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Canadian Rural Partnership Rural Dialogue Rural Voluntary Sector Leaders' Report

"Innovation and Skills Development in the Rural Voluntary Sector in Nova Scotia"

Truro, Nova Scotia September 20, 2002

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1. FOREWORD

This report is a summary of discussions that took place at the Rural Voluntary Sector Leaders' Dialogue, entitled "*Innovation and Skills Development in the Rural Voluntary Sector in Nova Scotia*", held in Truro, Nova Scotia on September 20, 2002. Many of the discussions took place in brainstorming sessions at which no limits were placed on the participants. In order to present a true report of the free-ranging discussions, recommendations made by participants that fall outside federal jurisdiction are also included. Views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the Government of Canada.

2. INTRODUCTION

The Rural Voluntary Sector Leaders' Dialogue was part of the Rural Dialogue, an ongoing, two-way discussion between the federal government and Canadians from rural, remote and northern regions. Launched in 1998, the Rural Dialogue is a key citizen-engagement component of the Canadian Rural Partnership (CRP) Initiative. The CRP is designed to support community development by adopting new approaches and practices that respond to rural, remote and northern priorities. The Dialogue process helps the federal government to understand local and regional priorities, and provides rural, remote and

northern citizens with an opportunity to influence federal government policies, programs and services that affect them.

The Rural Voluntary Sector Leaders' Dialogue was a part of the response by the Nova Scotia Rural Team to the recommendations made by participants at the Nova Scotia Regional Rural Conference held in Cornwallis, Nova Scotia in October 2001. Participants identified the revitalization of the rural voluntary sector as a high priority. The sector is facing a crisis in burnout, leadership and long-term sustainable funding. The Nova Scotia Rural Team is preparing a strategy in support of innovation and skills development in the rural voluntary sector.

The goal of the Rural Voluntary Sector Leaders' Dialogue was to provide a forum for the exchange of information, experience and ideas on the role of government in best supporting the revitalization of the rural voluntary sector. The expected outcome was sound advice and a framework for an action strategy in support of innovation and skills development in the rural voluntary sector in Nova Scotia.

The Dialogue was planned and organized by a Task Team of the Nova Scotia Rural Team. The Rural Voluntary Task Team is composed of Marilyn More, *Community Links*; Liz Crouse, Nova Scotia Agriculture and Fisheries; Susan Sanford, rural-citizen-at-large; Karen Swan, Justice Canada; Arial Harper, Nova Scotia Community College; and Roxanne Rjacob and Keith Cossey, Rural Secretariat.

Mrs. Eva Landry, a 30-year veteran volunteer from St. Peters, Cape Breton Island, was the guest speaker and key resource person who gave a moving and inspiring talk on "Trends and Issues in the Voluntary Sector". Mrs. Landry set the stage and talked very eloquently about the importance of volunteers to rural communities and to Canada. She gave excellent examples of the commitment, the sacrifice, the community service and the rewards of volunteerism. Participants included representatives from the following organizations and government departments:

- 4H;
- Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (Rural Secretariat);
- Canadian Red Cross;

- Coastal Communities Network;
- *Community Links*;
- Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Province of Nova Scotia;
- Nova Scotia Federal Council;
- United Way;
- Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada (VON Canada);
- Voluntary Sector Initiative Advocacy Working Group and Communications; and
- Women's Institutes of Nova Scotia.

3. ISSUES RELATING TO THE RURAL PRIORITY AREAS

(A) Access to federal government programs and services

- Facilitate and improve access by rural volunteers and voluntary organizations to the federal government programs and services.

(B) Access to financial resources for rural business and community development

- Provide long-term sustainable funding (3 to 5 years) to voluntary organizations.

(C) Opportunities, programs and services for rural youth

- Reach out to youth to involve them in volunteerism and engage them in community service.
- Increase the involvement of youth and seniors (an under-utilized pool of resources) in the voluntary sector.

(D) Community capacity-building, leadership and skills development

- Increase support for the voluntary sector organizational and leadership development.
- Encourage innovation, creativity and "thinking outside of the box".

(E) Infrastructure for community development

- Recognize that rural fire departments and search and rescue units are dependent on volunteers.

(F) Knowledge-based economy/society and use of the technology

- Ensure that the rural voluntary sector fully participates in and benefits from the knowledge-base economy.

(G) Strengthen economic diversification

- Support volunteers who provide advice and direction to Regional Development Authorities Boards and committees.
- Support co-operatives and credit unions which are run by volunteer Boards and committees.

(H) Access to health care

- Recognize and support the contribution of volunteer Boards, Committees and care-givers in sustaining the health care system.

(I) Access to education

- Provide leadership training and development.
- Provide volunteer training and skills development in human resource management, financial management, evaluation and strategic planning.
- Offer proposal writing and non-profit marketing and management courses in local communities.

(J) Partnerships for rural community development

- Increase co-operation on shared issues, such as liability insurance, advocacy and influencing policy and program design, diversity, and fund raising.
- Develop and support a province-wide network of volunteer organizations to provide a unified voice.
- Pool resources of the voluntary sector.

(K) Promote rural Canada

- Acknowledge and recognize the contribution of rural volunteers.

4. OTHER KEY ISSUES/RELEVANT TOPICS

- Increase the province's involvement with and support to the voluntary sector.
- Ensure that the federal Voluntary Sector Initiative works for rural voluntary organizations at the provincial level and in local communities.

5. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The voluntary sector provides the foundation for community service which maintains a high quality of life in rural communities. Volunteers provide their time, skills and other resources to strengthen non-profit organizations' contribution to every facet of community

life - social, spiritual, cultural, health, economic and environmental.

On October 8, 2002, the Government of Canada reinforced its support for volunteers by announcing the Voluntary Sector Initiative, which is a joint undertaking between the voluntary sector and the Government of Canada. It is a unique opportunity to focus on the voluntary sector as one of the three pillars of Canadian society, equal in importance to the public and private sectors.

During the Dialogue, the strengths and assets of the Nova Scotian rural voluntary sector were discussed and strategic areas for development were identified. Two key common themes emerged:

1. Voluntary sector sustainability which includes the need to establish a provincial organizational framework or network, to secure long-term sustainable funding, and to strengthen the capacity to influence policy; and
2. Leadership and skills development to stimulate innovation and creativity, to assist with planning, succession and fund-raising, to encourage volunteer recognition, as well as provide development tools.

Further to this Dialogue, a number of action items and next steps were identified. The Rural Voluntary Sector Task Team will prepare a draft framework for the development of a revitalization strategy for the rural voluntary sector. The Rural Voluntary Sector Task Team will expand its partnership network, share its resources, and will make linkages to the urban voluntary sector. The strategy will identify roles for the community, the private sector and all levels of government in revitalizing the sector.

The Nova Scotia Rural Team has an important on-going role to play in convening and coordinating a partnership network of community, private sector and government stakeholders towards revitalizing the rural voluntary sector in Nova Scotia.

