admit. Voluntary organizations need to be encouraged to appreciate the legitimacy of their role and place in policy dialogue and thus be motivated to participate when the opportunity arises.

My sense of the situation in this province is that neither government departments nor many in the sector really have a good grasp of the practical implications of the Accord and Codes of Good Practice or how the conversation should begin. Leadership in the voluntary sector at the provincial level is not at all strong, although an organization such as the CSC is probably better positioned to take a leadership role than is any other existing organization. In whatever form, however, leadership costs money and this would likely be an impediment for the CSC which, despite its resourcefulness, is no better off than any other group. A solution must be found, and there is much to recommend exercising provincial leadership from a central location. Without an awareness of the role of the sector in policy making and of the means by which it can be fostered, progress will be slow and inconsistent.

One of the goals of this fellowship was to identify appropriate linkages with federal departments, in order to increase awareness of the *Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue.* As I have suggested, a link should be forged between departments and an organization that has legitimacy and the capacity to act on behalf of the voluntary sector. Likewise, the federal community would be best served through the existing structure of the Federal Council of Newfoundland and Labrador that has, as sitting members, senior representatives from all departments in this province. The policy linkages to the voluntary sector are not equal for all departments and there are some that are obviously more important than others. Decisions need to be made on how a process gets started with the Federal Council and, in some cases, directly with specific departments.

Another fellowship goal was to determine how and to what degree federal departments in the province contribute to policy capacity. I believe that this issue has been well covered in this report. If my conclusion - that capacity is generally weak – is valid, it begs the question as to how this might best be addressed. This fundamental issue goes deep to the institutional core of how federal departments are structured in the regions and it will probably take considerable political as well as bureaucratic leadership to address it. Voluntary organizations often have good alliances and relationships with political representatives so they are able to be more persuasive, on this and other issues, than public servants, who cannot be as effective. In any event, a good first step is talking openly and candidly about this matter and the Federal Council is best positioned to take action in this regard. The voluntary, community-based sector can make a significant contribution to this discussion and it will be through this process that the final goal of the fellowship, which speaks to strengthening the capacity of both departments and the sector to engage in policy dialogue, might be met.

It is intended that my work with the CSC will facilitate ongoing dialogue with the Federal Council, including active discussions, so that working together, both groups may determine what actions might be taken to advance this agenda. The members of the policy sub-committee of the Federal Council were very encouraging about this work and it is hoped that they too will find value in its conclusions and use the study to inform their discussions and future actions.

On a personal note, my career with my home department is nearing an end. I believe that the fellowship has been broad enough that the CSC, through its considerable network and linkages to both the voluntary sector and the federal community (provincial and national), will find the means to make progress on this important front. It has been a pleasure to be part of this effort and I am appreciative of the opportunity to have contributed to the discussion in some small way.

Federal Department Representatives Interviewed

Name	Position	Department
John Collins	Regional Director	Policy and Economics Branch, Department of Fisheries and Oceans
Jane Rutherford	Senior Program Manager	National Crime Prevention Strategy
Gerald Alexander	Provincial Coordinator	Health Canada
Dawn LeMessurier	Regional Presence Officer	Industry Canada
Len LeRiche	Regional Director	Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada
Glen Hynes	Director	Public Works and Government Services Canada
Paul Green	Director, Strategic Policy	Human Resources and Skills Development Canada
Brian Power	District Manager	Environmental Protection Service, Environment Canada
Joan Walsh	Director	Citizenship and Immigration Canada
Bruce Pike	Science Director (Acting)	Natural Resources Canada
Shirley Dawe	Senior Policy Analyst	Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency

Voluntary Organizations Interviewed

Name	Position	Organization
Suzanne Ingram	Executive Director	Gateway Status of Women Council (Port aux Basques)
Rita Anderson	Executive Director	South West Coast Development Association (Port aux Basques)
Gaylene Buckle	General Manager	Theatre Newfoundland and Labrador (Corner Brook)
Colleen Kennedy	Executive Director	Gros Morne Cooperating Association (Rocky Harbour)
Ray McIsaac	Executive Director	Bay St. George Community Employment Corporation (Stephenville)
Eileen Pitcher	Executive Director	VON (Corner Brook)
Christine Young	Executive Director	Humber Community YMCA (Corner Brook)
Terry Carlson	Executive Director	John Howard Society of Newfoundland (St. John's)
Jean Smith	Executive Director	Newfoundland Independent Filmmakers Co-operative (St. John's)
Penelope Rowe	Chief Executive Officer	Community Services Council (St. John's)

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