Canada's Voluntary Sector Initiative and Sub-National Voluntary Sector-Government Relations: A Third Wave

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Abstract

Following a dismal and antagonistic relationship that coincided with three years of deep and sustained cuts to the voluntary sector in the mid 1990s, voluntary sector-federal government relations in Canada finally began to thaw. A number of high level joint meetings between the federal government and voluntary sector leaders in 1999 led to the announcement in June, 2000 of a joint initiative to "renew and strengthen their long-standing relationship". This five-year $94.6 million investment entitled the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) included the signing of a Voluntary Sector Accord; personnel exchange programs; policy engagement projects; two major national surveys; a national volunteerism initiative; and numerous capacity building projects.

The VSI program ended in 2005 with a change in the governing Liberal party leadership and the subsequent election of a minority Conservative government. Drawing on John Kingdon's multiple streams framework, this article takes a broad analysis of problems, policies, and political processes across multiple provinces to examine if the VSI may have influenced a third wave of sub-national level policy initiatives. While contextual differences at a provincial level clearly influence the status, structure, and scope of sub-national voluntary sector-government relations, it appears the VSI did contribute in a number of ways to these sub-national initiatives.

Introduction

As in most countries, Canada's relationship between the state and the voluntary sector is as old as the emergence of institutionalized governance. Since the early 1600s voluntary organizations have worked side-by-side with governments at all levels, often identifying and providing services and supports governments were either unable or unwilling to provide (Elson, 2011b). Faith organizations set up hospitals, schools, and social services with nominal state support while immigrant groups self-organized support groups to adapt to their new country (Bélanger, 2000; Lautenschlager, 1992; Valverde, 1995). Federal and provincial politicians, perennially reluctant to provide more than residual support for social services, agreed to give provinces control over health, welfare, and education, including hospitals, charities and asylums in the *Constitution Act, 1867* (Guest, 1997; Privy Council Office, 2010). Yet in 1930 when charities were first recognized by statute, it was the federal government's revenue department, not the provinces, that took charge (Elson, 2011b). With few exceptions it has been the federal government, through their regulation of the Income Tax Act, which has dominated policy discourse on voluntary sector-government relations.

In the 1970s a first wave of sector-wide consultations took place in several countries, including Canada, comprised of formal reviews of the role and functions of voluntary organizations. Foremost among these national commissions were the National Advisory Council on Voluntary Action in Canada (1977), the Wolfenden Committee in England (1978), and the Filer Commission in the United States (1976) (Van Til, 2000). Among many other observations, the reports pointed to a serious lack of detailed statistical information about the size and scope of the voluntary sector. These commissions also led to the first recognition of the very existence of a voluntary sector and initial forays into bilateral relations (Elson, 2011b). However, many of these issues were also left unresolved, only to resurface in the mid 1990s.

The second wave of sectoral consultation processes started in Canada in 1995 with the formation of the sector-led Voluntary Sector Roundtable (VSR)[1], followed by Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector (1998-9), the federal Voluntary Sector Task Force (1999), and the Voluntary

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[1] The twelve national organizations were Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, Canadian Conference of the Arts, Canadian Council for International Cooperation, Canadian Council on Social Development, Canadian Environmental Network, Canadian Parks/Recreation Association, Community Foundations of Canada, Health Charities Council of Canada, the Coalition of National Voluntary Organizations, United Way of Canada/Centraide Canada, and Volunteer Canada (Voluntary Sector Roundtable, 1998).

Sector Initiative (VSI) (2000-2005) (Lindquist, 2008; Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector, 1998; Social Development Canada, 2004). A parallel second wave consultation processes occurred in the province of Quebec, starting with the *March for Bread and Roses* in 1995, and resulted, among other events, in the formation of the Chantier de l'économie sociale and the Réseau québécois de l'action communautaire autonome (Chantier de l'économie sociale, 2010; Elson & Rogers, 2010; Réseau québécois de l'action communautaire autonome, 2008). Events and processes surrounding the VSI and its impact on the federal government have been the focus of substantial and in-depth policy analysis (Brock, 2005, 2010; Good, 2003; Phillips, 2003b; Phillips & Levasseur, 2005). In the same vein, John Kingdon's multiple streams framework has also been applied on several occasions to the VSI (Brock, 2008, 2010; Elson, 2004; Phillips, 2003a).

This article will focus on a third wave of sectoral consultation processes that were launched at the sub-national level in Canada following the end of the Voluntary Sector Initiative in 2005. The question this article seeks to address is not whether the VSI programs had an impact on the jurisdictions in which it originated, namely with the federal government and national voluntary organizations, but whether any of the programs initiated by the VSI had a subsequent influence on provincial voluntary sector-government relations. Three major VSI initiatives and the structure of the VSI itself will be examined to assess the extent to which these outcomes may have influenced the subsequent initiation, configuration, and policy agendas of provincial voluntary sector-government relations.

The three stated objectives of the Voluntary Sector Initiative were to: improve the relationship between the voluntary sector and the federal government; to build voluntary sector capacity; and to improve the regulatory and legal framework under which the voluntary sector operates (Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2009). The three VSI objectives are reflected in the following initiative clusters (see Table 1): 1) policy engagement (e.g. the Voluntary Sector Accord, policy development, boundary spanning); 2) capacity development (e.g. funding/ financing, information technology, human resources and volunteering, and research, including national surveys, sector promotion); and 3) governance (e.g. regulatory oversight and awareness) (Voluntary Sector Initiative, 2006). In addition, an overall Joint Coordinating Committee was established as one of seven Joint Tables responsible for the implementation of the program and policy initiatives.

Table 1: Voluntary Sector Initiative Programs (2000-2005)

Policy Engagement	Capacity Development	Governance
Joint Steering Committee	Code on funding	Review of Canada Corporation Act
Voluntary Sector Accord	IM/ IT Program to assess sector needs	Not for Profit Directors Primer
Policy Code and Guides	National Learning Initiative	Revised T3010
Boundary spanning activities	Canada Volunteerism Initiative	Accountability/ financial management
Policy Development Projects	National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations (NSNVO)	
Policy Internships & Fellowships	Satellite Account	
	Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating	
	Voluntary Sector Awareness Initiative	

Source: http://www.vsi-isbc.org/eng/about/goals.cfm

It is beyond the scope and purpose of this article to address each of these VSI programs. Policy, process, evaluation, and summative VSI reports have been issued by the Voluntary Sector Initiative, or its sponsoring federal departments (Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2009; Social Development Canada, 2004; Voluntary Sector Initiative, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d). Extensive documentation of the process took place as the VSI evolved, and an analysis both during and following the VSI has been undertaken by numerous researchers (Brock, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2010; Elson, 2004, 2006, 2009, 2011b; Lindquist, 2008; Phillips, 2003a, 2003b, 2004; Phillips & Levasseur, 2005).

Of all the VSI program initiatives, three can be considered legitimate and institutionalized policy outcomes: 1) the creation of the HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector; 2) a series of statistical reports, namely the Satellite Account of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Institutions, the National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations (NSNVO), and the Canada Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating (CSGVP); and 3) changes to the regulation of charities by the Canada Revenue Agency (Canada Revenue Agency, 2001; M. H. Hall, de Wit, et al., 2005; M. H. Hall, Lasby, Gumulka, & Tyron, 2006; Statistics Canada, 2008).

Other programs, such as policy development projects, executive exchanges, and funding and policy codes were either time-limited VSI projects, or were peripheral to existing federal department mandates, and not sustained

beyond the VSI mandate. Exceptions were departments such as human resources and social development, health, heritage, and revenue, each with a pre-existing and on-going relationship with the voluntary sector (Elson, 2008; Lindquist, 2008). Kathy Brock sums up the view of many observers in relation to the VSI as it pertains to federal government-voluntary sector relations: "Yes, there has been change, but change at the margins and by increments" (Brock, 2010, p. 28). To address the question of the impact of the VSI at the sub-national level, we turn to John Kingdon's multiple streams framework.

Multiple Streams Framework

John Kingdon's (1995) analysis of policy agenda setting is based on the premise that the alignment of problems, policies, and politics with a policy window is necessary for an issue to see the political light of day. This 'garbage can' model of policy processes is one where choices seek problems and solutions seek issues, rather than vice versa. How, Kingdon asks, are policy agendas influenced? A crisis or catastrophic event is certainly one way policy agendas are influenced, but others include changes in a well known policy indicators such as unemployment rates or the cost of living, and the dissemination and promotion of new research findings by academics and policy entrepreneurs. Both predictable and random political processes may open policy windows. According to Kingdon (1995), each of these three processes – problem recognition, generation of policy proposals, and political events – can serve as either an impetus or a constraint on policy change.

      These three streams – problems, policies, and politics – are also largely independent of each other, developing according to their own dynamics and rules, and influencing the value of a particular issue in relation to its policy or political currency at any given point in time (Kingdon, 1995). Michael Howlett has examined the predictive nature of policy windows in Canada's federal government, showing that the agenda-setting cycle is largely predictable and that random window openings are extremely rare (Howlett, 1998). This predictability is tied to such institutionalized events as the budget formulation process, Speeches from the Throne, and election cycles. A case in point is the explicit reference to the voluntary sector as a "third pillar of Canadian society" in the Liberal Party's 1997 federal campaign 'Red Book' (The Liberal Party of Canada, 1997, p. 67). As predictable as some of these windows may appear, synergy rules. Technical feasibility and value acceptability within the policy community needs to be combined with tolerable cost, anticipated public acquiescence, and receptiveness among elected officials for a proposal to be seen as serious and viable (Kingdon, 1995).

Kingdon's three streams model of policy analysis will be used to analyze the components of the VSI that tended to inform the issue identification stream, the policy stream, including policy entrepreneurs, and the political stream at the sub-national level.

Methodology

This research uses a comparative case study method. The relationship between Canadian provincial governments and their respective voluntary sectors has been systematically monitored to identify institutional changes that have occurred between 1995 and 2012. This monitoring included the retrieval, documentation and analysis of reports; committee structures; policy, program and funding announcements; web site changes; and personal interviews. This documentation was used to create a timeline for each province, divided by key provincial and federal developments on one side of the timeline and voluntary sector developments on the other (Elson, 2011a, p. 140). Interviews of matched voluntary sector representatives and provincial government officials took place in 2009 and again in 2011. At the same time, changes in provincial political leadership, provincial elections, and relevant provincial ministry configurations were noted.

The operational definition of the voluntary sector for this study is a functional-structural one: "the structural configuration of multiple voluntary sub-sectors designed to engage in systematic policy dialogue with their provincial government counterpart(s)". Bilateral policy discussions between individual ministries and their voluntary sector constituency in areas such as human services, arts, or recreation, for example, were not included. Multiple sub-sector representative organizations had to be involved as did multiple ministries, unless one ministry acted as a 'gatekeeper' for the government as a whole. This information was then analyzed to assess the extent to which there was evidence that a program element of the VSI may have contributed to the problem, policy or political stream as presented by Kingdon. The results will examine the trends in these developments across multiple provinces rather than examining each province on a case-by-case basis. This approach is taken for two reasons. First, there is not enough evidence in this study to determine if there was cause-and-effect relationship between the VSI and provincial policy developments. Second, provincial governments and voluntary sector leaders do not operate in isolation, as seen in the *Meeting of Counterparts* meetings (Campbell & Speevak Sladowski, 2009; Carter & Speevak Sladowski, 2008), and initiatives undertaken in one province, independent of the VSI, may have informed the activities of another.

Canada's Provincial Landscape

Between 2004 and 2010, eight of Canada's ten provinces[2] initiated an agenda to address issues associated with their voluntary sector. Only in Québec did community activists, social economy actors, and corresponding provincial government ministries, undertake two independent yet parallel second wave policy initiatives, independent of the VSI (Ninacs, 2000). Whereas the VSI was driven by a desire to improve the relationship between the federal government and the voluntary sector across a number of areas, including funding, governance, and accountability (Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector, 1999), the policy agenda in Quebec was driven by a desire to reduce and/or eliminate the high levels of unemployment and poverty (Mendell, 2003; Ninacs, 2000).

As illustrated in Figure 1, six of ten provinces (Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba, and British Columbia) initiated a voluntary sector-provincial government policy agenda following the completion of the VSI. Two provinces, Saskatchewan and Alberta, initiated their own policy initiative while the VSI was still underway. In 2002 Saskatchewan's Premier Lorne Calvert launched a Premier's Voluntary Sector Initiative Co-chaired by the Legislative Secretary to the Premier and a voluntary sector leader (Hamilton & Mann, 2006). In 2004, a group of leading Voluntary Sector organizations in Alberta initiated a "Leaders Group" that progressed over time to form the Alberta Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Initiative (ANVSI) (van Kooy, 2008), again co-chaired by representatives from the provincial government and voluntary sector. Prince Edward Island is the only province that has yet to open an agenda window for provincial government-voluntary sector policy dialogue, and there have been few attempts by voluntary sector organizations in that province to push for one.[3]

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[2] Canada also has three territories, the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut. These territories are not included in this analysis.

[3] The Community Foundation of Prince Edward Island recently issued a "Building on the Capacity of PEI's Third Sector" report, with consultations with both the government and the voluntary sector are pending (Community Foundation of PEI, 2011) . This report also directly refers to statistics from the 2005 National Survey on Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations.
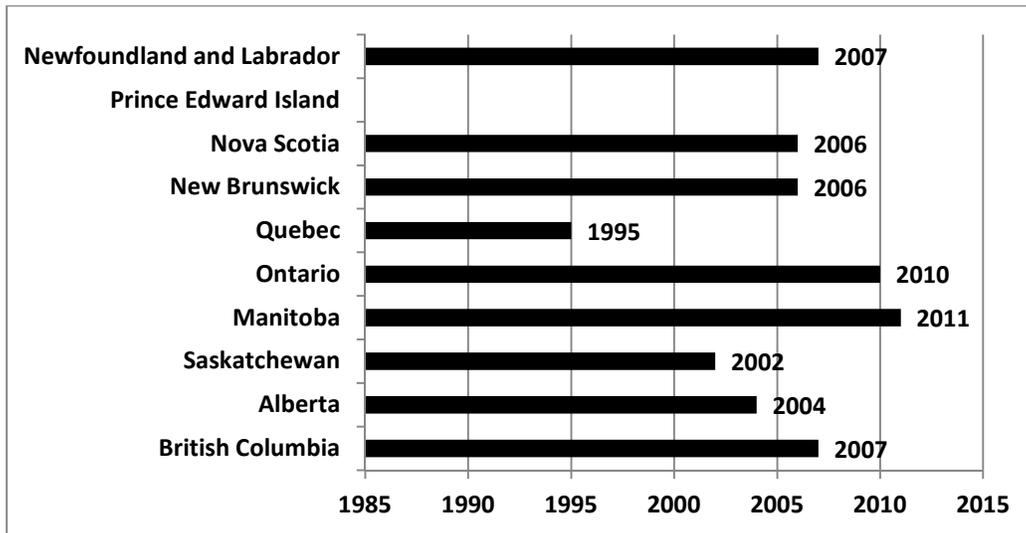
Figure 1: Year of transition to a provincial sector policy agenda

In 2001, with the exception of Quebec[4], there was no articulated policy agenda for the collective voluntary sector in any province. By 2011, seven of ten provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador) have an affiliated minister or deputy minister responsible for the relationship of the provincial government with their voluntary sector, and two other provinces (Saskatchewan[5] and New Brunswick) currently have significant bilateral policy forums with the community human service segment of the voluntary sector (Elson, 2011a). Why then, did these changes occur and what role, if any, did the VSI play?

The Problem Stream

The *problem stream* involves three factors: naming: that is, a situation or a purpose that requires attention; describing: the situation or purpose must be legitimate and realistic; and situating: the situation or purpose must be positioned within a constellation of problems (Jones, 2009).

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[4] There was a Minister for the Voluntary Sector in British Columbia between 1999 and 2001, but this position was terminated, as were many of their sector-focused initiatives when the New Democratic Party was defeated by the provincial Liberals in 2001.

[5] Saskatchewan also has a significant bilateral relationship with their sport, culture and recreation community as these three sub-sectors collectively manage the provincial lottery scheme.

The National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations, conducted in 2003 and released in 2005, provided the first comprehensive picture at a national and provincial level of the scope, composition and economic size of the voluntary sector in Canada (M. H. Hall, de Wit, et al., 2005). This survey was used in conjunction with a qualitative survey to profile the issues and concerns facing the voluntary sector (M.H. Hall, et al., 2003). As a result, each province and the leading voluntary organizations within those provinces were now able to see the size and scope of the voluntary sector in their particular province.

The qualitative and quantitative reports arising from the survey and affiliated activities clearly named a situation that required attention (M.H. Hall, et al., 2003; M. H. Hall, Barr, Easwaramoorthy, Sokolowski, & Salamon, 2005; M. H. Hall, de Wit, et al., 2005). The scope and depth of the survey established its legitimacy and the research itself established that the results were representative of the sector as a whole, at least in most provinces. While the results from the four Atlantic Provinces had to be consolidated into one collective report for statistical reasons, the other provinces benefited from province-specific reports.

The reports clearly documented the wide range of activities and services provided by nonprofit organizations. The reports highlighted the size of the nonprofit work force (second in the world after The Netherlands, as a percent of the national workforce); the percent of nonprofits that are involved in service delivery activities (75%), while the remaining 25% are involved in expressive activities; and most important in our context, the amount of revenue nonprofit organizations receive from different levels of government (M. H. Hall, Barr, et al., 2005). The provincial governments were, and continue to be, the largest source of government revenue to nonprofits by a wide margin, due to the aforementioned jurisdictional responsibility for health, social welfare and education.
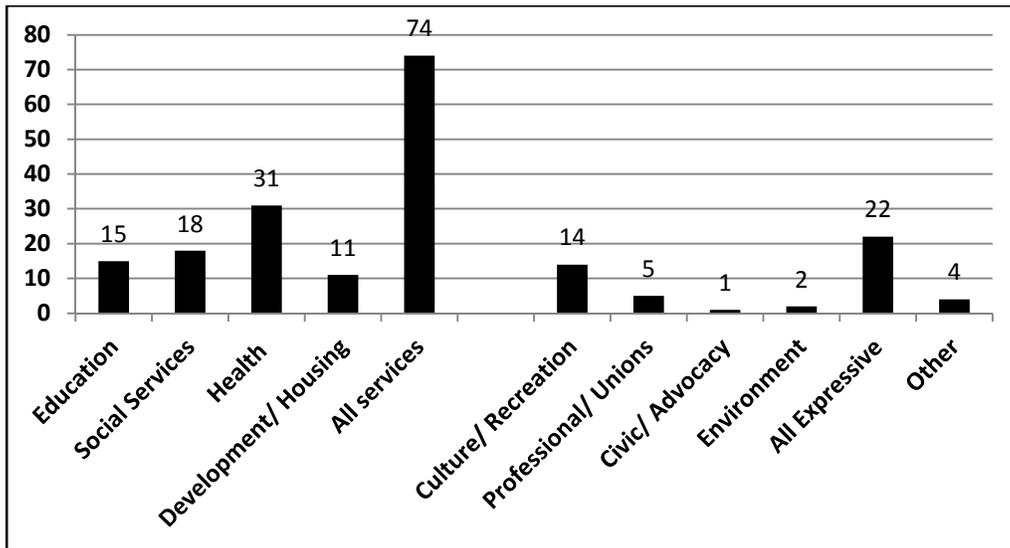
Source: The Canadian Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector in Comparative Perspective (M. H. Hall, Barr, et al., 2005).

Figure 2: Percent of Total Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Workforce (Canada)

Because seventy-five percent of nonprofit organizations in Canada are focused on the delivery of education, health, social service, and development/housing services, one would expect that voluntary sector relations would be particularly relevant to provincial governments (M. H. Hall, Barr, et al., 2005).[6] But it was not until 2005, when the first National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations was released, that there was an appreciation by either provincial governments or their respective voluntary sector constituencies that this was a substantial relationship that could be measured not only in policy proposals, services rendered, and volunteering efforts, but also in terms of employment and economic growth.

The National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations led to the creation of a Satellite Account of nonprofit institutions and volunteering that showed the voluntary sector as larger than the accommodation and food services, agriculture, and motor vehicle manufacturing sectors (Statistics Canada, 2008). It is no surprise then that policy makers and politicians at the provincial level started to take note of this sleeping giant in their midst.

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[6] Ontario is an exception. Ontario struck two independent task forces on the sector, the first on the role of charities by the Ontario Law Reform Commission, and the second on volunteering in the late 1990s. Ontario also has a statute governing charities.

At the same time reports such as *Funding Matters*, commissioned by the VSI Working Group on Financing, and the *Capacity to Serve*, a qualitative complementary report to the national survey, highlighted the struggle to deliver much needed and ever-more complex services within an overly bureaucratic and unresponsive funding regime (M.H. Hall, et al., 2003; Scott, 2003). Numerous human resources issues such as difficulties recruiting and retaining staff; poor salaries; contracting burdens, and decline in volunteers and qualified board members were articulated and quantified (M.H. Hall, et al., 2003; M. H. Hall, de Wit, et al., 2005; Scott, 2003). The Satellite Account profiled the percentage of funding nonprofit organizations receive from provincial governments. In 2007 this amounted to 72.7% ($16.3 billion) of the total revenue received by hospitals, universities and colleges; and 14% ($10.7 billion) of the total revenue received by other nonprofit organizations (Statistics Canada, 2007) (see Figure 3).
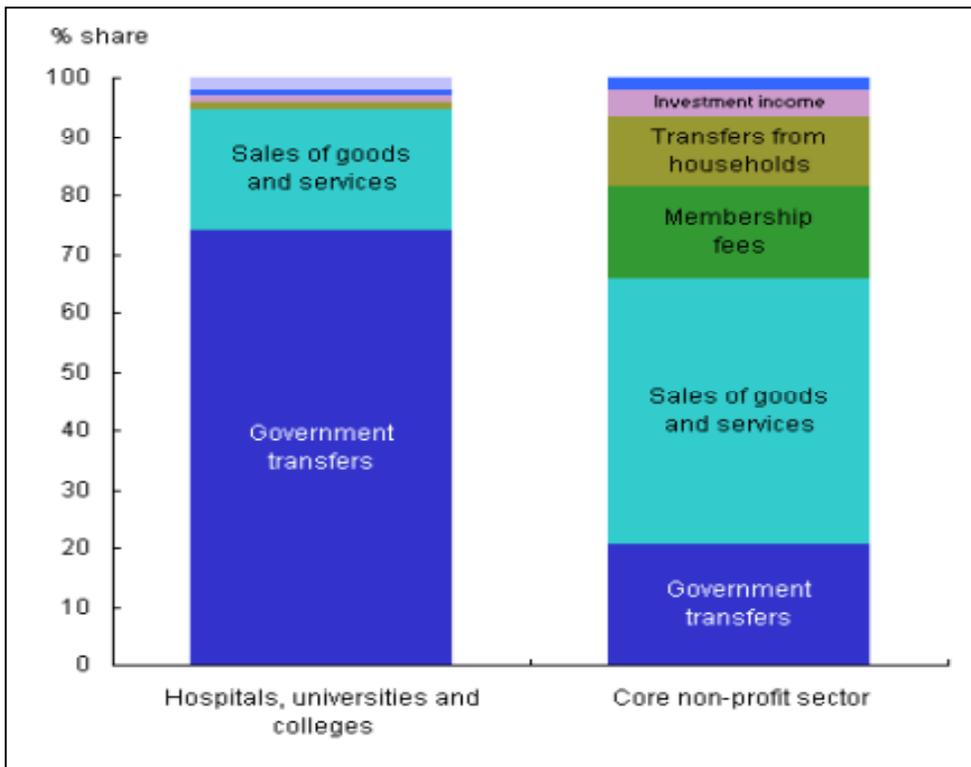
Source: Satellite Account of Non-profit Institutions and Volunteering 2007 (Statistics Canada, 2007)

Figure 3: Average share of revenue by selected sources, 1997 to 2007

As voluntary sector organizations gained an appreciation for the sector of which they were a part, the national survey also opened the eyes of senior bureaucrats and politicians at the provincial level. British Columbia for example, saw the extent to which the voluntary sector was the primary vehicle for the delivery of public services and the billions of dollars invested by the province for this service (Round Table on Government and Non Profit Relations in British Columbia, 2007; interview subject, 2011). This realization brought the importance of acknowledging and strengthening this relationship to the fore. This was a realization that took place, to varying degrees, across many provinces (see Table 2).

A series of on-going sector-wide surveys were also established through the VSI, including the National Satellite Account of Nonprofit Institutions and Volunteering (2004) and the National Survey of Volunteering, Giving and Participating (M. H. Hall, McKeown, & Roberts, 2001). Yet this was not the only means by which the VSI informed the naming, describing, and situating of policy issues or the problem stream at a provincial level. The Canada Volunteerism Initiative, another component of the VSI, also provided the means for many community groups across Canada to meet and identify common issues (Nova Scotia CVI Network, 2006). The Canada Volunteerism Initiative was a five-year federal initiative introduced in 2001, designed to encourage Canadians to participate in voluntary organizations; improve the capacity of organizations to benefit from the contribution of volunteers; and enhance the experience of volunteering.

In some cases, groups such as the Cape Breton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations were formed as a consequence of this VSI initiative (King & MacIntyre, 2005). In Manitoba, the VSI program, Sector Involvement in Policy Development (SIDP), provided the means for the Manitoba Voluntary Sector Initiative to conduct some specific research on the nonprofit sector in the province, host a multi-sector policy summit and launch a web site (Carter & Speevak Sladowski, 2008). This initiative subsequently led to the formation of the Manitoba Federation of Non-Profit Organizations.

A major 'problem' from the voluntary sectors' perspective was a lack of capacity to deliver needed services in communities. The same issue from the government's perspective was a lack of alignment of their support for this capacity with their own human service policy goals. Multiple ministries with different funding timelines and different reporting schedules and methods created unnecessary work and transaction costs for the government and the voluntary sector. Volunteering, including onerous security checks and the cost of recruiting, training and recognizing the work of volunteers was also identified as a major issue and several provinces have included this on their policy agenda, notably, Alberta, Ontario, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

An analysis of documentation related to proposals to establish sustained policy dialogue and a form of official recognition by the provincial government made a direct reference to the National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations in each and every relevant province. In some cases this data was augmented by internal government or provincial surveys, but the National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations undertaken by the VSI clearly contributed to the articulation, documentation, legitimacy, and strategic positioning of the voluntary sector.

Table 2 outlines the major problem stream identified by each province. There are certainly others not included here, but resources and structural alignments have clearly invested in the identified problems, particularly with respect to the delivery of human services.

Table 2: Provincial Problem Streams

Province	Problem stream
British Columbia	Support capacity to deliver human services
Alberta	Improve sectoral relations and generic capacity
Saskatchewan	Support capacity to deliver human services
Manitoba	Support sectoral capacity (esp. human resources)
Ontario	Improve sectoral relations and generic capacity
Québec	Support capacity to support economic and social inclusion
New Brunswick	Support capacity to support economic and social inclusion
Nova Scotia	Support sectoral relations and generic capacity
Prince Edward Island	
Newfoundland and Labrador	Support sectoral relations and generic capacity

In some provinces this statistical profile was carried by lead voluntary sector agencies to engage in a new level of policy dialogue with their provincial government counterparts (Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec). In other provinces it was the government who carried forward the agenda for increased dialogue with the voluntary sector (Saskatchewan, New Brunswick); or there was a mutual recognition that started with informal meetings and grew to a collaborative or mutually defined agenda (British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador).

The Policy Stream

The *policy or idea stream* involves testing ideas for their feasibility or taking the measure of their ability to be realistic and practical; their acceptability, that is, linking ideas with problems and decision-makers' accountability structures; and third, their relevance or the effectiveness, including knowledge of the formal rules and charting already existing opinions and associations, as well as external ideas, policies and associations (Jones, 2009).

This stream also brings into play the role of policy entrepreneurs, advocates for a particular policy to address the problem or issue. In the voluntary sector as a whole this policy entrepreneur role is frequently played by intermediary organizations in concert with large and/or representative umbrella groups. Examples of such organizations include the Community Sector Council in Newfoundland; Phoenix Youth Programs and the Federation of Community Organizations in Nova Scotia; the Ontario Nonprofit Network; The Manitoba Federation of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations; or the Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations in Alberta. These policy entrepreneurs played an important role by engaging provincial governments, articulating the specific consequences of the statistics reported in the VSI reports for communities within a particular province, and verifying the credibility of various policy ideas.

There are a number of ways in which the policy ideas have been tested at a provincial level, the most common being regional roundtables. British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador each conducted their own survey or organized regional and local dialogues with voluntary sector organizations. In Quebec the two major sector intermediaries, Le Chantier de l'économie sociale and Le Réseau québécois de l'action communautaire autonome, have both developed an association infrastructure to lead policy deliberations on behalf of their respective constituencies since the late 1990s (Elson & Rogers, 2010). Ontario has followed a similar path with the creation of the Ontario Nonprofit Network (Eakin, 2006; Ontario Nonprofit Network, 2010).

In the absence of formal representative organizations, lead sector organizations or established leaders came together as policy entrepreneurs, to use Kingdon's term, to initiate a common issue or 'problem' discussion. This was the case in British Columbia, Alberta, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador. This initial step was usually followed by a series of consultations, both within and between the voluntary sector and government, which led to an agreement, policy statement and mechanism to continue to discuss the identified issues on an on-going basis. Common elements of such agreements included a vision statement, values and guiding principles, and relational-operational principles. In this regard, they are very similar to the tone and content

of the Voluntary Sector Accord: long on generalities and short on specifics (Phillips, 2003a). Thus the agreements, where they were signed (e.g. British Columbia, Alberta, Nova Scotia) can be viewed as 'rules of engagement' rather than identifying specific policy objectives with implementation strategies.

Conducting regional discussions culminating in provincial "summits" has been another theme across provinces where there is a conspicuous absence of strong and inclusive apex organizations to speak on behalf of the sector. This collaborative voluntary sector-provincial government process built the legitimacy and political capital of the process and provided both the provincial government and voluntary sector leaders with a barometer of the scope and depth of issues that would need to be addressed.

Newfoundland and Labrador, for example, completed a series of regional meetings in 2010 and a provincial "Community Priorities Summit" led by the provincial government's Voluntary and Non-Profit Secretariat. British Columbia also catalyzed their first provincial summit in 2008 by holding a series of regional forums, and the Government Nonprofit Sector Initiative now hosts a provincial summit on an annual basis. New Brunswick, through their Community Non-Profit Organizations Secretariat, held a series of regional conferences to discuss how to move forward on the *Blueprint for Action*, the result of an earlier consultation process which culminated with the appointment of a Minister and deputy minister responsible for Community Non-Profit Organizations (Premier's Community Non-Profit Task Force, 2007).[7]

Table 3 provides an overview of the means by which provinces have been assessing the feasibility, acceptability, and relevance of co-ordinated policy dialogue. In British Columbia, a core group of senior provincial bureaucrats and voluntary sector leaders met to identify issues and assess their feasibility prior to presenting the idea of a collective initiative to their respective constituencies (Lindquist, 2008). Lindquist (2008) explicitly notes that many of these voluntary sector leaders had been active in the VSI. While not always documented this explicitly, interview respondents reported similar scenarios in Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador. Given the on-going and collaborative relationship that most lead provincial associations have with their provincial counterparts, one may assume that informal 'soundings' both across and within the sector and provincial government preceded any formal initiative. Several reports developed at a provincial level not only explicitly referenced VSI initiatives, but developments in other provinces as

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[7] Note that this initiative did not survive a provincial election in 2010 that saw the election of a majority conservative government.

well (Angelini & Nenshi, 2007; Round Table on Government and Non Profit Relations in British Columbia, 2007).

Table 3: Provincial Voluntary Sector-Government Policy Streams

Province	Policy streams
British Columbia	Regional meetings, provincial summit, joint policy table (human services)
Alberta	Joint policy table (sector-wide)
Saskatchewan	Regional Intersectoral Committees (human services)
Manitoba	Nonprofit Sector Council (sector-wide)
Ontario	Regional meetings, provincial summit, task forces (sector-wide)
Québec	Apex provincial networks, provincial meetings (sector-wide)
New Brunswick	Regional Inclusion Committees (economic and social inclusion)
Nova Scotia	Regional meetings, provincial summit, proposed sector council (sector-wide)
Prince Edward Island	
Newfoundland and Labrador	Regional meetings, provincial summit, advisory committee (sector-wide)

In addition to providing the opportunities for members of the provincial voluntary sector community to identify issues of concern, collaborative investigations of similar configurations in other jurisdictions were the norm. Not only were pan-Canadian surveys undertaken, but the VSI as well as the UK Compact were common ports of call (INNOVA Learning, 2005).

As it turned out, most provinces decided to establish some form of collaborative policy forum or policy 'think tank' as one interviewee described it. Only in British Columbia are the costs of such a configuration equally borne by the two sectors. In all other provinces the provincial government has allocated resources to sponsor the policy forum. The focus of the policy forums also varies, as noted in Table 3. The inter-sectoral policy forum for government and voluntary sector participation is primarily human service focused in British Columbia, Saskatchewan[8], and New Brunswick. In other provinces, the representation in such

[8] The Saskatchewan policy focus actually exists in two solitudes – human services and Regional Intersectoral Committees and Sport, Recreation and Culture organizations. Under the Premier's Voluntary Sector Initiative, there was wider representation, but, as noted, this initiative no longer exists.

forums, where they exist, are broader and work to address cross-sectoral issues such as capacity building, insurance, funding, and volunteering.

The HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector, established in 2002 under the auspices of the VSI Table on Capacity Building, has made a significant contribution to the advancement of knowledge and advice concerning human resource issues in the sector (HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector, 2012a). But strong provincial relations are also essential as it is at this level that service contracts are signed and funding structures developed. These funding structures can either support or thwart the capacity of voluntary organizations to provide responsive and high quality services. The Government Non-Profit Initiative in BC, for example, have initiated a Full Cost Financial Model Working Group and a joint *Understanding & Responding to Government Procurement Processes Course* for both sector organizations and government employees to participate in together (Wightman & Siebe, 2011).

In British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador there is either a joint or collaborative policy forum or an advisory committee in place. In Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec and Nova Scotia the sector has developed its own policy forum in the form of a sector council (Manitoba, Nova Scotia)[9] or an apex representative body (Ontario, Quebec). In this regard the joint nature of the steering committees and sub-committees mirror the structural alignment that was developed for the VSI. Thus the VSI may have directly or indirectly acted as a model for collaborative activity at a provincial level, independent of the mixed outcomes associated with the VSI.

The Political Stream

According to Kingdon, the problem windows and the political windows are connected. When an agenda window opens because a problem is pressing, the alternatives generated as solutions to the problem fare much better if they also meet the test of political acceptance. A change in the policy agenda occurs with developments in the problem and political window – not in the policy stream (Kingdon, 1995). When the political window does open, politicians look into the policy stream for possible solutions. Political timing counts. Kingdon (1995) is clear that policy solutions are often adapted to "fit" a given political agenda. In other cases, good ideas go unheeded because there is not the political will or incentive to make changes. The policy structures noted here, addressed at length in policy implementation literature, are but one manifestation of movement toward policy implementation (Sabatier, 2007).

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[9] Note that as of August, 2012, the Sector Council in Nova Scotia was still at the proposal stage.

Solutions that meet a pre-existing policy platform stand a better chance of rising to the fore, even if that connection is not a direct one. Examples of this link within Canadian provinces include community economic development, poverty reduction, and human service alignment. Several provinces, including Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador have a broad poverty reduction strategy (PovNet, 2008), and the relationship with the voluntary sector is connected to this broader socio-economic policy. British Columbia has configured its current relationship with the sector around improving the capacity to deliver human services, whereas in New Brunswick and Saskatchewan, this relationship is embedded in the functional structure of the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation and the Social Services ministry respectively (Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, 2011; Human Services Integration Forum, 2010; Ministry of Housing and Social Development, 2009).

Political timing

An analysis of the timing of the introduction of these initiatives shows that it occurred most frequently during the governing party's second term in office. Rarely did such an initiative take place during the party's first term. The exceptions were the Parti Quebecois that supported the social economy following their election in 1994; and the Conservative party in Newfoundland and Labrador at the later stage of Premier Danny Williams first term. There is no evidence of an overt ideological bias against the voluntary sector, although some see the voluntary sector as service delivery allies more consistently than others. All three major parties at the provincial level – the New Democratic, Liberal, and Progressive Conservative – have initiated voluntary sector policy forums of one type or another. At the provincial level there is a consistent blend of policy pragmatism with political ideology. Canada has always had a mixed social economy, contracting nonprofit organizations to provide services as a viable and often cheaper option to state delivery (Valverde, 1995). The initiatives investigated in this paper also corresponded to a period when the Canadian economy was quite robust. The extent to which commitments continue as austerity measures are implemented remains to be seen.

That said, there have been two overt political consequences to existing voluntary sector initiatives of note. In Saskatchewan, the Premier's Voluntary Sector Initiative was terminated following the election of Brad Wall's Saskatchewan Party in 2007. Structurally, Premier's Council's of any stripe are vulnerable to such changes as these types of councils are not aligned with any line ministry. Politically, they are also very closely connected with the premier of the day and if the premier or the party in power changes, they are often dropped. The second instance was in New Brunswick with the majority election of the

Progressive Conservative Party in 2012. The provincial Liberal Party recruited Claudette Bradshaw, a former Liberal federal cabinet minister, to lead a Premier's Community Non-Profit Task Force into relations with the nonprofit sector, that culminated in the aforementioned *Blueprint for Action (Premier's Community Non-Profit Task Force, 2007)*. While some support capacity programs have continued, the newly elected Progressive Conservative Party in New Brunswick dropped the existing voluntary sector policy agenda in favour of investing in a broad social and economic inclusion strategy of which the voluntary sector plays a significant role and engages in area Community Inclusion Networks throughout the province ("Economic and Social Inclusion Act," 2010; Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, 2011). These are clearly exceptions and while the status of voluntary sector policies may rise and fall, their relationship to core provincial jurisdictional responsibilities makes voluntary sector relations viable if not visible.

Government structures

Nine of ten provinces have an affiliated cabinet minister and a dedicated deputy minister. In British Columbia the Government Non-Profit Partnership Initiative (GNPI) operates at the deputy ministerial level and in Ontario the Minister for Citizenship and Culture has taken the lead on initiating a discussion concerning voluntary sector-government relations. In Alberta, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador, an affiliated minister and dedicated deputy minister have been assigned the voluntary sector-government portfolio. The term 'affiliated minister' is used because all ministers to date simultaneously hold other portfolios of which voluntary sector-government relations is often a minor part. Nevertheless, it does signal a clear intention by these governments that voluntary sector-government relations are valued and have a voice at the cabinet table.

British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador have each established a secretariat within their provincial government. Only in British Columbia is the cost of the secretariat shared with the voluntary sector. In all other cases where a dedicated secretariat has been established, a deputy minister is either associated or dedicated to the task of overseeing the secretariat. The actual structure of the secretariat and associated voluntary sector advisory committees varies from province to province. These structures range from 'separate-but-equal' to advisory and by provincial appointment only.

Government representation in these initiatives are currently more organized, resourced and institutionalized than the more non-formal voluntary

sector.[10] Existing structures within government are used as a conduit for internal policy dialogue. For example, issues about voluntary sector-government relations are raised at standing deputy minister committee meetings. Government representatives in an inter-sectoral representational forum seldom meet independently, although informal discussions with secretariat staff are common. There is also variation in the level of representation from each department. Because designated government representatives have reporting and representational responsibilities for their home department, together with formal reporting structures, a more formal institutional structure governs the representation from government.

Inter-sectoral policy structures

The inter-sectoral representational forums vary considerably in size and are generally non-formal in nature (see Table 4). In British Columbia, for example, the Government Non-Profit Partnership Initiative (GNPI) is seen as a policy 'think tank' rather than a formal forum for policy formulation. That is not to say that policy issues do not find their way to and from government policy decision makers, it is just that the connection is non-formal. Participation on these inter-sectoral representational forums also varies considerably. Where there are representative umbrella organizations, representatives are internally designated. In the case of joint committees, voluntary sector members are nominated by leaders in the field or appointed by a governing steering committee or government minister.

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[10] By non-formal, I specifically mean transitory representational and reporting protocol which is non-transferable across time. For example, coalitions that collaboratively make a deputation on one issue, but do not transfer this experience or expertise to another issue.

Table 4: Provincial Voluntary Sector-Government Policy Forums

Province	Formal Policy Forum Established	Type
British Columbia	Government Non-Profit Initiative (2009 -)	Sector partnership
Alberta	Alberta Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Initiative (2007 -)	Sector partnership
Saskatchewan	The Premier's Voluntary Sector Initiative (2002 - 2007)	Sector partnership
Manitoba	Nonprofit Sector Council (2010 -)	Sector voice
Ontario	The Partnership Project (2010 -)	Sector voice
Quebec	Multiple policy forums (1999 -)	Sector voice
New Brunswick	Delivering on the Blueprint (2008- 2011)	Advisory role
Nova Scotia	Collaboration Agreement (2008 -)	Advisory role
Prince Edward Island		
Newfoundland and Labrador	Community Priorities Implementation Plan (2010 -)	Advisory role

In British Columbia, 97 government and voluntary sector representatives sit on five sub-committees and an additional 17 sit on a Leadership Council comprised primarily of senior sectoral representatives and government deputy ministers. The Alberta Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Initiative is coordinated by a 22 person committee with equal representation from government departments and the voluntary sector. In Newfoundland and Labrador nine sectoral and government representatives comprise a non-formal inter-sectoral accountability team and in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia a representative advisory committee has been established.[11]

Where joint sectoral partnerships like BC's Government Non-Profit Initiative exist, there are typically co-chairs representing government and the voluntary sector and co-chairs and an equal number of representatives from government and the voluntary sector on sub-committees. Such voluntary sector appointments may or may not require approval from the provincial government. Currently this is the case in Alberta, but not in BC. Where there is a sector voice model, representation is determined or negotiated on an issue-by-issue basis. Where the sector plays an advisory role, there is usually a consultation process

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[11] The status of these two advisory committees is in flux as structural changes in sector representation take place.

leading to the announcement of appointments, but ultimately, the government determines the size and composition of these committees.

Advisory or standing bilateral policy forums have not been established in all provinces. In Ontario and Quebec, where the voluntary sector has developed an independent voice and policy capacity, there is no standing forum. In this regard it is similar to the Compact Voice in England, rather than the VSI (Compact Voice, 2007). The focus of these inter-sectoral representational forums is the identification and potential resolution of mutually identified issues (see Table 2). Whether the structure of these collaborative relationships flavour the very nature of the policy issues that are identified is an important area for future investigation.

Discussion

As mixed as the consequences of the VSI at the federal level appear, they appear to have whetted the appetite for government-voluntary sector relations within Canada's provinces. While provinces did not officially participate in the VSI, they were certainly kept informed of its developments (Brock, 2010), as were provincial and local voluntary associations, either directly through their participation in the VSI, or indirectly through national associations. The experience of sitting on joint policy tables with colleagues from across the country and senior government officials was a new experience for many. If nothing else, it was a training camp for learning about the parry and thrust of agenda setting, power relations, and policy dialogue.

Within one year of the end of the VSI in 2005, substantive changes at the provincial level started to emerge. A cautionary note must be sounded. Not all provinces have moved to establish a structured policy forum, and most are in the developmental stages of their relationship, thus these observations must be considered preliminary. Of Canada's ten provinces, nine are now engaged in a sustained voluntary sector-government relations policy forum (Campbell & Speevak Sladowski, 2009; Carter & Speevak Sladowski, 2008; Elson, 2010).

The National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations, for the first time, gave both a comprehensive picture at a national and provincial level of the scope, composition and economic size of the voluntary sector in Canada. This survey complemented a qualitative survey that profiled the strategic issues and concerns facing the voluntary sector (M.H. Hall, et al., 2003). Each province, unless statistically limited, was now able to see the size and scope of their voluntary sector. As voluntary sector organizations gained an appreciation for the sector of which they were a part, the survey opened the eyes of senior bureaucrats and politicians at the provincial level. While the provinces were well aware of the relationship they had with the non-profit basis on a ministry-by-ministry basis,

this was the first time a statistical profile of their collective relationship was revealed.

These new statistics showed that the voluntary sector was larger than the retail or the automotive sectors, about which the provincial governments were very familiar (Statistics Canada, 2008). The province of British Columbia, for example, saw the extent to which the voluntary sector was the primary vehicle for the delivery of public services and the billions of dollars invested by the province in this delivery (Round Table on Government and Non Profit Relations in British Columbia, 2007; interview comment). The Premier of Saskatchewan specifically noted the national survey in his rationale for the development of his Premier's Council (Hamilton & Mann, 2006). This realization brought the importance of acknowledging and strengthening this relationship to the fore and provided a point of departure for a 'mutual discussion of issues' at senior levels within the bureaucracy.

This was a realization that took place, to varying degrees, across all provinces surveyed to date. In some provinces this statistical profile was carried by lead voluntary sector agencies to engage in a new level of policy dialogue with their provincial government counterparts, while in other provinces it was the government who carried agenda for increased dialogue forward to the voluntary sector (Elson, 2011a).

The Canada Volunteerism Initiative provided the means for community groups to come together in a wide variety of ways for purposes generally or specifically connected to volunteering (Nova Scotia CVI Network, 2006). Regardless, both the voluntary sector and government in this province have moved toward a more comprehensive policy agenda, based on a signed Collaboration Agreement. The Canada Volunteerism Initiative, as well as its demise in 2006, was a catalyst for some local voluntary sector networks to keep organizing within provinces. In Nova Scotia, for example, volunteer groups in Cape Breton[12] organized the Cape Breton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (King & MacIntyre, 2005). This group, like the Federation of Community Organizations (COVA) in Halifax, subsequently sat on the Nova Scotia Volunteer Advisory Council (NS-VAC) at the provincial level where voluntary sector representatives met with provincial government officials to provide advice on policy issues. This was also the case in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. In 2002, these networks and others created a national "network of networks", the Canadian Federation of Voluntary Sector Networks, that has hosted a number of meetings among their own members and their provincial government counterparts (Calgary

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[12] Cape Breton is a region within Nova Scotia

Chamber of Voluntary Organizations, 2012; Canadian Federation of Voluntary Sector Networks, 2012).

The HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector continues to be a hub for human resource related advice, guidance, and resources. The Council has also spend considerable time over the last few years reaching out and co-ordinating initiatives with their nonprofit provincial counterparts (HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector, 2012b).

Obviously none of these changes would have taken place without leaders on both sides who were willing to engage, but the VSI programs and their subsequent by-products such as the *Satellite Account of Voluntary Institutions and Volunteering*, the *Canadian Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating*, and the Johns Hopkins survey report, *The Canadian and Voluntary Sector in Comparative Perspective*, provided fuel for sustained and structured policy dialogue. The voluntary sector across Canada has yet to directly utilize these collaborative policy forums to increase the formal structure of their own representation, as the National Council for Voluntary Organizations (NCVO) did in England during the evolution of the Compact (Elson, 2011b). In provinces, namely Ontario and Quebec, where an independent, credible and collective voice for the sector has emerged, the policy gains have been significant.

While a non-formal and more collegial type policy deliberation may appear to be suitable to governments and voluntary sector representatives at the outset, the long term consequences for public policy and the voluntary sector are not as clear. Other research (Elson, 2011b) would suggest that these collaborative policy forum structures will tend favour the more formal of the two, that is, government. Nevertheless, provincial government and voluntary sector representatives have consistently chosen a collaborative model to address policy identification, deliberation, and development.

The federal government has considerable persuasive and regulatory power, even though it is a minor funder of voluntary sector organizations and programs under provincial jurisdiction. The sheer size and scope of the voluntary sector in Canada, where seventy-five percent of nonprofits are engaged in some form of service delivery, profiled in the National Survey of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, caught the attention of provincial politicians and voluntary sector leaders alike (M. H. Hall, de Wit, et al., 2005).

This realization catalyzed some provinces into initiating a service provision alignment policy strategy to foster more productive relations where substantial provincial resources were being allocated. In other provinces a re-aligned and re-energized voluntary sector-government relationship was a manifestation of a provincial commitment to an "all-of-government" poverty reduction or community economic development policy strategy, two areas where a significant proportion of voluntary sector organizations are active. In most

provinces, however, attempts have been made to engage the whole voluntary sector, independent of funding relationships, in the desire to identify and build policy, administrative, and service delivery capacity within the sector.

Like the changes in government at the federal level, most recently the election of a majority conservative government, provincial voluntary sector and government representatives wait with baited breath to deal with the consequences associated with a change of government. Across the provinces studied to date policy forums have been able to adjust to changes in government, both in lead departments and political parties, which speak well for the desire by both governments and the sector to build a sustained, long-term policy relationship.

Conclusion

The evolution of non-profit sector/government relations at the provincial level in Canada is undergoing a remarkable third wave of change. Some of this change has been driven by the mutual recognition that a substantial and unnamed relationship already existed, brought to light by the National Survey of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, the Satellite Account for Non-profit Institutions and Volunteering, the Canadian Volunteerism Initiative, and related VSI capacity building activities.

The evidence presented here reveals that the VSI did influence, among other factors, the initiation of a collective voluntary sector-provincial government policy relationship in three distinct ways: 1) commissioning and releasing reports on the size, scope and capacity of the voluntary sector at a national and provincial level; 2) reporting on voluntary sector revenues from governments, donations, and fees for services, and volunteering rates and across multiple sub-sectors and sizes of voluntary organizations; and 3) the joint and bilateral nature of structuring policy forums for policy dialogue.

The burgeoning sectoral policy relationship that developed relatively simultaneously across multiple provinces was based on a number of common issues. Some of these issues, particularly those related to funding, human resources, capacity building, and volunteer management, were profiled in VSI related reports in aggregate form for the first time. The fact that these issues existed were not new to either the voluntary sector or provincial governments. What helped to raise these policy issues on political agenda was that voluntary sector issues were raised from anecdotal stories to system governance issues when placed in the context of the dominant role Canadian voluntary sector organizations play in service delivery and the constitutional responsibility by provincial governments for health, social services, and education.

The political will of the voluntary sector is less transparent, given dominance of non-formal voluntary sector representation, but it is just as

necessary. Leading organizations within provincial voluntary sectors acted as policy entrepreneurs, armed with provincial survey data arising from the VSI, and their own intimate experience of how issues affect citizens in communities.

The provincial bilateral policy forums that have been established have tended to have politically non-threatening policy agendas, and operate within non-formal representational structures. Bilateral joint policy tables, characteristic of the VSI, have been adopted by several, although certainly not all, provincial policy forums. These joint policy forums are conspicuously absent in provinces where there is a strong sector-based umbrella organization (e.g. the Ontario Nonprofit Network, Réseau québécois de l'action communautaire autonome) capable of representing and engaging broad sectoral interests. The importance of the capacity, consistency, and strength of formal representative organizations coalitions to hold governments to account has been well established (Sabatier, 2007). Thus while the lack of formal representation has not been a barrier to initiating a provincial policy forum, its sustainability and impact on policy outcomes over the long term is an open question.

The existence of individual or collective voluntary sector representation, while is necessary for a sustainable policy dialogue to be established, is not sufficient. Political will on the part of governments is also required, and this willingness appears to be tied to the alignment of the voluntary sector poverty reduction, community economic development, service delivery, and to a lesser extent, volunteering (Elson, 2011a). At the time these third wave initiatives were launched the economy was still relatively strong and surpluses, not deficits were the order of the day. It is likely that the instrumental "contract culture" relationship between governments and the voluntary sector that took hold in the mid 1990s will continue to define the provincial policy agenda (Elson, 2011b).

The proximity and jurisdictional power of Canadian provinces to issues and opportunities addressed by the voluntary sector certainly justifies a sustained and collective policy relationship. While there is nothing unusual in provincial governments having a relationship with individual voluntary organizations or their umbrella associations, the development of sustained sub-national policy forums to engage in sector policy dialogue to address policy issues is a new "third wave" development. The longer-term consequences of these collaborative sub-national government-voluntary sector relationships are worthy of serious on-going investigation, not only in Canada, but elsewhere.

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